Leaving the Verb 'To Be' Behind: An Alternative Reading of Plato's *Sophist*

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G.E.L. Owen opens his famous study of the *Sophist* "Plato on Not-Being"[1] with the following remark: "Platonists who doubt that they are Spectators of Being must settle for the knowledge that they are investigators of the verb 'to be'" (223). In other words, those who have forsaken metaphysical inquiry are left to treat the *Sophist*'s investigation of being and non-being as an issue of the 'is' or 'ἐστί' understood in three ways—existentially, predicatively, or as an identity sign. Indeed, for the last fifty years, a great deal of scholarship on the *Sophist* has been consumed by the question of just what kind of ἐστί is at issue and what role it plays in the overall project of the Eleatic Stranger's investigation. From the early debate concerning the "disambiguation" of the 'is,' through Owen's groundbreaking claim that the 'is' is exclusively connective, to Lesley Brown's attempt to reconcile the connective with the complete 'is,' it has been an enduring, self-evident assumption that the key to understanding the strategy and success of the Stranger's endeavor is to investigate the character of the verb "to be."

And yet—given the raging and, to my mind, unsettled debate over the kind of 'is' operating in the statement at 256a1, κίνησις " Ἔστι δέ γε διὰ τὸ μετέχειν τοῦ ὄντος,"[2] and given that this style of reading leaves key portions of the Stranger's investigation unattended—it must be asked: what, other than the conventions and constraints of modern grammar, compels scholars to insist on the *verb* 'to be' as the governing interpretive framework?

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[1] G.E.L. Owen, "Plato on Not-Being," in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Garden City, 1971); reprinted in G.E.L. Owen, *Logic, Science and Dialectic*, ed. Martha Nussbaum (Ithaca, 1986). Page numbers cited will refer to the first edition.

[2] Plato, *Sophist*, in *Platonis Opera* (Oxford, 1995). Hereafter the stephanus page will be cited in the text. There are several English translations of the *Sophist*, among which are included those of Seth Benardete (Chicago, 1986), F.M. Cornford (Indianapolis, 1957), William S. Cobb (Savage, 1990), and Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis, 1993). I have also consulted Schleiermacher's German translation (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1994) for further translation ideas. The translations that appear here, however, are most often my own.

How can it be claimed that such an approach lends the greatest clarity to the *Sophist*? For it may very well be the case, as will be argued below, that predication for Plato cannot be captured in our modern grammatical terms, and that the attempt to frame the issue in this way presents a host of interpretive problems.

My task in this essay is to question this overall interpretive strategy and to argue that the central issues of the dialogue gain clarity and collective coherence when they are recast in terms of naming. This interpretation takes its departure from the work of Charlotte Stough in "Two Kinds of Naming in the *Sophist*" but extends these insights into areas left unaddressed by her work, specifically into the debate over 256a1, which has proven particularly vexing to all who place value on the role of the 'is,' most especially to those who argue for Plato's consistent use of the connective 'is.' An attempt to settle this long-standing disagreement about the structure and meaning of ἐστί at 256a1 in such a way that grants this line its own integrity will additionally be outlined.

It will be argued that in Plato's parlance, the *'esti'* functions as a name, albeit a special one. He makes no mention of a verb all second-order remarks on language in the *Sophist* are framed in terms of naming, not in terms of a verb, unless one considers the *rhema* discussed at 262af. a verb. But it will be further argued that translating *rhema* as 'verb' is likewise misleading. Plato uses *onoma* and *rhema* interchangeably at 237d2, and later on the distinction made is between two kinds of names. It will be shown, therefore, that modern grammatical structures do not provide the flexibility needed to capture the solution set forth in the 'greatest kinds' section. Indeed, the coherence of this section surfaces precisely when the incongruence between the structure of the *logos* presupposed by Plato and by us is acknowledged. At issue in this investigation, then, are the problems ushered in by the assumption that modern interpretive structures can be seamlessly mapped onto Plato's text, and by the concomitant effort to render Plato intelligible without reflecting on the rifts between our contemporary philosophical projects and the specific aims, context, and conceptual assumptions shaping Plato's work.

THE PUZZLES AND THE SOLUTION

Before critically analyzing Owen's position, a brief summary of the relevant passages in the *Sophist* will first be outlined. There are five stages in the section outlining the paradoxes surrounding non-being. The first stage (237b7–e7) calls attention to the traditional equation of non-being (μὴ ὄν) with "what in no way is" (τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν), in other words, with nothing. The conclusion drawn from the acceptance of this equation is that the person uttering non-being is not only saying nothing, but is furthermore not

speaking at all. The second stage (238a1-c11) entertains the dilemma that, even though we cannot attach "one" or any number to μὴ ὄν, we nonetheless speak of it as singular (τὸ μὴ ὄν) or plural (τὰ μὴ ὄντα). As a result, it is not possible to utter μὴ ὄν correctly, and it is declared to be unthinkable, inexpressible, unutterable, and unsayable. In the third stage (238d1–239c8), drawing further conclusions from the second stage, the Stranger declares that anyone uttering μὴ ὄν is forced to contradict oneself. With μὴ ὄν proving to be intractable, the sophist has hidden himself in a trackless area. The fourth stage (239c9–240c6) takes up the question of the "image," since image-making is the sophist's specialty. These four stages culminate in the fifth stage (240c7–241b3) where the Stranger concludes that, since μὴ ὄν has proved unutterable, false opinions and statements, then, which involve non-being, are likewise not possible for speaking and thinking. At 251–59, in his discussion of the greatest kinds, the Stranger offers a new conception of non-being so that the paradoxes earlier enumerated no longer ensue. In this discussion, the Stranger and Theaetetus have come to the conclusion that being and non-being—two of the five greatest kinds—participate in one another and permeate everything else. Non-being, redefined as the kind "otherness" (ἕτερον), is no longer understood as the contrary of being, is no longer equated with nothing, but is rather clarified as "other than." Consequently, being both is and is not, non-being both is and is not, and everything else in many senses is and in infinite ways is not.

Prior to Owen's analysis, the basic interpretation of the puzzle and solution sections (which Owen calls the "received view") was that the success of the Stranger's investigation into non-being lay in reforming the role of ἐστί mid-dialogue, between the puzzles and the solution, in order to save non-being.[3] According to this view, the Stranger in the puzzle section rehearses paradoxes arising from the old, traditional way of understanding non-being articulated by Parmenides and by Plato himself in the *Theaetetus*[4] and then simply discards this understanding by the time of the solution. Implicit in this traditional conception of non-being is the existential sense of ἐστί—the source of the paradoxes in the first place—for one can neither think nor speak of nothing, i.e., "what in no way exists." In the solution section, however, it is shown that a sense of non-being is nonetheless salvageable, precisely with respect to the predicative sense of 'is.' According to the "received view," then, it is the switch in the role of the 'is' that holds the key to the Stranger's successful retrieval of non-being from the realm of Eleatic ob-

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[3] In ●ther words, Plato plays on the ambiguity of the ἐστί–hence, the interpreter's perceived task of "disambiguating."

[4] Cf. Plato's *Theaetetus* 188ef.

livion. According to Owen, however, there is no evidence for such a reading. His argument falls into three parts.

A. Finding it odd that the Stranger would refer to a dilemma only to abandon it later on in the investigation,[5] Owen disputes the view that the Stranger rehearses the old equation between non-being, nothing, and non-existence and rather alerts us to the way in which the Stranger, in the puzzle section as well as in the solution, reworks the very terms by which non-being was previously thought. According to Owen (244–50), the Stranger revises the significance of this equation at the outset when he prefaces the first puzzle by "asking the *Sophist's* question" at 237b10: "what is the proper application of the name 'what is not'" and "[o]f what thing and what sort of thing should we expect him to use it, and what should he point out to his questioner?" Owen argues that in asking this question, which "turns to challenge the very use" of this expression, the Stranger preempts the equation with nothing and non-existence by inquiring into the applicability or reference of the name "non-being." For this inquiry, the reconception of non-being is crucial, which leads to Owen's second move.

