

PLATO'S TASK IN THE *SOPHIST*

It is often thought that Plato sets himself an important task in the *Sophist* – that of disentangling different uses, or senses, of the verb *einai*. Plato is thought to have confused different senses or uses of the verb in his philosophical youth; here he is supposed to correct his mistake, and to mark out a danger area for his successors.<sup>1</sup> Plato is also often supposed, by commentators, to have set himself the task of disentangling a second confusion – a confusion between the *mē on* (what is not) and the *mēdamōs on* (what is in no way): on this view, the *mē on* is revealed as the negation of the *on*, whereas the *mēdamōs on* is the opposite of the *on*.

I shall argue, however, that neither of these views of Plato's task in the *Sophist* was that of Plato himself. It is certainly true, as Owen and Frede have argued, that Plato does exploit a distinction between different uses, or senses, of *einai* at one point in the dialogue (in 255cd, in the course of his proof that Being and Difference are different).<sup>2</sup> It is also true that Plato makes a contrast he thinks important between negation and opposition (though *not*, in my view, between *mē on* and *mēdamōs on* – see pp. 120–2 below). None the less, these are not Plato's main concerns in the *Sophist*.

I shall argue that it is clear that Plato would himself characterize his task in the *Sophist* as showing *τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν* (258d5) – that what is notbeing is being.<sup>3</sup> Problems arise only in the interpretation of Plato's task. We must be guided in our interpretation by the solution Plato offers to his problems. This solution turns firstly on his demonstration of Communion of Kinds, and secondly on his distinction between otherness and opposition. The conclusion Plato draws from his discussion of Communion of Kinds has sometimes been thought to lend support to the view that Plato's task here is that of distinguishing different senses of *einai*. I shall argue that this view of the passage presents serious problems for the commentator. And this view of Plato's task in the *Sophist* receives no support at all from Plato's contrast between otherness and opposition. That contrast, however, equally fails to support the other commonly held view of the problems Plato is facing in the *Sophist*, that Plato is keen to distinguish between the *mēdamōs on* and the *mē on*. In particular, the analogy Plato draws between 'being' and 'big' presents a major difficulty for this view.

Finally, I shall introduce a new interpretation of Plato's task, *via* a consideration of his stated intention to commit patricide and refute Parmenides' criticism of the road of enquiry followed by mortals. Once we have seen that Plato promises to refute Parmenides, but does not accomplish this task by distinguishing between different senses or uses of *einai*, nor yet by a distinction between being in no way and simply

<sup>1</sup> For the view that Plato distinguishes different senses of *einai* in the *Sophist*, see J. H. Ackrill, 'Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251–9', *JHS* 77 (1957), 1–7; M. Frede, *Prädication und Existenzaussage*, Hypomnemata Heft 18 (Göttingen, 1967); G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on Notbeing', in *Plato*, I, ed. G. Vlastos (London, 1972), 223–67. For the view that Plato confused different senses of *einai* in earlier works see Owen, 'Notes on Ryle's Plato', in *Ryle*, ed. O. P. Wood and G. Pitcher (London, 1971), pp. 341–72; C. C. W. Taylor, *Plato's Protagoras* (Oxford, 1976); D. Gallop, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1975). References to Owen are to 'Plato on Notbeing', unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup> See Owen, pp. 256–8; Frede, pp. 12–28.

<sup>3</sup> We normally translate *to mega* as 'what is big'. I consequently translate *to on* as 'what is being' and *to mē on* as 'what is notbeing', to preserve the parallel in the Greek.

not being, only one possibility remains: Plato thinks the refutation of Parmenides achieved if he can show that being (F) is not opposed to notbeing (G). This interpretation of Plato's task is then shown to fit well, both with the puzzles that introduce the central section of the *Sophist*, and with Plato's resolution of those puzzles by way of his demonstration of Communion of Kinds, and his distinction between otherness and opposition. It is compatible with what Plato says and does in *Sophist* 241–56; and it accounts well for the nature of Plato's discussion of negation and falsity in the dialogue.

*Plato's formulation of his task*

There can, in fact, be little doubt as to how Plato himself formulated the question he was treating in the central section of the *Sophist*. As Frede has noted (p. 11), Plato himself says in the *Politicus* that the *Sophist* is about 'the being of what is notbeing' (περὶ τῆς τοῦ μὴ ὄντος οὐσίας, 286b10). Now the meaning of this phrase may indeed seem somewhat obscure to us initially. But what Plato says in the *Sophist* itself makes it quite certain that this is what he thought much of the dialogue was about.

Socrates introduces the topics filled with *aporia* in 236e–237a by saying that the problem with the natural account of falsity, etc. is that it depends on the ability to say that 'what is notbeing is being' (ὑποθέσθαι τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι 237a3–4). Parmenides has forbidden us to say that what is notbeing is being, and quotations from Parmenides introduce at 237a and conclude at 258d1 that section of the *Sophist* concerned with the being of what is notbeing. This is not, in fact, quite the only subject tackled there. At 258d, Socrates says that he has not only shown that what is notbeing is being (τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν, 258d5), but has demonstrated its nature. None the less, the argument that what is notbeing is being is the central task of pages 237–58 of the *Sophist*: discussion of the nature of what is notbeing occupies only pages 257–8. In 260, the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus set off on what they call a new task (Theaetetus complains that it is a new task at 261ab) – an argument that notbeing communes with belief and language.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the Visitor makes a backward reference in 263 to one of the conclusions of the section 237–58. So the new task and the old task are not completely separate enquiries. None the less, *Sophist* 260–3 does clearly constitute a different argument from the one in *Sophist* 237–58. It would therefore be a mistake to see the discussion of falsity in 263 as a direct answer to the problem of falsity as expounded in 237 and 240–1.<sup>5</sup> By 263, there is no longer thought to be any difficulty in the nature of notbeing; and so the original problem expounded in 237 and 240–1 has been resolved.

