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**Seeking the Image-Maker:
An Evaluation of Plato's Account of Negation
and Falsity in the *Sophist***

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Abstract

This paper will explore Plato's metaphysical account of negation and falsity as outlined in *Sophist*, and evaluate some scholarly responses to it. It attempts to determine how the Forms interact when we say that something *is not*, or say something that is false. In order to achieve this we begin by examining the notion of a Kind (*genos*) that Plato seems to introduce in *Sophist*. This term is widely assumed to be synonymous with Form (*eidōs*); we shall argue that the evidence does not support this, on the grounds that Plato seems to be using Kinds in a new way in *Sophist*, even though he has used the word *genos* before. Second, we consider the question of how a Form or a Kind may be said to have parts, and finally we evaluate some scholarly interpretations of negation and falsity, both on their own merits and in light of what we believe Plato's purpose in seeking an account of negation and falsity has been. We propose some changes to an existing interpretation in order to make it fit more closely the results of our analysis of Kinds and the parts of Forms and so to more closely suit Plato's requirements.

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Introduction

This project is concerned with the metaphysics revealed by Plato's investigation of negation and falsity in *Sophist*. More specifically, it is concerned with trying to answer the question: how can Plato's theory of Forms explain and help to analyse what we mean when we say something that *is not*, or say something that is false? In *Sophist*, it seems this subject is not just a matter about how we speak; that is, not just about language but about metaphysics. Negation and falsity, for Plato, are linked: a negative statement presents *that which is not*, or non-being; a false statement says *that which is not* but presents it as *that which is*: a non-being masquerading as a being. Plato needs an account of both; in order to form an account of falsity he needs an account of negation, for he needs a way to explain how *that which is not* can exist before he can begin to explain false speech and false belief, which is what he is seeking an account of.

The Setting of *Sophist*

Sophist is generally believed to belong to Plato's "late" period, along with *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, *Critias*, and *Laws*, composed when he was in his sixties and seventies, somewhere between 367-350 BC. *Laws* and the earlier work *Theaetetus* can be tied to external events: *Laws* was apparently left unpublished at the time of Plato's death, and so is generally considered to be his last work: according to Diogenes Laertius, *Laws* was still written on wax tablets at the time of Plato's death (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 3.37). *Theaetetus* seems to be a memorial to its namesake, an associate of Plato's at the Academy who died in 367 BC. There is internal evidence of association between *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*; the three dialogues form a rough sequence of ideas. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, stylometric analysis concluded that the so-called late works were indeed among Plato's last. It is not currently known in what order they were composed, except for *Laws*.¹ It is possible, then, to see 'the cycle of dialogues to which the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* belong as the beginning of authentic Platonism',² making it more likely that Plato was writing in his philosophical maturity and so later in his life.

¹ John M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997, pp. xiii-xiv.

² Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 123.

The dramatic setting of *Sophist* is much easier to place. It is set the morning after the discussion contained in *Theaetetus* concludes. The *Theaetetus* ends abruptly with Socrates saying: ‘and now I must go to the King’s Porch to meet the indictment that Meletus has brought against me; but let us meet here again in the morning, Theodorus’ (210d2-4). Socrates leaves, and in the dramatic setting of Plato’s broader works encounters Euthyphro who is similarly on his way to court. The next morning the characters who participated in the *Theaetetus* meet up again to resume their investigations. Dramatically, then, *Sophist* is set in 399 BC, shortly before Socrates’ trial in *Apology*.

The Story of *Sophist*

According to the characters, *Sophist* was originally to be a resumption of the conversation which had been interrupted the previous day. However, one of the characters, Theodorus, has brought a guest along with him, named only as a stranger or a visitor from Elea. Socrates, musing that ‘true’ philosophers—‘by contrast to the fake ones’ (216c5)—can sometimes have the appearance of sophists or statesmen, or ‘they might give the impression that they’re completely insane’ (216d2), asks the Eleatic Stranger whether they would describe a sophist, a statesman, and a philosopher by separate names or use the same name for all of them. Affirming that three separate names are used, the Eleatic Stranger agrees to take on an investigation to distinguish each one of them clearly.

The three names seem to project a trilogy of dialogues—*Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philosopher*. Of these, only *Sophist* and *Statesman* are extant, so it is possible that Plato never wrote *Philosopher*, it has been lost in the intervening centuries between his time and our own, or that in searching for the sophist and statesman, the philosopher might be revealed.³

The Eleatic Stranger attempts to pin down what a sophist is using the method of collection and division (used also in *Phaedrus*). Broadly speaking, this is a method of categorisation where a general term is divided into two parts, one of which is divided

³ Cooper, p. 235, for example has: ‘Perhaps Plato’s intention is to mark the philosopher off for us from these other two through showing a supreme philosopher at work defining them [the sophist and the statesman] and therein demonstrating his own devotion to truth, and the correct method of analysis for achieving it’.

further, until we reach a term that cannot be further divided. This looks Aristotelian: dividing the genus into species, although this is not Plato's way of describing it. Plato gives an example, defining an angler; he begins by dividing art, or expertise, into production and acquisition—so expertise in making things or expertise in getting things. The angler belongs to the latter category, which is divided again into exchange and possession-taking—acquisition by exchanging one thing for another and acquisition by taking possession of a thing. This process continues until a definition of an angler is reached.

In investigating the nature of the sophist, the Eleatic Stranger and his interlocutory companion Theaetetus put forward seven different definitions over the course of the dialogue. The first five definitions, while interesting, do not have so much philosophically at stake; for reasons of space I do not discuss them further. I want to focus more closely on the final two definitions; they rather sound like definitions of the Socratic method, rather than sophistry. According to the sixth definition, the sophist will:

‘cross-examine someone when he thinks he’s saying something though he’s saying nothing. Then, since his opinions will vary inconsistently, these people will easily scrutinize them. They collect his opinions together during the discussion, put them side by side, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects’ (230b4-9).

This looks rather like Socrates' favoured method of examination. This definition, which the interlocutors call 'noble sophistry' (231b7), intentionally blurs the line between sophistry and Socratic art.⁴ At 231a6-8, the Eleatic Stranger warns that the similarity between the sophist and the above definition is like the difference 'between a wolf and a dog, the wildest thing there is and the gentlest. If you're going to be safe, you have to be especially careful about similarities, since the type we're talking about is very slippery'. According to Wei Liu, there are 'two parts of sophistic or Socratic art: one destructive and the other constructive'.⁵ The above definition represents the destructive art; the constructive art—of sophistry, at least—can be presented through the other definitions examined in *Sophist*. The key distinction, Liu argues, is that 'sophists use the eristic art as a tool to defeat the confidence of students, to show their own wisdom . . . and,

⁴ Wei Liu, "Plato's Attempts at Defining Sophistry", in *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 8:4 (2013), p. 574.

⁵ Liu, p. 575.

ultimately, to make money from these practises. Socrates, conversely, uses this similar eristic art as a tool to make his interlocutor realize his own ignorance, to open him up to a more philosophical way of life, and, finally, to lead him to embrace a truly virtuous life'.⁶ Perhaps, then, the end must be considered along with the means. Where the sophistic method has as its end a benefit for the sophist, Socrates' method has as its end a benefit for the interlocutor.

In the final definition of sophistry Plato seems to have in mind a person who pretends to have beliefs which they do not themselves hold, in order to produce a contradiction in conversation with another person. Their sophistry involves: 'imitation of the contrary-speech-producing, insincere and unknowing sort, of the appearance-making kind of copy-making, the word-juggling part of production that's marked off as human and not divine' (268c7-d2). This is the Socratic method we are familiar with and which arises among the charges laid against Socrates. The final definitions of sophistry prove Socrates' prediction at the beginning of the dialogue: that sometimes philosophers appear like sophists (216d1). It seems the reverse is also true.

In searching for the sophist, the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus run into a problem. After their sixth definition—the "noble sophist" mentioned above—they embark on a seventh definition, which requires them to say that the sophist produces false images—images that say *that which is not*. The Eleatic Stranger remarks that 'it's extremely hard, Theaetetus, to say what form of speech we should use to say that there really is such a thing as false saying or believing, and moreover to utter this without being caught in a verbal conflict' (236e3-237a1). This "verbal conflict" involves saying *that which is not* is—saying that non-being has being—which the interlocutors are initially convinced is impossible. The characters then embark on an excursion into metaphysical discussion to discover the exact nature of *that which is not*, and to examine whether it can be present in speech or belief. This excursion forms the focus of this paper.

The Eleatic Stranger takes the lead in this discussion. Plato's choice of principal character seems significant: the stranger is from Elea, home of the great pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides, who was probably born about 520 BC. It should be noted that

⁶ Liu, p. 576.

the Eleatic Stranger is unlikely to be Parmenides himself. Diogenes Laertius, referring to the Athenian Stranger in *Laws* and the Eleatic Stranger in *Sophist* and *Statesman*, argues: ‘these strangers are not, as some hold, Plato and Parmenides, but imaginary characters without names’ (*Lives*, III, 51-53).⁷ Another, dramatic, justification for this view: Socrates meets Parmenides in the dialogue of the same name. There, Socrates is a young man, and Parmenides is elderly. So by 399BC, when *Sophist* is set and Socrates is seventy, Parmenides is no longer living, and so cannot be a character.

The ideas of Parmenides are mentioned only in passing. Brevity is necessitated by the need to focus on *Sophist*; we can offer only an outline of Parmenidean philosophy. Parmenides held that the world was one, with neither parts nor movement, and that change was impossible. More significantly for *Sophist*, he held that negation—*that which is not*—is impossible, even to speak about: ‘from what-is-not I will allow you neither to say nor to think: For it is not to be said or thought that it is not’ (DK 28B8 7-10).⁸ The character of the Eleatic Stranger possibly softens the hubris which comes from attacking the views of Parmenides, whose philosophical investigations had been about as influential on the development of Ancient Greek thought as the works of Plato have been on the development of Western philosophy. Had Alfred North Whitehead been a fifth-century Athenian, he may have proclaimed that the development of Greek thought was a series of footnotes to Parmenides.

Philological Note

While Plato tries to avoid using technical language, later philosophers have not followed his example, and many of Plato’s terms are now seen to have technical meanings. These are all Greek words, and many authors express these terms in the Greek alphabet. For ease of reading, in this paper I have taken the liberty of writing all Greek words in the Latin alphabet, including those from direct quotations.

⁷ R.D. Hicks notes: ‘that the Eleatic Stranger is not Parmenides is decisively proved by *Soph.* 241E’. *Lives*, p. 323, n. c. The line in question says: ‘We’ll never be able to avoid having to make ourselves ridiculous by saying conflicting things whenever we talk about false statements and beliefs . . . unless, that is, we either refute Parmenides’ claims or else agree to accept them’.

⁸ S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, C.D.C. Reeve (eds.), *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, Fourth Edition, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011, p. 44.

Paper Summary

This textual analysis shall begin by examining what Plato has to say about Kinds and how he introduces them in *Sophist*. It shall then look at two scholarly interpretations: either a Kind is synonymous with a Platonic Form (the view held by F.M. Cornford), or it is not (the view held by L.M. de Rijk). We defend the latter view.

In the second section we examine this notion of a Form having parts. This notion seems counterintuitive; surely a Form, which is one pure metaphysical object, cannot be divided into parts. We argue that Forms can have parts, but in a particular way. We examine several scholarly interpretations of parts of Forms and object to them all; we therefore propose our own interpretation.

In the final section we examine how Plato structures his account of negation and falsity in *Sophist*. We examine four twentieth-century interpretations of this account; three of them we rebut. The fourth, Job van Eck's treatment of the Oxford interpretation, we adjust to take account of our new understanding of Kinds and the parts of Forms to bring it closer to what it seems Plato is attempting to do with his account of negation and falsity.

In pursuing this analysis we proceed in roughly the same order that Plato does. The notion of parts of Forms and his treatment of negation overlap slightly; we have separated them out to ensure that we can get a clear account of parts of Forms before we move to evaluate negation and falsity, as Plato's account relies on understanding how Forms can have parts.

I. Forms and Kinds

Plato introduces the concept of a Kind (*genos*) in *Sophist*, and uses it in ways which make it look like a Form (*eidos*). Many scholars think that the two words are just different names for the same thing: F.M. Cornford, for instance, simply states that ‘the term “kind” (*genos*) is used indifferently as a synonym of Form (*eidos*)’.¹ The majority of scholars seem to agree with him, but L.M. de Rijk argues against this consensus, claiming that ‘all Kinds are Forms but not *vice versa*’.² Plato is famous for his use of language, and his ability to push ordinary speech beyond its usual limits even while refusing to turn to very technical language. But that is an interpretative point, and rather than stipulate as Cornford has done here, we need to turn to the textual evidence. In fact, I think the evidence does not support Cornford’s claim. In this section, I shall examine the textual evidence and the different interpretations, and consider whether Form and Kind are just different names for the same concept, or if there is some point of distinction between them.

Plato’s Treatment of Kinds

Kinds are first raised in *Sophist* at about 251d, where the interlocutors, the Eleatic Stranger (ES) and Theaetetus (T) are discussing how it is possible to speak of one thing by several names. Surely, says the Eleatic Stranger, ‘we’re speaking of a man even when we name him several things, that is, when we apply colours to him and shapes, sizes, defects, and virtues’ (251a7-9). We are told that some people—the so-called ‘late-learners’ (251b6)—refuse to allow a sentence like “man is good” on the basis that a man is a man, and that which is good is good, but a man and the good are not the same thing; a somewhat extreme reading of the terms. In response to this hypothetical obstacle, the interlocutors ask:

251d

ES: Shall we refuse to apply being to change or to rest, or anything to anything else? Shall [a] we take these things to be unblended and incapable of having a share of each other in the things we say? Or shall [b] we pull them all together and treat them all as capable of associating with each other? Or shall we say that [c] some can associate and some can’t? Which of these options shall we say they’d choose, Theaetetus?

¹ F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935, p. 257 n. 1.

² L.M. de Rijk, *Plato’s Sophist: A Philosophical Commentary*, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1984, p. 144.

Plato has given us three possibilities for how this association might work:

[a] ‘we take these things to be unblended and incapable of having a share of each other’

If this is the case, then Change and Rest will have no share in Being, and so will not *be*—that is, will not exist. This is clearly absurd, so this possibility is discarded.

[b] ‘we pull them all together and treat them all as capable of associating with each other’.

If this were the case, then Change would be at rest and Rest would be changing. Once again, this leads to absurdity and this possibility is dismissed.

[c] ‘some can associate and some can’t’

Plato chooses not to examine this third option here, reasoning that if the first two alternatives are impossible, then the third must be the truth.³ We re-join the discussion at 252e.