B. Owen's second move is to show that the puzzles will be resolved not by clarifying different senses of the 'is,' but rather by giving up a confusion about negation" (231). This confusion concerns understanding non-being as the *contrary* of being, which is considered "a cardinal mistake" in need of correction (232). The confusion is cleared up, according to Owen, when the Stranger, arguing from analogy with the 'not-large' at 257b4, demonstrates that just as both the middling and contrary states are the 'not' of large, the 'not' of being does not imply a contrary to what is, but only 'something other' ($\xi\tau\epsilon\rho\upsilon\nu$). As analogy, the 'not large' not only dispels contrariety as the primary form of negation but it fully dismisses contrariety with respect to one pair of predicates—being and non-being. The analogy instructs us further by indicating that, even though no "intelligible" contrary to being can be found, this should not confuse or alarm us; those who nonetheless cling to the sense of non-being as non-existence or nothing have simply "mistaken the sense of negation" (235).

C. Owen further dismisses the received view's thesis that Plato switches the sense of 'is' from puzzles to solution and maintains the validity of the existential 'is' while dropping its negative counterpart on the grounds that such a reading is in defiance of what Owen calls the "parity assumption," that is, of the Stranger's own declaration that being and non-being must equally illuminate each other (Cf. *Sophist* 243c2–5 and 250e5–251a3). To

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[5] That is, as opposed to more directly working through and refuting it.

maintain one sense of 'is' while rejecting its negative counterpart would simply not comply with the Stranger's own declared methodological principle.[6]

The discussions of the *Sophist*'s question, the analogy with the not-large, and the parity assumption together support Owen's overall view that the Stranger's investigation is caught up in a larger enterprise, the basis of which is sustained by predication. The *Sophist*'s question asks not about the existence of non-being, but about the *applicability* of the name non-being. The analogy with the not-large elucidates the terms and constraints of this application. And the parity assumption makes clear that in whatever way the ἐστί is employed by Plato, both its positive and negative expressions must be in play. Since this does not hold for the existential ἐστί, it must be concluded that Plato draws exclusively on the copulative or connective 'is' throughout the dialogue. All of this leads right into what Owen considers to be the ultimate message of the μεγιστα γένη section, and of the dialogue as a whole: "that a subject must be identified and characterized as well as differentiated."[7] According to Owen, then, the success of the *Sophist* lies in the way the dialogue works within and contributes to a new constellation of thinking, one that in contrast to the opsimaths can account for both identity *and* predication statements (261). At the root of this constellation lies not the existential but rather the "connective use of the verb 'to be' ... distributed between identity and predication" (254).

The advantage of Owen's reading over the "received view" is that it lends consistency and coherence to some key portions of the dialogue by showing how this new constellation of thought circumscribes the entire central section of the dialogue—from the *Sophist*'s question at 237b on—and comprehensively transforms the theoretical structure by which the issue of τὸ μὴ ὄν is thought. Trouble arises, however, with Owen's claims about the role of the verb 'to be' in all of this. On the one hand, he seems to be saying that since the solution involves only the connective 'is' undifferentiated between identity and predication, the verb 'to be' plays no salient role in the Stranger's investigation. And yet, Owen further claims that the application of predicates is "*for Plato* ... an exercise in the incomplete use or uses of 'is'" (236, my emphasis). On what grounds does Owen make this claim? While the account of predication pioneered in the μεγιστα γένη section is most certainly of utmost importance, it must be asked whether there is textual evi-

[6] Cf. Owen, 266: "... Plato recognizes no use of the verb in which it cannot be directly negated."

[7] Owen, 236. Owen's chain of reasoning is as follows: "The attempt to speak of what is not as *nothing*, a subject which is not anything at all, has broken down (237b–39b). Thereafter it has been shown, for some specimen "kinds" of the highest rank, that there must be many things that each of them is as well as a still larger number that each is not (256e2–7), and this is later assumed to hold good of all subjects of discourse (263b11–12). Cf. Owen, 235.

dence for interpreting any of the key passages—the *Sophist*'s question, the paradoxes, and the solution—in terms of the incomplete use or uses of 'is,' that is, whether *for Plato* predication must always involve the verb 'to be.' It must additionally be pointed out that the consistency and coherence rendered by Owen nonetheless creates its own snags, most particularly with regard to the line at 256a1—"change is, by partaking in being"—for how can one possibly read the 'is' here as connective?[8] Furthermore, if this line is to be taken as the Stranger's response to the paradox concerning being at 250b, why *would* one read the 'is' as connective? And, finally, what if this statement is meant to have meaning exactly as it is, without invoking the existential 'is' *and* without elliptically calling for completion?

When the context of the solution is more closely examined, it can be argued that there is no trace of the connective verb 'to be' in either the paradox concerning being, the opsimaths' dilemma posed by the late learners, or the solution section. The former paradox is enlisted, in fact, in order to prevent the sentence 'change/rest is' from automatically sliding into 'change is resting' or 'rest is changing' (Cf. 250b5 and 252d6–8). In other words, contrary to Owen's contention, the Stranger seeks to gain independence for statements of the form 'A is' from those of the form 'A is/are B' in the attempt to establish a philosophical place for being as "some third besides these" (*Τρίτον... τι παρὰ ταῦτα*, 250b8).[9] The latter paradox furthermore makes no mention of 'is' at all, *ἐστί* or otherwise, but is posed in the following way: some people apparently take pleasure in not allowing one to say human being, good (*ἀγαθὸν λέγειν ἄνθρωπον*) but good, good (*τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν ἀγαθόν*) and human being, human being (*τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον ἄνθρωπον*).[10] Additional evidence for the insignificance of the 'is' can be found in the bridge between these two paradoxes, that is, in the formulation ensuing out the former and prefacing the latter: the Stranger and Theactetus are to explore how "we on each occasion call or address (*προσαγορεύομεν*)

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[8] Both Owen and Michael Frede (*Prädikation und Existenzaussage* [Göttingen, 1967]) have a response to this question, which will be addressed below.

[9] Cf. also 250a11, *Καὶ μὴν εἶναί γε ὁμοίως φὴς ἀμφότερα αὐτὰκαὶ ἑκάτερον*, 250b11, *...οὕτως εἶναι προσεῖπες ἀμφότερα* (in relation to their *κοινωνία* with being), and 250c2, *ὅταν κίνησιν καὶ στάσιν εἶναι λέγωμεν*. Again, to deny the presence of the connective 'is' in these formulations is in no way to claim that they should be read as examples of the existential 'is,' as will be made clear below.

[10] *Sophist* 251b9–c2: *ἀγαθὸν λέγειν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν ἀγαθόν, τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον ἄνθρωπον*. This translation is admittedly stilted in English, and it could, of course, be argued that although not explicitly stated, the 'is' is nonetheless implied, as is often the case in Greek. But it could also be argued that the absence of the 'is' rather provides a clue for what may be its irrelevance to the Stranger's inquiry.

the same thing by many names ($\pi o \lambda \lambda o \tilde{\iota} \varsigma \dot{o} \nu \dot{o} \mu \alpha \sigma \iota$)."[11] Indeed, the Stranger's very next line detailing the newly appointed task—as if to emphasize just what is at issue—likewise alludes to the act of naming: "[w]hen we speak about a human being, we surely use many other names ($\pi \dot{o} \lambda \lambda$ ' $\ddot{a} \tau \tau \alpha$ $\dot{\epsilon} \pi o \nu o \mu \dot{\alpha} \zeta o \nu \tau \epsilon \varsigma$)" (251a8–9).[12] Both paradoxes together, then, define the next task in the Stranger's inquiry as an issue of naming, and not of the verb 'to be.'

To raise such questions is not to dismiss the insights gained from Owen's interpretation. The Stranger does indeed open the investigation by asking the *Sophist*'s question, a question fitting a new framework to an old problem and in so doing, the inquiry inserts important changes into the discussion. But does the "*Sophist*'s question" really have anything to do with the verb 'to be'? Given that the Stranger at 237c2 opens the inquiry into non-being by asking about the applicability of "*this name* '$\tau \dot{o} \mu \dot{\eta} \ddot{o} \nu$'," the question seems to be first and foremost one of naming. Talk in terms of the 'name,' in fact, surfaces throughout the dialogue,[13] most importantly in the problem imme-diately provoking the solution, that of the late learners. Now, if both the propadeutic perplexities concerning non-being and the problem immedi-ately preceding the discussion of the $\mu \epsilon \gamma \iota \sigma \tau \alpha \ \gamma \dot{\epsilon} \nu \eta$ are posed in terms of naming, it would seem strange for the response to take a completely differ-ent turn and to be articulated in terms of the 'is,' incomplete or otherwise. This would in turn suggest that an interpretation in terms of the incomplete 'is' is not the most suitable interpretation, but would rather be superfluous.