Now that we have seen *when* Plato thinks that he has resolved his problem, we must

<sup>4</sup> As J. M. E. Moravcsik notes, 'Being and meaning in the *Sophist*', *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 14 (1962), 23–78 (p. 60), this new task is not strictly necessary. If everything that is being is also notbeing (and vice versa), then a separate argument that statement, etc. commune with notbeing is otiose.

<sup>5</sup> Two examples of this may be found in D. Wiggins' 'Sentence meaning, negation and Plato's problem of notbeing' in *Plato*, ed. G. Vlastos, I, 268–303, and D. Keyt's 'Plato on falsity: *Sophist* 263' in *Exegesis and Argument, Studies in Greek Philosophy presented to G. Vlastos*, ed. by E. M. Lee *et al.*, *Phronesis* Supp. 1 (Assen, 1973), 285–305. Both these commentators think that 263 directly answers the problems in 237–41. Moravcsik, by contrast, sees well enough that 237–41 is answered at 257 (see p. 25). But in common with all commentators before Frede and Owen, he radically misinterprets the dialogue because he assumes without argument that *einai* means 'exist'. This causes him problems when he considers the claim at 258e that Parmenides has now been refuted (see p. 66).

examine a little more closely just *what* he thinks this problem to be. I shall now discuss briefly the puzzles set on pages 237–41 of the *Sophist*, and argue that they all, in fact, make the same point about the being of what is notbeing. I shall follow Owen's numeration of the puzzles.<sup>6</sup> This yields five puzzles, the first three concerned with paradoxes inherent in the use of the expression 'what is notbeing', while the last two are concerned with phenomena – images and falsity – which we could not analyse without the help of this very expression, 'what is notbeing'. The first three puzzles thus might incline us simply to reject the expression 'what is notbeing', because of the puzzles about its use; but the puzzles about images and falsity show that this would be a mistake. For if this expression forms an essential part of the analysis of images and falsity, it must be possible to give an account of its use. Otherwise, of course, we would have to give up the view that there are such things as images and falsehoods.

Quite a number of assumptions are embedded in the puzzles. Owen, in his discussion of them, notes the assumption (*a*) that what is notbeing is identical with nothing (this assumption, he thinks, is confined to the first puzzle); and the assumption (*b*) that what is notbeing is identical with the opposite of being (this assumption, he thinks, is confined to the fourth and fifth puzzles). In addition, it is also sometimes thought significant that the expression 'what is notbeing' is treated, in the puzzles, interchangeably with the expression 'what is in no way being'.<sup>7</sup> So we should also list the assumption (*c*) that what is notbeing is identical with what is in no way being. And from (*b*) and (*c*) follows (*d*), the assumption that what is in no way being is the opposite of being.

I shall not examine these assumptions as yet, however, but will return to them later, when the issues involved have become clearer. As Owen has remarked, 'it will be generally agreed that Plato's understanding of these skeletal assumptions must be gathered from his subsequent treatment of them' (p. 259). All I wish to demonstrate for the time being, then, is that all the puzzles alike entail that what is notbeing is being.

Now the first puzzle shows that if we are to refer the expression 'what is notbeing' to anything, we must refer it to something that is being (237cd; 237c7–9 says it cannot be referred to what is being; 237c10–d5 says 'but there is nothing else to refer it to').<sup>8</sup> The second puzzle culminates in the *aporia* that 'what is notbeing' cannot be used *kath' hauto* 'in itself' – i.e. in isolation from what is being (cf. *Theaetetus* 188d9–10 for this use); and the third puzzle makes much the same point at 239b – that the use of the expression 'what is notbeing' implies that it is being. The puzzle about images notes that the analysis of images entails the combination of what is notbeing with what is being (conclusion at 240c3–6); while the final puzzle, about falsity, reiterates the

<sup>6</sup> See Owen, pp. 258–9.

<sup>7</sup> See below, pp. 120–2 for a discussion of this view, which has been adopted by J. Malcolm in his 'Plato's analysis of *ἴσθι* and *Μή ὄν* in the *Sophist*', *Phronesis* 12 (1967), 130–46, among others.

<sup>8</sup> Owen (pp. 241–4) takes the view that the problem Plato sets himself is transformed in the course of the puzzles. Owen's view is that Plato initially equates 'what is notbeing' with 'nothing', but then goes on to set puzzles about 'nothing' that are not, and are not confused with, puzzles about what does not exist. What is wrong with this view is that Plato focuses on the expression 'what is notbeing' and not on the expression 'nothing'. The equation of 'what is notbeing' with 'nothing' is indeed in the first puzzle – but only because of the assumption that 'what is notbeing' is opposed to 'what is being'. When the assumption is rejected, the identification of 'what is notbeing' with 'nothing' will no longer seem plausible. (Owen does seem to express this view of the first puzzle too. See pp. 247–8 of his article.)

point that introduces the puzzles – that the analysis of falsity also entails that what is notbeing is being (240e 1–2).

It seem clear, then, that Plato would say that his problem was to demonstrate that ‘what is notbeing is being’. But it is not immediately obvious what Plato means by this. And so I would now like to examine the various interpretations of the task that Plato has set himself, starting with the view that Plato’s task involves distinguishing different senses of the verb *einai*.