252

e ES: Certainly one of the following things has to be the case: either everything is willing to blend, or nothing is, or some things are and some are not.

T: Of course.

ES: And we found that the first two options were impossible.

T: Yes.

ES: So everyone who wants to give the right answer will choose the third.

T: Absolutely.

253 ES: Since some will blend and some won’t, they’ll be a good deal like letters of the alphabet. Some of them fit together with each other and some don’t.

T: Of course.

ES: More than the other letters the vowels run through all of them like a bond, linking them together, so that without a vowel no one of the others can fit with another.

T: Definitely.

ES: So does everyone know which kinds of letters can associate with which, or does it take an expert?

³ Clearly, Plato has had a hand in inspiring Sherlock Holmes: ‘when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth’ (the Sign of Four, chapter six).

- T: It takes an expert.
- ES: What kind?
- T: An expert in grammar.
- b ES: Well then, isn't it the same with high and low notes? The musician is the one with the expertise to know which ones mix and which ones don't, and the unmusical person is the one who doesn't understand that.
- T: Yes.
- ES: And in other cases of expertise and the lack of it we'll find something similar.
- T: Of course.
- ES: Well then, we've agreed that kinds [*gene*] mix with each other in the same way.

This is the first time Plato uses the word “kind” in this dialogue in the sense of kind *qua* Kind (as opposed to kind *qua* “a kind of . . .”). In order that we may avoid further confusing an already unclear issue, hereafter Kind will be capitalised when referring to its technical sense, just as Form is capitalised when discussing the metaphysical object (as opposed to the form, or shape, of something). When Plato chooses to be, he is clear and precise, leaving little room for doubt or misinterpretation. In other cases, he chooses to be vague and obscure. His discussion of Kinds falls into the latter category. His purpose in doing this might be made clearer by a comment in the following, which is marked with an asterisk (*).

254

- ES: We've agreed on this: some kinds will associate with each other and some won't, some will to a small extent and others will associate a
- c great deal, nothing prevents still others from being all-pervading—from being associated with every one of them. So next let's pursue our account together this way. Let's not talk about every form. That way we won't be thrown off by dealing with too many of them. Instead let's choose some of the most important ones. First we'll ask what they're like, and next we'll ask about their ability to associate with each other. *Even if our grasp of *that which is* and *that which is not* isn't completely clear, our aim will be to avoid being totally without an account of them—so far as that's allowed
- d by our present line of inquiry—and see whether we can get away with saying that *that which is not* really is that which is not.

It seems that Plato intends to put Kinds to work in seeking an account of *that which is* and *that which is not*. His interest is in what he can use the Kinds for, not in their nature; just as it is irrelevant to a bricklayer what the bricks are made of—provided they do the job for which they are required—so the nature of Kinds is irrelevant to Plato (beyond an identification of a Kind as a sort of Form). He is concerned with how they contribute to being and not-being. Plato does not directly address the nature of Kinds any further, so it seems that he expects us to do the work ourselves. He does give us some help, with an examination of three of ‘the most important kinds’ (254d4): Being, Change (which some other authors write as Motion),⁴ and Rest (which we might also call Stability). Change and Rest cannot combine with each other, but they both combine with Being. Immediately, a problem suggests itself: while each of these three kinds is different from the two others, it is the same as itself. ‘But what in the world are *the same* and *the different* that we’ve been speaking of?’ (*Sophist* 254e2-3), the Eleatic Stranger asks. Agreeing that the Same and the Different must be Kinds, they add them to the list, making it five. The interlocutors examine these five Kinds one by one, and conclude that while they all *are*, having a share in Being, at the same time they *are not*, being different from Being and each other (that is, having a share in Difference). In this way, Plato has reached a clearer understanding of *what is*, characterising it as “sharing in” Being, and *what is not*, characterising it as difference rather than contrariety, which is the characterisation of *what is not* with which he started. Thus he has reached his goal: avoiding being totally without an account of what is and what is not, through examining the way in which the five so-called “Greatest Kinds” relate to each other.

Scholarly Interpretations

Broadly speaking, there are only two possible interpretations of Forms (*eidē*) and Kinds (*génē*): either the terms are synonymous, or they are not. Let us examine the evidence for and against each interpretation and consider how Plato’s project might be affected by each view, in an attempt to evaluate which interpretation is of more use keeping Plato’s purpose for Kinds in mind as we do so.

⁴ J.L. Ackrill notes Cornford uses “motion”, but “change” would be better’. J.L. Ackrill, “Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251-259”, in Gregory Vlastos (ed.), *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Volume 1, London: Macmillan, 1972, p. 217.

Our first option is simple: Kind (*genos*) is just a synonym for Form (*eidōs*). Cornford seems to think that this is uncontroversial, crisply expressing in two footnotes: ‘here, as elsewhere, the term ‘kind’ (*genos*) is used indifferently as a synonym of Form (*eidōs*)’,⁵ and four pages later, ‘‘Kinds’ (*génē*), synonymous with ‘Forms’ (*eidē*), here as elsewhere’.⁶ Cornford is not alone in his view.. Kenneth M. Sayre, for instance, reduces the distinction to: ‘the theory of Forms (=Kinds)’.⁷ Many authors make no distinction at all, and refer only to Forms, rarely or never mentioning Kinds.⁸ Richard Bluck remarks:

‘It is interesting that what are called Kinds (*génē*) in 254b appear to be the same things as are called Forms (*eidē*) in 254c. Coming as it does immediately after the discussion of Dialectic,⁹ this passage seems to be a clear indication that the reader acquainted with Platonic doctrine should interpret what follows in terms of Platonic Forms’.¹⁰

All these authors seem to be in agreement: Plato’s use of Kind should be understood as identical to his use of Form. There seem to be two questions to answer: first, why do these scholars think that Form and Kind should be understood as synonymous, and second, what are the implications of accepting this view?

The quotation from Bluck, above, gives us a hint. Bluck says that Kinds are referred to in 254b; Forms in 254c. Here is the passage from Plato:

254b8

ES: We’ve agreed on this: some kinds [*genon*] will associate with each other and some won’t, some will to a small extent and others will associate a great deal, nothing prevents still others from being all-pervading—from being associated with every one of them. So next let’s pursue our account together this way. Let’s not talk about every form [*eidon*]. That way we won’t be thrown off by dealing with too many of them.¹¹

⁵ Cornford, p. 257, n.1.

⁶ Cornford, p. 261, n.1.

⁷ Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 218-219.

⁸ For example: Ackrill, who quotes heavily from Cornford, refers to the Forms; Michael Frede refers to ‘all other forms (except, of course, being itself)’, p. 403; W.K.C. Guthrie has ‘a Form (A) ‘shares in’ another (B)’, vol 5, p. 150; Edith Schipper mentions ‘the interweaving of forms’, p. 242; Frank A. Lewis mentions ‘the form ‘otherness’’, p. 89; J.R. Trevaskis refers to ‘certain kinds (or Forms)’, p. 109; Sir David Ross has ‘it may be added that Plato often uses *ousia* and *phusis* as ways of referring to an Idea, and that he so uses *genos* in the *Sophistes*’, p. 16. Surnames only are referred to here to avoid undue clutter—full citations of these sources can be found in the bibliography.

⁹ The Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus agree that only an expert in dialectic will be able to correctly divide things by Kinds.

¹⁰ Richard S. Bluck, *Plato’s Sophist*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975, p. 133.

¹¹ The Greek words, added by me, are as they are in the Greek edition of *Sophist*.

The discussion of Kinds associating with each other we shall approach later. Plato, it seems, has just used a different word, possibly to avoid becoming trapped in a technical meaning. Bluck seems to think that the Kind named in 254b is the same concept as the Form in 254c, only under a different name. From the evidence presented above, that seems a reasonable conclusion to draw. Plato is examining how Kinds might associate with each other, and in order to do this he chooses a few Forms to use as case studies. From this it seems perfectly natural to infer that Form and Kind are simply synonyms.

Another piece of evidence we might consider in wondering whether Form and Kind are meant to be synonymous is that Plato has used the word *genos* before, and does not give any indication that he intends to use it differently in *Sophist*. De Rijk has found some of the places in Plato's works where he has used the words *eidos* and *genos*, and considered the different ways in which it is used. Its basic sense, de Rijk explains, 'is 'race', 'stock', 'kin''. It is used in this sense—specifically, to mean the human race—at *Phaedo* 82b7 (the Greek is *anthropinon génos*), and in *Republic* V 473d6, *Symposium* 189d3, and *Timaeus* 75b5. It is used in the sense of *sort* or *type* several times in *Sophist*, at 226a1, 260a5, 261a4 and 7, 264e1, 265e5, and 268c9. Its third sense is that of 'domain', or 'area'; 'the container of all things of a certain sort'. It is used in this sense in *Republic* IV 434b3, VI 507c13 and d9, *Timaeus* 17c4, *Theaetetus* 206b7, *Sophist* 235b5. In this sense, de Rijk observes, it is often indiscriminately placed alongside *eidos*. These are the nontechnical senses of *genos*; its technical sense 'is to be viewed as being of the same order as the third use mentioned above ('domain') in so far as the Forms' extensional sense is concerned'.¹² De Rijk does not explain the further, nor does it need much more explanation here; for our purposes it is sufficient to note that *genos* has several senses, both technical and non-technical, and Plato has given no reason to assume that he is intending it to be understood in a new way.

The implications of this view of Forms and Kinds are fairly straightforward. If we accept the view that Forms and Kinds are synonymous, it makes understanding negation and falsity—which Plato is seeking an account of in *Sophist*—fairly simple. Because we are already familiar with Forms, understanding that they have this new property of

¹² de Rijk, p. 32.

associating with one another leads neatly into the discussion on how we define negation with regard to Plato's Forms. It seems that Cornford has arrived at his view, that Kind is simply a synonym for Form, because Plato seems to treat Kinds in the same way as Forms and gives no indication that they are anything different or new.

L.M. de Rijk presents a different interpretation. He agrees that 'the "Kinds" certainly are Platonic Forms, no doubt about that', but thinks it 'rather striking'¹³ that Plato switches between *eidōs* and *genos* in close proximity:

253d1—'Aren't we going to say that it takes expertise in dialectic to divide things by *kinds* and to think that the same *form* is a different one or that a different *form* is the same?'

254b8—'some *kinds* will associate with each other and some won't'

254c2—'let's not talk about every *form*. That way we won't be thrown off by dealing with too many of them. Instead let's choose some of the most important ones'.¹⁴

If, as Cornford *et al* claim, *genos* and *eidōs* are just synonyms, it seems curious that Plato chooses to switch between them so rapidly, given that any of the words refers to an ontological category and does not seem to be just a replaceable noun. While it is possible that Plato chooses to switch word for some reason of his own, that notion requires insight into Plato's mind which is not available with the evidence to hand. De Rijk argues the simplest answer is that 'all Kinds are Forms but not *vice versa*'.¹⁵ Thus Plato's choice to switch rapidly between *eidōs* and *genos* makes sense: he is content to divide things by Kinds—using Kinds as a general term—and in considering individual Forms he uses *eidōs*. De Rijk proposes a hierarchy of Forms: 'the lowest *eidōs* (the later *infima species*) is not a Kind (*genos*). The higher *eidê* may be called by that name as well as by '*genos*'. If they are regarded as subsuming other *eidê*, they are called *genê*, while they are called *eidê* in as far as this relationship is ignored'.¹⁶ So, the lowest *eidōs* might, for instance, be the Form of Human, which comes under the Kind (*genos*) of Animal. We would say that Human and Animal combine with one another, but it seems more that Human combines with Animal.¹⁷ This is why, according to de Rijk, Plato

¹³ de Rijk, p. 143.

¹⁴ Emphasis mine. In these quotes, *eidōs* is translated "Form"; *genos* is translated "Kind".

¹⁵ de Rijk, p. 144.

¹⁶ de Rijk, p. 144.

¹⁷ The way in which we can understand the combination of Kinds is discussed in more detail below.

wants to divide by Kinds rather than by Forms: ‘the basis of their function as the starting point for division is the very fact that they are *genê*’.¹⁸ The fact that a Kind can be divided gives Plato his method of division; moving down the chain of Forms to reach a definition of a complex object. The idea of a hierarchy of Forms is not a new one; Plato has used an analogy of the sun to provide such a hierarchy in *Republic*. Just as the sun is the ‘cause and controller’ (*Republic* VI 508a4) of sight—namely that which allows the visible to be seen—the Form of the Good fulfils the same function in the intelligible realm of Forms (508c-e). De Rijk’s hierarchy seems to be more elaborate than the one proposed in *Republic*, but then it is worth remembering that Plato’s purpose has shifted from the moral to the logical between *Republic* and *Sophist*.

If we accept the view that Form and Kind are synonymous it seems we run into a contradiction with *Timaeus*. Given Plato’s constant refining of his theory and the aporetic nature of many of the early works, it is almost impossible to find a consistent thread through Plato’s work. However, it may be possible to refer to the late works with some reasonable consistency, assuming that by the time Plato wrote them, he had worked out most of the problems with his theory. At *Sophist* 254b6-8, Plato talks about Kinds associating with each other. Yet in *Timaeus*, Plato tells us that a Form will not associate with anything else: it ‘neither receives into itself anything else from anywhere else, nor itself enters into anything else anywhere’ (52a2-4). It may be possible to explain that Plato is attempting to solve different problems in *Timaeus* to the problems in *Sophist*, so that we can adjust the theory. However, the question in that part of *Timaeus* seems to be whether the Forms really exist; it does not seem that *Sophist* is taking a radically different approach. We can say with reasonable confidence that this is a problem for Cornford. If we accept de Rijk’s answer, that Kinds are Forms but not *vice versa*, we are able to accommodate *Timaeus* as well: Kinds are just a special sort of Form which are able to associate with one another.

Accepting de Rijk’s interpretation of Forms and Kinds means that we are able to avoid getting into difficulty with other of Plato’s works, and, as we shall see, de Rijk’s interpretation is able to explain the communion of Kinds where Cornford’s is not.

¹⁸ de Rijk, p. 144.