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[11] *Sophist* 251a5–6. The Greek text for this line is as follows: " ...$\kappa \alpha \theta$ ' $\ddot{o} \nu \tau \iota \nu$ ' $\dot{\alpha}$ $\pi o \tau \epsilon$ $\tau \rho \dot{o} \pi o \nu$ $\pi o \lambda \lambda o \tilde{\iota} \varsigma$ $\dot{o} \nu \dot{o} \mu \alpha \sigma \iota$ $\tau \alpha \dot{\upsilon} \tau \dot{o} \nu$ $\tau o \tilde{\upsilon} \tau o$ $\dot{\epsilon} \kappa \dot{\alpha} \sigma \tau o \tau \epsilon$ $\pi \rho o \sigma \alpha \gamma o \rho \alpha \epsilon \dot{\upsilon} o \mu \epsilon \nu$." A similar formulation can be found at 251b3: "$\ddot{\epsilon} \nu$ $\ddot{\epsilon} \kappa \alpha \sigma \tau o \nu$ $\dot{\upsilon} \pi o \theta \dot{\epsilon} \mu \epsilon \nu o \iota$ $\pi \dot{\alpha} \lambda \iota \nu$ $\alpha \dot{\upsilon} \tau \dot{o}$ $\pi o \lambda \lambda \dot{\alpha}$ $\kappa \alpha \dot{\iota}$ $\pi o \lambda \lambda o \tilde{\iota} \varsigma$ $\dot{o} \nu \dot{o} \mu \alpha \sigma \iota$ $\lambda \dot{\epsilon} \gamma o \mu \epsilon \nu$."

[12] One may, of course, argue that this act of naming or attribution ($\dot{\epsilon} \pi \iota \phi \dot{\epsilon} \rho o \nu \tau \epsilon \varsigma$, cf. 251a9) implicitly involves the connective 'is.' The argument to be developed throughout this essay, however, is that *for Plato* this is not the case.

[13] The citations for the appearance of the "name"—whether $\ddot{o} \nu o \mu \alpha$, $\dot{\epsilon} \pi \omega \nu \upsilon \mu i \alpha$, or $\dot{\rho} \tilde{\eta} \mu \alpha$— are so numerous, it would be a bit tedious and superfluous to list them. Suffice it to say that it most prominently shows up in the diaresis section where it is aligned with $\pi \rho \dot{\alpha} \xi \iota \varsigma$ or signals the unity of a $\pi \rho \dot{\alpha} \xi \iota \varsigma$, in the critique of the Parmenidean one where the name is still understood in terms of a unity but no longer in terms of a $\pi \rho \dot{\alpha} \xi \iota \varsigma$, in the greatest kinds section where it still stands for a unity but has the capacity to combine with other names, and in the concluding discussion of false statements where the function of the name is divided into $\dot{\rho} \tilde{\eta} \mu \alpha$, which makes the $\pi \rho \dot{\alpha} \xi \iota \varsigma$ known, and $\ddot{o} \nu o \mu \alpha$, the sign for those performing the $\pi \rho \dot{\alpha} \xi \iota \varsigma$, the combina-tion of which forms the most elementary but complete $\lambda \dot{o} \gamma o \varsigma$. Furthermore, it is not to be forgotten that the dialogue and its motivating question begins with the issue of naming, that is, with Socrates' question to the Stranger at 217af. concerning what those in his area believe and how they name ($\dot{o} \nu \dot{o} \mu \alpha \zeta o \nu$) the aforementioned phenomena—sophist, politician, philoso-pher.

And this would leave the impression that Owen's text does not escape his own criticism, that other insights notwithstanding, his analysis operates in the shadow cast by the investigators of the verb 'to be.'

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Charlotte Stough sees the paradoxes and ensuing solution less as an issue of the 'is' and more as "a consequence of a single, more general position about names,"[14] one that only allows for a single kind of naming (359). Accordingly, she interprets the $\mu\epsilon\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\alpha$ $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta$ section as establishing "the semantic distinction … between two kinds of names rather than two senses, or uses of *esti*."[15] The crux of the issue, as Stough sees it, lies in the difference between $naming_1$ and $naming_2$. Stough describes these two kinds of naming as follows (360–61): (1) a Form has the $name_1$ 'F' in virtue of its own nature when it is (*numerically*) the same as the F itself, and (2) a Form has the $name_2$ 'F' by participating in the Form that has the $name_1$ in virtue of its own nature. $Naming_1$ thus allows one to say what any form is according to its own nature or $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (e.g., change is change) while $naming_2$ allows a form, by virtue of its participation in another form, to be called by the name of that form (e.g., change is other). According to Stough's reading, the solution section answers the dilemmas by showing that a name can *refer* in more than one way—"naturally," that is, to itself in its own nature, or "by participation," to other forms that combine with it (369).

This schema bears similarities to Michael Frede's thesis on the two uses of 'is' in both his earlier and later writings on the *Sophist*.[16] There is, however, a small difference of great consequence worth dwelling on for the discussion to follow. Based on an interpretation of lines 255c–12f., which introduce $\epsilon\tau\epsilon\rho\upsilon\nu$ as a fifth kind, Frede locates the "two uses of 'is'" he believes operate at the heart of the *Sophist*: (1) with the first use of 'is' (is_1), a "being can be what it is—namely being (*seiend*)—in relation to itself," and (2) with the second use of 'is' (is_2), a "being can be what it is—namely being—in relation

[14] Charlotte Stough, "Two Kinds of Naming in the *Sophist*," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1990): 359.

[15] Stough, 359. A full discussion of this position appears on 359ff. For a similar interpretation, cf. JC Gosling, *Plato* (London, 1973) 220, where he writes that given his reading of the late learners' paradox, "the distinction between the 'is' of identity and copula is simply not relevant to the difficulty. What we need to escape from is the view that neither the identity 'is' nor the copula can be used of anything but identity or copulation. The assertion that kinds can mingle must at best be the claim that many 'names' are applicable to one and the same subject."

[16] Michael Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage* and "Plato's *Sophist* on False Statements" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, 1992) 397–424.

to something *numerically distinct* from itself."[17] Seemingly almost identical in their basic message, these two interpretive frameworks nonetheless diverge on the assumptions imported into the matters of 'naming' and 'numerical distinctness.' A brief critical assessment of Frede's position will aid in elucidating this divergence.

According to Frede, the distinction between is$_1$ and is$_2$ should not be understood along the lines of the identity-predicative distinction.[18] As he sees it, to say e.g., that "a man is a vertebrate" or "white is a colour" is to make an is$_1$ statement, and not an identity statement, for such a statement does not effect an identity between man and vertebrate or white and colour, but it does say "what man is of himself or what white is of itself" (401–02) and so expresses what each respective being is in relation to itself. On the other hand, "Socrates is white" would be an is$_2$ statement since white is not something Socrates is by himself (400). At issue here for Frede is that the predicate in an is$_2$ statement refers to what is *numerically distinct* from the subject while in the is$_1$ statement, this is not the case. He elucidates this distinction by explaining that in the above is$_2$ statement, Socrates "is white, not by being this feature, but by having this feature," that is, by participating in it (400–01). This distinction between is$_1$ and is$_2$ further informs Frede's interpretation of the opsimaths' paradox and the Stranger's response to it. As Frede understands the opsimaths' position, language consists of names, the sole function of which is to denote particulars.[19] In addition, the opsimaths

[17] Frede, *Prädikation* 18–19, my emphasis. A similar formulation can be found on p. 29. All translations are my own. With regard to Frede's overall interpretation, it must be asked whether so much significance can be read into the passage at 255c12f., that is, whether one can use these lines as *the* basis for an interpretation of the *Sophist*. Plato does here employ the word ἀτεχνῶς (255d6) when referring to the distinction at which the Stranger and Theaetetus have just arrived. Moreover, the context seems to involve not two uses of 'is' but rather the distinction between the two kinds "being" and "otherness," the latter always spoken of in connection with other things. This point is then elaborated through the idea discussed at 257c7f. that the "nature of the other" is chopped up into pieces and thus *always directed to* some specific realm of beings.