#### *Senses of einai in the Sophist*

If we ask what task Plato has set himself, in maintaining that ‘what is notbeing is being’, only one thing is self-evident: that Plato is not trying to show that what does not exist does exist. Now this by itself does not imply that Plato is not concerned with existence at all; it still leaves open the possibility that Plato is trying to show that what does not exist none the less is being, in some other sense of that word, or that what is notbeing, in some sense of the verb, does none the less exist. But the work of recent commentators, Frede and Owen, has rendered such lines of interpretation implausible in the extreme. For, as Owen has pointed out (pp. 229–31), Plato leads us to expect parallel treatment of the positive and negative occurrences of the verb. And both Frede and Owen have given satisfactory analyses of those passages in the dialogue which were formerly thought to depend on existential uses of the verb, and have shown that this is not the case (see Frede, pp. 12–19; Owen, pp. 253–8). So commentators are now in a position to conclude that Plato’s interest lies in propositions of the form ‘*x* is...’ and ‘*x* is not...’. Thus Owen can write ‘and this is his point in the *Sophist*: to ascribe some proportion of notbeing to any subject does not preclude ascribing some proportion of being to it’ (p. 235).<sup>9</sup>

So far, so good. But it is at this point, I believe, that many commentators have gone wrong. For they have made the further unwarranted assumption that Plato must, in this case, be interested in propositions of the form ‘*x* is *F*’ and ‘*x* is not *F*’. It is then natural to suppose that Plato shows that propositions like this are not contradictory, if ‘is’ in one proposition is used to mark identity and in the other to mark predication. Thus they see Plato as showing that what is<sub>1</sub> *F* is<sub>2</sub> not *F*.

So let us see what evidence there is to support this view. As I have said, I do not propose to argue that Plato does not exploit a distinction between different senses of *einai* in the *Sophist*, but simply that such a distinction does not play a major part in the resolution Plato offers us to the initial puzzles, and to the difficulty about the coincidence of being with notbeing.

Now there are two notions on which Plato lays great stress as the keys to his problems – one is his demonstration of Communion of Kinds, the other is his contrast between otherness and opposition. (I take this to be uncontroversial; but for a brief discussion of Plato’s general strategy in *Sophist* 237–58, see pp. 125–6 below.) So if it were right to suppose that Plato’s method of resolving the apparent contradiction that interests him revolved round a distinction between identity and predication, we would expect this distinction to be drawn to our attention, stated clearly, and emphasized, both when Plato is drawing his conclusions from his demonstration of the Communion of Kinds, and when he contrasts otherness with opposition. But this is not what we find. It is certainly quite impossible to see Plato’s contrast between

<sup>9</sup> cf. also Owen, p. 249: ‘in denouncing the sophist’, ‘we seemed to assume’ ‘the incompatibility of what is with what is not’, and p. 260: ‘the man who speaks falsely does after all and without paradox ascribe being to what is not or notbeing to what is’.

otherness and opposition in terms of a distinction between different uses or senses of *einai*; and though Ackrill and Frede have tried hard to interpret 255–6, the upshot of Plato's discussion of Communion of Kinds, in terms of such a distinction between different uses or senses of *einai*, we will soon see that there are severe difficulties with both the two proposed readings of the passage.

First, however, let us consider briefly Plato's contrast between otherness and opposition. What Plato says here indicates clearly that he is *not* concerned with the distinction between identity and predication. He says in 257b3–4 that *whenever* we say notbeing we do not say what is opposed to being, but merely what is non-identical with it. Whereas, if Plato were concerned to contrast identity with predication, we would expect him to say, rather, that being and notbeing are sometimes opposed and sometimes not opposed. They are opposed if we are faced with two opposed predications (as in 'x is F' and 'x is-not F'), and they are also opposed if we are faced with two contradictory judgements of identity ('x is identical with x', 'x is-not identical with x'); but they are not opposed when we set a predication against a judgement of identity ('x is F' against 'x is-not identical with F').

When we turn to Plato's discussion of Communion of Kinds, however, it seems much more plausible to suppose that he is interested in distinguishing identity from predication. For Plato thinks of Communion of Kinds as a sort of antidote to the late learners' position about language. And whatever the precise details of the late learners' position,<sup>10</sup> it is certain that the late learners object to any form of predication. So perhaps one purpose of the demonstration of Communion of Kinds is to vindicate the possibility of predication. Our view of Plato's purpose in this passage must depend, however, on the use Plato makes of it later in the dialogue as well as on his original reason for introducing it. And if Communion of Kinds is introduced to refute the late learners, it is later put to use in 255e–257a to resolve a series of apparent contradictions. 'Resolve' may in fact be too strong a word; for I believe that the full resolution of these apparent contradictions awaits the introduction of 'other' in 257bff. None the less, Communion of Kinds does at least provide a partial explication of these apparent contradictions. One question we must ask, then, is whether, as Ackrill has claimed in his 'Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251–259', this explanation takes the form of isolating a predication on the one hand from an identity on the other. In particular, we must examine carefully the pair of propositions 'Motion is the same' and 'Motion is not the same', to which Plato (256ab) and Ackrill (p. 209) pay most attention.

The context here is that the Eleatic Visitor has just shown that there are five non-identical Kinds (conclusion at 255d9–e1), which are non-identical by participation in non-identity (255e3–6). He then takes Motion as an example, and reiterates its non-identity with the other four Kinds so far established, and glosses these denials of identity with *heteron* (255e11, 256a5, 256d5). So far, so good, for Ackrill's view: the 'is not' that relates Motion to each of the other Kinds is in each case the 'is not' of non-identity. On Ackrill's view, then, we would expect to find that the 'is' that relates Motion to each of the other Kinds is the 'is' of predication.

In one of the four cases in question, this may indeed be the case. It is hard to tell what Plato is getting at in 256b6–7 (there are several theories in the field). But it is at least possible that his point here is that the proposition 'Motion is not Rest' does not, of itself, preclude the partaking, or copulative, relation 'Motion is at rest' (this may indeed be precluded; but if so, it is precluded for a different reason).

<sup>10</sup> For different views about late learners, see Owen, p. 251 n. 48; Frede, pp. 61–7; Moravcsik, pp. 56–9.

But there are problems for Ackrill's view as soon as we turn to the cases of Motion and Identity, and Motion and Non-identity. For what, after all, would it mean to say that 'identical' or 'non-identical' was *predicated* of Motion? If a proposition reads 'Motion is identical/non-identical with...', it is very strange to say that 'identical' or 'non-identical' is being *predicated* of Motion. What is happening in the proposition as a whole is not a predication but an identification. It would be quite remarkable if a Plato intent on illustrating the distinction between identity and predication chose this as an example of predication: for it could only lead to confusion among his readers. In one and the same proposition, on Ackrill's view, 'x is not the same as y', the identity of x and y is denied, and 'same' is predicated of x.

