

STUDIES ON THE INTERACTION OF ART, THOUGHT AND POWER

Plato's Power

EDITED BY

CAROLINA ARAÚJO

BRILL

Plato's Power

Studies on the Interaction of Art, Thought and Power

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Abbreviations

Alcinous [Alcin.]

Introductio in Platonem

Apuleius [Ap.]

Deo. de Deo Socratis

Aristophanes [Ar.]

Ach. Acharnenses

Nu. Nubes

Aristoteles [Arist.]

APo. Analytica Posteriora

Cael. de Caelo

Cat. Categoriae

de An. de Anima

EN Ethica Nicomachea

Int. de Interpretatione

Metaph. Metaphysica

Mete. Meteorologica

Ph. Physica

Top. Topica

Chalcidius [Chalc.]

In Ti. in Platonis Timaeum commentarii

Hippocrates [Hp.]

Aër. de Aere, Aqua et Regionibus

VM de Vetera Medicina

Homerus [Hom.]

Il. Ilias

Od. Odyssea

Maximus Tyrius [Max.]

Or. Orationes

Olympiodorus [Olymp.]

in Alc. in Platonis Alcibiadem commentarii

Plato [Pl.]

Alc. I	Alcibiades I
Ap.	Apologia
Chrm.	Charmides
Clit.	Clitopho
Cra.	Cratylus
Cri.	Crito
Euthd.	Euthydemus
Euthphr.	Euthyphro
Grg.	Gorgias
Hp. Ma.	Hippias Major
Hp. Mi.	Hippias Minor
Ion	
La.	Laches
Lg.	Leges
Men.	Meno
Mx.	Menexenus
Phd.	Phaedo
Phdr.	Phaedrus
Phlb.	Philebus
Plt.	Politicus
Prm.	Parmenides
Prt.	Protagoras
R.	Respublica
Smp.	Symposium
Sph.	Sophista
Thg.	Theages
Tht.	Theaetetus
Ti.	Timaeus

Plotinus [Plot.]

Enn.	Enneades

Plutarchus [Plu.]

An.	de Animae Procreatione in Timaeo Platonis
Gen.	de Genio Socratis

Proclus [Procl.]

in Alc.	in Platonis Alcibiadem commentarii
in Ti.	in Platonis Timaeum commentarii

Simplicius [Simp.]

in Cael. in Aristotelis de Caelo commentarii

Xenophon [x.]

Ap. Apologia Socratis

Mem. Memorabilia

Introduction

Carolina Araújo

This book argues that, in Plato's dialogues, *dynamis* is a metaphysical concept denoting power causation. This introduction presents this hypothesis in three parts. First, it explains what powers are as causes. Next, it describes the *status quaestionis* pointing out the conclusions of the major studies on the subject. Finally, it shows the structure of the book and how it argues for its hypothesis in contrast to the current scholarship.

1 Powers as Causes

Powers are causes. We say that X has power when it moves, changes, or acts upon Y, and we say that Y suffered this effect because X has this power. Fire, for instance, has the power to melt ice. There are two powers here. X has the power to cause a change in Y because X is the trigger of such an alteration. Y has the power to be altered because it is disposed to suffer such an effect. One power is a property of X that acts as an efficient cause, it triggers events. The other power is a property of Y that acts as a disposition, it bears the effects caused by X. But to suppose that Y has this dispositional property may suggest that it is Y that actually does something: the change occurs in Y by virtue of its own property. Moreover, it is Y that manifests the power of X; one must look at Y to infer that X has a power. If this is so, we are dealing with a kind of causation in which all that matters about X is the power it has to trigger the event in Y. We are not concerned with what X is or may be, except for the fact that it has the power to trigger [T], which is associated with the disposition [D] that Y has, and which causes this event. If we are willing to account for such events, we can restrict ourselves to triggering powers and dispositional powers, instead of things like X or Y, which are simply bearers of these powers. For example, we can talk about the ability to liquefy as the triggering power that fire has and the ability of being liquefied that the ice has, which is its dispositional property.

Triggering and dispositional powers are correlative (Bird 2007), events happen when they connect, like matching pieces of a puzzle. This does not mean that there is only one T for one D, but rather that it is the matching effect that determines what counts as T and D. In this sense, it is the manifestation that gives identity to a power (Molnar 2003: 60, 195). If this is so, then we might want to think of the connection of TD as the event, while T and D are powers

when they are apart. Events in the world are nothing more than the duration of the connection between the correlative powers. The connection need not be a physical contact but corresponds to the persistence of the triggering effect. Motions, changes, actions have an end in both senses, they have directionality and duration.

Directionality means that the event aims at transforming a dispositional property into a categorical property. In other words, the end of TD is the state in which there is no further alteration to take place. The heat, for example, may liquefy all the ice present, so that all there is is already liquid. One might perhaps argue that when a dispositional property D becomes a categorical property, the disposition ceases to exist. For instance, that the water that results from the melted ice has no power of liquefaction. But this is not a convincing point. If D is a cause of an event, then the persistence of the event would entail the persistence of its cause, and so causation would entail the temporal coincidence of powers and the events they cause. The better formulation would be that the water is liquid because its power of liquefaction is still triggered by heat.

Duration means that a TD event stops due to intrinsic or extrinsic causes. Extrinsic causes make T and D to be disconnected. One can, for example, remove the fire from near the ice, leaving it half melted. In this case, the property is partially instantiated, or instantiated to some degree. Powers are required to account for this distinction between full and partial instantiation of an effect, they allow us to explain completeness and degree in causation. It is not part of the causal explanation of a power to account for the extrinsic causes. The intrinsic cause of the termination of a TD event, on the other hand, occurs when T or D cease to exist. If T and D are essential properties of X and Y, then the intrinsic cause of cessation is that X or Y have ceased to exist. For instance, if the fire is not enough, the melted ice can extinguish it, so the liquefying will stop because there is no more heat. If T and D are non-essential properties of X and Y, then X and Y can still be connected, and the event does not occur. This is important to grant the distinction between powers and bearers (or categorical properties of these bearers). An example is the elasticity of a rubber band that ends at a certain level of stretch. The band and the force that stretches it are still there, but the band neither returns to its original length nor is stretched further. It has simply lost its elasticity.

If the duration of the connection is relevant, a point to consider is whether the TD event can always have been the case, so that it is a continuously existing event, or rather, a factual state for which there is no cause for change. For example, the hypotenuse of a triangle is the side of a square twice the area of the triangle. Nothing will change this event; the hypotenuse will always have

this disposition to become the side of the square. One might object that this language is not appropriate, since powers are causes of change, and therefore not applicable to formal entities. But this is a *petitio principii*. If we grant that powers explain not only motion, change, and action, but also states, formal relations and permanence – especially bearing in mind that powers persist when the event occurs –, then there is nothing wrong with using powers to explain the manifestation of essential properties that imply correlation. Indeed, the ancient Greek geometers would have no problem with saying that a hypotenuse has the power to produce such a square (see Marmodoro 2021: 17–19). Powers, then, can account not only for triggering dispositions, but also for correlations between categorical properties.

This leads us to an objection to the whole attempt to take powers as causes. Are they descriptions (explanatory formulas) of the behaviour of something/someone or, as I have argued, real properties (inherent in beings)? Early modern philosophers, such as Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, 21, 20) and Hume (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, 16), saw the “realist” conception of powers as a metaphysical excess. The idea is that, instead of attributing a power as a real property that causes an event, one could simply assume that there are events and that some of them will follow if certain conditions are met. Thus, instead of accepting that powers are real, one should only accept laws based on empirical data according to the pattern “if..., then...” (see Ryle, [1949] 2009: 31; Goodman 1955: 40–41). The answer to this objection is a matter of priority. It is not the case that we formulate a law, and events will follow it, rather, it is on the basis of real events that we formulate a law. For any empirical data, the cause-effect event must have been real.

Another side of this objection claims that powers are not dispositional but categorical properties. In this sense, T and D are categorical properties of X and Y, respectively. This would destroy the causal explanation of powers. In our example, fire has the categorical property of being hot, while ice has the categorical property of being cold. These properties do not explain the event of liquefaction. It is an important scientific discovery to learn that fire also has the ability to liquefy in addition to being hot, and that ice also has the ability to be liquefied in addition to being cold. Categorical properties are not correlative, and they are not sufficient to explain events on the basis of correlation. That is why we need powers as causes.

A final objection is that a realist theory of powers is threatened by an infinite regress. According to this, TD is the event caused by the dispositional power D in Y, which is the event DY caused by the dispositional power F in D, which is the event FD caused by the dispositional power G in F, and so on (see Swinburne 1980). In our example, the liquefaction was caused by the ability

of the ice to liquefy, which is caused by the presence of the ability to liquefy in the ice, which is caused by the ability to be present of the ability to liquefy, and so on. The regress is not necessary because to be a power is not to account for a power, but for an event (Marmodoro 2009: 345–346). All that is needed is a distinction between powers (which are unconnected) and events (in which powers are connected). In this sense, powers are causes because, as mentioned above, they are identified by their manifestation, and not by other powers.

2 Plato's Power

Bury (1894: 297), in what is to my knowledge the first study devoted to an examination of the concept of power (*dynamis*) in Plato, begins by distinguishing between animate and inanimate bearers of power. Among the former, he mentions power as might or influence, as for instance, “the power of the Persians” (*Mx.* 240d)¹, a concept which he relegates in his analysis to the privilege of “psychical effectiveness”. As for the inanimate bearers, he mentions the use of *dynamis* as the meaning of a word² and as a technical term in mathematics for the side of a square³ as evidence of the wide range of applications of the term, but again focusing on the sense of “effectiveness” that he associates with the notion of function (*ergon*).⁴ According to him, Plato uses *dynamis* as a “function realizable at will” (Bury 1894: 298), which implies a distinction between potentiality and actuality. He claims, for example, that in the *Theaetetus* 197b ff. we find a distinction between a power that has been acquired and one that is active. Bury insists, however, that effectiveness rather than potentiality is the distinctive mark of Plato's concept of *dynamis*. Plato is not concerned with problems such as powers that are not manifest or that are not associated with function. Plato sees power, he concludes, as “causative efficacy, moving force or power of self-extension” (Bury 1894: 298, see *dia tēn tēs aitias dynamin*, *Phlb.* 30d). He includes mathematical *dynamis* in this kind of causation, claiming

1 See also *Cri.* 46c, *Grg.* 513a, *Phdr.* 258c, *R.* 351b, 364a, 423a, *Plt.* 271c, *Ti.* 24e, 25a, *Lg.* 686b, 706b, 814a.

2 See *hē tou onomatos dynamis* in *Cra.* 394b. One can see the relation of this use to the one of the *dynamis* of letters, syllables and numbers, for instance in *Cra.* 393d–394b, *Hp. Ma.* 285d, and perhaps make a case that they all refer to the function of these units within the system they belong. See also *Cra.* 394c, 424b–c, 427b, 435d, *Phlb.* 24c.

3 *Plt.* 266a–b, *Tht.* 147e, 148b, *R.* 587d. *Ti.* 31c, 54b.

4 Bury (1897: 297–298) has in mind passages such as *R.* 352e, 353a, 477c, 507c–508a, 518b. For the connection of power and function, see also Brickhouse; Smith 1994: 6.

that “‘square root’ involves in its notion that of the square which it has ‘power’ to form” (Bury 1894: 298).

This causation, Bury continues, can be expressed in reverse. One can speak of the doctor’s power to produce health, which he sees as fitting into the power of making (*dynamis tou poiein*), and of the power of health to be caused in something, the power of becoming made (*dynamis tou paschein*; Bury 1894: 298, see *Tht.* 156a). This feature leads him to conclude that *dynamis* is “the necessary quality of every object and every subject of a related pair”, implying a “reciprocal causativeness”. Bury concludes from this correlation that “everything which is in relation to another thing may be termed a *dynamis*, or said to possess *dynamis*” (Bury 1894: 298). His textual evidence for this inclusivity, however, is controversial. He refers to *Republic*, 366e and 367d and to *Theaetetus*, 184b–185e, which are passages on powers of the soul and powers of the body. More likely, instead of claiming that all correlation entails power, it seems more plausible to understand correlation as a feature of powers. Bury also seems to infer too much, or at least not to provide enough reasons, when he approaches the famous passage against the corporealists and the formalists in the *Sophist* (246c–249d). From the conclusion that powers exist and somehow involve the correlation between a *dynamis tou poiein* and a *dynamis tou paschein*, Bury concludes that “*dynamis* is the common denominator to which all reality, all causal relation, whether outer or inner, spatial or non-spatial, is reduced” (Bury 1894: 299). From being an explanatory concept of causation, *dynamis* takes on an extremely inclusive and vague meaning, a conclusion that was not innocuous for the relevance of the causal explanation of powers for the scholarship to come, as we will see later.

Nevertheless, Bury argues that there is a contrast that limits this inclusive meaning, namely the distinction between power (*dynamis*) and nature (*physis*). He finds in *Philebus*, 29b, 64e, 66a and *Republic* 433d, 508a, the contrast between *dynamis* as a “sense-affecting property” that depends solely on the formal aspects of what something is, and *physis* as a “substantial nature or constitution” that refers to what something is as a compound of form and matter. From this evidence he concludes that *physis* is to *dynamis* as effect to cause, the former being absolute and self-complete; the latter being relative and self-externalising (Bury 1894: 299–300). Again, this is too much of an inference from little evidence⁵ and almost no argument.

Souilhé’s monograph resists this generalisation and aims to show, through a detailed vocabulary analysis, that Plato is the first to establish the

5 Passages in which the concepts of *dynamis* and *physis* are not thus contrasted are *Cra.* 400b, *R.* 497b, *Phlb.* 29b–c, *Ti.* 50b.

philosophical meaning of *dynamis*, namely, the “property or quality that reveals being” (Souilhé, 1919: XII, 149).⁶ The undeniable merit of Souilhé’s work is that it not only provides a detailed table of occurrences of the term, but also places the Platonic terminology in a historical development of the concept in pre-Platonic authors. At no point, however, does his extensive catalogue develop into a semantic system. Souilhé emphasises above all the differences in meaning between the Platonic occurrences, referring them to the meanings found in the various earlier authors, and does not propose a systematising argument. Hence the surprise at his thesis regarding the philosophical meaning of *dynamis*, about which I see two problems.

The first of these is that Souilhé subtracts the causal features from the concept of *dynamis*. Properties or qualities in general may simply be attributes and not causes, and Souilhé sees *dynamis* as activities, principles of action or motion, states, principles of resistance and passivity (1919: 149). The second is the connection between such properties and being, which suggests that they are essential. In clear opposition to Bury, Souilhé says that *dynamis* is the external manifestation of the intimate nature of things, which allows us to make distinctions among them (1919: 149, 157). He rejects the idea that *dynamis* can be understood as being, claiming that being is the correlative implied in the concept of *dynamis* (Souilhé 1919: 155–156). As a result, Souilhé is committed to *dynamis* being a manifestation, rather than a power. Moreover, Souilhé shares with Bury the conclusion that *dynamis* is a far too inclusive concept.

Souilhé could have systematised a more limited philosophical concept. In the *Laches* (192a9–b8), for example, Socrates defines speed as a *dynamis*, namely, the power to accomplish much in a short time. Souilhé (1919: 72) suggests that *dynamis* in this context means “property”. However, this is obviously related to the following description of courage as a *dynamis*. Plato often uses *dynamis* to designate the kind to which virtues belong⁷, and Souilhé himself is willing to relate the two meanings. Thus, a more charitable reading of this

6 Cleary [1998] 2013: 253, 255 takes an even more radical perspective than Souilhé in claiming that the only philosophical use of *dynamis* in Plato is found in the *Sophist* 247e, where it is introduced as a criterion of existence. He labels as ordinary use deprived of philosophical relevance all occurrences that refer to natural capacities, sense faculties, linguistic powers, political power, demonic power, technical capacity and virtue.

7 See *Hp. Mi.* 375d–376b, *Prt.* 330a, 333a, 349b, 359a, *Smp.* 216c, *Phd.* 70b, *R.* 366e, 367a, 429b, 430b, 433b, c, 443b, 588b. One can also consider how dispositional powers are the criteria for distinguishing gods from each other and from humans: see *Ion* 533d–e, 534c, 535e, 536a, *Cra.* 397c, 402e, 403b, 404e, 405a, 406a, 408a, 438c, *Grg.* 456a, *Smp.* 188d, 189c–d, 202e, 212b, 215c, *Phdr.* 237c, *Lg.* 960d.

passage in the *Laches* would have speed and virtue as species of dispositional power.⁸ This would also make sense of the occurrence of *dynamis* in the *Hippias Minor* 375d–376b, where Socrates asks whether justice is a *dynamis* or a knowledge or both. Souilhé thinks that *dynamis* here must mean “force”, even when it is textually associated with the soul (*ei men dynamis esti tēs psychēs*).⁹

Another *occasion manquée* for a more systematic approach to *dynamis* as a philosophical concept in Plato is in the *Charmides*, 168b–169b (see also *Prm.* 133d–134d, *Sph.* 252d, 254c). While Socrates argues that knowledge, being a *dynamis*, necessarily has an object, Souilhé interprets him as saying that a property is necessarily relative to an object (Souilhé 1919: 73), which is, to put it mildly, a very controversial claim that Souilhé himself thinks Plato is not ready to accept (*Ibid.* 75). On the other hand, if Socrates is considering the consequences of knowledge being a dispositional power, he may well be considering that this power requires a trigger to be found in the object of that knowledge. The relation of knowledge and the arts to their objects and ends is, interestingly enough, generally linked in Plato to the description of knowledge and the arts as powers.¹⁰ If the objects are the triggers of our dispositional knowledge, one can, for example, learn about health in different degrees of perfection, until she becomes an expert with full knowledge. On the other hand, the object she knows is the end to be achieved by her art: she can be effective in generating health in sick bodies. Objects of knowledge are power triggers in both ways.

Powers are measured by their effectiveness, that is, their degree of success in achieving an end. Sometimes identified with a function¹¹, this end is better understood as the proper manifestation of a power.¹² Expressions denoting the

8 Other occurrences of dispositional powers similar to speed are found in *Prt.* 320d–e, 321b; *Chrm.* 156b, *Ion* 533d–e, *Cra.* 399d, 412e, 420a; *Phd.* 113c, *R.* 359d, 360a, *Phdr.* 246c; *Tht.* 197c, *Prm.* 150c–d, *Plt.* 272c, 289a, 308c, *Ti.* 60a–b, 65d–e, 82e, *Phlb.* 24c, 31e, 44c–d, 49c, *Lg.* 889b, 960d.

9 See the distinction between force and *dynamis* proposed by Protagoras in *Prt.* 351a–b.

10 See *Grg.* 447c, 452e, 455d, 456c, 457b, 460a; *R.* 348a–b, 364b, 454a, 473d, 477b, 477d–e, 478a, 511b, 521d, 532c, 532d, 533a, 537d; *Phdr.* 265d, 268a; *Sph.* 219a–b, 227b, 232e–233a, 265b, *Plt.* 261c, 280d, 281b, 304d–e, 305e, 308e, *Ti.* 41c.

11 For the connection between *dynamis* and *ergon*, see *Grg.* 452a, *R.* 351e, 477c–d, *Plt.* 287e, 305b–c, 305e, *Lg.* 918b. One should consider is an intermediary power at *R.* 479d means a power with limited degree of success. Perceptive or intellectual capacities are described as powers with a specific function, see *R.* 507c, e, 508b, 509b, 518c, 532a, *Tht.* 184e–185e, *Prm.* 135b–c, *Sph.* 236b, *Plt.* 272b, *Ti.* 46e, 64b, 66d, 71b, 71e, *Phlb.* 58d, *Lg.* 902c.

12 For proper manifestation, see *R.* 358b, 473b, 508e, 509b, 517b, 602c, *Phdr.* 271c, *Tht.* 158e, *Plt.* 291b, *Ti.* 32c (explaining 28a), 45e, 48d, 52e, 56c, 63b, 64c, 65e, 74a, 85d, *Phlb.* 29b–c, *Lg.* 655d. For limits on this proper manifestation, see *Phlb.* 29b–c, *Ti.* 74d, 83e.

limits imposed on powers, such as *hoson dynamai*, *kata / eis dynamin* or *en dynamei* abound in Plato and they denote the partial instantiation of ends.¹³ Souilh   avoids analysing these expressions on the grounds that they are unimportant (1919: 71), but they point to a relevant feature of powers: the fact that their successful manifestation is subject to external interference. Indeed, the control of external interference is a means of ensuring successful manifestation, and it seems reasonable to assume that when power is used absolutely, i.e., to denote something that can be acquired in contexts that do not express causation, it refers to this kind of control.¹⁴ Unfortunately, this is an idea that Souilh   does not consider.

Another point that Souilh   neglects is that powers can be acquired¹⁵, so a power is not the manifestation of the essence of something, but rather of its disposition. For example, if knowledge is an acquired power, then the soul is something that has the dispositional power to acquire it.¹⁶ In this case, triggered by some object of knowledge, the soul can remove the interference of forgetfulness and recollect what it knew before. The causal explanation of course differs according to what is doing the triggering and what has a dispositional power, so it is not intrinsic to the essence of something to have either an “active power” or a “passive power”, it depends on what its role is in the causation of an event. Determining what that role is is, of course, a major task of science.¹⁷

If Souilh   could have offered a more systematised version of his findings, Lodge (1927) offers us the opposite excess: an over-unification. He proposes a classification of the uses of *dynamis* into eight categories (1927: 22) – general, mechanical, psychological, political, moral, intellectual, ultimate source and realisability – which are explained as follows. The general meaning is the one related to change, which he divides into active and passive powers. Mechanical powers are those that explain the motion and change of bodies, which,

13 See *hoson*: *Cra* 422c, *R.* 374e, *Phdr.* 253b; *kata*: *Cra* 425c, *R.* 429e, 507a, 535a, *Phdr.* 249c, *Th  t.* 168c, *Sph.* 226b, 263a, *Pl  t.* 262a, 269e, 279c, 293d, 300d, 310c, *T  i.* 17b, 18d, 30a, 38c, 42e; *eis*: *R.* 427d, 458e, 590d, *Phdr.* 257a, 273e, *Sph.* 244b, *Pl  t.* 273b, 300c, 301a, 308c, *T  i.* 26d, 37d, 71d, 89d; *en*: *Smp.* 218e, *R.* 328c, 567b.

14 See *Euthyd.* 276b, *Grg.* 514a, *Smp.* 183a, *R.* 364a, 366c, 423a, 591a, *Pl  t.* 310b.

15 See *R.* 366d, 494c, 546d; *Th  t.* 197c.

16 For the soul as a power to move, see *Ph  d.* 70b, *Phdr.* 246a, d, *T  i.* 76a, *a contrario sensu Ph  l  b.* 28d, *Lg.* 899a, 927a. Compare to the *kh  ra* in *T  i.* 49a, 50b.

17 For identification of triggering (or active) powers and dispositional (or passive) powers as an important methodological step, see *Phdr.* 270d, *Th  t.* 156a, *Sph.* 247d–e, 248b–c. Menn 1994: 74 thinks what Plato means by *dynamis* is active or passive power.

largely based on the *Timaeus*, are mathematical solids that move according to mathematical laws. In a Locke-Humean like approach, Lodge claims that these laws are mental, arguing that for a Platonist the world is not governed by blind forces, but by the mind (Lodge 1927: 29–30). Psychological powers thus grounds physical motion and are ultimately reduced to the power of the mind in its pure contemplation of the ideas. The latter is a self-reflexive circular activity that controls the body as its instrument in order to change its surroundings from chaos to order. In this way, psychological power also causes real political power, using intelligence as the organising principle of a community (*Ibid.* 33). Moral powers are psychophysical dispositions that ultimately depend on the idea of the good as the organising principle that determines moral value and the function of each virtue (*Ibid.* 35). Intellectual power is the mind's organisation of chaotic sensations according to meaning-values, which are also ultimately organised by the idea of the good (*Ibid.* 36). Thus, the idea of the good is the ultimate source of power. A Platonist would find the general meaning of the causation of motion to be an image of the mathematical-intellectual laws that govern it; a combination of many into one organised by the idea of the good (*Ibid.* 36–37). Lodge concludes that there are limits to the imposition of such organisation on the world, for there is always something irrational and chaotic left over, hence the process of power activation is endless (*Ibid.* 42–43).

Lodge's conclusion is that power is the "creation of value by the best possible reorganization" (*Ibid.* 43). Instead of a concept to explain causation, we are offered a normative concept, a rationally based imperative to create some change in the world to a highly idealistic standard. This cannot be achieved without reading a lot into passages in various dialogues, mostly those analysed by Souilhé, in order to prove a conclusion that actually works as an assumption in his argument. Moreover, it may be true that Plato's general philosophical aim is to justify such an imperative, but the whole effort does not shed much light on what *dynamis* means in Plato.

Such a debate, wavering between overgeneralisation and lack of systematisation may have contributed to the position of some scholars who then saw Plato's use of *dynamis* as rebarbative. Gosling (1968: 121), for example, referring to *Republic*, 476d ff., thinks that when Socrates claims that *epistēmē* is a *dynamis* whose object is truth, this cannot be used to determine the sense of *dynamis* in the passage, and that the term was introduced without special weight (1968: 125). Vlastos ([1976]1981: 413) also claims that in Plato any causal meaning of the term *dynamis* depends on the context. Referring to *Laches* 192a–b, he claims that, understanding *dynamis* as power would lead to "the extraordinary assumption that the cause of everything done quickly by anyone anywhere

is *the same*, e.g., that the very same thing which caused a man to run quickly would also cause him to learn and to think quickly" ([1976] 1981: 413–414).¹⁸ Vlastos' argument reflects the threat of the infinite regress if one were to admit second-order powers, but in Socrates's argument speed is the power to accomplish much (*polla diaprattomenēn*) in a short time, not to do something specific quickly. The cause of, say, accomplishing many tasks in a day, is a certain disposition of the agent, and this cause cannot be reduced to the speed of performing one of the tasks, for it involves skills such as time management. What we see in Gosling and Vlastos is a certain scepticism about the reality of powers. A similar position can be found in Irwin (1995: 191): "when Plato asks what justice 'does' or what its power (*dynamis*) is, he may simply be asking what difference justice 'makes' to a soul".

A change in this scenario occurred with Hugh Benson's (1997) sketch of what he called Socratic dynamic theory. According to him, in this theory something that has a *dynamis* can do various things that need not to be intentional, and this means that this thing has a state or condition that causes it to perform such an activity under the appropriate circumstances. He also emphasises that Socrates is a realist with respect to the *dynamis*s, that are the feature of something *by which* it does what it does (Benson 1997: 81). On the other hand, the mere fact that an entity engages in a particular kind of activity does not in itself mean that the entity has the *dynamis* to engage in that kind of activity. The activity typical of a *dynamis* may occur because of other factors, such as an accident (see *Hp. Mi.* 366b–c, *R.* 346b3–6), but to properly identify an activity one must identify its *dynamis* (Benson 1997: 83).

To properly identify a *dynamis*, Benson claims, a necessary condition is to identify its object (Benson 1997: 86, see *Grg.* 454e–455a, *Chrm.* 168c–d). However, some problems arise. In general, two different *dynamis*s can have the same object, although distinct objects cannot belong to the same *dynamis* (see *Chrm.* 168b–e). But in the case of epistemic *dynamis*s, a non-knowledge *dynamis* and a knowledge *dynamis* can share the same object (see *Grg.* 464a–465d),

18 Vlastos was responding to Penner (1973) suggestion that when Socrates asks the "What is F? question", he asks for causes, not meanings. In the *Laches* passage, asking what speed means has the same purpose as asking what courage means, which implies a reference to a certain disposition of the agent. In this paper, Penner does not specify the role of *dynamis* in this argument, a task later undertook by Wolfsdorf (2005). Wolfsdorf's conclusion, however, is that the meaning of *dynamis* is commonsensical, i.e., "enables such-and-such to occur under such-and-such conditions" (2005: 334), including in this passage of the *Laches*. This use is typical, not of Socrates' conception of virtue, but of his interlocutors' initial responses to the "What is F? question" (2005: 335–338).

in which case the object is necessary and sufficient for a knowledge *dynamis*, but only sufficient for non-knowledge *dynamis*. The relationship between a *dynamis* and its object is also a relevant factor in distinguishing *dynamis*. In Benson we find the blueprint of a Platonic theory of powers.

Lefebvre (2018) has a different aim. He intends to carry out an archaeology of the Aristotelian notion of *dynamis*, devoting many pages to Plato. Lefebvre's focus, however, is on the clause "*kata dynamin*"¹⁹, which he describes as "acting in view of one's own limitations" (2018: 183). Thus, in Lefebvre's view, *dynamis* is not a comparative concept (2018: 214), but a restrictive one. It locates agents in their own sphere of action, and also provides them with proper objects to act on (2018: 236). Understanding *dynamis* restrictively, that is, according to the contrast between what something can and cannot do, leads us seamlessly to the concept's other metaphysical function: individualisation (2018: 312). The sphere of action of something determines its peculiar capacity, and allows us to distinguish it from everything else. However, these promising results do not provide a general Platonic theory of *dynamis*. Focused on *dynamis* as a restriction and aiming to explain Aristotle's metaphysics, Lefebvre is not interested, for instance, in discussing passages on the degree of success of powers, which would allow for a comparative use of the term, and their role as causes, which would allow for their interactive performance.

Bailey (2021: 30) has recently raised doubts about Plato's commitment to powers as the fundamental grounds of properties. He claims that Plato is committed to the distinction between a power and its vehicle or bearer, but *Republic* 476d ff. refers to the power of identifying powers, which entails the question of how a power relates to itself (2021:36). Bailey sees Plato hesitating on this problem both in the *Republic* and in the *Charmides* (167a–169a), and concludes that Plato "had not made up his mind about how far he would let powers take him in his own metaphysics" (Bailey 2021: 35). On the other hand, he sees some innovation in Plato's theory in *Sophist* 247d–248c: describing being as powers allows for causes that are not restricted to Platonic forms (Bailey 2021: 39), a theory of causation that is also present in the *Timaeus's* *khōra*. Yet, Bailey thinks that anyone willing to understand space as the *khōra* would be "unwilling to suppose that powers are foundational in their ontology". Again, Plato would be reluctant to develop these ideas (Bailey 2021: 42).

As we can see, there are many controversies about Plato's concept of power, and this is the rich soil from which this book has grown. It aims to show that

19 For the relevance of *kata dynamin* to the Aristotelian concept of potentiality, see Menn 1994: 95–100.

in the Platonic Corpus, powers are primary causes of motion, interaction and relation, allowing us to identify what things are and how they combine.

3 The Structure of this Book

This volume is structured to exhibit progressive levels of complexity of the concept, instead of any speculation about how the dialogues are to be organised. We begin with Plato's appropriation of the notion of *dynamis* from the medical tradition, in order to understand how exactly a word with the usual meaning of "strength" (of an individual), "might" (of an army), "power" (of a king) gave rise to the philosophical concept of power. As Arnaud Macé shows in our first chapter, the Hippocratic treatise *On Ancient Medicine* (xxii, 1) states that "*dynamis* is the intensity and strength of the humours" (ch. 1: 33). As in earlier uses of the term, *dynamis* here refers to the typical effects that a given body or substance will produce when given the opportunity to interact. In other words, power denotes the agency of the basic elements that constitute our bodies and our food, both in terms of strength and nature of their effects. *Plato and "Hippocrates" on Nature and Power* explains how, in the Hippocratic treatise *On Ancient Medicine*, health results from the patient having the power to dominate (*krattein*) the nourishment she intakes, and illness arises from a diet composed of too powerful ingredients. This degree of power establishes a continuous scale among these different "natures": natures of food and natures of patients, in both cases ranked from the strongest to the weakest. The art of medicine is all about finding the right diet for the right patient, matching two natures identified by their respective level of power.

The main concern in this first chapter is to demonstrate how Plato, in the *Phaedrus*, used and transformed the doctrine of nature and power from *On Ancient Medicine* to understand the true art of rhetoric through an analogy with a revisited "Hippocratic method". Plato makes two correlated significant changes. He first elaborates the concept of passive power which was only implicit in *On Ancient Medicine*: a reality is not only characterised by the intensity and nature of the effects it can cause, but as importantly by the intensity and nature of the effects it can receive. The nature of every existing thing now delineates a power to act and be acted upon. As a consequence, Plato reverses the order of the medical method presented in the Hippocratic treatise: instead of measuring powers to identify natures on a scale, one will have to divide natures to find specific powers of acting and being acted upon. In doing so, Plato also makes the concept of power a key element of his theory

of participation: to take part in a form (*eidos*) means, for any reality, whether a body or a soul, to be given a certain nature (*physis*) which defines, for whatever takes part in the same form, a precise power to act and be acted upon. Consequently, there will be no art, whether of medicine or of rhetoric, without the ability to identify such natures.

Active and Passive Powers in Plato?: this is the title question of chapter 2. Having Aristotle and Anaxagoras as Plato's counterpoints, Thomas Tuozzo addresses this difference. "On Aristotle's view", he explains, "when one substance causes change in another, it does so in virtue of possessing an active power that acts on a passive power possessed by what it causes to change". Therefore, "the causal powers by which one substance affects or is affected by another are *essentially* either active or passive" (ch. 2: 42–43). Plato, in his turn, considered this a pragmatic rather than metaphysical distinction. Perhaps faithful to his Hippocratic influence, Plato does not go so far. He recognises active and passive roles for (sensible) powers, but holds that any one power can perform either role, depending on the power with which it interacts.

The interaction of things in the world and their *ad hoc* activity or passivity is only part of Plato's metaphysics of powers, argues chapter 2. Another crucial aspect is what is called the "vertical causation", the one-way non-symmetrical causal role of Eternal Forms as powers active on changeable things. In this, Plato was influenced by Anaxagoras, who claimed that the cause of change had to be unaffected and separated from what it changes. Plato distinguishes two ways Forms act on sensible things. On the one hand, they metaphysically constitute sensible bodies; on the other, they cognitively inform souls and thereby give direction to their self-motion.

Next chapter develops the topic of horizontal and vertical causations by addressing the difference between pre-cosmic reality, in which things are always in generation, and the world which was once generated and remains in existence. I argue that the latter is an enhancement of the former accomplished by the demiurge, taking forms as his model. This is a typical description of the vertical causation of forms. Pre-cosmic reality, on its turn, features powers interacting horizontally independently of the forms. This textual evidence supports the choice of the title: *Powers as First Causes of Generation in Plato's Timaeus*. In order to claim, against the predominant alternative readings, that powers are metaphysical primitives – uncaused first causes – of the world, the chapter analyses *Timaeus'* account of bodily motion and weight. Both are caused by what is called "the law of displacement": the natural tendency of bodies and their particles to move towards their like. The chapter then demonstrates that this tendency is not designed

by the demiurge; instead, it is an inevitable trait of the world, whose origin lies in pre-cosmic causes.

Before the world, reality consisted in the interaction of, on the one side, unbalanced and different powers, and on the other side, the resilience of the bearer. The constant activity of these two causes is what precludes displacement coming to a stop. It is also the reason why they are two powers, rather than forces. Taking the conclusion of chapter one further, chapter three shows that powers do not counteract one another, increasing or decreasing their effects, instead they remain uninterruptedly active, even after the demiurge crafts the world. If the interference of the demiurge turned the generation of bodies in the world into the composition and decomposition of triangles into polyhedrons, it is also inevitable that these triangles and bodies are endowed with power-caused natural motions. If this is so, we can see that horizontal causation of powers happens among things in generation independently of the vertical causation of forms, although the latter is certainly responsible for significant changes in the former.

The topic of chapter four is the contrast of vertical and horizontal causation. In *Power, Participation and the Greatest Difficulty in Plato's Parmenides*, Mary Louise Gill addresses the theory of Forms put forward by Socrates in the beginning of that dialogue (*Prm.* 128e5–130a2) as well as in the *Phaedo* (*Phd.* 100c4–e3) and highlights Socrates' failure in accounting for participation: he ends up reifying the participation of particulars in forms and committing himself to a regress. Next, it turns to how Parmenides formulates what he considers to be the greatest difficulty of this theory: that a sceptic might object that forms are unknowable to us. Since Socrates lacks an adequate account of participation, Parmenides is warranted to take the premise that forms are “themselves by themselves” (*auta kath' hauta*) to mean that they are radically separated from things around us, existing in a completely independent ontological realm. Therefore, forms have no causal role, and to express this idea he says that things around us do not have their power in relation to forms. However, Parmenides maintains that they still have their power in relation to things around us. In sum, in Parmenides' extreme two world ontology, there is no participation between things in our realm and forms and no “vertical causality” between forms and us. Instead, there is “horizontal causality”: things in each realm exert their power in relation to other things in their own realm.

Having formulated the problem on these terms, argues chapter 4, Parmenides suggests that Socrates leave behind his flawed conception of participation and understand the connection between particulars and forms as the exercise of a thing's inner power toward a form, and of the form's causal power toward it.

By interpreting participation as the exercise of an inner power, Socrates can overcome objections such as the regress in the previous argument. Once the mistaken assumption that being lies *outside* the nature of things is abandoned, forms and particulars have inner natures that determine what they are, and that inner being enables them to relate to some things outside themselves and not others. The fourth chapter concludes by pointing out that this account of the theory of forms solving the problem of participation is developed in another dialogue, the *Sophist*.

The powers of acting and being affected are a central and controversial topic of the *Sophist*, this is why this dialogue receives substantial attention in this volume. *Plato's Central Conception of Being as Dynamis in the Sophist* contends that, at 247c9–e4, the Eleatic Stranger states that power – in the figure of these two kinds – is the causal definition of being. Fiona Leigh also addresses an objection to this claim: that, at 250e1–2, after the long argument that follows this definition, the Stranger asserts that they are in *aporia* about being. Through a detailed analysis of 249e–250e, chapter 5 points out that this difficulty emerges within a different inquiry on being, one not concerned with what is being *qua* cause, but with what sort of thing is a form. More importantly, the author demonstrates that the causal definition of being is assumed in the postulation of the Forms of Change, Rest and Being as one of the premises leading to the conclusion that Forms are a sort of thing that neither moves nor rests.

A crucial assertion made in chapter 5 is that the definition of being as power to act or to be affected is such that these actions and affections do not entail change. Quite the opposite, this implication is the claim of the Friends of Forms against which the Stranger aims to argue. Moreover, the chapter stresses that the Stranger's descriptions of participation never refer to the kind Change, consisting instead of sharing (*koinōnein*) in Being, Sameness, and Difference. It is precisely this claim – that powers do not entail change – that is developed in chapter 6.

Dynamis and Agency in the Sophist begins by evidencing how the Stranger's argument against the giants resembles the causation of forms in the *Phaedo*: “Nothing else makes [*poiei*] something beautiful other than the presence of that Beauty or the sharing in [*koinōnia*] [it]” (*Phd.* 100d). Next, Edward C. Halper claims that this does not denote an act – for an immaterial entity does not move a material one – but the causality exerted by the possession of a character, a case of formal causation expressed in the formula of a combination of elements. Based on this evidence, chapter 6 turns to the argument the Eleatic Stranger presents to materialists and friends of forms in order to sustain that the definition of being as *dynamis* supposes such an understanding of formal causation. Along

its lines, Plato makes it clear that power does not entail change or making, but combination. The author shows that motion is but a species of the much wider kind of conjunctions or disjunctions. Forms too can combine or not, and this does not mean that they change. They remain what they are while things in motion are simply a recombination of these essences according to time.

The conclusion is that, in Plato's *Sophist*, being is the capacity to combine. This capacity, and not its exercise, is requisite to be a being. The chapter shows that each of the five greatest kinds participates in being because each has the *dynamis* to combine with another kind, specifically, with being. On the other hand, *dynamis* is not a thing that exists by itself: there is nothing else to being but the capacity of things to commune. Since everything there is combines with something, non-being belongs to composites whose items cannot mix with each other. Non-being is therefore the incapacity of a being to mix with a specific being. Statements uttering a combination of items which do not have the capacity to mix are false. The sophist – conclude both Plato's dialogue and chapter 6 – is someone who denies that beings have a determined capacity of combination, this is why he denies the possibility of false statements.

As we see, in Plato's *Sophist* we find explanation of a different kind of horizontal power causation: one that occurs among formal entities by their combinability. This is nothing but the object of dialectic, which, as previously pointed out, enquires into the differences between forms and makes inferences about the power of each nature. The fact that the *Sophist* explores the horizontal causation of powers among forms is perfectly compatible with it also exerting another kind of vertical causation: the one between forms and entities endowed with motion. This is a theme that we begin to explore in chapter 7, which addresses the inclusion of motion in the set of things that should be accepted as beings by the Friends of Forms. There Francesco Fronterotta claims that the soul "has a nature and structure intermediate between the sensible and the intelligible" (ch 7: 58), which means it cannot be reduced to any of these entities. Therefore, as already mentioned, the power causation of forms on the soul is different from its causation on bodies and on other souls.

Movement, Life, Soul and Intelligence thus draws the consequences of the causal definition of being as power for another crucial passage of the *Sophist*, where the Stranger suggests that what fully is (*pantelōs on*) cannot be unmovable and hence must include the four items listed in the title. As the author shows, this does not mean that intelligible realities must have a soul or an intellect, rather that the soul cannot be entirely reduced to either the sensible or the intelligible sphere. It is the soul that has the kind of movement that is included in being, the so-called vital movement. Again, the encompassing of this motion within being, as chapter 7 demonstrates, is a development of the

causal definition of being. Two consequences follow from this thesis. The first is that the soul is featured among beings with power to combine or communicate with others, as seen in chapter 6. The second is that the motion of the soul is also explained by the causal powers of acting and being acted upon. These consequences are developed in the next two chapters.

Plato's Philebus on Mixing the Powers of Pleasure and Knowledge in a Good Life addresses the question of how to combine powers in order to obtain the best disposition of the soul. The *Philebus*, shows Cristina Ionescu in our eighth chapter, operates with different kinds of power causation, many of them already known to us. One is the power to cause change that is proper to elements in their horizontal interaction; they allow for degrees: weaker in us because of their being mixed, and stronger and purer in the universe. Another one is the power of the intellect to organise these elements in the universe in a vertical interaction of formal causation. Beside these cosmic powers, there are the powers of the soul. First, cognitive powers of different kinds: cause of the communication between the soul and different objects, they are ranked according to their precision and the purity of their objects, having in the power of dialectic its utmost accomplishment. Then, the power of pleasure, which explains how certain objects replenish lacks and cause fulfilment. These can also be pure depending on their object.

Having introduced all these categories, chapter 8 explains how the power of the intellect operates by mixing them and generating harmony and the good life. The recipe: selecting the ingredients – powers that provide either our survival or our benefit – with proportion. The interesting point in the recipe is that proportion is argued for in a “dialogue” between the powers of knowledge and pleasure. In this conversation both are persuaded of their reciprocal importance: cognition makes pleasure possible; pleasure makes knowledge desirable. The recipe therefore aims at enhancing the intrinsic connection of these powers by their own admission of a certain proportion. In line with the Hippocratic tradition, as shown in our first chapter, in Plato powers can be guided to generate good in things such as health and happiness. The cause of this proportional harmony is nothing but the power of the Good.

Developing the topic of the motion of the soul as the causal powers of acting and being acted upon, the next chapter approaches *The Possibility of Reflexive Powers in Plato*. The problem finds its formulation in the *Charmides* when Socrates questions Critias' definition of temperance (*sōphrosynē*) as knowledge of knowledge, therefore as a power that has itself as its object. Socrates regards the idea as puzzling, but, as the Francisco J. Gonzalez shows, there are plenty of examples of reflexive powers in the *Charmides* and elsewhere, the most conspicuous of which are the soul's self-motion in the *Laws*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*.

The inquiry on what would be Plato's position on reflexive power is contrasted to the solution Aristotle offers to the difficulty. The latter depends on determining that every motion consists of something moved and an unmoved mover, whilst claiming that the activity (*energeia*) of both is one and the same. This, however, does not seem a solution available to Plato, for it hangs on a concept of *energeia* that excludes *dynamis*.

Chapter 9 thence provides a tentative outline of Plato's explanation of reflexive powers based on relevant arguments in different dialogues. Specific passages on perception in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Timaeus* show that some powers cannot be sharply delimited one from the other before their encounter. The texts suggest that, for instance, whilst perception and its object are both motions, in some sense they constitute one single motion – perceiving. Therefore, and anticipating a point that will be made by Aristotle, the kind of self-reflexive power we find in Plato is one that shares the being of its object. On the other hand, Plato's reflexive powers do have an external object, but one that is such as to pertain to the proper being of this power. In contradistinction to Aristotle's *energeia*-based solution, in which the activity is self-directed, Plato's reflexivity of *dynamis* is necessarily other-directed.

The *Charmides* is not the only “Socratic” dialogue in which powers have a pre-eminent role. In *Power in the Hippias Minor*, Hugh H. Benson shows that, in its proofs that the same person is a liar and truthful, and that the good agent is one who willingly does injustice, the dialogue relies on an understanding of power characterised by three conditions. The first is the valency condition: *A* is good relative to some kind of activity iff *A* has the power manifested in that kind of activity. According to it, there is no good *A* if not in the manifestation of a power. The second condition involves the power of *A* and a self-motion agent *B* and is called the weak infallibility condition: *A* has the power manifested in some kind of activity iff (if *B* possesses and uses *A* in the performance of the activity & *B* wants to perform the activity well & there are no obstacles, then *B* performs activities of that kind well). According to it, power can be ascribed to things if they perform well whenever an agent wants to perform an activity well (barring obstacles). The third condition is called the duality condition: *A* has the power manifested in some kind of activity iff *A* has the power manifested in the opposite kind of activity. The sense of opposite here is vague, but it seems to be enough to make Hippias agree that good runners be those who willingly run fast and slow, a pivotal moment in the dialogue.

But there is more to the three conditions than this, shows chapter 10. The examples in Socrates' *epagoge* suggest a distinction between the agent who performs the activity, *B*, and the vehicle which possesses the power manifested in the activity, *A*; for instance, a distinction between the runner and the body

she uses to run. This is striking for positing different kinds of power acting in connection: the power of things depends on self-motion agents – those able to act willingly – determining their activity within a duality. In these cases, the power of B to perform the activity it wants relies on the power of the vehicle A. Perhaps we may find here a description of the role of agents with self-motion such as the soul in directing the powers of other things in motion.

This idea is explored in reply to the question: *Does Socrates' Divine Sign have a Dynamis?* By analysing all the passages that describe Socrates' account of his own peculiar motivation, Louis-André Dorion demonstrates that the power that opposes some of Socrates' actions must be ascribed to the god, and not to the sign as an independent entity. In contradistinction to the vehicles of the *Hippias Minor*, the sign is a sort of instrument through which the god manifests its power. This suggests a difference between divine and non-divine use of instruments, the power of the latter being subsumed in the power of the god. It also diverges, as the author proceeds to explain, from the power of a *daimōn* as it is described in the *Symposium* (202d–203a). *Daimōnes* are intermediate entities concerned with all the forms of mediation and communication between gods and humans, operating in both directions. Socrates' sign, on its turn, is one-directional and not the manifestation of an intermediate.

The description of the sign as a manifestation of divine power also contrasts with the traditional religious account of the Muse's inspiration of poets that we find in the *Ion* (533d–e). According to it, the Muses are like magnets that empower iron rings by making them acquire the power to do what the magnet does. Power would be thus transmissible. On the other hand, power would also be dependent on the presence of their source: iron rings cannot attract metal in the absence of a magnet. Neither condition applies to the case of Socrates' divine sign. Neither the sign nor Socrates acquires divine power, which remains the preserve of the gods. Moreover, Socrates' own power to act is not dependent on divine power; he keeps his power of self-motion.

This brings us to *Power and Willing Action in Plato*. As we have seen, willing actions are not only choice-based; they also express power. Andrew Payne takes this statement further in order to show that Plato's peculiar concept of willing actions depends on his peculiar understanding of powers. Take the cognitive powers of knowledge and opinion as a case study. To know is the quintessential willing action, for it fulfils the pursuit of a good, contributing to our happiness. But opinion allows for falsehood, and agents adopting false beliefs judge they are acting willingly whilst failing to do so. Therefore, they are not acquiring a good. Fulfilling the pursuit of a good is thence a condition for an action to be willing and this is why Plato asserts that all actions based on false opinions are unwilling.

Plato's concept of willing action strikes us as very different from the usual forensic meaning of the expression, according to which an unwilling action allows the agent to claim pardon. The author then shows how Plato's definition of justice becomes a very important element in explaining how the two concepts go together. Justice, states the *Republic* (443d2–444a1), is the power of self-ruling that balances the soul causing the well-being of an agent. Therefore, just actions are platonically willing, unjust actions are platonically unwilling. On the other hand, based on a *locus classicus* for the discussion of power, *Republic* 477d1–5, the author makes a distinction between that over which a power is set, its object, and the success of a power to accomplish its proper activity, which is marked by producing beneficial results. An unwilling action in a forensic sense, say external compulsion causing an agent to perform a certain action, is an action that fails due to ignorance of circumstances or due to external necessity. Correspondingly, a willing action in a forensic sense aims at benefit and therefore is caused by a power of the soul. However, if this action is based on a false belief, the agent will act forensically willingly and platonically unwillingly. Willing actions, on their turn, must combine forensic and platonic senses of the expression.

Finally, *Notes Towards a New Understanding of the Virtues in the Republic* argues that not only justice is a power, but also wisdom, courage and temperance, i.e. all the cardinal virtues. By presenting extensive textual evidence, Merrick Anderson embraces a functional theory, according to which virtues are the causes of accomplishing well an *ergon*. Powers, in their turn, are defined as the causes of anything doing what it is able to do, leading to the inference that virtues are a kind of power. The next question is what makes the cardinal virtues differ from each other. The case of courage is detailed: its subject is the spirit, whose function is to preserve opinions. When spirit performs this function well, it preserves the true opinions provided by reasoning, becoming its ally. This power of the good functioning of the spirit is courage. Each part of the soul has its own cardinal virtue – wisdom for reason, temperance for desire – whilst justice is the virtue of the entire soul. One must notice, however, that the function of the cardinal virtues is not accomplished in the world, like virtues such as magnanimity. Their outcome is rather internal to the soul, and this is why they are special: they cause our well-being.

From their role in Hippocratic health to their causation in our virtues, we demonstrate that powers are a crucial concept in Plato's metaphysics. They are the causal definition of beings as active agents, even if changeable beings

often yield to each other in this interaction. In this sense, powers cause change, but not only. They are also the cause of combination, determining what these beings are. In this sense, they characterise the soul both as a self-mover and a mover of others. Divine power, in its turn, causes things in us, not by any transmission, but by the power of the good, a formal causation of proportion and harmony in the world. Our aim is to display this refined theory of causation built into different texts. We hope the reader finds it interesting and rewarding.

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Plato and “Hippocrates” on Nature and Power: Reading *Phaedrus* 269d–272b in the Light of the Hippocratic Treatise *On Ancient Medicine*

Arnaud Macé

The question of determining how “Hippocratic” the method so labelled by Plato in the *Phaedrus* (269d–271d) is has been the source of important debates among specialists of the Hippocratic corpus.¹ It has aroused less interest among Plato scholars, who may have found it difficult to believe that Plato would meaningfully invoke Hippocrates in a crucial passage for the description of the dialectic method, or even suggest that the philosophical art of speech should really be constructed through an analogy with Hippocratic medicine. Such disbelief is also fuelled by the neglect of the most important achievement that Plato places under the patronage of “Hippocrates and true treason”² in this page of the *Phaedrus*: the principle that natures are individuated through their power to act and be acted upon.³ Such a principle indeed finds its origins in the Hippocratic treatises, and most of all *On Ancient Medicine*, as Souilhé first argued more than a century ago (Souilhé 1919: 31–57). Jouanna, one the most sceptical scholars regarding the possibility of a reference from the *Phaedrus* to the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, probably written in the middle of the fifth century, recognises that the analogy established by Plato between the way in which true rhetoric relies on knowledge of the nature of souls and of the effect of speech on souls, and the way in which the art of medicine relies on knowledge of the nature of the body and of how diet acts on it, is based on a description of the art of medicine that has no closest equivalent in the entire Hippocratic corpus than *On Ancient Medicine* (Jouanna 1977: 27–28; 1990: 80–81), a treatise from the late fifth or early fourth century, contemporary with Plato’s lifetime.

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- 1 Three important studies by Joly 1961, Jouanna 1977 and Mansfeld 1980 probably offer the best introduction to this complex debate.
 - 2 *Phdr.* 270c8–9. I will always quote and translate from the Greek text edited by Léon Robin (Robin 1933).
 - 3 And this despite Mansfeld’s call to stop neglecting this principle, more than forty years ago (Mansfeld 1980: 350–353).

The purpose of this paper is not to reopen the controversial “Hippocratic question”. The intellectual affinity between a sequence of the *Phaedrus* in which Hippocrates is named and *On Ancient Medicine* does not need to entail that Plato means this particular treatise to have been written by Hippocrates himself. Plato may very well regard as Hippocratic a certain number of treatises belonging to a school of medicine, as we also do, and name only the founder while using the description of the art of medicine found in such books. Once this difficulty is set aside, we may investigate a field of research that has only been waiting too long since it was opened by Taylor and Souilh  , namely the precise study of the importance of the Hippocratic corpus in the formation of Plato’s fundamental concepts, in particular his concept of *dynamis*, of *physis* and of *eidos* (Taylor 1911; Souilh   1919). In endeavouring such an intellectual archaeology of Platonic concepts and methods, it is not necessary to reduce Plato’s invention to a simple reuse of medical concepts and methods. The interesting part is to identify the doctrines and texts that Plato engages with, challenges, reuses into new constructions of his own.

In the present case, I believe that Plato shares some aims with the author of *On Ancient Medicine*, while differing on some essential points of method. The treatise *On Ancient Medicine* is well known for its challenge to a conception of an “enquiry into nature”, shared by some presocratic philosophers and by some physicians, according to which the essence of all things would be explained genetically by the history of their constitution from primary elements (Heinemann 2010). Plato is also known to have taken up such a critique of the “enquiry into nature” in the *Phaedo* (Mac   2006: 88–95). Now in the *Phaedrus*, Plato follows the project of the author of *On Ancient Medicine* to promote an interactionist approach to nature: to know the nature of something is to know how it can act upon another and be acted upon. In the first two sections of this paper, I will show how Plato prepares the introduction of this interactionist method not by criticising a genetic approach to nature, but by evoking a more popular vision associated with the study of “things above (*mete  ra*)” (first section) and the knowledge of the universe (second section).

The third section examines the important question of passive power: the complete formula of a power to act upon and be acted upon is found in Plato only and not in the Hippocratic treatise, which insists on active power. I will look at the Hippocratic text to show that passive power is implicit in it, but only understood through the conception of a balance of active powers. Plato turns this into an explicit concept of passive power, a key element of his own doctrine of nature. The fourth section deals with the fact that both Plato and the author of *On Ancient Medicine* develop a method of the division of natures based on a theory of nature as power. However, this convergence opens up a

new divergence. I will try to show that the author of *On Ancient Medicine* used a scale of powers and strength to divide natures – there are as many natures to be distinguished as there are levels of power to act and be acted upon, – and that Plato reverses this model, by using the division of natures to determine different powers to act and be acted upon. We will see that this development is precisely conditioned by the emergence of the explicit concept of passive power previously examined.

1 Speculations on which Nature?

As Phaedrus and Socrates attempt to give a true definition of the art of rhetoric, Pericles enters the scene. First, a gentle Pericles (accompanied by Adrastus of Argos, a man of sweet words) advises Socrates and Phaedrus not to be too harsh with those teachers of rhetoric who take the preliminaries of the art (distinguishing parts of speeches, varieties of styles and figures, effects of speech) for the art itself (269b5–c5). Second, Socrates and Phaedrus agree that a good orator needs all three qualities, a good nature (*physis*), science (*epistēmē*) and practice (*meletē*). They then decide to leave aside Lysias and Thrasymachus and look for a model in Pericles, a man who “has become the most accomplished of all in the art of rhetoric (*pantōn teleōtatos eis tēn rhētorikēn genesthai*)”.⁴ Pericles had a gifted nature (*euphyēs*),⁵ but what science did he have and how was he trained in it? We have learned from the previous sequence that all the knowledge of the professors of rhetoric belongs only to the preliminaries of the art. Now Socrates indeed goes on to explain that “all great arts (*pasai hosai megalai tōn tekhnōn*) also need (*prosdeontai*)”⁶ something more. Surprisingly, the tone changes when Socrates sarcastically describes what this additional requirement consists of in a few words that have attracted much comment: *adoleschia kai meteōrologia physeōs peri*.

Regarding the term *meteōrologia*, the question is whether it has, in this sentence, its usual literal meaning, that of a speech about the so called *meteōra*, a term referring to phenomena happening in the sky above and that one has to look up to see (Pohlenz 1938: 79; Joly 1961: 81; Mansfeld 1980: 346),⁷ or

4 *Phdr.* 269e1–2.

5 *Ibid.* 270a2.

6 *Ibid.* 269e4. See Yunis’ explanation on *prosdeontai* (Yunis 2011: 209).

7 See also the explanation by Aristotle who understands the term as having been used by all his predecessors to refer to the phenomena happening in the region under the stars, *Arist. Mete.* 328a26–339a5.

whether it has a more metaphorical meaning of “lofty” or pompous speech (Edelstein 1931: 134; Jouanna 1977: 18–19). Scholars tempted by the second option may have been persuaded by the association of “*meteōrologia*” with “*adoleschia*”, a term meaning “chatter”, or “idle talk”. The association of the two terms recalls Aristophanes’ comedy and the ridicule of those who look to the heavens for knowledge and power.⁸ We should therefore retain the literal meaning of *meteōrologia* if we want to hear all the irony. Pericles was indeed nicknamed “the Olympian”, depicted as thundering and throwing lightning bolts from the sky like Zeus.⁹ No wonder he used “chatter and speculation about things above” to attain the sublimity of mind (“*hypsēlonous*”) and the ability to use this art in all its effectiveness.¹⁰

The argument against translating *meteōrologia* as “speeches about things above” in the present passage may also stem from the awkwardness of having to add a second complement, namely “*physeōs peri*”, hence the temptation to translate the whole phrase as “chatter and high speculations about nature”. However, Léon Robin noted that “*physeōs peri*” should be considered as a common complement to both *adoleschia* and *meteōrologia*, and translated: “tous les arts, (...) exigent en surplus que, touchant la Nature, on bavarde et qu’on ait la tête en l’air” (Robin 1933: 79). A problem remains with this modern account of *physis* as Nature as a whole.¹¹ The early Greek writers “on nature” always meant a specific nature, of something, of all things, if necessary, even the nature of the whole (Collingwood 1945: 44). We should therefore consider that, at least in fifth century texts, the phrase *physeōs peri* always has an implicit complement, even in the absence of an explicit one indicating which nature is meant. In the present case, *physeōs peri* may refer to the nature of the things in the region one has in mind, the “things above” (Heinemann 2010: 22). However, Socrates is about to reveal the kind of nature that Pericles became familiar with by turning his mind to the heavens, and it is more specific.

Pericles became an accomplished orator because of the excellence of his nature and because he met Anaxagoras, who was “full of speeches about things above (*meteōrologias emplēstheis*)”.¹² Joly has noted that Plato never fails to use the term *meteōrologia* when he mentions Anaxagoras, typically in

8 See Ar. Nu. 228 and 369 for a pejorative use of *meteōrologia*, 1490 for the use of *adoleschia*.

9 Ar. Ach. v. 530–531. It is Zeus who manifests himself through meteorological phenomena, see Hom. Il. XII 282–284.

10 Phdr. 270a1–2.

11 Also see Schleiermacher’s translation: «Alle grössere Künste bedürfen doch etwas von jenem spitzfindigen und hochfliegenden Geschwätz über die Natur » (Edelstein 1931: 134). See objections in Jouanna (1977: 18–19).

12 Phdr. 270a4–5.

connection with the study of things above, for example the sun or the moon as in the *Apology*, 26d1–9 (Joly 1961: 81).¹³ However, what Anaxagoras brought to Pericles is more specific, since the former had “approached the nature of the mind (*physin nou*) and of thought (*dianoias*)”.¹⁴ Behind the fanciful evocation of the heavens and the popular image of the search for wisdom in the clouds, we are now introduced to the knowledge of the specific object of a specific art: the mind will appear as the true object of the art of speech. The same move, from a general reference to “nature” to an explicit reference to a specific nature, takes place on the next page, when one wonders what Hippocrates and true speech have to say “about nature (*peri physeōs*)”: this nature, first evoked in an apparently absolute way is in fact immediately instantiated. It is a search for what to do if one wants to “make up one’s mind about the nature of anything (*dianoieisthai peri hotououn peri physeōs*)”.¹⁵ Anaxagoras and Hippocrates both seem to be introduced to make the transition from the pleasant image of the study of things above, akin to comedy, to the study of the nature of specific things, which is the foundation of all science and art.

2 Hippocrates and the Nature of which Whole?

From 266d to 268e, medicine has been invoked to help us distinguish between empirical routine (*tribē, empeiria* 270 b 5–6) and true art. Now Socrates returns to this analogy to deliver its most important result: in medicine as in rhetoric, the difference between routine and art is made by the knowledge of a precise “nature”. Socrates and Phaedrus have already observed that those who have only a preliminary knowledge of medicine or rhetoric know how to perform a certain number of operations, but they do not know when and on whom to perform them.¹⁶ The presentation of the method proper to the art is achieved through an analogy between medicine and rhetoric, each of which has a specific nature as its object: that of the body and that of the soul.

Now, we learn that the method consists not only in distinguishing one nature from another, but above all in knowing how to “divide the nature (*dielesthai physin*)”¹⁷ of its object, in one case the body, the soul in the other. The natures in question, though the natures of particular things, are nevertheless wholes

13 See DK 59 A 35.

14 *Phdr.* 270a4–6, here I do not follow Robin’s text and keep *dianoias* instead of *anoias*.

15 *Ibid.* 270c9–d1.

16 See 268b6–8 for the medical version of this.

17 *Ibid.* 270b4.

from which a division can be made. We immediately learn that these particular natures cannot be known in turn “without” knowing “the nature of the whole (*aneu tēs tou holou physeōs*)”.¹⁸ Socrates asserts this holistic principle of method in the case of the soul and Phaedrus adds in that Hippocrates asserts it for the nature of the body. Is this a reference to *Airs, Waters, Places*, and to the general requirement that the physician begin, before treating patients, by situating the city he arrives in within a totality of environmental factors, including orientation to the sun, nature of winds, quality of water and soil?¹⁹ There have been objections to this traditional view, especially from those who think that the whole is neither the environment nor the universe, but the totality of the object under consideration.²⁰

It seems important to note, with Yunis, that it is Phaedrus, and not Socrates, who brings up Hippocrates here, in response to Socrates’ suggestion that the nature of the soul cannot be conceived independently of the nature of the whole (Yunis 2011: 212). However, this should not be used to dismiss the attempt at recognising what kind of Hippocratic doctrine is being alluded to here.²¹ Plato’s art of writing plays with all his characters and all possible references to Greek literature, even to suggest a misleading clue. The stronger arguments against the identification of *Airs, Waters, Places* are based on the idea that Plato’s method of division is indeed very different from the empirical method of this work (Lloyd 1991: 196–197, 202–3). But are these arguments not neutralised by the fact that if there is an allusion to *Airs, Waters, Places*, it is one made by Phaedrus? The young man has heard Socrates draw an analogy between the aim of medicine (administering drugs in order to restore health to bodies) and the aim of rhetoric (speaking in order to produce conviction and virtue in souls), and then suggest that the nature of souls cannot be known without knowing “the nature of the whole”, so far unspecified. Should we blame him for following the analogy and jumping at the idea that according to Hippocrates bodies cannot either be treated without such a holistic approach? Phaedrus is a bright young philosopher, and Plato might well think that his character would at least be familiar with the doctrine of *Airs, Waters, Places*, probably the most famous

18 *Ibid.* 270c2.

19 Hp. *Aēr.* I–II.

20 See for this debate the set of references provided by J. Jouanna (Jouanna 1990: 80, n.1). As the author rightly notes, most of Plato’s commentators read *to holon* as a reference to the universe. A minority, including Edelstein and Jouanna himself, see it as a reference to the object under consideration within the dialectical divisions (Jouanna 1977: 22–23).

21 Maybe Harvey Yunis takes his fine remark a step too far by attributing the search for the right Hippocratic doctrine to “the (mistaken) belief that Plato intends Phaedrus’ claim as a valid and informative insight into Hippocrates’ work” (Yunis 2011: 212).

and most ancient Greek treatise on medicine (Jouanna 1996: 7–10). The author of this treatise indeed fears that his approach might be thought to belong to "the study of things above (*meteōrologia*)", because he believes that the contribution of astronomy to medicine is an important one, since the "cavities (*koi-liai*)" inside humans, and their diseases, change with seasons.²² It is only natural that Phaedrus should think of this. Maybe he has not been attentive enough to notice that Socrates' holistic principle does not demand the knowledge of the whole (of the universe or of the environment around a city), but the knowledge of "the *nature* of the whole", i.e. the nature of something specific, which happens to be a whole, a phrase that is not uncommon in fifth-century literature (Heinemann 2010: 21–22, n. 32). What Socrates means is that the nature of the soul, or the nature of the body, or any nature, must be understood in relation to another nature, that of a whole, which at this stage is still unspecified. The next pages make it clear that each "nature" is in fact a whole in itself, to be divided into *types* of souls and *types* of bodies (Mansfeld 1980: 348).

Socrates gently corrects Phaedrus, asking him to listen to "what Hippocrates and true reason might possibly have to say about nature" (270c8–9). We are about to learn a method of investigating natures that has a much broader scope than just things above. First of all, we must make sure that we have grasped "a simple and not a multiform" object (*haploun ē polyeides*).²³ This consists, as will become clear a little later, in "showing the nature of a thing (*physin deiknynai*)", an expression used by Homer to describe the moment when Hermes shows Odysseus the nature of the *moly* (Hom. *Od.* x 303). When a master of rhetoric like Thrasymachus wants to show his seriousness, he will begin by "describing the soul in all exactness and making it visible". He will thus make us see "whether it is by nature one and homogeneous (*hen kai homoion*), or whether, like the configuration of the body (*kata sōματος morphēn*), it is multiform (*polyeides*)", and "this is indeed what we call showing the nature (*physin... deiknynai*)".²⁴ The anatomical division of the body suggested here is merely an analogy, used earlier by Socrates to recapitulate the division of the nature of love that has already been performed.²⁵ It is therefore fundamental to the art of speech to "make one see with exactness the reality (*tēn ousian deixei*) of the nature (*physeōs*) of what one is going to speak about".²⁶ And this clearly implies that one must "classify the genres of speech and those of the soul

22 Hp. *Aēr.* II 3, I quote and translate the Greek text by J. Jouanna (1996: 189, 10–12) here.

23 Phdr. 270d1.

24 Ibid. 271a5–8.

25 See Ibid. 265e–266b, and the explanations by Mansfeld (Mansfeld 1980: 348–50).

26 Phdr. 270e3–4.

(*diataxamenos ta logōn te kai psychēs genē*).²⁷ The true art of rhetoric will be attained only by one who can divide the whole nature of the soul, that is, distinguish all the kinds of souls, and know which kind of speech will convince which kind of soul. As Mansfeld has commented, Socrates assumes that “in the case of body and in that of soul, the first step has already been taken by the investigator and that it has been settled that there are many forms of soul, as of body” (Mansfeld 1980: 351). Soul is a multiform nature, and so is body, they both are wholes to be divided. Consequently, no individual soul or body will ever be treated without the ability to recognise to which type it belongs within the diversity of forms which make up this nature as a whole.

3 Nature and Power according to Hippocrates and True Reason

The original point made by Socrates in these lines comes with the second step of the method inspired by Hippocrates and true reason. In the case of a simple nature, one can then proceed to a second step, which consists in “examining its power (*skochein tēn dynamin autou*)”, and knowing “what power it has, by its nature, to act in relation to what (*tina pros ti pephyken eis to dran echon*), or what power to be affected under the effect of what (*ē tina eis to pathein hypo tou*)”.²⁸ The idea that a given nature can be singled out by the kind of things it can do and undergo is also formulated in the *Theaetetus*, when the philosopher is given the task of knowing “what it is appropriate (for each thing) to do and undergo in distinction from all others (*prosēkei diaphoron tōn allōn poiein ē paschein*)”.²⁹ Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, goes on to specify that each and every kind of a multiple nature will be singled out by this very criterion. If the thing we are examining “possesses multiple forms (*pleiō eidē echē*), we shall count them (*tauta arithmēsamenon*)”, and then, one might “for each of these, as for a unique one (*hoper eph’ henos*), see that in relation to which it acts by its nature (*tō ti poiein auto pephyken*) or that by which it is affected (*ē tō ti pathein hypo tou*)”.³⁰ The power to act and to be acted upon is the criterion for the individualisation of types. We recognise the individualising aspect of *dynamis* that Plato also expresses in the *Protagoras* (330a–b) and in the *Republic* (I, 346a). The example from the *Protagoras* might shed light on the use of the analogy with the anatomical division of the body in this page of the *Phaedrus*: a face is

27 *Ibid.* 271b1–2.

28 *Ibid.* 270d3–5.

29 *Tht.* 174b4–5.

30 *Phdr.* 270d3–7.

a multiple reality, because it has parts which have their own power, their own capacity of action which is different from that of the other parts. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between individual things which manifest a variety of concomitant powers, such as a given face or body, and a type of soul or body, which is individuated by a specific capacity to act and to be acted upon, even though there may be a variety of souls, sensitive to different discourses, and a classification of the diversity of souls and discourses is possible. The development in Plato's dialogues of a theory of nature as the capacity to act and to be acted upon, coupled with the idea that power to act and be acted upon is specific to a particular nature, and that more general natures will be divided into more specific ones, does not have many antecedents in Greek literature outside one main source, the Hippocratic corpus (Souilh   1919). Scholars have found affinities between Plato's theory of nature as power in the *Phaedrus* and *Airs, Waters, Places* (Mansfeld 1980: 356–358) or *On Ancient Medicine* (Jouanna 1977: 27–28; 1990: 80–81). I will concentrate on the latter, because it might provide the clearest textual evidence for the platonic reworking of Hippocratic doctrines.

Jouanna has identified chapter 20 of *On Ancient Medicine* as the best match for the type of medical doctrine that Socrates is alluding to. This chapter shows a strategic move that pits one kind of doctrine “on nature” against another. The real study “of nature” does not consist in a “genetic” approach in the manner of Empedocles, whereby the nature of all things is explained by the process of their coming to be (Heinemann 2010: 23–26), but in the search for how human beings will be affected by what kind of food. Such an enquiry will not only ask whether a kind of food, such as cheese, is “bad in itself”, but will seek to know “what harm it does, for what reason, and to what, among the things that are in man (*en t   anthr  p  *), it is inappropriate”.³¹ It is not enough to know that something harms man in general, for there are multiple foods and multiple drinks, which “do not dispose man in the same way (*diatith  si ton anthr  pon ou ton auton tropon*)”.³² We know what effect wine has on man, when drunk unmixed and in large quantities, and we know which parts of man are affected by it. All who see a man in this state, recognise “the effects of wine and that it is indeed responsible (*   dynamis oinou kai autos estin aitios*)”.³³ Here we recognise the meaning of the term *dynamis* already noticeable in Parmenides and Alcmeon: the capacity of a given body or substance to produce certain effects

31 Hp. VM. XX 3: 147, 1–4. I always quote the Greek text from Jouanna (1990), and translate from it.

32 *Ibid.* XX 4: 147, 5–6.

33 *Ibid.* XX 4: 147, 8–9.

that are specific to it and allow it to be recognised and known (Lefebvre 2018: 138–140). This is already an inflexion of the traditional meaning of strength of an individual or of an army, power of a king or of a city, often with a nuance of measure, of the limit of one's strength (Souilh   1919: 1–23). However, a more detailed theory of the causality of food and drink on man is needed to specify the various "powers" the former has to act on the latter.

The most interesting point made by the author of *On Ancient Medicine*, if we are looking for antecedents to Plato's conception, is that the specification of a power or capacity to act upon another is to be completed by the correlative determination of a passive counterpart. The medical author starts by acknowledging that patients might react differently to the same food. The same food will not have the same effects on all people, cheese does not affect everyone in the same way, benefiting some by giving them great strength and harming others who digest it badly: "now these differ, says the author, by their natures (*diapherousi de toute  n hai physies*)".³⁴ People who react differently have different "natures". It seems that in this case the nature of the effect depends not only on the power of the agent (cheese) but also on the nature of the patient. This still sounds a little different from what Plato says when he speaks of each nature to be characterised by its capacity to act or be acted upon. It is important for our comparison to look more closely at the way in which the author of *On Ancient Medicine* defines and distinguishes natures according to their capacity to act on and/or to be acted upon.