[18] Cf. Frede, "Plato's *Sophist*" 401–02. Frede's two uses of 'is' furthermore mark not only discursive but also metaphysical differences. Frede's reading is to be distinguished from both Owen's and Stough's in that Frede sees the different uses of 'is' as a reflection of two different ways of being.

[19] Cf. Frede, *Prädikation* 61–62. Frede makes the argument that the terms "man" and "good" here must refer to particulars and not to Platonic forms. This decision allows him to make the further argument that, since every name denotes a particular object, allowable utterances are not to be understood as a mere repetitive chain of the same name—what J.M.E. Moravcsik terms "logical atomism" ("Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*," *Acta Fennica* 14 [1962] 58ff.)— but rather as statements in the form "that is x," "that is y," etc. I find Frede's claim that "human" and "good" refer to particulars unsatisfactory for reasons that will be discussed shortly.

do not distinguish between kinds of names, i.e., between the name of a substance and the name of a property, but rather view all names as "competitive, classificatory predicates" (*Prädikation* 64); the terms "human" and "good," then, are thought to denote completely distinct objects and thus could not be combined in a single statement. The only allowable statements would be those of the form "that is x" and "that is y;" additionally, statements of the form "x is y" would be allowed solely on the condition that x and y refer to the same particular. Consequently, such is$_1$ statements as "Socrates is a man" abide by the opsimaths' criteria since in this statement (in the case that Socrates exists)[20] "Socrates" and "man" do not denote numerically distinct objects. The rest of the dialogue on Frede's view—in addition to and coordinate with the attempt to redefine non-being—is devoted to legitimizing is$_2$ statements.

This reading is unsatisfactory for several reasons. First suspect is Frede's view that the names "human" and "good" denote not forms but particular objects in the context of the opsimaths' paradox. Besides importing a middle-dialogue paradigm that may not be appropriate to this later dialogue,[21] such a view could not be sustained in relation to the discussion of the five kinds. If this latter discussion is a direct response to the opsimaths' paradox, then it must be assumed that a consistent view of names is employed throughout, from paradox to solution. Yet, would it make sense to say that the "same" and the "other" behave as Frede contends "human" and "good" do? Should it be said that e.g., the kind "same" denotes a particular object, and that this particular object is numerically different from that denoted by the "other"?[22] More accurate and sensitive to the text would be, as Plato explicitly writes, to view a name as demarcating a specific kind, each with its own distinct φύσις, which in turn signifies the constitution that makes each kind just *what* it is.[23] The name should be understood, then, as marking not a distinct object, but rather the specific "what" of each kind. This interpretation would additionally upset Frede's second suspicious point—that the opsimaths would

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[20] Cf. Frede, *Prädikation* 65. This thesis allows Frede to claim that the 'is' employed by the opsimaths is existential; cf. 66.

[21] By this I mean that Frede views the choice as strictly between the Forms and particulars without considering that Plato may no longer view the kinds in terms of this dichotomy.

[22] To those tempted to answer positively to this question, I cannot help but feel compelled to respond with a twist on a currently popular coin of phrase: show me the "same"! show me the "other"! Moreover, given that the Stranger at 257c7 first speaks of the nature of the "other" as broken up into parts, one can more confidently claim that prior to this remark, "change," "rest," "being," "same," and "other" function as names denoting not particulars but kinds.

[23] Cf. 258b11–d7 where Plato explicitly makes this link. It is only when its own φύσις is established that one can speak of the form (εἶδος) 'what is not.' In this dialogue, εἶδος and γένος should be regarded as interchangeable. For further evidence of this link, cf. 245c8–9.

allow is₁ statements—for if each name delineates a distinct φύσις, then it
would seem that each name accordingly denotes a *numerically distinct* entity
or unit, and that is₁ statements would be alien to both the opsimaths and
Plato. That Plato considers each name a sign (cf. 237d9 and 262b6) of a
numerically distinct entity must be the case, for if it were not, the Stranger
would never have been able to refute Eleatic monism in the way that he did.
For example, the Stranger's initial strategy at 244b6f. is to examine how the
Eleatic claim (paraphrased by the Stranger) "the one alone is" is immediately
refuted once one recognizes that there are two names—τι and ὄν—for the
same being, the same ὄν, since to "agree that there are two names while
putting down that there is nothing but the one is surely ridiculous" (244c8).
Later in the refutation, after having established that the "ἕν" and the "ὅλον"
are not the same, and further that "τί ὄν" and the "ὅλον" are likewise not
the same, the Stranger concludes that "the totality once again becomes more
than one, since what is and the whole have each separately (χωρίς) taken on
their own natures (ἰδίαν...φύσιν, 245c8–9). Thus one can see that it is on
the basis of each name signifying its own (ἰδίαν), separate (χωρίς) nature,
i.e., the numeric distinctness denoted by each name, that the Stranger can
declare the totality to be *more than one*. Accordingly, it would be the task of
the μέγιστα γένη section to demonstrate how names that nonetheless de-
note numerically distinct natures can combine in a meaningful, unified state-
ment. Indeed, the first move Plato makes in the μέγιστα γένη section is to
establish the numerical distinctness of the first three kinds 'change,' 'rest,'
and 'being' (cf. 254d4–12). This conception of the name tied to a numeri-
cally distinct nature likewise structures the transition between the first and
second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*.[24] Here Plato shows how, on the basis
of the very statement "ἕν εἰ ἔστιν," monism can be dismantled and, on the
contrary, plurality established (142b3f.). This is because the names 'one' (ἕν)
and 'is' (ἐστί, εἶναι) or 'being' (οὐσία) are thought to be distinct from one
another, to denote numerically distinct natures;[25] every time one asserts that
anything is, there are automatically two, which means that there cannot just
be the 'one.' Thus to seriously and more deeply consider the statement 'ἕν
εἰ ἔστιν' is to realize that the 'one' "partakes of being," which is other than
the one. Not agreeing to such consequences would amount to making the
statement 'a one is'—ἕν...εἶναι—into the statement 'one one'—ἕν ἕν—
and besides not being the hypothesis to be considered, such a statement
would obviously not aid Parmenides in establishing the *being* of the one,

[24] Plato, *Parmenides* in *Platonis Opera* (Oxford, 1995).

[25] Cf. e.g., 142b6–8: "If a one is, it cannot be and not partake of being (οὐσίας δὲ μὴ
μετέχειν), which means that there will also be, besides the one, the being of the one ...(ἡ
οὐσία τοῦ ἑνός), which is not the same as the one." My emphasis; remarks like this can be found
throughout the arguments that follow. Cf. also 142c4–5, 143a4–6, 143b1–3.

that it *is*. And furthermore, not acknowledging the implications of the dis-
tinctness of these names would result in a regress back to statements akin to
the opsimaths'.

This long digression has been taken in order to determine more defini-
tively what is at stake in the opsimaths' paradox and the ensuing solution.
Given the conception of the name functioning in these late Platonic texts, it
cannot be the case that Plato's opsimaths would concede an is$_1$ statement
such as "Socrates is a man." One must rather conclude with Stough that the
opsimaths would only allow expressions of a kind's φύσις, i.e., its name$_1$; in
other words, they would only allow such statements as "change is change,"
provided that the 'is' remains undifferentiated, which means virtually irrel-
evant. So far this position is somewhat similar to Owen's. It parts company,
however, with the claim that the solution depends not on the introduction
of predication but rather of naming$_2$, which may encompass but is not lim-
ited to predication. In other words, as Stough sees it, the ambiguities the
Stranger is dealing with and the distinctions he introduces run along a dif-
ferent axis than is generally thought. According to Stough, the Stranger's
solution entails a conception of naming *shared* with the late learners, i.e.,
one that does not distinguish between the nominative and descriptive func-
tion of the name. The opsimaths cannot accept the statement "human be-
ing, good," e.g., because the slippage between the descriptive and nomina-
tive functions of the name (a human being *as* good would mean that the
human being *is* good, 'being in change' would be equivalent to 'being change')
would usher in the assumption that 'human being' and 'good' refer to the
same *physis* (359ff., 368ff.), which is obviously not the case. The Stranger's
language, however, reveals this same slippage; based on a reading of 255a4–
b6, Stough demonstrates that the Stranger, too, "moves freely between 'Rest
is changing' and 'Rest is Change.'"[26] For both the Stranger and the opsimaths,