The Communion of Kinds

Plato uses many terms to describe Kinds combining: they ‘mix’, ‘blend’, ‘fit together’, ‘accept’ or ‘receive’ one another, or ‘partake’ of one another.¹⁹ Cornford argues that these terms are synonymous, that Plato ‘wisely refuses to allow any one metaphor to harden into a technical term’.²⁰ Paul Seligman agrees, saying that none of the terms Plato uses ‘should be looked upon as philosophical terms in an exclusively technical sense’.²¹ Putting Plato’s apparent reluctance to turn to technical language to one side, Cornford offers a definition: ‘two Forms [Kinds] are said to “combine” when they stand (eternally) in such a relation that their names can occur in a *true affirmative statement*’.²² J.R. Trevaskis agrees with Cornford: ‘Plato means by *génē* which ‘combine’ that words referring to them can be put together syntactically to form a true statement’.²³ So the statement ‘motion exists’ would indicate that the Kinds Motion and Being (or Existence) are capable of combining, or blending, or sharing in one another. A *true negative statement* such as ‘motion does not rest’ reflects that Motion and Rest do not blend. Taking the example from above, the Kind of Animal and the Form of Human, we can construct the statement “humans are animals”.

An alternative definition of combination might be that, for two arbitrary Kinds A and B, ‘A combines with B if and only if some possible individual participates in both A and B’.²⁴ From the examples above, an individual could participate in both Motion and Being—it exists, and can move—so we would conclude that Motion and Being combine. The same individual cannot participate in both Motion and Rest, since the same individual cannot be moving and resting at the same time, so we conclude that Motion and Rest do not combine. While this definition appears to hold, it does not seem appropriate to define relations between Kinds in terms of particulars. Cornford’s definition of combination of Kinds seems the most appropriate.

¹⁹ Cornford, p. 255-6.

²⁰ Cornford, p. 256.

²¹ Paul Seligman, *Being and Not-Being: An Introduction to Plato’s Sophist*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p. 45.

²² Cornford, p. 256. Emphasis Cornford’s.

²³ J.R. Trevaskis, “The μέγιστα γένη and the Vowel Analogy of Plato, Sophist 253”, in *Phronesis* 11:2 (1966), p. 207.

²⁴ Bas C. van Fraassen, “Logical Structure in Plato’s *Sophist*”, in *The Review of Metaphysics* 22:3 (1969), p. 486.

On de Rijk's interpretation of Kinds, the communion of Kinds is understood as a higher *genos* combining with a lower one, or with the lowest *eidos*. Two Kinds of the same level are not able to combine, nor is a lower Form able to combine with a higher. This makes for some difficult constructions. We accept that Animal is a higher *genos* than Human, and when we affirm that there is combination occurring, we say that "humans are animals". However, hierarchically speaking, we are committed to saying that Animal combines with Human, since it seems that combination is a "downward reaching" relation; the Kind "reaches" down to the lower Form. Considering Plato's language as provided by Cornford, it seems to make more intuitive sense to say that Human combines with Animal, inverting the hierarchy into an "upward reaching" relation. Saying that Human *mixes with* Animal gives the implication that Animal is the larger of the two. However, it does seem that the Kinds give Plato the framework for the method of collection and division; moving downward from the most general Kind to the most specific Form. This would make sense for combination to be a "downward reaching" relation.

Combination between Kinds must be a non-symmetric relation. Consider the example of Human and Animal: if combination were symmetric then the order of Forms in a true affirmative statement would be irrelevant. So we could say that "all humans are animals" and "all animals are humans". The latter option does not make sense. Cornford claims that combination is symmetric, and he 'has been severely taken to task for his view by practically everybody'.²⁵

Plato provides two analogies for the combination of Kinds, one of vowels and consonants, and the other of musical notes. His point seems to be to discover who would be the relevant expert in each case.

- 253 ES: Since some [Kinds] will blend and some won't, they'll be a good deal like letters of the alphabet. Some of them fit together with each other and some don't.
- T: Of course.
- ES: More than the other letters the vowels run through all of them like a bond, linking them together, so that without a vowel no one of the others can fit with another.

²⁵ Seligman, p. 46.

- T: Definitely.
- ES: So does everyone know which kinds of letters can associate with which, or does it take an expert?
- T: It takes an expert.
- ES: What kind?
- T: An expert in grammar.
- b ES: Well then, isn't it the same with high and low notes? The musician is the one with the expertise to know which ones mix and which ones don't, and the unmusical person is the one who doesn't understand that.
- T: Yes.
- ES: And in other cases of expertise and the lack of it we'll find something similar.

In the letter analogy, some letters 'fit together with each other' (253a2), while others do not. The vowels 'run through all of them like a bond', so that 'without a vowel no one of the others can fit with another' (253a4-6). The truth of this depends upon how Plato intends the letter analogy to be understood. One option might be pronounceability: we could say that π and β do not combine because $\pi\beta$ is unpronounceable, whereas π and ε do combine in that $\pi\varepsilon$ is pronounceable. Paolo Crivelli notes that 'another perhaps likelier hypothesis is that the combination of letters amounts to successive occurrence within words of a given language'.²⁶ Trevaskis puts it somewhat more succinctly: 'not all letters when set alongside succeed in making words'.²⁷ It would seem that the vowels are intended to represent those Kinds which can combine with all other Forms and Kinds, while the consonants represent those Kinds which only combine with a limited number of other Kinds and the Forms which can be combined with, but cannot themselves combine. In determining who the expert is in each case—for the letter analogy it is the grammarian, for the musical analogy it is the musician—Plato, perhaps unsurprisingly, concludes that the expert who can determine which Kinds will combine with which will be an expert in dialectic, and with a 'pure and just love of wisdom' (253e5), that can only be a philosopher.

The combination of Kinds and the letter analogy can be accounted for by de Rijk's interpretation, but not by Cornford's. Cornford's interpretation—that Form and Kind

²⁶ Paolo Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 116.

²⁷ Trevaskis, p. 115.

are simply synonymous—gives us no way of determining which Kinds will associate, and which will not, whereas with de Rijk’s interpretation we at least get a vague idea, thanks to his hierarchical structure of Forms. It seems that farther up the chain of Forms, each Kind becomes more “sunlike”—more universally applicable—until, at the top of the hierarchy is the Form of the Good, the most universally applicable Form of all.

Conclusions

We have examined the evidence in Plato concerning the nature of Forms and Kinds. His abrupt introduction of this new concept is indicative of his intent for Kinds; Plato does not want to examine Kinds on their own account, he is interested in putting them to work. It seems we must conclude that all Kinds are Forms, but not *vice versa*. Kinds differ from Forms in that Kinds are capable of associating, or combining, with other Forms or Kinds. This combination is made possible through a hierarchical structure of Forms, with the most able to combine—the Good—at the highest point, and the least able to combine—individual Forms, what would later be called the *infima species*—at the bottom.

II. Parts of Forms

In searching for the way in which ‘*that which is not* somehow is’, Plato is rebelling against Parmenides, who holds that only *that which is* can make sense; *that which is not* is impossible even to talk about. Declaring his intentions at *Sophist* 241d, Plato hopes that we will not judge him ‘some kind of patricide’ as he puts ‘father Parmenides’ views to the test. By 258d, Plato has ‘shown him [Parmenides] something even beyond what he prohibited us from even thinking about’, in not only showing that *that which is not* is, and establishing the Form of *that which is not*. He has done this by introducing this notion of parts of Forms, specifically the parts of the Form of Difference. This section will examine how a Form can be said to have parts in general, before discussing the analogy between the parts of Knowledge and the parts of Difference which Plato introduces in *Sophist*.

The Problem of Compounds

One of the roles Plato introduces Forms to fulfil is to solve the question of what happens to the soul after death. So we might expect this to be something Plato holds firm on, but in fact he subjects it to close scrutiny. In *Phaedo*, during his argument for the immortality of the soul, Plato asks: ‘is not anything that is composite and a compound by nature liable to be split up into its component parts, and only that which is noncomposite, if anything, is not likely to be split up’ (78c)? If a Form has parts, where each part is an independent whole, then we can call such a Form compound. A compound Form, Plato asserts, will be split up into its component parts, thereby changing its state. Forms, we are reminded even in the late dialogues, cannot admit change: a Form will ‘keep its own form unchangingly, which has not been brought into being and is not destroyed’ (*Timaeus* 52a); ‘that which is always changeless and motionless cannot become either older or younger in the course of time’ (*Timaeus* 38a). Therefore a Form cannot be a compound. Yet in *Sophist* Plato tells us that ‘the nature of the different appears to be chopped up, just like knowledge’ (*Sophist* 257c7-8). The phrase ‘chopped up’ seems to imply that Difference and Knowledge can be partitioned into smaller pieces, which in turn seems to imply that they are compounds.

There are three possible assumptions that we can make in determining how to resolve the apparent contradiction between *Phaedo* and *Sophist*: (1) we can assume that Plato

has made some modification to his theory between writing *Phaedo* and *Sophist*, and dismiss the passage from *Phaedo*; (2) we can assume that Plato has made an error, perhaps forgetting the earlier argument about compound Forms, and simply ignore the passage from *Phaedo*; or (3) we can assume that the Forms referred to in *Sophist* have parts without being compound, accommodating both *Phaedo* and *Sophist*. There is no evidence for (1), except for the apparent discrepancy between *Phaedo* and *Sophist*. While Plato did make many modifications to his theories over the course of his career, there is nothing to indicate that his position regarding compounds has changed. Without positive evidence that Plato has altered his theory, it does not seem appropriate to dismiss the *Phaedo* passage. The same objection applies to (2): without positive evidence that Plato has made a mistake, it does not seem appropriate to treat him as though he has. We shall therefore accept (3), and assume that Knowledge and Difference are able to have parts without being compounds, and we shall assume this of all Forms which can be said to have parts.

Parts of Forms

In order to show how Forms with parts are not compounds, let us first examine the way in which compounds have parts. A compound can be considered as one object which is in turn made up of smaller objects. Each of these objects has an independent existence; its existence is self-determined and does not depend on anything else. For example, a bicycle is one object made up of smaller objects: saddle, wheels, pedals, and so on. If the bicycle is disassembled, while the whole may have been destroyed, every part still exists. If one pedal is set aside and the rest of the parts destroyed, that pedal is still independently a pedal. It has being in its own right, unaffected by the being of any other part of the bicycle. This seems to be the way in which Plato considers a compound Form in *Phaedo*: a whole made up of independently-existing parts.

The parts of Forms which Plato introduces in *Sophist* do not have independent existence; they exist only in relation to some external object which is set over them. By way of analogy, consider a group of bunnies in a field. Let us suppose that some proportion of the bunnies like carrots; the remainder prefer lettuce. Assume that if a bunny likes carrot, it does not like lettuce, and vice versa. If I approach this group of bunnies with a carrot in my hand, those bunnies who like carrots will be very interested and hop towards me, while those bunnies who prefer lettuce will not be interested, and

remain where they are. Thus, I have created a part (or sub-set) of the bunnies. If I take the carrot away, the disappointed bunnies will return to whatever they were doing before, and the bunnies will be one homogeneous group again; the part no longer exists. Does the part of the group that likes carrots have any *independent* existence? When the bunnies were divided into two parts, it was on the basis of those who were attracted to the carrot, and those who were not. The part was defined wholly and completely in relation to some external object; when that object was removed, the part ceased to exist.

A question suggests itself: do all Forms have parts, or is it only Kinds that have parts? We have established that Kinds are special Forms which are able to combine with other Forms. It does not seem likely that there need to be other points of difference between Forms and Kinds, as Plato has introduced Kinds to solve a particular set of problems for which they seem adequately suited. Therefore it seems acceptable to conclude that all Forms can have parts, but not every Form requires them.

Parts of Knowledge

Plato makes his analogy with the parts of Knowledge at 257c:

257c8

EV: The nature of the different appears to be chopped up, just like knowledge.

T: Why?

EV: Knowledge is a single thing, too, I suppose. But each part of it that has to do with something is marked off and has a name peculiar to itself. That's why there are said to be many expertises and many kinds of knowledge.

T: Of course.

EV: And so the same thing happens to the parts of the nature of the different, too, even though it's one thing.

Edward N. Lee comments on the analogy: 'some ignore it entirely, regarding it, no doubt, as a merely "literary" embellishment. None, I think, have been sufficiently attentive to its structure and its force'.¹ If Lee is correct, then we want to know what the value of the analogy is. The value of any analogy is in its applicability to the thing being

¹ Edward N. Lee, "Plato on Negation and Not-Being in the *Sophist*", in *The Philosophical Review* 81:3 (1972), p. 269.

compared. So to find this applicability we should examine how the parts of Knowledge ought to be understood and then apply this understanding to parts of Difference.

Plato says that Knowledge is ‘a single thing’ (257c11). So Knowledge is one Form; a single whole without imperfection; it is not a compound. But Plato tells us that ‘each part of it that *has to do with something* is marked off and has a name peculiar to itself’ (257c11-d1; emphasis mine). The italics show the criteria by which parts of Knowledge are determined: having to do with something, or *aboutness*. This is the carrot from the bunny analogy; the subject (the ‘something’ which a part of Knowledge has to do with; with which it has some relation, some bearing) is the external object by which the existence of a part of Knowledge is generated. The ‘name peculiar to itself’ is also important. Because a Form is completely and perfectly what it is it can serve as a definition; the name of each part of Knowledge is derived from the subject (or Form) which is set over it: from the Greek *grámma* we get *grammatikè*, and so on. That, Plato tells us, ‘is why there are said to be many expertises and many kinds of knowledge’ (257d1-2). Crivelli explains the partition of Knowledge as ‘a specific knowledge is marked off from knowledge and comes to be over a certain kind in that it is knowledge of all things that fall under that kind (e.g. literacy is marked off from knowledge and comes to be over the kind letter in that it is knowledge of all things that fall under the kind letter—for literacy is the knowledge of all letters)’.² The specific knowledge is ‘marked off’ by its name. Thus it seems there are two significant features to the parts of Knowledge: “aboutness” and naming.

The fact that the parts of Knowledge must have a connection with the subject set over them—the aboutness criterion—means that the range of each part of Knowledge will be necessarily limited; for a subject X, the part of Knowledge over which X is set (knowledge-of-X) will be limited by its relation to X; its having-to-do-with-something, where X is the something in question. So the part of Knowledge over which the Kind Letters is set (knowledge-of-letters) will have its scope limited by the requirement that literacy has something to do with letters. Therefore knowledge of rhythm or anatomy cannot be called knowledge of literacy, as they have no relation to the subject of letters. In this way we can see that the parts of Knowledge are all necessarily limited.

² Crivelli, p. 207.

The key points we must take away from this presentation of the parts of Knowledge are that such parts have no independent existence; they exist wholly and completely in relation to some external subject. Additionally, the parts of Knowledge will be limited by their relevance to the subject which has been placed over them.

Parts of Difference

Having established the way in which Knowledge may be said to have parts, let us examine how Plato describes the way in which Difference has parts, remembering he has said that it is chopped up ‘just like’ Knowledge (257c8).