When we turn to the Greek, we find that Plato expands 'Motion is and is not the same' as follows:

(1) Motion is the same by *μέθεξις ταύτου πρὸς ἐαυτήν*

(2) Motion is not the same by *κοινωνία θατέρου...* (256a10–b4).

Both propositions are equivalent in construction (as Ackrill seems to agree; see pp. 216–17). The best we can say is that both involve identity (cf. Ackrill p. 209); perhaps both also express a predication. However we should take it, Plato just does not seem to be disarming an apparent contradiction by pointing to a distinction between identity and predication.

Frede, however, has set out a rather different reading of the passage, on which Plato would indeed employ a distinction between two uses of 'is' here, but where the distinction is not exactly the distinction between identity and predication. His views are consequently not vulnerable to quite the same criticisms as are the views of Ackrill. On Frede's view, Plato distinguishes between a use of 'is' which does *not* imply reference to something numerically distinct from the subject of whatever proposition is in question, and a second use of 'is' which does. Thus of the two propositions set out above, (1) exemplifies the first use of 'is', whereas (2) exemplifies the second use of 'is'.

Frede's view of the passage is perhaps most clearly set out on pp. 29–30 of his book,<sup>11</sup> where he writes that our passage illustrates the conclusion that there is a complete class of pairs (*a*, *b*) such that both '*a* is' and '*a* is not' hold good of *a* with reference to *b*.

Now Frede's view suggests that when we consider propositions (1) and (2), we are invited to focus our attention on the verb in each instance – 'is' and 'is not' – and that the negation 'not' relates closely to the verb. But *prima facie* it also seems possible to take the negation closely with the complement of the verb, 'the same', thus construing (2) as 'Motion is not-the-same'. And there is no imperative reason in either logic or Greek word order to adopt one of these constructions rather than the other.

But later in the *Sophist*, we learn that Plato thinks that the negation sign acts on the words that follow it, indicating not the opposite of what those words indicate, but just something different from them (257b9–c3). And in our passage the negation is repeatedly set before the complement of the verb 'is', and not before the verb itself. Thus we find:

*οὐ στάσις ἄρ' ἐστιν*

and not

*οὐκ ἄρ' ἐστι στάσις.*

Moreover, the paraphrase on offer here is *heteron staseōs*, and not something with

<sup>11</sup> Frede also deals with it on p. 71; but his treatment of it there adds nothing to what he says earlier.

*heteron* and *einai*. This fact, I believe, is sufficient to rule out Frede's view of the passage. For it shows that Plato is interested here in propositions of the form

(a) *x* is F

(b) *x* is not-F

and not

(a) *x* is F

(c) *x* is-not F.<sup>12</sup>

The interest of the passage as a whole then centres on the substitution of 'being' into the 'F' slot, rather than on the use of 'is' and 'is not'. And it is the possibility of this substitution that enables the Eleatic Visitor to conclude at 256d11–256e3 that all the Kinds are both being and notbeing.<sup>13</sup>

Now it may be, of course, that as soon as we start to reflect seriously on pairs of propositions of the form (a) and (b), we will want to introduce into our reflections some distinctions between different uses or senses of *einai*. And it may well be that Plato himself, had he been called upon to elaborate his discussion at this point, would in fact have had occasion to mention the distinction he has drawn in 255cd between different senses or uses of *einai*. My point here, however, is that Plato does *not* explicitly here raise the question of the ambiguity of *einai*; but that this is precisely what we

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Frede himself notes on p. 83 that Plato tends to analyse negative propositions as of the form '*x* is (not-*y*)'. See also J. McDowell, 'Falsehood and notbeing in Plato's *Sophist*', in *Language and Logos, Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy presented to G. E. L. Owen*, ed. M. Schofield and M. C. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 115–34 (pp. 116–21). McDowell, however, first recognizing the position of the negation sign in 255–7, concludes that when in place the 'not' will ultimately, for Plato, make no difference (p. 121). Plato, who remarks in 257bc that the negation sign operates on the words that follow it, is at least not explicitly drawing McDowell's conclusion.

<sup>13</sup> We do not yet have a satisfactory account of how the paraphrases offered in 256a12–b4 resolve the apparent contradiction involved in 256b10–11. Owen, who rejects the view that different meanings and/or uses of 'is' are involved here, has made two different (and incompatible) tentative suggestions as to what is going on here. In note 63 to his 'Plato on Notbeing' (p. 258) he suggests first of all that (1) and (2) are in no way paraphrases intended to clarify 'Motion is the same and not the same'. This approach to the difficulty must be rejected: there can be little doubt that the *hopotan* of a12 and the *hotan* of b1 pick up the *hotan* of a11, and that (1) and (2) each expand on one limb of the clause 'whenever we call it the same and not the same' (a11–12). We do, then, have paraphrases on our hands.

Owen's second suggestion is more helpful. The suggestion is basically that we do have paraphrases here, but paraphrases of 'the same' rather than paraphrases of 'is'. Owen simply suggests that in 'Motion is identical', 'identical' signifies 'partaking in the Form Identical', but that in 'Motion is not identical', 'identical' signifies 'the Form Identical'. And of course we would have to say much the same about the other cases – that Being, Rest and Non-identity here sometimes signify the Forms Being, Rest and Non-identity, but sometimes signify 'partaking in the Forms Being, Rest and Non-identity'.

But there remains a problem with this way of seeing 255e–257a: it does not explain why the Eleatic Visitor feels able to conclude at 256e4–5 that there is infinite notbeing with reference to each of the Kinds. None the less, I think we are forced to accept this reading of the passage *faute de mieux*.