[26] Following Stough, this becomes evident in the following way (367f.). Based on a reading
of 255a4–b6 where sameness and otherness are established as two independent kinds, it can be
demonstrated that there is for Plato "no distinction between 'Change' and 'is change (chang-
ing),'" in other words, no difference between the nominative or referential and the predicative
or descriptive function of a name; rather, all of these functions remain indiscriminate in Plato's
text. The argument can be reconstructed as follows. In establishing sameness and otherness as
the fourth and fifth of the greatest kinds, the Stranger reasons that they cannot be included as
among the other three kinds because, since change and rest are neither otherness nor sameness,
and since whatever is ascribed to them in common cannot be either of them, otherness and
sameness must be distinct kinds. The explanation of this is given in the line at 255a10, namely
that if sameness or difference were identical with either change or rest, "[κ]ίνησίς τε στήσεται
καὶ στάσις αὖ κινηθήσεται"—change will be at rest and rest in turn will be in change, or
rather, change will be rest and rest will be change. Of utmost importance here is the use of
στήσεται and κινηθήσεται—the future middle and passive third person singular—instead of
the proper names στάσις and κίνησίς.

then, 'is changing' and 'change' are names referring to the same *physis*. The
Stranger consequently does not quarrel with the semantic ambiguity involved
in naming (cf. 367).[27] Rather, the task is to circumscribe the opsimaths' view
as one kind of naming and to introduce another, one that reflects the partici-
pation of one kind in another without sacrificing its *physis* to the other. This
is what naming$_2$ accomplishes. Involving a secondary name that *refers* to a
kind to which the subject is related (372), naming$_2$—or the *koinonia* of
kinds, to revert back to Plato's parlance—allows one kind to be called by
another without implying that each kind denotes the same thing. It can do
so because as far as Plato is concerned, the secondary name may refer in two
ways—to the kind by which it has the name$_1$ and to the kind it mixes with in
the respective relation (cf. 369, 372). At issue, then, is not the distinction
between identity and predication, since both naming$_1$ and naming$_2$ state-
ments may equivocate between nominative/identity and predication state-
ments. The naming$_1$ statement makes this point particularly clear, for since
both "change" and "changing" "name the Form Change *in virtue of its own
nature*," that is, since a form's nature can be expressed by either a proper or
descriptive name, naming$_1$ results in single sentences which cannot be un-
equivocally distinguished as identity or predication statements. At issue is
the introduction of a name's capacity to refer dually, to be a name$_2$.

Stough's position thus further departs from Owen's in the way each views
the undifferentiated nature of the 'is.' While Owen views the 'is' as distrib-
uted between identity and predication, i.e., wearing one hat in one state-

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[27] This very slippage provides an objection to Gregory Vlastos' attempt in "An Ambiguity in the
Sophist" (in G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* [Princeton, 1973] 270–322) to show that despite the
asserted contrariety between change and rest, there is a legitimate way for Plato to say that
change is resting. Vlastos distinguishes between ordinary predication (OP—predication that
asserts that B is itself a member of the class of things which are A) and pauline predication
(PP—predication that asserts that if anything is a member of the class of things which are B,
then, necessarily, that same thing will be a member of the class of things which are A). On the
basis of this distinction, Vlastos explains that when Plato maintains that change cannot be rest
or resting, he must mean this in the pauline predication sense, that is, that any instance of
change cannot be rest or resting. But he could not mean this in the ordinary predication sense
because, according to Vlastos, change itself is a Platonic form, and as a form it is, like all
Platonic forms, invariant and thus resting (cf. 275–78). But if one considers the ambiguity
between nominative and descriptive names, the very statement Vlastos attempts to salvage,
"change is resting," can likewise be read as "change is rest," in which case the distinction be-
tween ordinary and pauline predication would be of no help, for the form 'change' could never
nominatively be named 'rest'. There are other objections to Vlastos' project, but suffice it to say
that the attempt to rejoin change and rest when Plato explicitly renders them mutually exclu-
sive is misguided. The task should not be to "fix" Plato's text but to try to understand the source
and role of the tension or ambiguity.

ment and another in another, Stough shows that the 'is' may equivocate within a single statement and that this equivocation, effected by the function of naming₁, has virtually nothing to do with the verb 'to be.' Furthermore, by showing that there is no difference between nominative and descriptive functions of naming, one can now see that the *Sophist*'s question at 237b simply asks how this name $τὸ\,μὴ\,ὄν$ could denote a kind, and where or to what this name can be attached or carried over,[28] which can be thought in either referential or descriptive terms, i.e., it asks how $τὸ\,μὴ\,ὄν$ can refer as both a name₁ and a name₂. On this reading, then, one can see that the 'is,' predicative or otherwise, plays no significant role at all, that the issue of naming consistently defines the task from the very beginning of the paradoxes through the solution, and that the Stranger's achievement is to establish a kind's commonality with, or participation in another numerically distinct kind as expressed through naming₂. In other words, the task of the $μεγιστα\,γένη$ section is to show how a kind can be called by another name, which is exactly and *explicitly* the appointed task as laid out at 251a5.

One could take this reading even further, however, and dispel yet another generally agreed diagnosis, this time with respect to the much disputed line at 256a1, $κίνησις$ " $Ἔστι\,δὲ\,γε\,διὰ\,τὸ\,μετέχειν\,τοῦ\,ὄντος$"—but change is, indeed by partaking of being.[29] Those who attempt to reserve a place for the complete, existential 'is,' turn to this line for their strongest, most obvious evidence.[30] These interpretations, however, do not demonstrate an overall coherence of the Stranger's inquiry. Readings based on the incomplete 'is,' in turn, tend to override the nuances and complexity of Plato's text in

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[28] The word translated here at 237b by "carry"—$ἐπιφέρω$—has been translated as "apply" in every prominent English translation. Here is an instance of a translation that overdetermines the text and, so to speak, "loads the deck" by already bringing to bear a whole set of assumptions concerning names, statements, and meaning which virtually usher in modern notions of reference, identity, and predication as the interpretive backdrop, thus overriding other important dimensions of this word. Keeping the root verb—$φέρω$—in mind, $ἐπιφέρω$ less abstractly and more literally means to bring, put or lay upon, place upon, carry over to, and also to give a name. Owen translates the first question as "what is the proper application of the name 'what is nor' (244). Other translations are as follows. Benardete: where he must apply this name, 'that which is not'? Cobb: to what this name 'what is not" is to be applied to? White: What should the name, that which is not, be applied to? Schleiermacher: *wo man dieses Wort anzubringen hat, das Nichtseiende?* As is evident, only Schleiermacher's translation is sensitive to a more open and literal translation of $ἐπιφέρω$.

[29] As further evidence against reading it connectively, it should be noted that $ἐστί$ appears here in the first position, emphasizing that change *is*. I would like to thank Martin Henn for pointing this out to me.

[30] Cf. e.g., Ackrill, "Plato and the Copula" 211–12 and Robert Heinaman, "Being in the *Sophist*," *Archiv für Geschichte Philosophie* 65 (1983): 1–17.

the effort to fit the bulk of the Stranger's investigation into the conceptual framework of predication. For example, in the effort to secure his strong claim that all key statements in the solution involve the incomplete 'is,'[31] Owen argues that however statements such as 256a1 are to be read, "fragmentary or elliptical they surely are in Plato's view" (255). In other words, the statement "change is" should not be understood existentially or in its own right but rather as either "a fragment of the preceding 'change is different from rest'" (255e11–12)[32] or as an ellipsis for 'change is with respect to something'" (255). This is because, as Owen elaborates, the whole μεγιστα γένη section is formulated with a view to the idea that "what is is multiple and what is not countless in number" (256e6, 259b6). Reading backwards from this context, then, Owen reasons that 256a1 cannot have existential import, but must rather be understood elliptically, in relation to something else (254–55). This reading, however, disregards the important role of 255e11–256a1 as a response to the paradox concerning being at 250a8–e4 where the Stranger seeks to prevent statements such as 'change is' from automatically sliding into 'change is rest,' and in doing so to show that just because two or more kinds participate in being, one kind does not automatically become the other. In other words, among the myriad tasks set out for the Stranger, in addition to documenting how kinds can relate to one another is the task of providing a place for expressing a kind's being just what it is without reference or relation to anything else, but simply by virtue of its *physis*. This is what I believe 256a1 is meant to express. Thus by placing too much weight and responsibility on the remark, "what is is multiple and what is not countless in number," this argument neglects the concomitant effort to mark the singularity and distinctness of each kind's being and so consequently fails to account for the meaning of the statement "change is." For it is both the distinctness of each kind *and* its capacity for combination that sustains the μεγιστα γένη section's argument.