On Ancient Medicine contains the first attempt, in Western thought, to write a history of the invention of medicine (Jouanna 2003). The aim of this history is to establish that medicine is a true art, distinct from the opinion of the profane. The arguments are based on an analogy between the invention of the human diet, by distinguishing it from the diet of other animals, and the invention of the diet of the sick, by distinguishing it from the diet of healthy people. The continuity between the two inventions establishes the reality of medicine and the necessity of its discovery, while the greater complexity of the second invention requires medicine to be an art. The starting point of this history is the consideration of an interaction between food and those who ingest it, in the form of a power relationship whose two possible outcomes determine the possibility of sickness and health: the domination of food over man leads to sickness, the domination of man over food leads to health. At the origin, the lack of distinction between the human food and the animal food creates a power relationship unfavourable to humans. Drinking and eating what oxen

34 *Ibid.* xx 6: 147, 16–17.

and horses drink and eat, humans “suffered multiple and terrible afflictions (*epaschon polla te kai deina*) under the effect of a strong and wild diet (*hypo iskhyrēs te kai thēriōdeos diaitēs*), taking things raw, unmixed and having strong effects (*ōma te kai akrēta kai megalas dynamias echonta espheromenoi*)”.³⁵ Translating *dynamis* here with “effect”, Souilhé recognised the alliance between the strength necessary to dominate and the capacity to produce a distinctive effect (Souilhé 1919, 32). The power to act upon is thus conceived through the reunion of the two types of meaning – strength and capacity – associated with the term *dynamis* in early Greece (Lefebvre 2018: 138–140). These two aspects are closely linked in the theory of humours proposed by *On Ancient Medicine* (Demont 2005): one should ask about the humours “what each is capable of doing to man (*hekastos ho ti dynatai poiein ton anthrōpon*)”;³⁶ in addition, the author writes that “power is the intensity and strength of the humours (*dynamin men einai tōn chymōn tas akrotētas te kai ischys*)”.³⁷ Intensity and strength, on the one hand, and the type of the effect specific to each of the humours, on the other, are inseparable aspects of the power to act upon. What about the power to be acted upon?

Throughout the treatise two levels are distinguished: that of affections (described with the verb *paschō* and the noun *pathēma*) and that of the power to have effects (described by the verb *dynamai* and the noun *dynamis*). The question is: how does the author establish a connection between these two levels? In a long development against those who want to explain everything with one or two elements, such as hot and cold or dry and wet (chapters 13 to 19), the author explains why those who actually invented medicine were the ones who asked themselves what, in each food, being strong and surpassing human nature, could cause illness and must be eliminated from our diet. For man is made of the same elements as food is, and “of a thousand others with a great variety of powers (*kai alla myria pantoias dynamias echonta*)”³⁸ and harm comes to him when one of these qualities separates and isolates itself: when one goes out of line, separates itself from the mixture where its qualities are mixed with the others, it becomes capable of dominating. Separation explains the appearance of the phenomenon of domination. The capacity for a power to have effects on a patient depends on its ability to modify the composition of the patient, and this ability depends on the composition of each of the interacting bodies, that is, on their nature. The fact that everything that acts has a

35 *Ibid.* III 4: 121, 15–18.

36 *Ibid.* XXIV 1: 153, 7–8.

37 *Ibid.* XXII 1: 149, 3–4.

38 *Ibid.* XIV 4: 136, 11–12.

nature that determines its effects is also seen in actions and operations: each type of operation performed in the preparation of bread “has its own nature and power (*idiēn dynamin kai physin echei*)”³⁹, which gives the product a specific power to act on man, and in this case, softens the powers of the ingredients through mixing and cooking. The attribution of nature to actions is also found in Plato, who will define the nature of the operations of art.⁴⁰

By comparing natures, the author approaches the phenomenon of passive power by a comparison of active powers. Affection is the effect that results from the fact that man is not equal to the power of a food, because his own power is of a lower level than that of the food. This explains why foods with the same power can cause illness in one (e.g. a man) and not in another (e.g. a horse). The author never calls this a passive power, or a power to be acted upon, but such a notion is nevertheless implicit in his use of the concept of nature. This concept is introduced precisely in order to be associated with a level of intensity at which a patient will yield. People who lived at a time when the human diet was not different from that of animals suffered less, perhaps, than those of today would in their place, from the power of their food, thanks to habit (*dia tēn synētheian*)⁴¹, but still in a way that differed according to their “nature:” the majority of them perished because they had “too weak a nature” (*asthenesterēn physin*),⁴² while the strongest resisted longer. This is a “nature” that is more particular than that of man: it concerns that part of the human population that has greater difficulty in resisting disease, simply because it has less capacity to resist the power of food. Nature takes on a physical reality, as when it is said that hunger “penetrates with force into man’s nature (*ischyrōs endynatai en tē physei tou anthrōpou*)” and weakens him.⁴³ It is equated with the *diathesis*, which itself is determined as setting a level of capacity to absorb food.⁴⁴ The weaker natures “sought food in accordance with their nature (*zētēsai trophēn harmozousan tē physei*)”⁴⁵, and discovered what we now use. The weaker natures guided them by subjecting raw foods to many transformations, including cooking and mixing, in order to “fashion them all in accordance with the nature and capacity of man (*plassontes panta pros tēn tou anthrōpou physin te kai dynamin*)”.⁴⁶ Souilhé shows an interesting hesitation on the analysis of

39 *Ibid.* XIII 3: 134, 15–16.

40 See *Cra.* 387a1–2 (Macé 2006: 61–62).

41 *Hp. VM.* III 4: 121, 21.

42 *Ibid.* III 4: 122, 2.

43 *Ibid.* IX 2: 128, 5–6.

44 See *ibid.* VII 5: 126, 9–14.

45 *Ibid.* III 4: 122, 6–7.

46 *Ibid.* III 5: 122, 14–15.

this passage (Souilh   1919, 32). He translates *dynamis* as “force” but immediately wonders whether this meaning should not be extended to that of “capacity” in order to recognise the correlation between *physis* and *dynamis* that he finds so characteristic of the Hippocratic treatises. Indeed, the author of this treatise approaches such a passive capacity through the balance of forces. The ability to dominate food also depends on the strength of the patient, so that the relationship of food to patient is one of strength to strength (Lefebvre 2018: 299). The verb *dynamai* is used in this context to indicate capacity: the invention of temperate foods, such as bread, stems from the idea that “nature (of man) will not be able to dominate (*ou dyn  setai krataein   physis*)”⁴⁷ foods that are too strong, and that the result of their ingestion will be disease and death, whereas the foods that such a nature dominates produce growth and health for that nature. Nature in man therefore sets a limit: below this limit a human being will have the power to digest, beyond this limit the power will yield. Looking back at the above sentence, we see that the verb *plass  *, evoking a technical activity (that of the potter who gives form to a new pot), which in other contexts might be seen in opposition to nature, is here understood in terms of a search for conformity with it.

The author of *On Ancient Medicine* only conceived of the passive power indirectly by comparing natures and setting a limit to the resistance of the patient (Lefebvre 2018: 299–300). However, his history of the invention of the human diet is an expression of a new attention to the nature of the patient and his specific capacity. This could have inspired Plato’s definition of art as opposed to routine in the *Phaedrus*, according to which true expertise is based on knowing the nature of the patient (Mac   2006: 159–61). It is precisely by insisting on the nature of the patient that Plato seems to have found the way to make explicit what remained implicit in *On Ancient Medicine*: to name the capacity to undergo a certain kind of effect as an actual passive power and thus to define nature not only as a capacity to act upon, but correlatively, as a capacity to be acted upon.

4 Principles of the Division of Nature? Nature before Power, or Power before Nature?

The Hippocratic author of *On Ancient Medicine* affirms that the discovery of the regime capable of producing health in man instead of sickness and death is

47 *Ibid.* III 5: 122, 16.

nothing other than the invention of medicine itself.⁴⁸ In fact, the adaptation of animal food to man is not yet medicine, but only analogous to medicine, which begins when the same concern is transferred to the sick man and the diet is adapted to the variation in the sick man's ability to dominate the elements. The absence of medicine (as is still the case among "barbarian" peoples), is characterised by an indifference to the variability of human nature revealed by illness. As we have seen, the *physis* of man determines a certain capacity which is, in most humans, overcome by a diet common to wild animals.⁴⁹ The same doctrine of the relation of powers that has helped to shape the human diet in accordance with human nature will make it possible to distinguish many degrees of weakness between the healthy and the very sick. Therefore, medicine will have to deal with a complex diversification of natures within human nature, and, in this case, it seems that the variation of the level of capacity will provide a great multiplicity of "natures". A nature can be as much specific to a whole population as to a part of it, permanent or temporary: the variation of thresholds makes it possible to imagine the continuous diversification of the same set into as many subsets. Thus, nature is now a principle of internal specification, as it divides and specifies itself: there is the nature of man, and, within it, women and men with stronger or weaker natures. Taking care of the smallest part is still taking part of the whole: the attention to the weaker nature contributes to the invention of a regime more in line with the nature of all humans, since a regime that is too strong can only be dominated by a part of them.

The philosophy of nature underlying the history of medicine is based on a principle of the division of natures and this division is based on a continuous scale of natures and powers. This continuity gradually asserts itself in the argument and offers the principle of a progressive specification descending from human nature in general to the individual one. At the end of chapter 5 the invention of medicine is described in three stages (Jouanna 2008: 64–65), noting first of all that the discovery of medicine may have begun with a quantitative change in the general diet, from much to very little of the same food: the reduction of the quantity to be absorbed makes it possible to adapt to that part of humanity which cannot tolerate the normal diet, while maintaining a diet of solid food. As this modification was not sufficient for many patients, who were unable to tolerate even a small amount of the same food, another diet was envisaged, thanks to the discovery of soups that softened the strength of the food by mixing a small amount with a lot of water. Finally, for patients

48 *Ibid.* III 6: 123, 3–8.

49 I would not commit to Souilhé's further claim that *dynamis* is the phenomenal expression of the invisible *physis* (Souilhé 1919: 36, 55–56).

who could not tolerate soup, drinks were found. An interesting sign of the continuity of the division of natures is the attempt to quantify the intensity of the illness felt by a patient on the wrong diet, for example one who, unable to dominate the semi-liquid diet of soups, ingests a dry food. In such a case, the patient would suffer "ten times more (*dekaplasiōs*)" than if he drank soup, and this for no other reason than the strength of the food compared to the disposition (*dia tēn ischyn tou brōmatos pros tēn diathesin*).⁵⁰ Instead of taking the third diet that would suit him, the patient did not take the second but the first, increasing his pain proportionately (some proportion, although we cannot explain the choice of "ten times"). The possibility of measuring harm in this way results from a comparison between a scale of natures and a scale of diets; the further one moves away from the correct correspondence between the two scales, the greater the harm. The causes of suffering are always the same: the strongest things cause the greatest and most manifest harm to people, both healthy and sick.⁵¹

While the discoverer of the human diet sought to remove all the things that "the healthy human nature would not be able to dominate (*mē edynato ē physis ē anthrōpinē hygiainousa epikratein*)", the physician who discovered the diet of the sick sought to remove all the things that the particular disposition (*diathesis*) of a given patient would not be able to dominate.⁵² The analogy suggests the existence of a continuum, including animals and man, from the most common nature of a species to the disposition of the individual, or even more precisely, to the ever-changing state of the individual, which each time defines a specific capacity to dominate or not to dominate such and such food. In chapter 7, the identity of relations underlying the analogy is made explicit: what the bestial diet is to the normal human diet, the human diet is to the sick human diet, and what the sick man suffers when he adopts the healthy human diet is of the same kind as what the healthy man suffers when he switches to the bestial diet. The analogy simply shows the continuity which makes the regime of the animal a simple degree of strength superior to that which suits the healthy man, and the regime of the sick a weakening of the regime of the latter. This continuity is palpable when the author speaks of the "healthy ones among those whose nature is neither altogether weak nor altogether strong (*allos te tōn hygiainontōn physin echōn mēte pantapasin asthenea, mēt' au ischyren*)".⁵³ A gradation is established on a continuous scale that makes the

50 Hp. VM. VI 2: 125, 12–14.

51 *Ibid.* VI 3.

52 *Ibid.* VII 2, p. 126, 9–14.

53 *Ibid.* VIII 2, p. 127, 6–7.

animal capable of dominating stronger things than human nature can dominate, and within this human nature, the strong nature capable of dominating stronger foods than the weakest cannot dominate. It is therefore the continuous scale of natures which is the basis of the analogy of methods and reasoning, and of the possibility of an invention which passes through the progressive differentiation of the human diet from that of all animals, of the diet of the least weakened patients from that of the healthiest men, and so on down to the weakest, passing through all possible individual nuances. The principle of the division of one nature into many natures is a vertical scale of power, and all the new “natures” there are to be discovered simply correspond to the exploration of this scale of power.

Now we see a very close method in Plato, with a very similar comparison of scales, but with one important reversal: it is from nature to power, and not from power to nature. To explain what a nature is is to explore the variety of its forms and to discover that each of these forms corresponds to a particular power to act and to be acted upon. All this becomes very clear in the subsequent application of the “method of Hippocrates” to rhetoric. The skilled orator will know how many forms (*eidē*) soul has, because he has learned how these forms should be “divided” (*diērēmenōn* at 271 d4). Now, when he encounters an individual or a collection of individuals, he will have to determine the “nature” of the souls he is dealing with by identifying the form of soul in which these souls are participating. Having done this, he will know what kind of speech to use in this case, because he will also know how to divide speech into different forms corresponding to different forms of souls. Instead of correlating two scales of powers (for example, the intensity of food and the level of tolerance), he uses a correlation of scales of forms (for instance, the division of soul forms and of speech forms). Having established this correlation, he will know “under the action of which speech (*hypo tōn toiōnde logōn* d5–6)” a given person will be convinced, and another one under the action of which other kind of speech. It is very important that, through the correlation of forms, the nature that is seen immediately reveals a passive power, a power to be modified, to be persuaded, in the present case. When he sees and hears a given person, he will recognise and see the *physis* that he has learned about, and he will know with what kind of speech he can produce a conviction in this soul, which style, which effects of speech will work on such a nature (272a1–7). Here, passive power is not merely a level of tolerance and resistance, but a determination of the precise kind of action to which a nature will lend itself. Socrates brings us back to where we started with Pericles. If an orator, a professor or a writer were to lack (*elleipē* 272a8) any of this knowledge, we would rightly think that he does not possess the art he claimed to possess. And

this is indeed the knowledge of a real whole: the division and correlation of the various forms of soul and speech, the localisation of a precise nature within such a network, a nature identified by its power to act and be acted upon, the passive power expressing the nature as much as the active power does.

Having followed Plato's analogy between rhetoric and medicine as far as we could as a conversation with the treatise *On Ancient Medicine*, we may now clarify the analogy and the difference between Plato's orator (and his "Hippocratic" method) and the physician from *On Ancient Medicine*. Both need to know how to treat a patient, whether by word or by diet, adapting each of these treatments to the very specific nature they recognise in the soul or in the body they are dealing with. Plato's orator sees a nature when he has located a soul within a division of the soul forms, and this allows him to deduce the type of speech he can use, also located within a division of speech forms; the doctor from *On Ancient Medicine*, also adapts two series of natures, of bodies and of diets. But let us concentrate on their precise *modus operandi*. The Hippocratic doctor deals primarily with a scale of intensity of powers, trying to avoid a diet that is too strong or not strong enough; he has to "aim at a certain measure (*metrou tinos stochasthai*)", and therefore the task is "much more varied (*pollon poikilōtera*)" and requires "much greater precision (*dia pleonos akribiēs*)" than one might expect.⁵⁴ Precision on the scale of the strength of regimes is difficult to achieve because the nature of patients is as diverse as the degrees and forms of weakness. This diversity is illustrated in particular by the study of the effect of changing the rhythm and quantity of daily meals, first in the case of the healthy (chap. 9–11) and then in the case of the sick (chap. 9) (Jouanna 2008). The weakest of natures among the healthy suffer more quickly and to a greater extent from any change in diet, and this make them similar to the sick, for the sick is even weaker than the weak.⁵⁵ The doctor cannot rely on a predetermined scale of natures; he must locate his patient on a continuous scale of strength and weakness, hoping that he has targeted the right nature.

On the contrary, Plato's orator will first have to see natures. Then he will have to "distinguish by counting the different natures of his listeners", which presupposes the ability to "divide beings according to their forms (*kat' eidē te diareisthai ta onta*)" as well as to "embrace them under one single idea (*mia idea*) according to each".⁵⁶ Only when he has located the right nature within a framework of forms will he know how to choose the right speech among the possible forms of speech. We can now see how important it is for Plato to

54 *Ibid.* IX 3: 128, 9–11.

55 *Ibid.* XII 1: 132, 12–13.

56 *Phdr.* 273e1–2.

consider passive power as an expression of a given nature, and not just as a degree of resistance (Lefebvre 2018: 300–311). The author of *Ancient Medicine* finds the nature of a given patient each time he identifies a limit of tolerance, a level of vulnerability. Plato's orator and his Hippocrates need to access a passive power that is not only a level of possible tolerance but also the direct expression of the kind of effects to which a given nature will lend itself to. This is why one method measures powers to find natures and the other seizes natures to find out powers.

Plato's Hippocrates in the *Phaedrus* is therefore very close to the author of *On Ancient Medicine* on important conceptual and methodological issues, but also subtly different on one essential point. In building his account of true rhetoric on an analogy with the "method of Hippocrates", Plato draws on many elements set out in the medical treatise, especially the idea that the true art of medicine cannot be based on a genetical or cosmological enquiry into nature, but rather on an interactionist theory of nature as power, which must work on correlating series of natures. Plato also completes the work of the author of *On Ancient Medicine* on a crucial point, by extending to passive power what the physician had recognised in the case of active power, namely the fact that power expresses nature in terms of the type of effects it produces or accepts. In this way, Plato developed a concept of nature as a power that expresses itself equally through its activity and its passivity. To participate in the intelligible forms, then, means for anything to receive such a nature and to express it though all the actions and affections that are its signature.

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Active and Passive Powers in Plato? a Speculative Chapter in the History of Causality

Thomas Tuozzo

After centuries of languishing in the dustbin of philosophical history, the theory of causal powers has in recent years been enjoying a comeback. Hume effectively banished causal powers from metaphysics (or rather, along with the rest of metaphysics) in the 18th century, and causal powers stayed banished throughout most of the 20th century as analytic philosophers developed de-psychologised versions of Hume's positive views on causation. These neo-Humean views have taken the form either of regularity theories (of general causal laws) or, more recently, of counterfactual theories (of particular causal occurrences); only the former are directly relevant to our study.¹ On all of these theories there is no essential or metaphysical connection between the items that stand in causal relations to one another. Causal relations hold only contingently; while fire burns paper in the actual world, in some possible worlds it turns it to stone. But towards the end of the 20th century a variety of considerations led some philosophers to develop causal power theories that bear some kinship to pre-Humean theories. On these views, causal relations are grounded in the natures of the causal relata. Fire is essentially such as to burn paper; nothing in any possible world could in fact count as fire if it were not such as to burn any paper that may exist there. The preeminent historical theory of causal powers is Aristotle's, and present-day theorists have drawn (varying degrees of) inspiration from it.

Now on Aristotle's view, when one substance causes change in another,² it does so in virtue of possessing an active power that acts on a passive power possessed by what it causes to change. According to Aristotle, the causal powers by which one substance affects or is affected by another are *essentially* either

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- 1 Hall (2008) distinguishes between the regularity accounts of Mackie (1965) and Davidson (1967) and the more recent counterfactual accounts, pioneered by Lewis (1973). Lewis (1973) notes that these approaches develop the two definitions of cause that Hume gives at *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, section VII.
 - 2 For the purposes of this paper I leave aside Aristotle's treatment of those powers (or rather, things "in the same class as power", *Metaph.* 1049b8–9) that cause change in the very things that possess them: namely, natures.

active or passive.³ When a hot poker is thrust into cold ale, its active power to heat affects the ale by acting on the latter's passive power to be heated. It is not in virtue of *this* interaction that the poker is cooled; the cooling occurs in virtue of a separate interaction that involves two different powers (which are, however, necessarily co-instantiated with the pair involved in the first interaction): the ale's active power to cool and the poker's passive power to be cooled.⁴ Modern causal power theorists, for their part, agree that causation results from the appropriate coming together of causal powers. But most of them reject or marginalise the Aristotelian distinction between essentially active and essentially passive powers.⁵ Such thinkers prefer to talk not of correlative active and passive powers, but rather of a group of "reciprocal" or "partner" powers that, when they come together in the appropriate way, jointly manifest their powers and so produce the new state of affairs. When salt and water come together, the salt dissolves and the water becomes salty; whether we consider the salt or the water to be agent is, at best, merely a matter of perspective or pragmatics.⁶ One contemporary theorist does argue that the active/passive distinction is important at the metaphysical level. On this view, in some causal interactions there are metaphysical grounds for distinguishing active and passive roles played by different powers. Still, on this account no power is *essentially* active or passive; the same power can be active in one interaction, passive in another.⁷

Aristotle is certainly the most influential of ancient Greek causal power theorists. But he can be usefully seen as standing in a specific tradition in Greek thought of thinking about causal powers. This tradition begins with

3 A central passage in which Aristotle distinguishes active and passive powers is *Metaph.* 1046a9–12: "As many [powers (*dynameis*)] as belong to the same type [i.e., the type having to do with change], are principles of a sort (*archai tines*), and are spoken of in reference to one primary one, which is the principle of change (*archē metabolēs*) in some other thing, or [in the thing possessing it] qua other. Now one [such derivatively called *dynamis*] is the power of being affected: the principle, in the thing itself undergoing change, of a passive change, [caused] either by some other thing, or [by itself], qua other".

4 For defence of this reading of Aristotle, see Tuozzo (2011, 2014).

5 Modern theorists who recognise something like a traditional distinction between active and passive powers: see Harré and Madden (1975), Ellis (2001), and Lowe (2006). Hansson Wahlberg (2019) argues that the distinction does not in fact do much work in their views.

6 See Heil 2012: 122. So along similar lines Mumford and Anjum 2011: 34, Martin 2008: 48, and Ingthorsson (2002).

7 Marmodoro 2017: 72–75. Marmodoro does not hold that every causal interaction involves active and passive roles: there are cases of symmetrical causation (e.g., two playing cards propping each other up). Hansson Wahlberg (2019) argues against all versions of the active/passive distinction, and further argues that the notion of reciprocal powers (adopted by the theorists cited in note 5 above) itself presupposes that distinction.

Anaxagoras, who posits *nous* as the sole cosmic causal force, which sets in motion an otherwise inert congeries of stuffs. Thinkers in the tradition following him continue to posit a strong distinction between cause and thing caused, a distinction that reaches a culmination in the Stoic contrast between a purely active God and a purely acted-on matter. In this paper I investigate Plato's relation to this tradition. What role, and how important a role, does the distinction between active and passive powers play in Plato's causal thought? As we shall see, there are a number of passages in which Plato speaks of powers to act and of powers to be acted on; there is no question of Plato's being grouped with those modern-day theorists who give this distinction at most a pragmatic, not a metaphysical basis. The more significant question is whether Plato holds that powers are *essentially* active or passive, or whether he believes that the same power can play either role, depending on the other powers with which it interacts. As we shall see, most of the relevant Platonic passages can be read as making the passive and active roles in causal interaction relative to specific interactions; the same power may play an active role in some interactions, and a passive one in others. In this regard, at least, Plato would seem to be closer to a version of the modern position than to Aristotle.

But, as I shall argue, that is only half the story. The powers that can assume either role are all powers belonging to the world of change, and they interact with one another in what we may call *horizontal* causation. The existence of these powers, however, is itself founded on what we may call a *vertical* dimension of causation, whereby atemporal and non-spatial Forms engender their instances in the world of change. In such causation, the Forms are solely active, and what they act on is, with respect to this sort of causation, solely passive. I shall argue that there are two cases of such vertical causation in Plato: the causation exercised by the Forms on the purely passive Receptacle to produce sensible copies of the Forms, discussed in the *Timaeus*, and the exercise of the Forms on the (in this respect) fully passive soul of the knower, discussed in the *Sophist*. In both the epistemic case in the *Sophist* and the ontological case in the *Timaeus*, causation is strictly one-way and non-reciprocal: the Forms do not undergo any change in exercising their causality. I shall first discuss the *Sophist*, where my interpretation will be more controversial, in part because it involves an interpretation of the much-contested passage in which the Eleatic Visitor offers as a *horos* of being the ability either to *affect* something or to be affected *by* something. I then turn to the ontological discussion in the *Timaeus*. In closing, I return to my claim that this sort of one-way causation is precisely the hallmark of the tradition of causal theorising initiated by Anaxagoras.

1 Platonic Powers in the World of Becoming: Horizontal Causation

There are several passages in Plato's dialogues that recognise a distinction between agent and patient factors in causal interactions. The passage that most closely approaches the Aristotelian picture of essentially active and passive powers is to be found in the *Phaedrus*. There Socrates advises the would-be philosophical orator to determine what kinds of souls are persuaded by what kinds of speeches, and to do so by employing a method of inquiry he associates with Hippocrates.⁸ He outlines the method as follows:

First, we must consider whether the object concerning which we intend to become experts ... is single or has many forms. Then, if it is single, we must investigate its power (*tēn dynamin autou*): by nature, what power does it have of acting on what? what power of being acted on by what? If, on the other hand, it has many forms, we must enumerate all [of them] and, as we did for the one, investigate what each by nature does to what, and what each suffers from what. (*Phdr.* 270d1–7)

This passage clearly counsels us to distinguish the powers through which a thing affects something else from those through which it is affected by something else. But it does not insist on any particular way of individuating powers; in particular, nothing in the passage precludes what serves as an active power in one context from serving as a passive one in another. Indeed, the fact that it uses the singular *dynamis* at 270d4 may suggest that Socrates is not concerned with enumerating a thing's powers and sorting them into the essentially active and the essentially passive.⁹

Nonetheless, it may be more natural, on the whole, to take this *Phaedrus* passage to endorse a distinction between essentially active and essentially passive powers.¹⁰ But this passage should be read alongside two passages in other dialogues that might also seem, at first, to endorse such a distinction, but which then go on to undermine that reading by relativising the active or passive nature of a power to specific causal interactions. The clearest case

8 See chapter 1, where this passage is compared with the method found in the Hippocratic treatise *On Ancient Medicine*.

9 Read in this way, this passage would be compatible with the theory in *On Ancient Medicine*, where (as is argued in ch. 1) the relative intensities of two powers determine which will be active (or "dominate"), and which will "yield".

10 See ch. 1, where it is argued that Plato here makes explicit a notion of passive power that is present only implicitly in *On Ancient Medicine*.

of this is the description of Heraclitean ontology Socrates attributes to the *kompsoteroi* in the *Theaetetus*. According to that view, “everything is really motion, and there is nothing but motion. Motion has two types (*eidē*), each an infinite multitude, the one having a power to act, the other to be acted on” (*Tht.* 156a5–7). While this passage seems to separate active and passive powers into two distinct groups, Socrates goes on to explain that such grouping is not essential and fixed:¹¹

For even in the case of the active and passive motions it is impossible, as they say, for thought, taking them singly, to pin them down to being anything. There is no passive till it meets the active, no active except in conjunction with the passive; and what, in conjunction with one thing, is active, reveals itself as passive when it falls in with something else. (*Tht.* 157a2–7)

The second passage which seems, but only seems, to suggest an essential distinction between active and passive powers is found in the *Timaeus*. After Timaeus has explained the structure of the corpuscles of earth, air, fire and water, and discussed their transformations into each other, he gives a general account of their interactions as follows:

Now as for motion and rest, unless there is agreement on the manner and the conditions in which these two come to be, we will have many obstacles to face in our subsequent course of reasoning. Although we have already said something about them, we need to say this as well: there will be no motion in a state of uniformity (*en homalotēti*). For it is difficult, or rather impossible, for something to be moved (*to kinēsomenon*) without something to set it in motion (*aneu tou kinēsontos*), or for something to set a thing in motion without something to be moved by it. When these are absent, there is no motion, and for these ever to be uniform [with each other] is impossible. (*Ti.* 57d7–e6)

Here Timaeus recognises a difference between mover and moved in any production of change. But this distinction is grounded in the more fundamental requirement that the two things that are to interact should be in some way uneven or differentially qualified. The sort of unevenness that a thing has to one thing will be different from the sort it has to another; there is no reason

¹¹ See also ch. 9 p. 13 for a more extended reading of this passage, which emphasises that correlative active and passive powers cannot exist independently of one another.

to suppose that the same feature that accounts for a thing's serving as agent in one interaction cannot account for its serving as patient in another. And indeed, we know that in Timaeus' account of elemental transformations, the very same geometrical structure both accounts for fire's agency when it breaks up water corpuscles and for its patiency when it is crushed by an overwhelming mass of water.

2 Forms as Causes of Psychic Properties – Vertical Causation I

In *Sophist* 243d–254c, the Eleatic Visitor leads Theaetetus through an investigation of the nature of being (*to on*) by considering various ontological theories put forward by their predecessors. In one important section (246a–249d) the Eleatic Visitor treats two such ontologies together, characterising their opposition as a “gigantomachy”. The “giants” are materialists who maintain that only bodies exist; their opponents are the “friends of the forms”, who maintain that “true being” is confined to “certain intelligible and incorporeal forms” (246b7–8). Now the Visitor and Theaetetus are concerned with getting clear on the nature of being, not with doxographical fidelity; accordingly, they have the giants make a concession that they acknowledge the giants would not in fact be likely to make: namely, that “justice, understanding (*phronēseōs*) and the rest of virtue” are not bodies (*Sph.* 247b7–c7). In similar fashion, they recognise that the friends, too, would not be persuaded by a point that is crucial to the argument they want to make: namely, that knowing and being known are cases of affecting and/or being affected (*Sph.* 248d3–e4). Here, though, instead of offering to reform the friends, the Visitor and Theaetetus simply make note of their likely refusal and proceed to accept on their own behalf the point at issue, and continue with the argument.¹²

The fulcrum on which the treatment of both giants and friends turns is a passage in which the Visitor formulates what he calls a mark (*horos*) of being:

I say that that which by nature possesses any power at all, either to do something to something else, or to have even the smallest thing done to it by even the most trivial thing, even if it only happens once – all this truly is (*pan touto ontōs einai*). For I lay down a mark to mark out beings: that they are nothing except power. (*Sph.* 247d8–e4)

¹² Unlike some scholars, I do not ascribe any philosophical significance to the difference between the imagined reformation of the giants and the equally imagined intransigence of the friends.

This passage seems to set up two different ways in which a thing can qualify as a being: either by possessing a power to act on something, or by possessing a power to be acted on by something. If the passage does do so, that would appear to be an argument against taking it to articulate a real definition of being, which should, presumably, not be a disjunctive one.¹³ It is true that the passage ends by encapsulating the *horos* into the one word, *dynamis*.¹⁴ However, if there are two fundamentally distinct and opposed ways of being a power, this seems merely to paper over the problem.¹⁵ And in using this *horos* in discussion with the giants and friends, the Visitor in each case relies on the ascription of only one of the two powers to an item the relevant theorists are disinclined to treat as being. It is because the incorporeal thing justice can affect souls and make them just that the (reformed) giants agree to count it as being, and it is because the mind (present in the soul), when knowing the Forms, either affects or is affected by them, that Visitor and Theaetetus, despite the failure of the friends of the forms to go along with them, conclude that change and soul must be allowed to have real existence.¹⁶

In both of these cases the causal relation is between the Forms and something that shares in becoming: the soul. In the case of justice, it is clearly a one-way causality: the form of justice causes souls to be just, and there is no suggestion that it suffers any change in so doing. And though the Visitor eventually describes the causal relationship between the soul and the Forms that accounts for knowledge as the latter's being affected by the former (248d10–e5), when he first raises the question of their interaction he remains studiously uncommitted as to whether the knower is the agent and the known the patient, or vice versa, or indeed whether each is both agent and patient (248d4–7). I find compelling the suggestion that here Plato wishes us to consider seriously the possibility that the objects of knowledge, the Forms, have an exclusively active causal role in knowledge, and that the mind or soul is

13 See Aristotle's criticism at *Top.* 146a21–33. To replace the Stranger's formulation with the nominally simple "capable of engaging in causal relations" seems to me to be an equivocation, if it is meant to cover two distinct ways of engaging in causal relations. (For a contrasting defence of this way of taking the Stranger's view, see ch. 5 p. 2.)

14 One might compare the use of singular *dynamis* at *Phdr.* 270d4, discussed above. But there is no indication here that the same power might in some contexts be a power to act, in others, a power to be acted on. Note that the disjunction recurs (again with the singular *dynamis*) when the Visitor invokes the *horos* in discussion with the friends at 248c4–5.

15 Similarly, the dualists who consider cold and hot to be the only beings might offer "being a pole of the temperature spectrum" as their definition of being. This would be a merely verbal way to hide the disjunctive nature of the definition.

16 The reader should compare the treatment of this important passage here with those in ch. 5, ch. 6, ch. 7, and ch. 9.

passively affected when it knows them.¹⁷ If that is the case, then with respect to the causality between Forms and souls, the former have only a power to act, the souls, the power to be affected.

In the *Sophist*, the disjunctive, causal *horos* of being is specifically deployed against the giants and the friends of the Forms in order to persuade them (in the one case successfully, in the other unsuccessfully) that some things that are not included in their ontologies nonetheless in fact have true being. The causal interaction that is invoked is, then, between two different orders of being; the fact they do have this causal interaction is enough to show (if one accepts the *horos*) that both orders exist. It does not, however, show that the causal relata – the soul and the Forms – are members of the same ontological order. It is a feature of their belonging to different ontological orders that they have distinct causal roles when interacting: the Forms are strictly causes, the soul, strictly what is affected.

3 Forms as Causes of Sensibles: Vertical Causation II

If the soul is passive in its causal interactions with the Forms, as I have suggested, this certainly does not entail that it is incapable of acting as an agent. Its passive status vis-à-vis the Forms in the vertical dimension of causation is, in fact, one of the conditions of its ability, in the horizontal dimension, both to act on, and to be acted on by, other items that, like it, are subject to change. There are of course other, non-psychic powers operative in that dimension: in particular, the powers possessed by bodies. It is the purpose of this section to argue that these powers, too, are grounded by a kind of vertical causation in which the Forms figure as solely active causes. We can approach Timaeus' account of this kind of causation by looking at a passage where he distinguishes between two kinds of causality at what I have called the horizontal dimension, within the realm of things subject to change. This is the distinction between causes that stem from reason or *nous* and those whose operation is a matter of necessity. What serves as the occasion for Timaeus' explanation of these two forms of causality is the account he had given of the mechanisms involved in vision and in the image-reversal in mirrors:

Now all the above [mechanisms operative in vision] are among the auxiliary causes (*synaitiōn*) employed in the service of the god as he does

¹⁷ Arguments for this position can be found in Brown (1998).

his utmost to bring to completion the character of what is most excellent. But because they make things cold or hot, compact them or disperse them, and produce all sorts of similar effects, most people regard them not as auxiliary causes, but as the actual causes of all things. Things like these, however, are totally incapable of possessing any account (*logon*) or understanding (*noun*) about anything. We must pronounce the soul to be the only thing there is that properly possesses understanding. The soul is an invisible thing, whereas fire, water, earth and air have all come to be as visible bodies. So anyone who is a lover of understanding and knowledge must of necessity pursue as primary causes those that belong to intelligent nature (*tas tēs emphronos physeōs*) and as secondary all those belonging to things that are moved by others and that set still others in motion by necessity. (*Ti.* 46c7–e2)

The powers at work when one body affects another are here demoted to the rank of secondary causes. Bodies possess these powers, as we shall see, through participating in Forms. Furthermore, Timaeus' general characterisation of these powers as "belonging to things that are moved by others and that set still others in motion", suggests that there is no principled or essential difference between powers to cause motion and powers to be caused to move. This agrees with the conclusions drawn in section one above about the powers involved in horizontal, intramundane causation.

That the powers operative at this level of causation are themselves produced by a form of vertical, one-way causation is made explicit when Timaeus revises the ontology with which he had been working since the beginning of the speech. That ontology had referred only to Forms and their sensible images; in the middle of the dialogue Timaeus explains that there must be an additional item, something to serve as a support for those images: the receptacle. Timaeus explains the way the Forms and the receptacle are together involved in the constitution of sensibles as follows:

We need to keep in mind three types of things: that which comes to be, that in which it comes to be, and that from which the thing coming to be is modelled and grows. It is in fact appropriate to liken the receiving thing to a mother, that from which to a father, and the nature between them to their offspring. (*Ti.* 50c7–d4)

Fully to unpack this dense passage is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I simply want to call attention to a plausible inference that can be drawn from Timaeus' comparing the role of the Forms in the constitution of sensibles to

that of a father: namely, that the Forms play a causal role in their constitution. Now at the start of his cosmological speech Timaeus had called the Demiurge the “maker and father” of the universe (28c3). However we ultimately decide to interpret the figure of the Demiurge, the concern of our current passage is different from that of the earlier one.¹⁸ The Demiurge is invoked to explain the ordering of the cosmos at large. In our passage, on the other hand, Timaeus is concerned with the ontological constitution of particular sensibles, in which it would be odd to suppose the Demiurge to be operative on a case-by-case basis. Now the constitution of a sensible requires as one of its conditions that the material in the sensible world come to be so arranged as to be appropriate for the supervening of the image of the Form on it.¹⁹ The materials becoming so arranged requires the interaction of causal powers on what I have called the horizontal level. But that interaction is to be distinguished from the image of the Form’s coming to characterise such a part of the sensible world when it is so arranged. The latter is an instance of asymmetrical, vertical, constitutive causation.²⁰

If the Forms are purely active in this sort of vertical causation, what is the purely passive thing on which they act? It must be the receptacle; indeed, for the most part, the receptacle as already suitably qualified by prior constitutive activity of (other) Forms. Yet for all of the levels of images of forms that a particular parcel of the receptacle receives, its essential nature as mere power to receive some images is never altered: “It does not depart at all from its own power: for it both always receives all things, and yet never takes on in any way at all any form similar to any one of the things entering into it” (*Ti.* 50b7–c2). This sort of vertical causation should be thought of as Plato’s explanation for what some contemporary philosophers call the *emergence* of a property. The proper arrangement of the properties on which a new property is to emerge must be present in order for the new property to emerge. This new property – or in Platonic terms, the newly-constituted image of a Form – itself has causal power, both to affect other things and to be affected by them. It thereupon enters into relations of horizontal causation with the other images of Forms

18 For a good discussion of the various arguments for treating the Demiurge as a distinct entity or as a literary presentation of something else (such as the *nous* of the world soul), see Brisson (2016).

19 Although I here use the language of “supervening”, I by no means wish to imply (as some contemporary users of the term do) that what supervenes does not add new causal powers to that on which it supervenes. As I suggest further below, the position in the *Timaeus* bears a closer relationship to what modern metaphysicians call “emergence”.

20 The relation between horizontal and vertical causation in the *Timaeus* is treated in some detail in ch. 3.

that it encounters. Those interactions produce rearrangement of the already existing images of Forms, and occasion fresh instances of vertical causation.

There is, then, as I have argued, an interweaving of vertical and horizontal causation in the operation of what Timaeus calls the secondary causes – those whose operation he ascribes to necessity. I now turn to Timaeus' primary causes, those belonging to "intelligent nature", and which he ascribes to *nous* (at 46d7–8). These causes, too, have both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. Horizontally, the mind acts on and is acted on by the body and, through it, affects and is affected by external sensibles. The vertical constitution of these causes can be elucidated by the results of our analysis of the *Sophist*. As I have argued, the Stranger there introduced the *horos* of being in order to discuss causal relations between different ontological orders, relations in which one relatum is purely active, the other purely passive. There the purely active element was the Forms, as it is in the *Timaeus*. But in the *Sophist* the passive power on which the Forms exercised their active power was located in the soul: justice makes the soul just, and Forms in general are causes to the mind of its knowing them. The *Sophist* does not discuss the way in which the soul, so affected, enters into relations of reciprocal, horizontal causation.²¹ The *Timaeus*, on the other hand, does.

The most striking case of the soul's causing bodily motion in the *Timaeus* is the orbits of the Same and the Different in the world soul carrying along the heavenly bodies. Timaeus treats these rotational motions of the world soul as natural to it, and gives no further explanation for them. But Timaeus does tell us that these motions are *thoughts* in the mind of the world soul; and it would seem that the Forms are the only objects of thought available for the world soul to be thinking of.²² If the world soul's motions – or their orderliness – is due to its contemplation of the Forms, then here we have an example of the vertical causation operative in knowing that was discussed in the *Sophist*. Now Timaeus does not tell us whether any bodily aspect of the world offers any resistance to the rational motions of the world soul whereby it moves the heavenly bodies. But in his treatment of the soul as embodied in human beings Timaeus gives us a dramatic picture of the way in which the soul, and the

21 A major concern of the *Sophist*, and one that I do not treat here, is what might be called horizontal causation at the level of the Forms themselves, e.g., that whereby the Form Being causes the Form Motion to be. For a discussion of this sort of causation, see ch. 6.

22 Timaeus calls them "thoughts and revolutions" (*dianoëseis kai periphorai*) at 90c8–d1. In this connection we may further note that Timaeus describes the rotation of the individual stars as related to their "always thinking the same things about the same things (*peri tōn autōn aei ta auta heautōi dianoooumenōi*)" (40a8–b1), which makes it clear that their thinking has objects distinct from itself.

circular motions of the mind in it, enter into horizontal and reciprocal causal interactions with sensible things (first and foremost its body, and via its mediation, with other things). This is most vividly illustrated by Timaeus' description of the fate of the soul when first implanted in the body. Here we learn that the mind's circular motions are dragged around by the current of nutrition flowing through the body and by the perceptions occasioned by the shocks the body receives from encountering other bodies:

And [the created gods] went on to invest this [human] body – into and out of which things were to flow – with the orbits of the immortal soul. These orbits, now bound within a mighty river, neither mastered that river nor were mastered by it, but tossed it violently and were violently tossed by it. (*Ti.* 43a)

Over time, and with the help of the progressive understanding of mathematical order that is promoted by observing the motions of the heavens, the motions of our soul, which are naturally akin to those heavenly motions, may be restored to their proper courses and come to dominate the motions of the body (see god). While Timaeus emphasises the assimilation of our own mind's motions to that of the heavens, it is clear that the means of effecting that assimilation is understanding the rational order of those motions. And understanding their rational order involves understanding the principles of that order, which must ultimately be the Forms.²³

4 Conclusion: Plato between Anaxagoras and Aristotle

At the beginning of this paper I contrasted contemporary accounts of causal powers with Aristotle's. Many contemporary theorists have little use for the notion of powers that are essentially active or passive (though some do recognise metaphysically distinct active and passive roles that powers play in some cases of causation). By contrast, the distinction between active and passive powers is at the very foundation of Aristotle's causal theory. An active power

²³ It is true that the *Timaeus* does not explicitly connect the ordering of the human soul's motions with its understanding the Forms, but only with its understanding of the rational motions of the heavens. But the alternative to saying that that understanding is grounded in an understanding of the Forms is to suppose that astronomy is the highest kind of human knowledge that Plato here recognises. While some have thought that this is in fact the position of the pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*, I do not know of any scholar who finds it in the *Timaeus*.

can only operate as an agent: in virtue of it a substance can only affect other things. For a substance to be affected requires that it possess a different, passive power for undergoing that affection.

Our analysis of passages in Plato that treat of causal powers has resulted in a more complex picture. While Plato appears to insist that every causal interaction in the world of things that come to be involves an active and a passive element, he seems happy to allow a particular power to play now one role, now another. Sensible particulars (and the souls that some of them possess) engage in a form of horizontal causation, where causal relata can both act on and be acted on by each other. On the other hand, Plato also recognises another sort of causation: a non-reciprocal, vertical causation in which the eternal and immutable Forms act on sensible particulars (and on the souls that some of them possess) without suffering any change or affection in return.²⁴ In acting on the receptacle, the Forms constitute particulars and are thereby responsible for their characters. These characters consist (at least in part) in powers to interact with other sensibles in what I have called horizontal causation. The Forms act on souls in a rather different fashion. The Forms do not *constitute* the soul by acting on something purely passive, nor does their acting on the soul endow it with powers to interact with other things. So far as the *Timaeus* goes, the soul has a sort of independent existence, which is not brought about by any causal action on the part of the Forms. What is more, the soul also has in itself the power of moving itself and its body, and does not derive it from being acted on by the Forms. The effect of the Forms' action on the soul is to give the soul's inherent motion *direction*. A soul that is just in virtue of participating in Justice will act among things and people in a just manner; a soul that possesses wisdom in virtue of the Forms' action on its mind will master the disorderly motions originating in the body and move that body wisely.

What are we to make the difference between Plato's and Aristotle's causal theories as here developed? In his rejection of Platonic transcendent Forms, Aristotle at the same time rejects the sort of constitutive vertical causation found in Plato. Why did he not follow Plato in holding that the causal powers active in the natural world are capable of acting as agent or patient, depending on what they encounter? The answer to this question, I believe, is to be found in the fact that both Plato and Aristotle follow in the tradition of causal thinking inaugurated by Anaxagoras. In *Physics* VIII, at a crucial point in his

24 As mentioned earlier, there are also causal relations among the Forms themselves, which I have not treated here. Causation of this sort is an important theme of the Sophist, and is treated in ch. 5 and ch. 6 of this volume.

investigation into the source of motion in the cosmos, Aristotle breaks off to sing the praises of Anaxagoras:

So, too, Anaxagoras is right when he says that Mind is unaffected (*apathē*) and unmixed (*amigē*), since he makes it the principle (*archē*) of motion; for only in this way could it cause motion – by being unmoved; and exert control – by being unmixed. (256b24-27)²⁵

Anaxagoras, I suggest, was the first to reflect on what was needed for motion to get started. Parmenides had asked, “What would have stirred [what is], later or earlier, to grow, starting from nothing?”²⁶ Anaxagoras answered: something categorically distinct from that which is caused to move. This, in his view, was mind. It is precisely because mind is distinct from the materials it moves that mind can master them and put them into motion.

Anaxagoras’ response to Parmenides exerted a profound influence on Plato and Aristotle. Originating motion is a distinctive kind of activity, which requires something that is fitted to the task; something that is separate from what it moves, so that it can, as Aristotle says, master it. Now in Anaxagoras’ system what mind starts to move is the mixture of all things (whatever we understand the ingredients of that mixture to be). Once mind starts this mixture rotating, the jostling of the ingredients causes them to separate out in accordance with their own specific natures. This action of the ingredients on each other constitutes a sort of reciprocal causation, distinct from that exercised by mind. Thus Anaxagoras has a two-level theory of causation similar to that we have found in Plato.

Plato’s theory differs from that of Anaxagoras in at least two crucial respects. The first concerns their treatment of mind. In Plato the causation of mind occurs at the horizontal level of reciprocal causation. It is true that the causation of “the intelligent nature” has a certain priority over causes that operate with mindless necessity; but mind itself can be affected by those latter causes.²⁷ Mind must contend with necessity. It draws the rational direction of its causality from its thinking the Forms, which thinking itself involves the vertical causality of the Forms on the mind. The second difference is connected with this. Whereas Anaxagoras conceives of his vertical causality as roughly along the lines of Aristotelian efficient causality, Plato conceives of it as having a different status – as befits a causal relation between the transcendent and that which exists in time. The constitutive role whereby the Forms cause the

²⁵ Translation drawn (and modified) from Barnes (1984).

²⁶ Parmenides B8.9–11, translated drawn and modified from Graham (2010).

²⁷ See, again, the description of the effect of the body on the infant mind at *Ti.* 43a.

properties of bodies, and the epistemologically active role whereby they cause souls to know them, are of a different order from the way souls and bodies interact in the realm of change.

Finally, a word on Aristotle's continuation of this tradition. Leaving aside the well-known difficulties in Aristotle's doctrines of the Unmoved Mover and of the Agent Intellect, I here turn to the horizontal interaction of active and passive powers in nature, and to the question raised earlier: why does Aristotle insist that powers are essentially either active or passive? Here, I would suggest, Aristotle transposes to the level of horizontal causality the understanding Anaxagoras developed of causation at the vertical level. For Aristotle, it holds good that, at the fundamental level of causation, there must be an active element that is essentially distinct from the passive element on which it acts. And Aristotle was followed in this way of understanding the Anaxagorean point by the next great theoreticians in this tradition of thought, the Stoics. For them, the two fundamental ontological constituents of the world are God, which brings about change but does not undergo it, and matter, which undergoes change but is incapable of bringing it about.

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Powers as First Causes of Generation in Plato's *Timaeus*

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1 Generation

The main character in Plato's *Timaeus* begins his long speech with a distinction within a question:

[T1] what is the being that always [is], admitting no generation, and what is that which [always] is in generation, never being?

ti to on aei, genesin de ouk echon, kai ti to gignomenon men [aei]¹, on de oudepote; (27d6–28a1)

The answer is that the first kind is that which we grasp with the intellect and reasoning and is always in conformity to itself (*aei kata tauta on*, 28a2). The second kind is the one that we grasp with belief and perception and is continuously in generation and destruction (*gignomenon kai apollymenon*, 28a3). The distinction is modal, i.e. between *always* being (in conformity with itself) and *never* being (*qua* being; *ontōs de oudepote on*, 28a3–4). The strong sense of “never” should guarantee that such a process of generation is not the one that ends in the accomplishment of a permanent being, in the sense in which, in the *Timaeus*, the world results from the work of the demiurge.² Plato's vocabulary testifies to this distinction in the contrast between *gignomenon* – a present participle of *gignesthai* (what is in generation) – and verbal forms such as *gennēton* (28c2, passive verbal adjective of the verb *gennaō*, begotten) and

- 1 The second *aei* is missing in important manuscripts, as well as in Cicero and Calcidius. The absence, however, should not alter the balance of the two clauses established by the two explanations: not allowing generation is what conveys the fact that the first kind *continuously* is; never being something is what clarifies that the second kind is *in constant* generation (see Procl. *In. Tim.* I, 240). On the absence of the *aei*, see Whittaker (1969, 1973) and Robinson (1979: 105).
- 2 As for example in *Sph.* 219b4–6, *Phlb.* 26d8; *Smp.* 205b8–c2. On the two meanings of generation, see Cornford 1935: 24–25; Owen 1953: 85; Hackforth 1959: 19; Frede 1988: 39.

gegonen (28b6, the perfect participle of *gignesthai*, what has been generated, in the perfect).³ While both semantic groups are included in the broader category of *genomenon* (28c2, the aorist participle of *gignesthai* – what is generated), only the former corresponds to the kind mentioned in T₁, which, though it is sometimes referred to as flux, I call generation.

Having established this difference, our object in this chapter is things in generation, of which we learn the following:

[T₂] Moreover, everything in generation is generated by a certain cause *ex anankēs*, for it is totally incapable of having a generation apart from a cause.

pan de au to gignomenon hyp' aitiou tinos ex anankēs gignesthai; panti gar adynaton chōris aitiou genesin schein. (28a4–6)⁴

“Moreover” indicates that we should add T₂ as another reason for the distinction between what is always and things in generation: there is no cause *ex anankēs* for what is always. The rationale is perhaps that since being is always in conformity with itself (*aei kata tauta*), nothing but itself causes it to be what it is, and nothing changes it from being what it is. Things in generation, on the other hand, are not *causa sui*; their coming into being requires an external cause, said to be *ex anankēs*. Before we try to understand what this expression means, let us examine the next sentence in the text:

[T₃] This is the thing whose form and power the demiurge, contemplating what always holds in conformity with itself and using it as a model, finishes off, thus completing everything finely *ex anankēs*.

hotou men oun an dēmiourgos pros to kata tauta echon blepōn aei, toioutō tini proschrōmenos paradeigmati, tēn idean kai dynamin autou apergazētai, kalon ex anankēs houtōs apoteleisthai pan. (28a6–b1)

The *Timaeus* is famous for its difficult syntax, and one of the challenges of this sentence is its first word, the relative pronoun in the genitive *hotou*.⁵ One would expect it to refer to something in T₂. The first option is *aitiou*, a tempting

3 On the difference between *gennēton* and *en genesēi*, see Alcīn. XIV.3; Johansen 2004: 119–120. For two kinds of becoming, see Turnbull 1988: 7–8; Krása 2021: 145–146.

4 Greek text edited by Burnet 1902.

5 I follow the syntax of *hotou* in Archer-Hind 1888: 87, Cantarín & Diéz 2012: 55.

alternative due to the genitive. However, T₃ identifies this cause with either the demiurge or what always is, and no syntactic construction could allow for this identification with a pronoun in the genitive. Unable to make sense of this reference, some translators have chosen to understand the relative as a vague reference to time: “whenever”.⁶ This leads to the assumption that the completion of everything is something that happens sporadically. But, as noted above, *gegonen* indicates that this is a one-time accomplishment. There is an alternative reading. It consists in taking the relative as referring to *gignomenon* and explaining the genitive by the *autou* further ahead. In this sense, things in generation serve as a matter that is finished off according to the model that is always, a development that brings the world about. Some translators reject this reading, assuming that *autou* should refer to what is always, the meaning being that the demiurge “reproduces” the form and power of these models elsewhere. But *apergazētai* does not mean “to reproduce”; it means “to accomplish”, “to finish off”, “to complete”, “to conclude” something. In offering an *ad hoc* translation of the verb, the interpreters acknowledge that the demiurge cannot complete the form and power of what always is, but they fail to see the easier alternative: the demiurge perfects the form and power of things in generation, using what always is as a model. I will soon explain how he does this, and provide more textual support for this reading.

For now, let us note that the model – what always is – is the focus of T₃. It is because of this model that the demiurge succeeds in completing everything finely (*kalon*). If he had looked at what has been generated (*gegonos*) and used a begotten (*gennētō*) model, the completion would not be fine (28b1–2). We note that *to gignomenon* is not mentioned as an option for a model, suggesting that flux does not qualify for the job. This fits with the idea that things in generation are those that need to be perfected. Perhaps once perfected, they can become something that lasts, that remains in existence. Probably this is what the demiurge does in creating the world: he improves things in generation by turning them into lasting generated things. The sequence of T₃ seems to address this issue: things that are seen, touched, and have a body are perceptible and grasped by opinion; they appear both in generation and as being generated (*gignomena kai gennēta*), and the world must be something of this sort (28b6–c2).

6 Cornford (1935: 22), Zeyl (1997: 1234–1235), Fronterotta (2003: 179), Brisson (2008: 1988), for instance, translate it as “whenever” qualifying *blepōn*, and then render *apergazētai* as “reproduces” resulting in something like: “whenever ... he has the gaze always fixed ... and reproduces its form and property in the object he produces”.

In this chapter I argue that the world was generated as a perfecting of things in generation. The reason why this turns out to be a relevant contribution to the present volume is that, once generation is verified as a primary – as opposed to a derivative – mode of existence, as stated in T₁, generational powers are confirmed as first causes in the world. By first causes, I mean that they are real, that is, not simply an expression of the causation of something over something, and that they are not caused by anything else. My argument begins with the term whose translation I have avoided, *anankē*, pointing out that it should be understood as the inevitable. I go on to show that there are five modes of existence in the *Timaeus*: two related to intelligence, the demiurge and what always is in conformity with itself; two related to the inevitable, what is always in generation and what always resists and never is something, the bearer; and one that is the outcome of the interaction of these four: what is generated and remains. I then contend that the pre-cosmic account claims that what is always in generation is the result of an interaction between the bearer and dissimilar and unbalanced powers. These powers are to be causally distinguished from things in generation and considered as metaphysical primitives, because they maintain what I call the inevitable law of displacement: the motion of items towards those of similar density. This law holds before and after the crafting of the world, the difference being simply that the world involves things that are generated and remain. I then offer an analysis of the natural motion of bodies and survey alternative readings to conclude that in the *Timaeus* powers are metaphysical primitives.

2 The Inevitable

We learned from T₂ that everything is generated by a certain cause *ex anankēs*. The latter expression generally means either “due to constraint” or “according to logical necessity or natural needs”. Some interpreters assume the second meaning associating *ex anankēs* with *adynaton*: since it is impossible for it to be otherwise, it is necessarily so. Their main reason comes from their understanding of T₄, which is stated shortly after T₃:

[T₄] we say that what is generated is *anankēn* generated by a certain cause.

tō d'au genomenō phamen hyp'aitiou tinos anankēn einai genesthai. (28c2–3)

Reading the accusative *anankēn* as qualifying *einai* in T₄, as some scholars have done, leads us easily to the conclusion that it means “necessarily”. But it

must be noted that this does not fit very well with the occurrence of *ex anankēs* in T3: it is not necessary for the demiurge to complete everything finely. If he had used the wrong model, he would not have done so. On the other hand, the idea of finishing it finely out of constraint does not fit with a later statement that the demiurge wanted (*eboulēthē*) the world to be good (29e1–3).

The puzzlement remains until we have a sense of the blueprint of Timaeus' account. After its majestic beginning in T1, we are led to understand the reasons why the demiurge would rather not make a cosmos by using visible and tangible bodies as models: to be finely finished, the world must also be intelligent and therefore it must have a soul (30a6–b6). Crafting the world consists in contriving the insertion of intelligence into a soul and a soul into a body, designing something that is both generated and enduring. This whole process is detailed in the text between 31b4 and 47e2, after which we read:

[T5] What has been said before shows, with a few brief exceptions, the things crafted by intelligence. One must now add to the account the things in generation due to *anankē*. The generation of this world occurred as a mixture resulting from (*ex*) the meeting of *anankē* and intelligence. Intelligence governs *anankē* by persuading it to maximally direct things in generation for the best, so the universe was crafted in conformity with its principles (*kath' archas*), i.e., by means of an *anankē* that was weakened by the intelligent persuasion. (47e3–48a5)

The meeting of *anankē* and intelligence can help us out of our puzzlement. If *anankē* is one of the ingredients of this mixture that results in the world, we can understand T2 as saying that generation has a cause whose origin is *anankē*. We can also see T3 as saying that the demiurge finely finished off the things derived from *anankē*, a much more sensible reading. Moreover, this approach supports my suggestion that he improved the form and power of things in generation, for two reasons. First, because this is the only way to make the occurrences of *to gignomenon*, *hotou*, *autou* and *ex anankē* in T3 coherent. Second, because, if read this way, T3 prepares us for T5, where we are told that things in generation are due to *anankē*.⁷ As for T4, we know from the verb “we say”

7 Taylor (1928: 65, 300) rejects the idea that the term has the same meaning in all occurrences. He understands *anankē* in T1 and T2 as a logical necessity and in T3 as conjunctions without justification, that would be explained if we knew better. If this were the case, the difference between *anankē* and intelligence would be purely cognitive. Archer-Hind (1888: 166) was closer to the mark when he spoke of physical laws, but not as the sum of all these laws, as if *anankē* could be completely subsumed under intelligence. A similar position can be found in Silverman 1992: 99. Cornford's (1935: 162–177) criticism is correct in that it would also conflate

(*phamen*) that it refers to T2, and therefore we should expect the sense to be the same in both passages. This is not problematic, since there is nothing to prevent us from reading T4 as saying that what is generated happens because of something called *anankē*, the meaning of which we have yet to learn. If this can be done, it is a good way out of the puzzlement.

But what is *anankē*? T5 makes it clear that it is one of the two principles of reality – the straying kind (*to tēs planōmenēs eidos aitias*, 48a6–7) – the other being intelligence. This brings us back to the primary distinction in T1 to explain that the demiurge used intelligence and persuasion to weaken *anankē*, in crafting the world. This establishes a difference between the full-fledged *anankē* found in T1 (what is always in generation and never is) and the generated and incorruptible world. Moreover, this shows the inadequacy of the two general meanings of *anankē* mentioned above. On the one hand, something done out of constraint cannot be weakened. On the other hand, logical necessity cannot be persuaded. *Anankē* in *Timaeus*' cosmology is not a modality, it is a causal factor, a *synaition* (46c7–d1). There is a sense of the Greek word that is much more appropriate to this use: mostly as a deity, *Anankē* is what we cannot avoid, the inevitable.⁸

There is, of course, some overlap of meaning between “the inevitable” and “real necessity”, as well as with “intelligence”. For example, one can assume that both principles of reality – what always is and what is in generation – are inevitable: there is no reality without them. In the same way, one can say that when voluntary or intelligent actions are successful, their achievement was inevitable – in the sense that intelligence “persuaded” its way around the inevitable. But there is a value implied in “the inevitable” that distinguishes it from “real necessity” in that it is something we would prefer to avoid. This makes the inevitable appropriate only to what is in generation. The reason for this is that the demiurge's commitment to a fine achievement leads him to favour intelligence as a resource in the craft of the world. Intelligible items – what always is – are the cause of the universe being fine; generation is not. The more he is willing to impress intelligence upon his production, the more it is the positive principle, and generation is to be removed as much as possible. Generation remains in the world to the extent that the demiurge cannot get

intelligence and *anankē*, but he is wrong in assuming that *anankē* entails chaos. I will try to show that *anankē* describes non-designed and randomly caused motion that nevertheless has its own law expressing sufficient necessity (if X happens, then Y happens, though X does not necessarily happen). For a similar position, see Jelinek 2011: 298.

8 See Rickert 1989: 15–34; 60 and Araújo 2023: 154.

rid of it. Thus the pejorative sense of the inevitable fits generation better than its counterpart.

Because generation is inevitable, it imposes limits on the work of the demiurge. He does not create the world *ex nihilo*, nor does he do as he pleases. He brings together two different modes of being to craft a hybrid of them. To do this, he must weaken the flux rather than destroy it. Therefore, the account of the world will not be complete without explaining how things in this world are inevitably in generation.

3 A Restart

The new beginning of Timaeus' account announced in T5 aims to provide an explanation of things in generation as a principle. What he calls the third kind in 48e4, I would like to argue, is the second kind in T1, things in generation.⁹ It is now called a third kind because Timaeus, in the first part of his speech, leaves it aside to focus on the role of intelligence in the contriving another kind: the generated and enduring things. Timaeus justifies this first omission as follows:

[T6] For these two were sufficient for the previous account: the one that is posited as the form of the model, intelligible and always in accordance with itself, the second is the reproduction (*mimēma*) of the model, which has generation and is seen. (48e4–49a1)

The second kind in T6 – the generated things – is obviously not a first principle, but the result of the work of the demiurge: what comes into being is a reproduction of the model that is always in conformity with itself. This is why T5 proclaims that we must now begin again, starting with things in generation – now called a third kind – and characterise their role as the inevitable cause of the world. This task, he clarifies, amounts to “establishing the nature of fire, water, air and earth before the generation of the sky, as well as the previous affections (*pathē*)” (48b4–5). They must do so because fire, water, air and earth were considered to be letters or basic elements (*stoicheia*, 48b8) of the world. In fact, Timaeus himself seemed to agree with this premise when he stated that “for this reason, the god began to put together the body of the world by producing it out of fire and earth” (31b6–8). However, he now claims that there

9 The counting is yet different in 50c7–d2; 51e6–52b5 and 52d2–4, where kinds 1 and 2 correspond to T2, but kind 3 is a novelty. See below.

is evidence against this assumption. We observe that what we call water, when condensed, becomes what we judge to be stone and earth, and this same thing, when dissolved and dissipated, transforms into wind and air (49b7–c7). These primordial bodies are not stable so that we can simply assemble things out of them; they are generated items that are also subject to destruction. More precisely, they are inter-generated: the destruction of one is the generation of the other.

We must note that the explanation of their intergeneration rests on two premises. On the one hand, unlike this water that remains in my glass or this air that is displaced into my lungs, things in generation are, as Timaeus puts it, *always* in generation (*aei ho kathorōmen allote allē gignomenon*, 49d4–5), running away (*pheugei*, 49e2), and *never* fixed or stable (*pagiōs*, 49d2; *monima*, 49e3). On the other hand, while denying the stability of things in generation, Timaeus refers to the same thing (*tauton touto* – 49c1–2) that is condensed, dissolved and dissipated, acquiring characteristics of the primordial bodies. This thing is the bearer (*hypodochē*, 49a6, *dechētai*, 51b5) of the generation of bodies, functioning as that in which the generation happens (*en hō de eggignomena* – 49e7–8), its territory (*chōran*, 52b4), and its nurturer (*tithēnēn*, 49a6, 52d4–5), causing the process never to be interrupted. This bearer is described as the nature that receives all the bodies (50b6); a nature that does not relinquish its peculiar power if accepting everything without assuming the character proper to these things (50b7–c2, see also *amorphon* at 50d7, 51a7). The rationale for this claim is found in 50e1–8: to have a form is to resist assuming another. Since the bearer must maintain its power of receiving, it cannot have the power of having a form. This peculiar power of being constantly affected without changing I will call resilience. Power of resilience is a first cause in the sense that it is not caused by anything else. Moreover, there is nothing to the bearer except its resilience, for if it were *something*, it would fail in its proper function of remaining indeterminate. Resilience also explains why flux is an apparition.¹⁰ In the absence of real change, generation is simply an epiphenomenon in the bearer.

In the next section, we will consider intergeneration as an interaction between things in generation and the bearer. Before proceeding, I must to point out that this distinction of modes of existence adds a fourth item to Timaeus's list: in addition to (i) what always is in conformity with itself; (ii) what is always in generation; (iii) what is generated and endures; we have

10 Following Crivelli (2012: 24–25), I use apparitions for objective phenomena (as opposed to the appearances that are relative to a subject), see also Silvermann 1992: 93–95; Miller 2003: 101; Krása 2021: 137.

now (iv) what always resists and is never anything – to which we might add the demiurge. I would also like to point out that Timaeus formulates different lists of these modes at different moments of the text. Sometimes he simply lists the two most basic principles (as in T1 and 51d3–e7). Sometimes he distinguishes things in generation from the bearer in which they occur (50c7–d2; 51e6–52b5, 52d2–4). Sometimes he mentions generated items which the demiurge has crafted as reproductions of what is always (50c5, 51a1–3, 51b6), with the intention of distinguishing them from things in generation (as in T6). I suggest that the latter is the case of 50d2–4, where the model is likened to a father, the bearer to a receiving mother, and generated things to the offspring. We should not assume that things in generation, a metaphysical primitive since T1, are to be confused with the generated result of the demiurge's procedure. Further support for this claim comes from considering reality before the world was crafted.

4 Before the World

Before the demiurge crafted the world, that is, before bodies such as water, fire, earth and air were contrived, there were, according to Timaeus, three kinds: being, the bearer and things in generation (52d2–3). The interaction between the latter two is described as follows:

[T7] The nurturer of generation appears in a diversified aspect [*pantodapēn men idein phainesthai*] – watery, fiery, receiving the characters [*morphas*] of earth and air, and affected by all the other affections that follow – for being replenished with powers that are dissimilar and unbalanced [*to mēth' homoion dýnameōn mēte isorropōn*], and finding balance in none of its parts. Being anomalously altered all over, they make it quake, while, by being moved [*kinoumenēn*], it makes them quake in return. (52d4–e5)

T7 describes things in generation as an interaction of the bearer and some dissimilar and unbalanced powers. The latter are active causes of different characters, affections and alterations and the former, as we should expect, displays resilience by not becoming anything. The bearer cannot cause itself to be affected, for it cannot have dissimilar and unbalanced powers. Therefore, these powers seem to be first causes of things in generation, not caused by anything else. However, this sounds controversial within the scholarship on the

Timaeus. I will address this controversy later. For now, we need to understand what T7 says about generation.

As mentioned above, the affections of the bearer are apparitions because of its resilience. Nevertheless, they provoke a distinction – however apparent – between local parts of the bearer (*tauta alla allēn*, 53a6). This seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest that the bearer has extension; rather, it is extension, it is territory (*chōran*, 53a6).¹¹ The affections are first said to differ according to some of the traits of the primordial bodies: watery, fiery, airy and earthy. No explanation is given for these traits, except that this difference causes imbalance in the bearer. As the following comparison with the winnowing basket makes clear, the important feature at this point is that these distinct portions contrast with each other, with some being denser and heavier, and others rarer and lighter (53a1–2). If so, the affections are primarily differentiations of the mass/area ratio, i.e., area density or grammage. If the bearer is extension without any other property, then it makes sense to assume that the traits of the primordial bodies – watery, fiery, airy and earthy – are differences caused by a concentration/dispersion of a portion into a smaller/larger area.¹²

There is another reason why *Timaeus* is interested in reducing affections to diversity in area density. As we have seen, the intergeneration of primordial bodies has been described as processes of condensation, dissolution and dissipation of the same thing (49b7–c7). If there were more to the, say, the watery affection than some mass/area ratio, its dissolution into air would not simply consist of such processes. If there were more to being watery than having a certain grammage, some other kind of change would be required for intergeneration. This, of course, does not preclude that other properties of being watery might follow from its peculiar surface density; it merely requires that these

11 Taylor (1928: 312–313) has the opposite interpretation: it is pure space and “bearer” is just a metaphor. The problem, in my view, is that *Timaeus* derives its extension from its power of resilience, not the other way around (see Zeyl 2010: 121). This is also the reason why I cannot agree with Miller (2003: 15) that the bearer and the place are two different things. His main argument is that the bearer is a three-dimensional field, while place is only two-dimensional. Below I will argue that the third dimension is a feature introduced by the demiurge in the crafting of the world.

12 Of course, pure extension cannot concentrate or disperse, but this is not a problem for *Timaeus*, since resilience explains why extension is never altered. In my view, *Timaeus* has in mind something like Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and the tortoise (see DK 29B1), which is based on the formal discontinuity of extension as opposed to its sensible continuity. The extension of a sensible entity like the world involves some continuity, at least some appearance of continuity, even if space is discontinuous. This is why, I argue, *Timaeus* refers to the “affections” as apparitions (*phainesthai*, 52e1).

properties must change whenever that density changes. If this is correct, then dissimilarity and unbalance are not independent characteristics of the powers causing generation: they are dissimilar because they cause a difference in density which is itself unbalanced, i.e., an uneven mass/area ratio.

Difference in area density causes quakes. T7 says that the bearer is moved by them, which may seem a contradiction given its resilience. One way out of the problem is to suppose that this motion is simply the activity of its resilience, which resists alteration by redirecting the impact back to things in generation. This is an interesting explanation for three reasons: (i) the bearer remains as that *in* which motion occurs; (ii) it does not attribute self-motion to things in generation – for, as we know, these require external causes; (iii) it explains motion solely in terms of difference in density – so we need no additional causes. But there is another reason to favour this reading: the resilience of the bearer links generation (of affections) to displacement. In other words, by resisting the impact of the unbalanced powers, the bearer causes things in generation to constantly change their position (*ta de kinoumena alla allose aei pheresthai*, 52e5–6). The characteristics of this displacement suggest a pattern – I would say a pattern of the inevitable.¹³

In sum, the incessant activity of unbalanced powers causes the random apparition of different densities on different areas.¹⁴ On the other hand, the reaction of the bearer to the imbalance causes the tendency of portions of the same grammage to be grouped in the same place (53a1–2), which I will call the like-to-like tendency. Balance is never attained because the powers of generation are constantly acting on distinct locations, so that the displacement is continuous despite the activity of the bearer, which by itself would tend to stop. The connection between the constant operation of the powers of generation and the like-to-like tendency forms what I call the inevitable law of

13 With this claim I intend to deny that generation is chaos (see Taylor 1928: 357; Vlastos 1939: 82). The affections caused by the powers are random (see *kinoumenon plēmmelōs kai ataktōs*, 30a4–5; *to tychon atakton*, 46e5, *ataktōs*, 69b3), but they are constantly caused so that motion is never interrupted. As Morrow puts it, this is a scenario in which “specific effects follow regularly from specific causes” (1950: 154). I also reject Vlastos’ (1964: 404) reading that these hints of fire, earth, air and water do not have the nature of these elements; on the contrary, they are hints *of their nature*, see below.

14 Taylor (1928: 351–352) suggests that the like-to-like tendency would bring motion to a halt (all the natures resting in their proper places) if the demiurge did not interfere. This is a projection of stability onto what is evidently described as a flux. The text is clear that the powers are constantly generating differences in the portions, and this alteration explains the displacement of bodies even after the world was crafted.

displacement.¹⁵ In the next sections, I will provide further evidence that it holds both before and after the world was crafted; it is a cosmic pattern.

Before proceeding, however, I would like to make a final point about how the affections in the bearer relate to the primordial bodies. I referred to them as traits, Timaeus calls them hints (*ichnē* – 53b1–2) that somehow manifest the peculiar nature (*pephykota tauta* – 53b4) of what will later become fire, water, air and earth. I have suggested that these hints consist in the difference of density in each area, and I will argue that this mass will be maintained in the solid structure of each body, thus preserving the law of displacement. If this is correct, these hints are precisely the things in generation whose form and power (*idean kai dynamin*) T3 said the demiurge would finish off in crafting the world.