257d

EV: And so the same thing happens to the parts of the nature of the different, too, even though it’s one thing.

T: Maybe. But shall we say how?

EV: Is there a part of the different that’s placed over against the beautiful?

T: Yes.

EV: Shall we say it’s nameless, or does it have a name?

T: It has a name. What we call *not beautiful* is the thing that’s different from nothing other than the nature of the beautiful.

EV: Now go ahead and tell me this.

e T: What?

EV: Isn’t it in the following way that *the not beautiful* turns out to be, namely, by being both marked off within one kind of *those that are*, and also set over against one of *those that are*?³

T: Yes.

EV: Then it seems that *the not beautiful* is a sort of setting of a being over against a being.

T: That’s absolutely right.

EV: Well then, according to this account, is the beautiful more a being than the not beautiful?

T: Not at all.

258 EV: So we also have to say that both the not large and the large equally *are*.⁴

³ It is interesting that these appear to be Parmenidean themes, being used in ways which Parmenides forbade. It seems also that Plato is being careful to avoid being trapped; not-being is being defined in terms of a being marked off against a being, avoiding the circularity of not-being defined in terms of not-being.

⁴ We are reminded here of the discussion about the Tallness-in-Simmias in *Phaedo* 102c-103a.

T: Yes.

EV: So we also have to put the not just on a par with the just, in that neither *is* any more than the other.

T: Of course.

EV: And we'll speak about the others in the same way too, since the nature of the different appeared as being one of *those that are*. And because it *is*, we have to posit its parts as no less beings.

T: Of course.

EV: So it seems that the setting against each other of the nature of
b a part of the different and the nature of *that which is* is not any less being—
if we're allowed to say such a thing—than *that which is* itself. And it does
not signify something contrary to *that which is* but only something different
from it.

This passage establishes that the *not beautiful* is the thing that's 'different from nothing other than the nature of the beautiful' (257d9-10). This could mean that the not-Beautiful simply consists of everything which is different from the Beautiful. This would seem to mean that the not-Beautiful consists of literally everything that exists, *apart* from the Beautiful. This kind of metaphysical analysis is a little bit like saying that the world can be divided into two categories: cats and not-cats; it is questionable how useful such an ontology can be, beyond providing a refutation to Parmenides. But this two-part ontology cannot be what Plato has in mind for the reason that he argues that Difference has parts in the same way as Knowledge does, and the parts of Knowledge are restricted to a certain range, so the parts of Difference must be restricted as well. It is not clear whether Plato requires unbounded negation-as-difference. The *not beautiful* additionally *is* (has being) (257e3-5), and the beautiful has no less being than the not beautiful (and vice versa) (257e8-9).

While the *not beautiful* has no less being than its counterpart, the beautiful, it is not clear whether the not beautiful is a Form in its own right, or whether any of the parts of Difference are Forms. If each part of Difference were a Form in its own right, then each of those parts would have all the qualities of a Form, including purity, and absolute being, as opposed to becoming. The parts of Difference cannot be pure: a pure Form has only one quality; the parts of Difference are made up of several qualities. Nor can the parts of Difference have the level of being ascribed to Forms, for that would give the parts of Difference independent existence, which they cannot have, as we have

established that the being of any part of Difference is dependent upon another being other than Being itself. So it seems that the parts of Forms are not themselves Forms. An objection might be raised: Plato says that the beautiful and the not-beautiful both equally *are*. This does not mean they share the same level of existence independently; the existence of Beauty comes from its nature; the existence of not-Beauty comes from the nature of Beauty. They both equally *are* in that they both equally combine with Being.

We might also ask whether Forms for negative Kinds exist. De Rijk wonders that they seem to be rather strange candidates for Forms. Forms are, by nature, perfect. So, for a negative Form, ‘in what should their perfection consist? Is the supposed Transcendent Form *‘Not-Beautiful’ to be taken as *‘Absolute Ugliness’?’⁵ This seems to lead to the absurd situation where the less a particular participates in a negative Form, the better it is. It is additionally unclear what makes a Form negative in the first place so to avoid unduly cluttering Plato’s ontology we shall leave this question to one side.

Scholarly Interpretations

In order to evaluate how we should interpret the parts of Difference, let us look first at the scholarly interpretations which are extant. There seem to be two major schools of thought, the names for which have been provided by Crivelli: ‘set-theoretical’ interpretations, which hold that each part of a Form consists of a set of some other Forms, and ‘intensional’ interpretations, which hold that each part of a Form is a Form as well.⁶ Each interpretation will be outlined and its value considered, then objections will be laid against it.

The names applied to each interpretation have been given by me, in order to make recalling them easier for author and reader.

Simple Difference Interpretation

The first set-theoretical interpretation, which I shall call the simple difference interpretation, takes its lead from Cornford, who holds ‘not-Beautiful’ to be ‘a

⁵ de Rijk, p. 174.

⁶ Crivelli, p. 206, n. 95.

collective name for all the Forms there are, other than the Beautiful itself'.⁷ So the not-X is the set of all Forms that exist *apart* from X. It takes parts of Forms as representative of difference *simpliciter*; the fact of Y being different from X is sufficient for Y being part of the not-X. The conception of each part of Difference consisting of every Form except one means that every Form is a member of every part of Difference except one: the part over which the Form itself is set. So the Beautiful is a member of every single part of Difference except the not-Beautiful, over which the Beautiful is set. According to Harold Cherniss, because every Form has some share in Difference, then every Form 'is different from *every* other, taken singly, and from *all* others, taken together'.⁸ He refers to *Sophist* 259b3-5, where Plato says '*that which is* indisputably is not millions of things, and all of the others together, and also each of them, are in many ways and also are not in many ways'. Plato's points here seems to be to remind us that Being and Difference combine with all Kinds but are not identical to the things they combine with. Any given Form is different to any other Form, and is different to the set of all other Forms. Thus any Form *is not* any other Form, and *is not* the set of all Forms. Hence, not-X is all Forms *apart* from X. Guthrie has some reservations, wondering 'whether 'everything' should be 'every Form' the fatal ambiguity of 'the beautiful' makes it hard to decide,'⁹ but decides that Cornford is most likely correct in his analysis of the not-Beautiful as the set of all Forms other than the Beautiful itself. Further support might be found at *Sophist* 256e5-6: 'as concerning each of the forms *that which is* is extensive, and *that which is not* is indefinite in quantity' (emphasis mine).

The value of this interpretation is that it seems to fit the text, without any great need for much interpretative work. It makes negation and falsity comparatively easy to understand, and does not saddle Plato with any major ontological complications. In short, it is a simple answer to an apparently complex question.

Disregarding, for the moment, the objections above, the chief objection to this interpretation would seem to come from Plato himself. In *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger says 'let's not take off one small part on its own, leaving many large ones

⁷ Cornford, p. 293.

⁸ Harold Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1944, p. 263.

⁹ W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume 5, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 153.

behind, and without references to real classes; let the part bring a real class along with it' (262b). The example Plato provides is dividing the human world into Greeks and barbarians—not-Greeks; the word for 'class' is *eidōs*. Crivelli argues that in this passage Plato is concerned with how to make correct divisions. In making divisions, 'one should avoid isolating a 'small' species by contrasting it with its remainder within the genus'.¹⁰ In the context of parts of Forms, we can understand 'species' as referring to a single part; 'genus' as referring to the Form as a whole. By claiming that the not-Beautiful is simply all other Forms apart from the Beautiful, the simple difference interpretation has isolated a single part by contrasting it with the rest of the Form, which it seems that Plato is warning us against. Cornford and Cherniss seem to read the *Statesman* passage differently. For Cornford: 'Negative terms like 'Barbarian' (non-Greek), though they have a name, have no Form that could be subdivided. 'Not every part is a Form, though every Form is a part.' So 'the not-Beautiful' is not a Form, but a group of Forms, negatively described, which is a part of the Real'.¹¹ Cherniss holds 'if there is no characteristic common to the members of the group save only that they are all different from some one entity, it is clear that the group is not a "natural unit" and so not an *eidōs*. This, however, is exactly the character of "not x"; it indicates all of the entities other than x, which—though different from one another—are also all different from x'.¹² While this explanation might work for *Statesman*, it fails to answer Crivelli's objection about the correctness of divisions (not that it should really be expected to, since Crivelli made his objection nearly eight decades after Cornford made his explanation). Lee seems to put the final nail in the coffin, pointing out that the simple difference interpretation 'cannot account for negative predication statements',¹³ and that whatever the virtues of Cornford and Cherniss' theories, 'I can see no reason for thinking they are *Plato's* theory, and thus no ground for thinking *he* could use them to deal with negative predications—an extremely grave shortcoming in his effort to rebut Parmenides'.¹⁴ If we add the objections discussed above, it becomes clear that the simple different interpretation cannot work.

¹⁰ Crivelli, p. 212. *Species* and *genus* are normally Aristotelian terms.

¹¹ Cornford, p. 293.

¹² Cherniss, p. 264.

¹³ Lee, p. 290.

¹⁴ Lee, p. 291. Emphasis Lee's.

Incompatibility Interpretation

The second set-theoretical interpretation, the incompatibility interpretation, reasons that when Plato says Difference is subdivided, ‘he seems to have in mind here a range of incompatibles; so that to say A is not B is to say that A is incompatible with B’.¹⁵ Two Forms are incompatible if ‘it is not possible that they hold together of the same object’.¹⁶ This would seem to imply that the part of Difference over which the arbitrary Form B is set (the not-B) consists only of Forms which cannot hold of the same object of which B holds. If we say ‘red is not blue’ we are saying that it is not possible for redness and blueness to hold of the same object at the same time. Since an object cannot be both red and blue at the same time, this seems to be true. Incompatibility is needed because otherwise ‘it would follow, from the vaguer account, that if someone is hairy, then as being hairy is being something other than nice, he is not nice’.¹⁷ It is this incompatibility requirement that leads J.A. Philip to argue that when we say something is not-large ‘we are implying the applicability of some predicate in the same incompatibility-range as small, but a predicate other than large’.¹⁸

An incompatibility-range is a set of Forms that contains all possible predicates in their range, but are mutually incompatible. So the colours red, blue, green, and so on constitute an incompatibility range: it is not possible to be red and green at the same time, so they are incompatible, and if we say that something is not green, we are indicating that it *is* some other predicate in the incompatibility-range, which is the exhaustive set of all colours. The same may be said of the not-large. When we say something is not-large, we are asserting that the object has some share (whether participatory or combinatory) in a Form in the incompatibility-range of which Largeness is a member, but a share in something *other* than Largeness. This interpretation therefore assumes that Plato gives an example of an incompatibility-range at *Sophist* 257b5-6, when he says that ‘when we speak of something as not large, does it seem to you that we indicate the small rather than the equal?’

¹⁵ D.W. Hamlyn, “The Communion of Forms and the Development of Plato’s Logic”, in *The Review of Metaphysics* 5:21 (1955), p. 292.

¹⁶ Crivelli, p. 188.

¹⁷ J.C.B. Gosling, *Plato*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 226.

¹⁸ J.A. Philip, “False Statement in the *Sophistes*”, in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 99 (1968), p. 319.

This interpretation is attractive in that it appears to align with real speech. When we say something like “Theaetetus is not flying”, we observe Theaetetus and see that he is sitting, and we know that sitting and flying are incompatible; they cannot be instantiated of the same object at the same time.

The objection to this interpretation is not an objection to restricting the parts of Difference to a range—that seems to be congruent with the analogy with the parts of Knowledge—but is an objection to a restriction based upon incompatibility. The incompatibility interpretation requires ‘some shift in Plato’s word *heteron*, which we otherwise would translate by simply “other,” or “non-identical,” to mean *contrary*. Such a shift in meaning is untenable on general grounds.’¹⁹ This is, Crivelli notes, a ‘devastating textual difficulty’.²⁰ David Wiggins points out some further issues with the incompatibility interpretation: ‘

- (a) the fact that the Stranger goes on to say (257C-D) that if anybody alleges that “negation signified the opposite” we shall deny that it signifies *opposite* and agree only that it signifies *something other than X* where X is what follows the negation sign; and
- (b) by the fact that the whole project is surely to contrive the explanation with the apparatus provided by the five greatest kinds; and (c) by the fact that Plato would surely have sensed that incompatibility could only be explained through negation itself’.²¹

So in (a), Plato is reaffirming the role of Difference in negation, in (b) Plato is using the five so-called Great Kinds Being, Motion, Rest, Sameness, and Difference to explain negation—and incompatibility is not one of these Kinds, and in (c) Plato realises that incompatibility is defined through negation. Two Forms are incompatible because they can *not* hold of the same object; a thing cannot be two things at once. Using negation to define negation becomes circular; a statement is negative because it is negative. Owen sums up: ‘Incompatibility has no place in Plato’s explanation of falsehood’.²² It seems that the incompatibility interpretation must, therefore, be discarded.

Intensional Interpretations

In general, the intensional interpretations of parts of Forms hold that each part of a Form is a Form in its own right. Above we have argued that this cannot be the case; we

¹⁹ Frank A. Lewis, “Plato on “Not””, in *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 9 (1976), p. 101.

²⁰ Crivelli, p. 190.

²¹ David Wiggins, “Sentence Meaning, Negation, and Plato’s Problem of Non-Being”, in Vlastos, 1972, p. 291, n. 15a. Emphasis Wiggins’.

²² G.E.L. Owen, “Plato on Not-Being”, in Vlastos, 1972, p. 232, n. 19.

suspend our objections in order to evaluate the interpretations on their own merits, rather than on how well they fit our ideas of what ought to be the case.

Difference-From Interpretation

The first intensional interpretation, the difference-from interpretation, claims that ‘things which are not Beauty form a sub-class of things which are other’.²³ Sub-class, in this case, seems to mean a Form, subordinate to the Form of which it is a part. Bluck wonders whether ‘there is a part of the Other set in contrast to the Beautiful to be concerned with a possible species of Otherness (Difference), namely, Difference-from-Beauty’.²⁴ So each part of Difference is its own Form, marked off against another Form. If a part of Difference is marked off against a Form x , then the part will be the Form Difference-from- x . This avoids the problem, noted earlier, that the parts of Difference will have many qualities and cannot therefore be a Form; the only quality will be difference from x . Frank A. Lewis reminds us that difference-from- x is all that is required: ‘there need be *no* form which two things that are not x have in common. In these circumstances, all that the two groups of forms have in common at all will be the common defining characteristic that all are other than x ’.²⁵

This interpretation seems fairly convincing, but it does not take account of Plato’s purpose in introducing Forms. They are primarily used as definitions to, among other things, solve the problem of universals. It is difficult to see what a Form like Difference-from-Beauty could stand as a definition for. In addition, this interpretation seems to be exposed to a Third Man-like objection. If there is a Form of Beauty, and a Form of Difference-from-Beauty, then there could well be a Form of Difference-from-Difference-from-Beauty, and so on *ad infinitum*. This interpretation seems to saddle Plato with a needlessly complex ontology.