Frede, albeit in different terms than Owen, also insists that the 'is' at 256a1 is not to be understood completely but relationally. According to Frede, there is no textual evidence for understanding the statement at 256a1 in any other way than in terms of the statement about identity at 256a7–8. Since a statement about identity always involves a relation to something else (to say 'change is the same' is to say that change participates in the same *in relation to* change), and since 256a1 and 256a7–8 should be read in parallel fashion, the simplest way to understand the *esti* in the former statement is as

[31] This is also Frede's position; cf. *Prädikation* 29, 37, 48, and 55.

[32] Owen makes this claim by taking his cue from Frede (cf. Owen 255, nt. 54); Frede's position will be outlined below.

"being in relation to something" (*Prädikation* 56). The more precise read-
ing, however, would be to see the 'is' at 256a1 behaving like 'is other than.'
Based on what he again considers to be a parallel structure of argumentation
at 256c4–8 and 263b7–11, Frede argues that the lines at 255e11–256a1
should be understood as follows: (a) Change is other than rest, (b) Change is
not, namely rest, (c) Change is, namely other. According to Frede, since they
are already included in statement (a), the latter two statements simply draw
out what is implied there. Moreover, (c) further draws out what is presup-
posed by (b); it is not contrary to it but included in it. For change to *be* in
this context, however, would be for it to be other than rest, which is why
Frede replaces the actual line—"indeed by participating in being"—with his
own line, "namely other" (56—57). This line of reasoning allows Frede to
claim that by rendering the implicit explicit, 256a1 is an is$_1$ statement pre-
supposed by and embedded in the is$_2$ statements that surround it (58).

In response to Frede's initial, more simplistic reading, it should be noted
that in the line just above at 256a5, the Stranger makes clear that change is
likewise *not* the same, which means that calling change 'the same' does not
exhaustively express what it means for change 'to be.' And this means that
256a1 cannot be seen as parallel to, but rather warrants its own reading
apart from 256a7–8. Contrary to Frede's claim, there is no textual evidence
for reading 256a1 in terms of 256a7–8. In response to Frede's more precise
reading, and rewriting, of 256a1, Frede's reformulation of 255e11–256a1
would read as follows: change is other than rest, change is not rest, change is
other. On this reading, 256a1 does not offer any new information or insight
but simply repeats what was already said at 255e11. Now why would Plato
be so repetitive here, so tautologically circular? Frede's substitution of "other"
for "indeed by participating in being" further makes it seem that the kind
'being' can just slide into the kind 'other,' as if there were not two distinct
physeis involved. Accordingly, the interpretation of *esti* as 'being in relation
to …'—in this case, based on Frede's revision, 'in relation to the other'—
gives the impression that Plato leaves the issue of being as "some third" dan-
gling in the wind.[33] And finally, since it has been shown that is$_1$ statements
have no place in Plato's writing, the idea that "change is" functions as an is$_1$
statement can be disregarded.

While there seems to be no evidence for reading the *esti* here as elliptical,
sense can nonetheless be made of the ἐστί at 256a1 by reading it, in Stough's
terms, as a name$_2$ for κίνησις, bestowed upon it exactly διὰ τὸ μετέχειν

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[33] This is Jean Roberts' quarrel with the interpretation of the *Sophist* based on the connec-
tive 'is.' Cf. "The Problem About Being in the *Sophist*," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3 (1986):
229–43.

τοῦ ὄντος, through its participating in being.[34] In Plato's terms, it could be said that the ἐστί functions as a ῥῆμα. In other words, although occupying what *we* would consider the place of the copula, the ἐστί functions *for Plato* just like any name that qualifies what is signified by an*other* name—without it being necessary that the kind signified by either name surrender its *physis* to the other.[35] To substantiate and elaborate this claim, it will be necessary to account for the revisions made to the concept of the ὄνομα during the course of the *Sophist*'s later, revised account of the λόγος (260aff.).

THE POWER TO COMBINE

One of the salient achievements of Plato's *Sophist* is to refine the conception of the *logos* from a mere listing of ὀνόματα in succession (συνεχῶς) to the mixing of *two kinds of names*: the ὄνομα and the ῥῆμα.[36] It is only when— but also as soon as—this weave is produced that a *logos* occurs, that a *logos* manifests itself. This notion of 'manifesting,' moreover—in Greek, δηλόω and its various derivative forms—is the primary way in which Plato describes the *logos* in the *Sophist* (Cf. e.g., 261e1, 261e5, 262a3, 262c4, 262d4). According to Plato, mere naming does "not make manifest (δηλοῖ) any state of affairs (πρᾶξιν) or lack thereof (ἀπραξίαν), nor the being (οὐσίαν) of what is, until one mixes *rhemata* with *onomata*" (262b5–c3). Unlike the bare name, which "signals,"[37] Plato writes that the weave "accomplishes something" (262d4). The word translated as "accomplish" here, περαίνει, resonates in ways that call for some attention. Combining a sense of *telos* and *peras*,[38] περαίνω could likewise be translated as "delimit." Thus the weave between *onoma* and *rhema* constitutes a *logos* in that it brings into view, by carving out, a definite, circumscribed shape—in other words, what is brought to its end and as such sits within its limits. And just what does the weave delimit? On this, Plato is clear: πράξεις, "states of affairs." A *logos* manifests by delineating and highlighting relations, and it is for this reason, writes

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[34] What this means will be addressed in the next section.

[35] In addition to 256a1, Plato captures this idea at 256d8–9 where he has the Stranger explain that although other than what-is (ὄν), change really is what-is because it participates in what-is (ἐπείπερ τοῦ ὄντος μετέχει). *Parmenides* 142b1. supports this reading, as it is made clear that the 'is' in "a one is" does not merely draw out what is in the 'one' but as a separate *physis* adds something to it.

[36] This is Gerold Prauss' thesis in *Platon und der logische Eleatismus* (Berlin, 1966). The exact phrasing in the Greek is: συμπλέκων τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς ὀνομάσι. I leave the terms ὄνομα and ῥῆμα untranslated because, as I will argue presently, the translation of these terms is at issue.

[37] Cf. nt. 13 above.

[38] Cf. the Liddell and Scott entry for περαίνω: bring to an end, finish, accomplish; limit, effect one's purpose; draw a conclusion; come to an end or limit.

Plato in the very next line, that a *logos* is said to "speak" or "gather" (λέγειν, d4–5).[39] The most basic function of the *logos*, then, is to carve out the relation it has gathered and in this way present it, an accomplishment of which a string of ὀνόματα alone is not capable.

To understand this more refined conception of the *logos*, however, it is important *not* to equate the *onoma-rhema* structure with our subject-verb schema. When introduced at 260a3, the difference in the "twofold genus" of names (261e6) unfolds as follows: the *rhema* is defined as "[τ]ὸ... ἐπὶ ταῖς πράξεσιν ὂν δήλωμα," the *onoma* as "[τ]ὸ...ἐπ' αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἐκείνας πράττουσι σημεῖον τῆς φωνῆς" (262a3–6). Of particular importance is the meaning and role of the related terms πρᾶξις and πράττω in this account. Although it has come to be primarily associated with our notion of action, the word *praxis*, as the Greeks used this term, captures a range of meanings which includes but is not limited to 'action' or 'activity.' *Praxis* could likewise mean affair, business, state, or condition, as in how someone or something is doing in the sense of faring.[40] Accordingly, it would make much more sense in this instance to describe *praxis* as manifesting the "faring," "business," or the "how" of what is signified by the *onoma* instead of "action," for this broader translation—encompassing an active, middle, or passive sense, as the case may be—includes but is not limited to the term "action," which does not always illuminate what is said in a *logos*. In the short *logos* "Socrates is snubnosed" or "human being, good," for example, the *rhema* signifies not an action but a state or condition; Socrates certainly does not *do* anything to be snubnosed. Accordingly, the *onoma* would likewise be better described as "the vocal sign directed to those *experiencing or achieving* (πράττουσι) these things, i.e., faring in this way."[41] Defined in this way, the *onoma-rhema* distinction may furthermore be seen as a more refined articulation of the *koinonia* of the five kinds; it is not merely that two kinds combine but that one expresses the state or condition, the business or faring, of the other. Consequently, such seemingly disparate statements as "a person learns" (262c9) "human being, good," and "change is" could all be considered among the first and smallest of *logoi*.[42]

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[39] On the translation of λέγειν as "speak" or "gather," cf. nts. 3 and 62 in Cobb's translation of the *Sophist*.