F. A. Lewis discusses three other possible readings of the passage in his 'Did Plato discover the *estin* of identity?', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 8 (1975), 113–43 (pp. 130–6). One is that Plato is here exploiting the relational nature of the term 'other' – but he thinks that 'external considerations go against... such a reconstruction' (p. 132). Another would turn on Plato's use of the definite article. Given the complications that arise on this reading, where *tauton* and *thäteron* are concerned, it seems very implausible. The third suggestion is that Plato has in mind here a distinction between two different senses of 'not'. One problem with this suggestion is that only one of each pair of *prima facie* contradictory propositions need be paraphrased (see Lewis, p. 134); but Plato does seem interested in paraphrasing both propositions in each pair.

would expect him to do, if that were his point; and that the obvious way to focus attention on the ambiguity of *einai* is by way of pairs of propositions of the form (a) and (c).

We have seen, then, that it is most implausible to hold that Plato is trying to draw attention to a distinction between different senses or uses of *einai* when he draws his distinction between otherness and opposition; and that there are serious difficulties in supposing that this distinction is the moral of his discussion of Communion of Kinds.

How, then, does Plato resolve his initial *aporiai* by means of these notions? Before introducing what I believe to be the correct account of this matter, I should like to examine another attractive, but mistaken, alternative, that of Malcolm.

#### *Malcolm's view*

It is often thought that, for Plato, being has both a negation, notbeing, and an opposite, in no way being; and that while the negation of being, notbeing, is just non-identical with being, the opposite of being, in no way being, does indeed preclude being. On this view, Plato's analysis of his initial puzzles is that they depend on a confusion between the negation of being (notbeing) and the opposite of being (in no way being). And once this confusion is discovered, the puzzles (on this view) are dissolved.

I shall refer to this view of the *Sophist* as Malcolm's view, although it is to some extent anticipated by Cornford, and has subsequently been taken up by Owen, among others.<sup>14</sup>

For Malcolm, as for Owen, the verb *einai* in the *Sophist* is incomplete. The *mēdamōs on*, he says, is to be contrasted with *pōs on*. *Pōs* in this context would seem to signify only that there exists possible completion to *einai*. For the *mēdamōs on*, in the view of Malcolm, is 'that which in no way at all may be said to be'. And he seems to mean by this that 'what is in no way being' is not F for all possible values of F. Thus he claims that unicorns may be said to *einai pōs*, in so far as 'many things may be affirmed of them' (see p. 137). Similarly, Owen describes the *mēdamōs on* as 'a merely paradoxical notion' (p. 266), 'a subject with all the being knocked out of it, and so unidentifiable, no subject' (p. 247), and sees it as a mistaken shot at forming the negation of being (p. 235).<sup>15</sup>

On this view, then, what is in no way being is incompatible with what is (in some way) being. And the moral of the dialogue is that a qualified compresence of being with notbeing is revealed to be possible. Now this view of the *Sophist* suggests, I believe, that Plato is giving a middle-period answer to a problem that might have arisen in his middle period; whereas I hope to demonstrate that Plato is giving us a new, late-period, answer to a middle-period difficulty. The examples Plato employs in 257–8 – the big, the just and the beautiful – are certainly familiar from the middle

<sup>14</sup> See F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1935), e.g. p. 208, where Cornford recognizes two senses of notbeing. Malcolm makes some necessary modifications to Cornford's position (p. 135 n. 13). He also explicitly equates 'what is in no way being' with the opposite of being (p. 135), unlike Owen.

<sup>15</sup> For Owen's view, see further pp. 234–5 and p. 259. Frede also uses the two expressions (opposite of being, and what is in no way being) interchangeably (see pp. 74–7). He understands 'what is in no way being' in the same way as do Malcolm and Owen. Thus on p. 75, he suggests that in a proposition of the form 'x is *mēdamōs on*', x must allow itself to be characterized in no way, if the proposition is to be meaningful.



period.<sup>16</sup> And the terminology Malcolm discusses also seems to be derived from the middle period: in *Republic* 5, objects of knowledge are *patelōs onta*, objects of ignorance are *mēdamē onta*, while objects of belief are both *onta* and *mē onta*. Malcolm's view, then, seems to amount to this: that Plato is now extending the moral he draws about objects of belief (i.e. particulars) in the *Republic* to cover Forms. Forms too now are seen to be both being and notbeing.

Let us see how well Malcolm's view fits the text of the *Sophist*; and let us turn first to the puzzles. Malcolm admits that in the puzzles the expressions 'notbeing' and 'in no way being' are used interchangeably; but, he says, they are well distinguished by 258e (p. 135). So the attentive reader of the *Sophist* would, on a second perusal of the work, see that the problem the Eleatic Visitor sets out to solve is given correctly in 241d5–7: the Visitor must show that notbeing is *kata ti* and that notbeing is *pēi*. In 240e1–6, by contrast, he is set the quite impossible task of showing *πὼς εἶναι τὰ μηδαμῶς ὄντα* and *μηδαμῶς εἶναι τὰ πάντως ὄντα*. For the presence of one of a pair of opposites rules out the compresence of the other opposite even 'in some way' (cf. *Charmides* 175: 'in no way knows' rules out 'in some way or other knows').

This is certainly a *possible* reading of the puzzles; but it is obviously not entirely satisfactory. For we might reasonably expect Plato *not* to mislead the unwary reader about what he intends to prove. And there are more serious difficulties in Malcolm's view, when we consider the solution Plato offers to his puzzles in 257–8.

First we must note that the Eleatic Visitor sets aside the question whether there is an opposite of being, and if so, whether it has a *logos*, in 258e–259a. He says that any potential opponent of his views should not now say to them that the opposite of being, namely *to mē on*, is what they have dared to show to be. Rather he should either accept what has been said (that what is not being is being) or attack that, and show the flaw in the argument. This is distinguished from the parallel questions concerning the opposite of being, to which 'we have long ago said goodbye' (Cornford). I take it that the Eleatic Visitor means here to distinguish these two questions because he takes himself to have answered the question about *to mē on*, but to have simply raised, and not answered, the question about the opposite of being. He would here, then, be trying to prevent any potential opponent of his argument from confusing the two issues. But whether or not this interpretation of these lines is correct, they certainly provide a serious problem for Malcolm's view. For, if Malcolm were right about the nature of Plato's task in the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Visitor would not only have dealt with the questions concerning the opposite of being; he would have dealt with those questions in the passage immediately preceding this claim of the Eleatic Visitor's to have said goodbye to those questions 'long ago'. (The answers to the questions are, on Malcolm's view, that (a) there *is* an opposite of being (= what is in no way being) and (b) nothing whatsoever is true of this opposite of being, and so it has no *logos*.)