5 The Law of Displacement

The intervention of the demiurge consists in transforming the fiery, watery, earthy and airy portions of the bearer (31b6–8, 48b3–5) into bodies (53c4–7) by giving them number, form, rationality and proportion (53a8, b4–5, 69b4–5).¹⁶ The first difference is that bodies are not portions of an extension, but three-dimensional solids with tangibility (53c4–8, see *oude apton aneu tinou stereou*, 31b5–6). The role of the demiurge is therefore to transform these areas into geometrical figures – more specifically, he selects the two types of rectangle triangles, the isosceles and the scalene (53c8–d4)¹⁷ – which can be used to compose other surfaces as well as solids. They also serve as the units into which these constructions are broken down.

Initially, one has the impression that the composition of triangles has replaced the interaction between the bearer and the dissimilar powers as a process of generation. Interpreters tend to see triangular figures as the most basic metaphysical item in the world built by the demiurge.¹⁸ But Timaeus makes a disclaimer: these are the first causes we postulate for bodies, but “the previous causes are known to the gods and the men they love” (53d6–7). The first causes of generation are hard to grasp, but they are not the triangles. This

15 For the like-to-like tendency as the ultimate cause of physical change, see Mohr 1980: 108–108.

16 Bodies are not deprived of rationality (as in Broadie 2011: 179); pre-cosmic flux is, and I take 46d4–7 to refer to this flux.

17 These are the elemental triangles because every polygon can be divided into two rectangular triangles, which are either isosceles or scalene.

18 See, for example, Taylor (1928: 373), Cornford (1935: 159) and Vlastos (2005 [1975]: 70). For a similar critique of their view, see Silverman (1992: 109) and Buckels (2018: 20).

reinforces my earlier argument that flux and the generation of lasting beings are different processes, the latter being the result of bringing intelligence into the world by perfecting flux. This is a point that Timaeus reaffirms by supporting his proposal in T3, even after he has detailed the construction of bodies:

[T8] Indeed, as regards quantity, the motion and the other powers of the proportions, the god finished them all off in every way, adjusting them proportionally to the extent to which the nature of the inevitable has been voluntarily persuaded to yield. (56c3–7)

T8 supports the thesis that the construction of elemental triangles should be understood as an improvement of the form and power of things in generation. This suggests that triangles are not simply shapes in geometric space, but a shape that gives regularity to areas of different density in the bearer. Evidence for this claim is found in the demiurge's choice for elemental triangles. He opts to work with two types of rectangular triangles (54a1–2) *because* (*gar*, 54b6) the earth is not one of the bodies that are intergenerated (54c3–5, 55e1–3).¹⁹ He claims that “it is most inevitable for this ‘such’²⁰ to be generated as having the most stable base” (*malista de anankē gegonenai toiouton to tas baseis asphalestatas echon* – 55e2–3). If being the most stable is inevitable, we can assume that stability was a hint of the nature of earth in pre-cosmic flux.²¹ In order to persuade the inevitable, the demiurge had to use a peculiar triangle that preserved this hint of earth's nature in the shape of the earth's body.

If this is true, then triangles are not simply shapes in a geometric space. They are endowed with different grammages, a difference that explains why they are subject to the law of displacement.²² In explaining the motion of triangles resulting from the disintegration of bodies, Timaeus says:

19 This does not mean, of course, that earth is not composed and dissolved (compare to Arist. *Ph.* 306a17), quite the contrary. It is simply the case that its elements are not compatible with those of the other primordial bodies.

20 I take *toiouton* to refer to the same term in 49d4–e2, a generated apparition similar to (such as) what earth is. I cannot develop here an interpretation of this – known as the much misread (see Cherniss 1954) – passage, on which see Araújo 2023: 158–159.

21 Being the most stable means denser and slower in displacement along the bearer. It does not contradict the claim that it is in flux. On flux as allowing for differences in speed and affections, see *Th.* 156a2–157c6.

22 Therefore, triangles do not limit the movements in the bearer, nor do they make its motion more reliable (see Morrow 1950: 436); they simply allow for the composition and decomposition of these mobile portions. Having a specific grammage and being the constituents of bodies does not make triangles three-dimensional, as Martin (1841, 2: 241) and Miller (2003: 183–184) suggest.

[T9] On the other hand, when [smaller particles/equilateral triangles], in the process of generating these same [bodies] are approached by one of the other kinds that fight them, their dissolution does not cease until they are either completely destroyed and their components flee to their like, or they are defeated and the many components become one unit similar to the one that prevailed, and rest as its cohabitants. Moreover, the affections²³ change position accordingly [i.e. according to the like-to-like tendency] along the whole territory. For the greatest number of each kind rests separated according to its peculiar places by the motion of the bearer, and those which at any time become dissimilar to themselves and similar to others, are carried along by the quake to the place of those similar to it. (57b4–c6)

When bodies disintegrate, the triangular particles that remain have a hint of nature that makes them move toward their like.²⁴ This like-to-like tendency is found in all bodies and is central to Timaeus' concept of weight. To understand the difference between the pre-cosmic motion and weight in the world, we must note that the demiurge, by giving a solid form – the dodecahedron or the sphere (55c4–6)²⁵ – to the entire extension of the bearer, introduces a spatial reference into it. Now we can indicate the location of each body according to its position within this sphere. We can say, for instance, that according to the like-to-like tendency, fire tends to move toward the periphery of the world and earth toward its centre (63b2–d6). Once this reference is available, Timaeus can argue that being heavy or light is not the same as moving downward or upward, as some of his predecessors seem to have assumed. Since the universe is spherical, its parts are not “up” and “down”, but rather “centre” and “periphery” (62c3–63a6), and the motions according to these directions are either centripetal or centrifugal.

Directional displacement is not the only factor in the explanation of weight. To introduce the second one, Timaeus resorts to a thought experiment in which

23 I understand *ta pathēmata* to be the subject of *diameibetai*. Translators such as Zeyl (1997: 1260); Brisson (2008: 2016) and Cantarín & Diéz (2012: 183) prefer to take *hapanta* as the subject and *pathēmata* as the effects of the collision of bodies. Both readings are possible, but I think that the reference to the law of displacement should lead us to consider the *pathēmata* as the original affections in the bearer.

24 This text is most troubling for authors who regard triangles as mere geometric forms. Taylor (1928: 389, 391), for instance, claims that Timaeus is inconsistent and tries to minimise the problem by saying that it is “an undercurrent of ‘tendency’”. Van Riel (2021: 179–180), who denies that triangles have mass or extension, does not address this passage.

25 For the proximity of the two solids, see *Phd.* 110b6.

a scale is placed in two different positions in the world: at the periphery – the position to which fire tends (63b2) – and at the centre – the position to which earth tends. At the periphery, the two plates of the scale will be filled with different amounts of fire, so that the plate with the largest amount will centrifugally displace more than the plate with the smaller amount (63b2–63c6). In the centre, different amounts of earth will fill the plates, and the result will be that the plate with the largest amount will centripetally displace more than the plate with the smallest amount (63c6–d6). The point is: it is not only the direction of motion that matters for weight; one must also consider the relationship between the quantity of bodies and the distance displaced.

The correlation of quantity and directional movement is explained in terms of the amount of force required to counteract the like-to-like tendency. For example, to move fire or earth to the place peculiar to air (63c1–d2), it is easier – it takes less force – to move a smaller portion than a larger one (63b5–c1). One could say that, according to Timaeus, weight is the resistance to moving to the place of the dissimilar,²⁶ or simply, inertia. This sounds right, but it still leaves us without an explanation of why such resistance occurs. There are two points to consider: (i) what could ever cause this “anti-natural force” (*bia kai para physin* – 63c8) to counteract the like-to-like tendency (see 63b6, c8), and (ii) what causes the resistance to this anti-natural force. The only passage in the *Timaeus* where answers to these questions can be found is in the description of the pre-cosmic reality. On the one hand, (i) there can only be a force that counteracts the like-to-like tendency, because there are powers everywhere in the world causing the generation of difference; in other words, they cause the apparition of (traits of) natures out of their proper place. As we know, this dissimilarity of natures in the same place is what maintains their constant motion (57e2–3). On the other hand (ii) this force is counterbalanced

26 See O'Brien 1984: 72. He concludes, however, that this is a “context-dependent” version of Timaeus' weight theory, aimed at explaining the connection between perceptible weight and a perceiver (*Ibid.* 154), as opposed to the “objective” version that takes the number of triangles as the fundamental criterion (see also Cornford 1935: 266, Mohr 1980: 107–108). O'Brien's argument rests on three premises I challenge in the last section: (i) he rejects pre-cosmic account as purely didactic (*Ibid.* 152, n. 14); (ii) he defines density simply as the number of triangles in a surface; (iii) he assumes that weight-related *pathēmata* are relative to the perceiver (as opposed to real effects caused by powers). In my view, Timaeus has a unified theory of weight based on the correspondence of the volumetric density (or specific mass) and a peculiar like-to-like tendency. Therefore, inertia is not the force of an observer, but rather the force exerted by the unbalanced powers to cause diversity in different places.

by the resilience of the bearer, and this is precisely what causes the resistance that explains weight.

This seems to be ample evidence that the inevitable law of displacement is preserved in the crafting of the world because the differences in density and their inherent properties are preserved. Powers still cause these differences. But the introduction of the third dimension of bodies causes a major change in how this motion occurs, precisely because in their case, motion depends on volumetric density. This is the subject of the next section.

6 Area and Volume Density

In the previous section, I argued that elemental triangles are endowed with different area densities. I also explained how the weight of bodies is the correlation of the quantity of bodies and the inevitable law of displacement. However, there is a crucial difference between elemental triangles and bodies – area density is not volume density – and this clarifies some apparent contradictions in the text.

In arguing for why the tetrahedron was chosen as the structure of fire, Timaeus says that it has the least number of bases and is composed of the least a number of parts (56a3–b2). The case of fire interests us because it points to a connection between being light and having the least number of the same compositional parts (*eti te elaphrotaton ex oligistōn synestos tōn autōn merōn* – 56b1–2).²⁷ This may indicate that in crafting the world the demiurge replaced the area density with the number of triangles as the criterion for distinguishing natures, and consequently for what we now understand as their specific mass. This assumption, however, would be unfortunate for the coherence of the argument, since we have seen that the law of displacement plays a central role in the account of the motion of the both bodies and the triangles resulting from the decomposition of the bodies. A few observations may help us out of this confusion.

The first is the fact that that fire is the lightest is inferred from its being the most mobile nature (*eukinētaton*, 56a3). It is reasonable to justify this statement by pointing out that, if pre-cosmic motion occurred in the absence of spatial directionality, then the portions most displaced by the quakes would be the lightest. But there is a significant difference between the argument about fire and the previous explanation about earth: earth was assigned a peculiar

27 Aristotle (*Cael.* 3.1, 299b31–300a7) claims that in the *Timaeus* weight depends on the number of components. For a modern defence of this thesis, see O'Brien 1984: 105ff.

elemental triangle – the isosceles rectangle triangle, – while the scalene rectangle triangle, whose hypotenuse measures the double of the smaller side, is common to fire, air and water. In crafting bodies, the demiurge had to accommodate the inevitable fact of their intergeneration, and this required a more complex execution. I suggest that in the design of volume-endowed bodies, earth underwent a direct transition from its peculiar grammage to its peculiar volume density, but the same did not happen to the others.

Density of area was the main difference between the natural traits before the world. This difference was perfected by the introduction of tangibility and the construction of solid bodies. Thus, we are to expect that the main differentiation in the natures of bodies should be their volumetric density, something similar to our concept of specific mass (the mass/volume ratio). In the case of earth, the transition was made by shaping the portions with the same mass/area ratio into scalene rectangle triangles, which were later composed into squares and finally into cubes. All the other mass/area ratios were given the shape of a particular scalene rectangle triangle so that they could become composable surfaces. T9 testifies that these elemental triangles retain their peculiar density and their tendency to move towards their like. But then we have a problem: if this is the case, these triangles would be peculiar to an element, just as earth has its peculiar triangle. This would make their intergeneration impossible.

The text does not explicitly indicate how this problem is addressed, but it does provide some clues, particularly regarding fire as having the least number of the same composing parts. What allows for this kind of comparison between different solids is their commensurability in number: the fact that they have *the same* composing part. This cannot be the scalene rectangle triangle, because it has a peculiar grammage.²⁸ But there is another part that is the same for all the solids of these bodies: their equilateral triangular faces, which are the result on an intricate composition of six scalene rectangle triangles (54d5–e3). I would like to suggest that this composition aims to neutralise the natural tendencies of the scalene triangles that make it up (tendencies determined by their area density), creating an artificial unit – a device – with three functions: (a) to be decomposable into the triangles that make it up; (b) to have no like-to-like tendency, and therefore to be stable in spite of the flux;²⁹ (c) to

28 For interpretations that acknowledge that triangles differ in “mass” see Code 2009: 211 and Mohr 1980: 107, who nevertheless do not explain how intergeneration would be possible.

29 As noted above, the crafting the world is the transformation of things in generation into stable generated things; for evidence, see the uses of *gegonen* to refer to bodies in 54d4, e3, 55b3, c3.

be a unit of composition of solids with different volumetric densities.³⁰ While (a) and (c) are very clearly stated in the text (54d6–7 and 55a2–4, respectively), (b) is an inference necessary to account for the identity of the composing parts of the polyhedra and their intergeneration, while still preserving the law of displacement.

If equilateral triangles are not endowed with a like-to-like tendency, they become the perfect unit for counting the parts of solids. It allows us to compare a polyhedron with fewer units, such as fire, with one with more units, such as water, and conclude that it is lighter in the sense that it has fewer units.³¹ This measure is useful for calculating the proportions of generation: how many solids of fire, for instance, would be produced after the dissolution of a body of water. It acts as an atomic number, giving us an important characteristic of each body. However, it is not enough to determine weight (and specific mass, for that matter), because we know that weight depends on the like-to-like tendency, which the equilateral triangle does not have. Therefore, the number of (equilateral) triangles is not sufficient to distinguish the natures, which must involve the law of displacement. The question we must now answer is: if equilateral triangles neutralise the natural tendency of scalene rectangle triangles, what explains that a solid has a peculiar nature?

A hidden premise of the mass neutrality of equilateral triangles is that the construction of geometric figures after previous ones repurposes their components. If the formation of an equilateral triangle counteracted the different area densities of its constituent triangles, then it is reasonable to infer that the construction of a polyhedron from equilateral triangles might also destroy its balance. On the other hand, the completion of the nature of fire did not end with the joining of four equilateral triangles, but with the assembly of a tetrahedron. Only in this way would we have a body that is both capable of intergeneration and endowed with a peculiar nature. If this is so, the shape of the tetrahedron provides a specific volumetric density whose nature is inevitably the most mobile (*eukinētaton anankē pephykenai*, 56a7). This is what I have called the indirect transition from two-dimensional surfaces to solids. It is not the case that a tetrahedron is composed of scalene triangles of fiery

30 Cf. Bruins 1951: 274–277; Cornford 1935: 237 for how the transformation of solids can happen without breaking up the faces into elemental triangles.

31 There is another version of the same problem. If Timaeus thought that fire was lighter simply because it was smaller, he would have overlooked the fact that a tetrahedron is not necessarily smaller than an octahedron (see Taylor 1928: 394; O'Brien 1984: 84). This would be particularly unfortunate since he recognises that triangles can vary in size (57d1–5), see below. This confusion could not be attributed to Timaeus if he considered specific mass as volumetric density.

density. It is assembled from triangles of different densities whose constant natural motion is interrupted by their connection in an equilateral triangle. The demiurge can transform things in flux into something that is generated and endures by proceeding in two stages: First, he cancels the change of shape in the portions of the bearer by assigning them the form of the scalene; second, he neutralises the natural displacement of these scalenes by joining them in an equilateral triangle. The demiurge, however, cannot revoke the inevitable law of displacement. Therefore, mass diversity is restored in compositions whose structures have a specific mass determined by their volumetric density. Once neutralised, the grammage peculiar to each nature is finished off in a volumetric density that preserves its natural motion.³²

To sum up, the construction of solids involves a transition from the mass/area ratio that was proper to each nature before the world to the volumetric density peculiar to each body, preserving the inevitable law of displacement. The number of equilateral triangles in a polyhedron can be a sign of their atomic number, but it is not the cause of their difference in nature. Nor is their difference in volume the cause of the different natures of bodies, since density is required to explain the natural motion of each of them. Bodies are not surfaces enclosing massless space, nor are they solids whose matter cannot be reduced to two-dimensional planes.³³ They are density organised in three dimensions, which can be decomposed into triangular two-dimensional density.

In determining the variety of generated things by their volumetric density, Timaeus provides an account that brings together the intelligent and the inevitable causes. Geometric forms are the insertion of intelligence into flux, structuring the portions of the bearer into bodies so that they can now endure,

32 The diversity of triangle sizes within a body (57d1–5, 58b2–8) changes the species of that body within each kind. For instance, if the types of fire are light, flame and ember (58c5–d1), their difference is explained by the size of the triangles that make up the surfaces of the tetrahedral structure of fire. At first glance, this may not seem to account for a difference. The “formula” of fire is that each face of the tetrahedron is an equilateral triangle made up of six elemental isosceles rectangular triangles (54d5–e3). Changing the size of these basic triangles would simply produce a larger molecule, not a different one. Nevertheless, Timaeus insists on this idea. When he goes on to explain the difference between liquid and molten water (58d8–e2), he explains that molten water is made up of large and homogeneous parts, while the liquid is made up of small parts. This is not to say that there are different numbers of triangles in each solid (see O’Brien 1984: 88), but that the weight changes when we hold the density in a greater volume and vice versa. If this is the case, then the nature of a body is determined by its polyhedral structure and the different species by their volume.

33 See Zeyl 2010: 127–129.

collide, decompose and recompose. Thus perfected, these portions of the bearer are still affections of unbalanced and dissimilar powers, which account for their diversity and natural motion.

7 Powers as First Causes

I hope to have provided sufficient evidence to show that Timaeus assumes flux as an inevitable component of the world and to support the central thesis of this chapter, namely, that the power to bear (affections) and the power to cause such affections are metaphysical primitives in Timaeus' cosmology. By metaphysical primitives, I mean that they are non-caused causes. My arguments in defence of this position are: (i) textual evidence in T7; (ii) the important role of these powers in the inevitable law of displacement; (iii) the preservation of the law of displacement in the world. There are alternatives to this reading that I would like to address.

A classical option to my interpretation comes from the premise that the creation of the world is merely a didactic account.³⁴ There was no moment before the cosmos, nor was there a demiurge who really crafted something from something else. If this is true, powers cannot be first causes chronologically; but, they remain metaphysical primitives. They must still cause the inevitable law of displacement and the motion of particles and bodies according to their density.³⁵

A more radical version of this reading rejects even this causation. Johansen (2004: 96–97) claims that the account of pre-cosmic reality has no didactic function. He denies that the apparitions in the bearer are actually in motion, that they have a like-to-like tendency, and that there is any *anankē* prior to the world: it is rather a side effect of its crafting. Though inspiring, Johansen's radicalism comes at the price of reading these large sections of the text as superfluous nonsense. Even more objectionable is his reduction of *anankē* to the necessary correspondence between certain shapes and properties of the bodies (*Ibid.* 98). Such a claim contradicts his earlier assertion (*Ibid.* 94) that *anankē* differs from intelligence in producing disordered results, since the shapes and properties of bodies are signs of the order of the world. As he puts it: "It is from their (the simple bodies') composition that the necessary motions

34 The origin of this interpretation can be traced back to Xenocrates. See Arist. *Cael.* 279b4–283b22, Simp. *In Cael.* 303.34–304.12, Plu. *An.* 1013a and Alcin. XIV. For a modern version of it, see Taylor 1928: 69; Brisson 1998: 472; Miller 2003: 11–12.

35 For a similar conclusion of the debate, see Procl. *In Ti.* I. 291; Chalc. *In Ti.* 23.

arise" (*Ibid.* 99). The fact that these motions are not teleologically chosen by the demiurge (*Ibid.* 100) does not make them a disorderly result, for the demiurge is intelligent enough to foresee their effect on the world order. I cannot develop all the details here, but my view is that Johansen's interpretation reduces *anankē* to persuaded *anankē*, making it difficult to distinguish it from intelligence.³⁶

Another approach is to assume that powers are not causal agents, but merely expressions of causation. If so, we should suppose that there is something that has the power to cause such affections, and this is the real cause. Plausible candidates for the role are the Forms and the demiurge.³⁷ According to this reading, the pre-cosmic affections in the bearer and their motion are paradoxically traces, leftovers, remnants of more perfected natures.³⁸ Two conclusions can be drawn from these premises. The first is to resort to the didactic account approach, which, as argued, does not deny power causation. The second is to assume that whatever hint exists before the world, if it is natural, it must be caused by intelligence.³⁹ I also expect to have shown that rationality works its way around the inevitable, and this implies that the inevitable must be a metaphysical primitive. By seeing the hints as marks of intelligibility, this reading leaves flux unaccounted for. The premise seems to be that, because they are unintelligible, one cannot even refer to pre-cosmic events. Timaeus challenges this premise by offering us a description of them that is perfectly intelligible. Indeed, as I have pointed out, he must do this if he is to support his opening distinction between what is and what is in generation. In addition, the assumption that intelligence caused the hints of natures conflates the pre-cosmic environment with the world. I reject this suggestion of a circular approach to causation because it entails the destructibility of the world, against which the *Timaeus* provides textual support. Pre-cosmic reality is deprived of rationality and measure (*alogōs kai ametrōs*, 53a8), and the hints of bodies are present only in the absence of god (*hotan apē tinos theos* – 53b3–4).

36 Johansen (2004: 101) finally claims that what *anankē* determines are the options of solids from which the demiurge can choose. However, the text in both 55e2–3 and 56a6–7 does not refer to options for solids – Timaeus never says, for example, there are *ex anankēs* triangles, squares, tetrahedra and octahedra.

37 For Forms as the cause, see Procl. *In. Ti.* 387, 8–19; Broadie 2011: 194. For a critique of this view, see Van Riel 2021: 174–175. For the demiurge as the cause, see Silverman 1992: 99. For a critique of this view, see Jelineck 2011: 295–296.

38 On the paradox of traces, see Vlastos 1939: 77; on the connection between pre-cosmic and post-cosmic, see Vázquez 2022: 128–129; on the difference in meaning between traces and hints, see Harte 2010: 132–133.

39 See Silverman 1992: 103–104.

It is also possible to reject powers as causal agents by understanding *dynameis* as properties specific to certain materials.⁴⁰ In this reading, the interaction between unbalanced and diverse powers and the bearer (52d4–e3) is metaphorical, and the pre-cosmic state consists only of these materials, which cause further effects in each other as they interact. Accordingly, there is no cause for the bearer to take the fiery, watery, airy and earthy shapes; this is simply a metaphysical primitive. The paradox of this interpretation is that it conflates powers and affections, which express causation when powers cause affections, not vice versa. It thus eliminates the explanatory function of the passage.⁴¹ There is, however, one point in common between this reading and the one I advocate: these scholars generally agree that *dynameis* cause the quakes and the law of displacement. In doing so, they must assume that the properties of these materials cause both their differentiation and their natural motion. It is controversial whether affections can explain natural motion, again because they seem to involve external causes. On the other hand, powers are not only dissimilar, but also unbalanced (52e2), providing one single cause for both motion and diversity.

If I am correct, powers are a metaphysical primitive in the *Timaeus*. Of course, they are not the only first causes in Timaeus' cosmology, which also includes the Forms, the demiurge and the bearer. Interestingly, the bearer is described as neither being nor becoming something (50d5–51b6). The resilience that characterises it is also considered a power. In this sense, we can say that generation is caused by two powers, that cause one, difference and motion, and the other, resilience. In this causal operation, their roles cannot be exchanged. This seems to me to be the reason for calling them powers rather than forces.⁴² Forces counteract each other and are affected by this interaction; they increase and decrease, they can even cancel each other out. Powers do not do this; they are uninterruptedly performing their function without interference from other powers.⁴³ This constant activity is what allows for results in the world, such as forces counteracting each other, or things being affected by them.

If powers are metaphysical primitives, their causation is not interrupted when the world is crafted. I referred earlier to interpretations that assume that

40 See Archer Hind 1999: 186–187; Morrow 1950: 156; Gill 1987: 47; Miller 2003: 152, 159–160.

41 Cornford (1935: 180–181, 199) tries to avoid the problem by identifying both things as properties. However, he acknowledges powers as constantly operating causes (*Ibid.* 176), and he cannot do the same for affections. For a similar position, see Mohr 1980: 98.

42 For *dynameis* as forces, see Robinson 1970: 94.

43 On powers as perpetually sustaining generation, see 58c2–4 and Cornford 1935: 26, 176.

an account of generation as the assembly and disassembly of bodies from triangles is incompatible with the pre-cosmic flux and that generation in the world is only the former. According to this view, the fact that triangles are pure forms in geometric space implies that they must be neutral with respect to the different natures of bodies.⁴⁴ But this would hardly leave room for an explanation of their displacement. As I have already pointed out, T9 explicitly states that triangles have a motion guided by the like-to-like tendency. The only explanation found in the *Timaeus* for such motion is in 52d4–53b5, the text that states the inevitable law of displacement. In the face of such evidence, one must admit that, while geometric forms structure the primordial bodies, there is more to being a body than that.⁴⁵ My contention is that volumetric density is an intelligent device for ordering natural motion.

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44 See Archer-Hind 1888: 203–204; Taylor 1928: 364–365; Mohr 1985: 114.

45 For a similar critique of the geometric conception of bodies, see Cornford 1935: 205.

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Power, Participation, and the Greatest Difficulty in Plato's *Parmenides*

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In the first part of Plato's *Parmenides*, young Socrates defends a theory of forms, reminiscent of forms as treated on the last day of his life in the *Phaedo*, and Parmenides subjects the theory to a blistering critique. This paper will focus on the final round of questions, called by Parmenides the greatest difficulty, in which a sceptic objects that forms, if they are as we say they are, cannot be known by us. Many scholars have claimed that Parmenides' argument is either fatally flawed or unfair, but I contend that Parmenides raises a serious concern and that his main departure from Socrates' view is justified, because, in earlier rounds of questions, Socrates failed to give an adequate account of participation (*methexis*), the relation between perceptible things and forms. For that reason, Parmenides assumes in the final round that there is no participation between us and forms and then elaborates the consequences. The Greatest Difficulty shows why Socrates must revise his theory in response to Parmenides' critique and demonstrates in particular that he must give a coherent account of participation. Not only that: This final round also points toward a constructive way to solve the problem. The path forward lies in the notion of *dynamis*, power, mentioned twice in the Greatest Difficulty at key moments in the dialectic.

My paper will analyse the whole passage against the backdrop of Socrates' theory of forms set out earlier in the dialogue, especially his proposals and concessions about participation and separation. Section 1 will focus on participation. We then turn to the Greatest Difficulty itself, which breaks into two main parts: the first stage ends with the objector's challenge about the knowability of forms, and the second reveals a more shocking result, that the gods are not our masters and have no knowledge of us. Section 2 will treat the opening stretch of text in stage 1 with reference to Socrates' earlier claims and admissions about separation, and I will flag the first mention of *dynamis* in the passage. Section 3 will explicate the stretch of text on cognitive states and their objects culminating in the conclusion that forms are unknowable to us. I will interpret that portion by appeal to Socrates' discussion of sight and hearing and knowledge and belief as powers in *Republic* v and of sight and its objects

and knowledge and its objects as correlative *dynameis* and their mutual exercise in *Republic* VI. Section 4 will turn to the second stage of the Greatest Difficulty and its discussion of correlative powers and their exercise and show why the situation envisaged raises an even more serious threat to Socrates' theory than considerations in the first stage, a threat with metaphysical as well as epistemological import. A final section 5 will reflect on the situation envisaged in the Greatest Difficulty and its gestures toward an answer to the hard question about participation.

1 Participation

The main conversation of the *Parmenides* starts after Parmenides' younger colleague Zeno has read his book aloud to the assembled group. In it he defended Parmenides' monism by arguing that, if there are many things, they have incompatible properties: things are both like and unlike, and both one and many. In a long speech (*Prm.* 128e5–130a2) Socrates replies that, if Zeno accepts that there are forms, problems about the compresence of opposite features in ordinary things are easily solved. Socrates is both *like* (Simmias in some respects) and *unlike* (Simmias in other respects) because he partakes of the forms of likeness and unlikeness. He is both *one* (man) and *many* (parts) because he partakes of the forms of oneness and multitude. Socrates would be amazed, however, if someone could show him that the one itself is many or the many one (*Prm.* 129b6–c1). Forms exclude their own opposite.

How is the theory supposed to work? Socrates does not tell us enough in the *Parmenides*. In the *Phaedo* he claims that he can prove the soul's immortality if his interlocutors agree that there are forms and that forms explain certain features things have in the sensible world:

For it appears to me that, if anything else is beautiful besides the beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than because it partakes of that beautiful; and the same goes for all cases. Do you agree to this sort of explanation? (*Phd.* 100c4–7)

Socrates rejects various proposed reasons why things are beautiful, such as bright colour and shape (*Phd.* 100c9–d3), on the grounds that bright colour and shape can explain beauty in one context but ugliness in another. A cause should explain one sort of effect and not its opposite and should be the sole cause of that effect. While refusing to take a stand on the nature of participation (*Phd.* 100d4–7), Socrates claims to be sure of one thing, that “by the beautiful (*tōi*

kalōi) all the beautiful things are beautiful" (*Phd.* 100d7–8, e2–3). He uses the Greek instrumental dative "by the beautiful" to indicate that the form of beauty is responsible for – the cause of – the beauty of beautiful things.¹ Plato's Socrates does not have our modern conception of a cause as an antecedent event sufficient to bring about an effect (e.g., the lit match causes the burning of the house). He thinks of causes as items responsible for certain effects.² Pervasive in ancient Greek theories of causation is a thesis, known as the "transmission theory of causation" or the "synonymy principle", that the cause has the feature it explains in the effect and has the feature more eminently.³ To use an Aristotelian example featuring an efficient cause, fire is hot and makes other things hot (*Ph.* VIII.5, 257b9–10; cf. *APo.* I.2, 72a29–30). Plato's theory invokes formal causes: the passage quoted above from the *Phaedo* indicates that the form of beauty responsible for the beauty of other things is itself beautiful. Whereas other things are beautiful in one respect and not in another, or in one comparison and not in another, or at one time, not at another, and so forth, the form of beauty is simply and unqualifiedly beautiful, beautiful independent of context (*Smp.* 210e6–211b5). Platonic self-predication of forms goes hand in hand with the transmission theory of causation.⁴ Because the form excludes its opposite, Socrates says in his long speech in the *Parmenides* that he would be astonished if someone could show him that the one itself is many. The one is simply and unqualifiedly one, and not many.

Whereas the problem of participation was left open in the *Phaedo*, the *Parmenides* confronts the issue with two main proposals. First (*Prm.* 130e4–131e7), Parmenides suggests that forms are immanent in their participants, and that partaking of a form is getting a share of it. He asks Socrates: in getting a share of a form, does a participant get the whole of the form as its share or only part of it? If it gets the whole of the form, then, if more than one thing has a share of the form, the form is separate from itself by being, as a whole, in different

1 For Socrates' use of the instrumental dative to specify a cause, cf. *Euthphr.* 6d9–e1, *Prt.* 332a8–b1, and *Hp. Ma.* 287c1–d2. Throughout I cite the Stephanus numbering in Burnet's *Platonis Opera*.

2 On Platonic causes, see Sedley (1998).

3 See esp. Lloyd (1976).

4 Scholars have found self-predication in Plato an embarrassment, a view he should have rejected. But the *Parmenides* invokes self-predication often in both the critique in Part I and the exercise in Part II. Moreover, a Platonic speaker still makes self-predication claims in the late dialogue *Sophist* (*Sph.* 258b8–c4). As I understand Plato's view, to say that the F is F, is to say that F-ness (the entity designated by the predicate) exhausts what the F (the entity designated by the subject) is, as in the example from the *Symposium*: Beauty has beauty in an unqualified way. Beauty may have other features as well, but beauty exhausts what beauty is in itself.

things at the same time. Had Socrates grasped Aristotle's notion of a universal, he might have retorted: That is precisely what it is to be a form – one thing predicated of many things or present in many places at the same time! (Aristotle, *Int.* 7, 17a39–40; *Metaph.* Z.16, 1040b25–26). But Socrates evidently did not have that conception. Instead, he offers a remarkable answer, one that reveals his commitment to separate forms: a form is like the day (*Prm.* 131b3–6). The day is the same in Boston, New York, and Washington, DC, without being separate from itself. Provocative as the suggestion is, it can be construed in more than one way. We might think of the day as an abstract object – daytime, a span of time – or we might think of the day as an invisible stuff, daylight, extended over an expanse of ground like a piece of cloth. Parmenides takes up the less exciting second option and asks if the whole of the day is over Boston or only part of it. When Socrates agrees that part of the day is over Boston, another part over New York, Parmenides declares that the form is divisible into many parts, and so many, as well as one.

Socrates tries a second time to make sense of participation, this time treating forms as separate perfect particulars (*Prm.* 132c12–133a7). Think of the forms as models (*paradeigmata*) and participants as likenesses (*homoïomata*) of them. Being the likeness of something is an asymmetrical relation (drawings are likenesses of the artist's model, the model is not a likeness of them). At the same time, the model and its likenesses are *like* each other, and that symmetrical relation links the participants to the model and the model to them. The form and its participants share likeness in common. Now, according to Socrates' proposal, they are likenesses of likeness (as well as likenesses of whatever other feature the participants initially copied). Then likeness itself is like its likenesses. Socrates introduced likeness (*homoiotēs*) as a form at the start of his long speech (*Prm.* 128e6–129a2). He gets into trouble in the Likeness Regress because he thinks of likeness as a reified link between a thing and a property it has. On that conception a further link is called for to tie the thing to the first link, and so on indefinitely.⁵ By reifying the participation relation, Socrates allows Parmenides to initiate a Bradley-type regress.⁶ Socrates' reification of the participation relation is a major shortcoming of his view, one to which Parmenides repeatedly calls attention in the second part of the dialogue.

5 The argument in the Likeness Regress is more complicated than the simple version I present here. My view of that argument in Gill and Ryan (1996) and Gill (2012) is indebted to Schofield (1996) and to conversations with Henry Mendell and Malcolm Schofield.

6 Bradley (1897: 17–18). I owe the reference to Ryle ([1939] 1965: 107). Given Ryle's own interpretation of the Likeness Regress, he sees more difference between the two versions than I do.

Socrates' failure to give an adequate account of participation in the Likeness Regress sets the scene for the Greatest Difficulty, the final round of objections.

2 Separation

Parmenides poses the greatest difficulty at the start of the final round:

Then do you see, Socrates, he said, how great the difficulty (*hē aporia*) is if one marks things off as forms, themselves by themselves (*auta kath' hauta*)? – Quite clearly. – I assure you, he said, that you do not yet, if I may put it so, have an inkling of how great the difficulty (*hē aporia*) is if you are going to posit one form in each case every time you make a distinction among things. – How so? he asked. – There are many other reasons, Parmenides said, but the main one is this: suppose someone were to say that, if the forms are such as we claim they must be, they cannot even be known? If someone should raise that objection, you wouldn't be able to show him that he is wrong, unless the objector happened to be widely experienced and not ungifted and consented to pay attention while in your effort to show him you dealt with many distant considerations. Otherwise, the person who insists that forms are necessarily unknowable would remain unconvinced.⁷ (133a8–c1)

Socrates asks why an opponent would raise the objection, and there follows a brief exchange:

Because I think that you, Socrates, and anyone else who posits that there is for each thing some being (*ousia*), itself by itself (*autē kath' hautēn*), would agree, to begin with, that none of those beings is in us (*en hēmin*). – Yes, how could it still be itself by itself (*autē kath' hautēn*)? replied Socrates. – Very good, he said. (133c3–7)

The Greek abstract noun *ousia* ("being") is used by Plato's dramatic characters to specify a form, along with *eidos* ("form"), *genos* ("kind"), and *idea* ("character").⁸ Parmenides used the phrase *auto kath' hauto* in the plural in the

7 Translations of the *Parmenides* rely on Gill and Ryan (1996), with modifications. All citations going forward are to the *Parmenides* unless otherwise indicated.

8 These terms are used by Plato in other ways as well, e.g., *ousia* can mean "essence", a thing's defining feature, and so used is contrasted with *pathos* "quality", an accidental property, at

opening passage setting up the Greatest Difficulty (133a9) and picks up Socrates' own use from his long speech introducing his theory of forms earlier in the dialogue (128e5–130a2). Socrates said:

Tell me this: don't you acknowledge that there is a form (*eidōs ti*), itself by itself (*auto kath' hauto*), of likeness, and another form, opposite to this, which is what unlike is (*ho estin anomoion*)? (128e6–129a2)

Plato's speakers use the phrase *auto kath' hauto* in two main ways in his dialogues. First, something is *auto kath' hauto*, if it exists on its own, separate (*chōris*) from other things. In the *Phaedo* Socrates characterises death as the separation of the body itself by itself (*auto kath' hauto*) apart from the soul (*chōris men apo tēs psychēs*), and of the soul itself by itself (*autē kath' hautēn*) apart from the body (*chōris de apo to sōματος*) (*Phd.* 64c4–8). Second, the phrase *auto kath' hauto* can be construed causally, as Parmenides does in the third deduction of the second part of the *Parmenides* (157b6–159b1) when he discusses what other things are by themselves (*kath' hauto*) without oneness (158b5–d8) and what they are by partaking of the one. By themselves, he says, the others are unlimited in multitude, lacking in definiteness. Through their participation in the one, they gain individuality and can be considered together as a group with a limit in relation to one another and in relation to the whole. The causal notion is also arguably at work in the first deduction, where Parmenides talks about what the one is solely by itself, that is, solely because of its oneness. Deduction 1 uses the instrumental dative, which we discussed above in connection with explanation by formal causes in the *Phaedo*.⁹

Euthphr. 11a6–b1; *idea* in Plato sometimes specifies an immanent character, such as largeness in Simmias, explained by a separate form.

9 My understanding of the first deduction in Gill (2012: 57–64) has been influenced by Meinwald (1991), who takes up Michael Frede's (1967) view of the distinction between *auto kath' hauto* and *pros alla* at *Sph.* 255b12–13, understood as what a thing is by/because of itself (essentially) and what it is in relation to other things (by partaking of them accidentally). Meinwald takes that distinction to be expressed in the *Parmenides* by the phrases *pros heauto* and *pros ta alla*. I think Meinwald is right that Parmenides exploits the *Sophist's* distinction in Deductions 1, 2, and 3 (of nine deductions) in Part II, but I am not persuaded that he uses the phrases *pros heauto* and *pros ta alla* as Meinwald claims. I take *pros heauto* to express a relation a thing has to itself, as in "change is the same as itself (*pros heauto*)" (*Sph.* 256a10–b4). The phrase *auto kath' hauto* (or simply *kath' hauto*) in the causal sense is rare in the second part of the *Parmenides*, except for Deduction 3. Instead, Parmenides expresses the causal notion by means of the instrumental dative, as at 139c3–e6, where he argues that by itself/by its oneness, the one is not different from anything or the same as itself. By its oneness, the one is one.

Evidence for taking *auto kath' hauto* to express separation comes toward the end of Socrates' long speech:

But if someone first distinguishes as separate the forms themselves by themselves (*chōris auta kath' hauto ta eidē*), of the things I was talking about a moment ago – for example, likeness and unlikeness, multitude and oneness, rest and change, and everything of that sort – and then shows that in themselves they can mix together and separate, I for my part, he said, would be utterly amazed, Zeno. (129d6–e4)

By juxtaposing *chōris* and *auta kath' hauto*, Socrates appears to favor the first construal, that forms are separate from the things that partake of them. Causal and/or definitional relations may be captured by other phrases, such as *ho estin anomoion* (“what unlike is”) and, accordingly, *auto kath' hauto* in the phrase *auto kath' hauto eidos ti homoiotētos* (“a form itself by itself of likeness”) in Socrates' earlier statement could function in a parallel way.¹⁰ The phrase might do double duty. Even so, up until the Greatest Difficulty, *auto kath' hauto* regularly indicates separation.¹¹ And this construal is made explicit in Parmenides' contrast in the little exchange with Socrates early in the Greatest Difficulty. If a form is *auto kath' hauto*, it is not in us (*en hēmin*) (133e5). Here Parmenides excludes the alternative he had himself proposed earlier and Socrates had resisted, which we discussed above, that forms are like stuffs and that participating in a form is getting a share of that stuff (130e4–131e7). In Part I Socrates has repeatedly pressed for the separation of forms from their participants.

The Greatest Difficulty proposes at the start that forms are separate from us and things around us, a position Socrates finds congenial. Ambiguity persists, however, because separation is itself an ambiguous notion. Immediately

10 In discussing the “in virtue of” locution (*kata* + accusative), Duncombe (2013: 43 n. 1) makes the helpful distinction between causal explanations and non-causal explanations. His example of a non-causal explanation is: Why are all biologists scientists? The answer points to some relation between biologists and scientists. To judge from this example, the relation is definitional and subsumes a species under a genus.

11 Indeed, had Socrates properly understood *auto kath' hauto* in its causal sense, he could have stopped the regress in the first version of the argument Aristotle calls the Third Man, the argument about largeness (132a1–b2). Many things are large because of largeness itself. But largeness as cause of the largeness in other things is itself large. Why is largeness large? Parmenides introduces a second form of largeness to explain why largeness itself and all the large things are large. Socrates could have blocked the regress at the start: other things are large by/because of largeness, and largeness is large by/because of itself, *auto kath' hauto*.

after Socrates' long speech earlier in the dialogue, Parmenides asked for clarification:

Tell me. Have you yourself distinguished as separate (*chōris*), in the way you mention, certain forms themselves, and also as separate (*chōris*) the things that partake of them (*metechonta*)? And do you think that likeness itself is something, separate (*chōris*) from the likeness we have (*echomen*)? And one and many and all the things you heard Zeno read about a while ago? – I do indeed, Socrates answered. (130b1–6)

Here Parmenides clarifies two points: first, separation is a symmetrical relation – if A is separate from B, B is separate from A – and second, there is separation not only between forms and their participants, for instance, between the form of largeness and Simmias, who is large, but also separation between the form and the immanent character – largeness in Simmias – which the form is invoked to explain.¹²

Despite the clarification, “separation” is still equivocal. It could indicate merely that forms are distinct from their participants and immanent characters and vice versa (as we might say that any two non-identical entities are distinct from each other). Or it might mean something more, for instance, that forms exist apart from their participants and the immanent characters and vice versa (as we might say of two objects in space, such as a table and a chair not in contact, that they are spatially separate, or of two events in time, such as the writing of the *Parmenides* and the stabbing of Julius Caesar, that they are temporally separate). Two objects are separate in that way if they have no common parts. Alternatively, “separation” might be construed as ontological independence. Two items are ontologically independent if the nature of one does not involve the nature of the other. The two are defined without reference to each other. For example, two chemical elements, such as copper and tin, are not only distinct from but also ontologically independent of each other, though they can be combined into a third entity bronze. Bronze, on the other hand, is ontologically dependent on both since its nature involves the natures of copper and tin.¹³ The third notion of separation is unlikely to be the one

12 I use the label “immanent character” only for those features of objects that separately existing forms are invoked to explain, and it is an open question what features count as immanent characters. To judge from the *Phaedo*, Simmias' largeness is an immanent character (*Phd.*102b3–103a2), whereas his height of five feet six inches is simply a feature of him but not an immanent character.

13 This discussion of separation is adapted from my Introduction in Gill and Ryan (1996: 17). My list of three alternatives is not exhaustive. Lewis (1979) offers an interpretation of separation in the Greatest Difficulty different from my own.

Socrates initially had in mind when he agreed to symmetrical separation as clarified by Parmenides, because in his view forms are ontologically independent of their participants, while their participants depend on forms for what they are. In the Greatest Difficulty Parmenides will exploit the third notion, insist that the ontological separation of A from B is a symmetrical relation, and draw out the consequences. We should note that the notions of ontological independence and dependence have implications for definition, and these implications will also prove important for our understanding of the Greatest Difficulty.

In the Greatest Difficulty, Parmenides proposes a radical separation between two realms, the realm of forms and our own. By “radical separation”, I mean that forms exist apart from us and moreover the two realms are ontologically independent of each other.¹⁴ In the realm of forms at least some forms are defined as what they are in relation to other forms in that realm, and those correlative items are ontologically dependent on each other. Parmenides says:

And so all the characters (*hosai tōn ideōn*) that are what they are in relation to one another (*pros allēlas*) have their being (*tēn ousian*) in relation to themselves (*pros hautas*) and not in relation to things that belong to us (*pros ta par' hēmin*). And whether one posits them (*auta*) [things that belong to us] as likenesses (*homoiōmata*) or in some other way, it is by partaking of them (*hōn*) that we come to be called by their several names.¹⁵ These things that belong to us, although they have the same names as the forms, are in turn themselves in relation to themselves (*auta au pros hauta*) but not in relation to the forms (*ou pros ta eidē*); and

14 Other scholars have claimed that the Greatest Difficulty posits a radical separation between forms and sensible things, though they disagree about what such separation entails. More and less radical versions of the divorce thesis are discussed by Peterson (1981: 3). She defends what she calls the Principle of Definitional Isolation, which is weaker than versions of the divorce thesis (1981: 1–2). Duncombe (2013: 46) states a stronger version of radical separation than those canvassed by Peterson and rejects it on grounds that it begs the question against the Platonist. See also Araújo (2022). Below I will argue that Parmenides is justified in assuming radical separation.

15 The sentence is difficult and the translation contested, because two pronouns are ambiguous in their antecedent: the neuter accusative plural *auta* and the genitive plural *hōn* at 133d1. The antecedent of *auta* could be *hosai tōn ideōn* (forms) or – more likely given the neuter *auta* and proximity of the antecedent – *ta par' hēmin* (things that belong to us). A further reason to take the antecedent to be things that belong to us is their identification as *homoiōmata*, likenesses, a reference to Socrates' proposal in the immediately preceding argument, where forms are models and things partake of them by being likenesses of them (132c12–d4). If *auta* specifies things that belong to us, *hōn* should have the same antecedent: *ta par' hēmin*. This textual construal is also supported by Parmenides' illustration quoted next in my main text.

all the things named in this way are of themselves but not of the forms. – What do you mean? Socrates asked. (133c8–d6)

To clarify, Parmenides offers an illustration:

Take an example, said Parmenides. If one of us is a master or slave of someone, he is surely not a slave of master itself (*autou despotou*) – what master is (*ho esti despotēs*) – nor is the master master of slave itself (*autou doulou*) – what slave is (*ho esti doulos*). On the contrary, being a human being, he is a master or slave of a human being (*anthrōpou*). Mastery itself, on the other hand, is what it is of slavery itself; and, in the same way, slavery itself is slavery of mastery itself. Things in us do not have their power (*dynamis*) in relation to forms, nor do they have theirs in relation to us; but, I repeat, forms are what they are of themselves (*hautōn*) and in relation to themselves (*pros hauta*), and things that belong to us are, in the same way, themselves in relation to themselves (*pros hauta*). You do understand what I mean? – Certainly, Socrates said, I understand. (133d7–134a2)

There is, on the one hand, a complete divorce between forms and us, while, on the other, items in each realm are determined with reference to a correlative in that same realm – mastery itself in relation to slavery itself, and vice versa, and a human master in relation to a human slave, and vice versa.¹⁶

Are Parmenides' moves in these texts justified? In the Greatest Difficulty Parmenides rejects a main tenet of Socrates' theory. According to Socrates' long speech, things around us partake of forms, and forms explain the features they have. Socrates would prefer to say of Parmenides' current example that a human master partakes of mastery itself and is what he is (a master) because of mastery itself. And a human slave is what she is by partaking of slavery itself. According to Parmenides in the Greatest Difficulty, things in our realm have the same names as forms (133d3), but the homonymy is not grounded in the participation relation between things in our realm and the realm of forms. We should note that Parmenides continues to use the verbs *metechein* ("to participate")

16 The two realms appear to be isomorphic, given the *au* (again) at 133d4 and the *hōsautōs* (in the same way) at 134a1, but they cannot be completely isomorphic, as we shall see when we discuss the second stage of the argument (§ 4 below). Some things in the realm of forms are defined with reference to other things in that realm, while relations between correlatives in our realm will be determinative but in some lesser manner than definitional.

and *echein* (“to have”) in the Greatest Difficulty, but whereas previously (as in Parmenides’ queries about separation and Socrates’ reply at 130b1–6) Socrates partakes of the form of likeness and has likeness in him, in the Greatest Difficulty Parmenides uses the two verbs interchangeably and always to relate entities within the same realm.¹⁷ Parmenides departs from Socrates’ earlier proposals, yet the divorce between the two realms is warranted, because, as we saw in section 1, Socrates has failed to give an adequate account of the participation relation between us and forms.¹⁸ In the Likeness Regress directly preceding the Greatest Difficulty (132c12–133a7), recalled in Parmenides’ use of the word *homoiōmata* (“likenesses”) at 133d1, Socrates proposed that forms are models and participants likenesses of them, and Parmenides drew out the consequence that the two realms are linked by the form of likeness. Socrates was lured into a vicious regress by reifying the link between an object and the form it partakes of. Whereas some scholars think Parmenides allows participation between things in our realm and forms, I see no evidence for that in the Greatest Difficulty. To be sure, things in our realm are called by the same names as forms, but not because of an underlying participation relation.¹⁹

Parmenides’ illustration contains the first of two instances of the word *dynamis* (“power”) in the Greatest Difficulty. We will discuss *dynamis* in section 3,

17 Accordingly, Parmenides says that whatever we call the things that belong to us, whether likenesses or something else, it is by *partaking of* (*metechontes*) them – the things that belong to us – that we come to be called by their several names (133c9–d2). We neither *partake of* nor *have* forms (134b3–4, 134b6–12), but we *partake of* features called by the same names as forms (133d1–5). Similarly in the realm of forms, forms *have* (*echousin*) their being (*tēn ousian*) in relation to one another (133c8–d1), and later he says that god *partakes of* (*metechēi*) and *has* (*echei*) knowledge itself (134c10–11). Fujisawa (1974) discusses Plato’s usual use of “partakes of” and “has” in Plato’s dialogues and the anomaly in the Greatest Difficulty (1974: 30–4).

18 Here I agree with Mueller (1983: 3–4) and Prior (1985: 81). Harte’s (2018: 76) observation that the first use of *aporia* in our passage (133a8) is backward-looking is congenial to my interpretation. Parmenides’ earlier objections have built up to the greatest difficulty that must now be faced. The second use of *aporia* at 133b1 turns to the new difficulty raised by a hypothetical objector. I also like Harte’s observation that Parmenides is taking the side of Socrates in this final round against the unnamed objector.

19 At the start of the first discussion of participation earlier in the dialogue, Parmenides clarified that, in Socrates’ view, things have their names by partaking of forms: “But tell me this: is it your view that, as you say, there are certain forms, from which these other things, by getting a share of them, derive their names (*tas epōnymias*) – as, for instance, they come to be like by getting a share of likeness, large by getting a share of largeness, and just and beautiful by getting a share of justice and beauty? – It certainly is, Socrates replied”. Cf. *Phd.* 102a10–b6. In Socrates’ view eponymous naming depends on sensible things participating in forms. With radical separation in the Greatest Difficulty naming is simply homonymy without grounding in the participation relation.

but for now I simply note its use at a key dialectical moment, precisely to deny a major element of Socrates' theory: that forms have causal power in relation to us.²⁰ Parmenides denies that things in our realm have their power in relation to forms, or that forms have theirs in relation to us. Things in our realm are of other things in our realm and are determined in relation to (*pros*) other things in our realm, and likewise in the realm of forms. In the final section of this paper, I will argue that Parmenides uses the word *dynamis* to point Socrates toward a solution to the problem of participation. Parmenides nudges the young man: Do not think of participation as a reified link between an object and a form it partakes of or a property it has. Think of participation as the exercise of a thing's inner power toward (*pros*) a form, and of the form's causal power toward it.

3 Knowledge and Its Object

In the final chunk of the first stage of the Greatest Difficulty, Parmenides treats knowledge and its object as a further instance of the intra-realm correlatives he has described and illustrated with mastery and slavery. He starts with the realm of forms:

So too, he said, knowledge itself, what knowledge is, would be knowledge of that truth itself, what truth is? – Certainly. – Furthermore, each branch of knowledge, what it is, would be knowledge of each sort of thing, what that thing is. Isn't that so? – Yes. (134a3–8)

Knowledge itself is defined with reference to the truth itself, and each branch of knowledge – formal arithmetic, geometry, and so on – are defined in relation to their formal objects. Thus arithmetic is defined with reference to numbers, geometry with reference to shapes, and so on.²¹ Next he turns to our realm, which appears to replicate the formal realm:

20 Araújo (2022) argues that Parmenides' replacement of Socrates' *ousia* (essence) of each thing (at 133c4), an absolute notion, with his own *dynamis* of each thing *pros* another, a relative notion, marks a serious break from Socrates' theory. Later in this paper I will argue that Parmenides is challenging Socrates to see that the two notions are compatible, but to see why, Socrates must make sense of participation.

21 Fine (2020: 221–31) examines in detail how to construe *alētheia* (truth) in this section and whether it should be taken ontologically or semantically. I take it ontologically, as a generic notion, since the specific sorts of knowledge (i.e., branches of knowledge) are differentiated by and directed toward formal objects. See 134b6–7, where Parmenides speaks

But wouldn't knowledge that belongs to us be of the truth that belongs to our world? And wouldn't it follow that each sort of knowledge that belongs to us is in turn knowledge of each sort of thing in our world? – Necessarily. – But, as you agree, we neither have (*echomen*) the forms themselves nor can they belong to us. – Yes, you're quite right. (134a9–b5)

And finally he drives home the sceptic's objection about the knowability of forms raised at the start of the Greatest Difficulty:

And surely the kinds themselves (*auta ta genē*), what each of them is, are known by the form itself of knowledge (*autou tou eidous tou tēs epistēmēs*)? – Yes. – The very thing that we don't have (*echomen*). – No, we don't. – So none of the forms is known by us, because we don't partake of (*metechomen*) knowledge itself. – It seems not. – Then the beautiful itself, what it is (*auto to kalon ho estī*), cannot be known by us, nor can the good nor, indeed, can any of the things we take to be characters themselves (*ideas autas*). – There's a risk. (134b6–c3)

To make sense of the discussion of knowledge and its objects, let us make a brief foray into *Republic* v and vi, where Plato elucidates these correlatives as *dynamis*, powers.²²

Toward the end of *Republic* v, Socrates claims that the smallest practical change that would enable the ideal city he has been constructing to become a reality would be to combine political power (*dynamis politikē*) and love of wisdom (*philosophia*) in a single individual (*R.* v, 473c11–e5). The question then is, who is the philosopher, the person suited to rule the city? While differentiating philosophers from other sophisticated folk – people he calls lovers of sights and sounds – Socrates distinguishes knowledge (attributed to the philosophers) from belief (the cognitive state he ascribes to the lovers of sights) and identifies both cognitive states as powers (*dynamis*).

Taking sight and hearing as examples of powers, Socrates remarks that powers are not perceptible. We identify and differentiate powers by two criteria: (1) what object the *dynamis* is set over (*eph' hōi*), and (2) what the

of the objects of knowledge itself as *auta ta genē*. On branches of knowledge, cf. *Sph.* 257c5–d2, where the Eleatic stranger clarifies the parts of difference by using an analogy with knowledge and its branches. The branches of knowledge are differentiated by the objects the knowledge is set over.

22 For a discussion of powers in *Republic* v and vi, see in this volume chapter 12, and on *Republic* v, see chapter 13.

dynamis accomplishes (*ho apergazetai*) (R. 477c1–d5). Sight, the power of the eye, is set over visible objects and enables the eye to see; hearing, the power of the ear, is set over audible objects and enables the ear to hear. He distinguishes knowledge and belief as powers on the grounds that they accomplish different things: knowledge knows and is infallible, whereas belief believes and is fallible. He then claims that the two *dynameis* are set over different objects (R. 477d7–478a5): knowledge knows what is as it is (*gnōnai hōs esti to on*) (R. 477b10–11; cf. 478a6); belief believes things that are and are not (R. 478e1–479d10). We need not interpret the tricky distinction between knowledge and belief in *Republic* v. Nor need we take a stand on the question as to whether Plato's Socrates in that text commits himself to a two worlds ontology – a realm of forms separate from the fluctuating realm of things around us, with knowledge directed at (and restricted to) forms, belief directed at (and restricted to) things around us.²³

Whatever Plato's view in *Republic* v, we should notice that Parmenides in the Greatest Difficulty presents a radical two worlds ontology, more extreme than the one scholars have located, rightly or wrongly, in *Republic* v. The two realms in the Greatest Difficulty are radically separate from each other, with things merely called by the same names; the two sorts of cognitive states are directed at objects in their own realm and not the other. Knowledge itself is directed toward the truth itself, and knowledge that belongs to us is directed toward the truth that belongs to our world. In the *Republic* the human philosopher possesses knowledge, and that knowledge is directed at forms. By contrast, stage 1 of the Greatest Difficulty culminates by denying that any human being, including the philosopher, has or partakes of knowledge itself (134b6–12), and so forms are unknowable to us (134b14–c2) – precisely the objection the sceptic posed at the start.

In *Republic* vi Socrates claims that the philosopher must engage in the most important study, and that concerns the form of the good. Socrates confesses that he cannot give a precise account of the form of the good but instead presents an analogy. The analogy adds some further dimensions to our understanding of knowledge and its object in the Greatest Difficulty: Sight is the power (*dynamis*) to see, and the things we see have the power to be seen (R. vi, 507c1–5). For sight actually to see and for visible objects actually to be seen, a third condition is required as well: light. The sun is responsible for light. Intelligence and intelligible objects are analogous to sight and visible objects (R. vi, 507c6–508a8). Intelligence is the power to know, and forms have the power to

23 Among those who reject the traditional view that Plato commits himself to a two worlds ontology are Annas (1981: ch. 8) and Fine (2003).

be known. Knowing and being known likewise require a third condition: truth. The form of the good is responsible for truth (*R.* vi, 508b12–509c2).

Again, we need not delve into the details of Plato's Sun Analogy to see its relevance for the Greatest Difficulty. Reflection on the *Republic* should encourage Socrates to think of knowledge and its object in the two realms as having correlative powers. Parmenides has not yet discussed the exercise of those *dynamis*, but he will speak of the exercise in the second stage of the argument.

4 A More Dreadful Result

We now turn to Stage Two of the Greatest Difficulty. Parmenides opens with an announcement:

Here's something even more dreadful than that. – What's that? – Surely you would say that if in fact there is knowledge – a kind itself – it is much more precise (*akribesteron*) than is knowledge that belongs to us. And the same goes for beauty and all the others. – Yes. (134c4–9)

We will come back to this passage because it states a truly shocking result Socrates needs to confront. Though the subsequent argument is superficially more shocking and at the same time important in directing Socrates toward a constructive path forward, this opening has already declared the main implications of Socrates' failure to give a satisfactory account of participation: Not only can we have no knowledge of forms, but our paltry cognitive state about things in our realm is imprecise and the objects we imprecisely grasp are themselves fuzzy and not precise.

I break the final stretch of the argument into two shorter bits. The first contains the second instance of *dynamis* in a statement recalling what was agreed in the first stage of the Greatest Difficulty:

Well, whatever else partakes of knowledge itself, wouldn't you say that god more than anyone else has this most precise (*akribestatēn*) knowledge? – Necessarily. – Tell me, will god, having knowledge itself, then be able to know things that belong to our world? – Yes, why not? – Because we have agreed, Socrates, Parmenides said, that those forms do not have their power (*dynamis*) in relation to things in our world, and things in our world do not have theirs in relation to forms, but that things in each group have their [power] in relation to themselves. – Yes, we did agree on that. (134c10–d8)

And finally Parmenides speaks, not only of correlative powers but also of their exercise. In the terminology of *Republic* v, he speaks of what a power accomplishes (*ho apergazetai*). I italicise the relevant verbs:

Well then, if this most precise mastery (*hautē hē akribestatē despoteia*) and this most precise knowledge (*hautē hē akribestatē epistēmē*) belong to the divine, the gods' mastery could never *master* (*desposeien*) us, nor could their knowledge *know* (*gnoiē*) us or anything that belongs to us. No, just as we do not *govern* (*archomen*) them by our governance and *know* (*gignōskomen*) nothing of the divine by our knowledge, so they in their turn are, for the same reason, neither our masters nor, being gods, do they *know* (*gignōskousi*) human affairs. – If god is to be stripped of *knowing* (*tou eidenai*), he said, our argument may be getting too bizarre. (134d9–e8)

Socrates balks at the end of the passage, because the gods' lack of omnipotence and omniscience offends his youthful piety.²⁴ But we might well ask what is so bad about the situation envisaged in the Greatest Difficulty. If things in our realm are determined as what they are in relation to other things around us, and if we can know those things without appealing to forms, why bother with forms? What use are they to us?

That reaction overlooks a major signal at the beginning of the second stage of the argument, just after Parmenides says that he will reveal something even more dreadful (134c4), and before he makes his claims about god. I requote Parmenides' two claims: "Surely you would say that if in fact there is knowledge – a kind itself – it is much more precise (*akribesteron*) than is knowledge that belongs to us. And the same goes for beauty and all the others" (134c6–8). This statement suggests that, without access to forms, our knowledge lacks the exactness enjoyed by the gods. And worse: beauty in us is fuzzy, not something precise. Perhaps we can do without forms, but with a loss of precision, because both our knowledge and its objects are somehow nebulous.

5 The Greatest Difficulty and a Way Forward

By the end of the first part of the *Parmenides*, capped by the Greatest Difficulty, Parmenides has shown that forms, if they exist, have no relation to us, or we

²⁴ Probably it would offend his mature piety too: Socrates speaks of divine mastery over us at *Phd.* 63c2–4 and 84d8–85b9.

to them, and so they do not explain the features things have in our sensible realm. Things around us are determined as what they are by their changing relations to other things in our realm. And since we have no access to forms, but only to things that belong to our realm, we cannot appeal to forms to ground our beliefs about the world or to explain the relations among things within it. In the Greatest Difficulty Parmenides has severed the causal link between forms and things in our realm – what we might call vertical causality. Forms do not explain the features of things in our realm. Instead, things around us are determined as what they are in relation to other things in our realm. Call that horizontal causality.²⁵

Imagine ourselves like the prisoners in Plato's Cave in the *Republic* (*R.* VII, 514a1–520d4). Our legs and necks bound, we can observe only the shadows flitting on the wall before us, and judge the appearances by comparing them with one another. The situation of the cave-dwellers differs significantly from our own at the end of the final argument in Parmenides' critique. In the cave, the shadows are cast by puppets carried along the road in the firelight behind the prisoners, and the shadows are linked indirectly to forms, even if the prisoners do not know it. The prisoners can also escape from their chains, turn their vision away from the shadows and first observe the puppets themselves in the light of the fire, then make their way out of the cave, and ultimately behold real things in the light of the sun (analogous to the form of the good). They have a chance to return to the cave and observe the shadows once more but now in the light of what they have learned. So they can come to know the shadows and what they are shadows of (*R.* VII, 520c1–6). By the end of Parmenides' critique, that possibility has vanished, permitting us no escape from the shadows. Remove the vertical causal link between forms and sensible things, and the world we inhabit is intrinsically unstable and unknowable.

At the end of the Greatest Difficulty Parmenides states the gravity of the situation and Socrates' need to address the difficulties:

And yet, Socrates, said Parmenides, the forms inevitably involve these objections and a host of others besides – if there are those characters of things (*hai ideai tōn ontōn*), and a person is to mark off each form as “something itself” (*auto ti*). As a result, whoever hears about them is doubtful and objects that they do not exist (*oute esti tauta*), and that, even if they *do* exist (*ei te malista eiē*), they must by strict necessity be unknowable (*agnōsta*) to human nature; and in saying that he seems to

25 I made this distinction in Gill and Ryan (1996: 49–50). For an excellent discussion of vertical and horizontal causality, see chapter 2 by Tuozzo above.

have a point and, as we said, he is extraordinarily hard to win over. Only a very gifted man can come to know that for each thing there is some kind, a being itself by itself (*ousia autē kath' hautēn*); but only a prodigy more remarkable still will discover that and be able to teach someone else who has sifted all these difficulties thoroughly and critically for himself. (134e9–135b2)

Socrates needs to come to grips with participation in a way that avoids the earlier objections. I have claimed that a major shortcoming of his view, spotlighted in the Likeness Regress directly preceding the Greatest Difficulty, is his treatment of participation as a reified link between an object and a property it has. Parmenides returns to that conception repeatedly in the philosophical exercise in the second part of the dialogue. In Part II, being plays the linking role performed by likeness in the Likeness Regress, and Parmenides causes trouble for his interlocutor again and again by treating being as a property that ties an object to a feature it has. Deduction 1 investigates consequences for the one on the assumption that the one is simply one. What is the one by itself? It is not different from anything, for if it were different from something it would be so by difference and not by its oneness (139b4–d1). Nor is the one the same as anything, for if it were the same as something, it would be so by sameness, not by its oneness (139d1–e6). All the one is by itself is one. By the end of Deduction 1, even the initial assumption is rejected, because to be one, the one would have to partake of being to link it to its oneness. And so it would be two things, not one (141e7–142a1). In Deduction 5 he shows that to have its own or any other character, an entity must partake of being to bind it to that character, and then it must partake of another portion of being to bind it to the bond, and so on indefinitely (161e3–162b8).²⁶ All these problems are rooted in the mistaken idea that being lies *outside* the nature of things, as difference does. Being is *inside* the nature of every being as its structural core enabling it to fit together with other things beyond its specific nature.

I have pointed to Parmenides' mention of *dynamis* in the Greatest Difficulty as a clue to solving the problem of participation. A *dynamis* is *inside* the entity to which it belongs, and manifests itself in an activity, for instance, the power of sight in the eye manifests itself in seeing. The Greatest Difficulty focuses on forms that are defined with reference to a correlative – mastery with reference to slavery, knowledge with reference to knowable objects, and similarly (albeit less precisely) their shabby counterparts in our realm.

26 I have argued for this reading of Deduction 5 in Gill (2002).

The Greatest Difficulty does not limit its discussion to entities that depend ontologically on other correlative entities. Parmenides also mentions beauty itself, what beauty is (*auto to kalon ho esti*), and the good (134b14–c2).²⁷ As knowable objects, beauty and goodness are defined in relation to knowledge itself, but beauty is also something in its own right independent of anyone's knowledge of it.²⁸ What is the being of beauty?

Parmenides offers a constructive hint about being early in stage 1 of the Greatest Difficulty and again in his summary at the end. Recall what he says: "...I think that you, Socrates, and anyone else who posits that there is for each thing some being (*ousia*), itself by itself (*autē kath' hautēn*), would agree, to begin with, that none of those beings is in us (*en hēmin*)" (133c3–5). When we discussed this passage before, I emphasised that Parmenides and Socrates take the phrase *auto kath' hauto* to indicate separation – forms exist apart, not *in us* (*en hēmin*) – but we also discussed the causal construal. Now consider what Parmenides says in his summary at the end: "Only a very gifted man can come to know that for each thing there is some kind, a being itself by itself (*ousia autē kath' hautēn*)..." (135a7–b1). I suggest that in the summary Parmenides is prodding Socrates to think of the other meaning of *auto kath' hauto*, the causal notion, which will be exploited in Part II. What is the being of beauty itself by itself, independent of anything else? The being of beauty is beauty, the essential feature that makes beauty what it is.

In the *Sophist* Plato's main speaker, a visitor from Elea, defines being as *dynamis*. He stages a contest between two groups, whom he calls Gods and Giants (*Sph.* 246a4–249d8). The Giants are materialists who think that the only real beings are things we can squeeze in our hands. The Gods are friends of the forms, who think that real beings are immaterial forms. They downgrade things around us to mere becoming. The stranger tries to get the two groups

27 I used to think that Parmenides extended his claims about relational forms to all forms: Gill and Ryan (1996) and Gill (2012: 42 n. 66). Here I revise my view.

28 Carpenter (2020: 251) worries that, because forms are intelligible, they depend on intelligence for what they are. While it is true that forms as intelligible are defined with reference to intelligence, that is not a problem for Plato: intelligibility, along with stability, imperishability, immateriality and so forth are ideal features of forms, features forms have qua forms, as distinct from what each form is in its own right. In *Top.* v.7, 137b3–13, Aristotle distinguishes ideal features of Platonic forms (his example is rest) from proper features of forms, the feature that makes a form the form that it is. The proper (essential) feature of beauty, what makes beauty the form that it is, is beauty, and that is independent of any intelligence. Cf. Aristotle, *Cat.* 7, 7b15–8a12, where Aristotle contrasts master and slave, which are simultaneous in nature, with knowledge and the knowable: the knowable is existentially prior to knowledge. See also Kahn (2013: 16–17).

to come to an agreement about being, by proposing that being is *dynamis*. He says to the Giants:

I say that that which possesses any sort of power (*dynamis*), whether it be naturally suited to act (*eis to poiein*) on anything else or to be affected (*eis to pathein*) to even the smallest extent by the most insignificant thing, even if only once: all this really is (*ontōs einai*). I am proposing, in short, to state a definition (*horon horizein*): things-that-are as they are (*ta onta hōs estin*) are simply power (*dynamis*). (*Sph.* 247d8–e4)

Later in the passage he revises the proposal to include rest, as well as change.²⁹ Scholars tend to regard the proposal as merely provisional, because the Gods resist it, and the visitor himself argues in the sequel to the Battle of Gods and Giants that being is just as puzzling as not-being. Then he seems to ignore it in the remainder of the *Sophist*.

But the proposal is not forgotten.³⁰ Later in the *Sophist*, in distinguishing being from difference, the visitor states that some things operate *auta kath' hauta* (themselves by themselves), whereas others always operate *pros alla*, in relation to other things (*Sph.* 255c12–e1). Being, he says, operates in both ways. A few pages earlier, in his discussion of dialectic, he says that some forms enable things to combine and others are responsible for division (253c1–3), and that knowledge of dialectic equips a philosopher to determine the ways in which kinds are and are not able to associate with other kinds (*koinōnein... dynata*) (253e1; cf. 254c5).³¹ Being is not a separate ontological tie binding an object to a property it has. The being of a thing is its own inner nature that makes it what it is and enables it to relate to some things and not others. Participation is the exercise of a thing's being – its inner *dynamis*, what it is *auto kath' hauto* – in relation to other things (*pros alla*).³²

29 This is not the occasion to argue that the visitor is giving a definition of being and not a mere mark. I have discussed that debate and the details of the Battle of Gods and Giants in detail in Gill (2012: chs. 3 and 7), with some recent revisions in Gill (2024).

30 See Leigh (2010). I am in sympathy with much of her view in her chapter 5 in the present volume. I believe that she has mistaken my view in her n.1. Differences remain, of course, but discussion of those disagreements must await another occasion.

31 Irani (2022) emphasises the connection between the Battle of Gods and Giants and the discussion of the *koinōnia* between forms later in the dialogue. In this volume, see Halper's chapter 6.