[40] Cf. the Liddell and Scott entry for πρᾶξις: a private, not a public *affair* (as in *Odyssey* 3.82, "We are not here on Ithakan *business*, though, but on my own"); doing, faring well or ill, state, condition.

[41] My emphasis. For evidence supporting the dual active-passive nature of this word, cf. the Liddell and Scott entry for πράττω: experience certain fortunes, fare (well or ill); achieve, effect, accomplish; to be busy with; manage affairs, do business.

[42] Of course, one of the main aims of the investigation, as prompted by the opsimaths' limited view of speech, was to establish "human being, good" as a legitimate *logos*.

Marking the *esti* at 256a1 as a *rhema* is admittedly a much simpler, less technical reading of 256a1. But such a reading preserves a place for the role and meaning of this important statement while showing it to be wholly consistent with, and not disruptive of, all the other formulations in the Stranger's solution. This translation captures the breadth needed for a structure that, according to Plato, accomplishes nothing less than provide the very conditions for the first and smallest of *logoi*, which do not always formulaically conform to our subject-verb schema. The further claim, then, is that the *logos* as Plato understood it does not—at least in any simple or obvious way—reflect our grammatical scheme, and that to impose this scheme on the issue of *koinonia* and the *onoma-rhema* distinction is an interpretive mistake that presents a host of unnecessary exegetical problems. Plato gives us a framework; in those terms, the *esti* ought to be considered a *rhema*, i.e., one of two kinds of *names* (261e5), the specific function of which is to express how things stand with what is signified by the *onoma*.[43] In other words, *for Plato* the *esti* in "change is" simply signifies the "how" of change—that it is, that it participates in or has being. But of course, the crucial question to be addressed is: just what does it mean to say "but change is, indeed by participating in being"?

Dismissing the elliptical reading of "change is" should not be regarded as an invitation to an existential reading of this *logos*. The intent is rather to call into question this entire conception of the verb 'to be' as a viable interpretive framework for Platonic texts; the speculative either-or decision between the existential and copulative 'is' should be discarded altogether. This is likewise the case for the broader discursive-metaphysical either-or divide informing contemporary approaches to the *Sophist*.[44] The view that Plato's dialogues should be read *either* discursively *or* metaphysically should be regarded with suspicion, since throughout his corpus, of equal importance to Plato is the fact that something *is and that it is said (or can be said) to be*. As Frede points

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[43] It should be noted that the text in question is not an Aristotelian text; accordingly, care should be taken not to read back through an Aristotelian lens. Although Aristotle's description of the *rhema* in *De Interpretatione* is more closely aligned with our understanding of a verb, as its function for Aristotle is to mark temporality, his treatment of the *rhema* is not unequivocal. At the beginning of *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle uses the term 'white' as an example of a *rhema* (16a14); in the *Metaphysics*, *rhema* simply means 'word' and is used in reference to the term 'itself' (1040b34); on the ambiguity of Aristotle's *rhema*, Mohan Matten in "Greek Ontology and the 'Is' of Truth (*Phronesis* 28 [1983]: 113–35) writes: "Unfortunately for the clarity of both his exposition and his own thought, Aristotle uses the term 'verb' (*rhema*) to denote both the verb phrase taken as a whole, and the predicable-denoter by itself," 123). And on the issue of whether the verb 'to be' and its inflections should be considered a *rhema*, Aristotle's text is even more confusing and ambiguous (cf. 19b10–30).

[44] Cf. Owen, 254 and Stough, 365, 367, 377, 380.

out, in order to initiate a discussion concerning a particular concept not yet clearly defined but certainly employed by the interlocutors, Plato on numerous occasions has his leading character pose a question in one of the following forms: "there is something such as X, isn't there," "you call something X, don't you," or "we say X is, don't we?"[45] For Plato, then, the *logos* of X and the being of X implicate one another, are somehow woven together; it is no coincidence that his inquiries into a particular subject area are so often launched with the question, "we say X is, don't we?" Plato would not pose this question (or have his main interlocutor pose this question)—and certainly not on such a regular basis—unless he was operating under the assumption that the saying of X and the being of X were connected. Indeed, 256a1 can only be made intelligible *as it stands* once dichotomous thinking is discarded and the link between the saying of X and the being of X is made. Accordingly, it would be most fruitful to pursue the question "what does it mean to say 'change is'" by first pursuing what, for Plato, it means to say anything at all.

As noted above, Plato clearly and immediately associates *logos* with *praxeis*, i.e., with phenomena that at their core are relational—both internally and externally (for a "state of affair" consists of the relation or "weave" between the "faring" and "what is faring," and any "state of affair" is likewise related to other states of affairs). To return to Plato's definition of the *logos* as manifesting, by delimiting, the relations involved in *praxeis* (or alternatively put, the *logos* is the manner by which these relations manifest themselves to us), it could be said that, for Plato, to say something at all is to be open to, subject to, *and* to participate in a matrix of meaningful relations that provide the context for our *praxeis*. This context, however, should not be regarded statically in any way, i.e., it should not be regarded as a fixed, immutable frame or container encompassing fixed and immutable relations and meanings. Rather, it should be viewed as more active and plastic—more like a power, less like an object—as a clearance (or clearances) keeping past, present, and possible meanings open for us, as the basis for both habitual repetition and novelty. Likewise, we speaking and acting humans should not be regarded as mere passive vessels for prescribed meaningful *praxeis* but as capable of actively engaging with these referential contexts. Accordingly, to pose the somewhat rhetorical but methodologically strategic questions, "you call something X, don't you?" or "we say X is, don't we?" would be Plato's way of having his interlocutors not just inhabit but also actively engage in this matrix of meaning by testing the limits of its intelligibility, i.e., to cross-examine conventional

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[45] For a discussion of this, cf. Frede, *Prädikation* 45–47. For examples in the *Sophist*, cf. 244b9, 250a11.

but superficial or untenable meanings, to probe for dimensions of X not yet made manifest, to introduce novel ways of understanding X,[46] or to expose the problems and paradoxes a particular name, such as "sophist," may present. In other words, to pose such a question is to launch a determinative, and perhaps critical and transformative, reflection via the *logos* of the relations that guide and govern our behavior, our practices, our affairs.

What would it then mean to say "X is" in a Platonic dialogue? It is to say that in some fashion, "change" *is able* to circulate or endure in the meaningful web that circumscribes our *praxeis*. In other words, the statement "X is" provides testimony for the *possibility or capacity*—for the δύναμις—of X entering into relations with other things or states that are. To say "change is," then, is not to say *directly* "change is other than rest" or "change is the same" but that "change," because its *physis* has meaning and integrity for us, can be associated with or differentiated from other *physeis*. Just how it does associate with others, these are details for the dialectician to elucidate (cf. 253df.). Thus, when the Stranger at 256a1 declares, κίνησις " Έστι δὲ γε διὰ τὸ μετέχειν τοῦ ὄντως," he is simply making clear that, although not στάσις, κίνησις nonetheless demarcates its own ontological-discursive domain. To say "κίνησις ἐστί," then, is to pronounce, *no matter how indeterminately*, that the kind κίνησις carries its own weight in the world of speaking, thinking, and behaving which the Stranger and Theaetetus share. In other words, it is to testify to the shared awareness, perhaps unreflective and inchoate, that X may be directly or indirectly related to the myriad of other members in this web. Accordingly, when combined alone with another kind, the 'is' prompts testimony, not to any particular predicative relation or combination, but rather to that kind's *relationality*, to its actual or possible currency in the circuit of discursive activity, to its power to predicate or be predicated. To be understood quite differently from the claim that the 'is' is always relational or connective, this view acknowledges the way in which the 'is' in 'X is' harbors the various possible combinations X may or may not enter into; in other words, it acknowledges the 'is' in this kind of statement as operating as resource and limit *at the level of possibility* before and beyond whatever actual combinations the interlocutors are aware of.[47]

⁴⁶ As is illustrated by Socrates' various inquiries into e.g., piety, virtue, justice, and eros.