Then there is the further very serious problem for Malcolm's view, that Plato just does not offer us a distinction between different ways of being F, when he resolves his problems in 257–9. We would expect him to mention here at least (a) what is being, (b) what is in some way notbeing, and (c) what is in no way being; and to point out that (a) is in fact compatible with (b); and that our original mistake was to identify (b) with (c), which is indeed incompatible with (a). But Plato says none of these things. Rather, he goes off at a tangent with a discussion of the negation of 'big'. Now this

<sup>16</sup> See Owen, p. 235 n. 24; Keyt, p. 302; Wiggins, p. 269 n. 1 and p. 284.

discussion should serve to illustrate the relation of a predicate to the negation of that predicate, and hence the relation of 'being' to 'notbeing'. Plato's analogy can in fact be presented schematically as follows:

predicate:	big	being
negation:	notbig	notbeing
opposite:	small	(opposite of being)

I shall discuss this table in more detail later, when setting out my own view of Plato's intentions in this passage. We should note now simply that we do not find here the terms Malcolm leads us to expect; and that Plato does not seem to be interested here in Malcolm's distinction between different ways of being F.

Malcolm's view of the *Sophist*, then, yields us a Plato who sets up a task he has no intention of carrying out (a task, indeed, which we come to realize is impossible); who manages not to make clear the key points of his solution to the task he has set himself; and who shows a very strange disinclination, in 258e–259a, to discuss, or even to sum up his views about, a question to which he has recently given a clear answer.

Plainly, Malcolm's view of Plato's task in the *Sophist* leaves much to be desired; so too, however, as we have seen, does the view that Plato's task is to distinguish between different senses of *einai*.

Let us now ask, then, what *is* Plato's task, and how he sets about it.

#### *Plato's task and its solution*

We have seen that it is not hard to describe Plato's task, and its solution, in Plato's own terms: the task is to show that being is notbeing and vice versa; and Plato accomplishes the task via his demonstration that these Kinds commune, and the distinction between otherness and opposition. Our problem is simply in the interpretation of all this.

This is perhaps best approached via Plato's criticism of Parmenides. Plato regards the accomplishment of his task as a refutation of Parmenides' criticisms of the route of enquiry embraced by two-headed mortals. We must ask, I believe, just what point we would expect such a refutation to bring out.

In fact, Parmenides' criticism of mortals does not lie at the core of his metaphysics. Parmenides in his poem raises difficulties both about the unintelligibility of 'notbeing' (there is nothing for it to refer to) and also about the compresence of being with notbeing. But Parmenides' position rests on the first of these two claims, the one about the unintelligibility of 'notbeing'. (For even if he were to be persuaded that being is compatible with notbeing, he would still rule out the route notbeing on the grounds that it is unintelligible.) Plato, like Parmenides, raises both difficulties. But Plato, unlike Parmenides, is primarily interested in the second of the two problems – that is, in the compresence of being with notbeing, and *not* in the intelligibility of notbeing. Hence the passages Plato quotes from Parmenides' poem.

That this is the focus of Plato's interest is borne out by the first three of the five puzzles that he introduces in 237–41. These three puzzles rest, one and all, on the assumption noted by Owen that notbeing is opposed to being, and so precludes being.<sup>17</sup> The supposed unintelligibility of notbeing arises in so far as notbeing is on the

<sup>17</sup> Owen locates this assumption only in the last two puzzles. The word *enantion* does figure most prominently there. But we also find it at 238e8 in the third puzzle. And if two *enantia* cannot be compresent, then the assumption is present throughout the puzzles. It simply becomes clearer as they progress.

one hand thought, as the opposite of being, to preclude being; and on the other hand, it is thought to entail being. So when once we have shown that notbeing is not opposed to being, and that notbeing does not preclude being after all, then there is no longer a problem of unintelligibility of notbeing.

There remains only a problem of the unintelligibility of an opposite of being. For this still seems to preclude being (as it is opposed to being), and yet to entail being (because, for instance, we can speak of it). But because we know that notbeing is not opposed to being and this is the focus of Plato's interest, this problem can be safely set aside unanswered. Thus it is, as we would expect, a real problem that Plato mentions in 258e–259a (though not one that is relevant to his concerns), and not (as it is on Malcolm's view) a problem to which he has already supplied us with the answer.

So much, then, for the supposed unintelligibility of notbeing. What of Plato's main task, that of refuting Parmenides? We should ask about this, first, perhaps, how Plato *should* have set about this task, and then how he actually did set about it.

Parmenides is now generally taken to have the complete, existential sense of the verb *einai* in mind in his criticisms of us mortals. In that case, his criticism seems to be quite simply mistaken. As Barnes has recently remarked, the reasoning least implausibly attributed to Parmenides here 'will stand no weight; and it is fortunate that Parmenides need set no weight on it'.<sup>18</sup> In Barnes's view, Parmenides has thought, mistakenly, that we mortals are contradicting ourselves, if we think, for example, that lions exist in Africa but do not exist in Athens.<sup>19</sup> If this interpretation is along the right lines (and it seems unlikely that we can do much better on Parmenides' behalf than this), Parmenides is in fact rather easy to refute on this point: we need simply to point out that it is not contradictory to hold that something can exist here but not there (or, indeed, at one time but not at another).