Incompatibility Range Interpretation

The second intensional interpretation, the incompatibility range interpretation, holds that ‘the not-F is the unique Form such that it and the F exhaust the incompatibility-range to which they both belong’.²⁶ Sayre expands on this, saying that ‘the ‘negative

²³ A.R. Lacey, “Plato’s *Sophist* and the Forms”, in *The Classical Quarterly* 9:1 (1959), p. 48.

²⁴ Bluck, p. 166.

²⁵ Lewis, p. 104.

²⁶ J.P. Kostman, “False Logos and Not-Being in Plato’s *Sophist*”, in J.M.E Moravcsik (ed.), *Patterns in Plato’s Thought*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1973, p. 205.

Form' not-A includes not all Forms simply different from A, but rather all Forms related to A such that together they constitute an exclusive and exhaustive set'.²⁷ He claims that 'the not-Beautiful and the not-Tall are Forms themselves'.²⁸ Here Sayre could be interpreted as presenting a set-theoretical interpretation or an intensional one.

This is another incompatibility reading; essentially the same as the previous one, but treating not-F as a single Kind rather than as a set. It is therefore prey to the same objection as the incompatibility interpretation: it is not feasible to read *heteron* as 'incompatible' instead of 'different'. This interpretation must be rejected, then.

Immanence Interpretation

The third intensional interpretation, the immanence interpretation, holds that when we say something like "A is not *x*", this 'does not mean that A is nothing at all, but only that it is something other than anything which is *x*'.²⁹ To put it another way, 'to say that a thing is not large is to say that it is one of the things other than the large things'.³⁰ In general terms, this interpretation holds the parts of a Form to be all the objects that participate in that Form. So to say that something is not *F*, it indicates that it is an object *other than* (i.e. sharing in Difference relative to) the objects which are participating in *F*. For example, if I said Socrates is not human, I am saying that Socrates is different to everyone that participates in the Form of Human. This seems to be at least very similar to de Rijk's view, who says that 'what are meant by 'parts' must be immanent forms of otherness occurring in particulars partaking in (the Transcendent Form) Otherness'.³¹ The immanent Forms are the Forms-in-us; the instantiation of the Form in the world. For example, in saying that Socrates is beautiful (Socrates participates in Beauty), we are observing an immanent form: the Beauty-in-Socrates.

As previously noted, it seems inappropriate to explain relations between Forms in terms of the particulars which participate in those Forms, for surely all particulars are becoming; they come into existence and they go out of existence. Therefore, we are requiring Plato to use objects of becoming as definitions, where he has previously said

²⁷ Kenneth M. Sayre, "Sophist 263B Revisited", in *Mind* 85:340 (1976), p. 585.

²⁸ Sayre (1983), p. 207, n. 95.

²⁹ A.E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work*, Third Edition, London: Methuen, 1929, p. 389.

³⁰ David Bostock, "Plato on 'is not' (*Sophist*, 254-9), in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984), p. 115.

³¹ de Rijk, p. 174.

we should never ‘speak of anything else as “this,” as though it has some stability’, but only as “what is such” (*Timaeus* 49d-e). It seems we cannot expect Plato to rely on particulars to define a relation among Forms; the extensional interpretation must therefore be discarded.

The Parts of Difference—the Problems Resolved

It seems that all the intensional interpretations of parts of Forms are unworkable given that they treat the parts of a Form as Forms in their own right, and it does not appear that this is a reasonable treatment. Therefore, the parts of a Form must be understood through a set-theoretical interpretation. However, the two set-theoretical interpretations identified above—the simple difference interpretation and the incompatibility interpretation—are inadequate.

Here I wish to propose a new interpretation of the parts of Difference, and the parts of a Form in general, which I call the *difference range interpretation* (hereafter, DRI). It follows from the analogy with the parts of Knowledge that the parts of Difference are limited to a certain range by the term which is placed over the part.³² The DRI holds that everything that exists—Forms and particulars alike; everything that has some share in Being—has a part of Difference over which it is set, as discussed above. The part of Difference will be bounded by the requirement that all of its members have some relation to the thing set over it. For example, the part of Difference set opposite Justice will not contain Tallness, because Tallness has no bearing or relation with Justice. But we should keep in mind that not all negative statements need to refer to those restricted parts of Difference. To say that justice is not beauty is to express that Justice and Beauty are not the same thing; they are different. Here we have a negative statement—which we can examine before looking at Plato’s account of negation—which does not require a part of Difference. This seems to explain Plato’s note that ‘concerning each of the forms that which is is extensive, and that which is not is indefinite in quantity’ (256e5-6); everything that is is-not everything else. So it is still possible to talk about difference *simpliciter*: to express that a Form F is-not a Form G, we say that F participates in Difference relative to G, and the converse is true as well.³³ To say, for example, that

³² The part of Difference over which the term “Beauty” is set, for example, will be limited to a certain range of predicates with some application to Beauty.

³³ While the explanation of the DRI refers mostly to Forms set over the parts of Difference, it applies to particulars as well. However, in order to avoid unduly cluttered explanations which may obscure

Homer is not Heracles does not mean that there has to be a part of Difference called not-Heracles in which Homer participates; it simply affirms that Homer and Heracles are different.

Kenneth Sayre argues for the restriction of the parts of Difference to some finite range. Talking about falsity, he says that ‘X participates in not-A by participating in any Form other than A itself. Hence, if there is even one Form other than A in which X participates, which for any X almost surely will be the case, then X participates in not-A: consequently ‘X is not a’ would never be false. Moreover, if X participates both in A and in one other Form, X participates in both A and not-A, and both ‘X is a’ and ‘X is not a’ are true simultaneously’.³⁴ He concludes that

‘The ‘negative Form’ not-A includes not all Forms simply different from A, but rather all Forms related to A such that together they constitute an exclusive and exhaustive set. The Form not-Sitting, for example, thus consists of Walking, Running, Jumping, Standing, Lying, and so forth, one (but only one) of which must apply to any individual that is not in fact sitting, but none of which can apply to a sitting individual’.³⁵

The DRI is able to deal with the objections levelled at both the simple difference interpretation and the incompatibility interpretation. If we agree that the *Statesman* passage is talking about making correct divisions, we have not broken Plato’s injunction to ‘avoid isolating a ‘small’ species by contrasting it with its remainder within the genus’;³⁶ rather we have isolated a small species by contrasting it with another small species. Where the incompatibility interpretation collapsed after an attempt to redefine Plato’s language, as well as an account of negation which was itself negative, the difference range interpretation maintains the reading of *heteron* as “difference”, and difference is entirely positive—a being is set against a being. Thus the difference range interpretation avoids the objections of the other two set-theoretical interpretations and we shall adopt it to examine negation and falsity.

more than they reveal, the explanations shall refer only (or mostly) to Forms, which can be most easily and intuitively integrated into Plato’s modified theories and our understanding of them.

³⁴ Sayre (1976), pp. 582-583.

³⁵ Sayre (1976), p. 585.

³⁶ Crivelli, p. 212.

III. Metaphysics of Negation and Falsity

Thus far, we have attempted to demonstrate two things: that Forms and Kinds are not simply synonymous, and that the parts of a Form are necessarily bounded by some relationship with whatever is set over them. In this section we shall utilise the metaphysical groundwork laid down in the previous sections to evaluate some interpretations of negation and falsity. We shall look at how Plato puts Kinds to work in his account of negation and falsity, and then we shall examine the different interpretations and come to a conclusion as to which interpretation appears to be the most effective solution for Plato's purposes.

Plato's Treatment of Negation and Falsity in *Sophist*

Plato starts his account of negation at 257b, before he introduces the analogy with the parts of Knowledge.

257

- b EV: Now let's look at this.
 T: What?
 EV: It seems that when we say *that which is not*, we don't say something contrary to *that which is*, but only something different from it.
 T: Why?
 EV: It's like this. When we speak of something as not large, does it seem to you that we indicate the small rather than the equal?
 T: Of course not.
 EV: So we won't agree with somebody who says that negation signifies a contrary. We'll only admit this much: when "not" and "non-" are prefixed to names that follow them, they indicate something *other* than the names, or rather, other than the things to which the names following the negation are applied.

When we say that something is not-X, we are not saying it is contrary to X, but merely that it is different to X. In Plato's example of the not-large, the negation does not indicate smallness any more than it does equality. This seems a simple point on its face, but it has proven controversial: Lesley Brown seems to think that here Plato 'explains the meaning of negative expressions'.¹ Job van Eck disagrees: 'there is no reason to

¹ Lesley Brown, "The *Sophist* on Statements, Predication, and Falsehood", in Gail Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Electronic Edition, Oxford University Press, 2008, via www.oxfordhandbooks.com, p. 456.

suppose' this is the case.² All Plato is trying to do, van Eck thinks, is 'to make clear that 'not X' does not mean the opposite of X'.³ The full meaning of negative expressions, van Eck argues, is unfolded in the passages which follow, where Plato develops the idea of the parts of Difference. After the analogy with the parts of Knowledge, and agreeing that the parts of a Form have just as much being as the Forms themselves, Plato goes on to say:

258

- b ES: So it seems that the setting against each other of the nature of a part of the different and the nature of *that which is* is not any less being—if we're allowed to say such a thing—that *that which is* itself. And it does not signify something contrary to *that which is* but only something different from it.
- T: Clearly.
- ES: So what shall we call it?
- T: Obviously *that which is not*—which we were looking for because of the sophist—is just exactly this.
- ES: Then does it have just as much being as any of the others, as you said it did? [a]Should we work up the courage now to say that *that which is not* definitely is something that has its own nature? Should we say that just as *the large* was large, *the beautiful* was beautiful, *the not large* was not large, and the *not beautiful* was not beautiful, in the same way *that which is not* also was and is not being, and is one form among the many *that are*? Do we, Theaetetus, still have any doubts about that?
- c T: No.
- ES: You know, our disbelief in Parmenides has gone even farther than his prohibition
- T: How?
- ES: We've pushed our investigation ahead and shown him something even beyond what he prohibited us from even thinking about.
- T: In what way?
- d ES: Because he says, remember.
- Never shall it force itself on us, that that which is not may be;
Keep your thought far away from this path of searching.*
- T: That's what he says.

² Job van Eck, "Plato's Theory of Negation and Falsity in *Sophist* 257 and 263: A New Defense of the Oxford Interpretation", in *Ancient Philosophy* 34:2 (2014), p. 280.

³ van Eck, p. 287.

ES: But we've not only shown that *those which are not* are. [b]We've also caused what turns out to be the form of *that which is not* to appear. Since we showed that the nature of *the different* is, chopped up among all beings in relation to each other, we dared to say that *that which is not* really is just this, namely, each part of the nature of the different that's set over against *that which is*.

There are two important points in this passage, labelled [a] and [b].

[a]:

'Should we work up the courage now to say that *that which is not* definitely is something that has its own nature? Should we say that just as *the large* was large, *the beautiful* was beautiful, *the not large* was not large, and the *not beautiful* was not beautiful, in the same way *that which is not* also was and is not being, and is one form [eidos] among the many *that are*?' (258b9-c3)

The Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus agree that *that which is not* is something with its own nature. This kind of language would seem to indicate a Form. However, some more information is given in the latter part of the passage: 'the *not beautiful* was not beautiful, in the same way *that which is not* also was and is not being' (258c1-3). Everything that exists shares in Being, and so *is*. At the same time, everything is *that which is not*, because everything *is-not* relative to everything else; everything participates in Difference relative to everything else. Hence *that which is not* both *is* and *is not*: it *is* by virtue of sharing in Being, and it *is not* by virtue of being different from Being. The final sentence of this passage is puzzling, implying that *that which is not* is a Form; this puzzle is answered by passage [b].

[b]:

'We've also caused what turns out to be the form [eidos] of *that which is not* to appear. Since we showed that the nature of *the different* is, chopped up among all beings in relation to each other, we dared to say that *that which is not* really is just this, namely, each part of the nature of the different that's set over against *that which is*' (258d5-e4).

The puzzle has been that *that which is not* seems to have its own nature; in the way that *the beautiful* is the perfection of beauty, *that which is not* is the perfection of "not-ness". This would lead us to say that there is a Form of "not-ness" (or Not), just as we would

say that there is a Form of Beauty. Plato tells us that the Form of Not is the parts of Difference, taken together. An illustration might be to consider the field of bunnies discussed earlier. There, we said that there were two parts of this group: carrot-liking-bunnies and lettuce-liking-bunnies. So we could say that the Form of Bunny-Liked-Things (assuming that there can be such a specific Form) is nothing other than the parts—all two of them—of the group of bunnies in the field.

Having established the nature of *that which is not*, let us examine the metaphysical implications of true statements and statements of negation. A true statement will have certain metaphysical elements. Taking ‘Theaetetus sits’ as an example; Crivelli says it ‘is true just if the kind sitting, the action signified by the verb ‘is sitting’, holds of Theaetetus’.⁴ Some authors take Crivelli’s “holds of” to mean participation: ‘the reason Theaetetus is sitting is his participation in Sitting’.⁵ So the true statement reflects the state of the world: when Theaetetus sits he is participating in Sitting (assuming that Forms exist for predicates).⁶ In terms of Forms, if a Kind is said to “hold of” another Form, this indicates that the Kind combines with the Form in question. For example, the Kind Animal holds of the Form of Human, so Animal combines with Human.

A statement of negation is usually an appeal to the parts of Difference. If we say, for instance, “*x* is not brown”, this says ‘that *x* (which is) partakes of that Part of Otherness (a Part which is) which is precisely Otherness-than-brown. That is, the negating statement says that the subject’s partaking lies outside the predicate negated—outside of brown: in otherness-precisely-than-brown. But that is *all* it says’.⁷ So there is a part of Difference over which Brown is set; the part not-Brown. According to our analysis of parts of Difference, not-Brown is limited to a certain range of things. To say *x* is not brown, then, is to say that *x* belongs to that part of Difference. Statements of negation make no attempt to say what *x* is, only what it *is not*. As noted above, not all negative statements seem to require this appeal to the parts of Difference.

⁴ Crivelli, p. 238.

⁵ Sayre (1976), p. 582.