32 I gave a version of this paper at a workshop "Platonic Power" in 2021, organised by Carolina Araújo. I thank the audience for their helpful questions and especially Carolina Araújo for her probing comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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

Fiona Leigh

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

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

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

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

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

Here is the proposal:

Well, I say that whatever sort of thing possessing the power (*dynamis*) by nature either to act on some other thing, or to be acted upon even to the smallest extent by the most insignificant thing, and even if only on a single occasion, every such thing really is. For I lay down a definition (*horos*) defining (*horizein*) the things that are as being nothing else besides power (*dynamis*).² (*Sph.* 247d8–e4, tr. Rowe, modified)

2 247d8–e4: STR. *Legō dē to kai hopoianoun tina kektēmenon dynamin eit' eis to poiein heteron hotioun pephykos eit' eis to pathein kai smikrotaton hypo tou phaulotatou, kan ei monon eis*

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

Once they are offered the *dynamis* proposal, the giants – who are by this stage thoroughly bewildered – accept it, and we hear no more of them for the remainder of the dialogue. The so-called Friends of the Forms, however, reject the causal definition of being articulated by the proposal, since in their view both what acts and is affected thereby undergoes change, and change cannot characterise their preeminent beings, Forms (248c7–e5). The general strategy employed by the majority of commentators is to argue that the Stranger's goal is to show, against the Friends, that there is an unproblematic sense in which Forms do in fact undergo change (which majority view is discussed below in more detail).⁵ Others, however, have suggested it is possible to read

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

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

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

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

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

2 A Challenge: Wiitala

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

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

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

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

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

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

In relation to the first ambiguous phrase in (ii), Wiitala first distinguishes between extensional and intensive readings of “*to pantelōs on*” at 248e8–249a1. According to the former, the Stranger is asking (rhetorically) whether change, life, soul, wisdom (and *nous*, *a2*), is present to or in “what altogether is”, i.e. belongs in the extension of the whole or totality of reality, while according to the latter, he is asking whether the corresponding characteristics (changing, being alive, ensouled, wise) are found in the entities that are beings to the highest degree. Wiitala then reasons that “[t]he very fact that *pantelōs* is an adverb rather than an adjective indicates the intensive reading is to be preferred, since adverbs indicate intensity rather than inclusivity or extension”.¹⁰ In the case of this particular adverb, however, it is unclear that this very general observation holds. For *pantelōs* can, and often does, mean “altogether”,¹¹ so that our phrase can be read as “what altogether is” just as happily as “what in

8 Wiitala 2018: 177–8.

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

10 Wiitala 2018: 188–89.

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

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

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

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

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

14 Wiitala 2018: 196.

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

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

15 Wiitala 2018: 179.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 The Power of Change, Rest, and Being: 250a–c

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

Theaetetus stands proxy for their account, answering on its behalf, while the Stranger questions him as he questioned the dualists earlier (250a4–6). Theaetetus agrees that he asserts that change and rest are most opposite to one another, and also that he says that each of change and rest in the same way are (*einai homoiōs*, α11).²⁰ There are two noteworthy features of the second assertion Theaetetus agrees to on behalf of their theory. First, the properties change and rest are treated as entities in their own right, i.e. as subjects of declarative statements. Second, the property, “being” is predicated of each of them as an attribute. Considered on their own, out of context, these features of the assertion might be puzzling and seem unjustified. Viewed, however, in the context of further scrutinising their account, which pivots on the definition of being in the *dynamis* proposal, both features of the claim are revealed as entailed by their account. For, since they have agreed that the realm of being includes both things that rest and things that change (249b–d), by the same reasoning that was employed in the debate with the Giants (concerning just and wise

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

20 Note the second-person *legeis* at 250a9, and *phēis* at α11.

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

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

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

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

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

23 250b8–11: *triton ara ti para tauta to on en tēi psychēi titheis, hōs hyp’ ekeinou tēn te stasin kai tēn kinēsīn periechomenēn syllabōn kai apidōn autōn pros tēn tēs ousias koinōnian, houtōs einai proseipes amphotera?* Taking *periechomenēn* and *syllabōn* together, with Lewis Campbell (1857: 134). Cf. Cornford 1935: 250, n. 1.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

26 *Ibid.* 51–57, 152–3, 208–9.

27 *Ibid.* 229.

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

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

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

29 *Ibid.* 235.

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

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

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

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

32 *Ibid.* 228.

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

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

5 The Aporia (250c6–e4)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

38 As is suggested by the majority of translations. For example, White gives: "Therefore by its own nature *that which is* doesn't either rest or change" (1993: 42), Rowe renders the statement as: "So then being is not by its own nature either at rest or changing" (2015: 149), Cornford renders it as: "In virtue of its own nature, then, reality is neither at rest nor in movement" (1935: 250).

39 Gill 2012: 210.

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 Conclusion

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

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

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Dynamis and Agency in the *Sophist*

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The *Sophist*'s claim that being is a kind of *dynamis* (247d–e) is as striking as it is controversial. This *dynamis* seems to include the physical power that bodies exercise over each other as well as the power of forms to be known, and the dialogue has, accordingly, been seen as rejecting separate forms, as showing that forms exercise power and agency over each other as they combine and separate, and, for Martin Heidegger, as disclosing the Being of beings. In my view none of these readings fits well with the context of the passage, the problematic of this dialogue, or the general tenor of Plato's thought. This paper argues that the *dynamis* that defines being is a power or capacity that lies in an element; specifically, a capacity to combine with another element in such a way that the composite takes on the character of one of them. In other words, to be is to be capable of communing with another being and, thereby, capable of being an element of a composite. The paper also argues that the greatest kinds make every art possible and that they are, as well, themselves elements and, thus, beings. The dialogue's exploration of their communion sets out, as it were, a way of knowing being through the dialectical art. It follows that the *Sophist* concerns exactly what it discusses throughout, the arts. Apart from accounting for the dialogue's details, this approach helps explain the pertinent type of falsity of the Sophist's sentences. To make my case, the paper considers, in turn, the dialogue's arguments against both sides in the *gigantomachia*, the communing of the kinds, and finally the discussion of false sentences.

1

Being usually appears in Platonic dialogues in opposition to becoming. Thus, in the *Phaedo* being (*to on*) is “always the same” and never changing in contrast with becoming, which is never the same and always changing (*Phd.* 78d–e). In the *Parmenides*, however, an entirely antithetical understanding of being appears: only what is in time and, thus, changing can partake of being (*Prm.* 141e). Both notions of being are in play in what the *Sophist* describes as a *gigantomachia*, a battle of gods and giants (246a). The “gods”, identified as the “friends of the forms”, take being to lie in what is always the same and relegate what is

always changing to becoming (*Sph.* 246b–c). The “giants”, materialists, hold the opposite: only what can be grasped by sensation, that is bodies in motion, are beings (246a–b). The *Sophist* contrasts the two views, but it proposes an understanding of being that embraces both and, thus, reconciles them. This is the function of the Stranger’s well-known definition of being as *dynamis*:

I say that everything that possesses a *dynamis* of any kind, either to make (*poiein*) some nature other or itself to be acted upon (*pathein*), to the smallest extent by what is least significant, even once, is really being; for I posit that being is nothing but *dynamis*. (*Sph.* 247d–e)

The remark is cryptic. It relies on the surrounding texts to fill in its meaning. In particular, the Stranger undertakes an imagined dialogue with materialists, the “giants”, and the friends of the forms, the “gods”, to force them to agree with this formulation or, at least, to force us to see that they *should* agree with this formulation. To understand the meaning the Stranger gives to *dynamis* we must first see why it is somehow common to what both propose as being.

In the case of the materialists, the Stranger begins by asking whether they would accept that there is a mortal animal and that it is an ensouled body (246e). He follows this by asking whether soul is a being. Theaetetus agrees to all. The Stranger continues by asking whether some souls are just and others unjust and some souls prudent (*phronimon*) and others imprudent and, then, whether a soul will come to be one or the other by its having justice or its opposite present to it (*all’ ou dikaiosynēs hexei kai parousia toiautēn autōn hekastēn gignesthai, kai tōn enantiōn tēn enantian*; 247a). The text generalises: “what has the capacity (*dynaton*) to come to be present or absent is certainly some being” (*alla mēn to ge dynaton tō paragignesthai kai apogignesthai pantōs einai ti*).

This passage is cryptic, but it contains two arguments. As first formulations, consider the following: The giants had assumed that body and being are the same (246b). Here, they agree that a living thing is also a being. The living thing is an ensouled body and, thus, differs from body by the presence of soul. It follows that soul, too, is a being. The second argument assumes the conclusion of the first and notes that a soul can be just or unjust as well as prudent or imprudent, and that soul comes to be either one of the contrary pairs by the presence of one contrary rather than the other. Then comes an assumption that is tacitly at work in the first argument as well: “what has the capacity (*dynaton*) to come to be present or absent is certainly some being”. It follows that justice, prudence, and the other virtues are beings. The giants have accepted what is not visible or tangible as beings (247b).

These formulations of the arguments are question begging. To claim that soul or justice may or may not be present with something else is already to assume that soul and justice are beings. What we need to know is: why must they be beings?

Reformulated arguments, still closely in line with the text, make the reasoning clear. First, the giants think that a body is a being, but also that an ensouled body is a being and that these two are not the same being. It can only be the presence of soul that makes the body an ensouled being (that is, alive). Insofar as it can, by its presence, transform body, soul must itself be a being. Likewise, a just soul is a different being from an unjust soul, and a prudent soul a different being from an imprudent soul. Since the differences lie in the presence of justice or prudence, each of these can by its presence make a soul just or prudent. Hence, justice and prudence must themselves be beings.

Central to the argument is the Stranger's claim: "each soul will come to be just *by* the possession and presence of justice" (*dikaïosynēs hexei kai parousiai toiautēn autōn hekastēn gignesthai*). "Possession" and "presence" are both instrumental datives. Other ways to express this point are to say that "soul is just because it has justice" or that "justice makes a soul just". Justice is not simply present to soul. It is acting on soul and transforming it by its continued presence. Because soul and justice are active and transformative, they must be beings.

Notice that the arguments are nested. The stranger needs to show that soul is a being before concluding that that which makes soul just by being present to it is also a being. Notice, too, that soul in this passage plays a dual role: it makes body alive and it, in turn, is made just by justice. Here it is the "agency" of soul and justice that effects a transformation. This is not the sort of agency that comes to mind when we think of the bodies countenanced by the giants moving each other. I think Stranger advances a broader notion of agency in order to encompass their agency, but he does not speak about bodies here. It is unclear what sort of agency soul and justice have. Does soul make body alive when it is present by acting on it, by making it function, by being its form, or in some other way? The account is vague, probably to accommodate any sort of agency. Still, one element gives its character to the other or, better, to the composite.

It may seem that I have made too much of one instrumental dative in 247a–b, but the interpretation of the arguments just proposed is entirely consonant with the 247d–e definition of being quoted above. Indeed, without the proposed interpretation or something like it, the definition of being would emerge out of the blue. The definition claims that being is a *dynamis* "to make (*poiein*) some nature other or itself to be acted upon (*pathein*)". Soul is a being because it has the capacity to make a body be alive, but also because it has the capacity

“to be acted upon” by justice. Importantly, the making and the being acted upon come about through the presence of something to another, that is, through a kind of combination, a transformative combination.

What the definition of being expresses is not unprecedented. We see much the same language in the *Phaedo*. There Socrates says:

Nothing else makes [*poiei*] something beautiful other than the presence of that beauty, or the communion with it [*koinōnia*], or in whatever way and however it is attached [*prosgenomenē*], for I do not confidently affirm more than this, namely, that all beautiful things come to be beautiful by Beauty. (*Phd.* 100d)

ouk allo ti poiei auto kalon e he ekeinou tou kalou eite parousia eite koinōnia eite hopē dē kai hopōs prosgenomenē; ou gar eti touto diischyrizomai, alla hoti tō kalō panta ta kala gignetai kala.

Burnet thinks the text should be emended: *prosagoreuomenē* for *prosgenomenē* – so that the issue is not how beauty is attached, but what to *call* this attachment, “presence”, “sharing” or some other name.¹ He thinks that it is clear that beautiful things are made beautiful by participating in Beauty, and the passage is saying only that there are different names for participation.

Burnet is right that there are different names for participation, but how Beauty or any other form is attached to sensibles is an issue. A sensible object could be beautiful by communing with or partaking of the form Beauty even though Beauty remains separate from sensibles.² Alternatively, Socrates claims: “it is

1 John Burnet (1972: 111), maintains that this sentence is “an echo of the formula used in the public prayers” and therefore adopts Wyttenbach’s substitution of *prosagoreuomenē* for *prosgenomenē*. He explains: “The whole issue is one of names; for Socrates has no doubt as to the fact”. Grube’s translation reflects this emendation.

2 Using this passage of the *Phaedo* to understand the causal character of the form is not new; cf. Brown 1998: 199. Leigh (2010: 70) notes that the *Phaedo* shows form capable of *poiēsis* in respect of particulars, but that the initial rejection of the *dynamis* proposal by the friends of the forms shows the need to expand its understanding of forms to include being capable of acting and being acted upon. The crucial expansion is effected, she claims, by distinguishing change from causation (*Ibid.* 72). This sounds promisingly close to what I argue here, but her approach is undermined by her notion that “the idea of the capacity for one thing to do something to another or to have something done to it answers to our intuitions about cause and causation” (*Ibid.* 75). I cannot see that either Beauty’s making something beautiful or Tallness making Simmias tall (*Ibid.* 78) is an ordinary intuition about one thing’s *doing* something to another or about causality. Plato is, rather, talking about what Aristotle would later call formal causes. He is not using “makes” in the way that the giants or contemporary empiricists would.

not by nature that Simmias is taller than this one [Socrates], by being Simmias, but by a tallness he happens *to have*" (*ou gar pou pephykenai Simmian hyperechein toutō, tō Simmian einai, alla tō megethei ho tynchanei echōn*, 102c). This latter is not the form Tall but a tallness in us (cf. 102d6–e2). In other words, what makes Simmias tall is a character that belongs to him, the tallness that is present to him. These need not be exclusive alternatives: something that partakes of Beauty may do so by possessing beauty within itself. Immanent presence might well seem more plausible to Pythagoreans like Simmias and Cebes. We will see soon that there is a third way that something could partake of a form. So, the issue is not merely how to name participation; it is how a form comes to attach itself to a sensible. Importantly, the *Phaedo* claims that both the separate form and the form within *make* (*poiei*) the participant tall or beautiful (100d4–6).

The *Phaedo* introduces a third way in which a form could make something have a character:

If you ask me, by what thing, coming into a body, will it be hot? I will not say the safe but ignorant answer that it is heat, but the more refined answer that has just emerged, that it is fire. And if you ask by what thing, coming into a body, will it be diseased? I will not answer that it is disease, but that it is fever. (*Phd.* 105b–c, my trans.)

eī gar eroio me hō an ti en tō sōmati eggenētai thermon estai, ou tēn asphalē soi erō apokrisin ekeinēn tēn amathē, hoti hō an thermotēs, alla kompsoteran ek tōn nun, hoti hō an pyr: oude an erē hō an sōmati ti eggenētai nosēsei, ouk erō hoti hō an nosos, all' hō an pyretos.

Evidently, the form Hot can attach itself to a body either by having heat present in the body or by having fire present in the body. Apparently, both the heat in us and the fire in us resemble the form. Socrates does not use *poiei* here, as he had at 100d, though Grube translates the passage if it he did. It is notable that when Socrates suggests at 100d4–6, quoted above, that how a form attaches itself to a sensible is an issue, he speaks of (a) the presence of beauty, (b) communion with Beauty, and (c) some other way of form's being attached as all (1) "making" something beautiful. The three options he mentions in this passage are clearly the three options that he spells out: "safe but ignorant" sensible imitation, the form, and the other safe sensible imitation. All three make a matter have the character of the form. Equivalently, he says that (2) either the form Beauty or the "safe" sensible imitation beauty is that "by which" (dative construction) some sensible comes to have the character of the form (100d6–8). The passage just quoted, 105b–c, includes the less

safe sensible character under locution (2). Obviously, only the two safe imitations can account for a sensible's having a character by their presence, and both locutions, (1) and (2), are used with it.

It seems clear, then, that when the Stranger declares that a soul can come to be just by the presence of justice (247a5–6) and when he defines being as a *dynamis* to make something other, he is speaking the language of the *Phaedo*. He uses both locutions to express the way form, that is, the “form in us” attaches itself. The Stranger does not mention a separate form, but his definition of being would seem to apply to it as well as immanent forms.

Where he does differ from the *Phaedo* is in introducing *dynamis*. Just what does *dynamis* add? What is the difference between a form's making something other and a being's *dynamis* to make something other? The *Phaedo* is accounting for a sensible's having some character; the *Sophist* is arguing that any character that it could have would have to be a being. Further, that justice has the *dynamis* to make soul just by its presence implies that it might or might not actually do so. Making *dynamis* the mark of a being allows justice, soul and others to be even when they are not present to soul.³ So, *dynamis* serves to separate whatever makes something other from what is made other without requiring that justice or soul exist apart from bodies – this last, a notion that even reformed giants would reject. Justice and soul are beings because they might possibly make a body alive and a soul just. They have the *dynamis* to do so, but their actually doing so requires that they be present. Thus, *dynamis* allows the Stranger to talk about things independently of their actual state and independently of time: they will *always* have a *dynamis* to come to be present. *Dynamis* opens a door to knowledge of changeable sensibles.

The mention of the *dynamis* to come to be present (247a) suggests an even richer connection with the *Phaedo*. In the midst of propounding the form and the two safe accounts, Socrates argues against the notion that (a) something becomes bigger by the addition of what is smaller and that (b) when one is added to one or when one is divided, it is either the addition or the division that is the cause of two (100e–101c). Both of these examples are instances of motion, and we are to understand that natural philosophers who see the world as matter and motion – he means those whom the *Sophist* calls the “giants” – endorse accounts of motion that he discredits. The *Phaedo* introduces an alternative understanding of motion based on immanent forms: something comes to be large not because of the addition of a small bit of matter, but by largeness coming to be present to it (cf. 104b–c). We do not learn, in the *Sophist*, how the giants speak of motion, but it seems that the Stranger ascribes to them a

3 The Stranger playfully speaks of the ability (*dynaton*) to “make” the giants better (246d4–5) perhaps to suggest to readers that they may not have the *dynamis* to have justice present.

Phaedo understanding of it because he speaks of something's having the *dynamis to come* to be present (247a). In both dialogues, motion is the presence of an immanent form after its absence or vice versa. A character's *dynamis* to make something else other or to be acted upon is its possibility of coming to be in motion. So understood, motion need not alter what moves or is moved: justice that comes to be present in a soul need not itself change in the process, nor need other elements change their natures when they come to be present with them in a composite. I refer to this notion of motion as "*Phaedo* motion".

Is it right to think of soul and body as elements that may or may not be combined? Are soul and justice the same sorts of elements? If the soul is the body's form, its presence should not be a combination with body, but a transformation of body, just as soul's coming to be just transforms it. The Stranger's approach is so unpromising that we might suppose that he could not have meant it. Aristotle could have had this approach in mind when he dismisses the combining or mixing of animal and two-footed as absurd (*Metaph.* Z.14.1039b2–6), though he does suggest that some things may be defined by mixing (H.1.1043a12–14). Of course, Aristotle understands mixtures as *energeiai* rather than through the *dynamis* of their elements. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this possible point of contact, but it and the seeming challenge of the *Sophist's* treatment of *dynamis* justifies our close consideration. Another feature of the dialogue is worth noticing: even though the context of the refutation of the giants is the coming to be of a composite, the emphasis is not on an agent that would bring about the composite but on the character of the elements that could become its constituents. This character is their being, that is, their *dynamis* to be present to at least some other element.

2

The foregoing interpretation of the reformed materialists' understanding of beings is only plausible if there is strong evidence that it applies to the friends of the forms as well, for the Stranger seeks a *logos* that includes what each of them regards as being (*Sph.* 246c5–6), and he claims that the friends of the forms have the same understanding of being as the materialists, though they do not admit it (248b–c).

As he did with the materialists, the Stranger undertakes an imagined dialogue with the friends of the forms. And, again, his immediate aim is to show that they need to recognise some truth in what their opponents count as being. He begins with a passage resembling *Phaedo* 79c–d:

Stranger: And you say that we commune with becoming through sensation by the body; through reason (*dia logismou*) by the soul, we commune with real being (*tēn ontōs ousian*) which is always the same way in respect of the same things (*hēn aei kata tauta hōsautōs echein*), whereas becoming is different at different times. (*Sph.* 248a10–13)

The Stranger is claiming that the body, through sensing, communes with becoming, while the soul communes with being. The claim recalls the *Phaedo*, but there the soul does both: it knows through itself, but it senses through the body (79c–d).

The Stranger then proposes that “communing” is nothing other than the previously stated definition of being:

Stranger: But, most excellent of men, what is this “communing” that we said to describe (*legein*) both? Is it not what we just now said?

Theaetetus: What is that?

Stranger: The having been affected (*pathēma*) or the making (*poiēma*) from (*ek*) some *dynamis*, that comes to be from things going together against each other (*tōn pros allēla syniontōn*). (*Sph.* 248b2–8)

The “going together” in this last phrase must be a general description of the connection between both (1) body and becoming (that is, sensation and the sensed object) and (2) reason and being, for it is these two pairs that, in the previous paragraph, the Stranger had said commune. Their communion is a *pathēma* or a *poiēma* that results from some *dynamis*. Here the *dynamis* can only be the capacity of one member of the pair to act on or to be acted upon by the other. This capacity is realised in a communion, but this passage does not indicate whether it is the faculty or its object that makes something other. When it comes to the communion of sensation and becoming, the Stranger thinks the friends of the forms will grant the *dynamis* of both making and being acted upon to becoming; but they deny that being has either *dynamis* (248c7–9).

The Stranger proposes two arguments for bringing what they call “being” under this definition. The first (248c11–e4) starts with the assumption that the soul knows and being (*ousia*) is known. To know is to make (*poiein*), and there cannot be a making without something’s being made and, so, acted upon (*paschein*). Since being is known, it must be acted upon, but to be acted upon is

to be moved. So, being must move.⁴ Insofar as being has a *dynamis* to be acted upon, it falls under the 247d–e definition of being.

The soul is here assumed to act on being by knowing it. In the discussion with the materialists, justice and *phronēsis* (=knowledge) act on soul by coming to be present and make it just and *phronimon*. Since here soul is acting upon being by coming to know it, being takes on the character of soul: soul makes being be known. Of course, being known or not being known does not change the nature of being. So here, as in the argument with the materialists, the object of knowledge and the soul come to be present together in a composite. There must be some such motion if someone comes to know. But, again, this is *Phaedo* motion.

The Stranger's second argument for being's having motion (248e6–249a2) works in the opposite direction. The Stranger asks whether motion, life, soul, and *phronēsis* could fail to be *present* (*pareinai*) to *tō pantelōs onti* (note the dative here). This phrase is so controversial that it is best to leave it untranslated initially.⁵ Whatever its precise meaning, it clearly includes what the friends of the form recognise as the object of knowledge, namely, the forms. The question here is whether this realm can be without *nous* and motion (248e6–249a2). If it has *nous*, must it not also have life? (249a4; cf. *Ti.* 30b). But *nous* and life require soul (249a6–7), and with these three, it cannot be immovable (249a9–10). Since Theaetetus concedes that *tō pantelōs onti* must contain *nous* (249a2–3), he agrees that the friends of the forms must expand being to include at least some motions. It follows that “being and the all” (*to on*

4 The passage concludes with the claim that being would not have been affected were it at rest (248e4). Now rest is one of the five kinds, and if it is known, it too would be in motion, an apparent contradiction. So, Plato seems to be tacitly suggesting a challenge to the Stranger's argument.

David Ambuel (2007: 120) raises another challenge to the argument: if being is affected by being known, then the Stranger is endorsing Protagoras' view (in the *Theaetetus*) that “the perceptible object exists only in the fleeting union of active and passive powers”. Here, though, knowledge is not a union but a communion of a pair, each of which has being apart from their communion. So, knowledge of being is not subject to the objections raised against Protagoras' account of perception.

5 The central issue in the literature on this phrase is whether it signifies the whole of what is, that is, the entirety of being or, rather, what preeminently is, the meaning the phrase has in its only other occurrence, *R.* 5.477a3. As Wiitala 2018: 188–189 formulates the issue, the question is whether the phrase should be understood extensionally or intensively. He argues for the latter. Leigh effectively undermines his argument in chapter 5 of this volume. Fronterotta, in chapter 6 of this volume, argues that the phrase is best understood intensively, but that it has an “extensive nuance” inasmuch as it encompasses multiple kinds of intelligibles. For more discussion of the literature, see these two chapters.

te kai to pan) encompass some of what moves in addition to what is immobile (249d3–4).⁶

Why does Theaetetus concede the inclusion of *nous*? He had already agreed that the soul communes with being through reasoning (*dia logismou*) (248a10–b1). That appears to be a way of saying that souls know forms. Indeed, it would be inconsistent to say that there are forms and deny that the soul knows them. How could we say that forms exist unless we know them? The faculty usually said to know forms is *nous*. However, *nous* may always know forms – that might be a consequence of learning's being recollection. What the Stranger really needs is something that comes to know forms, and this seems to be soul. It is assumed that there is no *nous* without soul. Since, then, we cannot speak of the forms without something that comes to know them, namely, a soul, and since this coming to know is a motion, forms cannot be without motion. It is, therefore, necessary to include motion in what is, that is, in "being and the all".

This argument includes motion as a constituent part of the whole of being, in contrast with the preceding argument that being is itself moved by being known. At first glance, then, the two arguments appear inconsistent: is the form moved by being known or does the soul that knows it do the moving while it is at rest? The conjunction of the two arguments indicates both. Soul and the forms it knows come to be together. The motion is the soul's coming to know and the form's coming to be known. Before the soul comes to know, it had the *dynamis* to know, and the form, likewise, had the *dynamis* to be known. Without these *dynamis*, neither could move. So, when the first argument claims that the soul (cf. 248d1–2) makes (*poiein*) being known and being, in turn, is acted upon by it, the *dynamis* of both are understood, and the Stranger is bringing both form and soul under his own definition of being. However, even if the friends of the forms agree that form moves in coming to be known, as the first argument shows, they could still reject the soul as a being.

Hence, the second argument expands the realm of being to include soul, life, and *nous*. It does not deny that being is moved by coming to be known. However, there must be something that comes to know the forms, the soul. If, then, soul must be, it would belong to the realm of being. Since soul moves in coming to know, to include it is to expand the realm of being by adding motions in addition to form, and soul is able to make the realm alive, especially if its knowing being is some sort of conjunction with form.

In this way, the second argument parallels exactly the argument against the materialists that expands their understanding of being to include what is

6 "Being and the all" here substitutes for *tō pantelōs onti*, a phrase that no longer appears. The same issues of scope apply to both phrases.

immaterial. So, being cannot be confined to forms, and the friends of the forms ought to accept the Stranger's definition of it.

The Stranger's arguments for forms' moving are incompatible with the *Phaedo's* descriptions of forms as unchanging (e.g., 78d), but we have seen that he is talking about forms that are present to the soul that knows them. They are what the *Phaedo* calls "forms in us", and they come to be in us through our knowing them. Again, the process through which these forms come to be in the soul is what I have called "*Phaedo* motion". They come to be present after having not been present without necessarily changing their natures.⁷ There is nothing here about the separate forms that do not enter into anything else (*Ti.* 51e–52a) and that the greatest difficulty of the *Parmenides* argues cannot be known (133b–134e). They may belong to the entirety of being, but they are not of interest here.

Just what is included in the entirety of being? The Stranger has secured agreement from both giants and gods about the definition of being, but not about the entirety of being. The giants were shown the need to add what is invisible, soul and justice, to the bodies that they wanted to include. The gods were shown that they should add souls as well as their motions and the motions of *nous* to the forms that they had wanted to include exclusively. Interestingly, the same case, a soul that has some sort of knowledge, forces both groups to expand their notions of being. However, the giants continue to include all bodies, while the friends of the forms are less clear. The Stranger notes that all of becoming falls under his definition of being (248c7–8). By getting the friends of the forms to include life, he probably intends to include human beings and so, indirectly, some bodies along with their motion (249a9–10). However, he does not mention bodies in the two arguments against the friends of the forms.

This seeming inconsistency draws our attention away from the instances of being and helps explain the surprising turn that the argument takes at 249b5. We might have thought that the Stranger was trying to show that being

7 Discussing the friends of the forms, Leigh, in chapter 5 of this volume, argues that to exercise *dynamis*, as a form does, is neither to change something else nor be changed. Elsewhere, Leigh 2012: 258, concludes that "Forms are causes, in so far as they structure their participants and make them what they are". She thinks that the forms act on their participants. Leigh 2010: 75–76, distinguishes a virtue outside a soul (that is, a form) that causes (as an effect) the soul's having the virtue as a property. It is hard to reconcile this with the *Phaedo's* claim (referred to by Leigh on p. 78) that Simmias is tall "by" – the same "causal dative" Leigh applies to the form – the tallness he happens to have. Could his own tallness act on him? Despite this issue, since Leigh distinguishes a form's acting on the participant, its causality, from motion, her view is not far from what I argue here, namely, that form or property is a formal cause rather than an efficient cause.

encompasses bodies and forms or, perhaps, motions and forms. Surprisingly, though, these latter turn out to be only illustrative instances of the kinds that he must have been after all along, for his summary of the arguments does not use the terms that those arguments used. Instead, he claims that the arguments undermine the supposition that all is at rest as well as the supposition that all is in motion (249c10–d4), and he insists that being encompass both (249d6–7). It is the friends of the forms whom he takes to deny motion (248e6–249b3) and, thereby, to make all rest. The consequence of their denial would be that *nous* would belong to nothing, be about nothing, nor be anywhere (249b5–6). On the other hand, he takes the materialists to assert that all things are in motion and, thereby, to exclude *nous* because without rest nothing could be “in respect of the same”, “the same way” or “concerning the same” (249b8–c1). Only if something is the same in some way can it be grasped by *nous* (249c3–4). In other words, the arguments against the materialists and the friends of the forms are taken to show that each must recognise what the other advances as a being and, thus, that both motion and rest are beings. The Stranger is not talking about *instances* of being like bodies and forms but about the *basis* for things’ being, that is, their capacity to move or their lack of this capacity (their being at rest). He is, in effect, identifying criteria by which to distinguish kinds of beings. In encompassing both kinds, being cannot be identified with either (250b). It must be a third kind.

Looking back at the arguments against the giants and the gods, we can see that the Stranger showed that forms are in motion by coming into soul, but also at rest in respect of their natures. In retrospect, we can also see that the bodies were in motion but came to have stable characters by the presence of soul. It seems, then, that bodies and forms *both* fall under motion and rest, as does soul and, as my previous paragraph makes clear, *nous*. It is not until their conclusion that we can see that the arguments were not focusing on body, form, and soul. These latter are merely the instances that the Stranger uses to come to see what encompasses them, the kinds motion and rest. And we see now that the instances fall under multiple kinds.

This distinction between instances and kinds is crucial for appreciating what being is. There is nothing here about the kind motion making some sensible instance move, nor about being’s making something be. The form language that is so prominent in the *Phaedo* and that figures into bringing gods and giants under a unified notion of being plays no role in respect of sensible instances of the kind being or the other two kinds that have emerged.

The three kinds are, though, closely connected with each other. Again, being is a *dynamis* of one thing to make something else other or to be acted upon and so to be itself made other. The actual making other or being made other is

motion, and we have seen that motion here is one thing's coming to be present to another (cf. 248b5–6). Rest signifies the completion of the process or a state of mere possibility for a motion. Again, being is the *dynamis* for motion; but as merely a *dynamis*, being remains at rest. When the *dynamis* is actualised, there is motion that, it seems, eventually comes to rest with a *dynamis* for more motion. Here motion is a mixing that results in one element's making the composite have its character. That the composite of elements acquires the character of an element highlights that the kinds themselves have *no* character. They are understood functionally through illustrative instances. Thus, no kind is a form.

The *Phaedo* famously characterises a form as “apart by itself” (*auto kath' hauto*) (78d5–6). Such a form is an instance of being as *Sophist* 247d–e defines being, though it is a being insofar as it makes a sensible have a character that resembles it. Again, whereas forms are independent of each other, the being defined here is a *dynamis* for combination. The Stranger does not reject forms nor does he abandon them: he identifies them as instances of the kind rest.

Insofar as being has no character of its own, we are indeed in the greatest perplexity about it (250e). Before we look at how the Stranger approaches being, we can mention other approaches to it. Aristotle argues that being cannot be genus because no character can be shared by all beings (*Metaph.* B.3.998b22–27). Hence, he uses “being” either as a collective term for all beings or as way to designate the primary being upon which the others depend. In sharp contrast, Heidegger uses being's necessary lack of determinate character to identify it as the transcendental source of all determination, that is, as the Being of beings. We will see that the Stranger uses the mixing of the kinds to expound an account of being that is between these extremes.

3

After declaring that we are in the greatest perplexity about being, the Stranger seems to drop the issue entirely and ask whether the same thing can have multiple names (251a5–6). The so-called “late learners” deny this, and the Stranger proposes to address the discussion to them and others (251b5–d3). He goes on to ask whether the three kinds have a *dynamis* to commune with each other or, as the late learners might say, none can commune with the others:

Should we, in our present discourses, [1] attach being (*ousia*) neither to motion nor rest, nor anything to anything else, but posit all as unmixed and in this way unable (*adynaton*) to partake of others; or should we

[2] bring them all together into the same [composite] as capable (*dynata*) of communing with each other; or [3] some are and some are not [capable of communing]? (*Sph.* 251d)

Since the question is directed to the late learners, we might suppose that two kinds will commune if the instance of one kind is also an instance of another, for then one thing would have two names. This is what Gregory Vlastos calls “Pauline predication”, an identity of two predicates based on at least some common instances.⁸ This cannot be the meaning of communion here because, as we saw, the Stranger assumes that *nous* is in motion but also at rest, and goes on to argue that these two kinds, motion and rest, do not commune with each other. No, kinds do not commune because some one thing belongs to two kinds; though if they do commune, then at least some one thing is an instance of both kinds and that thing could be called by the names of both kinds. Nor can communion be a coming to be present to something else, that is, a motion because there can be communion even when there is no motion. It is, evidently, the kinds that are at issue, not their instances. What, then, is communion?

To answer this question and to understand the inquiry that the Stranger proposes in the quoted text we need to appreciate the reflexivity of his question. In asking whether each of three kinds has a *dynamis* to commune with the others, the Stranger is asking whether each is a being, for a being is anything that has the *dynamis* to make something other or to be acted upon by another. When something communes with something else, it comes to have another character: it is acted upon by what it communes with. As we saw earlier, to commune is to be (248b2–6).

It follows that to ask whether the three kinds commune is to ask whether the kinds themselves are beings. Again, instances of the kind being are things that each have a *dynamis* to make something other or to be acted upon, but the Stranger is asking whether kinds themselves have *dynameis* to commune. In particular, is the kind being itself a being?

Before exploring this question, we might ask, what is to be gained? Can answering it or answering the Stranger’s question about whether the kinds commune with each other help resolve the perplexity about being that the

8 Vlastos 1973: 272–274, 307–308, argues that Plato uses both “Pauline predications” and “ordinary predications” but fails to recognise the difference. He takes the former to refer to the instances of concepts and the latter to refer to concepts. The distinction is, in turn, rooted in the use/mention distinction. Vlastos does not consider the possibility that either a form or a kind is not a concept but a special sort of thing.

Stranger noted before introducing it? My proposal is that the communion of kinds is not a side question but an essential strategy to understand what being is and, through it, non-being. Once we appreciate how exploring communion resolves the perplexity of being, we will see that it is paradigmatic of all the arts; and this insight will be essential for understanding the sophist's art and for deciding whether he even has one. The challenge is to understand how the communion shows the nature of being.

The communion itself is relatively easy to understand. The passage quoted above proposes three possible ways of communion. The first one mentioned and considered is that no kind can commune with any other. This is rejected on the ground that if nothing were capable (*dynamis echein*) of communing with anything else, the kinds motion and rest could not partake of being (*ousia*) (251e7–9). In a passage that seems to point to the reflexivity here, the Stranger asks, “will either be if it does not also commune with being?” (252a2–3). Apparently, the kinds can exist as kinds only if they are, and that entails communing with being. The text has three more arguments against no kind's communing. First, this would be inconsistent with the argument through which we discovered that what the giants and friends of forms propose as beings fall under the kind being (252a5–10). Second, elements could not sometimes mix and sometimes not mix (252b1–6). Finally, the late learners would not be able to say that each thing is what it is without its communing with being, or to assert that it is other than the others without, again, making it commune with others (252b8–c9).

The second possibility is all the kinds communing with each other. But this would mean that motion would make rest move and rest make motion rest – an obvious impossibility (252d2–10). By default, then, we are left with the third possibility, some kinds commune with each other, some do not (252d12–253a1). More specifically, motion and rest each commune with being, but not with each other. The kind being communes with motion and rest because it is a *dynamis* to make them other, that is to make motion be and to make rest be.

Since the kind being communes with the other kinds and, so, has the *dynamis* to commune with them, it is itself an instance of being. Likewise, the being that motion has is not a specific character – there is no character of being – but the *dynamis* of itself being capable of communing. And motion is *capable* of communing because it communes with being, though it does not commune with rest. Again, motion has the *dynamis* to be acted upon by being because being makes it be. Let me make the same point in a different way. Unlike a form, the kind being cannot make something other by giving it a determinate character, but it can make something other in a different way. Since to be is to have the *dynamis* to commune, the kind being can make the kind motion other

by making it have the *dynamis* to commune, that is, making it have the capacity to commune with another kind. Just how might the kind being do this? Simply by itself communing with the kind motion. And being communes with rest in the same way. In playing this dual role of making something other and being the other that the something becomes, being is no different than justice, for justice makes the soul just by coming to be present in it. The pertinent difference between being and justice is that being is kind.

As a kind, being communes with other kinds so that it is known along with them. Eventually, the number of kinds is expanded to include same and other, but we need not discuss this to appreciate how being both makes possible the communion of kinds and is itself explicated by this communion. Each kind is distinct, but each is also a being because it has a *dynamis* to make another kind other or to be itself acted upon. Recall that something makes another kind other when that other kind partakes of it. This state of partaking is rest. But being lies not in the partaking but in the *dynamis* to be partaken of, and we have seen that this is the possibility of “its coming to be present” (247a5–9) in what partakes of it. This coming to be present is, of course, motion. So, motion and rest go hand in hand with being even though they are opposite to each other, and being is inseparable from both. Again, being is something’s *dynamis* to make another thing other, the process of exercising this *dynamis* is motion and the result of motion, the presence of the other, is rest. And, of course, the participated composite that is rest is itself a being insofar as it itself has the *dynamis* to partake of something else or to be divided or uncoupled. In short, being is defined by its communion with the other two kinds because they are inseparable from it. Being makes communion possible because it is the *dynamis* that the other kinds must be able to exercise to be. The Stranger is using the kinds to talk about the kinds and, especially, to explain being.

This simple connection between the kinds seems not to be noticed in the literature and readers may wonder why the Stranger does not make it clearer. It seems to me that he does make it as clear as he makes anything else – in this the *Sophist* is not different from other dialogues – but that readers have looked in the wrong places to understand it. Immediately after discussing the communion of the three kinds, the Stranger illustrates it with what we can now see to be three examples (252e9–253e2).

The Stranger mentions three arts that also depend on knowing which elements commune and which do not. The art of grammar knows which letters combine and which do not, and, intriguingly, a grammarian knows how to use vowels to bind together consonants (252e10–253a12). The art of the musician knows which high notes will combine with which low notes (253b1–3). Third, there is the more general knowledge of kinds, the knowledge of which

“harmonise” with each other and which remain separate. This is the dialectical knowledge of the philosopher, and the Stranger raises the possibility that there are “some kinds that run through all the others and hold the other kinds together so that these kinds are *dynata* to be able to be mixed” and other kinds that cause division (253c1–3). This is followed by a famously complex passage that seems to elaborate on this mixing by speaking of one *idea* that runs through or, perhaps, encompasses others and concludes by talking about the knowledge by which to judge whether each has the *dynamis* to commune in respect of its kind and to what extent it does not (253d5–e2).⁹

That which runs through the other kinds must be the kind being, and the philosopher judges each kind as a being but also the kind being that somehow communes with them all. However we understand this passage, it clearly asserts that there is a knowledge that grasps the kinds together in their relation to each other, just as there are arts that, respectively, grasp the letters in relation to each other and the musical notes in relation to each other. The knowledge of the relations of kinds is much like grammar and music, even if it is their paradigm.

The dialogue gives us as little about grammar and music as about dialectical knowledge. In each case, there are elements, all of which have a *dynamis* to mix with some but not all others. Someone who knows the art, knows which element has the *dynamis* to combine with which and can, therefore, bring about these combinations. Combining a consonant with a vowel makes a syllable (253a4–8). The vowel allows the consonant to sound, but it takes on the sound of the consonant. Even though the letters are distinct, it is their possibility (*dynamis*) of conjunction that makes possible actual consonant sounds, and they are known through their conjunctions. Similarly, combining a high sound with a low sound can yield a harmony that is only possible through their *dynamis* to combine. Here, each of the letters or the notes is a being in its own sphere, grammar or music: it is a *dynamis* to combine with other beings in its sphere. Their coming to be present to each other is motion – the same sort of motion we have seen all along. Their remaining conjoined or their remaining unconjoined is rest. Motion and rest are incompatible, but they are also understood through each other, as is being in each sphere. In this way, grammar and music imitate the dialectical knowledge we have seen at work so far in the mixing of the three kinds. Inasmuch as the arts, at least the productive arts, aim to produce conjunctions of elements, the three kinds make these arts possible.

9 Mitchell Miller (2016: 348, 349–50) nicely distinguishes between the dialectic that shows an encompassing whole (here and at 250a–b) and the dialectic that consists of bifurcation and collection. Both count as mixtures of forms.

Only if the elements of a sphere have *dynameis* to commune with other elements can these elements be moved and come to rest in stable composites like syllables and harmonies. The Stranger is not suggesting that these composites are eternal or even that they exist. They exist only as eternal possibilities that are rooted in the powers of the elements.

Not only are the elements that have the *dynamis* to combine beings, but their stable composites are also beings. The art of grammar knows which letters will commune with which other letters and is, therefore, able to produce syllables. There must be another art, perhaps another branch of grammar, that knows which syllables combine into words. (It is not clear how to fit this combination into the model of one element's making another element other while the other element is acted upon – perhaps the dominant syllable is the one stressed in the word). Near the end of dialogue, we learn of an art that combines words into sentences (261d–262e). The art of rhetoric, only hinted at here, knows which sentences will combine into speeches. At every level, elements that have the *dynamis* to commune with other elements can produce stable (resting) composites that are themselves elements with their own *dynamis* to combine with like elements into still higher composites.

The *Sophist's* implicit successive composition contrasts with the *Theaetetus's* use of division as way of understanding wholes (202d–203c). A syllable can be known through its letters, but the letters, being indivisible constituents, admit of no account and are therefore unknowable. A little later, discussing the wagon, this dialogue suggests that the whole differs from its elements and, so, would be as unknowable as they are (207a–d). The conclusion is that nothing that is undivided can be known, and the *Theaetetus* ends in failure. Apparently accepting the notion that arts have knowledge (*Th.* 146c7–d2), the *Sophist* shows that a grammarian knows indivisible letters by recognising which letters they can combine with, that is, by their knowing their *dynameis*. Insofar as this account applies to all productive arts, the *Sophist* propounds a solution to the problem of knowledge, a solution that accounts for knowledge of the arts.

However, dialectical knowledge includes division as well as production as we see from the Stranger's brief discussion of it (253b–e). The kind other, a kind that runs through the other kinds, makes division possible. But the *Sophist* does not focus on the arts that depend on division or, rather, it sets them aside after treating them extensively in its first part. Since an acquisition is a kind of division, the first six definitions of the *Sophist* are all based on division. Five characterise different modes of acquisition. Notice that not only is the Stranger making divisions to locate the *Sophist*, but the arts he discusses must make divisions to acquire their prey. The sixth definition expresses what is common to all these divisions by considering ways to make divisions. At the same time, it redirects

our attention from separating external things to divisions within the soul, especially its ignorance and its ugliness (228d). We could well ask whether the dialogue is right to separate division and production so sharply: there can be no productive combination of elements without first separating the elements. Separating the letters would seem to be as much a part of the grammarian's art as combining them, and the passage on dialectical knowledge speaks of both together. Nonetheless, the dialogue's seventh and final definition locates the sophist as having a productive art. That requires the discussion of the possibility of productive arts that leads us to being as *dynamis*, specifically, the *dynamis* to commune, and that means the *dynamis* to come to be a composite (through motion) and to remain one (rest). The kinds make possible the productive arts. The kind being is known through its relations with other kinds.

Having come to this account of being, the Stranger proceeds to non-being. This involves introducing two more kinds, same and other – both of which, like being, go through all the kinds. Inasmuch as the kind other is needed to distinguish kinds from each other, and the kind same is needed for each to be the same as itself (256a11–b4), all five kinds are still defined through each other, as are the first three. Famously, non-being turns out to be otherness, and instances of otherness are possible only because they are beings or composed of beings. Knowing how the kinds make productive arts possible and how non-being can be, the Stranger can finally address the question of what sort of art the sophist has or, indeed, whether he has an art at all.

4

Being is the capacity (*dynamis*) that elements, at whatever level, have to commune, that is, to mix with other elements. Not all elements combine, but only someone with knowledge of the specific sphere to which the elements belong – letters, sounds, or whatever – can determine which do and which do not combine. Since being belongs both to individual elements and to their combinations insofar as both have the *dynamis* to make or be acted upon, non-being would be the absence of this *dynamis*. Inasmuch as each individual element has this *dynamis* by partaking of being, non-being can only belong to composites or, rather, putative composites. Elements that have no *dynamis* to commune with each other can be claimed to be combined by those lacking knowledge of the elements. Their claim is false, but this can only be discerned by someone who knows the *dynamis* of the pertinent elements.

As we have seen, the Stranger and Theaetetus agree that motion and rest cannot combine. Since each is other to the other, they cannot constitute a

composite. Equivalently, although motion and rest are each beings, their composite is a non-being. Someone who has dialectical knowledge knows that these two cannot combine. Only someone who lacked this knowledge would try to combine kinds that have no *dynamis* to mix or to assert that such kinds do combine. An assertion that would unite motion and rest would be false.

We know that the sophist lacks the knowledge that would allow him to recognise which elements have the *dynamis* to combine with which other elements. What he produces are, accordingly, non-beings, that is, putative composites that cannot exist. What, though, is the specific sphere in which the sophist works? What are the elements that he purports to combine? What sort of non-being does he create? The obvious answer is that he creates speeches (235c). We can well ask, as a sophist does, how can a speech be a non-being when the speech exists (cf. 236e–237a)? To answer the question, recall that the Stranger speaks of both combinations of words and combinations of things (262d–e). The former follows the rules of speech, whereas the latter are based on the natures of things. Since speech requires a noun and a verb, both “Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus flies” are good examples of speech. In contrast, neither a string of nouns (“lion deer horse”) nor a string of verbs (“walks runs sleeps”) is a good example of speech (262b). In respect of speech, these latter are non-beings because they are composites of elements that lack the *dynamis* to combine *in speech*. Contrariwise, in respect of speech alone, both “Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus flies” are beings. They are grammatically legitimate combinations of elements into sentences. Either could be part of a discourse. Indeed, both sentences are parts of the discourse that constitutes the dialogue called *Sophist*.

Each of these sentences also expresses a mixture of things. Each of these things is a being because it has a *dynamis* to combine with other things, though, again, not everything combines with every other thing. Thus, “Theaetetus sits” combines two words that designate things that each have the *dynamis* to combine with the other. In contrast, “Theaetetus flies” combines words that designate things that have no *dynamis* to combine. As a sentence, “Theaetetus flies” is grammatically correct and is, therefore, a being. But a human being cannot, by nature, fly. So, the sentence combines two things that lack a *dynamis* to combine with each other. The result is a non-being. Again, the sentence is a being, the composite thing it aims to signify is not. Hence, the *dynamis* in words do not align with those in the things they designate:

Whenever someone says “man learns”, ... he makes clear something about beings, *whether they come to be, have come to be, or will come to be* So just as some things fit together and some do not, some signs of sounds do not fit together and those that do produce speech. (262c9–e1)

The discussion of the sophist's falsehood is widely read as describing truth as a correspondence and falsity as a lack of correspondence. Much earlier in the dialogue, the Stranger had described the sophist as saying what does not correspond to what is, and he proposed that the sophist's audience will come, eventually to recognise this lack of correspondence (234d–e), an argument we also find in the *Theaetetus* (178c–e). But the Stranger assured Theaetetus that he would try to spare him this experience. Are we, then, to understand that when the subject comes up again near the end of the dialogue, the Stranger means to reaffirm the correspondence account? In one passage the Stranger does seem to do so: “the true [sentence] says about you the beings that are” whereas the false statement says about you beings that are other (263b4–9). However, the sentence's repetition of “being” as elements that combine and as their combination should provoke us to read it in terms of the Stranger's account of being as a *dynamis* to combine, the account that the dialogue works through in order to understand the truth and falsity of what the sophist says. Here, then, the beings said about you each have a *dynamis* to combine with some other beings, but what is said will be true only if they have the *dynamis* to combine with you. When the beings have no such *dynamis*, a sentence that combines them is “truly in its being false” (*ontōs to kai alēthōs ... pseudēs*) (263d1–4). This is the kind of falsity of “Theaetetus flies”. It is false not just because there is nothing that corresponds to it. It is false in its being.

Similarly, the sentence “Theaetetus sits” could signify a correspondence, but it does not have to, and it would not draw on what precedes it if it did. Since Theaetetus and sits each have a *dynamis* to combine with each other, there is a sense in which the sentence is true even when he stands. So, too, “Theaetetus walks” or “A human being walks on two legs” is true not because anyone is actually walking when it is uttered, but because walking belongs to our nature.¹⁰ Walking and human being are two elements that have been combined

10 Aristotle has a parallel discussion in the *Metaphysics*. He claims that a combination is true when it is combined and false when not, such as “light wood” or “the diagonal and the commensurable” (Arist. *Metaph.* Θ.10.1051b18–21). That he is not talking about statements or beliefs here is clear because both could be true or false whether or not there is a combination: an assertion of separation is true if there is no combination. Whether wood and light are combined can be determined by perception. Depending on their lengths, some diagonals and sides of right triangles are commensurable (e.g., 3, 4, 5); the mathematician knows which. But the general claim about their commensurability is always false. See Halper 2005: 218–22. In contrast, Paolo Crivelli (2004: 137) characterises Aristotle's theory of truth as a correspondence theory that is a “mirror isomorphism”: “each class of assertions ... is singled out by the property of asserting that the attribute on which it is mapped obtains”. This move strikes me as an *ad hoc* way of avoiding saying that the truth Aristotle discusses in Θ.10 belongs to things rather than statements or beliefs.

by a divine craftsman (265e). Flying does not belong to human being. There is no *dynamis* for them to mix. “Theaetetus sits” might seem to lie between “necessarily combined” and “impossible to combine” because Theaetetus might or might not be actually sitting, but insofar as being is a *dynamis* to combine, we need to say that this sentence is and remains true even when he stands.¹¹

The non-being that the sophist propounds is not the result of getting facts wrong. In that case, anyone with the pertinent art could correct him about what to expect in the future. The sophist speaks about justice and virtue, and he ardently tries to make them appear as if they were present within him (267c2–6). However, he makes an imitation without knowing what he is imitating (267e4–5), and he knows that he does not know them (268a). Anyone imitating knowledge and virtue without have them is likely to fail to manifest them. But the Stranger’s point here is stronger. Any pretense to virtue while being ignorant of virtue is necessarily contrary to virtue: pretense to virtue is vice. That is to say, pretense to virtue while being ignorant of it has no *dynamis* to mix with virtue. Hence, the sophist necessarily fails to be virtuous insofar as he is a sophist. If the arts are always good, he has no art.

On the other hand, the Stranger claims that the sophist is ironical because the sophist suspects he does not have knowledge (268a). In this case, his *logoi* would not be about things at all. Perhaps, we mistook him to be concerned with things when the elements he combines exist solely in speech and appearances. In this latter case, he may well have an art: it would be to use appearances to persuade those who also lack knowledge of their truth. However, if he relies on his appearing just to persuade others about justice or even if he uses his speeches to persuade people about what he does not know, he once again seeks to combine elements that have no *dynamis* to be united. So, the ambiguity about whether or not the sophist has an art persists after we have finally defined him.

In short, the Stranger’s proposal that being is a *dynamis* is central to understanding the possibility of productive arts and, so, the possibility of composites made from elements. And *dynamis* is crucial for grasping the sophist for he aims to bring about a composite from elements that have no *dynamis* to mix. Central to the dialogue is a notion of truth that lies in things rather than

11 Monique Dixsaut (2022: 683–690) argues that inasmuch as the discussion is about the Theaetetus “with whom I am now speaking”, an individual about whom we can have an opinion but not knowledge, and inasmuch as he is long dead when the dialogue was written, “Theaetetus sits” is a fiction, but not false. This is an alternative solution to the problem of how a claim about a temporal event can have enduring truth.

correspondence.¹² In order to determine the character of the sophist, the dialogue sets out the kinds that make any productive art possible. The beings (elements) that an art works with as well as those that it creates exist among sensibles, but their *dynamis* persist and give them a kind of atemporality that allows them to be known as objects of an art.

5

We can conclude by contrasting the understanding of being as a *dynamis* that has emerged here with the two main sorts of interpretation being has received.

In the *Phaedo* Plato describes a form as “one, apart by itself, standing in the same way in respect of the same, and not at any time, in any manner, in any way, admitting any otherness” (*monoeides on auto kath’ hautō, hōsautōs kata tauta exei kai oudepote oudamē oudamōs alloiōsin oudemian endexetai*). As such, forms cannot mix with each other. However, we have seen that they can “make” sensible things large or beautiful. Hence, they count as beings according to the *Sophist*’s 247d–e definition. But these forms play little or no role in the *Sophist*.

12 In his careful study of negative predication, Paolo Crivelli (2011: 184–85), distinguishes four main lines of interpretation of 257b9–c3. These interpretations mostly concern linguistic predications, even though the passage in question grounds negations of names in relations of things (*pragmata*), as I have been arguing here. The interpretation that most easily accommodates things is what Crivelli calls the “incompatibility” interpretation, but he rejects it because of a “devastating textual difficulty: it presupposes that at some points in the *Sophist* the Greek word *heteron* expresses (not difference, as it does elsewhere, but) incompatibility”. In fact, the term has just this meaning at 255e11–12 when the Stranger declares that motion is entirely (*pantapasin*) other than rest (cf. 250a) in contrast with motion that is merely other than the same (256a3). The dialogue uses the term for a range of differences. So, the term itself is not a precise guide to its meaning. Likewise, the dialogue’s suggestion that the sophist’s soul is not just because it is ignorant (267c) masks the difference between the sophist’s necessarily lacking knowledge and his happening to lack knowledge. In general, the language of negation is more misleading than edifying because it encompasses a variety of differences. Aristotle’s famous “square of opposition” (Arist. *Int.* 10) is one attempt to delineate these differences. The *Sophist* is less systematic.

Crivelli (2011: 211), following M. Frede and others, thinks that being means definable. Ironically, that would imply that being itself, which as a *dynamis* has no determinate content, lacks being. Other greatest kinds are, at the very least, challenging to define and, so, may lack being if the latter means definable.

Insofar as the sophist thinks of justice *phantasmata*, he cannot know what justice is nor, accordingly be just. This implication picks up on the earlier claim that justice has the *dynamis* to become present to or absent from a soul (247a). The activity of the sophist undermines this *dynamis*.

What is important for us here are the kind being and the other kinds. They have no fixed content, and they are defined through each other. Being is a *dynamis* to make something else other or to be acted upon. It is, we have seen, equivalent to a *dynamis* to commune with other beings and also to a *dynamis* to move as well as a *dynamis* to rest. Being designates the elements that a productive art mixes together as well as the composite it produces. Motion refers to the mixing, and rest refers to its beginning and its result. Inasmuch as *dynamis* belongs to and depends upon the element itself, it does not change whether the element remains at rest as an element, comes to mix with other elements, or remains as part of the composite. As such, *dynamis* provides a way to grasp the activity of an art as an enduring kind even though the art deals with sensibles and produces composites that do not endure. *Dynamis* is, then, a way to know some of the sensible world that Plato repeatedly insists is unknowable; specifically, the part that comes under human arts. *Dynamis* is, thus, Plato's counterpart to Aristotle's sensible *energeia*: always the same without being eternal.¹³

The *Sophist* takes Plato's dichotomy between forms and sensibles and lays it on its side, as it were. It becomes the kinds rest and motion as well as two more kinds, same and other. A productive art unifies all five kinds: The elements are its beings, and each element is a *dynamis* to combine with others, but also each is the same as itself and different from the other elements. The process of the elements' combining is motion, the resulting composite is at rest. In this way the kinds make productive arts possible, and each kind's being defined in relation to the others mirrors the elements of an art, each of which is known through its relation to the other elements treated by the art.¹⁴ Thus, the sphere treated by each art takes on a wholeness that, we can speculate, imitates the unity of a separate form.

With this understanding of being, we can appreciate two strands of contemporary interpretation of the dialogue. According to J. L. Ackrill, the *Sophist* discovers the copula, and a number of readers have explored the dialogue from the perspective of language and grammar.¹⁵ There is some truth to

13 On Aristotle's use of *energeia* to know sensibles, see my chapter "Aristotle on Knowledge of Nature" (Halper 1993: 93–105).

14 There is an echo of the *Sophist's* account of the arts in Aristotle's claim that one science knows one genus (*Metaph.* 4.1003b19–21). Significantly, his example is grammar.

15 J. L. Ackrill (1967: 218) argues that "partakes of" (*metechein*) "has a role in Plato's philosophical language corresponding to the role of the copula in ordinary language". His paper has been masterfully defended against more recent criticism by Lesley Brown (2025). Ackrill's argument turns on the difference between "motion partakes of being" (256a1) and "motion partakes of other in respect of the same" (Ackrill 1967:

this notion because the copula, like being, has no determinate content but simply allows words to combine. Further, Ackrill is right to think that something resembling existence is at issue. However, the Stranger claims that language allows combinations of nouns and verbs. No copula is necessary for a well-formed sentence. In order to combine into a sentence, a noun and a verb must each be elements. Each must already be a being by itself: it is the *dynamis* of *each* individual element to commune with other elements that allows for the composite. Although the kind being is an element among kinds, being seems not to be an element of language here; at least, the Stranger's examples do not use a copula. I argued earlier that a sentence like "Theaetetus sits" is better understood as an assertion about the *dynamis* of human being than an assertion of existential fact. Yet, this sentence and other claims that elements have *dynamis* to combine with each other are not eternal truths but what we could call "enduring relations" that exist in nature and that are exploited by arts. As such, they are universal claims that give some knowability to sensible existence.

Akrill supposes that linguistic composites reveal something about the nature of things. However, the case of the sophist shows the difference between a portrait made in sentences and the *dynamis* of things to commune. One point of the dialogue would seem to be the opposite to the conclusion

208–209). The former is an existential assertion, the latter a simple predication, but both ascribe some character to motion and, so, are not, as Brown puts it, "sharply distinct". She notes, "every affirmative predicative use of *einai* presupposes that the subject 'is' i.e. exists" (she argues this thesis in Brown 1986: 65–67). Ackrill and Brown, along with their critics assume that the mixing of the kinds is about language or, at least, concepts (Akrill 1967: 207). However, the Stranger designates the kinds as things, either *ta onta* (258d) or *ta pragmata* (257c). Although there are passing references to naming and speaking throughout the discussion, it is not until 259e that he turns to the interweaving necessary for speech, and this involves, not the greatest kinds nor, indeed, kinds at all, but instances of kinds, particular nouns and verbs. To be sure, the Stranger insists that these latter are (263b); and, along the lines of what I argued earlier, they need to be in order have the possibility of combining with each other. However, the Stranger gives being no role in speech. Indeed, were being (*dynamis*) present in speech, then "Theaetetus sits" would be true even when he is walking around because the subject and predicate would have the possibility of combining and, thereby, be connected with being. So, the presence of being in speech would undermine much of speech as we use it. Moreover, inasmuch as the copula has a linguistic function – and, in fact, many languages make predications without a copula – and inasmuch as being is a kind, that is, a thing, being cannot be a copula. On the other hand, any mixing of the greatest kinds must always be a mixing of other kinds with being. In this latter respect, Ackrill and Brown are right, but the necessary inclusion of being in the mix makes it *unlike* the copula because being plays a real functional role in the mixing, whereas the copula is more of placeholder that alerts readers or auditors that it and what follows it are subject and predicate.

that Ackrill draws: language is not a good guide to things.¹⁶ The reason is that the *dynamis* to combine in the sphere of language differs from the *dynamis* to combine among the things that language signifies. The dialogue distances the images that the sophist makes in language from the realities of things that he speaks about without knowledge. Indeed, insofar as the former have the pretence to virtue, they are intrinsically false.

There is, as well, something to be said for Heidegger's understanding of the *Sophist*.¹⁷ He is right to think that being here has no determinate content in itself but manifests itself in sensibles and that being is, thereby, transcendent. There are many resonances between his philosophy and the *Sophist*, including the special role for human being (*Dasein*) through our raising the question of being and the notion that being discloses itself to us as presence (*Vorhandenheit*) in contrast with the objects used in the arts (*Zuhandenheit*). Finally, he appreciates how deeply mysterious Being is.

Despite all this, Heidegger is not a good guide to the *Sophist*. He has elevated being so much that it cannot play the role that it does in delimiting the elements of spheres treated by arts, nor can such a being explain the *dynamis* of one element to commune with some other elements but not with all. Such *dynamis* depend on the natures of individual elements in respect of other elements in their sphere, that is, on the being of the elements. Heidegger would make them depend on Being's somehow disclosing itself to Human Being and, thereby, on the artisan's agency. The *Sophist* rather locates the possibility of the works created by artisans in the *dynamis* of the beings (that is, the elements) they work with.

In sum, Ackrill and others in the Analytic tradition ignore other arts besides language, whereas Heidegger and his followers ignore the arts entirely. If the reading of the *Sophist* advanced here is correct, being is the *dynamis* of elements to commune with each other in such way that one element makes the other have its character and the other element is acted upon by it. The productive arts can combine only what has the *dynamis* to be and remain

16 Aristotle's *Categories*, a work that has also been supposed to be about the way we speak, suggests something comparable when it distinguishes between "in" and "said of" at 1a20–29. "Man is rational" and "man is musical" have the same grammatical form, but they express quite different types of sentences. Aristotle is not showing that grammar is a key to reality so much as that although grammar misleads us, we can surmount it.

17 He quotes a part of it as a preface to *Being and Time*, Heidegger 1962: 19. Although he mentions the *Sophist* only once in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, (2014: 62–63), I think it is a more sustained engagement with the dialogue. On pp. 33–37, for example, he expounds being as a possibility that lies in each being that "makes' this be a being instead of a nonbeing".

combined. Thus, being makes them possible, as I have said. The kinds motion and rest are also necessary to make an art possible because the elements must be combined – though the motion of combining can be what I have called “*Phaedo* motion” – and they must rest in the combined state for them to constitute a new whole that itself has a *dynamis* to combine with others. In short, the dialogue is showing how there can be productive arts. An art depends both on elements and the knowledge of their combinations. In each case, it is necessary to break down the sphere into elements, that is, beings, and to come to recognise which elements have the *dynamis* to combine with which others. Whereas philosophers have dialectical knowledge of the greatest kinds, it is the artisans who know particular beings by grasping their relations with other particular beings in their sphere.

If this understanding of being seems less profound and enticing than Heidegger's call to Being or less compelling than Ackrill's discussion of language, it is because we have lost an appreciation for the arts. Recall that Socrates in the *Apology* finds that, unlike poets and politicians, the artisans actually know something (22d) and that, aiming to explain moderation and order to Callicles, he points to the form that an artisan imposes on matter (Grg. 503e–504a). In fact, Plato often uses the arts to illustrate knowledge of separate forms. The *Sophist* aims to understand the arts. As the Stranger proposes, human arts resemble the divine arts that are responsible for nature (265d–e). The beings that human arts combine and separate retain a spark of that divine being.

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Movement, Life, Soul and Intelligence: the *Dynamis* of Being at *Sophist* 248e–249a and Its Reception in the History of Platonism

Francesco Fronterotta

In this chapter I intend to discuss the few yet quite controversial lines of *Soph.* 248e7–249a2 and some of their main theoretical and historical implications. I will gradually move from the interpretation of the passage and its context, with particular attention to its tone and general thrust, to the sense and significance of some of the problematic expressions appearing in it (especially the syntagma *patelōs on* and its description as *semnon* [*kai hagion*]). Next I will briefly highlight some moments in the exegetical history of the passage – most notably the interpretations offered by Aristotle, Theophrastus and Plotinus, who certainly allude to it – and make a connection between the status of (true) being and some of its properties, which can be traced back to some form of “mobility” or “dynamicity”, a certain kind of “vitality” and strictly “intellectual” features.¹

As is well known, the passage comes at the end of the celebrated *gigantomachia* between the “earthborn” and the “friends of the ideas”. The former exclude from being all that is not a “body”, whereas the latter identify that which is with certain unmovable and unchanging “ideas”. A possible mediation between these two positions is here put up for discussion, a new and different definition of being as a *dynamis eit'eis to poiein ... eit'eis to pathein*. The “materialists” accept this definition without much resistance, while the “idealists” fiercely oppose it. For they are well aware that subscribing to it would mean for them to have to admit that ideas, i.e. real being, are subject to some kind of affection or action (*pathēma ē poiēma*) and, accordingly, to a form of movement (*kinēsis*) – yet this is impossible on their doctrine, whereby movement is limited to the sphere of becoming.² It is worth pointing out that the key problem with the

1 The most recent discussion of this passage is to be found in Morel 2018: 11–26.

2 See also on this point in this volume ch. 5: 107–108, 112. For the translation and interpretation of this *Sophist* passage, which raises major exegetical problems, starting from the reconstruction of the different stages of the argument, see my introduction and relevant notes in Fronterotta 2007: 75–89; 370–79. I offered a detailed discussion of the nature and implications of the definition of being as a *dynamis* of acting and being acted upon in my papers Fronterotta 1995 and 2008.

“idealists” is precisely, and *exclusively*, whether *kinēsis* (or some form of it) should be included in being, as the argument aims to have them acknowledge, or excluded from it, as they fiercely maintain (248e). It is no coincidence that the one thing they are explicitly forced to admit at the end of the discussion, when they are definitively refuted, is the presence of *kinēsis* (or some form of it) within the sphere of being (249b–d).

I will now quote the passage coming immediately after, so that we can have a closer look at it:

What then, by Zeus? Are we going to be so easily convinced that really movement, life, soul and intelligence (*kinesin kai zōēn kai psychēn kai phronēsin*) are not present in the totality of full being (*tō pantelōs onti mē pareinai*), and that being neither lives nor thinks (*mēde zēn auto mēde phronein*), but venerable and holy, it stands, devoid of intellect, unmovable and at rest (*alla semnon kai hagion, noun ouk echon, akinēton hestos einai*)? (*Sph.* 248e–249a)

The passage is extremely complex and highly controversial. I will focus on its crucial aspect for my present purpose, i.e., as is clear, the inclusion of «movement, life, soul and intelligence» (*kinesin kai zōēn kai psychēn kai phronēsin*) in *pantelōs on*. Is this “inclusion” to be taken seriously or not? If so, is it to be interpreted literally or in some metaphorical way? What precisely does this “inclusion” consist in and what are its consequences? To answer these questions, we have first to take a stance on the meaning of the syntagma *pantelōs on*. Now, the adverb *pantelōs* may be construed in an *extensive* sense, i.e. as referred to the “whole” or “totality” of being and the things which are, hence as designating such a large ontological sphere as to encompass both the sensible and the intelligible world. On this interpretation, the inclusion of movement, life, soul and intelligence in the “whole” or “totality” of being would not be problematic at all. For in accordance with the view defended by the “idealists”, it could be argued that movement, life, soul and intelligence are included in the “whole” or “totality” of the things which are, yet confined to the sensible section of *pantelōs on* – which would guarantee the absolute immobility of its intelligible section.³ Against this reading, however, one might claim that *pantelōs on*, while covering a plural and comprehensive sphere of reality, cannot include the sensible world. There are a number of reasons for this.

3 This is the traditional interpretation of the syntagma *pantelōs on*, suggested e.g. by Cornford 1935: 245 and Brisson 2008. See also in this volume ch. 5: 109–111.

First, the syntagma *to pantelōs on* is surely to be contrasted with *to mēdamōs on* mentioned at 237b. As the latter is clearly referred to absolute non-being, its opposite, i.e. *to pantelōs on*, can plausibly be thought to designate that which really and fully is. In addition, at 249b it is claimed that, were movement not included among the things which are, i.e. in *pantelōs on*, and were all things unmovable (as the “idealists” maintain), there would be no *nous* «for anyone, of anything and in any way». Now, the word *nous* normally refers to true knowledge of being proper, as distinct from the intermediate epistemic form, opinion, which is only directed towards sensible things. Finally, at 249c–d the claim is made that the philosopher should acknowledge that «both domains, of unmovable as well as moving things, are being and everything». But a few lines later (254a–b) the philosopher is described as someone who in his reasonings always sticks to being (*tē tou ontos aei dia logismōn proskeimenos idea*). And being is a “region” difficult to see because of its brightness (*dia to lampron au tēs chōras*), as the eyes of most people’s soul are unable to resist the sight of the divine (*ta gar tēs tōn pollōn psyches ommata karterein pros to theion aphorōnta adynata*). From which we can gather that what the philosopher contemplates, i.e. the whole and comprehensive being of unmovable as well as moving things, is nothing other than the highest ontological sphere, i.e. the intelligible alone. As a result, an *intensive* translation and interpretation of the syntagma *pantelōs on* seems to be preferable. The expression should be rendered as “that which really and fully is” and construed as referring exclusively to the intelligible. This brings us back to the problem about how movement, life, soul and intelligence can be included in being proper, i.e. the intelligible.⁴ However, I would supplement this *intensive* interpretation, which for the reasons I have just explained I consider as the most convincing, with an *extensive* nuance. Though identical with the intelligible proper, *pantelōs on* has a plural and organic structure – not in the sense it encompasses the sensible world, but in that it is compatible with real and full being embracing an organic plurality of intelligibles. The overall aim of the passage is not so much (or just) to show how much movement, life, soul and intelligence are, but to place them within the *whole* or *totality of the things which really and fully are*. This is confirmed beyond a doubt by the fact that the inclusion of movement, life, soul and intelligence in *pantelōs on* is referred to by the verb *pareinai*, “to be present” or

4 While drawing from it different consequences, the following scholars adopt an intensive translation and interpretation of the syntagma *pantelōs on*: Gerson 2006: 292, n. 3; Centrone 2008: XXXV–XXXIX; Ferrari 2012: 602–04; as well as Morel 2018: 15–17. Karfik (2010) subscribes to the intensive interpretation, but denies that the argument implies the inclusion of movement, life, soul and intelligence in *pantelōs on*.

“to be included in”, expressing the presence of something in a place or, in this context, in a certain sphere of reality, not just a higher or lower degree of ontological intension.⁵

From all this it will be clear that in my view the passage should be taken seriously and literally, and that it does imply the inclusion of movement, life, soul and intelligence in *pantelōs on*, in the sphere of realities or beings which fully “are”, i.e., in a Platonic context, intelligible ideas. And it is precisely this concluding attack, if taken seriously and literally, that deals a mortal blow to the resistance of the “idealists”. What remains to be explained – and this is the second crucial aspect for a correct understanding of the passage – is why Plato describes *pantelōs on* as «venerable and holy» (*semnon kai hagion*). This expression can be construed in at least two ways, both of which are in my opinion perfectly acceptable from a grammatical point of view. It can be taken (1) as having concessive meaning, as I would tend to prefer («... that being neither lives nor thinks, but, *although it is* venerable and holy, it stands, devoid of intellect, unmovable and at rest ...»); or it can be interpreted (2) in a causal sense («...that being neither lives nor thinks, but, *since it is* venerable and holy, it stands, devoid of intellect, unmovable and at rest ...»). On the first reading, the “venerability” and “holiness” of being depend on its “mobility” and “vitality”. So it is contradictory to postulate that it «stands ... unmovable and at rest», if it is really «venerable and holy» and therefore necessarily “mobile” and “vital”. On the second reading, the “venerability” and “holiness” of being are linked to its “immobility”. So it is impossible to accept that «venerable and holy, it stands ... unmovable and at rest», as it should be thought of as possessing “mobility” and “vitality”. In this case, we should assume Plato is representing *pantelōs on* in an ironic or even derogatory way. Its “venerability” and “holiness”, then, would be comparable to those of silent and “dead” paintings – as suggests a *Phaedrus* passage (275d) where the adverb *semnōs* is used – and should be attributed to the absolutely unmovable being of the “idealists”, whom this passage is meant to refute, but not to *pantelōs on* rightly understood, which necessarily possesses “mobility” and “vitality”.⁶ Personally, I am unable to see any irony, much less contempt, in these lines. To me, they look charged with rhetorical intensity stemming from the importance of the problem at issue, as this is the decisive move to overcome the resistance of the “idealists”. Also, as is claimed immediately after (249a3), were one to deny that movement, life, soul and intelligence are present in *pantelōs on*, one would have to accept an argument

⁵ This same thesis is defended by Abbate 2016: 228.