Clearly, however, Plato is not interested in the complete, existential sense of *einai* in the *Sophist*; and so it is most unlikely that this is the sense of the verb that he ascribes to Parmenides in this passage. Rather, he takes Parmenides to have in mind an incomplete use of the verb. We have seen, however, that he does not take the refutation of Parmenides to consist in distinguishing between different incomplete uses of the verb, or between different ways of being (F). What, then, can his task be? It too, I believe, is essentially simple: it is to show that it is possible for what is (F) to not-be (G). Being (F) is not opposed to notbeing (G). For example: lions can be (large in Africa) but not-be (large in Athens).

Can Plato have thought such a task worth while? I believe that he can have done so. No less a philosopher than Parmenides had been led astray on this point, after all; and the mistake is one that can still generate confusion in the hands of the sophist. And Plato himself may once have had other views than those he expresses here on how to resolve such cases of apparent contradiction (cf. pp. 120–1 above). Certainly, the text of the *Sophist*, I shall argue, endorses this view of Plato's task in the central section of the work.

Let us now return to the puzzles of 237–41. Only in the fourth puzzle, about images, does the question of completions to 'being' and 'notbeing' arise. It is natural here to think that Plato's problem is that an image of a cat both is (a cat) and is not (a cat). This problem would not, of course, be resolved by a distinction between identity and predication; nor would a distinction between different ways of being F really do anything to cast light on images (it might show that it is possible to be and not be

<sup>18</sup> J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 1. *Thales to Zeno* (London, 1979), p. 170.

<sup>19</sup> See Barnes, pp. 169–70.

a cat in different ways, but there would remain the question whether an image is and is not a cat in the same way). But in fact, I believe, Plato's problem is not that an image both is (a cat) and is not (a cat). The conclusion in 240c5 is indeed that the sophist forces us to agree that what is notbeing is being in some way. But if we look just above this, at 240b11–13, we see that this conclusion is derived from the fact that the image is really not *a cat* but is really *an image* (240b11 – the image is εἰκῶν ὄντως; 240b12–13 – οὐκ ὄν ἄρα ὄντως ἐστὶν ὄντως ἣν λέγομεν εἰκόνα). The resolution that we need to this puzzle is, of course, that being (a cat) is not opposed to notbeing (an image, or an image of a cat).

What, finally, of the fifth puzzle, and the problem we noted earlier, that the Eleatic Visitor uses the expressions 'notbeing' and 'in no way being' interchangeably in his description of his task in 240–1? I believe that we can now give a satisfactory explanation of this fact although this explanation will involve us in a new interpretation of the meaning of the expression 'what is in no way being' in the *Sophist*.

On Owen's view, the expression 'being' in the *Sophist* (and elsewhere in Plato) is incomplete; but in the *Sophist* the expression 'in no way being' is not incomplete – because the 'in no way' indicates that the 'being' can in no way be completed. It does not, however, seem necessary to adopt this position *a priori*: it seems perfectly possible that, just as when Plato says 'x is F', he feels free to conclude 'x is being (F)' (as e.g. at *Sophist* 252), he feels equally free to conclude that 'x is in no way being (F)' from propositions of the form 'x is in no way F'.<sup>20</sup> The virtue of consistency speaks in favour of this latter interpretation of 'in no way being' – it is exactly parallel to the generally accepted account of 'being' in the *Sophist*, and of the expression 'in every way being' when it is used of Forms in the *Republic*.

And this new interpretation of the phrase enables us to see why Plato should treat the expressions 'notbeing' and 'in no way being' interchangeably in the puzzles in the *Sophist*. Both expressions alike will be incomplete; and the Stranger's task will be to show that what is notbeing is none the less being and to show that what is in no way being is none the less being.

This view of the nature of Plato's task is also recommended, I believe, by the analogy between being and big that Plato draws in 257–8. We set out the relevant points of this analogy above (p. 122) as follows

predicate:	being	big
negation:	notbeing	notbig
opposite:	(opposite of being)	small

Now if we consider the right-hand column of this table, it might seem that 'big' is no more compatible with 'notbig' than it is with 'small'; and more generally, that the negation of a predicate is just as incompatib. with the predicate as is its opposite. This has led some commentators to take *heteron*, the standard Greek word for 'non-identical', as 'incompatible' both here and in 263.<sup>21</sup> This has the apparent advantage that when Plato later employs *heteron* in 263, he will be making the points we expect him to make about the true and the false. But it is very questionable whether this is, in fact, an advantage. For the whole point of the dialogue may well be that we have an intuition about being and notbeing (and consequently about the true and the false) – namely that they are opposed – which leads to paradoxes, is proved

<sup>20</sup> The question how 'being' relates to 'is' for Plato is discussed by Owen, pp. 232–3; Malcolm, p. 143. Malcolm draws a comparison with Aristotle. Aristotle explicitly remarks in a number of places that e.g. *badizei* may be expanded at will into *esti badizon* (e.g. *Met.* 1017a19–30). Plato seems to expand *esti* to *esti on* in just the same way.

<sup>21</sup> By Keyt, for example.

mistaken, and should be given up. To take *heteron* as 'incompatible', then, is to misunderstand Plato's purpose in writing the *Sophist*. As Frede has seen (p. 89), it would render the compresence of being with notbeing problematic.

Moreover, the Eleatic Visitor seems to insist that he is concerned with non-identity here, and not incompatibility, by the language that he uses in 257–8. Not only *heteron*, but also *allo*, turns up in this context (257b4, b 10, 258b 10, 259b2–3) – that is, both standard Greek words for non-identity. And Plato gives no indication that he is about to give these familiar words new meanings. Rather, he is engaged in explaining being and notbeing. So it is being and notbeing we should be trying to understand, in terms of what we already know – and what we know includes the standard meanings of common Greek words. In fact, it is not hard to restore to *heteron* its usual meaning of 'non-identical'.