⁶ There does not seem to be much direct evidence for Forms of predicates, but equally Plato does not seem to rule it out. However, two of the ‘Great Kinds’ are Motion and Rest—which would seem to be predicates. Without any definite evidence one way or another, herein we shall treat predicates as though Forms do exist for them, as it makes visualising the metaphysics of negation and falsity much easier.

⁷ Lee, p. 292.

Falsity

False statements are investigated in 261c, analysing speech and belief in an attempt to ‘calculate whether *that which is not* comes into contact with them, or whether they’re both totally true and neither one is ever false’ (261c5-7). After a brief discussion about what kinds of names will combine with each other (echoing the combination of Kinds and the letter analogy, as Plato points out at 261d1-2), the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus agree that ‘the simplest and smallest kind of speech’ can be formed by a name (noun) and a verb. Then, they agree that ‘whenever there’s speech it has to be about something. It’s impossible for it not to be about something’ (262e5-6). Finally, the Eleatic Stranger gives Theaetetus an example of speech which the two of them can examine. Here again we see the importance of aboutness and naming.

263a2

EV: “Theaetetus sits.” That’s not a long piece of speech, is it?

T: No, not too long.

EV: Your job is to tell me what it’s about, what it’s of.

T: Clearly it’s about me, of me.

EV: Then what about this one?

T: What one?

EV: “Theaetetus (to *whom* I’m now talking) flies”

T: No one would ever deny that it’s of me and about me.

EV: We also say that each piece of speech has to have some particular quality.

b T: Yes.

EV: What quality should we say each one of these has?

T: The second one is false, I suppose, and the other one is true.

EV: And the true one says *those that are*, as they are, about you.

T: Of course.

EV: And the false one says things different from *those that are*.

T: Yes.

EV: So it says *those that are not*, but that they are.

T: I suppose so.

EV: But they’re different things that are from the things that are about you—since we said that concerning each thing many beings are and many are not.

T: Absolutely.

We have already established the metaphysical implications of a true statement. ‘Theaetetus sits’ posits that there is a Form, namely Sitting, in which Theaetetus is participating; it posits that Sitting *is* with respect to Theaetetus. So now the puzzle is to work out the metaphysical implications of a false statement. ‘Theaetetus flies’ posits that there is a Form, namely Flying, in which Theaetetus is participating. However, we know that Theaetetus is sitting, not flying—even that he cannot fly. The false statement is saying something different to the things that are. The things that are, in this case, are the Forms in which Theaetetus participates. So we can imagine Theaetetus as a set of Forms. There will be another set of Forms, the part of Difference, over which Theaetetus is set. This set will consist of the Forms which are different to Theaetetus, yet related to him in some way. We can posit yet another set of Forms, the part of Sameness—the great Kind which is the partner to Difference—over which Theaetetus is set; the set of Forms which are the *same* as Theaetetus. Making a false statement about Theaetetus makes the claim that a Form which belongs to that part of Difference over which Theaetetus is set is part of that part of Sameness over which Theaetetus is set. So ‘Theaetetus flies’ makes the claim that Flying, which is in the part of Difference over which Theaetetus is set and therefore *is not* with respect to Theaetetus, *is* with respect to Theaetetus. This is what Plato seems to be referring to at 263d1-2, when he notes that a false statement ‘says different things as the same or not beings as beings’.

In defining truth and falsity, Plato almost exclusively uses plurals. Examples include ‘and the true one says *those that are*, as they are, about you’ (263b4), ‘they’re different things that are from the things that are about you’ (263b10-11), ‘if someone says things about you, but says different things as the same or not beings as beings’ (263d1-3). Van Eck calls this ‘striking’, and agrees with Michael Frede that ‘this use of plurals is deliberate’.⁸ Frede notes that ‘Plato could have said in 263b3-4 that the true statement says of something that is that it is’, but ‘he wants to get a reference to the whole class of things that are, relative to a given subject, into the characterization of the true statement, as this will be needed to get an adequate characterization of the false statement’.⁹ Brown disagrees; she claims that the plural form is just ‘a stylistic device loved by Plato but

⁸ van Eck, pp. 275-276.

⁹ Michael Frede, “Plato’s *Sophist* on False Statements”, in Richard Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 420.

highly confusing to the reader'.¹⁰ Brown argues that we should re-write the passage to eliminate the plurals. Her chief reason for advocating this is that 'Theaetetus sits', 'which plainly says one thing about Theaetetus, is described as saying *ta onta*, things that are'.¹¹ So, on Brown's reading, the true statement 'says, of something that is concerning you (viz., sitting) that it is', where the false statement 'says, of something that is not (viz., flying) that it is'.¹² This is an unorthodox view; as a rule we do not re-write Plato's work because we think he should have written it differently. The plural forms here do not seem to be merely stylistic. Van Eck notes that in *Sophist* 263 we find the plural forms, 'which normally refer to set of things, used to apply to the singular attributes Sitting and Flying. In order to account for this let us first work out what the meaning of these plural expressions is and then see how they function in the analysis of 263'.¹³ According to van Eck, the plural forms at 263 are used to refer to 'the things that are the case concerning Theaetetus. These are the attributes that apply to Theaetetus (the properties he has, the forms he participates of)'.¹⁴ So the use of the plural forms is legitimate; referring to 'the things that are' relative to Theaetetus is not merely for stylistic purposes. It is therefore inappropriate to recast Plato's words into the singular.

Scholarly Interpretations of Negation and Falsity

There seem to be four main interpretations of negation and falsity: (i) the Oxford interpretation, (ii) the incompatibility interpretation, (iii) the quasi-incompatibility interpretation (also called the incompatibility range interpretation), and (iv) the extensional interpretation. We shall briefly identify how each interpretation accounts for negation and falsity, provide objections to the incompatibility and extensional interpretations, and subject the apparently more popular Oxford and incompatibility range interpretations to a detailed analysis.

(i) Oxford Interpretation

Falsity as difference from everything that is x.

¹⁰ Brown, p. 454.

¹¹ Brown, p. 454.

¹² Brown, p. 454.

¹³ van Eck, pp. 284-285.

¹⁴ van Eck, p. 285. We could further argue that "Theaetetus sits" does say more than one thing in that it says "Theaetetus" and it says "sits". This would be an important point against Parmenides, who denied that there was more than one thing.

The Oxford interpretation was originally championed by W.D. Ross, I.M. Crombie, Michael Frede, and G.E.L. Owen. It is named after Oxford because of the association which all of those men had with that university.¹⁵ It is championed most recently by Job van Eck.

According to the Oxford interpretation, in saying the false statement “Theaetetus flies” we are not ‘asserting of him [Theaetetus] something that does not exist, but simply something that does not belong to him, something “other”, i.e. other than all the things that do belong to him’.¹⁶ Crombie’s slightly menacing personification (to borrow Keyt’s phrase) is too tempting to resist: ‘the false proposition accuses the object that it belongs to of an activity which is a real activity, but which is other than the activities of which that object is in fact guilty’.¹⁷ To put it in a slightly different way: if ‘not flying’ were applied to Theaetetus, then every kind which belongs to Theaetetus must be different from flying. In a false statement, ‘Theaetetus flies’ is false ‘because flying is different from everything that applies to Theaetetus’.¹⁸ Hence the Oxford interpretation may be simply remembered as: falsity as difference from everything belonging to *x*.

(ii) Incompatibility Interpretation

*Falsity as incompatibility with *x*.*

The incompatibility interpretation was first advanced by K. Lorenz and I. Mittlestrass in a jointly-authored article in 1966, although the idea of negation based on incompatibility is not a new one; Hegel proposed an analysis of negation based on incompatibility in *Wissenschaft der Logik* in 1816.¹⁹

¹⁵ David Keyt, “Plato on Falsity: *Sophist* 263B”, in E.N. Lee, A.P.D. Mourelatos, R.M. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, Assen, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1973, pp. 293-294.

Ross served in a number of posts, including Chancellor, between 1923-1947. Crombie was a Fellow in Philosophy at Wadham College 1947-1983. Frede was Chair in the History of Philosophy 1991-2005 (although Keyt is most likely referring to the fact that Frede undertook his doctorate at Oxford in 1962-63 with J.L. Ackrill and Owen), and Owen was an undergraduate at Oxford, and taught there from 1953-1966.

¹⁶ Sir David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 116.

¹⁷ I.M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, Volume 2, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 495.

¹⁸ van Eck, p. 275.

¹⁹ Crivelli, p. 189.

Under the incompatibility interpretation, the false statement “Theaetetus flies” ‘says, about Theaetetus, something that is *incompatible with* what is about him’.²⁰ A statement of negation such as “Theaetetus is not flying”, expresses that “flying” is incompatible with Theaetetus or with some predicate which holds of Theaetetus. This would seem to be the interpretation closest to natural speech; van Eck agrees that ‘we usually verify a sentence of the form ‘x is not F’ by establishing that x has an attribute G, incompatible with F’.²¹

(iii) Quasi-Incompatibility (Incompatibility Range) Interpretation

Falsity as a range of attributes incompatible with x.

This interpretation is proposed as a modification of the incompatibility interpretation. Crivelli calls it the quasi-incompatibility interpretation; Brown calls it the incompatibility range interpretation. I follow Brown’s naming convention.

According to this interpretation, the false statement “Theaetetus flies” says ‘something different [from the relevant range of incompatible properties] from what is about you’.²² A negative statement then—“Theaetetus is not flying”—asserts that there is a range of incompatible attributes, one of which Theaetetus participates in (and, as a result, he cannot participate in the others). An incompatibility range is defined in the previous section; it is a set of mutually incompatible Forms that collectively constitute all possible predicates in their range. In expressing negative and false statements, we would say that if ‘not flying’ is applied to Theaetetus, then flying is different to, but belonging to the same incompatibility range as, some kind that holds of Theaetetus. For false statements, “Theaetetus flies” is false because ‘flying is different from something taken from the range of attributes incompatible with flying (viz., sitting) that applies to Theaetetus’.²³

(iv) Extensional Interpretation

Falsity as difference from every x-type object.

The extensional interpretation can be found as early as the 1920s—though not under that name—and seems to have lasted to the present day. It has had several proponents,

²⁰ Brown, p. 455. Emphasis Brown’s.

²¹ van Eck, p. 287.

²² Brown, p. 457. Square brackets are Brown’s.

²³ van Eck, p. 275.

including Taylor, Frede—although he later abandoned it for the Oxford Interpretation—and Bostock, but most recently it appears to be championed by Crivelli.

Taylor and Bostock were quoted above, reproduced again here: when we say something like “A is not x ”, this ‘does not mean that A is nothing at all, but only that it is something other than anything which is x ’.²⁴ To put it another way, ‘to say that a thing is not large is to say that it is one of the things other than the large things’.²⁵ So the negative statement “Theaetetus is not flying” says that Theaetetus is different from every flying object. Both negation and falsity have at their core that Theaetetus is different from every flying object. This interpretation has the virtue of simplicity; the cause for negation and falsity seems to be exactly the same in both cases.

Objections to the Incompatibility and Extensional Interpretations

In these objections we rely heavily on Crivelli’s analysis of each interpretation. Crivelli performed an exhaustive investigation of each interpretation; rather than attempt to reinvent the wheel and do all the work from scratch we shall borrow his insights.²⁶

Incompatibility Interpretation

Crivelli notes that this interpretation seems attractive for at least two reasons: it appears able to explain negation by only invoking positive kinds, and it appears to fit the text.²⁷ There is no requirement for negative Kinds; negation is defined by a being set against a being, as Plato describes at 257e2-4. It appears to fit the text in that at 257b Plato does seem to discuss negation in terms of incompatibility, using the example of the not-large meaning the small or the equal. However, it is exposed to three objections: first, it is negative, because ‘incompatibility could only be explained through negation itself’.²⁸ Thus the incompatibility interpretation becomes circular as negation is explained by negation. Second, it is not clear what type of incompatibility two attributes may be said to possess—is it physical incompatibility, analytic, logical? It does not seem to be logical incompatibility; Bertrand Russell follows Leibniz in claiming that ‘two positive

²⁴ Taylor, p. 389.

²⁵ Bostock, p. 115.

²⁶ Like Sir Isaac Newton, we shall stand on the shoulders of giants.

²⁷ Crivelli, pp. 187-189.

²⁸ Wiggins, p. 291, n. 15a.

predicates . . . cannot be logically incompatible'.²⁹ Finally, Crivelli claims that an incompatibility interpretation of negation does not seem universally applicable. While it is true, he points out, that 'not white' is true of courage, is it possible to identify any Kind which is incompatible with whiteness yet holds of courage?³⁰ The death blow comes in that the incompatibility interpretation must read *heteron* as "incompatibility" rather than "difference" and, as the previous section concluded, 'incompatibility has no place in Plato's explanation of falsehood'.³¹ The incompatibility interpretation is not able to plausibly recover from this problem; hence, it must be discarded.

Extensional Interpretation

The extensional interpretation seems to work for negation, if not for falsity. Crivelli undertakes an extended defence of it related to negation which relies heavily on the Greek.³² In determining falsity, however, Crivelli admits the extensional interpretation 'sits uneasily' with the passage in question.³³ The true statement ('Theaetetus sits') says of the *things that are*, that they are, about Theaetetus. Under the extensional interpretation, this says that Theaetetus is an object of which the kind 'sitting' holds. It is difficult to see how this applies to Plato's description of a true statement. A false statement ('Theaetetus flies') says of things *other than the things that are*, that they are, about Theaetetus. Under the extensional interpretation, this says that Theaetetus is other than all objects of which the kind 'flying' holds. Once again, it is difficult to apply this to Plato's characterisation of a false statement. The final objection to the extensional interpretation is that it does not seem appropriate to define relations between Forms—which is what negation and falsity are, metaphysically—in terms of particulars. Therefore, the extensional interpretation must be discarded.

We have separated off the Oxford and incompatibility range interpretations for a more detailed analysis because they seem to be the stronger interpretations; they cannot be effectively rebutted in a paragraph or two, unlike the incompatibility and extensional interpretations.

²⁹ Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948, p. 140. Russell does not explain this overmuch, except to say that 'given two complex predicates P and Q, they will only be *logically* incompatible if one of them contains a constituent A and the other contains a constituent not-A'. p. 140.

³⁰ Crivelli, p. 188-189.

³¹ Owen, p. 232, n. 19.

³² Crivelli, pp. 192-4.

³³ Crivelli, p. 240.