⁶ *Ibid.* and Morel 2018: 17, who regards this reading as preferable from a textual viewpoint as well.

described as *deinos*, «fearsome» or «impious». Whatever the rhetorical colour of the passage, the use of this adjective is clearly at odds with the postulation of the “venerability” and “holiness” of being. As a result, these should be seen as connected to the characters that the argument against the “idealists” presents *pantelōs on* as having, i.e. “movement”, “life”, “soul” and “intelligence”, in that order. It is, then, in virtue of its “mobility”, “vitality”, etc., that *pantelōs on* is to be conceived of as “venerable” and “holy”. Rejecting these properties, as the “idealists” do, has a “fearsome” or “impious” consequence, as it amounts to denying the “venerability” and “holiness” of being. For this as well as other reasons that will become clear later in the discussion of the exegetical history of the passage, I prefer, as I said, the first of the two readings and interpretations mentioned above. But let me for now leave aside this point and focus on the key question about the significance and consistence of the inclusion of movement, life, soul and intelligence in *pantelōs on* – a question unrelated to the formal determination of the sense of its *semnotēs*.

To begin with, I should like to note that in my opinion Plato’s dialogues contain insurmountable objections to the view that being and the intelligible realities can have a soul and an intellect.⁷ Plato, to put it quite simply, regards soul as having two basic ontological features. It has a nature and structure intermediate between the sensible and the intelligible, and is made up of sensible as well as intelligible elements, or a mixture of both.⁸ This means it cannot be entirely reduced to either the sensible or the intelligible sphere. Rather, in virtue of its moving function, it can govern the sensible and corporeal world, and that depends on the knowledge of the intelligible its noetic function enables it to gain.⁹ Consequently, the relation between the soul and the intelligible is not one of identity but, as is repeatedly claimed in the dialogues, “congenericity” (*syngeneia*),¹⁰ a form of “kinship” and partial “communication” allowing the soul to have access to the intelligible and to contemplate the ideas.¹¹ This provides indubitable evidence for the soul’s diversity from the ideas. Were this not the case and were the soul identical with the ideas, it would make no sense to raise the problem about its access to the intelligible and the conditions of its contemplation. Let us then re-examine the question starting from the first term of the series in the *Sophist* passage, i.e. movement.

7 This is the view expressly defended by L.P. Gerson 2006.

8 Cf. *Ti.* 34c–36d.

9 Cf. *Ti.* 36d–37c.

10 Cf. e.g. *Men.* 81c–d, *Phd.* 79b–d, *R.* X 611d–e. On the crucial notion of *syngeneia* in Plato’s dialogues, with particular reference to its onto-cosmological and epistemological implications, see now Delle Donne 2021.

11 Cf. again *R.* X 611d–e and *Ti.* 42b. But see too the celebrated myth at *Phdr.* 248a–c.

Immediately we are faced with an evident difficulty. From the inclusion of movement in *pantelōs on* it would seem to follow that the latter is affected by the former – which would be at odds with one of the classic assumptions of Plato's concept of the intelligible, i.e. its being by itself unmovable and unchanging.¹² Like most scholars,¹³ I do not regard this as an inevitable consequence or as being suggested by the text. Rather, I incline to think that the inclusion of movement in *pantelōs on* and the resulting relationship between movement and the intelligible – two theoretical points undeniably present in the *Sophist* passage – can be accounted for without questioning the assumption of the immobility and immutability of being. We should simply focus on the ontological difference between the sensible and the intelligible world. Consider the case of any sensible property with respect to the corresponding intelligible idea. The former displays concretely and actually the features of which it is the property, whereas the latter expresses the essence or form of that property. Multiplicity, for example, manifests itself at the sensible level as a concrete and actual plurality of beings, while at the intelligible level it is the essence or form of multiplicity – yet it is not multiple, for the idea of multiplicity is in itself one, not multiple. Similarly, *kinēsis* of the intelligible and in the intelligible, unlike its sensible “version”, is not a concrete change of place or aspect, much

12 That on this argument intelligible ideas turn out to be subject to movement, if not wholly or essentially, at least insofar as they are known, and therefore moved, by the intellect, is claimed by. Moravcsik 1962: 40, and Bluck 1975: 96–100.

13 Scholars who strongly denied that Plato may have so dramatically changed his views about the intelligible and come to think of ideas as being in some way moving and mutable include most notably Cornford 1935: 244–48; Cherniss 1945: 81, and Vlastos 1973: 270–317, 309–317. In defense of this position it can be recalled that *Euthyphr.* 11a, by pointing out «la possibilità di *pathē* relativi all'*ousia* che non modificano la natura di ciò che è affetto» [the possibility of *pathē* concerning *ousia* that do not alter the nature of what is affected] (cf. Centrone 1995: 151, n. 45), could provide a basis for claiming that ideas are the object of knowledge, and accordingly are affected by a *pathos*, without this implying they are necessarily moved. A different view is suggested by L.M. De Rijk (1986: 105–09). De Rijk adopts the opposite perspective: we should not ask whether ideas move, but become aware that movement is included in the intelligible, in addition to and among ideas. There remains, however, a problem about the consequences of this passage. Once movement is introduced into the intelligible, will it follow that ideas move? De Rijk answers this quite reasonable question by suggesting a distinction whereby ideas, as separate and transcendent beings, stay absolutely pure and unmovable, whereas, insofar as they are subject to participation by the sensibles, they come into contact with changing things, and are subject to an affection setting them in motion. Personally, I regard such a distinction as implausible, since no mention at all is made here of participation of changing things in intelligible ideas nor does sensible reality seem to be in any way referred to. See also in this volume ch. 2: 45–53, and ch. 5: 106–108.

less an actual alteration, but only a condition which is in some way *dynamic* and compatible with the ontological requirements of immobility and immutability that must by definition belong to the intelligible. To clarify what precisely this condition is and what its *dynamism* consists in, it is helpful to focus on the other three terms of the series in the *Sophist* passage, i.e. “life”, “soul” and “intelligence”, which should be viewed as illustrating the first, movement, rather than as so many additional characters of *pantelōs on*.

That this is possible, and indeed probable, is proved by what I said earlier about the central role played by *kinēsis* in the discussion and refutation of the thesis of the “idealists”. The new definition of being as a *dynamis* of acting and being acted upon (247d–e) aims at forcing the “idealists” to acknowledge that being is not entirely unmovable and inert, and this is why they reject it (248e). Basically, the only outcome of the discussion is that movement should be included in being and therefore the view of the “idealists” should be dropped – which implicitly amounts to overcoming their opposition to the definition of being as a *dynamis* of acting and being acted upon (249b–d). I believe the very text of our passage, at 248e–249a, suggests this reading. We only need to take the sequence *kinēsīn kai zōēn kai psychēn kai phronēsīn* as having exegetical force, and to consider *kinēsis* and its inclusion in *pantelōs on* as the pivot of the demonstration, and the terms *zōē*, *psychē* and *phronēsis* as its specifications, i.e. as clarifying what kind of movement is presented as included in being.¹⁴ A paraphrase of the passage might read like this: “Are we really going to be so easily convinced that movement, i.e. that *vital* movement which is of the same kind as that produced by the activity of the *soul* and corresponds to the noetic function of the *intellect*, is not present in the totality of full being, and that the totality of full being does not possess *vital* or *intellectual* features, but, venerable and holy, stands, devoid of *noetic* character, unmovable and at rest?”. As can be seen, in this case we would get a consistent answer to the question we raised a while ago. Unlike sensible movement, which implies a concrete change of place or an actual alteration of state, *kinēsis* of the intelligible and in the intelligible is a kind of dynamism that can be called “vital”, as it is akin to that produced by the soul. Hence, it is subject to strict order and regularity, it does not imply any movement in space, it unfolds in purely noetic or intellectual terms and is independent of any connection with matter or bodies and the changes they are subject to. In short, *pantelōs on* should be seen as possessing a “vital” movement which is *similar* to that of the soul yet does not involve its presence, and a “dynamic” character which is *similar* to that of the intellect yet

14 On the close connection between “movement”, “life” and “soul” (and “intelligence”), a recurrent theme in Plato’s thinking, see again Fronterotta 2007a: 379–80, n. 197.

does not involve its presence. In other words, this twofold analogy should not lead to the extreme and in my eyes untenable conclusion that *pantelōs on* is really “ensouled” and “thinking”. Let me now sketch the ultimate consequence of my interpretation, and suggest a view that certainly needs a firmer and more extensive foundation than I can give here. The “vital” movement of *pantelōs on* mentioned and discussed in this passage is a development of the definition of being as a *dynamis* of acting and being acted upon. Referred to later in the dialogue as a *dynamis koinōnias* (at 251e, or *dynamis epikoinōnias* at 252d), it is the intelligibles’ capacity of establishing reciprocal relationships of “communication” or “participation”,¹⁵ which constitutes their being and definition. Being’s *kinēsis*, compared to a psychic or noetic feature, should be conceived of as the series of movements, whether active or passive, that establish a reciprocal *koinōnia* between the intelligibles. “Communicating” is an action, i.e. an active movement coming from a *dynamis* of acting, whereas “being communicated” is an affection, i.e. a passive movement coming from a *dynamis* of being acted upon. The “vitality” of *pantelōs on*, then, manifests itself wholly in its internal dynamic-relational dimension.¹⁶

While based on elements that are in part inevitably conjectural, this interpretation seems to me to be the most consistent (or the least inconsistent) for a non-aporetic understanding of the *Sophist* passage and its argumentative context, as it accounts for the dynamic nature and organic structure of being and its function as a model for plural and changing sensible reality.¹⁷ This brings us to conclude by a very short discussion of some moments in the exegetical history of our passage. We will find once again the connection between being and *semnotēs* and, most importantly, we will see this connection described in terms of a “vital” and “intellectual” or “noetic” dynamism or activity. I will only discuss Aristotle’s, Theophrastus’ and Plotinus’ position and three sections of

15 For the interpretation of the definition of being as a *dynamis* of acting and being acted upon (249b–d) and its later developments in the *Sophist* as a *dynamis koinōnias*, and therefore as key to understanding the ontological section of the dialogue about *koinōnia tōn genōn*, see my study Fronterotta 1995; 2008. See also in this volume ch. 6: 138–144.

16 A less explicit conclusion than mine is arrived at by Centrone 2008: XXXIX, and, more cautiously, Morel 2018: 17–18. It is unclear to me whether M. Abbate (2016) also accepts a purely dynamic-relational interpretation of the “vitality” of the intelligible or regards it as having a strictly psychic and noetic dimension, as suggested by his reference to Plotinus’ reading of the *Sophist* passage. A different reading of the relationship between “acting” and “communicating” and “being affected” and “being communicated” is suggested by Teisserenc (2007: 41–42; 2012: 91) and Wiitala 2018: 179–80. I will consider this point on a future occasion.

17 I attempted to elaborate on this interpretative hypothesis, particularly with regard to the conception of the intelligible model as a *panteles zōon* in the *Timaeus*, in Fronterotta 2021.

their works, leaving a more extensive and detailed reconstruction for another occasion.

At *Metaphysics* XII 9, 1074b15–30, while offering his celebrated and extremely complex account of the status and condition of the prime unmoved mover and its function as the ultimate principle of movement and highest intellect, Aristotle raises the following problem: what characters of this intellect allow us to regard it as the most divine of beings? If the intellect were not endowed with thought and did not think (*eite gar mēden noeī*), it could not be “venerable” (*ti an eiē to semnon*) and would look like someone who is sleeping (*echei hōsper an ei ho katheudōn*). In addition, if it did not think by itself, i.e. did not think itself, it could not possibly be the best *ousia* of all. What interests us here is the first bit of the argument. Aristotle clearly establishes a close connection between the thought of the highest intellect and the *semnotēs* of its condition. Thought is the pure activity of thinking, devoid of any potential dimension or feature, and fully coincides with the essence of the intellect. The latter’s *semnotēs*, then, can be regarded as a sign of the vitality, dynamism and intellectual features that characterise it and that Aristotle explicitly attributes to it. I think there can be no doubt that Aristotle has in mind our *Sophist* passage here, and nothing leads us to assume he is suggesting a correction of Plato’s view. Indeed, he takes over his master’s position without any changes, though of course he places it within his own peculiar theoretical perspective. Noetic activity and intellectual dynamism are the distinctive and discriminating element of the “venerability” of the highest intellect and are clearly incompatible with the absolute inactivity or immobility of someone who is sleeping.

Theophrastus’ stance is somewhat less explicit. That is why, to the best of my knowledge, it has not yet been adequately discussed with respect to our present topic. At the beginning of the work, perhaps fragmentary, known as *Metaphysics*¹⁸ (4a–b), he asks about the status of the inquiry into “first things” (*tōn proton theōrian*), described as determinate and always identical (*hōrismenē kai aei kata tauta*) as opposed to the study of nature, which deals with beings that are mutable and therefore various and disorderly (*polychousterā, kai ... ataktotera, metabolas echousa pantoias*). This is why “some people”, no doubt including Plato and the Platonists, conceived of this inquiry as concerned with intelligible, not sensible beings – since the former are unmovable and unchanging (*en noētois, ouk aisthētois, ... hōs akinētois kai ametablētois*) – and accordingly saw it as «more venerable and higher» (*semnoteran kai meizō nomizousin autēn*, 4a8–9). To settle the issue, we have first to clarify whether

18 See the comprehensive survey offered by L. Repici (2013: 9–29).

there is some form of contact or communication (*synaphē tis kai hoion koinōnia*) between the intelligibles and the sensibles, or whether they are separate (*kechōrismena*), though making up between them the whole of reality (*synergounta de pōs eis tēn pasan ousian*). Theophrastus leans towards the first option. He argues in favour of a relationship between eternal and perishable beings, between the intelligibles and the sensibles, a relationship of priority-posteriority (*ta men protera ta de hystera*) such as that between principles and the things of which they are principles (*archas ta d'hypo tas archas*). Were this not the case, the universe would be “episodic” (*epeisodiōdes to pan*) – and it is certainly no coincidence that this criticism recalls Aristotle’s well-known objection to Speusippus.¹⁹ But what kind of relationship is this and what action or function does it imply by first intelligible beings upon sensible beings subordinate to them? For Theophrastus this relation cannot be conceived of in purely mathematical terms, as Speusippus would have done, for in that case the intelligibles should be regarded as purely mathematical beings. Yet mathematical beings are absolutely “insufficient” or “unable” to produce by themselves any effect (*outh'holōs axiochrea pantos*) upon sensible things. They are abstract entities with no nature of their own (*auta de di'hautōn oudemian echein physin*), invented by ourselves (*memēchanēmena ... di'hēmōn*) in order to provide the sensibles with «figures, forms and ratios» (*schemata te kai morphas kai logous*). As a result, mathematical beings and numbers are unable to produce in the sensibles such effects as “life” and “movement” (*empoiēsai kathaper zōēn kai kinēsēsin autois*, 4b3–4), and first intelligible beings have to be sought in some other prior and higher substance (*hetera tis ousia protera kai kreittōn*). It will be necessary to establish whether this substance is one or multiple in number, species or genus, and to pose the indispensable premise that it possesses some “capacity” and “power” with respect to other things (*dynamēi tini kai hyperochē tōn allōn*, 4b14), as if it had a divine nature (*hōsper an ei ton theon*): «For divine is the principle of all things, by which all things are and abide» (*theia gar ē pantōn archē, di'hēs hapanta kai estin kai diamenei*). In what immediately follows (4b–5a), Theophrastus argues that the principle or principles which, in virtue of this higher “capacity” or “power” (*tini dynamēi kreittōni kai protera*), originate movement in the sensibles (*aitian theteon ... tēs kinēsēōs*), i.e. the latter’s chief characteristic (*hē de physis ... en kinēsei kai tout'autēs to idion*), should be viewed as unmovable (*akinētos*), despite their “dynamic” and causal features. I cannot offer here a detailed commentary on such a difficult and obscure passage. I will only quite rapidly remark that

19 Cf. Arist. *Metaph.* A 10, 1075b37; N 3, 1090b19.

Theophrastus initially attributes “venerability” to the *theōria* of first intelligible beings because of their immobility. But, as he immediately points out, their immobility does not imply they are separate from that of which they are principles, nor that they are radically inert like mathematical beings. In that case, they would have no causal power, and reality would be reduced to a disconnected series of separate and unrelated “episodes”. The condition of the intelligibles is “dynamism” arising out of a *dynamis* and initiating “life” and “movement” in what is subject to them. “Vitality” and “movement”, however, do not belong as such to the intelligibles initiating them. The “venerability” of the intelligibles depends on their dynamic and causally effective character, which is not immediately identical with its effects, but is their cause. It can convincingly be argued that Theophrastus here is thinking of our *Sophist* passage. First, the language he uses is very close to Plato’s. Second, he describes first beings or principles as intelligible, endowed with a *dynamis* initiating “life” and “movement” that, while produced in the sensible world, depend on and stem from the dynamism of the intelligibles. These have by themselves no part in the “life” and “movement” they originate in the sensible world, yet appear to be “active” and “dynamic” – which represents the reason for their “venerability”.

Finally, as far as Plotinus is concerned, I will just refer to *Enneads* VI 7 [38], 39, 28–34, with its discussion of why the first principle, the One-Good, has no capacity to think anything, including itself.²⁰

But how could <the Good> be related to itself, if it does not know itself, but, venerable, stands at rest and unmovable (*semnon hestēxetai*)? Now, when talking about being, Plato claimed that it thinks (*peri tēs ousias ... hoti noēsei*) and therefore it cannot stand, venerable, at rest and unmovable, insofar as it thinks (*ou semnon hestēxoito hōs tēs ousias men noousēs*). By contrast, that which does not think stands, venerable, at rest and unmovable (*tou de mē noountos semnou hestēxomenou*). And Plato uses the words “it stands at rest and unmovable” because he could not express himself otherwise (*to men hestēxoito tō mē allōs an dedynēsthai hermēneusai*), as he considers to be more venerable and really venerable that which is beyond thought (*semnoteron de kai ontōs semnon ... to hyperbebēkos to noein*).

20 For a discussion of the context and the arguments developed in this long and complex treatise of the *Enneads*, see my introduction and relevant notes in Fronterotta 2007b: 15–38; 166–67.

At first blush, one gets the impression that Plotinus, making explicit reference to the *Sophist* passage, is here connecting the characters of “venerability” and “immobility”. This seems to lead him to exclude that for Plato being, insofar as it is endowed with thought, can therefore be unmovable and “venerable”. This character would only belong to the first principle, the One-Good, as it does not think and is unmovable (l. 29–32). Immediately after, however, showing his usual tendency to overinterpret Plato’s dialogues, he claims that Plato viewed *also* moving and thinking being as “venerable”, though less “venerable” than the One-Good, which is unmovable and devoid of thought. Thus, Plato would have established a hierarchy, or difference in degree, of “venerability” between being and the One-Good, based on the former’s intellectual “mobility” as opposed to the latter’s “immobility” and absence of thought (l. 32–34). No doubt Plotinus feels the need for such an overinterpretation because he is well aware that Plato considered moving and thinking being as “venerable”. Therefore, in order to preserve the superiority of the first principle, he thinks it necessary to add that Plato regarded being as *less* “venerable” than the One-Good. In other words, if Plato had just argued, on Plotinus’ interpretation, that being is not “venerable” because it moves and thinks (while only the One-Good, as Plotinus maintains, is “venerable” in that it is unmovable and devoid of thought), then Plotinus would have no reason to insist that the first principle is *more* “venerable” and *really* “venerable” (*semnoteron de kai ontōs semnon*).

This short survey enables me to conclude that, despite the dramatic changes of the philosophical context within which the interpretation of our *Sophist* passage occurs, there is basic continuity between Aristotle’s, Theophrastus’ and Plotinus’ views. What changes is surely (1) the “subject” to which “venerability” is ascribed (for Plato it is *pantelōs on*, for Aristotle *nous* or the prime unmoved mover, for Theophrastus first beings; for Plotinus *nous* or the second hypostasis); (2) the nature of the “dynamism” associated with “venerability” (it is relational “dynamism” for Plato, noetic “dynamism” for Aristotle, causal “dynamism” for Theophrastus, noetic-generative “dynamism” for Plotinus); (3) the “object” of the dynamic action (the intelligibles for Plato, *nous* as the object of its own thinking for Aristotle, the sensible world for Theophrastus, the soul – the hypostasis inferior to *nous* – for Plotinus). But the description of intelligible being or intellectual reality as “venerable” stays constant. Aristotle, Theophrastus and Plotinus view it as a positive feature of the intelligible, related to its characters of noetic activity, vitality or dynamism. So, contrary to what has been argued,²¹ it seems implausible that, as compared to both the

21 Most recently by Morel 2018: 21–22 and 24–25.

Sophist passage in itself and its interpretation by Aristotle, Theophrastus and Plotinus, this *may* represent a break with or a reversal of Plato's view of the *semnotēs* of *pantelōs on*. Aristotle, Theophrastus and Plotinus consider "venerability" as a consequence of the view that being has a form of noetic dynamism analogous to intellectual activity and vitality, and they regard Plato as the founder of this conception. This being so, I find it hard to believe that particularly Plato's direct pupil, however critical, and his subtle interpreter, however original, while explicitly taking over this conception, may have attributed to *semnotēs*, which on this interpretation characterises *pantelōs on*, an opposed meaning to the original one in the *Sophist* passage, so reversing the nearly corpse-like *inertness* of the unmovable and sleeping being that Plato, in order to refute them, would have described the idealists as committed to, and turning it into the *venerability* that is an essential and distinctive feature of moving and vital being.

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Plato's *Philebus* on Mixing the Powers of Pleasure and Knowledge in a Good Life

Cristina Ionescu

Pleasure and knowledge are spoken of as powers (*dynameis*) in the *Philebus* 44c7, 44d4, 57e7, 58a, 58d4, 67a and the dialogue culminates with the right mixing of these powers as ingredients in a good life (59d–64b). My present attempt is to explore two major aspects of this mixing: What are the respective powers involved in the mixing? and What happens to them in the process of mixing?

I proceed by first analysing Plato's usage of the notion of power throughout this dialogue and argue that *dynamis* is used in relation to distinct types of realities and, correspondingly, manifests distinctive causal roles in each case. This analysis will illuminate the sense in which knowledge and pleasure, respectively, are said to be powers. The second part of my paper will focus on the actual mixing of pleasure with knowledge described at 59d–64b. I argue that a proper understanding of their mixing must also consider the other powers at work, specifically, the power ascribed to the Good, the power attributed to the Unlimited, and the innate power of our soul to love the truth.

1 *Dynamis* in the *Philebus*

Dynamis is the noun answering to the common verb to be able (*dynasthai*), and it designates the ability to be acted upon as well as the ability to act on something else, and thus includes both active and passive aspects. As earlier chapters in this book have already shown, Plato uses the term with these connotations in the *Phaedrus*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and also in the *Timaeus*, where in its active sense it refers to the powers of the four elements (*Ti.* 32c), the pungent properties of substances like soda (66a), the congealing power of fibrin acting in the blood (85d), and in its passive sense to the capacity for receiving affections. In the *Philebus* also, as we will see, *dynamis* is used in both active and passive sense.

1.1 *The Powers of Body and Soul in the Universe and in Us: Powers to Make Mixtures and to Arrange and Order Them*

The first use of *dynamis* in our dialogue occurs in the context of the cosmological argument (*Phlb.* 28d–30c), where we are told that the elements that make up the universe exceed by much in power (*dynamis*) and purity (*eilikrinēs*) the elements that make up our own body (29b, 29c), and hence, that cosmic *nous* also surpasses our own reason in power (*dynamis*), beauty, and purity (30a–d). The argument goes like this:

1. The universe is governed by reason (*nous*) and intelligence (*phronēsis*) (28d–e).
2. The elements of which our body is constituted are a weak reflection of the elements present in the universe at large: they lack the purity (*eilikrinēs*) and the power (*dynamis*) that characterise these elements as part of the composition of the body of the universe.
3. The universe is constituted of the same elements, though of superior size, beauty, and power (29b–c).
4. The higher power elements are responsible for generating, nurturing, increasing or ruling the elements of lower power, not the other way around. (29c–d5). We also have souls.
5. Therefore, the universe must have a soul that is responsible for generating and maintaining our own soul (30a).
6. Hence, the soul of the universe, this all-encompassing wisdom, must be responsible for the order and training of our own soul and body as well as for the order of the whole universe, which is more beautiful and purer than our own (30b).

There are two types of causality in question in this argument, one is generative or productive, whereby mixed elements are produced by purer and more powerful ones, and the other one is a sort of formal causality responsible for ordering and arranging existent parts, and the latter, formal or intellectual sort of cause, is the one ruling over the former. In both cases, purity (*eilikrinēs*) and power (*dynamis*) go hand in hand: the greater degree of power belongs to whatever has greater purity, greater beauty, and heightened degree of order and wisdom. Furthermore, the higher power (*dynamis*) has the role of a causal agent in relation to something of lower power.¹

1 For a detailed account of the cosmological argument see Fronterotta 2016.

1.2 *The Power of Dialectic and the Innate Power of Our Soul: Power to Love the Truth*

Dynamis is also explicitly associated with our own human reason and with dialectic as the highest of the sciences that our reason is capable of. Reason exercises itself in different degrees in a variety of types of knowledge, ranging between the lower, productive ones, guided by lucky guesses, and the higher, educational ones, like pure mathematics and dialectic. Knowledge is first divided into the productive and the educational sort; each of these in turn is divided into more specific types. Productive knowledge is divided into (a) knowledge associated with the less precise of the productive arts, guided by lucky guesses (music, medicine, agriculture, navigation, strategy) and (b) the more precise productive arts (shipbuilding, house-building). Educational knowledge comprises (a) applied, vulgar mathematics (the “arithmetic of the many”, who “compute sums of unequal units, such as two armies or two herds of cattle, or any two units regardless of whether they are very small or huge”, 56d9–e1), (b) pure mathematics (56e–57a), and (c) dialectic (58a1–5).²

The criteria used for adjudicating superiority among various kinds of knowledge are purity (*eilikrinēs*, 55c), truth (55c, 57d), certainty (*saphesteron* 57b), precision (*akribeia* 55a, 57d), and the use of measure and number (56e, 57d). Purity has already been associated with higher power in the cosmological argument (28d–30b), and this new context strengthens that connection. The purer a science is, the more powerful it is. The purity of a science depends on the degree of purity of its object. This means that sciences whose object is universal and unchanging are purer than those allowing for a lot of imprecisions and whose objects are subject to change. It is therefore only natural for Socrates to declare that the power of dialectic (57e7) would repudiate us if we put any other science ahead of her (57e7), for dialectic is the science concerned with Being and with what is really and forever in every way eternally selfsame by far the truest of all kinds of knowledge (58a).³

In the cosmological argument, the causal agency performed by whatever had higher power was generative or productive. It was responsible for producing elements of weaker power from preexistent elements (Limit and the

2 Compare *Phlb.* 54a–59d to the *Republic's* Divided Line (*R.* 509d–511e). For detailed discussions of the classification of knowledge in the *Philebus* see Harvey 2012, Harte 2018, Moss 2018.

3 For a refined and subtle account of the difference between the objects of dialectic and the objects of the philosophical mathematical arts see Harvey 2012. On Harvey's account, while objects of both disciplines are eternal and unchanging, the greater power of dialectic compared with even the mathematics of philosophers comes from the fact that the objects of dialectic are also *what something really is*, they have ultimate causal responsibility for determining the nature of things, their essences, in a way that the objects of mathematics do not.

Unlimited). It seems though that when we now talk about the power of dialectic as higher than the powers of every other type of knowledge or art, we have a different sort of cause in mind. The respective powers of the sciences are measured in relation to *how fully they grasp reality*. The imprecise arts have weaker power because they grasp only transient, unstable entities and as such they traffic in opinions. The educational arts that are precise, like mathematics, have higher power than the former in that they deal with eternal and unchanging pure mathematical realities; yet since they are restricted to mathematics, they still fall short of the power of dialectic, whose primary object is the Good. What gives more or less power to a science is the object it aims to uncover, the Good, mathematical units, changing or shifting entities, respectively.

The power of dialectic to uncover truth originates or springs from the power of our soul to love the truth and to do everything for its sake (58d4). This psychic power of love is teleologically oriented towards truth. The view that our soul has an innate power to desire the truth joined with the earlier argument that, for the soul to have a desire for something, our memory must have been in touch with what we desire (35a–c), lead us to infer that our memory must have been in touch *a priori* with the truth that we now desire to learn, and, hence, that our soul must have been in touch with the Forms prior to being embodied. We hear Plato's theory of recollection distinctly echoed in this (see also Benitez 1999: 116–117, Iwata 2018). In fact, there was an allusion to recollection of Forms even earlier, when Socrates talked in one breath about two types of recollection: empirical, whereby a previously forgotten perception (*aisthēsis*) is called up in memory, and *a priori*, whereby a previously forgotten piece of knowledge or learning (*mathēmatos*) is recalled (34b10–c1).

1.3 *The Power of Pleasure: Power to Restore the Natural Balance of an Organism, Power to Replenish a Lack*

That Socrates talks about the power of reason is not surprising, but that he talks emphatically about the power of pleasure, might come as a surprise to some. Socrates explicitly criticises the naturalists for not recognising any genuine power to pleasure (44c7, 44d4) and later ranks “the power of pleasure” fifth among the ingredients responsible for a good life (67a15).

Plato's Socrates understands pleasure as the perceived replenishment of a lack (31d, 33d) and as natural restoration of an organism. Whenever we perceive a disruption or disintegration of balance in our organism, we feel pain, while when we perceive the restoration of balance or a progression towards a more natural state, we experience pleasure. This means that there is an intrinsic power to advance towards goodness in our experience of pleasure. As Wood aptly puts it, we desire pleasures not only because they make us feel good, but

also because this feeling of wellness indicates a progression in the goodness characteristic to our kind (Wood 2016: 270).

Pleasures can be pure or mixed with pain. While pleasure is always a perceived replenishment of a lack, they sometimes replenish a perceived and other times an unperceived lack in us. If the lack was felt as painful, then the pleasure experienced upon replenishing that lack depends on pain: we enjoy the replacement *because* we have been in pain before. But when the lack or the imbalance of the organism are not perceived as painful, the pleasure felt upon perceiving the restoration of balance in this case is pure, unmixed with pain, and hence independent of it (51b5–c7).

On this understanding of pleasure, the real enemies of Philebus, Socrates says, are not those who merely prioritise reason over pleasure the way he has been doing, but rather those who reduce pleasure to mere avoidance of pain (44b). For these people never appreciate the positive benefit that pleasure brings to our life. These true anti-hedonists deny the existence of real pleasures. They cannot conceive of pure pleasures, the way Plato's Socrates does, and nor can they recognise any of the positive contributions that true pleasures which are mixed with pain bring to our natural harmony (44c–d).⁴ Socrates characterises them as people with a tremendous reputation in natural science (44b)⁵ who have a certain harshness in their own nature and hatred against the power of pleasure, insofar as they refuse to acknowledge anything positive and healthy in pleasures, to the point where they regard even the attractiveness of pleasures as mere witchcraft (44c).

Socrates attaches himself to these natural scientists and follows their teaching *to a certain extent*, thought clearly not all the way. Their maxim is that if you want to know the nature of anything, you must look at the most intense specimens of that (44e). In this vein, the most immediate and intense among the pleasures are the ones connected with the body (45a). These natural scientists are looking at cases of sickness and vice to explore the nature of pleasure. No wonder that they end up discovering that there is hardly anything good and

4 The same argument occurs also in the *Republic*, when we are told in regard to those who are inexperienced in what is really up, down, and in the middle, that they “are so disposed to pleasure, pain, and the intermediate state that, when they descend to the painful, they believe truly and are really in pain, but that, when they ascend from the painful to the intermediate state, they firmly believe that they have reached fulfillment and pleasure. They are inexperienced in pleasure and so are deceived when they compare pain to painlessness, just as they would be if they compared black to grey without having experienced white” (*R.* 584e–585a, trans. by G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve).

5 Most likely, these harsh people, the true enemies of Philebus, are some Pythagorean friends of Plato, who adopted extreme rigor and asceticism.

healthy to these pleasures and that whatever is thus called pleasure is rather repugnant and not worth cultivating. But Plato's Socrates would never have agreed that the most immediate and intense pleasures of the body are the most powerful pleasures to begin with, and hence he could never have used those as relevant for discerning the nature of pleasures in general. Rather, the pleasures of learning and contemplation are for Socrates the standard for the truest and hence the most powerful pleasures. Correspondingly then, the power of pleasures is saved by making their intensity and worth directly dependent on the object of replenishment they are connected to and on their respective capacity to reestablish the balance of our organism, and not on the physical intensity by which they are disrupting the natural state of our organism.

Socrates invokes the power of pleasure also in the concluding context, where it is said to rank fifth among the ingredients responsible for the goodness of a good life (67a15). The fact that the power of pure pleasures is placed fifth in this ranking has often been interpreted as indication of the low esteem that Plato's Socrates has for pleasures. On the contrary, I believe that the text encourages us to see how high and valuable they are taken to be and how important among ingredients responsible for the goodness of a good life. This list is not a list of ingredients that are randomly included into our lives, but rather a list of the top causal agents most directly responsible for the goodness of human life. To rank fifth on that list, right after reason and intelligence, is an honour, not a shameful thing.⁶

Pleasures then have their own power, and distinct varieties of pleasure have correspondingly distinct degrees of power. The purer and truer the pleasure, the more powerful it is. The degree of power does not depend on the intensity of pleasures, as the naturists would have it, but rather on pleasures' inherent capacity to replenish us with Being and thereby to reestablish the balance of our organism.

1.4 *The Power of the Good*

The power of the Good is said to have found refuge in the nature of the Beautiful:

But now we notice that for us (*hēmin*) the power (*dynamis*) of the Good has taken refuge in an alliance with the nature of the beautiful. For measure and proportion manifest themselves in all the areas as beauty and

⁶ Vogt also points out that gaining fifth rank in a hierarchy with such illustrious members as measure, the beautiful and the proportionate, reason and intelligence, *elevates* pleasures, rather than demoting them (Vogt 2010: 251–52).

virtue. – Undeniably. – But we did say that truth is also included along with them in our mixture. – Indeed. Well, then, if we cannot capture the Good in one form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth. (Frede's translation, slightly modified 64e–65a)⁷

The meaning of this is not immediately transparent. If Forms are sources for the members of Limit, as I argued in another work (Ionescu 2019: 12), then saying that the power of the Good has taken refuge in an alliance of Beauty, Proportion, and Truth, means that the power of dialectic as practiced in the *Philebus* is not capable of fully grasping the power of the Good in and by itself, yet it can nonetheless comprehend that power through its reflection in the threesome of Beauty, Proportion, and Truth. This echoes the placement of the Good beyond Being (*epekeina tēs ousias*) in *Republic* 509b, whereby the Good was declared source of Being and Truth. Just like in the *Republic*, where Plato's Socrates declared that he has no knowledge of the Good, but merely some opinions about it, and hence can only articulate some views about what it is like (*poion ti*) and not yet about its full essence (*ti esti*), so too, in the *Philebus*, the Good is only glimpsed at through a glass darkly, as it were. This is not to be taken as criticism of the power of dialectic as such, but merely as indication of the fact that *the interlocutors'* present use of that dialectical method (*hēmin* 64d5) is insufficient for a comprehensive grasp of the essence of the Good.

1.5 *The Power to Destroy*

As soon as the four main articulations of reality have been identified, Limit, the Unlimited, Mixture, and the Cause of mixture, Protarchus asks:

Might you not also be in need of a fifth kind that provides for their separation? – Perhaps. But I do not think so, at least for now. But if it turns out that I need it, I gather you will bear with me if I should search for a fifth kind. – Gladly. (23d–e)

As it turns out, a search for a fifth kind never occurs in the *Philebus*, but that is not because there is no need for explaining dissolution or separation, for dissolution happens and is the root of all imbalances and lacks in the cosmos and in our own lives. What we discover as the dialogue progresses, is that the source

⁷ Unless otherwise specified, I use Frede's translation of the *Philebus* throughout. In this passage, however, I replaced Frede's "force" with "power" (*dynamis*) of the Good and also translated the dative *hēmin* as "for us", which Frede omits altogether.

responsible for dissolution had already been identified among the four kinds, specifically, as the Unlimited.⁸ The Unlimited is a domain of indefiniteness and indetermination (24a–e), whose members are in permanent flux between contrasting features (24d2–5). It contains several pairs of mutually relative opposites that frame continua which are governed by the more and less, the stronger and milder, and the *too much*, as structural principles (24e7–25a1). Thus, the hotter and the colder, the dryer and the wetter, the high and the low, the fast and the slow all belong to the Unlimited, insofar as each of these continua is governed by at least one of the structural principles mentioned, such that more of one term in the pair implies less of its opposite, and too much of one implies too little of its opposite.⁹ The “too much”, i.e. excess, that is included among these structural principles is the source of the power to destroy. The Unlimited thus manifests a dual aspect of power, a passive one, insofar as it has the capacity to receive measure, limit, and determination, and also an active one, since it is capable to destroy and disrupt balance by resisting the imposition of Limit.

2 The Mixing of Powers

The dialogue culminates with Socrates’s and Protarchus’s attempt to combine the ingredients of a good life. The process requires attention and insight, for it makes all the difference in the world if it turns out to be “a well-mixed life or a poorly mixed one” (61b). The theme of the quality of mixtures is essential to our understanding of the powers at play: whereas earlier on we talked about mixed pleasures being inferior to the unmixed (pure) sort and about purity of knowledge being indicative of superior power over mixed varieties thereof based on guess work and opinion, now we talk about a kind of mixture that could enhance both the quality of the ingredients themselves and that of the life combining them. The earlier sort of mixture, admixing pain into pleasure and of imprecision and ignorance into knowledge, weakens the power of pleasure and knowledge respectively, whereas the intentional mixture of pleasure and knowledge that Socrates and Protarchus set out to do under rational guidance enhances the powers of each of the two ingredients at play and produces a more orderly life. The former type of mixture resonates with the

8 For an account defending this view and revealing some of its implication as far as Plato’s metaphysics of evil is concerned see Wood 2009.

9 For detailed accounts of the Unlimited see Harvey 2009: 10; Miller 2010: 73–74; Garner 2017: 44–50.

Hippocratic explanation of the interaction of powers discussed in Chapter 1 in this anthology, whereas the latter sort of composition resonates more with what in Chapter 6 was called capacity to combine.

Two main factors determine the righteousness of the mixture: (a) the intrinsic worth of the elements combined, and (b) the inner harmony and cohesion of a soul in which pleasures and reason can carry out a conversation, which means that the type of pleasure must be *proportional* to the degree of purity and truth pertaining to the knowledge that is effective in a person's soul.

The passage begins as a dialogue between Socrates and Protarchus about what types of knowledge and what types of pleasures may be included in a good life. Midway through this conversation, however, the interlocutors turn to pleasures and knowledge themselves, which are personified and placed in dialogue with one another. In this way, each one of the respective powers is invited to express directly how mixing affects them. The conversation thus focusses on the effect that the mixing has on the respective powers.

The approach to mixing begins from the top down, as it were, from the higher power of knowledge, considering which types thereof to let in, and descends to our sensible experience of pleasure. Midway through, the approach is reversed and proceeds from the ground up: *all* pleasures, including even the merely would-be pleasures that call themselves pleasures while being false variants thereof, are first asked whether they welcome any types of knowledge side by side with them, and only after they have given their full report, is knowledge invited to express its position on whether it welcomes any pleasures, and, if so, which ones. This allows pleasures to *recognise* their own nature and to *acknowledge* that their own wellbeing and truth depends on cognitive components. Knowledge is not being 'shoved down the throat' of pleasures, so to speak, but is rather invited along by pleasures themselves as their faithful supporter and companion. The contrast with the opening scene of the dialogue, where Philebus drops out of the conversation turning his back to reason, could not be any starker. Recall Philebus's drop-out line: "To my mind pleasure wins and always will win, no matter what" (12a) There is no room left to engage in any dialogue with reason. And how could there be, when Philebus had been lumping together the pleasures of all animals (*pasi zoois*, 11b), instead of restricting his account to pleasures characteristic to human beings (*anthropoi*)?!

2.1 *Dialogue between Socrates and Protarchus regarding what Types of Knowledge and Pleasure to Mix*

2.1.1 All Types of Knowledge Are Welcome

First, they establish that various kinds of knowledge need to be mixed with one another, and that it is very important that the more precise types of knowledge be admitted in first, before the less precise and imprecise ones are allowed.

Ought we at the same time to include the inexact and impure science of the false yardstick and circle, and add it to the mixture? Yes, necessarily so, if any one of us ever wants to find his own way home. – But how about music: Ought we also to mix in the kind of which we said a little earlier that it is full of lucky hits and imitation but lacks purity? – It seems necessary to me, if in fact our life is supposed to be at least some sort of life. – Do you want me then to yield like a doorkeeper to the pushing and shoving of a crowd and to throw open the doors and let the flood of all sorts of knowledge in, the inferior kind mingling with the pure? – I, for my part, can't see what damage it would do to accept all the other kinds of knowledge, as long as we have those of the highest kind. Shall I then, let the lot of them flow into the vessel, like Homer's very poetical "comingling of mountain glens"? – Absolutely. – In they go! (62c–d)

Notice the gradual way in which lower sciences are allowed in. First, the inexact and impure sciences are introduced for survival: "Yes, necessarily so, if any one of us ever wants to find his own way home (62c). In the next step, the even more imprecise ones, like music as an art "full of lucky hits and imitation", but lacking purity, are also allowed, since a healthy and robust life also requires enjoyment, leisure, and relaxation (62d).¹⁰

The general rule for this mixture of knowledges is that we are safe with them all as long as the higher ones are present (62d). The conversation, however, establishes not only that it is *safe* to mix all the crafts, but also that it is *beneficial* to mix them all, as sources of leisure and enjoyment (63a). Different types of knowledge enhance, inspire, and stimulate one another as long as the higher sorts of knowledge are present. On the one hand, in the absence of the higher varieties of knowledge, a person could easily be wasting their talent on a variety of hobbies pursued as distractions, with no real purpose or direction in which to build. On the other, leaving room for leisure is essential for our capacity to enjoy the higher types of knowledge. A good balance and rightful proportion between the varieties of knowledge is essential.

10 The reference here to music as an art "full of lucky hits and imitation but lacks purity" echoes the earlier description of flute-playing as an art in which "the harmonies are found not by measurement but by the hit and miss of training, and quite generally music tries to find the measure by observing the vibrating strings. So, there is a lot of imprecision mixed up in it and very little reliability" (56a). This contrasts with the way the musicologist approaches music by dividing and collecting sound according to the mathematically specified ranges of measure for high, low, and even pitch (17c–e).

2.1.2 Knowledge Welcomes Pleasures

Now it is time for us to decide about pleasures, too, whether we ought to admit the whole tribe in their cases or whether we should at first admit the true ones only. – It is much safer if we let the true in first. – Let them in then. But what next? If some turn out to be necessary, should we not mix them in also, as we did in the other case? – No reason why not, at least if they really are necessary. (62e)

Admission of pleasures is also gradual: first we allow the *safe* ones in, namely the true ones, next all the ones that are necessary. This way of phrasing implies that, among the necessary ones we might occasionally encounter false ones alongside true ones. The spheres of the necessary and the true ones overlap only partially. Let us unpack this thought with its implications, taking in turn, first, the true pleasures welcomed, and then the necessary ones.

No true pleasure can ever threaten the integrity of knowledge or the well-being of other pleasures. True pleasures can only enhance our cognitive performance since pleasures make us *feel* the harmonisation of our nature and reestablishment of balance that is taking place while we exercise our cognitive capacities. Wood seems to be saying the same when he writes:

While the value for us of this pleasure cannot be separated from the value of this fulfilling activity and the value of the source of the fulfillment, the converse is also true; for without pleasure, as we saw in the testing of pleasure and intellect, even the most intellectually active and accomplished human life would seem less desirable, and so could not be the good for us. Without pleasure as the sensation of increased harmonization in our nature, we simply could not experience, literally could not feel the fulfillment of our nature that proceeds from the activity of learning, and so could not properly appreciate its goodness. (Wood 2016: 272)

True pleasures, however, can be pure or mixed with pain (Ionescu 2019: ch. 3). As long as they are true, even the mixed pleasures of eating when hungry, resting when tired, etc. are to be welcomed as necessary in the fabric of a good life. Even if the pleasures of eating when hungry or sleeping when tired do not make a good life any better, they are necessary for maintaining the healthy mixtures in the body. For without the desire to eat when hungry and the pleasure of satisfying hunger, we would damage our health and would put the good life out of reach.

Moreover, all the pleasures connected to our cognitive and emotional life which are mixed with pain, like the pleasures of recollection or calculation associated with the pain of ignorance or forgetting, the pleasures mixed with pain attendant upon emotions such as anger, fear, love, longing (47c–d), etc. – those too are necessary for maintaining our healthy organism.

Being angry when we witness injustice and feeling depleted because we suffer the pain of the victim (whether directly, or indirectly, through empathy and compassion) and replenished when we manage to externalise the feeling of outrage at the situation and affirm what is missing, or feeling sad and hence experiencing pain in longing and also being replenished by the hope of seeing our loved ones again – these are all woven into the fabric of our complex good lives.

Not only are pleasures associated with emotions *tolerable* by knowledge, but many of them are also *beneficial* for enhancing not only the overall balance and health of our organism, but also, specifically, our cognitive involvement. Think for a moment about pleasures associated with comedy. In the *Philebus*, Socrates deals explicitly only with the pleasure of the malicious person and provides only implicit hints regarding a virtuous person's pleasant experience of comedy. By extension, however, we can speculate for instance on the role that the pleasure of self-irony has in encouraging knowledge and self-awareness. Socrates treats not only his interlocutors, but also himself ironically, as he understands that self-irony can be an excellent instrument for self-improvement. Socrates understands that the discrepancy between the lofty aims of philosophy and our modest resources for attaining those often rightfully makes us look ridiculous in our very practice of philosophy, for we aim to attain too much with the limited intellectual resources that we possess (23d1–3). Similarly, the comic aspect of the philosopher's natural tendency to dwell in the medium of eternal truth while neglecting the obvious, the immediate, the simple, is also derided in the same spirit. For, as Socrates prompts Protarchus to note, in addition to the highly pure knowledge associated with the “divine circle or sphere”, a good life must also include crafts associated with concrete manifestations of geometric shapes in tridimensional objects (the “false yardstick and circle”), if one is to ever “find his own way home” (62b), and also the even more imprecise arts of music, if one is supposed to live a *life* (62c).

In addition, many of the pleasures that we take in learning various crafts are pleasures mixed with pain. Since all types of knowledge, including the less precise ones, are welcomed, these pleasures of learning that accompany them, must also be admitted, cherished, and encouraged. Think about learning to play an instrument, an experience of pleasure that is wrought with so much

frustration in its early stages.¹¹ In fact, even the pursuit of dialectic itself is often fraught with mixed pleasures of learning, since for many of us pleasures of learning in response to *aporia* generate most of the time pleasures mixed with pain. The *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic* provide clear accounts of the way in which pain is integral to the pleasure of doing philosophy. Far from rejecting mixed pleasures from the philosopher's life, Plato's Socrates develops insightful accounts that show the relative value of mixed pleasures of learning in our lives.¹² In short then, the philosopher's pleasures of learning are very often mixed with pains. None of this contradicts what Plato's Socrates says in the *Philebus*. For while he singles out specifically the always pure and true pleasures of learning experienced by those engaged in dialectic, Socrates does not mean to restrict our pleasures of learning to these. Pure, along with mixed, and sometimes even false pleasures of learning, are part and parcel of everyone's life, including the good life of a philosopher. Not even the most accomplished of philosophers are exempt from experiencing occasionally less than perfect pleasures of learning, for learning is, at times, a painful experience even for the most talented among us.¹³

I just mentioned that even false pleasures of learning are encountered in a good life. They are of course not pursued as such, but they are inevitable. So too are other occasional false pleasures of eating, drinking, anger, lamentation, anticipation, etc. A certain amount of falsity is inescapable, given our own human nature and limited cognitive faculties. Exaggerating or under-evaluating the degree of replenishment that we are undergoing is only natural and points to our natural complexity. Even the best among philosophers have their blind spots regarding their own flaws or limitations. We work at minimising these throughout our lives.

11 This is *not* to say that experiences of learning in the various applied crafts are *always* mixed or impure, for it is certainly possible to be pleased at learning things in any of these fields even when there is no previously perceived experience of lack. Learning any new skill or information can feel intrinsically fulfilling in cases in which such learning was not preceded by some sort of "hunger for learning".

12 In the *Phaedrus* learning is depicted as a process of the soul growing its wings which it had lost at the moment of embodiment. The loss of wings is depicted as a dramatic experience that mixes pleasure with pain, and the erotic encounter between lover and beloved can serve as a catalyst for starting to grow wings once again (*Phdr.* 251c–e). Pain is mixed with pleasure also in the lover's ascent to Beauty as depicted throughout the *Symposium*. Remember the pangs of labour that the lover experiences as he gives birth to the beauty that he carries inside himself (*Smp.* 207a–b). The philosopher's struggle to adjust his eyes to light as he exits the cave in the *Republic*, or again, as he reenters the darkness of the cave speaks to the same experience (*R.* 515e).

13 For more on this see Arenson 2016.

Not only are these true and necessary pleasures not harmful to our intellect, but they are in fact essential and instrumental to our appreciation of the goodness of a good life. As Wood rightly puts it:

Moreover, pleasure as the sensual manifestation of this goodness cannot be construed as an instrument conveying something basically foreign to it, as if pleasure were a mere vehicle for bringing goodness from somewhere outside of us into our possession, or an instrument for producing goodness as an external and independent product. In that case we would perceive goodness as something wholly other than pleasure; but in fact, we experience pleasure as good and good things as pleasant. So, while it is certainly possible to experience intellectual activity, and other good things, without enjoying them, we cannot do so while fully appreciating their goodness. The reason for this is that pleasure is not merely an external sign of the coming of goodness to us; rather, pleasure is the sensual aspect of the increasing harmonization of the nature that is our good. (Wood 2016: 272–3)

In short, all true pleasures, whether pure or mixed, are welcomed as powerful contributors to a good life, and among them, the pure ones related to learning hold special place. In addition, while, on occasion false pleasures will make their way in as necessary in the grand robust scheme of even the best of the human lives, a reflective person will be acutely aware of the disruptive potential of their power.

2.2 *Dialogue between Pleasures and Knowledge Themselves*

Pleasures are first asked if they welcome knowledge:

We should not turn to ourselves with this question, Protarchus, but to the pleasures themselves, as well as to the different kinds of knowledge, and find out how they feel about each other by putting the question in this way. What way? “My friends, whether you ought to be called ‘pleasures’, or some other name, would you prefer to live together with every kind of knowledge or rather to live without it entirely?” – To this I think they cannot help giving this answer. What answer? – What has been said already: “It is neither possible nor beneficial for one tribe to remain alone, in isolation and unmixed. We would prefer to live side by side with that best kind of knowledge, the kind that understands not only all other things but also each one of us, as far as that is possible” – “An excellent answer” we will reply to them. (63a–c)

Notice first that in this conversation *all* pleasures are invited, true ones as well as false ones (“whether you ought to be called ‘pleasures’ or some other name”, 63a), pure ones as well as mixed. What does it mean for pleasures to be saying that it is “neither possible nor beneficial for one tribe to remain alone”? Let us unpack that question by addressing each part separately.

First, why would it not be possible for pleasures to remain isolated and separated completely from all knowledge? A complete separation from knowledge threatens pleasures at their core, since pleasures depend constitutively on a cognitive component.¹⁴ A life of pleasure completely devoid of knowledge turns out to be impossible. For in the absence of even the basic cognitive functions of memory and right opinions, one cannot even aware of themselves, let alone of their own experience of pleasure. That would be truly a life worthy of a mollusc, not of a human being (21b6–c8).¹⁵

The admixture of knowledge not only makes pleasures possible, but also enhances the experience of pleasure, and this is true both for pure and for mixed pleasures. Good memory, for instance, allows us to enjoy pleasures longer. In addition, knowledge of what we lack and of what could replenish that lack is constitutive to pleasures and enhancing our experience thereof. The better we are at identifying our lacks and at providing the objects that truly fill those lacks, the more pleasure we experience. What is more, getting rid of false pleasures is not only beneficial for reason, but beneficial also for the true pleasures we can have instead, since it removes obstacles in their way. Hence, if earlier on I talked about how mixing pleasures in a life is beneficial to the knowledge we have, now we see that mixing knowledge in this life is beneficial,

14 For detailed arguments and evidence supporting this reading see Ionescu 2019: ch. 2 where I argue also that we witness, throughout the dialogue, a gradual progression from the initial unbridgeable gap between pleasure and knowledge to an intimate relation between them. This transition reflects a shift from the Phileban conception of pleasures as thoughtless thrill or sensation to the Platonic understanding of pleasure as cognitively structured experience that depends on our beliefs not only about factual situations, but also about the meaning and value of such situations for life generally.

15 As I argued in detail in Ionescu 2019, ch 2, the metaphysical reason why pleasures depend on knowledge is that, as a group, pleasures belong to the class of Mixtures (26b7–c1, 31c2–d1, 52c4–d1), while knowledge to that of the Cause of mixtures (29b–30e). Implications of this metaphysical thesis are witnessed throughout the text, as it accounts for why and how pleasures depend on knowledge. From the recognition already alluded to that life of pleasure without knowledge is impossible for human beings (21b–c), to the more complex arguments showing that desire, on which pleasure often depends, is itself structured by knowledge (33d–35e), or the recognition that ignorance of the object and the amount that secures replenishment is responsible for the falsity of pleasures (37a–39b, 39a–40e, 41a–42c, 42c–44d), all these are just as many illustrations of the benefit that pleasure derives from knowledge.

not only to other types of knowledge, which are obviously enhanced and stimulated by more knowledge, but also to the pleasures we experience.

Knowledge is then asked whether it welcomes pleasure. First, the excessive and false pleasures are excluded as a tremendous impediment for knowledge and for any development of the soul altogether. In the next step, however, the pleasures that are true and pure are warmly invited and recognised as *akin* to knowledge, and so too are said to be the pleasures of health, of temperance, and all those associated with virtue generally:

But after that, we have to raise the question with intelligence and reason. "Do you have any need for any associations with the pleasures?" that is how we would address reason and knowledge. "What kinds of pleasure?" they might ask in return. – Very likely. – Our discussion would then continue as follows: Will you have any need to associate with the strongest and most intensive pleasures in addition to the true pleasures?" we will as them. "Why on earth should we need them, Socrates?" they might reply, "They are a tremendous impediment to us, since they infect the souls in which they dwell with madness and even prevent our own development altogether. Furthermore, they totally destroy most of our offspring, since neglect leads to forgetfulness. But as to the true and pure pleasures you mentioned, those we regard as our kin. And besides, also add the pleasures of health and of temperance and all those that commit themselves to virtue as to their deity and follow it around everywhere". (63c–e)

The kinship here referenced between knowledge and the true and pure pleasures is of a twofold nature: knowledge inspires and secures these pleasures and is also in turn stimulated and encouraged by them. And the higher and purer the knowledge, the purer and truer the pleasures associated with it. The strong correlation between the purity of knowledge and the truthfulness and purity of pleasure is rooted in the fact that pleasures belong to the class of Mixtures, and knowledge to the class of Cause of mixtures. Naturally, then, the purity of knowledge has a direct influence on the truthfulness and purity of the pleasure taken in the acquisition of the type of knowledge in question. Consequently, the purity of the intelligible objects contemplated through dialectic determines and is responsible for the truthfulness of the pleasures we take in such learning. Having the sensitivity required for taking pleasure in intelligible, stable objects presupposes that one knows these objects, for taking pleasure is not just replenishment, but *perceived* replenishment. Thus, to be able to perceive replenishment, we must have a cognitive grasp of the object replenishing us. The stability and reality of intelligible objects responsible for

our replenishment rule out the possibility that we might be misestimating the replenishment we are experiencing.

Pleasures of health, of temperance, and all those associated with virtue generally, whether pure or mixed with pain, are also akin to knowledge. This is evident both insofar as such pleasures secure the inner contentment that is supportive for our pursuit of knowledge, and insofar as health, temperance, and virtue generally rely on knowledge, for we need to know which pleasures are healthy and temperate, and therefore identifying these and pursuing them requires an applying of knowledge.

2.3 *Additional Powers Involved in the Mixing Pleasure and Knowledge in a Good Life*

As seen in the first part of this chapter, besides knowledge and pleasure, power is also attributed in distinctive ways to the Good, the Unlimited, and to our soul. Let us see how these additional powers are involved in the mixing of pleasure with knowledge. As human beings, we are an amalgam of mixtures, and we derive our unity from striving towards the Good. The arc of our moral and spiritual growth is measurable in relation to how closely our life reflects the Good. While it has taken refuge from the present dialectical investigation in that triune unity of Beauty, Proportion, and Truth (64e–65a), the power of the Good nonetheless reflects its presence in the good human life as measure. This is most clearly expressed in the following passage:

But it is certainly not difficult to see what factor in each mixture it is that makes it either most valuable or worth nothing at all. – What do you mean? – There is not a single human being who does not know it. – Know what? – That any kind of mixture that does not in some way or other possess measure or the nature of proportion will necessarily corrupt its ingredients and most of all itself. For there would be no blending in such cases at all, but really an unconnected medley, the ruin of whatever happens to be contained in it. (64d–e)

It is therefore not surprising that in the final list of ingredients responsible for the goodness of a good life the highest rank is given to measure (*metriotēs*), the measured (*to metrion*), the timely (*to kairon*), and everything else similar (66a).¹⁶ Since its role is to turn a plurality of ingredients into a harmonious

¹⁶ Next come the well-proportioned, and beautiful, the perfect, the self-sufficient and everything else that belongs to this kind; reason and intelligence get the third place; sciences, arts, and right opinions get the fourth; and pure pleasures, the fifth (66a–c).

blending of powers that are promoting goodness in life, the measure listed here first in rank along with the timely (*to kairon*) functions as a normative standard of the proportion of ingredients that best reflects the presence of the Good in any given concrete set of circumstances of life. Thus, for instance, in the good life of an individual who is by nature very intellectual, the due measure and intensity of pure pleasures of learning theoretical subjects will be much higher than that of pure pleasures of smell or sight, while in the life of a very intuitive artistic type, the due amount of pure aesthetic pleasures necessary for a good life might be greater than that of pleasures taken in abstract theoretical studies.¹⁷ The power of the Good then is exercised and manifests itself as the due measure that governs the mixing of pleasures and knowledge in our concrete lives. Its force and efficacy determine what pleasures can and ought to combine with what types of knowledge, based on everyone's natural inclinations, talents, and circumstances of life.

As we now turn to the role that the power of the Unlimited plays in the mixing of pleasure and knowledge, we recognise it as responsible for destroying or destabilising the ingredients themselves and their combination. This happens insofar as, through its expression as indetermination and excess, the power of the Unlimited is responsible for the falsity of pleasures (40b–c, 42b–c, 45a–e, 46e–47b), for the imprecision that is constitutive to lower types of knowledge like flute playing, agriculture, navigation (55e–56a, 59a–b), and for destabilising the proportions of pleasure and knowledge in a human life. In short, it acts by destabilising mixtures, destroying measure, and degrading composites. This characterisation already suggests that the Unlimited is a power that is parasitic on order, Limit, and the Good. In other words, the power of the Unlimited makes sense only in relation to Limit, the ordering Cause, and ultimately to the Good as source of all Limit, and not otherwise, as independent source of evil.¹⁸ This is what Socrates means when he repeats what they have often said

17 Along similar lines, individuals will sometimes *rightly* find learning practical crafts more fulfilling than studying pure mathematics, or mathematics more fulfilling than the study of dialectic, even though, absolutely speaking dialectic is higher than mathematics, and mathematics higher than the crafts. The pleasure that a musical person takes in studying a powerful musical work is much more intense than the average feeling of musical enjoyment.

18 Wood defends the same view: "To be unlimited is already and necessarily to be in relation to some limit, and therefore to be also limited, which means the unlimited is always already mixed and as such subject to the mixing cause. Limit and unlimited always exist together within the particular beings of the world, and indeed, collectively constitute their being and nature through their generative interaction. To understand how they both conflict and cooperate, oppose, and yet depend upon the existence of the other, we must view their opposition from the perspective of their creative coexistence. In the

(*pollakis eirekamen*), namely that “there is plenty (*poly*) of the unlimited in the universe as well as sufficient (*hykanon*) limit, and that there is above them a certain cause, of no small significance, that orders and coordinates the years, seasons, and months, and which has every right to the title of wisdom and reason” (30c2–7).

While in the cosmic order the Unlimited is always parasitic on Limit and order, at the level of our individual moral lives it is possible for our own choices to empower the Unlimited so much as to allow it to take complete hold and rule over our lives (Wood 2009: 146–7). Hence, while we will always be part of a universe in which spiritual growth and ascent to the Good is possible, it might well be that, within the temporal confines of an individual life which is utterly unbalanced, no such improvement is possible anymore. It is in this light that we understand Plato’s Socrates talking about bad and wretched people (40b, 45b–e). All this brings us to recognise even more the importance of cultivating our soul’s love of truth and its innate desire to do everything for its sake (58d4).

The inborn power of our soul to love the truth is ultimately what secures the possibility of orienting our lives towards measure and proportion and away from the destructive power of the Unlimited. The claim that our soul has an innate desire for truth taken together with his argument that for the soul to have a desire for something our memory must have been in touch with what we desire (35a–c) suggest, as already mentioned, that Socrates believes that our souls have been in touch with the Forms and throughout life is trying to recover or recollect awareness of those realities. Throughout the *Philebus*, the dialectical method of collection and division is proposed as an approach to reality that places itself in subordination to the reality it investigates and modulates its steps based on the object under investigation. Recollection and this dialectical method go hand in hand and aid one another. Recollection of Forms both gives dialectic the impetus to aspire towards uncovering reality and is itself in turn also fueled by new discoveries made along the way.

To conclude then, the right mixture of pleasure and knowledge in the good human life is the concerted result of several types of powers at play, all of which fall in the end under the order of measure and the Good. When not governed by the Good, powers end up dissolving in incapacities and obstacles, and instead of acting as fuels, they turn into impediments for good living. The Good

light of that context, the essential relationship between the limit and the unlimited is revealed as neither conflict nor cooperation between equals but as hierarchical harmony – an association of unequal partners – whose interaction is marked by the overcoming of the one by the other. The limitless flux of indeterminacy is transformed in the presence of the limit and cause into the possibility of progress, motion toward an end, productive change” (Wood 2009: 145).

acts as ultimate teleological power, the power of the Unlimited as ultimate threat to balance and harmony. Between these opposing forces, the power of our soul to love the truth fuels our cognitive capacities, which in turn play a constitutive role in relation to our pleasures. Good living is what happens upon the fitting activation of these causal interactions and is itself a continuous process of adjustment and readjustment of the power balance.

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The Possibility of Reflexive Powers in Plato: an Unsolved Problem in the *Charmides*

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Something that emerges from the discussion of the nature of *sōphrosynē* in the *Charmides* is the essentially reflexive character of this virtue. After his initial failed attempts at definition, Charmides introduces a definition that he turns out to have gotten from his cousin Critias: doing one's own things (*to ta heautou prattein*, 161b6). When, in response to Socrates' abusive interpretation of this definition as meaning that *sōphrosynē* requires making one's own shoes and weaving one's own clothes, Critias himself pretends it to mean simply "doing what is good" (*tagatha prattein*, 163e1–4), Socrates protests that simply doing good things *without the awareness of doing so, and thus without self-awareness*, could hardly count as *sōphrosynē* (164c). It is in response to this objection that Critias suggests identifying *sōphrosynē* with nothing but self-awareness, i.e., with a reflexive knowledge of knowledge. Socrates then raises the problem of how such a reflexive knowledge of knowledge is even possible and situates this problem in the context of the broader problem of how any power (*dynamis*) could have itself as its object. In addressing this broader problem, he suggests that a division is required between powers that cannot possibly be related to themselves and those that can. Indeed, he himself already begins to make the division by claiming that it is simply impossible for such things as magnitudes and quantities (*megethē men gar kai plēthē kai ta toiauta pantapasin adynaton*, *Chrm.* 168e5–6) to relate to themselves (since, for example, what has the power to be larger would need to be smaller than itself and what has the power to be double would need to be half of itself), whereas in other cases it is not impossible, but simply incredible to some and perhaps not to others (*tois men apistian an paraschoi, isōs de tisin ou*, 168e10–169a1).¹ These other cases include the powers of seeing, hearing and knowing. It is not immediately clear what makes these latter cases more promising: if what is larger could be larger than itself only by being smaller than itself, Socrates has argued that sight could see itself only by having a colour and hearing could hear itself only by being

1 Of course, the argument of the second part of the *Parmenides* (151a–b) concludes that the One, if it is, is greater than itself and lesser than itself (and equal to itself).

itself audible. Is it not just as impossible for these psychic powers to relate to themselves as it is for quantities and magnitudes to do so? Socrates nevertheless asserts that a great person could distinguish the one class from the other (*megalou dē tinos andros dei*, 169a1–2), show how it can be self-reflexive, and determine if *sōphrosynē* is included within it.

Such a project is never explicitly carried out either in this dialogue or in any other. One might conclude from this that Socrates' "great man" is a euphemism for "no one" and that the project simply cannot be carried out. This would be the case either because there are no reflexive powers or because their possibility and difference from non-reflexive powers cannot be explained. The first alternative, however, can be ruled out: Plato clearly recognises the existence of reflexive powers. First, the existence of such a power is attested in the *Charmides* itself when Socrates describes his examination of Critias as motivated by the fear that he might think he knows something that he does not know (*phoboumenos mē pote oiomenos men ti eidenai, eidōs de mē*, 166d1–2), thus identifying his goal with knowing what he knows and what he does not know. Indeed, it is always noted that the description Socrates proceeds to give of the *sōphrōn* as seeking to know what he knows and what he does not know (*to eidenai ha te oiden kai ha mē oiden*, 167a6–7), and even as examining others to determine whether they know what they know and do not know, fits perfectly Socrates's self-description in the *Apology* (21d).² Therefore, to dismiss the possibility of a knowledge of knowledge is to dismiss the possibility of the reflexive power attributed to Socrates throughout the dialogues.

Others, such as Christopher Moore and Thomas Schmid, have found reflexive powers illustrated throughout the *Charmides* and going beyond the knowledge of knowledge to include perception of perception, opinion of opinion and desire of desire.³ For example, Socrates sees those in the palaestra seeing him as he arrives (*me hōs eidon eisionta*, 153a6–b1), sees others seeing Charmides

² See for example Tuoazzo 2011: 203.

³ Moore (2015: 92–96) claims that Socrates' arguments against self-reflexive powers are belied by the many instances of self-reflexive attitudes we find in the conversation itself. This is especially true, of course, of that knowledge of knowledge Socrates explicitly claims to be aiming at in the conversation. That reflexive powers are possible is shown by the conversation itself; the challenge is explaining *how* they are possible when other kinds of relatives (such as "greater than") cannot be reflexive. Schmid (1998: 90–93) also argues that the events of the dialogue demonstrate the reality of what the arguments call into question: specifically, the possibility of a perception of perception, a desire of desire, an opinion of opinion and, of course, a knowledge of knowledge. Witte (1970, 119) likewise observes that the very discussion that seeks to determine whether knowledge can relate to itself is itself an attempt to know what knowledge is and therefore performs what it brings into question.

(154c7–8), and sees Charmides seeing him (*eneblepsen te moi*, 155c8). If we go beyond the *Charmides*, we have in the *Alcibiades* a famous description of the eye seeing itself and the mind knowing itself:

If the eye is to see itself, it is necessary for it to look to an eye and to that region of the eye in which comes to be the eye's virtue: and this is sight ... Likewise, if the soul is to know itself, it is necessary for it to look to a soul and most of all to that region of the soul in which comes to be the soul's virtue, wisdom, and at anything else that is similar to it.⁴

Yet the examples cited above from the *Charmides* are clearly not examples of *seeing my own seeing*, nor therefore of *seeing what I see and what I do not see*. As for the *Alcibiades* passage, Socrates' immediately preceding example of an eye looking into an eye as into a mirror shows that the reflexivity of a seeing of seeing or of a knowing of knowing is here described as requiring *reflection in another*. According to this passage, at least on a common reading, "self-knowledge is not immediate but only possible via an object that has the function of a mirror. This additional object would be a soul similar to ours".⁵ How such self-knowledge *via others* relates to the stricter reflexivity raised as a problem in the *Charmides* is a question to which I will return.

But then can only perceptive or cognitive powers be reflexive? Here we must address a surprising and unexplained move Socrates suddenly makes in the *Charmides* while speaking of the class of powers that might be possibly reflexive: having earlier included in this class only what we could call powers of the soul, Socrates suddenly adds (*eti ge*) two new examples: "motion moving itself" (*kinesis autē heautēn kinein*, 168e9–10) and "heat burning" (*thermotēs kaein*, 168e10).⁶ The second example is especially puzzling: how exactly is it an example of a reflexive power and why is it mentioned here? One answer one finds in the secondary literature is the suggestion that "heat burning" is a reference to "the burning sensation of erotic passion" Socrates experiences earlier

4 "ophthalmos ar' ei mellei idein hauton, eis ophthalmon autoi blepton, kai tou ommatos eis ekeinon ton topon en hōi tynchanei hē ophthalmou aretē eggignomenē: esti de touto pou opsis ... kai psyche ei mellei gnōsesthai hautēn, eis psychēn autēi blepton, kai malist' eis touton autēs ton topon en hōi eggignetai hē psyches aretē, sophia, kai eis allo hōi touto tynchanei homoion on" (*Alc. I*. 133b2–10).

5 Renaud & Tarrant 2015: 65.

6 Tuckey (1944: 116) suggests that the introduction of these examples "shows that the enquiry whether an activity could be its own object had for him [Plato] an independent logical interest over and above its importance for the present investigation".

in the dialogue when he looks into Charmides' cloak.⁷ While this suggestion seems rather farfetched, Witte makes a related suggestion that is at the same time more plausible: that with the obscure expression "heat that burns or heats itself" "a psychic process appears to be meant [scheint ein seelischer Vorgang gemeint zu sein]" (Witte 1970: 121, n. 46). Witte cites in support a passage from the *Cratylus* in which Socrates imagines a god creating an image of Cratylus by reproducing not only his external colour and form, but also everything internal, including his weaknesses and *his heat*, his motion, soul and intelligence (*kai ta entos panta toiauta poiēseien hoiaper ta sa, kai malakotētas kai thermotētas tas autas apodoiē, kai kinesin kai psychēn kai phronēsin ... Cra. 432b–c*). From this and a passage in the *Republic* where what is frightening in poetry is censured as making the future guardians "weaker and hotter than they should be" (*thermoterōi kai malakōterōi tou deontos, R. 387b–c*), Witte concludes: "*thermotēs* appears to be a comprehensive expression for the nonrational psychic processes [scheint also ein zussammenfassender Ausdruck für die nicht rationalen seelischen Vorgänge zu sein]" (Witte: 121, n. 46).

If we turn to the first example, which shows conclusively that the class of reflexive powers exists for Plato since the existence of a "motion of motion" is explicitly recognised in other dialogues,⁸ its connection to the soul is even clearer and stronger.⁹ In the *Laws* the Athenian identifies as the first motion, in the sense of being the principle and source of all other motions, what he calls "self-moving motion" (894b–895b). Locating this motion in living things, he then proceeds to offer it as a definition of the soul: the soul is precisely

7 The suggestion is made by Eisenstaedt (1981) and Schmid (1998: 98). For a critique of this suggestion, see Tsouna 2022: 228. Oddly, however, she dismisses the example of self-moving motion with the same hand, despite noting how others have found this notion in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*.

8 See Centrone 1997: 280, n. 64), Untersteiner 1965: 41, Halper 2000: 311, Tuozzo 2011: 225, Moore 2015: 92, and Lefebvre 2018: 253–4. H. Cherniss (1944: 435–6), assuming the chronology standard at the time, takes the *Charmides* passage to show that Plato had already developed the theory of self-motion that would later be explicitly defended in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*. The assumed chronology leads in contrast Paul Friedländer to the following developmentalist silliness: "At the time of the *Charmides*, to be sure, Plato was still far from developing such a system [i.e., of self-moving motion]; he was on his way toward it, however, and he was certainly not so perplexed as he makes Socrates pretend to be" (Friedländer 1964: 74). As Centrone (1997: 280, n. 64) notes, the sudden inclusion of these examples has seemed so strange to some scholars that they have argued for their excision from the text.

9 It is simply wrong to claim, as Tsouna does, that the examples of self-moving motion and self-heating heat "are naturally associated with the domain of nature, not of psychology" (Tsouna 2022: 228). In making this claim, Tsouna misses how the introduction of these examples supports Socrates' claim that psychological reflexivity, if strange, is not impossible as is reflexivity in quantitative relations.