⁴⁷ That is, with the proviso that the *dunamis-energeia* distinction is understood in a non-teleological, non-Aristotelian fashion, or alternatively, if the *dunamis* in the *Sophist* is understood more like the Aristotelian *energeia*. On the issue of possibility, cf. Robert Turnbull, *The Parmenides and Plato's Late Philosophy* (Toronto, 1998) 41: "... the careful use of *association* and *mingling* is rather more indicative of the investigation of *possibilities* than any sort of effort to arrive at definitional or logical certainties or necessities."

In other words, in expressing that there is a *physis* of X, the statement 'X is' signals a set of relations in their indeterminacy, while the particular set of connective statements—X is B, X is C, X is not D—articulate determinately just how that *physis* unfolds or emerges in the realm of *praxis*.[48] Thus contrary to the general view that statements involving the complete 'is' are embedded in and thus derivative of those involving the incomplete 'is,' the proposal here is that, conversely, connective statements concerning X are implicit in the statement 'X is;' they elaborate, this time in detail, what is contained monadically, so to speak, in the *physis* of X. To express this idea in the terms of the *Sophist*, one could replace the 'X' in 'X is' with 'sophist' or 'angler.' Thus to say 'a sophist is' or 'an angler is' is to say that 'sophist' or 'angler' has a rightful place at the top of a genera/species tree derived, or to be derived, through the method of collection and division. It has a rightful place at the top of this tree because it has meaning for us in the world of *praxis*, even if, as is the case with the sophist, the intelligibility of this name and this *praxis* is yet to be fully mapped out.[49] Accordingly, the various specific divisions that unfold through the course of collection and division articulate the relations involved in just what it is to be an angler or a sophist; they serve as the basis of name₂ statements, the secondary name of which could very well independently stand at the top of its own distinct genealogical chain (this additionally illustrates how *for Plato* a name₂ could refer dually). In this way, one can see how the statements 'X is A,' 'X is B,' 'X is not C' follow from, are embedded in, the short statement 'X is,' and not the other way around. At the same time, however, that each branch in the tree is signalled by a name that in turn refers to its own *physis*, the collective set of divisions that branches out under a particular name articulates the specific singularity of that *physis* in relation to other *physeis*; each name/*physis* has its own tree which is completely distinct from any other. In this way, one can see how a name or a kind can have its own integrity, can simply 'be,' *and* be in relation with other names or kinds. In saying 'X is,' then, one concedes that X can function in just this way—at the top of its own genera/species tree and as possible branches in other trees.[50]

Consequently, to capture the meaning and role of the ἐστί at 256a1, it would not be appropriate to say simply that the 'is' is always used relatively;[51]

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[48] It is fitting here to note, as Kahn does, that our verb *to exist* is derived from the Latin verb meaning *to step out* or *to emerge*. Cf. Kahn, "On the Theory of the Verb 'To Be'" 18.

[49] It should be noted that the very first division made is between two kinds of τέχνη; cf. 219a4.

[50] For a discussion of the increasing importance of the method of collection and division for the late Plato and of the way in which this method and the 'method of suppositions' in the *Parmenides* exhibits the "logical structure of the world, cf. Turnbull, *The* Parmenides.

[51] Cf. Frede, *Prädikation* 42.

sometimes we simply say 'change is,' and in insisting that 256a1 be read
elliptically, the general diagnosis, to put it in Greek terms, does not 'save the
appearances.' It can, however, be said that this statement reveals X's mean-
ingful validity, and that the ἐστί here functions not as a "sign of predica-
tion,"[52] but as a very peculiar and special name, one that marks the threshold
between meaninglessness and meaningfulness for X and as such first signals
X's readiness to be combined, to emerge into the realm of relation, of predi-
cation—as signalling the *power*, the δύναμις, of being in relation. Such an
interpretation of the of the *Sophist* may seem strange or counterintuitive,
but it should really come as no surprise. Plato does, after all, have the Stranger
define being as δύναμις, as "power" or "capacity"—more specifically, as the
power or capacity to affect or be affected, as the power to combine.[53]

It can now more definitively be said that the success of the Stranger's
investigation lies in demonstrating that names denoting numerically dis-
tinct entities, states, or conditions—in other words, denoting distinct
physeis—may be combined to produce meaningful statements, and that the
'is' at 256a1 need not be read elliptically but rather just the way it stands
without ushering in endless paradox and obstructing the overall coherence
of the inquiry. This diagnosis, however, is in no way exhaustive; it is meant
to be but a beginning, a way of charting previously unexplored paths for
understanding Plato's *Sophist*. The terms and conclusions of this inquiry

[52] Cf. Kahn, "On the Theory of the Verb 'To Be'" 12ff.

[53] Cf. 247d8-e4, 248a10-c5. For a discussion of being as δύναμις, beyond the scope of the
present argument, cf. John Ellis, "Dunamis and Being: Heidegger on Plato's Sophist 247d8-
e4," *Epoche* 3 (1995): 43-78. The interpretation put forth here bears some resemblance to
Lesley Brown's argument that the 'is' at 256a1 is complete and not elliptical. Based on the
analogy of the relation between such statements as "John is eating" and "John is eating grapes,"
Brown argues that the complete use of 'is' should be taken at face value, but it should also be
considered closely related to the predicative, incomplete 'is.' In other words, although a state-
ment employing a complete use of 'is' is not to be regarded as elliptical but rather as having its
own meaning and integrity, this does not preclude such statements from acquiring additional
complements (which of course alters the meaning of the statement); e.g., "John is eating" has
its own meaning, and yet it can be further "completed" with the word "grapes." With this
analysis, Brown demonstrates that the 'is' may not always call for completion, that it can stand
on its own in meaningful statements; in other words, she demonstrates the syntactic place of
the complete 'is.' She neglects, however, an analysis of the meaning and integrity of the com-
plete use of 'is' in the *Sophist*, i.e., its semantic role. Here it must be asked: within the context of
the *Sophist*'s overall inquiry, what exactly is accomplished when the structural but not the mean-
ingful role of the complete 'is' is shown? Furthermore, at several points in her discussion, Brown
claims that complete being is not only intimately tied to but *derived from* incomplete being (cf.
e.g., "The verb 'to be'" 228, my emphasis). At this point in the argument, Brown's line of
interpretation seems to merge with that of the "general diagnosis," namely that all being—and
that means every instance of the 'is'—is relational. As should be clear, my argument departs
significantly from this claim.

may seem unsatisfactory to some, but such a moment of dissatisfaction in which the text resists our expectations and desires should not give us license to force it to conform. The tension between the familiar frameworks we employ to render an ancient text such as Plato's intelligible—familiar—to us and the way in which such a text invariably escapes complete and comfortable appropriation must always be kept in mind by the responsible, historically aware interpreter. In other words, the examining and questioning between interpreter and text should go both ways, and the interpreter should be flexible and willing enough to critically examine, rework, or even relinquish interpretive assumptions when significant dimensions of the text seem irreconcilable with other dimensions, when large portions seem to fade from view and coherence can only be made by dismembering what Plato regarded as whole. As is the case of such a rich and influential text as Plato's *Sophist*, the tension that surfaces along history's fissures should rather compel a self-critical look at *our* expectations and at whether we have achieved, on these issues, any more clarity than Plato.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I critically assess readings of Plato's *Sophist* which, influenced by the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, have in the latter half of the twentieth century set the terms for discussions of this text's central issues. While aware that these readings are often at odds with each other and therefore do not form one coherent reading, I argue that the basic theoretical move unifying these readings—equating the Greek terms *esti*, *to on*, and *ta onta* with the verb 'to be,' understood existentially, predicatively, or as an identity sign—cannot serve as the basis of an illuminating approach to the Eleatic Stranger's investigation. Any reading of the *Sophist* informed by our modern understanding of the verb 'to be' not only presents more problems than it can solve but also blocks a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the limitations and accomplishments of the Eleatic Stranger's inquiry. In the course of this discussion, I offer an alternative reading of the *esti* at 256a1, a passage that has sparked intense controversy among Anglo-American interpreters. I argue that the *esti* here should be interpreted as a *rhema*, i.e., as a name which, in this instance, says something about *kinesis*. I conclude with thoughts on what it might mean to be a historically aware interpreter of texts such as Plato's *Sophist*.