Oxford Interpretation—Detailed Analysis

Van Eck argues that, in considering the Oxford and incompatibility range interpretations, we are wondering whether *Sophist* ‘offers an adequate theory of falsity or not. On the Oxford interpretation it does, on the incompatibility range interpretation it does not’.³⁴

Brown’s Criticism of the Oxford Interpretation

As discussed above, the definition of truth and falsity given at 263b4-11, and the summary at 263d1-4 almost exclusively uses plural forms (for example: ‘the true one says *those that are*, that they are, about you’ (263b4)).³⁵ Frede and van Eck argue that this is deliberate: Plato ‘wants to get a reference to the whole class of things that are, relative to a given subject . . . to get an adequate characterisation of the false statement’ (as quoted more fully above).³⁶ Brown, on the other hand, claims that adherents of the Oxford interpretation ‘invoke the plural’ at 263b7, where the Eleatic Stranger says ‘and the false one says things different from *those that are*’, so that they can ‘indicate that it is correct to import a universal quantifier into the translation’.³⁷ With the universal quantifier duly imported, the phrase reads: ‘and the false one says things different from [all of] *those that are*’. We might rephrase this as: “things different from *everything that is*”. Brown claims that ‘there is no good reason to supply . . . that universal quantifier—the “every”—which is so crucial’,³⁸ and that referring to the plural at 263b7 is not legitimate. In the true statement at 263b4-5, we read: ‘the true one says *those that are*, as they are, about you’. The Greek for *those that are* is *ta onta*. Brown notes that ‘since *ta onta* evidently refers to just one thing/verb, “sits”, it must there be understood as “what is.” We cannot, with the Oxford interpretation, suddenly read it to mean “everything that is” two lines later’.³⁹ This is part of Brown’s requirement that we remove the plural forms in the definition of truth and falsity. The true statement is referring to only one *thing that is*, about Theaetetus, so it makes sense to infer that the

³⁴ van Eck, p. 275.

³⁵ The plural / singular debate here is not only a semantic issue or a translation preference. Whether we agree that Plato’s text should retain its plural form or if it should be re-tooled into the singular will significantly strengthen either the Oxford or the incompatibility range interpretation. Hence the emphasis on it.

³⁶ Frede, p. 420.

³⁷ Brown, p. 454, n. 46.

³⁸ Brown, p. 455.

³⁹ Brown, p. 455, n. 49.

false statement refers to one *thing that is not*, about Theaetetus, if only to avoid inconsistency. Since we are working from standard texts in English rather than engaging with the Greek directly, we can only report on what appears to be a controversial issue here; we cannot attempt to weigh in on an issue of language interpretation. The discussion is included because of its potential effect on the metaphysics, and because van Eck spends some time discussing it.

Brown's second point of criticism of the Oxford interpretation is that it requires different supplements. Assuming we can be justified in writing the statements in the singular, in a false statement 'something different is said to be the same'.⁴⁰ According to the Oxford interpretation, 'in the false statement 'something different [from everything that is] is said to be the same [as something that is]'. And this is impossibly awkward'.⁴¹ The awkwardness arises from the Oxford interpretation being forced to change suddenly from the universal sense (everything that is) to the existential (something that is). Brown finds this move inconsistent, it would be more fitting to use the same supplement both times, as the incompatibility range interpretation does; it uses "something that is" in both cases.

On the basis of a misguided interpretation of stylistic devices as philosophical points and an awkwardness caused by different supplements, Brown concludes that the Oxford interpretation is hard to find at 263b4-11 (the full definition of false statements), and impossible to find at 263d1-4 (the summary of the investigation).

Crivelli's Critique of the Oxford Interpretation

Crivelli agrees that the Oxford interpretation 'fits Plato's account of falsehood at 262e11-263d5', but thinks that it 'cannot be plausibly read into 257b9-257c3'.⁴² By this he means to highlight what he sees as a fundamental difference between the way Plato has written the text and the way in which the Oxford interpretation needs to handle it.

The relevant section says:

'so we won't agree with somebody who says that negation signifies a contrary. We'll only admit this much: when "not" and "non-" are prefixed to names that follow them, they indicate something *other* than

⁴⁰ Brown, p. 456.

⁴¹ Brown, p. 456.

⁴² Crivelli, p. 186.

the names, or rather, other than the things to which the names following the negation are applied’.

According to Crivelli, the Oxford interpretation needs a universal quantifier—‘something . . . other than [all of] the things to which the names following the negation are applied’—but the text at that point uses a particular quantifier—the “not” prefixed to the names that follow indicates *one* of the things other than [. . .] whatever objects the names uttered after the negative are given to’.⁴³ The Oxford interpretation requires not-*x* to mean “different to everything that is *x*”, so it needs a universal quantifier in Plato’s sentence to account for the “everything”. However, it seems at this point that the text is using an existential quantifier: “different to *something* that is *x*”. This would seem to be a problem for the Oxford interpretation, for it means that while it is able to explain falsity, it fails to account for negation, and Plato needs an account of both.

Crivelli describes—and rejects—four possible ways to reconcile the Oxford interpretation with 257b9-c4, the third of which may actually be quite plausible, despite Crivelli’s objections. If the phrase “*ton állon ti*”, which Crivelli translates as ‘one of the things different’ is rendered as ‘something different’, the Oxford interpretation can be maintained. Crivelli claims that this commits the translator to a phrase like ‘the “not” indicates that the object which is being spoken about is, i.e. participates in, <only> something different from the kind signified by the words that follow’, and objects that ‘“only” is not in the text and cannot be plausibly supplied’.⁴⁴ It is not immediately clear why Crivelli chooses “only” as his interjection. However, it seems that ‘only’ does not need to be supplied; Nicholas P. White’s translation of *Sophist*, the main reference to that dialogue in this text, has: ‘when “not” and “non-” are prefixed to names that follow them, they indicate something *other* than the names, or rather, other than the things to which the names following the negation are applied’ (257b10-c3). This reading of the text does not have “only”, and it does not seem implausible to read a universal quantifier here. Thus it seems Crivelli’s objection to the Oxford interpretation at 257 is a philological one, and not a philosophical one. It is grounded in an understanding of the

⁴³ Crivelli, pp. 186-7.

⁴⁴ Crivelli, p. 187.

nuances of Plato's Greek and the difficulties of translating it into English; beyond the discussion of this paragraph it is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴⁵

Crivelli is content to accept the Oxford interpretation when considering false statements, for he has significant objections to the other major interpretations which he considers, and he argues that Plato's account of negation commits him to the following principle: 'for something not to be (a) ϕ is for it to be different from everything that is (a) ϕ (where ' ϕ ' is a schematic letter to be replaced with general terms)'.⁴⁶ This statement can be restated thus: for x not to be (a) ϕ is for x to be different from everything that is (a) ϕ . So for flying to not be about Theaetetus is for flying to be different from everything that is about Theaetetus (substituting 'about Theaetetus' for ϕ and 'flying' for x).

Defense of the Oxford Interpretation

Brown argues that the Oxford interpretation invokes a universal quantifier inappropriately at 263b7, inconsistently switching between singular and plural, and that the Oxford interpretation, in requiring different supplements, is impossibly awkward. Van Eck answers Brown's criticisms, arguing that leaving the text as it is with the plural forms intact, it is possible to arrive at the Oxford interpretation without problems. van Eck proposes we think of negation and falsity in terms of two sets: the set T—the *things that are* concerning Theaetetus, and the set DT—the *things that are not* concerning Theaetetus, namely everything *that is different* to T.⁴⁷ He proposes a third set as well, the set of *things that are the same* concerning Theaetetus. This is the set of things each of which is the same as some of the *things that are* concerning Theaetetus; this set will have precisely the same members as T: $ST=T$. With these sets in mind, what does it mean to say that "Theaetetus flies" says of things different from the things that are, that they are? Let us call the statement "Theaetetus flies" t . So a false statement claims that t , which is part of DT, is a member of ST. Obviously t cannot be both in DT and ST simultaneously, for Difference and Sameness do not combine. Van Eck notes that

⁴⁵ As in previous puzzles grounded in the Greek, here I can only report on what appears to be a contentious issue; I cannot weigh in with any authority. In this case I have been bold enough to borrow White's authority as a translator and use it to oppose Crivelli's objection.

⁴⁶ Crivelli, p. 240.

⁴⁷ DT cannot be the set of things that are different to at least one thing in T; this would be the set of all properties. Van Eck therefore requires that DT is 'the set of things (each of which is) different from all his [Theaetetus'] attributes'. p.285.

‘flying is one of the things different from all the things that are, but the false sentence “Theaetetus flies” says that is one of the things identical to some of the things that are’.⁴⁸ This slight adjustment to the Oxford interpretation means that it does not have to smuggle a universal quantifier into 263b7, thus the first of Brown’s criticisms is answered. The different supplements objection can be dealt with also: the same supplement (“the things that are”) can be added both times, to get, from the quote above: “Theaetetus flies” says that (flying) is one of *the things that are* identical to some of *the things that are*. The difference in the text (“one of” and “some of”) provide the only possible reading: ‘taking both occurrences of ‘the things that are’ in the universal sense, or taking both in an existential sense would lead to an anomalous reading, involving an empty set and the universal set, respectively: an absurdity in both cases’.⁴⁹

Crivelli’s main objection to the Oxford interpretation—that it cannot be plausibly read into 257b9-257c3—can be met by the alternative translation of the passage employed by White; it is, therefore, an objection that we shall set aside.

Incompatibility Range Interpretation—Detailed Analysis

Having evaluated the Oxford interpretation and found it reasonably plausible, let us consider the incompatibility range interpretation.

Brown’s Argument for the Incompatibility Range Interpretation

Brown holds that at 257b1-c3, Plato explains the meaning of negative expressions. The passage is as follows:

257b

ES: Now let’s look at this.

T: What?

ES: It seems that when we say *that which is not*, we don’t say something contrary to *that which is*, but only something different from it.

T: Why?

ES: It’s like this. When we speak of something as not large, does it seem to you that we indicate the small rather than the equal?

T: Of course not.

ES: So we won’t agree with somebody who says that negation signifies a contrary. We’ll only admit this much: when “not” and “non-”

⁴⁸ van Eck, p. 285.

⁴⁹ van Eck, p. 286.

are prefixed to names that follow them, they indicate something *other* than the names, or rather, other than the things to which the names following the negation are applied.

According to Brown, in the sentence explaining the meaning of ‘not large’ ‘we are introduced to the idea of a range of incompatible properties or attributes F, G, and H, such that what is not F is either G or H’.⁵⁰ To support this, Brown asks us to ‘think how laughable it would have been if . . . the ES had chosen a random attribute different from large, and said (for instance), “when we say not big, do you think we signify small any more than yellow?” Being yellow does not rule out being large, so appealing to it in the explication of what “not large” means would be ridiculous’.⁵¹ This is all the support Brown provides for her contention that Plato is at pains in 257 to explain the meaning of negative expressions.

The second argument Brown provides is that, unlike the Oxford interpretation, the incompatibility range interpretation is able to provide the same supplement both times. In a false statement ‘different things are said to be the same, and not beings are said to be beings’.⁵² In Brown’s formula, we replace the plural with the singular, to get: ‘something different [from what is about you] is said to be the same [as what is about you]’.⁵³ By avoiding the inconsistency of the Oxford interpretation, Brown can provide a more elegant and less ontologically taxing—not to mention linguistically taxing— notion of falsity.

Brown does note a caveat in her interpretation: it gives ‘at best a sufficient, but not a necessary, condition for a false statement. (The same objection applies to the equivalent accounts of negation)’.⁵⁴ She gives the example of “virtue is not square”. It can be false that virtue is square, or true that virtue is not square, without it being the case that virtue has any shape at all, under the incompatibility range interpretation.

⁵⁰ Brown, p. 457.

⁵¹ Brown, p. 457.

⁵² Brown, p. 457. Her translation of *Sophist* 263d.

⁵³ Brown, p. 458. Square brackets are Brown’s.

⁵⁴ Brown, p. 458.

Van Eck's Criticism of the Incompatibility Range Interpretation

Van Eck claims that Brown's reading of 257b3-b3 'leads to an absurd result and an inconsistency with the immediate context'.⁵⁵ These could be considered fighting words. Suppose we accept Brown's argument and agree that not- x means something from a range of things, incompatible with x , other than the things for which x holds. Now let us substitute Being for x . So not-Being is something from the range of things incompatible with Being other than the things for which Being holds. The problem is this: there is nothing incompatible with Being. So the term not-Being is meaningless, yet at 256d8-9 the Eleatic Stranger observes that '*change* really is both something that is not, but also a thing that is'. In other words: it is possible to use the term "not-being" in a meaningful way. Van Eck concludes: 'if we have to maintain the above reading of negative expressions 'not X ' in terms of an incompatibility range of X , the result is devastating. It annihilates the very notion of not being that is at the core of the ES's argument'.⁵⁶ Van Eck disputes that the section at 257 gives the meaning of negative expressions: it is only if we see in the example of the not-large 'a full account of the meaning of 'not X ', and view the phrase 'something other than' as the definiens of 'not', do we have to read this 'something other' as restricted to an incompatibility range'.⁵⁷ If van Eck is correct, it would appear that one of the core assumptions Brown has made has turned out to be groundless; Plato does not explain the meaning of negative expressions at 257.

Van Eck argues that 'the incompatibility range interpretation of 263 has a serious drawback'.⁵⁸ At 263b11-12, the Eleatic Stranger remarks: 'we said that concerning each thing many beings are and many are not'. This seems to refer back to 256e5-6: 'so as concerning each of the forms that which is is extensive, and that which is not is indefinite in quantity'. At 256 there is no mention of incompatibility; the indefinite *that which is not* with respect to x seems to be referring to all Forms different from x . Thus the incompatibility range interpretation is inconsistent with its understanding of "not being", 'jumping from one use (restricted to an incompatibility range, 263b7-11) to the other (plain difference, 263b12) and back again (restricted, 263d1-2)'.⁵⁹ It is not clear

⁵⁵ van Eck, p. 279.

⁵⁶ van Eck, p. 280.

⁵⁷ van Eck, p. 280.

⁵⁸ van Eck, p. 283.

⁵⁹ van Eck, p. 283.

how the incompatibility range interpretation could plausibly recover from both of these objections.

Crivelli's Critique of the Incompatibility Range Interpretation

Crivelli's main objection to the incompatibility range interpretation is that it fails to fit the text. *Sophist* does not explicitly refer to incompatibility ranges. If this interpretation is correct, we would expect the remark at 257b9-c3 to refer explicitly to an incompatibility range. But, 'the passage explicitly says only that if a negative predicable is applied to an object, then what is said about this object is that some kind that holds of it is different from the kind signified by the predicable that follows the negative particle'.⁶⁰ No reference to incompatibility ranges—or ranges of any kind—is made at that point.