“the movement with the power of moving itself” (*tēn dynamenēn autēn hautēn kinein kinēsin*, *Lg.* 896a1–2). We have, of course, the same characterisation of the soul as the source of all motion by virtue of being a self-mover in the *Phaedrus* (245e3–246a1) and there in the context of a proof of the soul’s immortality: what moves itself, and only what moves itself, will never desist from movement because to do so it would need to *abandon itself* (*monon dē to hauto kinoun, hate ouk apoleipon heauto, oupote lēgei kinoumenon*, *Phdr.* 245c7–8). That the soul would be abandoning itself in ceasing to move suggests that it is, not simply *some thing that moves itself*, but, as stated explicitly in the *Laws*, *motion* capable of moving itself.¹⁰ This identification of self-motion with motion of motion indeed appears to parallel a shift in the *Charmides* that has puzzled many commentators: the shift from *self-knowledge* to *knowledge of knowledge*.¹¹ Finally, in the *Timaeus* what is identified as the best of motions is that which is “in itself [caused] by itself” (*hē en heautōi hyph’ hautou aristē kinēsis*, *Ti.* 89a1–3). The reason given for its being best, furthermore, is that it is most akin to the motion of intelligence and of ‘the all’ (*malista gar tē dianoē-tikēi kai tē tou pantos kinēsei xyngenēs*). These texts show that the self-moving motion Socrates suddenly introduces in the *Charmides* as a possible reflexive power is not in fact different in kind from the cognitive powers he has given as examples up to that point: the motion capable of moving itself describes the being of the soul. This is important for the following reason: if the soul is itself in its very being a reflexive power, i.e., that of a motion capable of moving itself, we should not be surprised if its powers of perceiving, desiring, and knowing should also prove reflexive.¹² Furthermore, even the second example of “heat burning” might be a reference, as we have seen, to a psychic process.

10 This point is completely missed by Balaban (2008: 674–5, n. 23) who, simply ignoring the definition of the soul in the *Laws* as a *movement* that moves itself, insists on interpreting the soul in the *Phaedrus* as a *thing* that moves itself. Such a misreading serves his overall aim of denying the existence of any reflexive relations, and therefore any reflexive powers, in Plato. See in contrast Ferro (2022: 111), who sees precisely the conflation here of soul as motion and soul as subject of motion as a target of Aristotle’s critique. And it is this conflation that might commit Plato “to a genuinely reflexive analysis of self-motion as the relation between a single, indivisible item and itself” (*Ibid.* 426). Ferro, however, sees the *Charmides* as suggesting otherwise in failing to note that it leaves in principle open the possibility of a genuinely reflexive motion of motion (*Ibid.* 426, n. 7).

11 See Tuckey 1944: 33–37; 107–8, and Chen 1978: 14. Brunschwig (2000: 289–90) sees the same shift in Aristotle’s account of the thinking of the unmoved mover and believes that in both cases knowledge or thinking that has the self as its object is taken to presuppose knowledge of knowledge or thinking of thinking.

12 I see no basis for Halper’s (2000: 312–3) contention that what the *Charmides* is meant to suggest is that only knowledge can be reflexive whereas the other powers of the soul

It should now be clear that Plato did recognise the existence of that class described by Socrates in the *Charmides* of powers that, unlike quantitative relations, can have themselves as their objects. We can also conclude that his ontology must include, rather than rule out such powers. The following words of Thomas Schmid merit being cited here with approval:

A metaphysics that denies the possibility of self-relation is a metaphysics of beings that conform to purely quantitative relations. Plato's rejection of such a metaphysics is anticipated in the *Charmides*, by his implicit affirmation of self-relational beings. Neither rational selves nor Ideas conform to a world composed simply of objects and their relations. (Schmid 1998: 94)

But the question remains: was Plato enough of a "great man" to explain how such reflexive powers are possible as well as what distinguishes them from relations, such as quantitative relations, that cannot be reflexive?¹³ As already noted, we do not find anywhere in the dialogues the explicit carrying out of the project Socrates anticipates in the *Charmides*. But might we still find indications of how Plato understood and would explain reflexive powers?

such as sensation, belief and feeling cannot be. Hazebroucq insists that the reflexive character of the soul does not entail the reflexivity of knowledge given that the latter has its power only in relation to an object distinct from itself: "In bringing [the *Charmides*] together with the *Phaedrus*, one risks concluding too quickly that the knowledge of knowledge is identical to that of the soul that moves itself [Du rapprochement avec le *Phèdre*, on risque de conclure trop vite que la science de la science s'identifie à celle de l'âme qui se meut elle-même]" (Hazebroucq 1997: 293). But as I will argue below, there is a false dichotomy here from which the whole of Hazebroucq's discussion suffers: the self-motion of the soul does not exclude its being in its very being a movement towards a reality higher than itself, as the myth shows; conversely, the fact that the power of knowledge is exercised on an object other than itself does not exclude its having also itself as its object.

- 13 Tuckey clearly answers in the negative: "It is plain that the whole question of whether knowledge, or any other activity, can be its own object, cannot be solved without a logical analysis such as Plato was certainly incapable of making at this date; that is why he says that 'some great man' is needed to determine it" ... (Tuckey 1994: 115). Centrone (1997: 281, n. 65), in contrast, sees the reference to a great man as self-praise on Plato's part, without explaining what would entitle Plato to such self-praise. Witte (1970: 124) also identifies the great man with Plato, but sees the reference as pointing beyond the dialogues to the esoteric teaching within the Academy; this is also the position of Untersteiner 1965: 41, 43, 47. Tsouna (2022: 233–5) sees a reference to the later dialogues and their method of division. According to some, philosophy would need to wait much longer for the 'great man': Hegel! See Martens 1973: 70.

Before pursuing this question, I would like to turn to someone who clearly considered himself to be the “great man” Socrates is looking for in the *Charmides*: that is Aristotle. Aristotle in *De Anima* explicitly addresses and purports to answer the question of whether and how the soul’s powers can be reflexive.¹⁴ That his account, however, will not agree with whatever Plato’s was is shown by his categorical rejection of the important example we have seen Socrates add to the class of reflexive powers: self-moving motion. For Aristotle, the notion of a self-moving motion is an absurdity, both as a definition of the soul and as such. In the *Physics* Aristotle argues that “it is impossible for what moves itself to move itself in its entirety” (*adynaton dē to auto hautō kinoun pantēi kinein auto hautō*, *Ph.* 257b2). The reasons he gives are, one, that the continuity of movement requires that what is in movement be divisible and, two, that what is moved and the mover cannot be the same thing because the former is a potency for movement while the latter must be in activity. The conclusion is that something can move itself only if part of it is moved and another part of it is an unmoved mover (*tēs holēs ara to men kinēsei akinēton on to de kinēthēsetai. Monōs gar houtōs hoion te ti autokinēton einai*, *Ph.* 258a1–2). Such an argument obviously renders the very notion of a “self-moving motion” an absurdity. But if the notion is absurd in itself, it is if anything even more absurd as a definition of the soul according to Aristotle’s arguments in the first book of *De Anima*. He begins the third chapter of this book by suggesting that it is not only false that the soul’s being is such as it is claimed to be by those defining it as self-motion, but that it is impossible that motion should belong to it at all (*isōs gar ou monon pseudos esti to tēn ousian autēs toiautēn einai hoian phasin hoi legontes psychēn einai to kinoun heauto ē dynamenon kinein, all’ hen ti tōn adynatōn to hyparchein autēi kinēsin*, *de An.* 405b31–406a3). Of all the arguments Aristotle proceeds to give in defence of this impossibility, one is of special interest here as it appears to be a direct retort to the argument we have found in the *Phaedrus*: far from it being the case that a self-moving soul would not abandon itself, if movement belonged to the soul’s being, the soul would constantly step out of its own being (*hē psychē existait’ an ek tēs ousias*, *de An.* 406b15–16).¹⁵ This is because, as Aristotle argues in the *Physics*,

14 As Gregoric rightly claims, “Aristotle accepts Plato’s challenge, and ... the opening passage of *de An.* 111.2 is a reply to the difficulties raised by Plato” (Gregoric 2007: 177). Paul Shorey already noted “the indebtedness of the entire passage to Plato” (Shorey 1901: 154), as did R. D. Hicks (1907: 434). J. Souilhé already suggested that “the great man” was Aristotle (1919: 75, 173), but for reasons having nothing to do with the discussion in *De Anima*, as will be noted below.

15 On Aristotle’s argument here as a riposte to the *Phaedrus*, see Ferro 2022: 62, 112. For a detailed account of all of Aristotle’s arguments here, see Carter 2019: ch. 3. On what he

motion is “ecstatic” in the sense of taking what is moved out of its present state or being (*ei pasa kinēsis ekstasis esti*; see *Ph.* 222b16). A self-moving motion would therefore be a motion that, rather than moving eternally, would constantly stop moving. For in what way can a motion itself move other than by desisting from motion?¹⁶

Despite this fundamental disagreement with Plato, however, the possibility of a “knowledge of knowledge” considered in the *Charmides* is still affirmed by Aristotle. The unmoved mover, as we well know, is characterised by Aristotle as a “thinking of thinking” (*noēseōs noēsis*, *Metaph.* 1074b34–5; *autē hautēs hē noēsis*, *Metaph.* 1075a10). Yet, if a thinking of thinking is possible for Aristotle, this is only because he considers thinking *not a motion but an activity (energeia)*. An activity unlike a motion *can* be reflexive. Indeed, to the extent that an *energeia* in the strict sense is its own end, as Aristotle argues in the very passage from *Metaphysics* Θ 6 in which he distinguishes *energeia* from *kinēsis*, there is a sense in which every *energeia* is reflexive. We also have the famous passage from *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.9 in which Aristotle, in one of his longest and most convoluted sentences and arguments (*EN*, 1170a25–b8), appears to say essentially this: life is pleasant to the virtuous person; but to find life pleasant we must perceive that we live or exist; living for human beings is perceiving and thinking; therefore, we must perceive that we perceive and think that we think (*hōste an aisthanōmethi; hoti aisthanometha, kan noōmen, hoti nooumen*).¹⁷ Most significantly, Aristotle states the general principle that for every activity there must exist a perception that we are active (*kai epi tōn allōn homoiōs esti ti to aisthanomenon hoti energoumen*).

When Aristotle then in *De Anima* III.2 explicitly addresses the same problem raised in the *Charmides*, the notion of *energeia* is the key to the solution. Aristotle begins the chapter with what he clearly considers simply a fact: that

calls “the self-destructing soul” argument in particular, Carter notes that the conception of motion used in the argument is to be found in Plato himself, thus giving the argument the strength of using Plato’s own analysis of motion against him (Carter 2019: 72–73). Yet Carter believes that Plato can answer the objection with his conception of the soul as “a perpetually revolving circular motion” (Carter 2019: 74).

16 Later Neoplatonist commentators saw the apparent tension between the proof of the soul’s immortality based on its self-motion in the *Phaedrus* and Aristotle’s insistence that the soul is an unmoved mover in *Ph.* VIII.5 and they tried to minimise the disagreement: see Long 2020. As Long shows, a strategy common to Hermias and Simplicius is to interpret Aristotle as denying to the soul only *bodily motions*; Simplicius in particular suggests that the disagreement is one of terminology, with Aristotle restricting ‘motion’ to bodies and calling ‘activity’ what Plato called ‘motion’.

17 Untersteiner (1965: 39, 61) finds Aristotle’s solution to the problem raised in the *Charmides* precisely in the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage cited above and in *Metaphysics* Λ.

we perceive that we are seeing and that we are hearing. The question then is by what activity we perceive this. If we take the example of sight, do we *see that we are seeing* or do we perceive that we are seeing by some other perception?¹⁸ Aristotle dismisses the second option as either leading to an infinite regress or simply repeating the problem at a higher level: the sense by which we perceive we are seeing would itself either have to perceive itself or be perceived by yet another sense. But the first option confronts us with the difficulty raised in the *Charmides*, the one Socrates claims would require a great man to solve: in Aristotle's own words, "For if perceiving by sight is seeing, and what is seen is colour or what has colour, for someone to see what sees, what primarily sees must have colour" (*de An.* 425b17–20). The text that follows is of course difficult and controversial, but at least part of Aristotle's solution is to claim that in the *activity* of seeing the power becomes identical with its object (425b22–24).¹⁹ He can claim this because he has already claimed in his general

18 Caston (2002) importantly argues that what is at issue in Aristotle's discussion are not capacities but activities: i.e., the question is not by what *capacity* we perceive that we are seeing, but by what *activity of perceiving*. Yet the contrast with Plato is missed when he insists that what is at issue in the *Charmides* passage is also activities rather than capacities (Caston 2002: 773). He wants to understand the notion of *dynamis* in Plato's text as expressing primarily a *relation*, though he thinks Gadamer "overstates the case" in suggesting that this is simply what the term *means* (Caston 2002: 773 n. 48). Tsouna (2022: 204–5) argues that the question of whether what is at stake in the *Charmides* discussion are faculties or activities is deliberately left open by Plato. Marmodoro clearly offers the kind of reading against which Caston argues, translating Aristotle as saying that "it is through *sense* that we are aware that we are seeing or hearing" (my emphasis) and taking the problem to be that of "*how* a sense can be aware of itself" (Marmodoro 2014: 195–6). And her solution is that what brings about perceptual self-awareness is "the common power of the perceptual system as a whole" (Marmodoro 2014: 257).

19 Gregoric identifies two possible solutions offered by Aristotle, the other being that we perceive that we see "by sight, but not in a way that involves color, that is, not by seeing" (Gregoric 2007: 181). This is how he interprets Aristotle's first response that "perceiving by sight is not one thing, for even when we are not seeing, we discriminate light and darkness by sight, though not in the same way" (*de An.* 425b20–22). Gregoric goes on to claim that this is the *only* solution, since the other (i.e., that the sense is in a way coloured) is "not put forward as a serious option" (Gregoric 2007: 183). I have a hard time seeing how Aristotle could not take seriously a solution based on his own distinctive account of perception. Marmodoro takes the solution to be "only speculative" (Marmodoro 2014: 199). Caston sees both of Aristotle's suggested solutions to the *Charmides* problem as only stabs at a solution or gestures towards an answer (Caston 2002: 788–90). The problem he sees with the solution of an identity between the activity of the sense and the activity of the sensible object is that they are only in a sense one. Not only are they different "in being", as Aristotle would say, but most importantly, as Caston notes, their *difference* is what prevents the reduction of reflexive awareness to awareness of the object (and thus its disappearance as reflexive awareness). As Caston claims, "it is different for a perception

account of perception that, in perceiving, the sense takes on the quality that is sensed, as the wax receives the imprint of the ring; there is a sense in which sight *does* become coloured in perceiving colour. Thus what makes a seeing of seeing possible is the identity of sight with its object in the *activity* of seeing. The *power* of sight, in contrast, cannot perceive itself because as a power it remains distinct from what can be seen (see 418a3–6). Thus Aristotle in chapter 5 of Book 3 (417a3–8) explains why there can be no “perception of the perceptions themselves” (*aisthēsis tōn aisthēseōn autōn*) without an external object (*aneu tōn exō*) – which of course does not exclude there occurring such a perception of perception *with* an external object – by the fact that the sense (*to aisthētikon*) exists only in *dynamis* (*dynamei monon*).²⁰ Aristotle’s solution to the *Charmides* problem, then, is in short: “the activity of the sensible object and the activity of the sense are one and the same” (*hē tou aisthētou energeia kai tēs aisthēseōs hē autē men esti kai mia*, 425b26–27).

As Aubry has shown, it is precisely the Aristotelian notion of *energeia*, with the identity it makes possible between the intellect and the intelligible object, that Plotinus appeals to in offering a solution to the *aporia* of the *Charmides* (see especially Aubry 2007: 173–5). The context is treatise 49 on “Modes of Knowledge and the Transcendental”. If knowledge must have as its object the intelligible (*to noēton*), Plotinus argues as follows: the intelligible is not a *dynamis* and is not deprived of life, but is an *energeia tis* (*Enn.* v.3.5.33–34). As an *energeia*, and indeed the highest and best, the intelligible would itself be *thinking* and *substantial thinking* (*noēsis an eiē kai ousiōdes noēsis*). Approaching thinking from the other side, as it were, we can say that the intellect itself is not something potential distinct in substance from its activity of thinking: rather, its substance is its activity. Plotinus thus concludes that intellect, thinking, and intelligible object are one and the same (v.3.5.43–44). But in this case, when the intellect thinks an intelligible object, *thinking is thinking itself*. “For it will think with the thinking that it is itself and will think the intelligible object that it is itself” (*noēsei gar tē noēsei, hopēr ēn autos, kai noēsei to noēton, hopēr ēn autos*, v.3.5.46–7).

This solution to the *aporia* of the *Charmides*, like that of Aristotle himself, is not available to Plato, however, since it depends, as Aubry notes, on

to be *of itself* (*autē hautēs*, *de An.* 425b15) than for it to be *of a colour* (*tou chrōmatos*, b14)” (Caston 2002: 785). But this difference in being, I would add, does not prevent them from coinciding in the same act.

20 It is intriguing that Aristotle here uses an example that parallels the puzzling example in the *Charmides*: what is combustible (*to kauston*) cannot burn itself (*ou kaietai auto kath'auto*) without encountering an actually existing fire (*tou entelecheiai pyrosontos*, *de An.* 417a8–10).

the distinctly Aristotelian notion of *energeia*: intellect, intelligible object and thinking are one because they are all *energeia* and *not dynamis*; and with no *dynamis* to distinguish them, they are the same *energeia* and it is this *energeia* as such that is reflexive or self-directed. Indeed, Aristotle's definition of *dynamis* in *Metaphysics* Θ as the principle of change *in another* or in itself *qua other* (*archē metabolēs en allō ē hē allo*, *Metaph.* 1046a10–11) clearly implies that a *dynamis* as such cannot be its own object.²¹ Thus we are left with the question the present paper seeks to address: can we find in Plato a sense in which a *dynamis* as such can be reflexive? And do we find any way of making the distinction between the kind of *dynamis* that can be reflexive and those that cannot? And do the answers to these questions shed any light on what is at issue in the *Charmides*: the nature and possibility of that self-knowledge practiced by Socrates? A major goal of this paper has already been met in simply raising and properly contextualising these questions, given their neglect in the secondary literature. In what follows, I offer a possible way of at least beginning to answer them.

A possible clue to the solution is found in Socrates' claim that a power that has its power in relation to itself would need also to have the *being* to which the power relates (*hotiper an tēn heautou dynamin pros heauto echē, ou kai ekeinēn hexei tēn ousian, pros hēn hē dynamis autou ēn*; *Chrm.* 168d1–3).²² As already noted, Socrates applies this principle by concluding that sight would need to be coloured to see itself and hearing would need to have a sound to hear itself (168d6–10). That this need not be as absurd as it might appear is shown by Aristotle, as we have seen. But is there a way of understanding this in terms of powers, without introducing the distinct notion of *energeia*? What if the object of the power were to be understood as itself a power, so that the power *would* have the being of that to which it relates, i.e., the being of a power?²³ Indeed, in the case we are trying to understand, i.e., self-knowledge, the being towards

21 Thus if Souilhé (1919: 173–5) considers Aristotle to be the “great man” sought in the *Charmides*, it is because he thinks that Aristotle decides the question raised there in the negative: no, a *dynamis* cannot be reflexive. See also Lefebvre 2018: 254, 452–3.

22 Lefebvre (2018: 253, n. 3) translates *tēn ousian* here as “cette chose” and insists that it is equivalent to *pragma*. But it is an odd translation to say that the power “must have that thing” to which it relates in order to be reflexive. As Tsouna rightly observes, “the context strongly suggests that ‘ousia’ here refers to the special nature of a relative’s proprietary correlative” (Tsouna 2022: 223).

23 See Hyland 1981: 119–120. Tuozzo writes: “If there is to be a reflexive case of knowledge, knowledge must be capable of having the very nature that the relatum of knowledge must always have. Without knowing what the nonrelative nature of that relatum is, we will not be able to decide whether knowledge admits of a reflexive case” (Tuozzo 2011: 233). The same point is made by Tuckey 1944: 41. I am suggesting here that knowledge has the

which the power is directed is clearly itself a power. But this may also be the case with perception if we understand colour and sound as themselves powers. In this context it is important to note that the class of things for which Socrates judges self-relation to be impossible appear to be less “powers” than what we would call quantitative relations.²⁴ Even if Socrates identifies “the greater” with what has the power of being greater than something else (168b5–6), it does not appear to be a “power” in the way “seeing” or “moving” or even “burning” are: it is a static, external relation, not a power of doing or undergoing something as in the other cases. Is it possible that that which is genuinely a power as opposed to a mere relation between two objects not only can be reflexive but is so necessarily?

The paper on the *Charmides* by O. Balaban is highly instructive here, if only in showing how denying reflexivity to powers can result in denying the very existence of powers. Arguing throughout the paper against the existence of reflexive relations in Plato, Balaban indeed ends up in effect denying the existence of powers as such; on his view, in other words, a power is *reducible to its object* and is nothing in itself.²⁵ Thus he can claim that according to Plato there is no such thing as medicine or politics (Balaban 2008: 685)! The point is

nature of the relatum of knowledge in that both are *dynamis* without it being the case that the one is purely active and the other is purely passive.

24 On the disanalogy between these examples, see Tuckey 1944: 115. Lefebvre (2018: 253) makes the point that if “larger” and “smaller” cannot be reflexive relations, “equal to” and “identical to” can be; see also Halper 2000: 311. Martens (1973: 60) makes the important observation that this group of examples includes only logical relations and that the relata in such relations have no real causal connection between them. But unfortunately, Martens leaps from this observation to the conclusion that the self-relations considered possible are relations of self-causing and self-grounding. He thus concludes that only God’s knowledge can be a knowledge of knowledge because only it can cause and ground itself (see Martens 1973: 61 ff). But this seems to be a confusion. The question of whether knowledge or perception can have themselves as their objects is not the same as whether knowledge and perception cause themselves. When Aristotle in *De Anima* addresses the question raised in the *Charmides* about whether perception can perceive itself, there is no question of perception *causing* itself. Thus, though dedicating an excursus to “Das Selbstbezügliche Wissen Bei Aristoteles”, Martens ignores completely the discussion in *De Anima* and instead discusses Aristotle’s argument against Protagoras in *Metaphysics* IV that perception is caused by or depends on an object distinct from itself: as if it were *there* that Aristotle is addressing the problem raised in the *Charmides*.

25 On the other extreme of the interpretative spectrum we have Untersteiner: “The entire dialogue consists in admitting and demonstrating the necessity of the existence, and therefore the existence of an *epistēmē epistēmēs* – that is, of a method that renders possible dialectical investigation ... [Tutto il dialogo si resolve pertanto nell’ammettere e dimostrare la necessità dell’esistenza e, quindi, l’esistenza di un *epistēmē epistēmēs* – cioè di un *metodo* che permetta l’indagine dialettica ...]” (Untersteiner 1965: 66).

that *as a relation* medicine or politics is *nothing in itself* (Balaban 2008: 688). Balaban's overall position is summed up in the following claim: "Scientific knowledge as such does not exist. We should understand scientific knowledge as having signification only in its object [La science en tant que telle n'existe pas. Nous devons entendre la science comme n'ayant de signification que dans son objet]" (Balaban 2008: 687). Thus, in denying that knowledge or any other power can be reflexive, he ends up denying the existence of knowledge or any other power *as such*. Indeed, he does what Schmid warns against in the passage cited above: seeing the world as composed simply of objects and their external relations. In taking the interpretation diametrically opposed to that of Balaban, I want now to consider texts from three different dialogues that make the reflexivity of powers at least possible, but that also might give us some reason for considering some powers to be necessarily reflexive. Given the absence of any explicit solution to the problem raised in the *Charmides*, this final part of the paper can be only speculative and suggestive.

The first is the account of perception in the *Theaetetus*. According to this account, the colour white is not something existing outside of the eyes or in the eyes or having any specific place (*Tht.* 153d9–e1); the colour is neither that which impinges nor that which is impinged upon, but something *in between* peculiar to each person (*oute to prosballon oute to prosballomenon estai, alla metaxy ti hekastōi idion gegonos*, 154a1–3). The perception is the result of two motions, one with the power to act and one with the power to suffer (*tēs de kinēseōs duo eidē, plēthei men apeiron hekateron, dynamin de to men poiein echon, to de paschein*, 156a5–7). But neither has a stable being and neither is even active or passive except in relation to the other: "For nothing is active before encountering something passive nor passive before encountering something active. And what is active in encountering one thing proves passive in falling upon something else" (*oute gar poioun esti ti prin an tō paschonti sunelthē, oute paschon prin an tō poiounti. to te tini synelthon kai poioun allō au prospeson paschon anephanē*, 157a4–7). Of course, the extent to which this account of perception can be attributed to Plato is a matter of debate, given Socrates' association of it with the doctrines of Protagoras and Heraclitus. But there is a suggestion that the account could stand independently of the refutation of Protagoras (171d–e) and the Heraclitean 'universal flux' doctrine, far from supporting the account, turns out to undermine it in making it impossible to say that anything is seeing rather than not-seeing or white rather than not-white (182d–e). In any case, if anything like this account of perception is correct, it appears to render the reflexivity of the power of perception possible by treating both the sense and the sensible object not only as powers, but as powers that cannot be sharply delimited one from the other since they can be

distinguished as active or passive only in and relative to their kind of encounter. A sharp distinction between active and passive powers would make reflexive powers, which must be simultaneously both, impossible.²⁶

The second text is the account of seeing in the *Timaeus*. This is a notoriously difficult text and I neither can nor want to get into the details here. All I wish to take out of it is the way in which it appears to make vision and the visible object one. While Timaeus describes our eyes as possessing an inner fire, the explanation given for our inability to see at night is that vision requires the coalescing of this inner fire with a kindred fire in the air, forming *one kindred body* (*hen sōma oikeiōthen*, Ti. 45c). This body, furthermore, because uniform throughout, is *uniformly affected and is affected both in contacting something else and in being contacted by something else* (*homoiopathes dē di' homoiotēta pan genomenon, hotou te an auto pote ephaptētai kai ho an allo ekeinou*, Ti. 45c–d). One of the difficulties in understanding this account is indeed what distinction remains here between contacting and being contacted, between active and passive. In any case, this account clearly meets Socrates' criterion in the *Charmides* that in order to be reflexive a power *must have the being of that to which it relates*.

The third text is from the *Sophist* and takes us from speaking of perception to speaking of knowledge. The text is the critique of the 'Friends of the Forms' for an ontology that has the effect of excluding knowledge from being. I first want to suggest that a central point of the argument is that the Forms cannot be known without themselves being powers rather than static, motionless entities. This should not be a controversial suggestion, given that the Visitor's aim here is to get the 'Friends of the Forms' to accept the definition or criterion of being he suggested earlier: that what "truly is" (*ontōs einai*) is what possesses any sort of power either to act upon something or to be acted upon by something (*eit' eis to poiein heteron hotioun pephykos eit' eis to pathein*, *Sph.* 247e1–2); that, in short, "being is nothing other than *dynamis*", in which case the Forms must themselves being nothing other than *dynamis*. But are the Forms active powers or passive powers? Here I must make a more controversial claim: the *dynamis* attributed to the Forms cannot be simply the passive capacity to be acted upon in being known. The reason is that in this case the objection the Visitor goes on to make against the "Friends of the Forms" appears groundless: he accuses them, in their refusal to accept the mentioned definition of being, of excluding from "what fully is" (*tōi pantelōs ontī*) movement, life, soul, and intelligence (248e7–249a2). The Visitor thus seems to go, suddenly and without justification, from the claim that the Forms must have the power to be known,

26 For a similar reading of this passage, as well as other evidence in Plato for relativising the distinction between active and passive powers, see ch. 2: 45–47.

and thus to be affected in this sense, to the claim that they must include soul and intelligence.²⁷ Are the Forms living? Do the Forms think?²⁸ Or is it rather that the power of knowing and the power of being known, and generally the power of acting and the power of being affected, are to the extent inseparable, even being perhaps two ways of looking at the same power, that to include one in “what fully is” is to include the other? That the active and passive capacities can indeed not be sharply distinguished here may be suggested by the odd way in which the Visitor formulates the question he poses to the “Friends of the Forms”. He asks the following:

What then? Regarding knowing or being known, do you call them a doing or a being-affected or both? Or the one a being-affected, and the other the other? Or is it that neither takes any part in either? (*Sph.* 248d4–7)

What is odd here is the number of options offered which can be identified as five: knowing and being known are (1) a doing (*poiēma*) or (2) a being-affected (*pathos*) or (3) both; alternatively, (4) one is a doing and the other is a being-affected or (5) neither is neither. The Visitor of course is arguing against the fifth option. Furthermore, he proceeds to speak on the supposition (*eiper*, 248d10) that knowing is a doing and being-known is a being-affected. However, what I have identified as the third option, i.e., that knowing and being known is each *both* a doing and a being-affected is never ruled out.²⁹ And as already suggested, the Visitor’s immediately following objection that the “Friends of the Forms” are excluding intelligence and soul from “what truly is” is most comprehensible if this option is not excluded. The point again is that the being of the active power, in this case knowing, and the being of the passive power, in this case what is known, are sufficiently one to meet Socrates’ requirement for a reflexive power that must be simultaneously both.³⁰

What I would suggest on the basis of these texts, therefore, is that perception and the object of perception, knowledge and the object of knowledge, are not only both motions, but in some sense constitute one motion. This unity is of course not an identity, but it tells against the sharp opposition between

27 For a recognition of this problem, see ch. 6: 135, though with a different solution.

28 Compare the reading of this passage in ch. 7, especially 158–161.

29 Whether this doing and being-affected count as a “change” or “movement” (see ch. 7: 159–161) or do not (see ch. 5: 112) is a question I leave open here.

30 Abbate suggests, on the basis of the *Sophist*, that the definition of the soul in the *Laws* as “motion that moves itself” can be attributed to being itself since the latter, as intrinsically dynamic and relational, is “ensouled” (Abbate 2016: 229). And as he documents, this is the reading defended by the Neoplatonists.

a power and its object that makes reflexive powers appear to be impossible in principle. Furthermore, even a qualified identity might be sufficient for claiming that perception of an object is always and necessarily *also* perception of perception and knowledge of a Form is always and necessarily *also* knowledge of knowledge. Here it is of crucial importance to note something about the structure of the argument of the *Charmides* that has not yet been noted. Socrates' first objection against the possibility of a knowledge of knowledge (167a–168a) is the apparent absurdity of a seeing that sees itself (and other acts of seeing) *but not colour*, of a hearing that hears itself *but not sound*, of a love that loves itself, *but not what is beautiful*, etc. In short, in this objection the self-relation *excludes* relation to an object.³¹ However, Socrates refers to a possible class of self-reflexive powers only after suggesting, in the passage cited above, that these powers would need to share the being of their objects. The kind of self-reflexive power now in question, then, is not one that excludes a relation to an object, but one that shares the being of its object: thus, not a seeing that sees itself and not colour, but a seeing that sees itself in itself being in some way coloured; not a hearing that hears itself and not sound, but a hearing that hears itself in itself having in some sense sound (168d1–10).³² We can add, though Socrates himself does not do so: not a love that loves itself and not what is beautiful but a love that loves itself in being itself beautiful.

This of course sounds like Aristotle's position.³³ On his account too, as we have seen, a perception can be of itself only in being of an object distinct from itself and taking on the form of that object. In the *Metaphysics* XII.9 Aristotle

31 That the problem here is the exclusion of the object is noted by Tuozzo (2011: 215), as well as Politis who observes: "The argument does not claim absurdity in the idea that there should be a state of the soul that is of itself and of other such states and the lack of them; it claims absurdity in the idea that there should be a state of the soul that is *only* of itself and of other such states and the lack of them" (Politis 2008: 17).

32 This is the fundamental point missed by both Hazebroucq (1997) and Balaban (2008) who argue throughout as if relation to its object and relation to itself were mutually exclusive, an assumption that enables them to conclude that self-relation is an absurdity, with Balaban going even further in concluding that there is no "relation itself" distinct from its object. Tsouna, while noting the shift in the argument (Tsouna 2022: 223–4), in effect ignores the significance of this shift in insisting that the discussion is until the end concerned only with the question of whether a power can be directed *only* towards itself (Tsouna 2022: 227). According to Socrates' argument in the second passage, a power can be directed towards itself only in possessing the nature of its object, which means that it can be directed to itself only in being directed *also* towards its object. It is *this* possibility of a power that is both self- and other-directed that Socrates leaves open though puzzling.

33 Untersteiner notes that with its characterisation as the science of itself and of other sciences *sōphrosynē* "comes implicitly to signify that self-awareness of the content that, as we know, will be examined more deeply and clarified by Aristotle [viene implicatamente

indeed explicitly claims, in the context of defending the characterisation of the unmoved mover as a “thinking of thinking”, that “knowledge and perception and opinion and thought appear to be always of something else (*aei allou*), but of themselves by the way” (*hautēs d’en parergōi*, 1074b35–36).³⁴ The crucial difference, however, is that the operative notion in Plato is not *energeia* but what arguably plays a comparable role for him: self-moving motion. Given what I have found suggested in the *Sophist*, perhaps the closest echo of Plato’s position in Aristotle is Aristotle’s claim in *Metaphysics* Θ 1 that “there is clearly a way in which the power to act and the power to be affected are one” (*phaneron oun hoti esti men hōs mia dynamis tou poiein kai paschein*, 1046a19–20). (In what sense they are one for Aristotle is a difficult and controversial question that I neither can nor want to pursue here). To the extent that the power to see and the power to be seen, the power to know and the power to be known, are one, it would seem that the powers themselves *could* be reflexive; to the extent that these powers themselves partake of the being of their objects, they *would* be reflexive, given again Socrates’ criterion in the *Charmides* that a reflexive power would need to share the being of its object.

It should be noted that the reflexivity of a power does not require that there be no distinction between it and its object, but only that they are “one” in the sense of sharing the same kind of being.³⁵ As a further illustration of this point, I would like to conclude with an observation concerning *desire*. Socrates’ argument against Agathon in the *Symposium* (200a–201b) that a desire has as its object what it *lacks* might seem to rule out conclusively the possibility of a desire of desire, or an *erōs* of *erōs*, that Socrates considers in the *Charmides*. But

a significare quell’autoconsapevolezza del contenuto che, come sappiamo, sarà approfondito e chiarito da Aristotele]” (Untersteiner 1865: 65).

34 On this text see Caston 2002: 786–7, who notes that while reflexive awareness is for Aristotle immediate and intrinsic to awareness of an object, it is also secondary and characterised by a certain indirectness. Brunschwig (2000: 291–5) maintains that Aristotle in *Metaph.* XII.9 proceeds to question the *parergon* model in the case of *epistēmē* and also in the case of *noēsis*. He takes this, however, to be a difference between the account in XII.9 and the account of divine thinking in XII.7 since he sees the latter as not dismissing the *parergon* structure (302–3). For a similar view see also Martens 1973: 69.

35 As Politis notes, the implication of the dialogue’s overall argument is not only that self-knowledge must be *both* a knowledge of knowledge *and* a knowledge of the *object* of knowledge in order to be both possible and beneficial, but that these two aspects of self-knowledge cannot be independent of each other (Politis 2008: 33–34). But there seems no other way for this to be the case beyond maintaining that knowledge and its object (and the other psychic powers and their objects) are not simply distinct, *but also one*. Without some kind of identity here, there is no reason why the knowledge *of knowledge* and the knowledge *of the object* of knowledge would not be independent of each other.

does it? Here the characterisation of the soul in the *Phaedrus* already referred to is revealing. We should be puzzled by the fact that the myth of the *Phaedrus* is introduced by the argument that the soul is a self-mover (and therefore immortal). The reason is that the myth depicts the soul as always and in its very being *moved by* what is other than itself and what it lacks: the true reality in the place beyond the heavens. In other words, there seems at least a tension between the characterisation of the soul as a self-mover and its characterisation as *erotic*. Surely *erōs* is *not self-motion*? But the reply is that *surely it is*. In being moved by the object of its desire the soul is *moving itself* towards this object. Its desire is as much *self-moved* as *other-moved*.³⁶ The soul being a self-moving motion does not rule out its being moved by something other than itself and its being moved by something other than itself does not rule out its being a self-moving motion. Desire being of what it lacks does not rule out its being desire of desire. As already noted above, what Socrates rules out in the *Charmides* is an *erōs* that is of itself and *not* of the beautiful (167e7–8). This is the false dichotomy that a “great man” would need to overcome.³⁷

We have, of course, an example of erotic desire in the *Charmides* itself when Socrates looks inside Charmides’ cloak and catches fire. Socrates describes himself as no longer being “inside himself” in his desire (*ouket’ en hemaoutou hēn*, 155d4), thus expressing the passive dimension of *erōs*. But Socrates’ comparison here of himself with a fawn being potentially eaten by the lion it gazes upon only reminds us that *he* is the real predator here: he is the one who appears on the scene asking where the most beautiful boys are to be found; it is *his desire* and one he affirms, indeed, desires. Perhaps there is a point after all to the suggestion that the example of a self-burning heat is a reference to *erōs*.

This example leads me to another important clarification. Mary Margaret McCabe, in the chapter of her *Platonic Conversations* (2015) dedicated to both

36 Socrates’ account makes it clear that it is the perception of beauty in the beloved that awakens *erōs* in the soul and draws the soul towards the reality beyond the heavens. The image of the wings is revealing in this regard: while representing the soul’s ability to move itself, they also depend on the higher reality that nourishes them in order to grow and be able to move the soul. On the question of how self-motion can be the source of an impulse of caring for the other (*Fürsorge*) that allows the other to be manifest, see the helpful article by Lavecchia 2016.

37 Thus Lefebvre claims that the problem here is not reflexivity per se, but the absence of an object (and a subject): “The defect of Critias’ definition is therefore not its reflexivity as such but either the absence of reflection, that is, of a soul, which appears nowhere in his definition of temperance, or the absence of a determinate object of temperance [La défaut de la définition de Critias n’est donc pas sa réflexivité en elle-même mais ou bien l’absence de réflexion, c’est-à-dire d’une âme, qui n’apparaît nulle part dans sa définition de la sagesse, ou bien l’absence d’objet déterminé de la sagesse]” (Lefebvre 2018: 255).

the problem in the *Charmides* and Aristotle's response in *De Anima* (283–309), rejects the claims I make above as an interpretation of either one: i.e., that perception of an object is always and necessarily perception of perception and knowledge of a Form is always and necessarily knowledge of knowledge. She argues that what is instead at issue in both cases is a second-order perception and a second-order knowledge, where both have normative content. Perception of perception is a perception that *reflects on* perception and is therefore a higher order perception; knowledge of knowledge is a knowledge that *reflects on* knowledge and is therefore a higher order knowledge.³⁸ Now I do not want at all to deny that for both philosophers there exists such second-order perception or knowledge. At least in the case of the *Charmides* – the case of *De Anima* is more complicated and I therefore leave it aside here – it is clear that the “knowledge of knowledge” potentially to be identified with *sōphrosynē* and practiced by Socrates is not simply the reflexivity inherent in every act of knowledge but is a higher-level reflexivity that must be achieved (and that most people indeed fail to achieve). My argument is simply that this second-order reflexivity depends on a first-order reflexivity inherent to knowledge or perception themselves as powers. If all perception of an object is at the same time perception of perception, it is possible to have a perception that focuses exclusively on perception. If all knowledge of an object is at the same time knowledge of knowledge, it is possible to have a knowledge that focuses exclusively on knowledge itself.³⁹ Here I can claim simply to be following Socrates since it is Socrates himself in the *Charmides* who makes the possibility of the knowledge of knowledge being identified with *sōphrosynē* depend on the possibility of knowledge being its own object by sharing the being of its object.

If we return to the *Alcibiades* passage, we can further develop this point. The reflexivity I have described is intrinsic to a power and therefore would not *require* to be mirrored by another in order to be reflexive, as the *Alcibiades* passage might be taken to suggest. It is not the case that seeing can see itself only in seeing the seeing of another, and it is not the case that knowledge can know itself only in knowing the knowledge of another, just as it is not the case that motion can move itself only in moving motion in another. But if psychic powers are reflexive in the way described, it is possible that a relation

38 One can find a similar view in Shields who, “relying on ... slender evidence”, concludes that Aristotle is using perception non-univocally here, i.e., “that he is treating the kind of perception involved in perceiving *that we see* as distinct from the kind of perception that seeing is” (Shields 2016: 266).

39 Something along these lines is suggested by Caston 2002 as a reading of Aristotle: Aristotle does not rule out the possibility of explicit introspection, but sees reflexive awareness as prior to it and not identifiable with it (786–7).

with another exercising the same power is required by, or at least facilitates, a higher order reflexivity. Perhaps we can best see our own seeing in seeing others' seeing, as we have seen Socrates do in the opening of the *Charmides*. But, of course, the best and most important confirmation of this principle is Socrates' own practice of elenctic examination. Socrates could in principle know what he knows and what he doesn't know *by himself*, but his decision to examine himself in examining others suggests a conviction that he can best know what he knows and does not know in knowing what others know and do not know.⁴⁰ Recall that the "knowledge of knowledge" whose possibility is being examined in the *Charmides* is described as a knowledge of itself *and of other knowledges* (*heautēs te kai tōn allōn epistēmōn epistēmē*, 167c1), so that the parallel would be a seeing that sees itself *and other seeings* (*heautēs te kai tōn allōn opseōn opsis estin*, 167c9–10). And could Socrates know what he does not know without knowing what others know and do not know? Significantly, it is immediately after describing the knowledge of knowledge as also of other knowledges that Socrates adds that it will be also of non-knowledge (*kai anepistēmosynēs*, 167c2). In the parallel example of a seeing that is of other seeings, he likewise adds: "and likewise of non-seeings" (*kai mē opseōn hōsautōs*, 167c10). It is worth noting that we find a similar view in Aristotle. The passage cited above from *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.9 is of course found in the context of Aristotle's argument for why the virtuous person needs *friends* and shortly after he has claimed that we can contemplate the actions of our neighbors better than our own (*theōrein de mallon tous pelas dynametha ē eautous kai tas ekeinōn praxeis ē tas oikeias*, *EN*. 1169b33–35).

Let us conclude with two contrasting figures. The first is an erotic Socrates desiring his own desire and desiring to know what he knows and what he does not know and doing so in relation to others. The second is Aristotle's unmoved mover characterised as an "understanding of understanding" and having no object other than itself and relating itself to nothing outside itself (and, yes, having no friends). In both cases we have reflexivity.⁴¹ But in the first case it

40 See Tuozzo's (2011: 205) excellent comments on this point.

41 As noted above, Brunschwig 2000 sees the parallel here with the *Charmides*, though he interprets it differently and makes nothing in the context of the distinction between *dynamis* and *energeia*. Witte even sees the *Charmides* and the passage from *Metaphysics* Λ as exhibiting "proportionally the same structure" (1970, 123). But he completely ignores the important difference introduced by Aristotle's distinctive concept of *energeia*. Untersteiner draws the connection between the science of itself in the *Charmides* and the Aristotelian notion, already presented in his *Protreptikos*, of a knowledge that produces nothing other than itself (1965: 55); but he too does not reflect on the difference introduced, at least later in Aristotle, by the new notion of *energeia*. Martens also sees

is the reflexivity of a *dynamis* while in the second it is the reflexivity of an *energeia* that excludes all *dynamis*. In the first case, it is a reflexivity that, precisely as characterising a *dynamis*, is inescapably also other-directed; in the second case it is a reflexivity that is absolutely self-directed. Two ontologies, two models of self-knowledge.

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the parallel and also makes no distinction between the position of Plato and Aristotle, since he takes the problem of a knowledge of knowledge as a problem of *self-grounding* (Selbstbegründung) and believes that both Plato and Aristotle restrict such self-grounding to god (1973: 69).

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Power in the *Hippias Minor*

Hugh H. Benson

1 Introduction

The *Hippias Minor* presents three arguments on behalf of two allegedly paradoxical theses – one argument (366a2–369b7) for

[T1] “The same person [is] a liar and truthful” (369b3–4)¹

and, two arguments (373c6–375d2 and 375d7–376b6) for

[T2] “The one who willingly misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust, ... – that is, if there is such a person – would be no other than the good man” (376b4–6).²

These three arguments all rely on the same understanding of power.³ This understanding of power may be roughly characterised by the following three conditions:

[V] *A* is good at some kind of activity iff *A* has the power manifested in that kind of activity.

[WI] *A* has the power manifested in some kind of activity iff (if *B* possesses and uses *A* in the performance of the activity & *B* wants to perform

1 The translations are found in Cooper and Hutchinson (1997), sometimes with moderate alterations.

2 See Adams (2010: 34–35) for the “book-end” statements which indicate the theses which these arguments purport to support.

3 In this essay “power” generally translates *dynamis* and its cognates and “powerful” translates *dynatos* and its cognates. I say generally because the understanding of power is at play even when *dynamis* and *dynatos* are not used. Indeed, *dynamis* occurs only four times in the dialogue and not until the final argument. *Dynatos* which occurs much more frequently and which I understand to be equivalent to the possession of a *dynamis* is almost entirely restricted to the first argument (of the 34 salient occurrences none occur in the second argument and only three in the third). Nevertheless, the understanding of power which these words denote is also at play in the second argument.

the activity well & there are no obstacles, then *B* performs activities of that kind well), and

- [D] *A* has the power manifested in some kind of activity iff *A* has the power manifested in the opposite kind of activity (in some sense of opposite).

I will call the first condition the valence condition, the second the weak infallibility condition, and the third the duality condition.

I say that the three arguments in the *Hippias Minor* rely on an understanding of power *roughly* characterised by these three conditions because considerable work to make them precise remains – work which I do not attempt. For example, these conditions raise questions concerning individuating kinds of activities, the nature of the distinction between the agent, *B*, and the vehicle of the power, *A*, and the relevant sense of opposite kinds of activities. These questions are partially addressed in what follows but in the end they are left standing, in part because they are left standing in the *Hippias Minor*. My focus is on the understanding of power that underlies the three arguments in the *Hippias Minor*. I leave open how well these conditions fit with the understanding(s) of power or *dynamis* in other Platonic dialogues, and so how, indeed whether, they develop throughout the Platonic corpus. I do not even assume that Plato or Socrates is committed to these conditions in the *Hippias Minor*. It suffices if Hippias is committed to them for Socrates to successfully show that Hippias cannot consistently believe Homer made Achilles better than Odysseus in being simple and truthful while Odysseus is wily and a liar.⁴ I maintain that the arguments of the *Hippias Minor* depend on these conditions whether or not Socrates or Plato is committed to them.⁵

2 First Argument

In coming to understand Hippias' assertion that Homer made Achilles better than Odysseus Socrates uncovers that Hippias maintains that:

4 Though in fact I am sympathetic with the idea that Socrates, and so Plato, are so committed at least in the *Hippias Minor*. See the debate concerning Socrates', and so Plato's, commitment to the soundness of the argument(s) for [T2] between Weiss (1981) (more recently Weiss 2006: ch. 4) and Jones and Sharma (2017).

5 See Nawar's two recent studies of skill and ability first in *Republic* 1 (Nawar 2018) and then in Plato and Aristotle more generally (Nawar 2021). This essay further develops some of his most important insights at least as they pertain to the *Hippias Minor*, though Nawar might not agree.

[A1] (According to Homer) Achilles is a truth-teller and Odysseus a liar,⁶ and

[A2] (according to Homer) the truth-teller is better than the liar.

Socrates points out and Hippias agrees that it follows from [A2] that

[A3] (according to Homer) the truth-teller is distinct from the liar, viz. if *A* is a truth-teller, then *A* is not a liar (365c3–7; cf. also 366a5–6).

After Hippias agrees to put Homer aside and speak in his own voice, Socrates sets out to discover what Hippias means by liar. He first uncovers that according to Hippias

[A4] *A* is a liar iff *A* is powerful in deceiving people (365d6–8),

and that the power liars have⁷ is a cognitive one. As Socrates puts it

[A5] “Liars are powerful and intelligent and knowledgeable and wise in those matters in which they are liars?” (366a2–4).

After recapitulating Hippias’ commitment to [A3] and [A5], Socrates asks:

But each person who can do what he wishes when he wishes is powerful. I mean someone who is not prevented by disease or other such things, someone like you with regard to writing my name. You have the power to do this whenever you wish to. That’s what I mean. Or don’t you say that one in such a condition is powerful? (*Hp. Mi.* 366b7–c4)

Hippias’ affirmative response indicates his commitment to

[WI*] *A* has the power manifested in some kind of activity iff if *A* wants to perform an activity of that kind and there are no obstacles to performing it, *A* performs the activity.⁸

6 I do not address the dialogue’s discussion of being wily (*polytropos*). The relationship between being wily and being a liar occupies a great deal of the attention of the scholarly literature. Adams (2010: 35–38) rightly suggests this may be mistaken. Weiss (1981: 290) rightly defends Socrates from the charge of fallacy alleged to result from his use of *pseudēs* and *polytropos*. My focus on the argument for [T1] permits setting these issues aside.

7 Given the equivalence between being powerful and possessing the power; cf. n. 3 above.

8 Hippias’ response alone may only require that the right hand side of [WI*] is necessary for the left, but some of Socrates’ further comments indicate the equivalence. See Nawar 2021: 46–47.

Since liars have the power to lie,⁹ it follows that liars lie if and when they want to, barring obstacles of some sort.

In committing to [WI*], Hippias commits to a first approximation of [WI] introduced above. According to [WI*] an individual with the power manifested in some kind of activity and who wants to perform an activity of that kind, performs it if no obstacles are present. Such individuals do not often perform such activities. They do not sometimes perform such activities. They always perform such activities – if they want to and barring obstacles. As Nawar¹⁰ recognises, this is a weak version of the infallibility condition assumed by Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1, though Thrasymachus puts the point in terms of *technē*, a cognitive power, rather than power alone – a point I will return to in a moment. According to Thrasymachus an individual who wants to act in a particular way but does not act in that way does not have the power to act in that way. For Thrasymachus an individual with such a power always acts in that way, if she wants, no matter what. Here in the *Hippias Minor*, however, Socrates and Hippias allow that individuals who fail to act as they want when they want may nevertheless have the power which is manifested in such activity, though only if some obstacle to the activity stands in the way. Unfortunately, the nature of such obstacles is radically under-described in the text.¹¹ Socrates' focus is on the infallibility of the power, not on its potential obstacles, as becomes clear with the subsequent examples. Indeed, having mooted the possibility of such obstacles here, they are never mentioned again in the dialogue, let alone more adequately addressed. Moreover, there is no hint here of a potential distinction between the vehicle of the power and the agent of the activity manifested by the power, nor does the passage broach the nature of the activities manifested by the power. The salience of these last two features will become apparent as the dialogue progresses.¹²

In recapitulating Hippias' commitment to [A3] and [A5] immediately before introducing [WI*], Socrates indicates that he intends to show an inconsistency

9 Between 366a8 and 366b8 Socrates has stressed that liars are powerful at lying (*dynatoi pseudesthai*; 366b2–3, 366b4–5, 366b6–7), unlike Hippias' earlier assertion that they are powerful at deceiving (*dynatoi exapatan*; 365d8). For our purposes nothing important hangs on this change.

10 See Nawar 2018: 373 n. 41.

11 Socrates' example of Hippias' power to write Socrates' name suggests that Hippias retains that power even when his hands are tied behind his back or he is too ill to lift his arm. Thus, Hippias appears to have the power to act in a particular way, though he is unable to act in that way for some period of time. One wonders how long the inability can last before the power disappears.

12 Kahn (1996: 116) calls this "the definition of capacity", but it is at best a first approximation.

in Hippias' position based on Hippias' commitment to [WI*].¹³ Hippias' view that truth-tellers are better than liars and so different than liars is incompatible with his view that liars are "powerful and intelligent and knowledgeable and wise in those matters in which they are liars" given [WI*]'s understanding of power. [A5] and [WI*] entail [T1], or at least so Socrates will maintain. But [T1] entails that [A3] is false.¹⁴ Nevertheless, we should notice that Socrates' appeal to [WI*] suggests that the move from [A4] to [A5] plays no role in the argument. [A4] and [WI*] entail [T1], if they do, without appeal to the cognitive character of the liar's power. This is easy to miss since Socrates introduces [A5] as though it does play a role, and all of the examples in the epagogic¹⁵ passage that follows are cognitive powers. But *technai* and *epistēmai*, like arithmetic and geometry, are powers for Socrates,¹⁶ and apparently for Hippias, though not all powers are cognitive, and [WI*] makes no reference to the cognitive features of such powers. Whatever being a *technē* or *epistēmē* adds to being a power evidently does not account for the inference to [T1].

After elucidating the nature of power which Hippias thinks a liar has, Socrates turns to a series of examples aimed at justifying the inference to [T1]. Socrates cites the cases of arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, followed by the assertion that all *epistēmai* are similar, but he spends the most time on arithmetic. Socrates begins by getting Hippias' agreement first that given Hippias' arithmetical expertise¹⁷ he has power (and wisdom) manifested in arithmetical activities or calculating (366d2–3), he is good at calculating (366d3–6),¹⁸ and

13 This need not be all that Socrates intends to show. He may also intend to show that as a result of that inconsistency Hippias lacks knowledge or wisdom. More to the point, if Socrates is himself committed to [WI*], then he is showing that [A3] is false because [T1]. Cf. n. 4 above.

14 Socrates maintains that [A5] (or as we will see [A4]) together with [WI*] entails that [A3] is false, though he actually argues for something stronger, viz. [T1]. To show that [A3] is false it would suffice to show one individual who is both a liar and truth-teller. What Socrates in fact maintains is that [A4] together with [WI*] shows that all liars are truth-tellers, i.e. [T1].

15 Cf. n. 37 below.

16 Cf., e.g., Benson 2000: 193–197.

17 Socrates describes Hippias as *empeiros* in the case of arithmetic and geometry, but he then refers to Hippias' *technē* of astronomy at 367e9 and his other *technai* throughout 368a8–369a2. Socrates is not here distinguishing between being *empeiros* and *technikos* as he does elsewhere; cf., e.g., *Grg.* 462b–466a.

18 This argument, as well as those that follow, are put in the comparative and superlative degrees of being powerful or wise. But nothing hangs on this. The salient point is that *A* has the power to lie iff *A* has the power to tell the truth, and so *A* cannot be better than *B* on the grounds that one is a liar and the other a truth-teller. The comparative degree would be salient if Hippias meant to claim that Achilles was better than Odysseus on the

as a result whenever he wants to speak truthfully concerning his calculations (*ei bouloio*), he does (366c5–d3, 366d6–e1). Next, he gets Hippias' agreement that as such he also has the power manifested in and is good at lying concerning arithmetic¹⁹ whenever he wants (*boulomenos*) (366e3–6, 367a4–5). Socrates explains this by pointing out that if he were not expert, and so lacked the power concerning arithmetic, he would sometimes²⁰ speak truthfully, wishing to lie concerning arithmetic, while experts always lie, if they wish (367a2–5).²¹ At this point Socrates reminds Hippias that he takes a liar to be the person who has the power to lie, i.e. [A4], (367b1–6). And, so Hippias, *qua* arithmetical expert, is a liar concerning arithmetic.²² But, he had also shown, that *qua* arithmetical expert, Hippias has the power to tell the truth concerning arithmetic, whenever he wants back at 366c5–e1 (367c1–2), and assuming that a truth-teller is the one who has the power to tell the truth, it follows that [T1*] the same person, viz. Hippias, in virtue of his expertise and so power concerning arithmetic, is a liar and truth-teller concerning arithmetic (367c7–d3).

Notice that this argument indicates not merely that Hippias is both a liar and truth-teller concerning arithmetic which would suffice for rejecting [A3], at least in the case of arithmetic. Rather, the argument shows that the power Hippias has in virtue of his arithmetical expertise by which he says arithmetical truths whenever he wants (and so is an arithmetical truth-teller) is also responsible for his saying arithmetical falsehoods whenever he wants (and so

grounds that Achilles was a *better* truth-teller than Odysseus or that Odysseus was a *better* liar than Achilles, but those are not the grounds that Hippias offers. A similar point can be made for the arguments for [T2] which itself is put in the positive degree. Plato's use of the comparative and superlative degrees complicates and may even weaken his arguments, but his arguments can be seen to be valid when put in the positive degree given the understanding of power found in [V], [WI], and [D], or at least so I argue.

- 19 Socrates makes clear that the lying and truth-telling being discussed in this passage is restricted to lying and truth-telling concerning arithmetic at 367a6–b1, though the qualification is not always explicit.
- 20 Sharma (forthcoming) rightly takes *pollakis* to mean “every so often” or “perchance”, not “often”. But for our purposes “often” would work as well.
- 21 Socrates' explanation here assumes not only that if one has the power to lie concerning arithmetic, then if one wants to lie, one does, but also that if one lacks the power, then it is not the case that if one wants to lie, one does. Cf. n. 8 above.
- 22 This inference is assumed given Socrates' redundant assertion at 367b6–7, but it requires that [A4] be read as a bi-conditional and not simply that having the power to lie is necessary for being a liar as the text minimally requires. I thank Carolina Araújo for pointing this out to me. The assertion concerning the geometer at 367e1–7 may suggest the equivalence. In any case, the prior thesis that *A* has the power to lie just in case *A* has the power to truth-tell rather than the posterior thesis that *A* is a liar just in case *A* is a truth-teller is what is vital for understanding power in the *Hippias Minor*.

is an arithmetical liar). The power which manifests truth-telling in arithmetic is also the power which manifests lying in arithmetic. And so, whoever is a liar is a truth-teller, viz. [T1], at least with respect to arithmetic. In reaching this conclusion, Socrates relies on [WI*], the idea that one has the power manifested in some kind of activity just in case, if one wants to perform that kind of activity well (and there are no obstacles), one does, together with the suggestion that the power of arithmetic is manifested in calculating and expressing the results of those calculations, and doing so well is doing so truthfully. Moreover, Socrates relies on [V] in indicating that Hippias is good at arithmetic precisely because he has the power manifested in calculating well.²³ And, finally Socrates relies on [D] in making the move from his power to truth-tell concerning arithmetic whenever he wants to his power to lie concerning arithmetic when he wants.

The remaining cases – geometry, astronomy, and all the *epistēmai* – are described more briefly based on this discussion of arithmetic. After affirming that Hippias is also expert in geometry (367d5), Socrates reiterates that the same person – the geometer – has the power manifested in lying and truth-telling (when she wants)²⁴ concerning diagrams (367d7–9), viz. [D], and so the same person – the geometer – is the liar and the truth-teller at least in the case of diagrams (367e5–7).²⁵ Along the way, he points out that one is good at expressing her geometrical diagrams, viz. a good geometer,²⁶ just in case she has the power manifested in those activities (367d9–e5), viz. [V]. Again, after affirming Hippias' expertise in astronomy (367e8–368a1), Socrates identifies the one with the power to lie concerning astronomy with the good astronomer (368a3–6), and so, presumably with the one who has the power to tell the truth, viz. [V] and [D], concluding that the same person – the good astronomer – is the liar and the truth-teller at least in astronomy (368a6–7). Finally, Socrates

23 This is recapitulated between 367c1–2 and the conclusion at 367c7–d3.

24 This qualification is dropped in the remaining cases after being emphasised in the case of arithmetic.

25 Socrates only indicates the inference from having the power to lie to being a liar, but he must also be plausibly assuming that being a geometer and so having the power to truth-tell is being a truth-teller.

26 Socrates uses the phrases “the good geometer” at 367e2 and “the good astronomer” at 368a4 raising the possibility of bad geometers and bad astronomers. Nevertheless at 367d9–e1, Socrates indicates that the one who is good concerning diagrams is the geometer. “Geometer” and “astronomer” are being used equivocally, sometimes for one who is wise about diagrams and the heavenly bodies, and sometimes for one who speaks about diagrams and heavenly bodies. The latter can be good or bad. The former cannot. A similar equivocation is at stake in *Republic* 1. Nothing hangs on this equivocation in the course of the argument. The context readily resolves the equivocation.

turns to all of Hippias' *epistēmai* as well as any *epistēmē* Hippias does not have and indicates that based on what they have agreed the powers which constitute these *epistēmai* are the same in the truth-teller and the liar (368e1–369a3). These examples suggest that the account of power characterized by [V], [WI*], and [D] on which they depend is meant to be fully general.

Socrates concludes that even in the case of Achilles and Odysseus with which they began the same person is a liar and truth-teller (369b3–4), and so if Odysseus is a liar, then he is a truth-teller, and if Achilles is a truth-teller, then he is a liar (369b4–5). At least on this basis they do not differ, and one is not better than the other. Thus, Socrates' first argument in the *Hippias Minor* – the one aimed at [T1] and the identity of the liar and truth-teller – depends on seeing both the liar and the truth-teller as possessing a power characterised by [V], [WI*], and [D].

3 The Second Argument

The second argument – the first one aimed at [T2] – begins at 373c8 following a transition in which Hippias attempts to avoid the results of the previous argument. Hippias offers to prove that Homer made Achilles better than Odysseus and not a liar. Socrates deflects Hippias' offer by citing *Iliad* I 169–171 and IX 357–363 in which Achilles is allegedly portrayed as wily,²⁷ or at least as lying (*pseudetai goun*). Hippias now concedes that Achilles may perhaps occasionally lie, but he is not a liar. His lying activity, if it occurs, is not a manifestation of some power, wisdom, or knowledge which he has.²⁸ Rather Achilles lies, if he does, unwillingly, without treachery,²⁹ and in a sense from good-will.³⁰

27 Socrates use of the phrase *kata ton son logon* here is unclear. I suspect it refers back to the equivalence, according to Hippias, between being a liar and being wily; Hippias agrees that being a liar is necessary for being wily at 365b7–8, and sufficient at 365e1–2. Cf. n. 6 above. Socrates is about to cite a passage in which Achilles is portrayed as a liar and so wily, although he concedes it may only indicate that Achilles occasionally lies.

28 See ch. 12: 256. N.B. lacking the power to lie is compatible with Achilles' lying sometimes, or even often; cf. n. 20 above.

29 Perhaps "without malice aforethought", as Nick Smith suggested to me. The important point is that the force of *ex epiboulēs* is as much on design, purpose, or intention (given its introductory pairing with *hekōn* and *akōn*) as on negative charge. It is because Achilles does not want to lie that he lacks the power to lie. I thank Ravi Sharma and Nick Smith to help me see this. See Jones, et al. (2017: 125 n.27) *contra* Weiss (2006: 129–130). For more on the *hekōn/akōn* distinction and its connection to power, cf. Ch. 12: 248–257.

30 In responding to Hippias' denial that Achilles is portrayed as lying willingly, Socrates cites Hom. *Il.* IX, 650–655 which he takes to display Achilles as lying with intelligence

Thus, according to Hippias, Achilles is not portrayed as a liar, given [A4], and so remains better than Odysseus.³¹ Socrates demurs, pointing out that if Odysseus lies willingly and Achilles unwillingly then Odysseus is better than Achilles. Those who lie willingly have just been shown to be better than those who lie unwillingly (371e4–8). Where this has been shown is unclear, but Hippias rejects the suggestion since those who act unjustly, lie, or otherwise do something bad (372a3)³² willingly are treated more harshly than those who do so unwillingly. Following a repetition of Socrates' professed ignorance on this matter (372a6–373b9), the first argument for [T2] begins.

The argument consists of more than 18 examples of kinds of activities. In each case, those who willingly perform these activities when they bring about bad things are better than those who unwillingly do so. The examples in order are

- [B1] Running (373c9–374a1)
- [B2] Wrestling (374a1–6)
- [B3] Other bodily activities (374a6–b4)
- [B4] Posing (374b5–c2)³³
- [B5] Singing with one's voice (374c2–5)
- [B6] Walking with one's feet (374c5–d2)³⁴
- [B7] Seeing with one's eyes (374d2–7)
- [B8] All perceiving with one's senses (374d8–e2)
- [B9] Steering with a rudder (374e4–5)

(*tou Odysseōs ... phronein pleon*) and expertise (*tō technazein*). Hippias, however, explains what Achilles says here by his good-will (reading the text with Burnet). According to Hippias, no doubt implausibly, it is true that what Achilles says to Odysseus is untrue and so to that extent a lie, but it is not a result of his wisdom. Rather, when speaking to Odysseus, Achilles fails to realise that his good-will (toward Ajax?) will lead him to stay, just as he failed to realise that the misfortune of the army will lead him to stay and help.

- 31 Whether Hippias concedes the force of Socrates' first argument and so accepts that Achilles is not portrayed as a truth-teller either is left obscure. Hippias may now believe that Achilles is neither a truth-teller nor a liar, and it is in virtue of this that he is better than the liar Odysseus. Such a change of heart would run up against Hippias' commitment that having a power relative to some activity is better than not having it relative to that activity; cf. [V].
- 32 See also *adikountes kai hekontes epibouleusantes kai kaka ergasamenoi* at 371e9–372a1 where *epibouleusantes* seems to be substituted for *pseusētai*.
- 33 What Socrates means by *schēmata schēmatizein* is unclear. I assume he has in mind striking a pose and that gracefulness and awkwardness are the positive and negative instances of *schēma*. Nothing hangs on this assumption as long as we allow that *schēmata schēmatizein* is analogous to *erga ergazethai*, at least for the purposes of this argument.
- 34 Assuming that lameness is walking badly.

- [B10] Shooting with a bow, making music with a lyre, and making music with a flute (374e5–375a1)
- [B11] Working with all tools (374e3–375a1)³⁵
- [B12] Riding with a horse (375a1–6)³⁶
- [B13] Other activities (perhaps hunting or herding) with a dog and other animals (375a6–7)
- [B14] Shooting by an archer (375a7–b4)
- [B15] Treating the sick by a doctor (375b4–7)
- [B16] Lyre playing by a lyre-player, flute playing by flautist, and all other activities by the corresponding practitioners (375b7–c3)
- [B17] Activities by a slave (375c3–6)
- [B18] Activities by free persons (375c6–d1)

The last activities invoked in [B18] are meant to exemplify [T2], Socrates' present position about which he wanders that "those who harm people and act unjustly and lie and deceive and go wrong willingly, rather than unwillingly, are better than those who do so unwillingly" (372d3–7; cf. also 372e2–3 and 372e3–6). The previous examples are offered in its support.³⁷

Those familiar with the text of 373c8–375d1 may be dismayed by attempting a uniform construction of these examples given their descriptive variety. Nevertheless, Socrates presumably intends each example to model the general idea that individuals who perform activities of some sort badly willingly are better than those who do so unwillingly leading to [T2]. Characterising each example in terms of an activity begins to display a common structure enabling such sentiment. Moreover, thinking in terms of activities allows a connection

35 I here assume the answer to the question raised at 374e3–4 based on the examples of rudders, bows, lyres, and flutes. See *talla sympanta* at 374e6.

36 The text indicates "riding with the soul of a horse". I will return to this complexity below.

37 Like part of the first argument, this argument is epagogic in character. As a result how it is to be understood is controversial. Vlastos (1991: 267–269) maintains that Socratic epagogic arguments are always what he calls "intuitive inductions" providing explanations of, but not inferences to, specific theses. They are not offered as empirical support. McPherran (2007) maintains on the contrary that many of Socrates' epagogic arguments are inferential. McPherran takes the inferential nature of epagogic arguments to tell against seeing Socrates as merely uncovering the beliefs of his interlocutors and so the non-constructive interpretation of the *elenchos*, as defended, for example, in Benson (2011). Neither Vlastos nor McPherran explicitly address the two epagogic arguments in the *Hippias Minor* and the controversy is orthogonal to my concerns in this essay (though it may effect whether one takes Socrates to be committed to the understanding of power underlying these arguments). Consequently, I take my description of the arguments to be neutral concerning this controversy.

with the previous argument. Each activity can be seen as the manifestation of power possessed by the individual who so acts (although this will need to be made more precise in a moment). Nevertheless, one is hard pressed to characterise the last two sorts of activities (perhaps the most salient for the argument) independently of their being done well or badly. We can readily characterise the activities of the wrestler, or the eyes, or the archer, when they are not explicitly given: wrestling, seeing, and shooting. But it is less clear how to characterise the activities of slaves or free-persons.³⁸ Nevertheless, whatever these activities are, the previous examples are meant to indicate that the latter when done badly amount to harming others, acting unjustly, and/or lying and deceiving.

Even if Hippias were to grant that these examples support [T2] in some way, why should Hippias or anyone else grant the examples so characterised. Why should Hippias concede, for example, that individuals who willingly perform running or singing activities (i.e., who run or sing) badly are better than individuals who do so unwillingly? This is especially striking given his adamant denial that those who willingly do bad things like acting unjustly and lying are better than who unwillingly do those bad things. Socrates' description of the first example – the only one he spends any time developing – provides some guidance. Like Socrates' discussion of arithmetic in the previous argument, Socrates' discussion of the first example provides a model for the rest.

Socrates begins by pointing out that

- [1] There are good and bad runners (373c8–d1),

and then accounts for their difference as follows:

- [2] Good runners run well and bad runners run badly (373d1–2).

While [2] might suggest that running well is a sufficient, as well as a necessary, condition for being a good runner, it should not. Socrates' next step indicates an equivalence between running well and running quickly.

- [3] Runners who run well run quickly and runners who run badly run slowly (373d2–5; the second conjunct is repeated at 373e3).

38 The difficulty is exacerbated by the brevity of Socrates' description of the final example. He asks simply "So, will [our soul] be better if it acts badly and misses the mark voluntarily or involuntarily?" (375d1–2). How "we" are to be characterised is under-described.

But, if [2] were taken to indicate that running well suffices for being a good runner, it would follow that bad runners never run quickly, contrary to common sense and the previous argument's comments concerning arithmeticians, et al. Intuitively, bad runners sometimes run quickly, when, for example they are pushed down a hill,³⁹ and bad arithmeticians sometimes tell the truth concerning their calculations. Further, Socrates is about to maintain that good runners sometimes willingly run slowly contrary to the second conjunct of [2] read as a sufficient condition for being a bad runner. One way to avoid these untoward consequences is to see [2] as looking back to the nature of power at play in the previous argument. Recall that good arithmeticians have the power to tell the truth concerning calculations. That is, they tell the truth whenever they want (barring obstacles), [WI*]. So here, good runners have the power to run, [V], and so run well whenever they want, [WI*]. They also have the power to run badly, whenever they want, [D]. So read, when conjoined with what it is to run well, i.e., [3], good runners run quickly whenever they want and bad runners do not.

Next Hippias agrees that

- [4] Runners who willingly run slowly are better than runners who unwillingly run slowly (373d5–7).

Surprisingly, given its importance and Hippias' adamant denial of [T2], Hippias agrees to this without any argument or justification. Socrates simply asks him which is better, the one who runs slowly willingly or the one who runs slowly unwillingly and Hippias opts for the former. It follows from [3] and [4] that

- [5] Runners who willingly run badly are better than those who unwillingly run badly,

though Socrates does not make this point explicitly. Rather Socrates asserts that

- [6] Runners who run well bring about something good in running and runners who run badly bring about something bad in running⁴⁰ (373e1–2),

39 The example of running works less well than most of the other examples in the argument. Clearly, the bad wrestler can sometimes trip up the good one, the possessor of a bad voice can sometimes hit right the note, the possessor of a good rudder can sometimes reach one's destination, etc.

40 Socrates' use of *en dromō* here, and especially at 373d4 and later at 373e6, translated as "in a race" or "in racing", has suggested to some the importance of the result of the activity, as does the move from [5] to [7] in the running example. Cf. Sharma (forthcoming).

evidently based on the general consideration that for any activity that can be characterised as doing well or badly, performing it well is bringing about something good in that activity and performing it badly is bringing about something bad in that activity.⁴¹ Socrates concludes, therefore, that

- [7] Runners who willingly bring about bad things in running are better than runners who unwillingly bring about those bad things (373e6–374a1) (from [5] and [6]).⁴²

[7] is [B₁], fully expressed.

The key to this series of questions is of course [4], the surprising agreement that runners who willingly run slowly are better than those who unwillingly run slowly. It is the most substantive and debatable of the contentions made on behalf of [B₁]. Everything else seems relatively intuitive, trivial, or even analytic. And yet Hippias, who denies that the one who willingly misses the mark and acts badly is better than the one who does these things unwillingly, agrees to [4] without argument. Hippias' agreement can be explained, however, if the understanding of power found in the previous argument is at work here too. Like the good arithmeticians, good runners have the power to run, [V]. Consequently, good runners are those who run well, i.e., quickly whenever they want, [W^I*], and badly, i.e., slowly, whenever they want, [D]. If they run slowly, it is willingly; they did not want to run quickly. And bad runners do not have this power. And so, if they run slowly (or quickly), it is unwillingly, or at least their wanting does not suffice for doing so.

The remaining examples are considerably abbreviated versions of the running example. Most offer no justification at all. They simply specify the example itself ([B₃], [B₈], [B₁₁], [B₁₅], and [B₁₆]), the relevant version of [4] ([B₄], [B₅], and [B₁₄]), or the relevant version of [5] derived from [3] and [4] ([B₁₂], [B₁₃], [B₁₇], and [B₁₈]). Only five examples offer anything like an explanation

Focusing on the result of the activity may help resolve the alleged paradoxical nature of [T₂] and may even suggest a further teleological feature of power. But for the purposes of identifying the three features of power with which I am concerned focusing on running as opposed to racing will suffice. The prepositional phrase serves to restrict the point to a specific type of activity. Cf. *en palē* at 374a1 and *en tē allē pasē tē tou sōmatos chreia* at 374a6–7.

41 The text of 373e1–2 only mentions the second conjunct but it is difficult to imagine what accounts for the second conjunct that would not account for the first.

42 The intermediate conclusion at 373e3–5 according to which the good runner accomplishes bad things willingly and the bad runner bad things unwillingly I take to be equivalent to [7], the former put with negative valence, the latter with positive.

or justification and all of them refer to the relevant version of [4].⁴³ The relevant version of [4] is key to each example and as we have seen its general plausibility depends on understanding the relevant activities as manifested by powers characterised by [V], [WI*], and [D]. The force of the epagogic argument is to encourage Hippias to apply such an understanding of powers to the case of acting harmfully, unjustly, and deceitfully.

Nevertheless, the remaining examples add a complexity which the running example conceals. As others have noticed the activities fall into two major groups – activities of bodies and activities of souls.⁴⁴ After listing eleven examples connected with bodies, the soul is introduced with the horse-riding example ([B12]) and is explicitly mentioned in three of the remaining six ([B14], [B17], and [B18]). In the other three the gender of the subjects indicates that the soul is the referent ([B13], [B15], and [B16]). But what has been less noticed is that once the idea of possession, specifically the idea that possessing good things is preferable to possessing bad things, is introduced between the examples of singing ([B5]) and walking ([B6]) at 374c5–6, it is maintained in the remaining 13 examples either explicitly or by implication. It is explicitly mentioned at [B6], [B7], [B8], [B12], [B14], [B17], and [B18] and straightforwardly implied at [B13]. After indicating that it is better to possess sense organs that enable one to perceive badly willingly than to possess those that do not at [B8], the next three examples concerning tools ([B9], [B10], and [B11]) are evidently to be understood similarly. It is better to possess rudders, lyres, etc. which enable one to perform the relevant activities badly willingly than to possess those that do not. Again, following upon the example that it is better to possess the soul which has the *technē* of archery because such a soul enables one to miss the target willingly than to possess the soul that cannot ([B14]), the next two examples ([B15] and [B16]) suggest that in general it is better to possess the soul that has a *technē* or *epistēmē* and so power because such a soul enables one to ‘miss its target’ willingly than to possess the soul that does not.

This idea of possession introduced at 374c5–6 indicates a somewhat more complex grouping than simply those activities that have to do with bodies and those that have to do with souls. Rather, those activities that have to do with bodies fall into three groups: activities performed with whole human bodies ([B1]–[B4]), activities performed with parts of a human body ([B5]–[B8]), and

43 The wrestling example, [B2], specifies the relevant versions of [3] and [4] together with the example itself, the relevant version of [7]; the walking and seeing examples, [B6] and [B7], mention the relevant versions of [3] and [4]; and the steering, shooting, and playing examples, [B9], [B10], and [B16], specify the relevant version of [4] and [7].

44 For example, Mulhern 1968: 287 and Weiss 1981: 297.

activities performed with non-human bodies ([B9]–[B11]). For example, individuals run or wrestle with their whole body, individuals sing and see with their voice and eyes, and individuals steer and shoot with rudders and bows. Similarly, those activities that have to do with souls are similarly grouped though in inverse order. Thus, individuals ride with horses' souls⁴⁵ ([B12] and [B13]), individuals shoot and treat the sick with parts of human souls ([B14] through [B16]),⁴⁶ and individuals do what slaves do or what free individuals do with whole human souls ([B17] and [B18]). This suggests a distinction between the agent who performs the activity and the vehicle⁴⁷ which possesses the power manifested in the activity. This structure and the idea of possession on which it is based requires that weak infallibility should be characterised as follows:

[WI] *A* has the power manifested in some kind of activity iff (if *B* possesses and uses *A* in the performance of the activity & *B* wants to perform the activity well & there are no obstacles, then *B* performs activities of that kind well).

Socrates, however, is not always as careful as he should be in distinguishing between the agent (*B*) performing the activity and vehicle (*A*) possessing the power manifesting the activity. As a result while *A* and *B* may not always need to be distinct they evidently are for some activities, and so [WI] reflects that possibility.⁴⁸

45 Riding with the soul of a horse, rather than with a horse, strikes us as odd, but Socrates is explicit (375a3–4). See also *psychēn kektēsthai hippou, hē ...* at 375a1–2.

46 It is unclear and irrelevant for Socrates' purposes whether he takes treating the sick (doctoring) to be literally using only a part of the human soul, while acting justly and unjustly to be using the whole human soul. What is salient is that, as Socrates sees it, acting justly or unjustly stands to the activities of the various *technai* and *epistēmai* like the activities of running and wrestling stand to the activities of singing and seeing. For a similar progression of whole bodies, body parts, tools, *technai*, and souls cf. *Clit.* 407e3–408b4, even referring to the distinction between slave and free individuals and the use of the rudder. That these things are the objects of use is explicit in the *Clitophon*, though the passage's overall point is distinct from the argument in the *Hippias Minor*. I owe the *Clitophon* reference to Sharma (forthcoming).

47 I owe the use of the term "vehicle" to Bailey (2021: 33 ff.). For related, but distinct, issues cf. ch. 11: 245–246.

48 Socrates talks as if the bodies or their parts act *willingly* or *unwillingly* in the case of posing at 374b5–8, singing at 374c2–5, walking at 374c6–d1, and perceiving at 374d8–e2, while in the case of seeing, steering, shooting, making music and working he indicates that it those who possess the non-human vehicles of the power who act willingly or unwillingly (374d3–6 and 374e3–375a1). In the case of riding and the activities of dogs and other animals, those who possess their souls act willingly or unwillingly (375a1–6), while human

4 Third Argument

Finally we turn to the third argument – the second on behalf of [T2]. Hippias responds to the termination of the second argument as follows:

But it would be terrible, Socrates, if those who commit injustice willingly are to be better than those who do it unwillingly! (*Hp. Mi.* 375d3–4)

On its face Hippias' response appears out of line. To respond to numerous examples of individuals willingly performing badly being better than those unwillingly performing badly by simply denying it in the case of acting unjustly smacks of irrational stubbornness. Socrates' final example, however, does not explicitly mention acting unjustly.⁴⁹ Rather, the final example consists of the anticipated answer to the following question:

So, will it be better if [our soul] acts badly and misses the mark willingly or unwillingly? (*Hp. Mi.* 375d1–2)

– an anticipation Hippias dodges with his response. So, perhaps Hippias concedes that the soul that acts badly willingly is better than the soul that acts badly unwillingly but denies the equivalence between acting badly and acting unjustly in the case of the activities of our whole human soul. Alternatively, Hippias may accept the equivalence⁵⁰ but deny that just and unjust activities are subject to the understanding of power at play in the activities of the second argument. The final argument addresses both of these avenues of escape.

The final argument is both more straightforward than the previous two arguments and more obscure. It is more straightforward in that it appears to be paired down to nothing more than the necessary premises of the argument together with some of their consequences. Thus, for example, Weiss lays out the final argument by virtually reproducing the text, though putting the

souls themselves (both parts and wholes) willingly and unwillingly perform the remaining activities. Because of the implausibility of thinking bodies and their parts act willingly and unwillingly I take the canonical expression to distinguish between the agent who acts willingly or unwillingly and vehicles of a body or soul with or by means of which she acts. Socrates, however, certainly does not always talk that way, and so may allow that for some activities the distinction collapses. Cf. Sharma (forthcoming) for a similar point.

49 Cf. Weiss 1981: 300, though my explanation is different.

50 Cf., e.g., 371e9–372a3.

premises and conclusions in her own words.⁵¹ It is more obscure because of the argument's beginning. The first of the argument's three parts has the structure of constructive trilemma as follows:

- [C1] Justice is necessarily either some power, or knowledge,⁵² or both (375d7–e1)
- [C2] If justice is a power of the soul, then the more powerful soul is more just (375e1–3)
- [C3] If justice is knowledge of the soul, then the wiser soul is more just (375e4–6)
- [C4] If justice is both, then the soul having both is more just (375e6–8)

The nature of a constructive trilemma is to establish the consequent of the three conditionals. Thus, [a] either a or b or c, [b] if a, then d, [c] if b, then d, [d] if c, then d, and [e] so, d. Understood in this way the first third of the final argument would appear to be aimed at establishing, roughly, that the more powerful or wiser soul is more just. But it is unclear what role such a consequent plays in the rest of the argument. Weiss, for example, gives it no role so far as I can tell. Moreover, even if such a role could be uncovered it is not clear why Hippias, or anyone else, should grant [C1].⁵³ Finally, it is surprising that Socrates should offer a constructive trilemma as opposed to a constructive dilemma. As we have seen, the previous arguments as well as other dialogues indicate that according to Socrates knowledge is a power. If justice is knowledge, it follows it is a power; so the second disjunct, if it is distinct from the third, is vacuous. I will return to this part of the final argument, after rehearsing the less obscure second and third parts.

Socrates begins the second part of the argument by reminding Hippias that

51 Cf. Weiss (1981: 297) and Weiss (2006: 135). The second version supplies line numbers and fills the lacuna left in the former by leaving out my [C3] below. Even so, only the second version, and only in the case of six of its 15 steps does she indicate how the steps are related to each other. Neither Adams (2010) nor Jones, et al. (2017) spend much time laying out the structure of the final argument.

52 Plato must be using *epistēmē*, *technē* (cf. 376a3), and *sophia* (the comparative adjective of which is used at 375e4–5 and 375e9) roughly interchangeably in this argument. *Amathia* (the comparative adjective of which is used at 375e5 and 375e7) must mean something like “the lack of knowledge”, not “complete ignorance”.

53 Cf. Guthrie 1975: 195 n. 3. This is the premise according to Weiss which leads to the paradoxical conclusion, [T2] and to which Hippias is committed but not Socrates. Cf. n. 4 above.

- [C5] It has been shown that the more powerful and wiser soul is better (375e9–10), and
 [C6] that such a soul is able to do both fine and shameful things (375e10–376a1).

Socrates does not say where this has been shown. Socrates may be referring back to 374a7–b1 where Socrates indicates that the better (and so more powerful) body in other fields of bodily activity is able to accomplish both shameful and fine things.⁵⁴ But, the understanding of power we have been discovering will also serve to explain the comment. [C5] follows immediately from [V] and [C6] from [D], shorn of the comparative degree. Next Hippias agrees that

- [C7] if the more powerful and wiser soul does shameful things, then it does so willingly (376a2–3),
 [C8] justice is either power or expertise or both (376a3–4), and
 [C9] “to do injustice is to do bad, whereas to refrain from injustice is to do something fine”. (376a4–5)

Socrates concludes with a version of [T2]⁵⁵

- [C10] “So the more powerful and better soul, when it does injustice, will do injustice willingly, and the worthless soul unwillingly” (376a6–7).⁵⁶

54 Cf. Sharma forthcoming.

55 Socrates’ frequent descriptions of what is to be shown in the final two arguments (371e9–372a2, 372d4–7, 372e2–3, 372e5–6, and 373c7–8) all indicate that the person, not the soul, acts unjustly willingly. *Psychē* and its cognates are used only three times in the dialogue prior to its introduction in the horse-riding example, and none in the context of [T2] except in [B18], 376a6–7, and the third of the final argument that follows where the move from the soul (the vehicle of the power) to the man (*anēr*) (the agent) is made explicitly.

56 The second conjunct looks unjustified. Nothing requires that a soul which does not act unjustly whenever it wants because it lacks the power of justice does not sometimes act unjustly when it wants to and so willingly. Perhaps, the second disjunct should be read as “if the bad soul acts unjustly, it sometimes does so unwillingly”, or alternatively as “if the bad soul acts unjustly, it does so not *because* it wants to”. Recall the ignorant arithmeticians who sometimes successfully lie or tell the truth when they wish, but accidentally. Plato’s focus now, however, is on individuals who have the power, not those without it. This may explain the imprecision in characterising the latter.

[C7] follows from [WI*] on the assumption that a soul which performs shameful things (acts badly),⁵⁷ not wanting to perform fine things⁵⁸ (to act well), performs those shameful things (acts badly) willingly, and [C8] recapitulates [C1]. [C9] explains what it is to act well in the kinds of activities associated with our whole soul, as opposed to the activities of the whole souls of slaves. In the case of these activities, to act well is to act justly⁵⁹ and to act badly is to act unjustly, just as in the case of running to run well is to run quickly and to run badly is to run slowly, ([3] in the running example). Hippias here concedes the equivalence of acting well and acting justly, thereby shutting off one of his avenues of resistance. [C8] shuts off his other as we will see in a moment.

The final third of the argument recalls the complexity introduced in the second argument. The activities exemplified in the previous argument encouraged the distinction between the agent who performs the relevant activity and the vehicle which possesses the power manifested in that activity. Thus, the singer sings well or badly when she wants by means of her voice which possesses the power manifested in that activity. In the final third of Socrates' final argument Socrates recapitulates that complexity. Socrates secures Hippias' agreement to

[C11] A man (the agent of the activities of our whole human soul) is good just in case he possesses a good soul (the vehicle of the power manifested in those activities) (376b1–2).

But since possessing a good soul in the case of such activities enables its possessor to act well or badly whenever he wants, it follows from [C10] and [C11] that

[C12] this good man acts unjustly just in case he acts unjustly willingly (376b2–4), and

[C13] “[s]o the one who willingly misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust, ... – that is, if there is such a person – would be no other than the good man” (376b4–7; [T2]).

57 For the equivalence of acting badly and doing shameful things, see [6] in the running example.

58 As she does not since, having the power to act well, if she had wanted to, she would have (from [WI*]).

59 Socrates' use of *mē adikeion* may allow that failing to act unjustly by simply failing to act is acting well in these sorts of activities. But throughout the dialogue Socrates appears to be thinking in terms circumstances which require acting, one way or the other.

It is not clear what [C13] adds to [C12]. Perhaps, Socrates is recapitulating the move he made in the running example from doing well or badly ([5]) to bringing about fine or shameful things ([6]), though here Plato uses *aischron poiein* rather *aischron ergazesthai*. Alternatively, he may be recapitulating the running example's move from the good runner runs slowly willingly [4] to the good runner runs badly willingly [5], though in the running example, it is [4] to which Hippias readily agrees, while he explicitly resisted the final example's version of [4]. In either case, Socrates seems to be driving home the consequences of understanding justice as a power on the understanding of power we have been uncovering in the dialogue and thereby finally securing Hippias' agreement to [T2].

This last point returns us to the first third of the argument. We have seen that beginning with [C6] the second argument for [T2] is based on the assumption that justice is a power understood as characterised by [V], [WI], and [D]. Moreover, no part of the argument depends on the conclusion of the constructive trilemma apparent in the first third of the argument. Rather, only the first premise of that apparent constructive dilemma, which gets repeated at [C8], is used in the final two thirds. Consequently, we should ignore the apparent trilemma structure of the first third of the final argument and see its point rather as driving home the similarity of just activities to running and medical activities. We saw that Hippias could resist concluding [T2] after the final example ([B18]) in the first argument for [T2] only by denying the equivalence of acting well or badly in the case of "our" whole soul with acting justly or unjustly or by denying that just and unjust activities are subject to the understanding of power at play in the previous activities. Hippias concedes the equivalence at [C9] and that just and unjust activities are subject to the understanding of power at play in the previous activities in the first third of the final argument. Just as quickness is the power associated with running and the more powerful body in this respect is quicker and the medical expertise is the knowledge associated with treating the ill and the wiser soul in this respect is more medically expert, so justice is the power or knowledge associated with the activities of our whole soul and the more powerful or wiser soul is more just.⁶⁰ Once this is conceded Hippias can no longer resist [T2] as Socrates goes on to show. Socrates is not arguing for this concession.⁶¹ He is reenforcing the similarities.

60 This still leaves unexplained why Socrates offers three options (power, knowledge or both) rather than two (power or knowledge) given that knowledge entails power. Perhaps, Socrates simply wants to nip in the bud the potential for distinguishing the two and keep the focus on the similarity between just activities and the other activities encouraged in the previous argument. Cf. Sharma forthcoming.

61 A concession which Hippias may want to make for other reasons. Cf. Carelli 2016.

5 Conclusion

All three arguments for the two allegedly paradoxical theses found in the *Hippias Minor* depend on the same understanding of power. This understanding can be characterised roughly by three features. The first feature, a valence feature, indicates that something is good relative to some kind of activity just in case it has the power manifested in that kind of activity ([V]). For example, a rudder is a good rudder relative to ship steering activity just in case it has the power manifested in ship-steering activity. The second feature, a weak infallibility feature, maintains that a thing has the power manifested in some kind of activity just in case if it is used in the performance of that kind of activity by an agent who wants to perform that activity well (and there are no obstacles), the agent performs that activity well ([WI]). For example, a voice has the power manifested in singing just in case if it is used in singing by a singer who wants to sing well (and there are no obstacles), the singer sings well. And the third feature, a duality condition, indicates that a thing has the power manifested in some kind of activity just in case it has the power manifested in the opposite kind of activity ([D]). For example, the lyre-player's soul has the power manifested in playing the lyre well just in case it has the power manifested in playing the lyre badly.

Uncovering this understanding of power in the arguments of the *Hippias Minor* raises a variety of questions. Does Socrates endorse this understanding of power in the *Hippias Minor* or is it only Hippias who is committed to it? Does Socrates and/or Plato endorse this understanding in dialogues other than the *Hippias Minor* and, if so, does it undergo revision or development – in particular are the obscurities surrounding individuating kinds of activities, the agent/vehicle distinction, and the relevant sense of opposition clarified? Finally, how, if at all, does recognising this understanding of power in the *Hippias Minor* help to address the alleged paradoxical nature of the two major theses of the dialogue, [T1] and [T2], the latter of which has captured so much of contemporary scholarly attention? I hope the rough characterisation of the understanding of power we have discovered underlying all three arguments of the *Hippias Minor* will go some way toward addressing these questions.⁶²

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Does Socrates' Divine Sign Have a *Dynamis*?

Louis-André Dorion

There are numerous studies of Socrates' divine sign, but if I am not mistaken, no one has shown an interest in the question whether the sign has a *dynamis*. It is true that the relevant texts are few in number, but I still believe that they deserve a detailed examination because they concern nothing less than the nature, the status, and the function of Socrates' divine sign.

At the very beginning of the *First Alcibiades*, Socrates explains to his eponymous interlocutor in the dialogue the reason why he has not spoken to him before now:

Toutou de to aition gegonen ouk anthrōpeion, alla ti daimonion enantiōma, hou su tēn dynamin kai hysteron peusē.

Human causes didn't enter into it; it was something divine that opposed me, the power of which you'll hear about later on. (*Alc.* 1. 103a, trans. Hutchinson, modified)

This passage calls for the following observations:

(a) There is no question that Socrates evokes his "divine sign" here, the sign that only intervenes, in Plato at least, to prevent him from doing something.¹ However, it is important to note that according to the syntax of the sentence, the *dynamis* is not that of the *daimonion*,² a term that is used as an adjective here, but instead that of an opposition or hindrance (*enantiōma*). Is the source of this opposition Socrates' divine sign or another divine entity? The answer to the question is revealed later in the dialogue.

(b) Socrates tells Alcibiades that later (*hysteron*) he will learn the nature of the *dynamis* of the divine opposition that has long prevented him from

¹ See also *Ap.* 31c–d, 40a–c, 41d; *Euthd.* 272e; *Phdr.* 242b–c; *Tht.* 151a.

² In his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, Olympiodorus has no hesitation about attributing this power to the *daimonion* (*hou sy tēn dynamin kai hysteron peusē: tou daimoniou*, *Olymp. in Alc.* 26.8), which he (wrongly) interprets as Socrates' *daimōn*. It is essential to note that *daimonion* is not a substantive, but an adjective, and that the *dynamis* is not that of the said *daimōn*, but that of the opposition or hindrance.

speaking to him. According to various commentators,³ Socrates is referring to the passage at 105d–e. It is a passage that deserves to be quoted in full:

[Socrates] Yes, I will tell you, my dear son of Clinias and Dinomache. It is impossible to put any of these ideas of yours into effect without me (*aneu emou adynaton*) – that's how much influence I think I have over you and your business (*tosautēn egō dynamin oimai echein eis ta sa pragmata kai eis se*). I think this is why the god hasn't allowed me to talk to you all this time (*dio dē kai palai oiomai me ton theon ouk ean dialegesthai soi*); and I've been waiting for the day he allows me. For if, for your part, you place your hopes on the city, thinking to demonstrate you're of great value to it so you can immediately gain complete power (*dynēsesthai*) over it, for my part, I hope to exert great influence over you (*houtō kagō para soi elpizō megiston dynēsesthai*) by showing you that I'm of great value to you and that nobody is capable of providing you with the power you crave (*tēn dynamin hēs epithymeis*), neither your guardian nor your relatives, nor anybody else but me – with the god's help (*meta tou theou*), of course. (*Alc.* 1. 105d–e, trans. Hutchinson, modified)

A careful reading of this passage eliminates any doubts concerning the validity of the claim that the deity is at the origin of the divine opposition (*ti daimonion enantiōma*, 103a5–6) that prevented Socrates from speaking to Alcibiades. Moreover, *dynamis* is a central theme in this passage. Alcibiades aspires to be powerful in the city, but according to Socrates, he is mistaken to believe that it is the people around him (his tutor, his parents) or the city, that will grant him this *dynamis*. The power sought by Alcibiades can only be obtained with the help of Socrates, and him alone. In this sense, Socrates stands as an intermediary between the *dynamis* of the deity and the *dynamis* sought by Alcibiades. The deity is the only veritable holder of *dynamis*, and it is through Socrates that this *dynamis* can be transmitted to another man, in this case Alcibiades. This interpretation is confirmed by a passage that occurs later in the dialogue:

3 In *Alc.* 26.17–21, Olympiodorus states that the term *hysteron* refers to 105d–e. This view is shared by, among others, Pradeau and Marboeuf (1999: 194, n. 4). According to Denyer (2001: 84), the expression *hysteron peusē* (103a6) means on the contrary, and despite appearances, that the topic has in fact been dropped as a theme for discussion: “[T]hey do not discuss it ever again in the course of this dialogue. Socrates’ words are in fact an idiomatic way of dropping a subject”. Denyer is clearly wrong about this, for the passage at 105d–e provides the explanation to which Socrates refers at 103a.

- SOCRATES: My guardian (*epitropos*) is better and wiser than Pericles, your guardian.
- ALCIBIADES: Who's that Socrates?
- SOCRATES: A god (*theos*), Alcibiades; it was a god who prevented me from talking with you before today (*hosper soi me ouk eia pro tēsde tēs hēmeras dialechthēnai*). I put my faith in him, which is why I say that if he is to manifest himself to you, it will be entirely my doing (*hō kai pisteuōn legō hoti hē epiphaneia di' oudenos allou soi estai ē di' emou*). (*Alc.* 1. 124c, trans. Hutchinson, modified)

This exchange between Socrates and Alcibiades confirms once again that it is the god who prevents Socrates from speaking with him⁴ and that the *dynamis* in question, at the beginning of the dialogue, is also the *dynamis* of the god, not that of the sign that addresses itself to Socrates. Later we shall see the importance of this observation. But what exactly is the *dynamis* of the god? It cannot simply be the power to prevent Socrates from speaking to Alcibiades. Indeed, Socrates maintains that the god is indispensable to Alcibiades if he is to acquire veritable power in the city. The point is that self-knowledge, which is indispensable to the political leader, cannot be acquired without knowledge of the divine part of ourselves. And it is precisely the role of Socrates to foster this form of knowledge. Thus, in the *First Alcibiades*, the *dynamis* of the god resides in the capacity to lead men to the self-knowledge that will allow them to govern other men in such a way as to improve them.

The second text in which Socrates' divine sign plays a role is the *Theages*. Although the *Theages* is probably not a Platonic dialogue, the passage that I want to analyse contains a wealth of Platonic references all the same. Before I quote the passage, let me briefly recall the context of discussion. Socrates has just provided several examples of occasions where his divine sign has

4 In his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, Proclus also sees a connection between 103a and 124c: "Further on in this dialogue, he states clearly 'My guardian is better than your uncle Pericles, Alcibiades: he is a god, who would not allow me to converse with you.' He calls the same being, then, spirit (*daimona*) and god (*theon*); for what was the subject of a previous remark 'a spiritual opposition, whose force you will learn of later,' he now terms a god, since this it is which supplies the reason for his silence in the past" (Procl. in *Alc.* 78.12–19, trans. O'Neill, very slightly modified). However, Proclus is wrong to state that Socrates calls the same being both a *daimōn* and a god (*theos*), for in 103a, it is not a question of a *daimōn*; moreover, there are no occurrences of this term in the *First Alcibiades*.

intervened, and he has shown that each time the interventions of the sign were relevant and justified. He continues as follows:

[SOCRATES] I've told you all these things because this influence of the divine (*hē dynamis autē tou daimoniou toutou*) is also all powerful (*to hapan dynatai*) in my dealings with those who associate with me. On the one hand, it opposes many (*pollois men ... enantioutai*), and it's impossible for them to be helped by associating with me, so I can't associate with them. On the other hand, it does not prevent my associating with many others (*pollois de syneinai men ou diōkōluei*), but it is of no help to them. Those whose association with me the divine power favors, however (*hois d' an syllabētai tēs synousias hē tou daimoniou dynamis*) – these are the ones you've noticed, for they make rapid progress right away. (*Thg.* 129e, trans. Smith, modified)

The context of this passage is very similar to the one in the *First Alcibiades*. Indeed, Socrates uses the term *dynamis* while describing (1) cases where the *daimonion* intervenes to prevent him from allowing certain young persons to associate with him; (2) cases where it does not intervene, a situation that he interprets as an authorisation to associate with certain young persons, but one where most of them do not take advantage of this opportunity; and (3) cases where it intervenes to promote his associating with certain young persons who then make rapid progress. Therefore, in this context, the *dynamis* consists in a capacity to identify with precision which young persons possess – and which young persons do not possess – the qualities necessary to benefit from their association with Socrates. But to whom does this *dynamis* belong? And who exercises it? In other words, who is the subject of this *dynamis*? In the above passage, Socrates states twice (at 129e1–2 and at e7–8) that it is a question of the *dynamis* of the *daimonion*. However, the expression *dynamis tou daimoniou* has no other occurrences in the Platonic corpus and is thus specific to the *Theages*.

Commenting on the two passages that I have just analysed (*Alc.* 1, 103a and *Thg.* 129e1–3), Mark Joyal (1995: 53) states that “[w]ithin the Platonic corpus, only in these two places (and *Thg.* 129e7–8) is *dynamis* applied to Socrates’ sign (never in Xenophon)”. I cannot agree with this statement. To explain why, I need to discuss (a) the *First Alcibiades*, then (b) Xenophon, and finally (c) the *Theages*.

(a) In the above discussion of the *First Alcibiades*, we saw that in the second sentence of the dialogue the term *dynamis* is syntactically connected to the term *enantiōma* (103a), which clearly refers to the negative function of Socrates’ divine sign. In light of the two other passages (105d–e and 124c) from the

First Alcibiades that we examined, both of which are closely connected to the sentence at 103a, it appears that in reality the *dynamis* is not that of the divine sign, but instead that of the god who sends it. Indeed, it would be strange to attribute a specific *dynamis* to the divine sign, for this sign is not an independent entity, but merely an instrument that is entirely subordinate to the deity. The sign does not manifest itself by way of its own inherent *dynamis*, but as a result of the *dynamis* that belongs to the deity. This is the reason why I disagree with Joyal when he states that in the *First Alcibiades* the term *dynamis* is "applied" to Socrates' divine sign.⁵

(b) It is true that a *dynamis* is never attributed to Socrates in Xenophon; however, Joyal fails to mention a very important passage in the *Apology* in which Xenophon raises the very question of whether the sign that addresses itself to Socrates possesses a *dynamis*. To my knowledge, it is the only text in the Socratic literature that explicitly raises this question; therefore, despite its length, I think that it is important to quote it in full:

[SOCRATES] As for my claim that a divine voice comes to me and communicates what I must do, how in claiming this am I introducing new deities (*kaina ge mēn daimonia*)? Those who rely on bird-calls and the utterances of men are, I suppose, receiving guidance from voices. Can there be any doubt that thunder has a voice or that it is an omen of the greatest significance? And take the priestess who sits on the tripod at Pytho – doesn't she too use a voice to announce messages from the god? [13] Moreover, that God has knowledge of the future (*to proeidenai ge ton theon to mellon*) and communicates it in advance (*to prosēmainein*) to whomever he wishes – this too, as I say, is a universal claim and belief. But whereas others state that it is birds and utterances and chance meetings and oracles which forewarn them, I call it divine (*egō de touto daimonion kalō*), and I think that in using this description I am being both more accurate and more devout than those who ascribe the power of the gods (*tēn tōn theōn dynamin*) to birds. Furthermore, I have evidence to show that I am not attributing things falsely to God: I have often told friends what God has advised and I have never been found to be wrong. (x. *Ap.* 12–13; trans. Waterfield)

5 Joyal (1995: 54) puts forward the hypothesis that the author of the *First Alcibiades* took his inspiration from the *Symposium* (202e–203a) when he attributed the *dynamis* proper to *daimones* to Socrates's *daimonion*. This interpretation cannot be accepted, for it is neither the divine sign nor the *daimonion* that intervenes to prevent Socrates from speaking with Alcibiades – it is the deity.

Socrates likens his divine sign, which he describes as a voice (*phōnē*), to the other signs expressed by voices that the gods use to address human beings when they communicate the future to them. Therefore, he maintains that his divine sign has no special or privileged status with respect to the other signs that the gods use to communicate. But Socrates' refusal to attribute to his sign the *dynamis* that belongs to the gods distinguishes him from other men. In other words, other men are so fascinated by the various signs that reveal the future that they come to attribute a *dynamis* to them, as if the signs themselves had the power to reveal the future; however, in reality, these signs are completely dependent on the *dynamis* of the gods. Thus, in refusing to attribute to the sign that addresses itself to him the *dynamis* that is the preserve of the gods, Socrates shows that he is more pious than other men. Curiously, Joyal seems to attribute this *dynamis* to a *daimōn*, that is, to a divine entity intermediate between human beings and the gods: "Ap. 13–14 make it plain that Xenophon viewed Socrates' 'voice' or 'sign' quite simply as the work of a *daimōn*, since its occurrence proved how highly he was honoured by *daimōnes* (*eme tetimēsthai hypo daimonōn*)".⁶ If by "the work of a *daimōn*", Joyal means "the work of an divine entity intermediate between human beings and the gods", then his position seems to me mistaken, for it fundamentally misinterprets the text itself of Xenophon's *Apology*. Indeed, it suffices to read the full text of the passage in question to realise that the *daimones* that honour Socrates are in reality the gods, for given that Apollo is one of these *daimones*, this is the only possible interpretation:

[SOCRATES] Listen: if some of you are inclined to disbelieve that I have been honoured by deities (*eme tetimēsthai hypo daimonōn*), I can tell you more, to increase your disbelief. Once, when Chaerephon made an inquiry about me in Delphi, Apollo replied – and there were many witnesses – that I was the most free, upright, and prudent of all people (x. Ap. 12–13, trans. Waterfield)

Therefore, the voice or the sign that addresses itself to Socrates is not "the work of a *daimōn*", but instead a phenomenon directly related to the *dynamis* of the gods.

The passage from the *Apology* (12–13) is fundamentally important because it clearly establishes that the divine sign of Xenophon's Socrates possesses no *dynamis* of its own. Is this also the case for the divine sign of Plato's Socrates? Before responding to this question, I shall rapidly comment on the term

⁶ Joyal 1995: 53, n. 46.

daimonion. In the context of the passage from the *Apology*, this term cannot refer to the divine sign, for if it did, Socrates would be the same as other men who attribute to signs that are purely instrumental the power that belongs to the gods. In the final analysis, it is the god (*theos*) or the deity (*daimonion*) that manifests itself in the form of a voice warning Socrates. The entities that warn men or indicate things to them in advance (*tous prosēmainontas*) are not intermediaries – voices and birds – they are the gods. Thus, contrary to what many translators and commentators believe,⁷ the term *daimonion* refers to the deity, not to Socrates' divine sign.

In my view, this interpretation is confirmed by a parallel passage in the *Memorabilia* in which, *just as in the Apology*, Xenophon uses *theoi* and *daimonion* as interchangeable terms to refer to the origin of that which forewarns (*prosēmainein*) men:

[I]n fact it was common gossip that Socrates claimed that the divine communicated with him (*to daimonion heautō sēmainein*). This, I imagine, was the chief reason for accusing him of introducing new deities. [3] Yet he was no more heretical than any other people who believe in divination and rely on portents and omens and chance meetings and sacrifices. They do not suppose that the birds they see or the people they meet know what is the right course for those who are consulting the diviner; they believe that these things are simply means used by the gods to communicate (*alla tous theous dia toutōn auta sēmainein*), and Socrates took the same view. [4] But whereas most people say that it is the omen or the encounter that dissuades or encourages them, Socrates asserted what he actually believed: he said that the divine does the communicating (*to daimonion gar ephē sēmainein*). He often warned his associates to do this or that, at the prompting of the divine (*hōs tou daimoniou prosēmainontos*). (x. *Mem.* 1.1.2–4, trans. Tredennick, rev. Waterfield)

Although this passage from the *Memorabilia* contains no explicit reference to a *dynamis*, it still confirms my interpretation of the parallel passage in the

7 In the clause *egō de touto daimonion kalō*, many translators and commentators translate the term *daimonion* by "divine sign" (e.g., Ollier 1961; Chambry 1967; Todd/Henderson 1923/2013). This translation is problematical, not only because the noun "sign" (*sēmeion*) does not occur in this clause, but also because of the referent of the pronoun *touto*. This thing (*touto*) that Socrates calls *daimonion* can be none other than the gods who tell select men in advance (*tous prosēmainontas*) what their divine will is or what the future holds in store. In a word, an attentive reading of Xenophon's argument in this passage of the *Apology* makes clear that the term *daimonion*, which qualifies *touto*, can only refer to the gods who use the intermediary of signs to reveal the future to select men.

Apology. As for what it is that exercises the *dynamis*, it is the entity that communicates to Socrates through the intermediary of a voice, and to other men, through the intermediary of other signs (birds, chance meetings, divination, etc.). Contrary to other men, Socrates believes that it is not the signs themselves that spur men to action, but the gods. The very fact that the subjects of the verbs *sēmainein* and *prosēmainein* are sometimes the gods, sometimes the *daimonion*, confirms that the term *daimonion* refers to the deity itself and not to the sign, and this clearly shows that it is the gods who exercise a *dynamis* when they communicate to men through signs.

(c) In the case of Plato, it is indisputable that his dialogues contain no passages comparable to *Ap.* 12–13 in Xenophon, where a *dynamis* is explicitly denied to Socrates' divine sign. According to Joyal (1995, 2001), the rarity of passages in the Platonic corpus where *dynamis* is associated with Socrates' sign can be explained as follows:

It is not hard to account for the infrequency [that is, the infrequent association of *dynamis* with the *daimonion* in Plato]: since it is impossible to say what *to daimonion* actually *is* or *does*, it is excessively assertive to speak of its “power”, “influence”, or “function”. The word does however belong better in a context in which claims are made about the efficacy of a deity, *daimōn* or *theos*, as is done in *Alc.* 1 and *Thg.* where *to daimonion* is presented more clearly as an agent. (Joyal 1995: 53)

Since *dynamis* is not applied to Socrates' divine sign elsewhere in the unquestionably authentic works of the Platonic Corpus, the question naturally arises of whether this usage signifies an un-Platonic ingredient. If *dynamis* is given a fairly conventional translation here [in *Thg.* 129e] such as “capacity” or “power” – among the commonest meanings in all the dialogues – it will become evident why Plato avoids its use in conjunction with *to daimonion*. Plato, as we have already seen, is decidedly vague about the nature of the divine sign; it would therefore have been unusual for him to speak of its *dynamis* when he could not sharply define its characteristics. (Joyal 2000: 89)

Joyal has two main reasons for maintaining that in the *Theages* the *daimonion* “is presented more clearly as an agent”. First, in virtue of its *dynamis* and the fact that it is “all powerful” (*to hapan dynatai*, 129e3), the *daimonion* approves of the relations between Socrates and certain young persons, and thus it plays an active role.⁸ Second, at the end of the dialogue, Theages evokes the possibility

⁸ The active role of the divine sign is also expressed by the verb *syllabētai* (129e7).

of making prayers and sacrifices to the divine thing that manifests itself to Socrates,⁹ suggesting that it is a deity whose favor could be gained. But what exactly is the *daimonion*? Is it Socrates' sign? Or is it the deity itself? Although this debate is ancient, it continues to divide commentators today. If, as I have tried to show elsewhere,¹⁰ the expression *to daimonion* does not refer to Socrates' divine sign, but instead to the god or the deity that takes the initiative to reveal things to Socrates by way of a sign, then the expression *dynamis tou daimoniou* is in no way problematic, for the *dynamis* is attributed to the god or the deity. However, if *to daimonion* in fact refers to Socrates' divine sign, then in my view it is much more difficult to justify attributing a *dynamis* to this sign. Indeed, Joyal's position amounts to treating the sign as an autonomous entity that has its own *dynamis*, but this would imply that it was a form of deity that could manifest itself to Socrates on its own initiative. In a word, the *daimonion* would be a *daimōn*, which is exactly how Joyal understands it:

Although in this dialogue [that is, in the *Thg.*] *to daimonion* has not been called (and will not be called) a *daimōn*, its description has been such as to suggest this familiar concept; and there would be nothing unnatural in speaking about the *dynamis* of something that is so described. (Joyal 2000: 90)

If there is nothing strange about referring to the *dynamis* of a *daimōn*, this is because in the *Symposium* Plato himself attributes a *dynamis* to a *daimōn*. Thus Joyal¹¹ shows no hesitation about suggesting that the description of the *daimonion* in the *Theages* is inspired by the passages in the *Symposium* where a *dynamis* is attributed to a *daimōn*. In this regard, 202e¹² is particularly relevant:

[SOCRATES] "Then, what could Love be?" I asked. "A mortal?"
 [DIOTIMA] "Certainly not."
 [SOCRATES] "Then, what is he?"

9 "[Or we could] try to appease the divine thing that comes to you with prayers and sacrifices and any other way the diviners might suggest (*eite kai auto to theion to soi gignomenon peirasometha paramytheisthai euchaioi te kai thysiais kai allō hotō an hoi manteis exēgōntai*)" (*Thg.* 131a, trans. Smith).

10 See Dorion 2013: 275–300.

11 See Joyal 1995: 53; 2000: 90.

12 See also 188d, where Eryximachus attributes a *dynamis* to Eros, and 212b, where at the end of his speech, Socrates celebrates the *dynamis* of Eros: "Now and always I praise the power and courage of Love (*enkōmiazō tēn dynamin kai andreian tou Erōtos*) so far as I am able" (trans. Nehamas and Woodruff).

- [DIOTIMA] “He’s like what we mentioned before”, she said. “He is in between mortal and immortal (*metaxy thnētou kai athanatou*)”.
- [SOCRATES] “What do you mean, Diotima?”
- [DIOTIMA] “He’s a great spirit (*daimōn megas*), Socrates. Everything spiritual, you see, is in between god and mortal (*pan to daimonion metaxy esti theou te kai thnētou*)”.
- [SOCRATES] “What is their function (*dynamis*)?” I asked.
- [DIOTIMA] “They are messengers who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods, while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all. Through them (*dia toutou*) all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy, and sorcery. Gods do not mix with men; they mingle and converse with us through spirits (*dia toutou*) instead, whether we are awake or asleep. He who is wise in any of these ways is a man of spirit (*ho men peri ta toi- auta sophos daimonios anēr*), but he who is wise in any other way, in a profession or any manual work, is merely a mechanic. These spirits (*daimones*) are many and various, then, and one of them is Love”. (*Smp.* 202d–203a, trans. Nehamas and Woodruff)

The *dynamis* of a *daimōn* is very extensive because it concerns all the forms of mediation and communication between the gods and men. I readily acknowledge that it may be tempting to interpret Socrates’ divine sign in light of this passage from the *Symposium*. Indeed, as Socrates himself acknowledges on at least two occasions,¹³ his divine sign is a form of divination, which means that it belongs to the same sphere as a *daimōn*. It is essential to note, however, that when Plato and Xenophon refer to Socrates’ divine sign, they never use the term *daimōn*. The divine sign that addresses Socrates in the form of a voice is never treated as a *daimōn*. At the same time, it is clear that in the later Platonic tradition, this passage from the *Symposium* (202d–203a) played an extremely important role when it came to justifying the interpretation of

13 *Ap.* 40a: *hē gar eiōthua moi mantikē hē tou daimoniou*; *Phdr.* 242c. See also Dorion 2013: 291–295.

Socrates' divine sign as a form of *daimōn*.¹⁴ If Socrates is indisputably spiritual or "demonic" (*daimonios*),¹⁵ this can only be because of the *daimōn* that accompanies him wherever he goes and addresses itself to him. In Plato and Xenophon, Socrates' divine sign is never treated as a *daimōn*, but this interpretation of it is presented and fully developed in the works of the middle Platonists (Plutarch, Apuleius, Maximus of Tyre) who left treatises on Socrates' *daimōn*.

I shall now come back to the *Theages*. I want to ask whether, by way of the *Symposium*, the expression *dynamis tou daimoniou* can be interpreted as referring to the *dynamis* of Socrates' divine sign when the latter is understood to be a type of *daimōn*. If it is acknowledged that Plato is not the author of the *Theages*, then there is no a priori reason not to suppose that, inspired by the *Symposium*, the actual author of this dialogue interpreted the *daimonion* on the model of a *daimōn*¹⁶ and attributed to it a fraction of the *dynamis* that Socrates attributes to *daimones* in the *Symposium*. I speak of a "fraction" of the *dynamis* of a *daimōn* because, as described in the *Theages*, Socrates' divine sign is fundamentally negative,¹⁷ just as it is in Plato's dialogues. In other words, it opposes Socrates' initiatives, or those of his friends, but it never encourages him to take any positive action whatsoever. However, if as described in the *Symposium*, the *dynamis* of a *daimōn* concerns all the forms of mediation and communication between the gods and men, then it must be a power exercised both in the prohibitions and in the encouragements that the gods address to men with respect to possible action. Of course, when Socrates states at 129e3 that the *daimonion* is "all powerful (*to hapan dunatai*)" in his relations with the persons who associate with him, this suggests that the sign is not purely

14 Joyal 1995: 54: "One result of the appropriation of the *Smp.* passage would have been for *to daimonion* to be invested with the kinds of mediumistic *dynamis* attributed to *daimones* in *Smp.* 202e3–203a4".

15 See *Smp.* 219c. In 203a, in the passage quoted above, the description of the spiritual or "demonic" man (*daimonios anēr*) immediately brings to mind Socrates.

16 Joyal 2000: 90: "[I]t may well be that the application of *dynamis* to *to daimonion* was influenced by the passage in *Smp.* which was after all the *locus classicus* in antiquity for the description of *daimones* ... At any rate, comparison of these two passages suggests strongly that what is being presented in *Thg.* is not *to daimonion* of Socrates as it is portrayed in the indisputably genuine works of Plato, but rather Socrates' sign conceived in terms of a *daimōn* – Platonic, or traditional, or both". See also Joyal 1995: 51.

17 See *Thg.* 128d: "[SOCRATES] There's a certain spiritual thing (*ti ... daimonion*) which, by divine dispensation, has been with me since childhood. It is a voice that, when it comes, always signals me to turn away from what I am about to do (*aei moi sēmainei, ho an mellō prattein, toutou apotropēn*), but never prescribes anything (*protrepei de oude pote*)" (trans. Smith).

negative. Besides the fact that it is extremely difficult to see how this statement could possibly accord with what Socrates says in 128d, it is necessary to admit that even if the sign is described by him as all powerful, the power in question is not absolute – indeed, far from it – for it only concerns the selection of young persons who can associate with Socrates. Moreover, the *dynamis* of a *daimōn* operates in both directions, that is, both from the gods to men and from men to the gods (see *Smp.* 202e). Yet Socrates' divine sign only operates in one direction, from the deity to Socrates, and the philosopher never invokes his sign to request something from the deity. That said, if the *Theages* dates from the period 345–335, as Joyal (2000: 155) suggests, then the idea that the sign is a type of *daimōn* will be much older than the first texts (Plutarch, Apuleius, Maximus of Tyre) in which this interpretation is attested, most of which appeared in the second century CE.

Before concluding that Socrates' divine sign, as portrayed by Plato and Xenophon, does not exercise any *dynamis* that can be properly called its own, I still need to examine an objection based on a passage from the *Ion* that is much less well known. In the passage in question, Socrates acknowledges that the *dynamis* of the deity is transitive, in other words, that it can be communicated to men:

[SOCRATES] As I said earlier, that's not a subject that you've mastered – speaking well about Homer; it's a divine power (*theia de dynamis*) that moves you (*hē se kinei*), as a “Magnetic” stone moves iron rings. (That's what Euripides called it; most people call it “Heracleian”) This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does (*alla kai dynamin entithēsi tois daktyliois hōste dynasthai tauton touto poiein hoper hē lithos*) – pull other rings – so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone (*pasi de toutois ex ekeinēs tēs lithou hē dynamis anērtētai*). In the same way, the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended. You know, none of the epic poets, if they're good, are masters of their subject; they are inspired, possessed and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems. (*Ion.* 533d–e, trans. Woodruff)

It may be tempting to use this text to object to my position by arguing that Socrates' divine sign is exactly like the inspired speech of poets. If the divine

dynamis can be transmitted to the poet, nothing stands in the way of its also being transmitted to Socrates' divine sign, which would mean that the sign would have a *dynamis* too. At first sight, this objection is appealing, but on closer examination it itself is open to two objections. First, the case of Socrates' divine sign is not in every respect comparable to the case of the poets who receive their *dynamis* from the deity. In the case of the poets, the deity communicates its *dynamis* to men, that is, to independent living beings, whereas in the case of Socrates' divine sign, it is not a question of an independent entity that receives a *dynamis* from the deity, but instead of a mere sign that is a means or an instrument completely under the control of the deity. Second, even if Socrates' divine sign were to have a *dynamis* comparable to the one that the deity communicates to the poets, it would be, at best, a borrowed or derived *dynamis* without any autonomy. Indeed, just as the *dynamis* of all the rings derives from and depends on the *dynamis* of the Heracleian stone (*pasi de toutois ex ekeinēs tēs lithou hē dynamis anērtētai*, 533e2–3), the *dynamis* of Socrates' divine sign would have to derive from and entirely depend on the *dynamis* of the deity, but that would mean that in attributing to Socrates' divine sign its own *dynamis*, we would be committing the very error that Xenophon denounces in the *Apology*, the one that consists in attributing to Socrates' divine sign the *dynamis* that is in reality the preserve of the gods.

To conclude, I think that it is appropriate to highlight the connection between two expressions that occur in Plutarch's treatise on Socrates' *daimōn* but that do not occur in the authentic dialogues of Plato and Xenophon. The first one is *to Sōkratous daimonion*,¹⁸ which also corresponds to the title of Plutarch's treatise, *Peri tou Sōkratous daimoniou*, and in which the term *daimonion* is used as a synonym of *daimōn*. In Plutarch's treatise, Socrates' *daimonion* is understood to be the specific *daimōn* that he has been attributed and that intervenes to give him advice. Plato and Xenophon never use the expression *to Sōkratous daimonion*, an expression in which the term *Sōkratous* is clearly a subjective genitive. Moreover, they cannot use it, for if they did, this would imply that Socrates had his own deity or personal *daimōn*. The second expression is

18 There are ten occurrences of this expression in Plutarch's treatise: *Plu. Gen.* 10.580c, e, f; 11.580f, 581a, e (twice); 20.588c (twice); 21.590a. Maximus of Tyre also uses this expression (see *Max. Or.* 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6).

formulated in different ways, but it essentially consists in Plutarch's explicit attribution of a *dynamis* to Socrates' *daimonion*:¹⁹

"You suppose, then, Theocritus", replied Galaxidorus, "that Socrates' *daimonion* had some peculiar and extraordinary power (*to Sōkratous daimonion idian kai perittēn dynamin*) ... ? (Plu. *Gen.* 11.58of, trans. De Lacy and Einarson, modified)

They were already well along in an inquiry of no trivial scope, the one Galaxidorus and Pheidoloüs had engaged in shortly before, when they raised the problem of the nature and mode of operation of the so-called *daimonion* of Socrates (*tinous ousias kai dynamēōs eîē to Sōkratous legomenon daimonion*). (Plu. *Gen.* 20.588b, trans. De Lacy and Einarson, modified)

Timarchus, then, desired to learn the nature of Socrates' *daimonion* (*houtos oun pothōn gnōnai to Sōkratous daimonion hēn echei dynamin*). (Plu. *Gen.* 21.590a, trans. De Lacy and Einarson, modified)

These two expressions are not independent of each other, for the first one, which indicates that the sign is a form of *daimōn*, makes the second one possible. Indeed, it is impossible to attribute a *dynamis* to a sign that has no other status or ontological consistency other than that of a mere instrument used by a deity. As soon as Socrates' divine sign acquires the status of a peculiar divine entity, in this instance, that of a *daimōn*, there is no reason to object to the notion that his *daimonion* – which is no longer the sign – has its own *dynamis*. The absence of these two expressions from the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon is a sign, even a confirmation, that neither author ever considered that Socrates' divine sign had its own *dynamis*.

19 On the other hand, Maximus of Tyre never explicitly attributes a *dynamis* to Socrates' *daimonion*. As for Apuleius, rather than attribute a power to *daimones*, he characterises them as powers: "Now there are certain intermediate, godlike powers (*diuinæ mediae potestates*), who are placed between the highest level, the ether, and the lowest, the earth, in this region of air, and they carry both our desires and our good deeds to the gods.' These the Greeks call 'demons' (*daemonas*)" (Ap. *Deo.* 6.132–133, trans. Jones). See also 7.136: "All these, as I have said, are the tasks of certain powers intermediate (*mediae quæpiam potestates*) between men and gods". Proclus holds the same position: "[W]e must observe that in another way also power is very much akin to the spirits (*hē dynamis oikeiōtatē tois daimosin estī*). Everywhere power has been allotted the middle place (*pantachou gar hē dynamis to meson keklērōtai*)" (Procl. *In Alc.* 84.13–15, trans. O'Neill).

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Power and Willing Action in Plato

Andrew Payne

I hope to show that Plato's understanding of *dynamis* or power helps us to develop important elements of a distinctively Platonic theory of human action. In speaking here of a theory of human action, I mean a coherent approach to a set of questions that probe the nature of human action. We would like to know how bodily or other movements express agency, so that I move my arm as opposed to my arm being moved by an electric charge from a well-placed electrode. We would like to know how fully engaged and unconstrained actions differ from actions that are coerced or stem from weakness of will, *akrasia*. Recent scholarship on these issues has focused on Plato's understanding of how action can be explained by reference to the parts of the soul and on his arguments for and against the existence of *akrasia*.¹ Less attention has been given to the understanding of the terms he uses to refer to what we call willing and unwilling actions.² I confess that I do not have a fully worked out Platonic theory of action, but I hope here to sketch one element of such a theory. An important element in any theory of action is its conception of willing or unconstrained action and its difference from unwilling or constrained action. The concept of power is especially helpful in allowing us to achieve a unified account of Plato's terminology in his presentation of constrained and unconstrained action, unwilling and willing action. In passages that make important use of the notion of willing action, the universal desire for happiness when combined with a cognitive power such as craft or knowledge yields willing action.

In a range of passages from dialogues written at different stages of his authorship, Plato describes actions as either unconstrained or constrained. Unconstrained actions are described with the Greek adjective *hekōn* and other cognate forms, such as the adjective *hekousios* and the adverb *hekousiōs*. Constrained actions are described with terms formed as antonyms to *hekōn*, such as *akōn* and *akousios*. An immediate problem for understanding Plato's

1 See Bobonich 2017; Kamtekar 2017; Penner 2011.

2 An essential starting point is Rickert 1987, which surveys ancient Greek sources from Homer onward to the time of Aristotle in order to characterise the use of words for willing and unwilling action, *hekōn* and *akōn*.

philosophy of action is explicating his use of these terms; this is required not only to speak with confidence about Plato's conception of action but also to give consistent and sensible translations of his Greek text. At various points in Plato's dialogues, we read variants of the claim that no one willingly acts unjustly or does wrong: for instance, Socrates asks Callicles at *Gorgias* 509e the following question with an affirmative answer implied:

(Text 1) Do you think Polus and I were or were not correct in being compelled to agree in our previous discussion when we agreed that no one does what's unjust because he wants to, but that all who do so do it unwillingly [*akontes*]?³ (*Grg.* 509e2–7)

For the sake of consistency I will translate *hekōn* as “willing” and *akōn* as “unwilling”, although at times a more elegant translation would result from a different choice. In speaking of action as willing or unwilling, no commitment is intended as to whether Plato recognised the will as a distinct faculty.⁴

One immediate problem in this regard is the fact that Plato's student Aristotle has provided us with an influential account of actions that are voluntary (*hekousion*). According to that account, voluntary actions are those which flow from a principle internal to the agent and which are not carried out under compulsion or in ignorance of the particular conditions of action:

(Text 2) Since that which is done under compulsion or by reason of ignorance is involuntary, the voluntary would seem to be that of which the

3 Translation by Zeyl. Here and elsewhere, translations from the Platonic dialogues are taken from Plato 1997 except where amendments to the translations are noted. Similar statements appear at *R.* 589c (Socrates says that whoever praises injustice does not willingly go wrong [*ou gar hekōn hamartanei*]) and at *Lg.* 860c–d (the Athenian Stranger affirms that all who do injustice do so unwillingly).

4 The scholarly consensus is that this notion is absent in Plato. Dihle 1982 and Kahn 1988 treat Augustine as the key figure who puts the notion of the will and its freedom on the philosophical agenda. Frede 2011 locates the development of the concept of the will primarily in Stoic authors. Kenny 1979 and Irwin 1992 turn to Aristotle, not Plato to find an example of an ancient philosopher who possessed something comparable to the modern concept of the will. And despite its title, Horn 2013 does not attribute to Plato a concept of the will, a faculty distinct from reason and desire; rather, Horn aims to display the structure of Platonic eudaimonism, according to which all actions are comprehensible only as fitting into extended chains of actions leading up to one or more highest ends which are desired for their own sake.

moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action. (*EN* 1111a 22–24)⁵

Aristotle provides this rightly celebrated account of voluntary action in order to justify our intuition that some actions are well-suited for praise and blame and thus are especially relevant for our understanding of virtue and vice. Other actions, though often indiscernible from an external standpoint, are not similarly apt for praise and blame. Thus Aristotle's notions of voluntary and involuntary action overlap fairly closely with our notions of intentional and unintentional action.⁶

Plato employs the terms *hekōn* and *akōn* at times in a way which is reasonably close to these ideas of voluntary and involuntary action. For instance, Socrates at *Apology* 25d asks Meletus whether, in his opinion, Socrates corrupts the youth willingly or unwillingly. In the event that Meletus were to answer that Socrates corrupts the youth unwillingly, Socrates has his answer ready:

(Text 3) Now if I corrupt them unwillingly, the law does not require you to bring people to court for such unwilling wrongdoings, but to get hold of them privately, to instruct them and exhort them; for clearly, if I learn better, I shall cease to do what I am doing unwillingly. (*Ap.* 26a1–4)

Here we can recognise one sense of willing and unwilling action in Plato's dialogues. If an action is performed in ignorance of what the action is and of the particular circumstances of the action, including the consequences of the action, or if the action is coerced by an external force, the action is performed unwillingly. Willing action is action which is performed without external compulsion and with an awareness of the particular circumstances of the action. This conception of willing and unwilling action was apparently already established in Athenian legal practice in Plato's day; cases of external compulsion as well as cases of ignorance of the nature of an action were recognised in Athenian law as offering grounds for excusing an agent from blame and legal penalty that would normally accompany the commission of such actions (Dihle 1982: 31–33; MacDowell 1978: 113–16). I will refer to this as the forensic sense of willing and unwilling action. While on trial, Socrates shows himself to be familiar with this conception of willing and unwilling action. That conception is based on the common-sense intuition that praise and blame, as well

5 Translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are by Ross and Urmson in Aristotle 1984.

6 In this presentation of Aristotle's discussion of voluntary action I follow Sauvé Meyer 2012: 36–53.

as legal culpability, can be cancelled or mitigated when an agent acts in a way that is not based on sufficient awareness of what she is doing or when an external force is responsible for the agent's behaviour. This forensic sense of willing and unwilling action is closely related to Aristotle's notion of voluntary and involuntary action.

Although Socrates does make use of the forensic sense of these terms, a number of important passages in Plato's dialogues employ the terms *hekōn* and *akōn* quite differently. Consider Socrates' explication of a poem by Simonides in the *Protagoras* (338e6–347a5). Simonides takes issue with a saying of Pittacus and composes a poem which includes the following lines:

(Text 4) But I praise and love all
Whoever willingly does
Nothing shameful; for not even the gods fight against necessity. (*Prt.* 345d3–5)⁷

As Socrates interprets these lines, Simonides did not intend to say that he praises and loves the one who willingly does nothing shameful. As the wise Simonides was well aware, no one ever willingly does what is wrong, and praise directed at each and every person is meaningless. Rather, as Socrates rewrites Simonides' lines, he meant to apply the term "willingly" and its antonym "unwillingly" to the way in which one praises and loves. Here is Socrates' rendition of Simonides:

(Text 5) I do not look for a completely blameless person among those who eat the fruits of the broad-chested earth – if I find him, I'll let you know – and so on this account I'll not praise anyone; but sufficient for me is the one who is moderately good and does nothing bad, so that I willingly love and praise all such..., whoever does nothing shameful; but there are those whom I praise and love unwillingly. (*Prt.* 346d3–e4)

In the preceding lines 345d–346b Socrates has explained what it is to love and praise another unwillingly. When a good person finds herself paired with a quite different set of parents or finds herself part of a flawed political community, she does not do as the bad person will, namely rejoicing in the flaws of those near and dear to her and criticising them mercilessly; instead she brings herself to praise and love those whose character is foreign to her. This unwilling

⁷ Simonides 542 in Bergk 1914.

praise and love in Socrates' eyes is a quite different matter from the willing praise we give to a moderately good person. That moderately good person who does no wrong is one who has come to possess craft expertise of some sort: the one who has knowledge of medicine, navigation, farming, or grammar (*Prt.* 344d2–5, 345a1–2). Such people do good things until they are overthrown by illness or storms or some other external force. Apparently Socrates will praise and love such craft-experts gladly or willingly.

We should of course question the value of Socrates' contrived interpretation of Simonides, considered as a piece of literary criticism.⁸ However, it should be clear that in making application of his intuition that no one does wrong willingly, Socrates does not simply mean that no one does wrong voluntarily or intentionally. He claims that it happens often that a good and wise person like Simonides will praise and love unwillingly. By this he does not mean that one praises and loves involuntarily or unintentionally, whatever that would be. He means that one brings oneself to praise and love people to whom one owes respect, such as one's parents or fellow-citizens, even when doing so takes some effort to overcome one's disapproval of their flawed character. This is different from the direct and easy approval we feel for those with whom we find ourselves in like-minded accord, as when Simonides says that he willingly praises and loves another wise and moderately good person. Unwilling praise and love follow upon a choice that we make in recognition of what we owe to others; it is not well-characterised as unintentional or involuntary praise and love.

A second text which indicates that *hekōn* and *akōn* are not well-captured by the terms "voluntary" and "involuntary" arrives in Book 1 of the *Republic*. Here Socrates is engaged in examination of Thrasymachus' claim that justice is the interest of the stronger. According to Thrasymachus, those who rule in cities pursue their own interest as they create laws which define just behaviour. One part of Socrates' refutation of this view is his discussion of the nature of rule. A ruler in the strict sense is one who considers and acts to promote the good of the thing ruled, not the good of the ruler. Thus Socrates asks Callicles at *R.* 345e2, "But do you think that those who rule cities, the true rulers, rule willingly [*hekontas*]?" Thrasymachus expresses his certainty that they do in fact rule willingly, at which point Socrates makes the following claim:

8 See Pappas 1989 for a helpful review of the motivation for Socrates' idiosyncratic reading of Simonides.

(Text 6) But, Thrasymachus, don't you realize that in other kinds of rule no one wants to rule willingly [*hekōn*], but they ask for pay, thinking that their ruling will benefit not themselves but their subjects?⁹ (*R.* 345e5–346a1)

In the following pages Socrates brings Thrasymachus to agree reluctantly that every craft and every form of rule benefits the subject of the craft or rule, not the one who exercises the craft or rule. Benefit arrives for a ruler only if the ruler employs in addition the wage-earning craft, which is unique among crafts in benefiting the one who uses it. Thrasymachus is rightly reluctant to agree with Socrates on these points, because in the forensic sense of *hekōn* it is clearly false that no one rules willingly, especially in the case of political rule. Clearly men like Pericles and Themistocles sought to rule as a result of their own ambition; no one forced them to engage in public life. Their ruling was not a result of ignorance of the details of their situation; such ignorance of what they were doing would have made ruling impossible. Using the forensic sense of *hekōn*, then, Socrates is speaking nonsense. Apparently what he means is that, contrary to what the typical politician believes, the activity of ruling by itself makes no contribution to the well-being of the ruler. Many politicians would agree with Thrasymachus that the best life is gained by the activity of ruling, and they aim to rule with this in mind. Socrates believes that even so they do not rule willingly because the nature of ruling defeats their plans to gain the good life by ruling. The demands set by the nature of ruling – care for the well-being of the subject of rule – differ from the ruler's goals of achieving his own well-being through rule. But this claim cannot be articulated within the bounds set by the forensic sense of willing action.

A third text which illustrates the limits of the forensic sense of *hekōn* arrives in the context of Glaucon's account of justice and injustice at the start of Book 2 of the *Republic*. Basic to human nature is pleonectic desire which leads us to seek advantage over each other. In order to protect themselves, humans make agreements to abide by laws that define just conduct. However, anyone who comes to possess the power to commit injustice with impunity will do so, or would be rightly thought a fool. To illustrate this point, Glaucon tells the story of the ancestor of Gyges who acquires a ring of invisibility and uses it to

9 Here I alter the Grube-Reeve translation, which gives "for its own sake" as a translation of *hekōn*. This obscures the paradoxical quality of Socrates' position. That position implies that political rule is never exercised willingly, despite the evident fact that this rule is eagerly sought after by many and is the object of intense competition.

take political power unjustly. The larger point of the story is that anyone who gained such power would also use it in the same way:

(Text 7) This, some would say, is a great proof that one is never just willingly but only when compelled to be. (*R.* 360c6–7)

Similarly, Glaucon's brother Adeimantus states that no one, except for a few exceptional individuals, is just willingly:

(Text 8) So, given all that has been said, Socrates, how is it possible for anyone of any power – whether of mind, wealth, body, or birth – to be willing to honor justice [*dikaiosynēn timan ethelein*] and not laugh aloud when he hears it praised? Indeed, if anyone can show that what we've said is false and has adequate knowledge that justice is best, he'll surely be full not of anger but of forgiveness for the unjust. He knows that, apart from someone of godlike character who is disgusted by injustice or one who has gained knowledge and avoids injustice for that reason, no one is just willingly [*hekōn*]. Through cowardice or old age or some other weakness, people do indeed object to injustice. But it's obvious that they do so only because they lack the power to do injustice, for the first of them to acquire it is the first to do as much injustice as he can. (*R.* 366b8–d4)

Texts 7 and 8 go beyond the forensic sense of *hekōn* when they assert that no one is just willingly. Glaucon and Adeimantus allow that many people do act justly by their own choice. Their justice is voluntary or revealed in their intentional actions. Such people realise their own weakness and, after tasting the badness of being treated unjustly by others, opt for just and lawful behaviour in the hope that others will likewise comply. According to the brothers, this is unwilling action, in contrast to willing action, which is action unconstrained by the necessity of complying with laws. Here willing action is not simply any action reflecting choice and flowing from an individual's deliberation; the conventionally just actions of weak individuals can satisfy these criteria of voluntary or intentional action, but according to the two brothers such conventionally just actions are done unwillingly. Willing action stems from choice that expresses power. Within the perspective which Glaucon and Adeimantus adopt at this point in the conversation, the power in question is the ability to act on human nature's inherent pleonectic desire.

These texts indicate that the terms *hekōn* and *akōn* for Plato do not correspond closely with our terms for voluntary/intentional and involuntary/unintentional action. As a hypothesis, I propose that willing action for Plato

is action that flows from the desire for happiness when this desire is combined with a cognitive power such as a craft that bestows knowledge on the agent. Thus willing action for Plato constitutes only a subset of what we call intentional or voluntary action, and various actions that we will recognise as intentional or voluntary will not count as willing actions in the Platonic sense. I will refer to this second sense of willing action as the fulfilment sense, since willing action in this sense follows upon a cognitive power which fulfils the desire for happiness. With this understanding of the fulfilment sense of willing action in place, I hope to provide clarification of various passages which employ the terms *hekōn* and *akōn* as qualifications of action.

In order to provide an example of the fulfilment sense of willing action, I begin with the *Hippias Minor* and Socrates' discussion of cognitive powers and their relation to willing action. Two stretches of argumentation are relevant. In the first passage, from 365d6–368a7, Socrates introduces the notion of power in order to support the claim that the person who speaks truly is also the one who is able to deceive and speak falsely. In the second passage, from 373c6–376b6, Socrates builds upon the notion of power to draw conclusions about willing and unwilling action. In particular, the person who willingly goes wrong and does shameful actions is better than the one who performs the same actions unwillingly. If this person who is better and wiser should act shamefully, he or she does so through a power, namely a craft (376a2–3). Before considering these two passages in more detail, it is worth noting that Socrates starts from considerations about power and proceeds to claims about willing and unwilling action. This is what we would expect if willing action is constituted by action that flows from a cognitive power. In addition, I take it that this dialogue, even with its potentially unsettling observations on the ability of the wise person to deceive and to act unjustly, provides genuine insight into Socrates' understanding of power and willing action. In particular, its conclusion about the superiority of the man who goes wrong willingly speaks to the greater abilities of the person who is wise, not to the actual tendencies of the wise person to act unjustly in service to her own interests.¹⁰

10 See Weiss 1981 and Jones and Sharma 2017 for fuller discussion of the Socratic credentials of the *Hippias Minor*. In particular Jones and Sharma argue convincingly against Weiss' claim that the final pages of the dialogue contain an *ad hominem* demonstration aimed at Hippias of the incompatibility of his sophistic conception of justice as a craft and his intuitive conviction that a good person will not voluntarily commit injustice. According to Jones and Sharma, the conclusion that the one who willingly acts unjustly is better than the one who does so unwillingly is genuinely Socratic, but not in a way that allies wisdom with injustice. The person who acts willingly is a better example of a human being than the unwilling agent, but even so wisdom forbids injustice. The greatest interest

In the first stretch of argumentation, Socrates introduces the notion of a power in order to support his claim of the coincidence of the one who is able to speak the truth and the one who is able to deceive. According to *Hippias Minor* 366c, a person is powerful when he can accomplish what he wishes unless prevented by an external intervening factor, such as disease: "But then is not each person powerful who does at that time whatever he wishes, when he wishes; I mean someone who is not prevented by illness or such things, but just as you [Hippias] are capable of writing my name whenever you wish". This is a weak form of infallibility provided by possession of a power: as long as the power is in operation, the right result will be produced, but external factors can impede the operation of the power. So Hippias can write Socrates' name using his knowledge of grammar whenever he wishes unless, perhaps, his arm has been disabled by muscle cramps.¹¹ One who has the craft of arithmetic can state the truth about sums of numbers, but can also reliably deceive if he so wishes. By contrast, the person ignorant of arithmetic will unwillingly tell the truth when he sets out to deceive but slips up in the process (367a2–5).

In the second stretch of argumentation, Socrates draws conclusions about the relative values of willing and unwilling action. At 375a–e, Socrates performs an induction by marshalling a series of examples of people with craft being able to produce both good and bad results at will. He ends at 375e–376a by saying that the powerful and wise person is capable of doing both fine and shameful actions. If the wise accomplish shameful actions, this is done willingly and by craft. In such cases, willing action coincides with a craft expert using wisdom. Unwilling action is seen in the person who lacks knowledge and is associated with the use of tools, organs, and servants who are less well suited to achieve practical ends. In general, willing action is produced by the person who is better at the relevant activity than the person who acts unwillingly, and this superiority in action is explained by the willing agent's possession of a power.¹²

From the *Hippias Minor* we can draw two general conclusions about power and willing action. First, for Plato power and lack of power serve as explanatory factors basic to willing and unwilling action. The standing condition of possessing a craft explains why an arithmetician calculates whenever the wish

a person can have is the best state of their soul, which wisdom will preserve by avoiding unjust action.

11 See Chapter 10 of the present volume and the condition WI for possession of a power.

12 See Chapter 10 for a closer analysis of the notion of power operative in the *Hippias Minor*. A power is had by a person or thing that is good at a certain activity, the person or thing that possesses that power is also good at the opposed activity, and for some activity *R* a person who has the power to *R* and wants to *R* will straightaway do some *R*-ing (assuming there is no intervening obstacle to *R*-ing, such as illness or external force).

arises that she calculates. It is not the case that choice or intention or resolve is the decisive factor in willing action and lacking in unwilling action. Both Wilhelmine and Albert may want to achieve some desired end, but Wilhelmine acts willingly because she possesses a power while Albert acts unwillingly because he lacks that power. Here it is not Wilhelmine's intentions or choice that ensure willing action, but the fact that a cognitive power such as arithmetic latches on to the truth in the way required to produce some valuable end. Second, this Platonic notion of willing action is not defined simply by the production of a desired end, such as the right answer to an arithmetic problem or the securing of happiness. Willing action must produce such ends in the right way. Albert, the person who lacks the craft of arithmetic, may by accident guess the right answer to the question 'What is 700 times 3?', and Wilhelmine may on occasion be disabled by illness and be unable to produce the right answer. Even so Albert has not acted willingly because there is no power in his soul, no lasting element of the person, that secures the correct result now and in time to come. Wilhelmine is the better mathematician even if she chooses to offer the wrong answer because she has a power which fulfils itself in willing action.

Another important passage which illustrates Plato's conception of willing action is Socrates' refutation of Meletus in the *Apology*. Socrates' refutation of Meletus at *Apology* 24c10–28a2 falls naturally into three parts. The refutation follows immediately after Socrates' recitation of the formal indictment lodged against him. The indictment is in three parts, charging Socrates with corrupting the youth, with not believing in the gods of the city, and with believing in new spiritual things. In the first section, from 24c10 to 25c5, Socrates disputes the suggestion that he corrupts the youth by appealing to the implausibility of Meletus' claims that he alone corrupts the youth of Athens. It is craft-practitioners such as the horse trainer, one or a select group of experts, who makes others better, while the many make them worse whenever they associate with or make use of horses. So it is unlikely that only one person corrupts horses while the many improve them. By analogy, it is unlikely that Socrates is the only one who makes the youth of Athens worse while everyone else makes them better. In the second section, Socrates attacks the charge of corrupting the youth from a different angle. He asks Meletus to specify whether Socrates corrupts the youth willingly or unwillingly. It is not credible to say that Socrates corrupts the youth willingly, since any reasonable person can see that one who corrupts his comrades is likely to receive harm from them in the course of their shared life. No one wishes to accept such harm, and Socrates is not so ignorant as to be unaware that by making his companions worse he runs the risk of being harmed himself. So it is not to be believed that Socrates willingly harms the youth. If he works this harm unwillingly, suggests Socrates,

then the proper move on Meletus' part would be to instruct him on the damage he is doing to others and to warn him to cease from doing harm. Finally, in the third section of the refutation, from 26a9–28a2, Socrates turns to the charge of not believing in the gods of the city but in new spiritual things.