Crivelli makes another objection, which he also applied to the incompatibility interpretation. While "not white" appears to be true of courage, 'it is hard to identify a kind that both holds of courage and is incompatible with whiteness'.⁶¹ The Kinds incompatible with whiteness will be blackness, greyness, yellowness, and all the other colour forms. This seems to be a similar objection to the one Brown herself noted about virtue being square. Crivelli concludes that the incompatibility range interpretation attributes to Plato an account of negation that is too narrow.⁶² For the same reasons, Crivelli is moved to dismiss the incompatibility range interpretation for falsity as well.

Plato's Purpose

It seems, at this point, that van Eck's defence of the Oxford interpretation has significantly strengthened it, and his and Crivelli's objections to the incompatibility range interpretation have rendered it almost useless. However, we will not yet move to accept the Oxford interpretation. First we will speculatively discuss what Plato's project has been regarding negation and falsity, and consider how—or, indeed, if—the Oxford interpretation is able to fit into that project. This discussion is speculative; with only limited insight into Plato's mind it is impossible to divine his intentions with any certainty.

⁶⁰ Crivelli, p. 191.

⁶¹ Crivelli, pp. 191-2.

⁶² Crivelli, p. 192.

The investigation into false speech and belief begins in the first attempt at a seventh definition of the sophist around 232a; it proceeds through the method of collection and division, dividing each Kind ‘along its natural joints’ (*Phaedrus* 265e2). After some discussion, the interlocutors agree that the sophist might be found in a division of imitation (*Sophist* 235d-e), which is duly split into likeness-making, producing an imitation ‘by keeping to the proportions of length, breadth, and depth of his model, and also by keeping to the appropriate colours of its parts’ (235d5-e2), and appearance-making, where ‘those craftsmen say goodbye to truth, and produce in their images the proportions that seem to be beautiful instead of the real ones’ (236a5-6). In this latter part of imitation the interlocutors encounter the problem of *what is not*; in seeking a division of appearance-making they need to come up with an account of false images. Therefore in seeking an account of negation and falsity Plato is seeking a way to understand appearance-making; when he divides it again at the end of the dialogue he reminds us that ‘the other kind [in the division of copy-making] was going to be appearance-making, if falsity appeared to be truly falsity and by nature one of *those that are* (266d8-e1). The division of appearance-making into appearances made with tools and appearances made with one’s own body (which the interlocutors name imitation) is not part of Plato’s puzzle regarding false speech and belief; it does not affect our project and we can safely disregard it.

The Oxford interpretation, while a workable account of negation and falsity, cannot be understood as Plato’s account. The Oxford interpretation saddles Plato with a metaphysical explanation that has limited grounding in his ontology. While van Eck’s proposed sets T, DT, and ST do work to explain how a statement is false, it does not correspond with Plato’s ontological requirements revealed in *Sophist*. Plato is seeking an account of negation and falsity which is grounded in the five so-called great Kinds; the Oxford interpretation has replaced the Kinds with sets. However, with some small modifications, the Oxford interpretation can provide a satisfactory account of negation and falsity that suits Plato’s requirements.

Difference Range Interpretation (DRI) for Negation and Falsity

We have established that Plato is using the Great Kinds as building blocks to explain negation and falsity. These Kinds—Being, Change, Rest, Sameness, and Difference—are the concepts in which an account of negation and falsity must be grounded if it is to have the claim of representing Plato’s ideas and working towards his goals.

The previous section of this paper proposed an interpretation of the parts of Difference which limited the scope of an individual part to some set of attributes, and this was called the *difference range interpretation* (DRI). This interpretation can be applied to negation and falsity as well. When related to the parts of Difference, it was argued that a part is restricted by its relation to that which was set over it. A statement of negation of the form “ x is not F ” says that x is a member of the part of difference not- F , over which F is set. However, statements of the form “ x is not F ” can express simply that x participates in Difference relative to F ; that x and F are non-identical. It is not immediately clear how the two kinds of statement are to be differentiated; one answer might be that statements of Difference *simpliciter* are statements of negative identity, while statements requiring the parts of Difference are statements of negative predication; this is not immediately clear. Nor is it clear whether this constitutes a problem for the DRI; that is a question beyond the scope of this paper.

The aboutness feature of statements that Plato introduces fits with the DRI. The key feature of the DRI is that a part of Difference will be limited to a certain range by a relationship to whatever is set over it, just as the parts of Knowledge are limited in their scope by a relationship to the subject which is set over them. This is aboutness. Plato is adamant that a statement must be about something (*Sophist* 262e 5-6). Thus the statement “Theaetetus sits” says of the things that are, that they are, about Theaetetus. This gives us an aboutness frame in which to work: things-that-are-about-Theaetetus. The part of Difference over which Theaetetus is set, the “not-Theaetetus”, will consist of everything *that is* which is different to everything that is in Theaetetus but is limited by a relation to Theaetetus or the things in which he participates. So the form of Fire—assuming there is such a Form—is not going to be part of the not-Theaetetus, since it has no relation to him.

A false statement about x claims that something in the part of Difference over which x is set—the not- x —is in fact in the part of Sameness over which x is set—the same-as- x . The DRI is able to interpret false speech and belief in terms of the five Great Kinds.

The Oxford interpretation fails only because it does not take account of the distinction between Forms and Kinds, and it does not take account of the way in which Forms have parts. It is easily adapted to fit with the DRI. Van Eck proposes three sets, T, DT, and ST, where T is the set of attributes that *are*, relative to Theaetetus, DT is the set of attributes different to everything in T, and ST is the set of attributes that are the same as something in T; DT is the set of attributes that *are not*, relative to Theaetetus, ST is a set of attributes that *are*, relative to Theaetetus. Under the difference range interpretation, ST would remain unchanged: the set of attributes that *are*, about Theaetetus; the Forms—and, perforce, Kinds—in which he participates. DT is still the set of attributes that *are not*, about Theaetetus, but the two sets ST and DT do not, taken together, constitute the universal set. DT is the set of things different to everything that is about Theaetetus, limited by some application to Theaetetus' attributes.

Objections

This interpretation might be exposed to the same objection as the incompatibility range interpretation: it, at best, provides a sufficient but not a necessary condition for negation or falsity. Let us consider a statement like: “virtue is not square”, and examine what the DRI is committed to saying this means. Under the DRI, virtue is-not square indicates that there is a part of Difference over which Virtue is set (not-Virtue), which contains everything different to Virtue, but restricted to only those things related to it. It would seem that Squareness does not need to be a part of not-Virtue, so the statement “virtue is not square” must be taken either as a statement of negative identity or dismissed as meaningless. The first option seems incorrect; while it is true that virtue does not actually have a shape, the statement seems clearly to be applying the predicate squareness to the subject virtue. To simply dismiss the statement as meaningless does not seem correct either. It seems that the DRI may not be able to deal with statements which are neither clearly true nor clearly false. Whether this is a problem with Plato's metaphysics or with our interpretation of it is not clear. It is also unclear how Plato would regard statements like “virtue is not square”. However, we must also remember that we are not attempting to construct an account of negation and falsity which is

sufficient and necessary; we are attempting to create an interpretation that is as close as possible to Plato's account of negation and falsity, which may not be a perfect account.⁶³

Test of the DRI

In order to get an idea of how effective the DRI is at handling Plato's account of negation and falsity, let us subject it to some of the objections levelled at the incompatibility range and Oxford interpretations—for it contains elements of both—and evaluate its success in each case. Let us test the DRI's response to (i) not-Being—that is, the part of Difference opposed to Being—and (ii) using different supplements.

(i): Not-Being

This test did not work for the incompatibility range interpretation as it led to an absurd result; not-being indicates something from a range of attributes incompatible with Being, but there are *no* attributes incompatible with Being. Under the DRI, then, not-being is a part of Difference whose members are limited by their relation to Being. Surely, this would be everything except for Being itself, for everything is related to Being by virtue of sharing in it; by virtue of existing. So a sentence of the form “*x* is not being” cannot be a statement of negative predication—for if it were, then *x* would be something which has no share in Being; *x* would be *that which is no way is*, which is impossible to talk about (268c8-10). So the sentence “*x* is not being” must be a statement of negative identity; for everything is not-being by virtue of being different to Being. So it is not clear whether a part of Difference for Being is required. It seems the DRI is able to fare somewhat better than the incompatibility range interpretation in dealing with not-Being, but at the risk of becoming aporetic.

(ii) Different Supplements

One of the objections Brown levelled at the Oxford interpretation was that it required different supplements at 263, holding that in a false statement: ‘something different [from everything that is] is said to be the same [as something that is]’.⁶⁴ Van Eck argued that the same supplement—the things that are—could be added, and that there would necessarily be a difference in order to avoid absurdity. The false statement “Theaetetus

⁶³ The tendency to object to philosophical problems in Plato as interpretative problems is not a new one; Keyt points it out but observes that ‘this fallacy is easily committed by Platonic scholars. One doesn't want the master to look bad’. Keyt, p. 286.

⁶⁴ Brown, p. 456.

flies” says ‘*those that are not*, but that they are. (263b9). If we substitute the definition of “those that are not” from 263b7, we see that the false statement says ‘things different from *those that are*, but that they are’. The false statement “Theaetetus flies” says things different from *the things that are* but that that they are [the same as] *the things that are*, about Theaetetus. This way, we have the same supplement, and we have not attempted to smuggle a universal quantifier into the text. The question to ask, though, is what does this actually mean under the DRI? Substituting “Theaetetus” for “*the things that are*”, we see that the false statement says things different from Theaetetus but that they are [the same as] Theaetetus. It seems that the DRI is able to accomplish this task as well.

Conclusion

Now that Plato possesses a working account of negation and falsity, he is able to propose a division of appearance-making, into appearances made with tools and appearances made with one’s own body (imitation). We shall review the metaphysical elements which have allowed him to do this, which have been discussed in this paper.

Review

We began by asking whether Form (*eidos*) and Kind (*genos*) are, as in Cornford’s view, simply synonymous or if, as in de Rijk’s view, Kinds are metaphysically distinct from Forms. We have found that the evidence seems to support de Rijk’s view; Plato seems to be using Kinds to solve problems where Forms alone would be inadequate, and Plato’s problems seem to require Kinds to be non-identical with Forms. We have therefore come to the conclusion that Kinds are a special type of Forms which have the property of combining with lower Forms, thereby facilitating the method of collection and division. This seems to indicate a hierarchy of Forms which become less general—less “sunlike”—the further down the hierarchy they are. Forms combine if their names can be put together in a true affirmative statement like “motion exists”; and they do not combine if their names can be put together in a true negative statement: “motion does not rest”, for example. The five Great Kinds—Being, Motion, Rest, Difference, and Sameness—are what Plato is using as his foundation to establish the distinctions between *what is* and *what is not*.

Plato has said that Forms cannot be compound, but explicitly mentions two Forms in *Sophist* which are “chopped up” into parts. These Forms have parts which have no independent existence; they are defined relative to some external object. Through the Difference Range Interpretation (DRI), we have shown that these parts will be restricted to some range on the basis of some relation to whatever defines the part. For instance, the part of Difference not- x , over which x is set, the members of not- x will be restricted by a relationship to x . We have assumed that this works for particulars as well as Forms; there will be a part of Difference for each particular, as well as for each Form. Exactly what the relationship is which limits the scope of a part does not seem clear; it might be applicability or the ability to combine. The DRI seems to be the only interpretation which is able to deal satisfactorily with the way parts of Forms seem to function; all other interpretations we examined ran into difficulties.

In the final section, we examined how Plato defines negation and falsity in speech and belief. There are two important features to statements: aboutness and naming. The aboutness requirement is particularly important for true and false statements. Plato showed that a true statement says of the things that are, that they are, relative to a given subject, while a false statement says of different things to the things that are that they are, relative to a subject. In this way different things are said to be the same; not-beings are said to be beings. We examined different interpretations of Plato’s account of negation and falsity and proposed an alternative: the DRI, which we had previously proposed to account for parts of Forms. This posits that in a false statement about x , something which is in the part of Difference set opposite x (the not- x) is claimed to be in the part of Sameness set opposite x , and therefore to be part of x . We have used the Oxford interpretation, as most recently modified by Job van Eck, as a basis for forming the DRI; having subjected it to some possible objections we find that it works reasonably well.

The Difference Range Interpretation (DRI)

We might ask at this point, why opt for the DRI over the Oxford interpretation, if the Oxford interpretation is able to everything the DRI does and more? The Oxford interpretation provides a good account of negation and falsity, but there seems no reason to believe it is Plato’s account. The DRI, on the other hand, is able to solve Plato’s problems, using the tools Plato has created. Additionally, the DRI is able to

account for parts of Forms as well as negation and falsity; it seems most appropriate to have one interpretation to cover these related points, rather than needing two or three, depending on which interpretation one favours. As we saw, Crivelli did not think any single interpretation was able to adequately account for both negation *and* falsity. The DRI *can* account for both these things, and is able to account for parts of Forms as well. It is true that the DRI has problems and does not seem to be able to account for all negative or false statements—especially statements that are neither clearly true nor clearly false—but it seems that this interpretation is closer to Plato’s intentions than any other we have examined. As previously mentioned, we are not looking to simply construct the best account of negation and falsity; we are looking to get as close as possible to Plato’s intentions. We therefore opt for the DRI which seems to be, for the reasons given above, closer to what Plato has in mind when pursuing an account of negation and falsity.

The Sophist in Context

Commentators seem to agree that Plato is doing something different in *Sophist*. Ross and de Rijk argue that Plato passes the entire range of previous Greek thought under review in the section from 242b to 251a. His purpose in doing so does not seem clear. Possibly he wishes to refute all possible alternatives, to argue that the theory he is unfolding in *Sophist* is the only acceptable choice. Whatever his purpose, he has been accused of ‘a seemingly callous indifference to his readers’ comfort’ and ‘bewilderingly loose language, even for him’.

It certainly seems that *Sophist* is a very different dialogue to those that have come before it. The so-called “early” dialogues are largely investigations into virtue, seeking definitions for moral questions. This theme continues through the “middle” period with the introduction of the theory of Forms as definitions, and the theory is expanded to solve more problems. In the “late” period, Plato seems to take a critical evaluation of his own theory, particularly in the *Parmenides*. In *Sophist* he continues, with the Forms no longer serving as moral definitions but as logical ones as well. In his discussion of *what is not*, Plato also had to discuss *what is*, in order to ensure a clear understanding of the Form of Being. It is this ‘metaphysical excursion into the topic of being’ and the new

theory of being that is explored in *Sophist* that provides much of the interest in this dialogue.¹

¹ Cooper, p. 236.

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