One way to motivate the idea that possession of a craft or a similar cognitive power is necessary for willing action is to consider that willing and unwilling action show up in the refutation of Meletus as different ways of teaching what one knows. Meletus has charged Socrates with corrupting the youth, thus drawing on the earlier accusations that Socrates teaches eccentric and harmful ideas to the youth and suggesting that Socrates is an atheist. Socrates proceeds by presenting Meletus with a choice between two options: "Come now, do you accuse me here of corrupting the young and making them worse willingly or unwillingly?"¹³ Meletus answers that Socrates does this willingly. Meletus wishes to present Socrates to the jury as someone who teaches and in doing so fills the heads of the Athenian youth with harmful nonsense. Socrates could be doing this teaching with the awareness that the result of this teaching and learning is harm to his students. Or he could be teaching and doing harm to his students while believing falsely that the effect of the teaching is beneficial. The former would be willing corruption by teaching, the latter would be unwilling corruption by teaching. Meletus chooses the former, perhaps because it expresses his own sense of what Socrates does that is so harmful and certainly because he calculates that this interpretation of the charge will do the most damage to Socrates. If Meletus were to say that Socrates corrupts the youth unwillingly, then even if Socrates were to be convicted, in the succeeding penalty phase of the trial Socrates could propose a lighter penalty and support this proposal by citing Meletus' own charge of unwilling corruption of the youth.

Socrates' next step is to portray as unbelievable Meletus' interpretation of the charge, according to which Socrates willingly corrupts the youth by his teaching. Socrates has already gained Meletus' assent to the claims that no one wants to be harmed by his associates, and that in general no one wishes to be harmed: "And does the man exist who would rather be harmed than benefited by his associates? ... Is there any man who wants to be harmed?"¹⁴ Meletus answers in the negative: no one wants to be harmed, and so no one wants to be harmed rather than benefited by his companions. In addition, Socrates has gained Meletus' assent to the common-sensical observations that the wicked do harm to those close to them while the good benefit those closest to them

13 Ap. 25d6–7. Here I alter Grube's translation of *hōs diaphtheiron ta tous neous kai ponēroterous poioūnta hekonta ē akonta*; by giving "willingly" for *hekonta* instead of "deliberately".

14 Ap. 25d1–4.

(*Ap.* 25c). With these admissions in the background, Socrates presents as absurd the thought that he would willingly corrupt the youth by his teaching:

(Text 9) Are you so much wiser at your age than I am at mine that you understand that bad people always produce something bad for those closest to them while good people produce something good, but I am so far gone in lack of learning that I am ignorant of this fact, namely that if I make one of my associates wicked I run the risk of being harmed by him, so that I willingly do so great a bad thing, as you say? I don't believe you, Meletus, and I do not think anyone else will. (*Ap.* 25d1–4)

Here Socrates dismisses as incredible what may seem to some a viable possibility: namely that Socrates could engage in teaching some piece of knowledge or practice to his associates, being aware that the end result is harm to his associates. Socrates might do this with the awareness that his willing corruption is likely to lead them to harm Socrates himself, so that he is aware that he is doing something likely to harm himself. Or Socrates might engage in corrupting teaching while being unaware that he is doing something that is very likely to harm himself. Socrates treats both options as unbelievable.

Socrates is in good position to reject as implausible these possible scenarios involving willing corruption through teaching. Socrates can appeal to the notion of making people better by teaching that he has himself developed in earlier sections of the *Apology*. As he recalls his conversation with Callias, the son of Hipponicus, Socrates tells us at 20a–c that whoever, like Callias, wants to make his sons turn out well will turn to the expert in human and political excellence. This person is described as analogous to the expert horse-trainer, one who knows the best state of horses and cattle and is able by virtue of the exercise of this knowledge to make young horses exhibit such excellence. The expert in human and political excellence is expected to produce this sort of good thing, and not to harm or corrupt the youth. Similarly, in the first section of the refutation of Meletus, Socrates has made the point that all those who associate with horses and make use of them will either harm them or benefit them, corrupt them or make them better. It is the one or few with knowledge of horsemanship that benefit them while the many who lack this knowledge in fact corrupt them.

From this Socratic perspective, the scenario in which someone teaches the youth while being aware that the result is harmful to them is not plausible. More likely is the scenario in which one who corrupts the youth makes a false claim to knowledge; this person is similar to the many who use horses without the craft of horse-training and harm them in the process. This sort

of outcome is what is described in the second alternative that is offered to Meletus: Socrates corrupts the youth unwillingly. In such a case of unwilling corruption, Socrates says, it is proper to direct instruction and exhortation at the corrupter, not legal action: "But if I corrupt unwillingly, it is not our custom right away to bring a person to court for such errors, but to take up the person in private to teach and to warn [*nouthetein*]; for it is clear that if I learn, I will cease from what I am doing unwillingly".¹⁵ Here unwilling action comes to an end once a person advances in knowledge.

From this review of the first and second sections of the refutation of Meletus, we have the following description of willing and unwilling action. Willing action, as exemplified by willing teaching, involves the use of a craft to produce some benefit for the area of life governed by that craft (the use of horses for horse training, education of the young for human and political excellence). However that particular benefit tied to that craft is used in a wider context, willing action produces benefit via use of a craft. Unwilling action as seen in unwilling corruption of the youth by teaching involves acting on a false impression of one's own knowledge such that one takes oneself to be benefiting others by use of a craft, even though one lacks the relevant knowledge. A parallel to this picture of willing and unwilling action can be found in Socrates' summary of the results of his interrogation of craft experts at 22c9–e6. Craft experts do know fine things, Socrates says, and on the basis of this knowledge they bring their craft to its completion. This corresponds to willing action. But on the basis of this wisdom they make the false inference to having knowledge about other important matters of which they lack knowledge. This state of mind, described by Socrates as the characteristic ignorance (*amathia*, 22e4) of the craft experts, corresponds to unwilling action in the refutation of Meletus, which is also a state of ignorance in which one claims knowledge one actually lacks. Socrates himself lacks knowledge of any craft and lacks any special sort of wisdom, and so we should not ascribe to him willing action in the full sense. When he says at *Apology* 37a6–7 that he never willingly does injustice to anyone, we may understand him to mean two things. First, without exception he avoids actions that amount to treating others unjustly. Examples of this avoidance of injustice are his refusal to participate in the improper trial of the generals after Arginusae and in the assassination of Leon of Salamis. Second, this consistent avoidance of injustice is not a result of Socrates' own possession of a craft. It should instead be ascribed to the influence of Socrates' divine sign, mention of which precedes the discussion of Socrates' avoidance of public affairs. If the

15 *Ap.* 26a2–5; translation by the author.

divine sign is responsible for Socrates' avoidance of injustice, then he cannot claim to avoid injustice in a way that reflects his own cognitive achievement. His avoidance of injustice is not a case of willing action in the strict sense.

This conception of willing action provides a vantage point for review of scholarly commentary on the refutation of Meletus. Rachana Kamtekar in her recent book *Plato's Moral Psychology* takes up the passage *Apology* 25d–e (Text 9) in the course of her discussion of why wrongdoing is unwilling. Her answer to this large-scale question is that wrongdoing is unwilling because it runs counter to the natural human desire for well-being and for one's own good.¹⁶ I believe that this is not so much wrong as incomplete, in that her answer leaves out the intellectualist insight that unwilling action is characterised as action that lacks guidance from a craft or similar cognitive power. What is distinctive of unwilling action is not simply that it produces results that run counter to desire; unwilling action can by accident produce a desired result. This comes out in Kamtekar's analysis of Socrates' claim that either he does not corrupt the youth or only corrupts the youth unwillingly due to ignorance. In her view, Socrates uses the following line of thought, according to which willing action can be carried out in ignorance:

(Text 10)

A1 The vicious harm their associates while the good benefit theirs (25c).

A2 If I corrupt my associates, then I make them vicious (25d).

A3 No one wants (*bouletai*) to be harmed (25d).

A4 If I corrupt my associates willingly (*hekonta*), I must (by A3) be ignorant of A1 and A2 (25e).

A5 It is not plausible that I am ignorant of (A1) and (A2) (25e).

A6 Therefore, either I do not corrupt my associates, or if I corrupt them, I do so unwillingly (26a).¹⁷

Kamtekar reads A4 as proposing ignorance as an explanation of how Socrates could be corrupting the youth. She proposes "intentionally" as a translation of *hekōn* at 25e4, and comments as follows: "[I]f Socrates corrupts his associates intentionally, he must intend to corrupt them, but if he intends to corrupt them, he must intend the (obvious) consequence A5, that they become harmful to their associates, of which he is one, which is tantamount to intending that he be harmed (A1, A2). But no one intends to be harmed (A3)".¹⁸ Kamtekar

¹⁶ Kamtekar 2017: 69.

¹⁷ Kamtekar 2017: 71–2.

¹⁸ Kamtekar 2017: 72.

comments that the impossibility of Socrates doing bad willingly is secured by the implausibility of his being ignorant of simple facts about bad people harming their associates as mentioned in A5, not by treating every bad action as due to ignorance.

Setting aside the larger issues of how best to make sense of the claim that wrongdoing is unwilling because done out of ignorance, I believe that Kamtekar's treatment of *Apology* 25c–d does not satisfy. I take it that Socrates expects his audience to reject out of hand the first alternative he proposes, namely that he corrupts the youth willingly through his teaching. A willing act of teaching involves knowledge of what one is doing and the use of a craft. Socrates has laid the foundations for this claim by his discussion of the use of craft to teach and improve the young. Once Socrates spells out the sort of ignorance that would be involved in willingly corrupting by teaching, he expects the jurors to see that such willing corruption by teaching is not merely implausible but impossible. He expects them to reject the alternative of willing corruption by teaching not simply due to the implausibility of Socrates being unaware of the long-term effects of making his associates worse. In addition he expects his audience to notice the impossibility of using a craft to make others worse while remaining oblivious to the sort of things a craft expert will know.

In his 1989 book *Socrates in the Apology*, C. D. C. Reeve considers a different interpretation of willing corruption. After reviewing the reasoning that leads Socrates to conclude at 26a1 that if he corrupts the youth, he must do so unwillingly, Reeve takes issue with this conclusion. He provides the following description of two ways in which someone might corrupt the youth willingly, or voluntarily to use his translation. "First, even if no one voluntarily risks being harmed without cause, people do voluntarily risk harm if they think they stand to gain enough by doing so. Second, people often voluntarily do what they know or believe will harm them, out of *akrasia* or weakness of will".¹⁹ Why couldn't Socrates corrupt willingly or voluntarily in service to some larger end that is (believed to be) choiceworthy, Reeve asks, or in service to an end that overmasters the agent's belief that he ought not to corrupt? We should oppose this interpretation of willing corruption by recalling that Socrates is accused of corrupting willingly by teaching. Such teaching involves the use of a craft, where a craft as such is oriented toward the good of the subject area over which it is set. The point of horse training is to make horses better, and the use of the human and political excellence is to make the young better. Some who style themselves teachers may of course use the tricks of the trade to corrupt

19 Reeve 1989: 92.

the youth voluntarily in order to achieve a larger end that is seen as choiceworthy, but this is not a matter of using the relevant craft. Hence it is not a case of willing action, even if it may be a case of voluntary or intentional action. As noted earlier, willing action is only one subset of voluntary action.

Our analysis of passages from the *Hippias Minor* and the *Apology* has drawn our attention to the role of crafts and similar cognitive powers in enabling willing action. This account of willing action helps shed light on a vexed passage in the *Protagoras*, namely Socrates' presentation of the paradoxical claim that no one willingly chooses what is bad when it is possible to gain something better:

(Text 11) No one willingly [*hekōn*] goes for what is bad or for what one believes to be bad, nor, it seems, is this in human nature, to be willing [*ethelein*] to go for what one believes to be bad instead of what is good. (*Prt.* 358c6–d2)

This claim, described by Santas 1964 as the prudential paradox, arises out of Socrates' defence of the view that knowledge is powerful and is not such as to be overcome by pleasure or other passions such as anger or fear (*Prt.* 352b–d). In order to convince the many of this claim, he provides his own analysis starting at 352e of the experience that the many will describe as being overcome by pleasure. Accepting as an hypothesis the hedonism of the many, according to which the good is pleasure and the bad is pain, Socrates rejects the idea that anyone will know that some actions and the pleasures they bring are bad yet also accept or go for what is known to be bad as a result of being overcome by pleasure. Once this is spelled out carefully in the terms of hedonism, this would amount to the ridiculous scenario of a person knowing what is bad but accepting the bad because he is overcome by what is good (355c–d). The proper explanation of the phenomenon of being overcome by pleasure requires consideration of the fact that we must select actions resulting in pleasures and pains that occur now and in the future. The relative nearness and distance in time of the pleasures and pains involved can make them appear greater or smaller, just as sounds will seem louder or softer to us depending on how near or far away from us the sounds are produced. Given all of this, we stand in need of a craft of measurement which will reveal to us the truth about the actions and pleasures we select; otherwise we are delivered over to the unreliable power of appearances:

(Text 12) If then faring well for us consisted in this, in doing and choosing the larger quantities on the one hand, while avoiding and not doing the smaller ones, what would be our security in life? Would it be the craft of

measurement or the power of appearance? Or does the one not make us wander and many times makes us shift back and forth both in our actions and in our selections of things great and small, while the measuring craft renders this appearance powerless, so that once it shows the truth it puts the soul at peace, resting in truth, and thus saves our life? (*Prt.* 356c8–e2)

Here Socrates directs the many to rely on a cognitive power, the craft of measurement, instead of turning over their lives to the unreliable guidance offered by the power of appearance. Without the knowledge of greater and smaller pleasures and pains afforded by the craft of measurement, as Socrates rehearses his answer to the many, we are apt to go wrong and be mistaken in our selection of pleasures and pains. This lack of knowledge and ignorance is the source of being overcome by pleasure and thus being weaker than oneself (*Prt.* 357d–e, 358c). Whenever this happens the result is unwilling action, since we have set out for what we take to be best without the guidance of a cognitive power. Willing action, as Text 11 tells us, is marked by selection of the best.

Socrates' train of thought in this section of the *Protagoras* shows similarities to his procedure in the *Hippias Minor* and the *Apology*. He arrives at conclusions about willing action (no one willingly does what is bad) on the basis of his previous discussion of a cognitive power. In order to demonstrate that knowledge is the saving power within human life, he develops an account of the craft of measurement that will be of interest to the many, his intended audience in the *Protagoras*. This is a cognitive power that allows us to hit on the truth about the different actions to be included in a happy life. Once this account of a cognitive power is secure, Socrates characterises as willing the actions that flow from this power. If a person has this craft then he or she will never willingly go for what is bad or second-best.

This much can be said with certainty, it seems; but where there is interpretation there is disagreement. One contested issue is the proper characterisation of Socrates' attitude towards the phenomenon of being overcome by pleasure. By redescribing this phenomenon as a matter of ignorance, it seems that he is denying the existence of *akrasia* or weakness of will, the selection by an agent of a bad or second-best action where the agent believes that a better is possible. According to Penner 1997, the standard interpretation of the Socratic denial of *akrasia* goes wrong by treating belief rather than knowledge as the central issue. On what Penner terms the "Direct Corollary" view, the denial of *akrasia* is linked to the claim that no one willingly errs in getting what is best for them, and this claim that no one errs willingly is simply the claim that no one acts contrary to their belief about what is the best option open to them. Knowledge entails belief, and so as a trivial consequence of the denial of *akrasia* (no one

acts against what they believe is best for them) it follows that knowledge is strong (no one acts against what they know is best for them).²⁰ Penner takes this to be a misconstrual of Socrates' real commitment, which is to the strength of knowledge, not to the efficacy of belief in generating action. The present account of willing action lends support to Penner's position by tracing willing action back to knowledge, be it craft expertise or some other cognitive power. Penner notes that Socrates in the *Protagoras* asserts that no one willingly errs, and he treats this statement as equivalent to the claim that no one acts contrary to their belief as to what is the best option possible for them. But this is already to accept one aspect of the Direct Corollary view. Closer analysis of willing action in Plato will uncover the centrality of knowledge, not merely true belief, for willing action.

The present account of willing action also has consequences for our understanding of the motivations involved in action. On one common interpretation, Socrates holds in dialogues such as the *Protagoras* and *Hippias Minor* that no one errs willingly in part because all human desires are rational and centre on what is good. Here is Penner as he describes his own view of Socratic motivation: "On this theory, all desires to do something are rational desires, in that they always automatically adjust to the agent's beliefs about what is the best means to their ultimate endinsert space.... Rational desires adjust to the agent's beliefs. In fact, on this view the *only* way to influence my conduct is to change my opinion as to what is best".²¹ Because there are no nonrational or good-independent desires in the Socratic moral psychology, the only factor that determines whether one acts rightly is the presence or absence of true belief or knowledge; wrong action stems from ignorance and is unwilling for this reason.²² Departing from this interpretation is the view developed by Daniel Devereux and Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, according to which Socrates recognises the existence of nonrational desires and passions. As Devereux 1995 explains, Socrates differs from Aristotle by conceiving of virtue as closely related to continence, the capacity to restrain unruly and irrational desires and to hold close to one's convictions concerning right action. Where Aristotle treats virtue as something quite different from continence, an amalgam of properly cultivated desires and right reason that aims always at what

20 See Penner 1997: 117–18. See also Penner 1996: 200: "On this purely economic view of the relation of belief to action [the "Direct Corollary" view], one automatically acts in accordance with what one believes best at the moment of action. But then since what one knows one also believes, we get as an immediate corollary the impossibility of synchronic knowledge-akrasia ..."

21 Penner 1992: 128; italics in original.

22 See Irwin 1977: 78; Irwin 1995: 75–6; Penner 2000: 164; Nehamas 1999: 27–58.

is fine or noble, Socrates allows that even the virtuous person, not to speak of the rest of us, must deal with recalcitrant nonrational desires. In support of Devereux, Brickhouse and Smith 2010 show that Socrates treats passions such as fear, desire, and anger as possible nonrational motivations. They hold that these passions play a role in explaining action by influencing the formation and retention of beliefs: whether I believe the piece of cheesecake before me to be good will often depend on how strongly I desire to eat it. Thus they combine recognition of nonrational desires in Socratic moral psychology with the claim that for Socrates belief remains the proximate cause of action.

The present account of willing action favours the position of Devereux and Brickhouse and Smith. Willing action arises from the normal human desire for happiness, which in the *Protagoras* is assumed to be the desire for pleasure of various kinds, including bodily pleasure. Once this desire is combined with the craft of measurement, willing action results. Nothing else is required. The desires that are judged by the craft of measurement may be of the most varied kind and may conflict with the counsels of reason. What is essential for a secure and happy life, on the picture we find in the *Protagoras*, is obedience to the dictates of the craft of measurement, whatever the power of appearance may suggest to us. In other words, willing action is quite close to the action of Aristotle's continent man, just as Devereux proposes. As has been noted previously, willing action is only a subset of the larger class of voluntary and intentional action. For those who do not live strictly by the craft of measurement, the power of appearance is able to provide us with a range of nonrational desires and passions. As Brickhouse and Smith suggest, these desires are able to shape our perceptions of what is reasonable to do. Thus even within the moral psychology of the *Protagoras* we are capable of acting in familiar ways on a range of nonrational desires and passions.

I have argued that in dialogues such as the *Hippias Minor*, the *Apology*, and the *Protagoras*, Plato relies on a particular conception of willing action: willing action arises from the desire for happiness when this is combined with a cognitive power such as craft expertise. In the *Republic*, Plato provides further confirmation of the connection between cognitive powers and willing action. In his construction of the best city and the necessity for philosophers to rule in it, Socrates characterises our psychic actions of accepting truth and falsehood as willing and unwilling. Part of the education of the philosophers is the use of traditional myths which, though literally false, help to instil positive character traits in the future rulers. In order to clarify the way in which this involves the use of falsehood, Socrates distinguishes between the "true falsehood", which is always to be avoided, and the image of falsehood, which can be used with care for limited purposes. The true falsehood is the acceptance of falsehoods about the most important subjects into the soul, and this is something that we all oppose:

(Text 13) I mean that no one is willing to tell falsehoods [*pseudesthai ... oudeis hekōn ethelei*] to the most important part of himself about the most important things, but of all places he is most afraid to have falsehoods there. (*R.* 382a7–9)

Just as no one wishes to be miserable and unhappy, Socrates will say, no one willingly takes on false belief simply as such. When we accept a belief, we see it as true rather than as false. Acceptance of false belief thus involves ignorance of the nature of the false belief and so cannot be done willingly.

After this discussion in Book 2 of acceptance of false belief, Socrates in Book 3 distinguishes between willing and unwilling loss of belief. The context here is the preparation for the introduction of the noble lie, the myth which is to be told about the origin of the distinction between rulers and ruled in the best city. The guardians are those who are least likely to forget or give up their belief that they must do what is best for the whole city, and the myth of the metals is intended to convey in figurative terms the truth that some members of the city are better guardians of this belief than others and are less likely to discard this belief. Socrates addresses this process of discarding or losing beliefs as follows:

(Text 14) I think the discarding of a belief is either willing or unwilling – willing when one learns that the belief is false, unwilling in the case of all true beliefs. (*R.* 412e9–413a2)

We are willingly deprived of bad things, such as false belief, the sort of thing that one rids oneself of in the process of gaining knowledge, and unwillingly deprived of good things, such as true beliefs. The unwilling loss of true beliefs is likened to actions that one performs through compulsion from an external source, in that such loss of true beliefs is ascribed to theft, bewitchment by magic spells, and necessity (*R.* 413a–c). In less vivid terms, the loss of true belief is due to persuasion and forgetting in the passage of time (theft), to the influence of fear and pleasure (magic spells), and the influence of pain (compulsion). In such cases of unwilling loss of belief, presumably, there is a conflict between the part of us that “knows better” and the part of us that loses hold of the truth because it is too easily persuaded or is unable to stand against the influence of pain, fear, and pleasure.

In addition to the loss of true belief, Socrates also addresses the acquisition of false beliefs. In the course of Book 5 the philosophers as distinct from the lovers of sights and sounds are introduced; they are the only ones to whom rule in the best city is to be entrusted. Philosophers are able to comprehend Beauty Itself as well as the many beautiful things, while the lovers of sights and sounds will recognise only the many beautiful things. To explain fully how

the philosophers differ from other possible rulers, Socrates at the start of Book 6 discusses the moral character of the philosophers. They will be temperate, courageous, just, and quick to learn. The root of all these traits is their devotion to truth, the first trait ascribed to the philosophers:

(Text 15) And further, let's agree that, like the honor-lovers and erotically inclined men we described before, they love all such learning and are not willing to give up any part of it... Consider next whether the people we're describing must also have this in their nature.

What?

The lack of falsehood and their being willing in no way to accept what is false, but to hate it and to love the truth [*to hekontas einai mēdamē prosdechesthai to pseudos alla misein, tēn d'alētheian stergein*]. (R. 485b5–c4)

Socrates says that philosophers will never willingly accept what is false. If this is meant to differentiate philosophers from the lovers of sights and sounds, which is the point of the current discussion, it must be the case that in some way the lovers of sights and sounds do willingly accept what is false. Clearly this cannot be a case of someone sincerely uttering to himself a statement such as “‘ $2 + 2 = 5$ ’ is false, but I believe it anyway”, since as we have seen in Text 13 no one willingly accepts falsehoods as such. A different interpretation of willingly accepting falsehood is needed, one that draws on the possibility of division within the desires of the soul.

The philosophers' devotion to the truth shows itself when their desires flow strongly towards learning and are diverted from the pleasures of the body (R. 485d). Such a person will not take seriously whatever money can buy and will not consider death to be something fearful. The implied contrast is with the lovers of sights and sounds, who take perceptible things to be the whole of reality and thus are directed in their search for happiness towards the body, its perceptions and pleasures, and its well-being. Such willing acceptance of falsehood can be seen in an agent's pursuit of goods such as pleasure, money, and honour in preference to virtue and the knowledge of truth that comes with wisdom. For an example of this sort of willing and hence culpable pursuit of lesser goods, we may return to Book 1, where Socrates speaks at 347a–c of the different sort of incentives that move people to engage in ruling. Good people are motivated by fear of a particular penalty, namely being ruled by the worse sort of people. Others seek willingly to rule in pursuit of the wrong sort of good, either money or honour:

(Text 16) Therefore good people won't want to rule for the sake of either money or honor. They don't want to be paid wages openly for ruling and

get called hired hands, nor to take them in secret from their rule and be called thieves. And they won't rule for the sake of honor, because they aren't ambitious honor-lovers. So, if they're to want to rule [*ethelein archein*], some compulsion or punishment must be brought to bear on them – perhaps that's why it is thought shameful to go willingly to rule and not to await necessity.²³ (*R.* 347b6–c3)

As Socrates develops his counter-intuitive understanding of justice and the craft of ruling, those best suited to rule are those who rule unwillingly, under compulsion and the threat of punishment, while those who are unfit to rule are those who willingly set out to rule due to a false and blameworthy conception of goods. Here it is the forensic sense of willing action that is in play, as signalled by Socrates' observation that those who go willingly to rule do not do so through the force of necessity or external force. Setting out willingly to rule cannot be a case of willing action in the fulfilment sense of willing action, since it is not motivated by a cognitive power such as a craft. The person who goes willingly to rule has made a mistake by placing honour too high in the scale of value.

The conceptual resources for this account of willing action by reference to cognitive powers appear in Book 5 of the *Republic*. As Socrates develops a distinction between belief and knowledge, he explains his understanding of powers:

(Text 17) Powers are a class of things that are that enable us – or anything else for that matter – to do whatever we are capable of doing. Sight, for example, and hearing are among the powers, if you understand the kind of thing I'm referring to. ... A power has neither color nor shape nor any feature of the sort that many other things have and that I use to distinguish those things from one another. In the case of powers, I look only to this: what it is over and what it accomplishes. And by reference to

23 Here I revise the Grube-Reeve translation of 347b6–c3, which renders *ethelein archein* as "to be willing to rule". 347c1–3 in Grube-Reeve reads as follows: "So, if they're to be willing to rule, some compulsion or punishment must be brought to bear on them – perhaps that is why it is thought shameful to seek to rule before one is compelled to". This translation has the disadvantage of implying that good people rule willingly, in that they are willing to rule out of compulsion or fear of punishment. At the same time those unfit to rule are those who seek to rule and thus also rule willingly. I take it to be preferable to present the good people discussed in Text 14 as wanting (*ethelein*) to rule in light of the necessity imposed on them, but not ruling willingly, out of an internal power that fulfills itself in the pursuit of happiness. Bad people want to rule because they accept the false belief that money and honor are the essential ingredients of well-being.

this I call each the power it is. What is ordered over the same thing and accomplishes the same thing I call the same power; what is ordered over something different and does something different I call a different power. (R. 477c1–d5)

The criterion of identity for a power is two-fold: powers are identical if they are set over the same thing and they do or accomplish the same thing. Two powers are distinct if they are set over different things and they do or accomplish different things. In order to expound this conception of powers more fully, it is necessary to set forth Plato's reasons for using this two-fold criterion rather than simply treating powers as distinct if they relate to different objects or if they produce different effects. Presumably he wishes to distinguish between powers which relate to different objects, but do so in a way that is best understood by grasping how the powers produce different effects in relation to their objects. Sight and hearing are powers which are sufficiently distinguished by noting the difference in their objects, that over which each is set: sight is set over colours and shapes while hearing is set over sounds. But other powers, such as the crafts of medicine and gymnastic discussed at *Gorgias* 464a–465d and *Republic* 404b–410d, are in one sense set over the same thing, the body, and produce the same thing, health. They differ in how they act on the body to produce health. Medicine produces health by curing sickness while gymnastic produces health by preserving the body in a healthy state through programs of exercise. Medicine and gymnastic are set over different types of bodies, sick and healthy ones, but we can grasp this difference best by considering how the two crafts act in different ways to produce health. Thus Plato builds into his account of powers not only a specification of the object of a power, that over which it is set, but also the things that the power does or accomplishes, in the sense of the processes that unfold from the power.

The second part of this criterion of identity for a power, that which the power does or accomplishes, can be explicated in the case of psychic powers using the notion of success conditions of a power. Powers such as the craft of grammar and the craft of arithmetic are psychic powers and principles of action. As noted previously, Socrates in the *Hippias Minor* treats such psychic powers as guarantors of a defeasible sort of infallibility. If a person knows how to write grammatically or how to calculate the sum of two numbers, then she will write Socrates' name correctly or calculate that $37 + 13 = 50$ immediately whenever she wants to, barring external interference. Other psychic powers include the powers of perception, such as sight and hearing; sciences and crafts such as medicine, arithmetic, and carpentry; and virtues such as courage, temperance, and justice. Psychic powers here are qualities whose success

is marked by producing beneficial and desired results. When they operate successfully, they provide us with true judgments about the world around us and about which things are truly valuable for obtaining the happiness we desire. Perceptual powers, in their successful application, provide us with true beliefs about the sensible objects in the world and their location. Humans are fallible in their judgments about sensibles, of course, but the fact of perceptual error is due to the failure of the power, not its success. Sciences and crafts allow the soul to make correct judgments about how to heal the sick, to add and multiply numbers, and to heal the sick. Possession of the virtues allows humans to make right judgments about which desirable things are to be pursued and in which order of priority.

With this understanding of powers in hand, it is time to return to the larger theme of willing and unwilling action and to the well-known Text 1 in the *Gorgias*. There Socrates encourages Callicles to accept the result of the earlier conversation with Polus, namely that “no one does what’s unjust because he wants to, but that all who do so do it unwillingly”. Immediately before this passage, Socrates asks whether obtaining a power is sufficient to avoid suffering and doing injustice. Callicles responds immediately to the effect that obtaining a power will protect us from suffering injustice; apparently he thinks that gaining political power is the best way to prevent being accused unjustly, brought to trial, convicted, and then executed, the fate he foretells for Socrates. But Socrates is more interested in how we may protect ourselves from the greater harm, namely committing injustice. “Is it when [a man] doesn’t wish to do it, is that sufficient – for he won’t do it – or should he procure a power and a craft for this, too, so that unless he learns it and practices it, he will commit injustice?” (*Grg.* 509d7–e2) The power that Socrates has in mind here, the one that protects us against committing injustice, is not the one that he immediately criticises at 510a, namely the power that comes from becoming a tyrant, but the true political craft mentioned at 521d. Like other crafts such as medicine or gymnastic, this is a power which acts to ensure the well-being of the thing or field of activity which it supervises or rules.

Important for our purposes is that at 509d–510a Socrates treats possession of such a power as the only security against committing injustice. Having the wish [*boulēsis*] not to commit injustice does not suffice to avoid committing injustice unwillingly. I take this to mean that the fulfilment sense of willing and unwilling action is in play in this passage. According to Socrates, the possession of some craft suffices to protect a person from committing injustice. But possession of a craft will not suffice to protect a person from acting against the dictates of a craft out of ignorance of circumstances or due to external necessity, as in the forensic sense of unwilling action. The possession of the

craft of medicine does not protect a doctor from ordinary ignorance of the circumstances of action; she can mistake a 50 millilitre dosage of a drug for a 5 millilitre dosage. Similarly, an external force can compel a doctor to use her knowledge for improper ends. Thus, in the forensic sense of unwilling action, it is false that a psychic power will suffice to protect its possessor from unwilling action. Even if we do not hold the doctor to be morally culpable or ignorant of her craft in such circumstances, her action does not meet the standards for successful practice of her craft and does not qualify as medical actions, the actions of a doctor. It is by possessing and acting on such a craft that a doctor is secured from the commission of actions that undermine rather than promote health.

Similarly, the craft that is justice or true rhetoric will involve bringing order and harmony into the soul by judging which of the soul's appetites is to be gratified and which is not (503c–504e). It is by having and acting successfully on the dictates of this craft that we are protected from committing unjust actions. In the passages immediately preceding 509d–e, Socrates' concern is not the question of how best to apportion moral or legal culpability, the issue for which the forensic sense of willing action is most relevant, but how we may avoid doing harm to our souls. Consider Socrates' words at *Gorgias* 509b:

(Text 18) And if [these things are so] – if injustice is the worst thing there is for the person committing it and if that person's failure to pay what's due is something even worse, if possible, than this one that's the greatest – what is the protection which would make a man who is unable to provide it for himself truly ridiculous? Isn't it the one that will turn away what harms us most? (*Grg.* 509b1–6)

This protection is secured not simply by acting willingly in the forensic sense, in awareness of the circumstances of action and without external compulsion, but by fulfilling the dictates of the craft of justice. Hence it is the fulfilment sense of willing and unwilling action that stands in the background of the Socratic claim that no one willingly commits injustice.

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Notes towards a New Interpretation of the Virtues in the *Republic*

Merrick Anderson

The purpose of this paper is to articulate the beginnings of a new interpretation of the virtues in Plato's *Republic*. My primary concern is with the ethical virtues, but, as we shall see, because the ethical virtues are one among several different types of virtues, my account will have much to say about all the virtues. Ultimately, I will argue that there are two central and structural features characteristic of every virtue: first, they function by helping some subject realise its particular work [*ergon*] well, and, second, they are powers [*dynameis*]. As *dynameis*, they will be over some particular object(s) and accomplish something on or with respect to those objects. To fully state the structure of any given virtue, then, one will have to identify what *ergon* it helps its subject to realise as well as what it is over and accomplishes. My interpretation will have interesting implications for understanding the individual virtues, a few of which I attempt to highlight below. I end by laying out some promising candidates for the differentia that makes the four cardinal ethical virtues a distinct grouping from the rest of the virtues. That is to say, I will gesture towards the special feature that makes these virtues *ethical* virtues.

One major assumption of my paper is that there is a unitary account of *dynamis* operating in the *Republic*. What I mean by this is that if (as will turn out to be the case) we discover that several ethical virtues are identified as *dynameis* in Socrates' analysis of them, we may assume that they are *dynameis* of the sort we later learn about from the famous discussion of powers in Book v. This assumption is not obviously correct. Some uses of the term "*dynamis*" in the *Republic* are clearly non-technical and are not meant to be laden with the metaphysical structure discussed in Book v.¹ But I believe the assumption is plausible all the same. For if in a dialogue about justice Socrates defines – or, in any case, identifies the nature of – the cardinal ethical virtues by referring to the *dynameis*, it is a safe bet that in these cases the term is being

1 This is certainly true of the adverbial expressions "*eis dynamin*" (366d3–4, 427e1, 458e3–4 and 590d5) and "*kata dynamin*" (429e7, 507a6 and 535a11). But it is probably true of other humdrum uses as well, e.g. 360a5–6.

used technically. Certainly, it would be a bit strange for Plato to indicate that a particular virtue is a *dynamis* and expect his careful readers to forget this fact when they read Socrates' rich theoretical discussion about what it is to be a power.²

Finally, I should stress that the following is not intended to be comprehensive or definitive. The present contribution is too short to provide the last word on the heady topic of the nature of the virtues.³ My aim here is modest. I provide a set of schematic notes that present a coarse-grained account of the structure of the virtues. This should be instructive in its own right. But it will also draw attention to the hitherto underappreciated role that the *dynamis* play in the *Republic*'s moral philosophy.⁴ For if I am correct, it will turn out that powers were foundational to Plato's thinking about the virtues in his most famous dialogue.

1 Some Textual Evidence

Some people may find the suggestion that the ethical virtues are *dynamis* surprising. To allay any worries, let us begin by considering some textual evidence.

One of the major projects of Book IV is to identify and characterise the ethical virtues as they exist both in the city and the soul. It is here that we find the most explicit and detailed statements about their nature as virtues.

The first virtue discussed in Book IV is wisdom and, in particular, the city's wisdom. Though Socrates never provides a succinct definition of wisdom, he comes close at 428c11–d3 when he asks: "Is there some *epistēmē* among some of the citizens in the city just now founded by us that does not judge about some one of the things in the city but about it as a whole, both in what way the city would best deal with itself and other cities?"⁵ It is by the possession of this

2 I was heartened by the fact that none of the other contributors to this volume objected to this assumption during the initial presentation of my paper. This increases my confidence that the assumption is correct.

3 I have elsewhere published a lengthy article arguing that courage is a power in the *Republic*. See Anderson (2024a). Several parts of this chapter include material similar to what is covered in that article.

4 Though scholars have often noted that several of the ethical virtues are identified as *dynamis* in the so-called "early dialogues", there has been a notable lack of attention paid to them in the *Republic*'s theory of virtues. To the best of my knowledge, only Reeve (1988) draws a clear and explicit link between the nature of the ethical virtues in the *Republic* and the powers. For more authors that ignore the *dynamis*, see Anderson (2024a, n. 2).

5 The Greek is from the OCT (Slings' 2003 edition for the *Republic*). Translations are my own.

particular *epistēmē* that the city is said to have good judgement and be truly wise (428d8–9). This suggests that the *epistēmē* under discussion is the wisdom of the city. And this seems to be confirmed at 429a1–3, when Socrates – clearly thinking about this very *epistēmē* – says that it is proper for the ruling class of the city to share in “that *epistēmē*, which alone of all the *epistēmai* ought to be called wisdom”. Wisdom is the knowledge possessed by the ruling class that judges how the city is most beneficially ordered and how it should behave.

It is possible to disagree with this interpretation of wisdom. But even if one does, the passage at 429a1–3 leaves little doubt that wisdom is a kind of *epistēmē*.⁶ This is sufficient for our purposes because in Book v *epistēmē* is explicitly identified as a *dynamis*.⁷ And if wisdom is a sort of *epistēmē* and *epistēmē* is itself a power, it follows that wisdom must be a power.

Socrates is even clearer about the nature of courage in the city. In fact, he seems to define courage in the city as a sort of *dynamis*. The relevant discussion begins with him identifying the military or auxiliary class as the locus of the virtue in the city. He then explains to Glaucon that the city is courageous if and when this class has within it the power that preserves the correct opinion about the fearful things (429b8–c2). This confuses Glaucon and prompts further explanation. Included in this further explanation is a detailed analogy between dyers, who select and treat white cloth so that it preserves the colour with which it is ultimately dyed, and those who found cities, who select and educate auxiliaries so that they will preserve the correct opinions that they are taught. These opinions are “dyed” fast so that not even the most potent of psychic soaps – pleasure, pain, fear, and desire – can wash them out. At the end of this analogy Socrates returns to the courage of the city and offers his account of it:

Such a *dynamis kai sōtērian* through everything of the correct and lawful belief about fearful and not fearful things I call and set down as courage. (430b3–5)

Though “*dynamis kai sōtērian*” is sometimes translated as “power and preservation”, Socrates is not offering a conjunctive definition of courage as both

6 This is reflected in past scholarship. Many scholars have concluded that wisdom (both in the city and in the individual) is an *epistēmē*. Thus, Cross and Woollsey (1964: 105) claim that the wisdom of the city is the *epistēmē* “which is concerned, not with the interests of any particular person or group, but with the welfare of the city as a whole and its relations with other cities”. Similarly, Santas (2010: 92) tells us wisdom in the individual is: “knowledge that only reason can have about what is beneficial for each part of the soul and the whole soul”.

7 See 477b6, 477b8, 477b12, 477d8–9, 478a7, 478a11, 478a14–b1, and 478d7.

an unspecified power and a preservation of appropriate beliefs.⁸ Two points make this clear. The analogy with dyers cannot reasonably be read to support an interpretation of courage as involving two distinct elements. Those who dye clothes select raw material and treat it so that it acquires the power to preserve the colours which will make it an attractive and marketable piece of clothing. They do not aim to produce wool that has a power and, in addition to and differently from that, preserves colours. Likewise, the members of the auxiliary class are selected and trained so that they develop the *dynamis* that will “preserve through everything the belief about the fearful things” (429b9–c1).

The correct way to read the *kai* in the above definition is epexegetic. It specifies what the power in question does. And if this is right, then Socrates defines courage in the city as a *dynamis*. This is clear evidence that the nature of courage is to be a *dynamis* of a particular sort.

We turn now to justice, the virtue about which we learn most in our dialogue. Unsurprisingly, there are even more indications that Plato conceived of justice as a *dynamis*. The first comes from his discussion of justice in the city. Socrates uses an infamous argument from elimination to find the city’s justice. He claims that the city he and the other interlocutors have constructed is good and, therefore, possesses all four cardinal ethical virtues – and only those four. This gives rise to the strategy of first finding the other three ethical virtues and then finding justice by identifying, if at all possible, whatever ethical virtue remains (427e6–428a8). And this is, in fact, how the discussion of the city’s virtues proceeds. Thus after discussing wisdom, courage, and temperance, Socrates tries to identify the one remaining feature of the city that contributes to its overall virtue as much as the other three:

- [S]: It seems, then, that the power of each to do their own work (*hē tou hekaston en autē ta autou prattein dynamis*) rivals wisdom, temperance, and courage in its contribution to the virtue of the city.
- [G]: Very much so, he said.
- [S]: So, you put down justice as the rival to them for the virtue of the city?
- [G]: Absolutely. (433d6–12)

8 See, for example, Bloom (1991: 108). Grube/Reeve’s translation of “power to preserve” in Cooper (1997: 1063) does a better job of capturing the force of the Greek.

It is because the power of each doing their own work contributes as much to the virtue of the city as wisdom, courage, and temperance that we can be sure that this is justice.⁹

Plato is even more explicit about the nature of justice at the end of Book IV. For after wrapping up his treatment of the virtues and convincing his interlocutors that his account of justice passes certain “vulgar” tests – and is, therefore, really about justice – Socrates asks Glaucon:

[S]: So, are you still searching for justice to be something other than that power (*tautēn tēn dynamin*) which produces this sort of individual and city?

[G]: By god, I am not! (443b4–7)

This passage signals the beginning of the end of the *Republic's* theoretical investigation into the nature of justice, which began at 368c6–7 with Socrates being asked by Glaucon and others to explain the *ti esti* of justice and injustice. At that point in Book II Socrates responds by noting that justice is the same whether it is in a city or a soul and then launches into his discussion of the city. 443b4–7 marks the culmination of the project of searching for justice first within the city and then within the individual, all of which is officially in the service of answering this *ti esti* question. Glaucon's unhesitating response leaves little doubt that he believes justice is a power.

This is compelling textual evidence suggesting that at least three of the four cardinal ethical virtues are *dynamis*.¹⁰

2 Virtue

We have seen that three of the ethical virtues are clearly described as *dynamies*. What we need now is a general account of virtue to help contextualise and make sense of the evidence presented above. I suggest that we find just such an account at the end of Book I.

The second half of Book I contains a series of arguments designed to respond to Thrasymachus' subversive claims about justice, its place in the political

⁹ Cf. 433b7–c2.

¹⁰ A case can be made for thinking of temperance as a *dynamis* as well, though the textual evidence is less straightforward. I lack the space to offer a nuanced treatment of that evidence here.

sphere, and, finally, the superior value of injustice vis-à-vis human prospering.¹¹ In Socrates' final stand against the sophist, he purports to show that – contrary to what his opponent has argued – justice is actually the *sine qua non* of the prosperous human life. The argument unfolds in two stages. First, Socrates introduces and delineates two foundational concepts that underlie the demonstration to come: *ergon* and *aretē* (352d–353d). And then, after securing Thrasyarchus' agreement about the basic meaning and operation of *ergon* and *aretai*, he applies them to the human soul and its *ergon* of living. This application apparently shows that the life of the just individual is prosperous, whereas the life of the unjust individual is miserable (353d–354c).

It is the first stage of this argument that concerns us here. Socrates begins by asking whether we shouldn't "put this down as the *ergon* of a horse or anything else: that which someone could do either with it alone or best with it" (352e3–4). Thrasyarchus does not quite understand, so he is offered a series of examples meant to illustrate Socrates' point. First, he is told that there is nothing else in the world by which we see than the eyes; and similarly, there is nothing else by which we hear than the ears. Since these are the only things that can do the relevant sort of perceiving, Socrates explains, it is the *ergon* of the eyes to see and the *ergon* of the ears to hear. Socrates next turns to manufactured tools to elucidate what he meant by the second part of his account of *ergon* – namely, what it means to do something "best". We are told that many things could be used to prune grapevines, such as swords, cooking knives, or teeth. But the pruning knife designed for this purpose prunes the vines best of all. For this reason, Socrates explains, only it has the function of pruning vines.

These examples offer paradigmatic cases of things that have an *ergon* in virtue of the fact that they alone or best of all can do some activity. And they are apparently sufficient to motivate Socrates' point. For Thrasyarchus now seems to understand:

[S]: Now, then, I think you might understand better what I was just now asking when I inquired if this is not the *ergon* of each: that which it alone or finest of all accomplishes.

[T]: Ah, I understand. And this seems to me to be the *ergon* of each thing. (353a9–b1)

11 "Prospering" and "prosperous" are my translations for, respectively, "*eudaimonia*" and "*eudaimōn*". These are non-standard translations, which I discuss and defend in Anderson (2024b: 5–8).

After getting Thrasymachus to agree to this, Socrates takes the concept of *ergon* as settled and moves on to the related concept of *aretē*. The virtues are those things without which subjects cannot accomplish their *ergon* finely or those things by which subjects accomplish their *ergon* well (353b16–c2 and 353c5–7). Socrates' understanding of *aretē* is, then, dependent upon and conceptually derivative of his understanding of *ergon*. This is made very clear by the way he first introduces the concept:

And then does there seem to you to be a virtue for each thing which has also been assigned an *ergon* (*hōper kai ergonti prostetaktai*)? (353b2–3)

The perfect here is quite important. Subjects get *aretai* only after they have *already* been assigned an *ergon*.¹² The same point is emphasised in the discussion that follows. For in the next stretch of text the two interlocutors clearly proceed to infer that a subject admits of an *aretē* from the fact it has an *ergon* (353b4–13). Functions come first. Virtues follow. In short order Socrates and Thrasymachus conclude that *aretai* are those things that enable subjects with a particular *ergon* to accomplish that *ergon* well. Let us call this the “Functional Account of Virtue”.

In the second stage of the argument Socrates suggests without any opposition that living is the *ergon* of the soul, and then he reminds Thrasymachus of their past agreement that justice is the *aretē* of the soul. (It does not seem to trouble Socrates that the “agreement” he refers to was at best less than wholehearted; see 350c12–d7). From this Socrates infers that justice is the very thing that enables the soul to realise its *ergon* of living well. And since living well is here presented as being equivalent to prospering, justice turns out to be the one thing we cannot do without if we are going to be prosperous.

This stage of the argument moves quickly and quite possibly relies on a vitiating equivocation of the term *eu prattein*, which sometimes takes a grammatical object and has the meaning “do something well” but also can be used idiomatically to indicate that someone is doing well, i.e. that they are prosperous (353e4–5). Plato also gives clear dramatic hints that Socrates' argument is problematic.¹³

12 Of course, the “already” here does not need to be understood temporally. I am not suggesting Socrates thought nature literally gave subjects *erga* and then offered them *aretai* to accomplish their *erga* well. The perfect tense makes a conceptual point. We can only understand *aretai* in light of the *erga* they help to accomplish well.

13 It is not only Thrasymachus who is left unpersuaded by the claims made about justice and the soul. Glaucon and Adeimantus are too, and the latter of the two later implies that Socrates' argument in Book I was overly formal and lacking substance (367b3–5 and 367e1–3).

But the problems seem to me to be restricted to the second stage of Socrates' argument – that is to say, they are restricted to Socrates' application of the Functional Account of Virtue to the particular case of the human soul. I can see no reason to doubt or second-guess the Functional Account of Virtue itself. To the contrary. The detailed examples Socrates uses and the care he takes to make sure Thrasymachus understands the steps of the argument suggest that Plato accepted and endorsed the account of *ergon* and *aretē* produced at 352d–353d.

In fact, we have good reason to believe that the Functional Account of Virtue is operant in the remainder of the dialogue. Consider the following statement Socrates makes in Book x when he turns to the topic of poetry for the second time:

So then the virtue, beauty, and correctness of each tool, animal, or action is related to nothing other than the use to which each thing was made (*pepoiēmenon*) or naturally purposed (*pephykos*). (601d4–6)

The distinction between being made and being naturally purposed clearly looks back to the discussion of *erga* in Book I, which includes a distinction between natural objects and manufactured products. Recall that eyes and ears are used as examples of subjects that alone of all the things in the world can do something; and the pruning knife is used as an example of a subject that accomplishes something best of all. As we can see from this passage in Book x, the foundational ideas presented in Book I are preserved – and, it seems to me, presupposed – throughout the remainder of the dialogue.

This conclusion is significant for two reasons. First of all, it gives us crucial information about how the virtues in our dialogue should be understood. In particular, it can help us to flesh out our earlier discussion of the material from Book IV. If the Functional Account of Virtue is presupposed throughout our dialogue, it must be the case that each of the cardinal ethical virtues enables its subject to accomplish its *ergon* well.

And second, it gives us further reason to believe that the virtues are *dynamis*. For when we are explicitly introduced to the powers for the first time in Book v, Socrates characterises them as those entities that enable us to do whatever we do:

Powers are a class of the things that are which enable us to do whatever we are able to do – and anything else to do what it is able to. For example, I say sight and hearing (*opsin kai akoēn*) are among the powers. (477c1–4)

This makes the *dynameis* very promising candidates for those entities that enable subjects with functions to realise their functions well – that is to say, for being virtues. Indeed, since *dynameis* seem to enable everything to do what it is able to do, it is hard to see how virtues could fail to be *dynameis*.¹⁴

We can reach the same conclusion by attending to Plato's careful use of examples throughout the *Republic*. Recall that Socrates relies most of all on the examples of eyes and ears in Book I. The conversation he has with Thrasy-machus leaves little doubt that the virtue of the eyes is *opsis* and – given very reasonable assumptions and a straightforward reading of the text – we can infer that the virtue of the ears is *akoē* (353c3–4 and 352e8–10). Given these examples, it can hardly be a coincidence that *opsis* and *akoē* are named as the two paradigmatic *dynameis* at 477c1–4. This is yet further proof that the virtues discussed in Book I are powers.¹⁵

3 One Objection

Before moving on I would like to consider and respond to one objection.

Start by noting that early in Book II Glaucon tells Socrates that he desires to hear of justice and injustice, “what each is and what power each has all on its own in the soul”.¹⁶ Talk of virtues having powers occurs once before this passage and once after (351b8 and 588b7–8). Though some scholars have (correctly, in my opinion) treated 358b4–6 as evidence that justice *is* a *dynamis*,¹⁷ one might be tempted to argue that texts such as these show instead that the virtues possess powers – and are, therefore, something above and beyond powers. Consider by way of analogy that, as a human agent, I possess many powers.

14 Those with keen eyes will have noticed that in Book v *dynameis* are said to enable anything to do what it is able to do, whereas in Book I the *aretai* are said to be what enable subjects to realise their function well. This is an important point, and it deserves more space than I can give it here. But briefly: this does not pose a serious difficulty to my interpretation because *dynameis* come in degrees. The same power may function maximally effectively in one subject but only moderately effectively in another. Both are *dynameis*, but only the former is a virtue because only it allows its subject to accomplish its *ergon* well. I address this point further with the example of *opsis* below.

15 Sight is discussed in connection with the virtues by Payne in chapter 12 of this volume as well.

16 “*ti t’ estin hekateron kai tina echei dynamin auto kath’ auto enon en tē psychē*” (358b4–6).

17 For example, Irwin (1977: 325–6, n. 8) says about this passage: “To say what justice is is to say what power of the soul it is; that is why the question about its *dynamis* is coupled with the demand to know what it is, 358b4–6”.

Yet I am more than the sum of those powers. They are in me and at my disposal. There is a “me” behind them that possesses and uses them. Does 358b4–6 suggest that the virtues are – like me – something more than their powers?

I think not. For at least two reasons it would be a mistake to take these passages to indicate this. First, one must be careful not to give these three passages too much weight. When Glaucon expresses his desire to hear what justice is, he is implicitly admitting his ignorance about the virtue. So, it would be unwise to take his statements as authoritative. It is not until Book IV that he (and we) learn the true nature of justice, and it should be clear by now that in that book we learn that justice is a power. More importantly, there is a way of making sense of this sort of talk even though the virtues are powers. In fact, it is not uncommon for Plato to lapse into a way of speaking that implies *dynamis* have *dynamis*.¹⁸ This occurs because *dynamis* are essentially active and there is a natural tendency to posit a doer behind any doing. In lieu of any other relevant subject the power is itself reduplicated, and we get talk implying that *dynamis* have *dynamis*. (Compare the tendency of some English speakers to talk as if gravity has a power or force that pulls us to the earth.) But this talk is compatible with it being the case that the power in question is just a power. There is, therefore, no reason such passages should make us doubt that justice – or wisdom or courage, for that matter – is conceived of as a *dynamis* in the *Republic*.

4 Power

At this point we have filled in the first half of the picture I wish to sketch in this paper. But as emphasised above when considering the text of Book IV, the virtues are not only things that enable subjects to realise their function well. They are *dynamis* that enable their subjects to realise their functions well. To complete our picture, then, we must turn to the famous discussion at the end of Book V in which Socrates tells us about the *dynamis*.

This much-discussed passage will be familiar to everyone reading this volume:

I see neither colour nor shape belonging to powers, nor any other of those features had by many other things, looking to which I distinguish

¹⁸ Long ago, James Adam (1969, 1:339) noted that Socrates sometimes talks about *doxa* as if it were a *dynamis* and other times as if it has a *dynamis*. Adam correctly recognised that despite the variation in expression, Socrates understands that – strictly speaking – *doxa* is a power.

for myself some things from others. In the case of powers, I look only to this: what it is over and what it accomplishes. And by reference to this I call each the power it is. What is ordered over the same thing and accomplishes the same thing I call the same power; what is ordered over something different and does something different I call a different power. (477c6–d5)

In this canonical statement of the nature of the powers we are told that each power is distinguished by being (1) over something(s) and (2) accomplishing something. Therefore, to understand any given power one must know what it is over and what it accomplishes.

How exactly we are to understand these two features is a matter of scholarly controversy, the details of which are best avoided here. I will simply state that, following the recent work of David Lefebvre, I take Socrates to be identifying two distinct features of each and every power.¹⁹ Of course, these features are linked. (Indeed, they are so closely linked that Socrates can speak as if they are one: N.B. he looks only to “this”, in the singular). That which the power is over are the objects on which it typically operates; what it accomplishes it typically does to or with respect to those objects. It does not follow from this, however, that the two are inter-defined or so tightly conceptually related that identifying one feature immediately tells us about the other.

Indeed, it is important to keep some daylight between the two because in the case of any given *dynamis* it might be obvious what it accomplishes but not at all obvious what it is over.²⁰ It is quite clear, for example, that *opsis* must accomplish seeing. But what on earth is it over? Shapes? Colours? Some mixture of the two? One can only identify what it is over after thinking about the activity and investigating how it functions out in the world. In other cases, the objects of a power will be obvious but what it accomplishes will not be. And this is, I suspect, why Socrates distinguishes between that over which the power is set and that which it accomplishes, even if he sometimes speaks of these two features as if they are one.

5 The Structure of the Virtues

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions about the structure of the virtues. Because the Functional Account of Virtue tells us that virtues enable subjects with particular *erga* to realise their *erga* well, it will be true of every

¹⁹ Lefebvre (2018: esp. 229–72).

²⁰ Lefebvre (2018: 259) stresses this point.

virtue that they (1) belong to a subject and (2) contribute to realising that subject's function well. And because the *aretai* are also *dynameis*, it will further be the case that they are (3) over something(s) and (4) accomplish something(s). If the argument of the paper is on track, all this will be central to the anatomical make-up of the virtues in the *Republic*. This is an important metaphysical finding about the nature of the virtues.

We can go further and put some flesh onto this bare-bones analysis by discussing a couple of examples. Doing so will help make the central claims of the paper more perspicuous. It will also highlight several interesting upshots of thinking hard about the structure of the virtues in the way I have attempted to do here. Let us begin with the relatively simple case of a non-ethical virtue about which we learn much in our dialogue, *opsis*. After that we shall turn to the more difficult case of courage.

Book I indicates that *opsis* is the virtue of the eyes because it is that by which they realize their *ergon* well (353b1–c8).²¹ We also learn that the *ergon* of the eyes is to see because there is nothing else in the world that can see (352e6–11). Turning now to the material from Book V, we can safely say that what *opsis* accomplishes is seeing. However, as was noted in the previous section, it is not initially clear what *opsis* is over. Fortunately, other evidence suggests an answer. One important passage from Book VII indicates that *opsis* acts upon, and therefore is over, colours (507d10–11).²² This same point is made somewhat more explicitly in a passage of the *Charmides* addressing the possibility of self-reflexive *dynameis* (168d6–7).²³

Given these findings, the anatomy of *opsis* must look like this:

Subject: the eyes

Function of the subject: to see

Over: colours

Accomplishes: seeing

21 Admittedly, it is not Socrates but Thrasy Machus who suggests that *opsis* is the virtue of the eyes at 353c3–4. But Socrates does not deny that *opsis* is the relevant virtue. He simply flags that identifying the particular virtue of the eyes is less important than figuring out what that virtue will do at this point in the argument.

22 “*enousēs pou en ommasin opseōs kai epicheirountos tou echontos chrēsthai autē, parousēs de chroas en autois*” Cf. *Men.* 76d1–5.

23 “*kai hē opsīs ge pou, ō ariste, eiper opsetai autē heautēn chrōma ti autēn anankē echein. Achrōn gar opsīs ouden [an] mē pote idē*”. For a more thorough discussion of powers in the *Charmides*, see Gonzalez in this volume.

A few points should be noted. First, attentive readers will realise that the same Greek word, “*opsis*”, is given as an example of a *dynamis* in Book v and that it is also indicated to be an *aretē* in Book i. This presents a *prima facie* difficulty for my view. For it looks as if there are two different *opseis*: one that is merely a *dynamis* enabling the eyes to see and one that is a virtue enabling them to see well. This raises a host of questions. Are these two types of *opseis* distinct entities or are they somehow connected? If they are connected, in what sense is the virtue special? How are we to know if an instance of *opsis* is a *dynamis* or a full virtue?²⁴

Thinking about these questions is instructive because it helps to reveal the different ways a *dynamis* can fail to be a virtue. For example, a *dynamis* can fail to be an *aretē* because it enables a subject to do something other than its function. Since powers enable everything to do whatever they are able to do, there must be, for example, some *dynamis* that enables a sword to prune grapevines. But because it is not the *ergon* of the sword to prune grapevines, this *dynamis* will not be a virtue. This is true even if the *dynamis* enables the sword to prune grapevines as well as any sword could. Powers can also fail to be virtues if they enable a subject to realise its *ergon* but do not enable it to do this well. The first sort of failure is a failure of relevance. The *dynamis* that enables the sword to cut grapevines might be quite impressive, but because cutting grapevines is irrelevant to the *ergon* of the sword it will not be a virtue. The second failure is one of performance rather than relevance. The *dynamis* enabling pruning knives to prune is relevant precisely because pruning is the *ergon* of the knife in question. But it may fail to be a virtue if it does not enable the knife to prune well.

This suggests a solution to our difficulty. For it turns out that many *dynamis* admit of degrees of performance. Among the powers discussed in the *Charmides* passage referred to above are hearing, desire, love, and fear. We know from experience that such *dynamis* come in degrees. Many people seem to be much more susceptible to fears and love – both in terms of the frequency with which they feel the emotions and their intensity – than others. It may well be that my ability to fear and to love is blunted and is not operating as well as it is for you. The prominence of eyeglasses and hearing aids makes it even more obvious that something similar is true of the perceptual powers as well. Many people can see but cannot do so with much precision or over great distances unaided. They cannot see well. Yet those with 20/20 vision can see with a great amount of precision and over relatively great distances all on their own.

24 I thank Andrew Payne for helping me to appreciate the full force of this difficulty. He discusses sight in his contribution to this volume as well.

My suggestion, then, is that one and the same power, *opsis*, comes in degrees and that it becomes a virtue only when it passes some threshold of enabling the eyes to see well. Whereas some people's *opsis* is operant but falls far below the threshold of ideal sight, other people have access to maximally effective *opsis*. For that reason, they have the genuine virtue that enables their eyes to realise their function well, whereas the former group merely possesses the *dynamis* that enables them to do what they do in a mediocre fashion.

It is worth noting that Plato's point is not the overly simplistic one that whoever has virtue – *opsis* sees colours perfectly whenever colours are present. At 507d10–e3 we learn, for example, that no one can see at all unless light is present to facilitate the activity. Nor does Plato think the abstract structural analysis presented above exhausts what there is to say about the activity of seeing. He is quite aware that there are important mechanistic and physical aspects of seeing as well (cf. *Ti.* 45c–d).²⁵ The analysis in the *Republic* helps to explain how *opsis* can be a virtue. The point is that those with the virtue will see colours and the objects they form at some relatively high level. And, moreover, insofar as they do this, they are realising the special activity of their eyes to a greater degree than many other people ever do.

Let us turn now to courage. This case will be more complex and controversial. But for that reason, I hope it might also be more interesting.²⁶

The text of the *Republic* leaves no doubt that the subject of courage in the individual must be the *thymoeides*. Just as there is a *dynamis* in the auxiliary part of the city and it is by that part that the city is courageous (429b8–c1), so too it is in virtue of their spirit that we call an individual courageous (441b10–c2). The spirit is the “location” of the courageous individual's courage. It is admittedly less clear what the function of the spirit is. But the evidence suggests that at least *qua* member of the tripartite soul its function is to serve as reason's ally and to fight on reason's behalf against the destabilising force of appetite.²⁷

We have seen compelling evidence that courage is a power. Things get a little counterintuitive when we try to specify what it is over and what it accomplishes. It is quite natural to think that courage must accomplish external

25 The materialistic account of seeing offered in the *Timaeus* is briefly discussed by Gonzalez in his contribution to this volume as well.

26 The following is a truncated analysis of what is presented at greater length in Anderson (2024a).

27 Consider, in particular, 442a4–b8 and 440a9–c4. In these two passages Plato explains how the spirit works on behalf of reason to control or fight the worst impulses of appetite. In doing so it ensures that the agent will act on reason's deliberations. Cf. Singpurwalla (2013).

courageous activity.²⁸ However, as will become clear momentarily, this cannot be right. Instead of thinking about what the power accomplishes, we should start by thinking about what it is over. For the textual evidence concerning this is more plentiful and explicit than the evidence about what it accomplishes.

Indeed, in the case of both the city and the individual courage is presented as operating on what we might call practical beliefs or deliberations about what ought to be done. Recall again Socrates' definition of courage in the city:

Such a *dynamis kai sōtēria* through everything of the correct and lawful belief about fearful and not fearful things I call and set down as courage. (430b3–5)

It is a particular sort of belief that courage operates on and preserves. This belief is practical because it informs our behaviour. Now consider the most important passage about courage in the individual. We say an individual is courageous:

whenever their spirit preserves through both pains and pleasures the thing prescribed by rational accounts as fearful or not. (442b10–c2)

The sentences that follow this one indicate that these prescriptions derive from a rational soul-part that has knowledge of what is best for the body and soul (442c4–7). This knowledge informs the rational part's prescriptions to the spirit. So here, too, it seems that courage operates upon and preserves prescriptions or decisions about what ought to be done.

These two passages are notable because they do not give the impression that courage acts on the external world or directly causes any sort of external behaviour. Quite to the contrary. Like justice in the individual, these texts indicate that courage is conceived of by Plato as operating on and affecting the internal workings of the soul.²⁹

The textual evidence indicates that courage is over our practical beliefs or prescriptions about what is or is not to be feared. This now leaves us with the question of what courage accomplishes. Mercifully, we can answer this

28 Wolfsdorf (2005: 338) makes this suggestion in his discussion of the *Laches*: "Let us now turn to the work of courage ... The obvious candidate is courageous corporeal action; that is to say, the psychological state of courage enables a person to act courageously".

29 It is quite clear that justice is conceived of as primarily operating within the soul rather than without. Consider 443c9–d2: justice is not *peri tēn exō praxin* but about action *peri tēn entos*.

question by appealing to the work of others. Josh Wilburn has persuasively argued that we should understand the well-functioning spirit as “ensuring that reason maintains [its] judgements in the face of appetitive impulses”.³⁰ In response to the appetitive impulses that threaten to destabilise reason’s judgements, the power of courage preserves those judgements. This is what Plato is saying when he tells us that the spirit of the courageous individual “preserves through both pains and pleasures the thing prescribed by rational accounts”.

If this is correct, then the anatomy of courage will look like this:

Subject: the *thymoeides*

Function: to be reason’s ally in the fight against appetite³¹

Over: reason’s prescriptions about what is and is not fearful

Accomplishes: preserving these prescriptions

Thinking about courage in light of our structural analysis of the virtues is interesting because it forces us to confront a number of facts that are often overlooked in scholarship. First, courage primarily acts upon beliefs or practical prescriptions. That being the case, it cannot be that courage directly accomplishes external courageous activity. Instead, it works with reason to preserve the beliefs that motivate our behaviour. Thus it only indirectly brings about any sort of external behaviour. Furthermore, because courage preserves reason’s prescriptions, which are themselves about what we ought to do, courage has a much wider scope than is normally assumed. It will, for example, help us resist the urge to act on base sexual desires if we have decided that doing so is bad.³²

6 What Makes the Cardinal Ethical Virtues Special?

I would like to end with the observation that Plato clearly regards the cardinal ethical virtues as somehow special. Consider the following passage from Book iv:

The first three [virtues] in the city have been spied out by us...Whatever would the remaining form be, because of which the city still shares in virtue? Surely, it’s clear that it is justice. (432b3–6)

³⁰ Wilburn (2015: 8).

³¹ Calling the *thymoeides* reason’s ally is of course somewhat metaphorical. But it gets at the basic point that in the tripartite soul the spirit is meant to work with reason to prevent appetite from upsetting reason’s deliberations.

³² As the spirit at least attempts to do in the case of Leontius at 439e–440a.

This passage implies that wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice together make up the *whole of the city's aretē*. Other passages in the *Republic* likewise imply that these four ethical virtues make up the whole of the individual's virtue (445c1–7). Similar claims are made about the ethical virtues elsewhere in the corpus.³³

But how and why are these four virtues special? They are certainly not the only virtues. Plato's point cannot be that the power enabling the excellent sight of the eyes or the perfect hearing of the ears are not genuine virtues. It follows directly from the Functional Account of Virtue that they are, and, as we have seen, Plato returns to talking about such virtues throughout our dialogue. Nevertheless, texts like the one quoted above would seem to indicate that the ethical virtues work together in a unique way and, moreover, that they are especially salient for us to think about when we are considering the well-functioning of the city and the soul.

Why should this be? One possibility is that these virtues are relevant when it comes to ethical appraisals of others. Contemporary moral philosophers are accustomed to thinking of the virtues as states of characters that dispose individuals to engage in virtuous activity. According to this picture, virtuous acts are explanatorily prior to virtues because the virtues are just those states that dispose individuals to practice virtuous acts, which are what we often look to in assigning praise and blame.³⁴ Following this, we might think that what makes the cardinal ethical virtues especially worthy of discussion is that they are the *dynamais* that dispose us towards the ethical actions that we all care about and want to see more of in the world.

Yet though there is evidence in the Platonic corpus that lacking the moral virtues or possessing the vices is associated with activities that make one an appropriate subject for anger, resentment, and many of the other reactive emotions normally associated with blame,³⁵ this cannot be the whole story.

33 Consider just a few examples: *La.* 190c–d, *Men.* 79a–c, *Prt.* 329c–d, *Phd.* 69a–c, *Lg.* 630e–631d. All these texts state or clearly imply that there are a small number of ethical virtues that make up the whole of virtue.

34 See, for example, Thomson (1997: 281): “I mean for the list [sc. the list of virtues] to include all those act properties F such that there is a character trait consisting in proneness to performing F-ish acts, and it is a virtue. Thus, being just is on the list since there is a character trait consisting in proneness to performing just acts – I am taking the noun ‘justice’ to refer to it – and it is a virtue”.

35 This is implicit in Protagoras’ celebrated discussion of punishment at *Prt.* 323d–324d. The Greeks get angry at people (and are right to get angry at people) who commit acts of injustice or behave intemperately because they have failed to acquire the virtues they should have acquired through education, training, and practice.

First, Plato thinks about the ethical virtues differently than contemporary ethicists typically do. He does not primarily conceive of them as states that dispose us to act in certain ways. When Plato talks about courage he does not focus on the sorts of activities it gives rise to in the external world. He focuses, instead, on what it does to our beliefs or deliberations. There is no reason to believe he gives explanatory priority to external virtuous behaviour. In fact, to the extent that he discusses the relationship between virtuous behaviour and the virtues themselves, things seem to run in the opposite direction. The virtues are defined or characterised first and only then are we told that we can understand virtuous deeds as those that produce the virtues in us (444c2–e2). Of course, I do not mean to deny that Plato thinks people who possess justice will act justly. I am only pointing out an important difference between Plato's thinking about the virtues and what we find in contemporary work on the virtues.

Second, Plato seems to recognise more kinds of ethically virtuous activities than ethical virtues. So far as I can tell, there is no good reason to think that Plato would deny that one can act generously or magnificently, ungenerously or unmagnificently (402b9–c8). But unlike Aristotle, Plato does not think one must posit *eleutheriotē* and *megaloprepeia* as independent ethical virtues on par with wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice to explain generous or magnificent actions.³⁶ They apparently correspond to no power in our psychology. One indication of this is that they are not particularly informative about one's character or behaviour. The Platonic agent who is both wise and temperate is *already* likely to share extra money if they come into any. Their temperance entails that they are not particularly attached to wealth or the pleasures it can buy, and their wisdom recognises that charity is good. We may rightly call them generous. But that does not make *eleutheriotē* as salient in understanding their behaviour as their wisdom or temperance. Similarly, *aneleutheria* is surely a bad thing. But the text of the *Republic* suggests that this is because it is a painful marker of some deeper psychological pathology (577d1–5) or because it upsets the proper relationship between the spirit and the appetite (590b6–9).

We need a different answer to the question of what makes the cardinal ethical virtues special. Luckily, I think the points raised in this paper gesture towards some candidate answers.

Consider first the subjects of these virtues. One thing that seems unique about the virtues discussed in Book IV is that they all have parts or aspects of the tripartite soul as their subjects. We have seen already that the subject of courage is the *thymoeides*. It is equally obvious that the subject of wisdom

36 Aristotle discusses *eleutheriotēs* in N.E. IV.1 and *megaloprepeia* in IV.2.

must be the rational soul-part (442c5–8). As is well known, temperance extends through all the parts of the soul (442c10–d1). But Socrates' own emphasis on our pressing need to keep particular pleasures in check suggests that temperance especially implicates the appetitive part of our soul (430e3–9). Whereas justice really is concerned with all three soul-parts *qua* members of a genuine tripartite whole (443c9–444a1).

So it may be that what makes the cardinal virtues special and ethical is that they alone have the various parts or aspects of the tripartite human soul as subjects.³⁷

Another possibility is suggested by our discussion of *eleutheria* and *megaloprepeia*. Plato believed that the four cardinal virtues are overwhelmingly responsible for how well our lives go. Certainly, the argument of the *Republic* suggests that the four cardinal virtues working together are as solid a foundation for securing human prospering as one could hope for. Socrates' project in the dialogue is to show that those who have justice will be more prosperous than those who are unjust *no matter what else is true of the just and unjust agents*. Plato clearly thought these four virtues were especially important for living a good life. And this may explain why Plato talks about these four making up the "the whole" of virtue. After all, if our final function as humans is to live a human life and these four virtues are what help us to realise this function well, what more could there be to human virtue (442c5–8)?³⁸

7 Conclusion

Within the *Republic* one finds underdeveloped but nevertheless clear hints about how to understand the structure of the virtues. In this paper I have tried to collect these different hints and bring them together in a set of notes that sheds light on the metaphysical nature of the virtues. I have argued that there is a basic structure to each of the virtues. Because the virtues enable subjects with particular *erga* to realise their *erga* well, they will (1) belong to a subject and (2) contribute to realising that subject's function well. And because the *aretai* are *dynamais*, they must be (3) over something(s) and (4) accomplish

37 Cf. 518d9–519a5, where Socrates seems to refer to wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice as the virtues of the soul.

38 This suggests one reason why the second part of Socrates' last argument in Book I is problematic. There he identifies justice as the only virtue of the soul, thereby implying that it is the only virtue needed for the soul to realise its function of living well. But in Book IV we learn that there are three other virtues of the soul.

something. Finally, I have drawn on this structure to gesture towards an answer to the question of what makes the cardinal ethical virtues special and distinct from the rest of the virtues. Hopefully, the considerations adduced here indicate that more attention should be paid to the *dynameis* in Plato's moral philosophy.

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What do we mean when we say that something has power? Plato's dialogues are probably the first philosophical *corpus* to address this question. Powers are causes; they account for how events happen. They are properties that agents have, as well as dispositions in those who suffer the effects of an action. This explanation is the basis of Plato's metaphysics and moral philosophy. He proposed that things are the power they have to act or be acted upon; this is their nature. This book brings together a group of specialists to guide the reader through this fascinating theory.

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