The Eleatic Visitor asks Theaetetus in 257b6–7 οἶον ὅταν εἴπωμέν τι μὴ μέγα, τότε μᾶλλον τι σοι φαινόμεθα τὸ μικρὸν ἢ τὸ ἴσον δηλοῦν τῷ ῥήματι; to which he receives the reply καὶ πῶς; (257b8).<sup>22</sup> Now *ison* here has been taken to mean 'of middle size'.<sup>23</sup> And if *ison* did mean 'of middle size', then the three rows of our table would indeed be incompatible with each other, and *heteron* would mean 'incompatible'. For 'big' is incompatible both with 'small' and with 'notbig', if this is taken to mean 'either small or of middle size'. But *ison* does not mean 'of middle size', it means 'equal'; and *heteron* does not mean 'incompatible', it means 'non-identical'. And once we take *ison* to mean 'equal', the first row of our table becomes compatible with the second row. A thing's being big does not rule out its being notbig, if 'notbig' covers not only 'small' but also 'equal'. But though a thing can be both big and equal, being big and being equal are not the same thing. Similarly, being will not rule out notbeing; but being and notbeing are different.<sup>24</sup>

Now at this point we have examined Plato's description of his task, his initial puzzles about notbeing, and his final resolution of his difficulties. And we have seen that on all three counts the interpretation of Plato's task in the *Sophist* that I favour fits the text of the *Sophist* very well – much better than its rivals. So let us now examine the rest of the *Sophist*, and see whether anything Plato says there provides any indication as to the nature of his task.

A very brief survey of *Sophist* 241–56 will serve to demonstrate, I believe, that nothing in these pages tells either for or against any view as to the nature of Plato's task. After posing his five puzzles about 'notbeing', the Eleatic Visitor sets out to show that there are equal problems in understanding 'being'. These problems, as Malcolm has seen (pp. 131–2), are essentially problems of reference. The question for dualists and monists alike, if they admit what is being to their ontology (ὄν καλεῖτέ τι; 244b 11), is what the term 'being' refers to. The difficulty is that either 'being' is simply another name for the One, for the Two, or for one of the Two, or it is some entity not catered for in dualistic or monistic ontology. In 246–9, Socrates then argues that whatever there is is either in motion or at rest; only to pose for himself the question he had previously addressed to the monists and dualists (249e 7–250a 2) – to what, then, does the term 'being' refer? He is able to answer that being is a third entity, non-identical with both Motion and Rest (250bc). The problem now assumes the form that there is nothing in the world to which 'being' applies but 'in motion' or 'at rest' does not

<sup>22</sup> See F. A. Lewis, 'Plato on "Not"', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 9 (1976), 89–115 (pp. 97–9), for a full discussion of *kai pōs* here.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Owen, 'Proof', p. 306 n. 1. Lewis, 'Plato on "Not"', also takes this view (pp. 96–7).

<sup>24</sup> This line is taken by R. S. Bluck, in his 'False statement in the *Sophist*', *JHS* 77 (1957), 181–6 (p. 185 n. 16).

apply (250c12–d3). The difficulty is like that with ‘notbeing’, the Visitor tells us; our difficulty there was *τοῦνομα ἐφ’ ὅτι δεῖ φέρειν*.

At this juncture the Eleatic Visitor takes it upon himself to defend, against the late learners, the possibility of applying more than one word to the same thing. This, of course, will eventually enable him to say that ‘being’ and ‘notbeing’ are just two terms that apply to the same things, and that what is being is also notbeing, and vice versa. Immediately, however, it means that he can proceed with the investigation of certain selected ‘great’ kinds, some of which ‘mix’ with one another – that is, they apply to the same things.

Now the Eleatic Visitor reverts to the points he was making in 249–50: that Being, Rest and Motion are three ‘great’ kinds, that Rest and Motion do not mix with one another, but that Being mixes with both Rest and Motion (254d). He shows next that Identical and Non-identical are two further ‘great’ kinds. Then, as we saw above (pp. 117–18), he takes Motion as an example, and claims that it is non-identical with each of the other ‘great’ kinds, but that this non-identity does not in itself prevent its participation in any of the other kinds. Being is one such kind, with which Motion is non-identical, but in which it does participate (256d); and what holds true for Motion holds true for everything else (256de). Everything is both being and notbeing. And now the Visitor, having drawn this conclusion, feels free to make the point, which we have examined at length above, that ‘being’ and ‘notbeing’, in this case, are not opposed but are just non-identical.

Now whether this summary of the argument in the *Sophist* from 241 to 256 is accepted in its entirety or not, I think it is clear that nothing Plato says in that section of the dialogue tells against the account I have offered of his task in showing that what is being is notbeing.

Let us finally, then, examine Plato’s analysis of negation and falsity in the *Sophist*, and see how well his treatment of these topics fits with the interpretation I have offered of the nature of his task in the *Sophist*. I believe it is generally recognized that his theories of negation and falsity are philosophically unsatisfactory, but we can account for his shortcomings in this area if we attribute to him merely the task of showing *that* negation and falsity are possible, and not that of analysing *how* they are possible. The former task fits well with the project of showing that being does not rule out or preclude notbeing; the latter task would necessitate his giving an explanation of how being F rules out notbeing F, or of how existence rules out non-existence – a task he does not undertake in the *Sophist*.

#### *Negation and falsity in the Sophist*

When Plato introduces his account of the relation of being to notbeing, he regards it as typical of the relation between any predicate F and its negation not-F (257b9–c3). And *that* relation, he says, is simply one of otherness, or non-identity. Now the problem with this is that each predicate is non-identical with each other predicate, but each predicate is not the negation of each other predicate. Wiggins puts the point thus: ‘Plato’s analysis of negation is palpably inadequate. Indeed it is wrong. Simple difference of F and G cannot suffice to make them exclude one another. Theaetetus’ having some quality distinct from flying can hardly in itself rule out the possibility that Theaetetus flies. He would have a distinct quality even if he were flying’ (p. 294). An illustration may make this point clearer. Let us suppose that Theaetetus is pale – paleness being a quality distinct from both flying and sitting. If we then say

'Theaetetus is not flying', we are not just saying that Theaetetus has some quality distinct from flying – such as his paleness, which is distinct from his flying. For his paleness does not rule out his flying.

Wiggins sees clearly that *heteron* must be taken to mean 'non-identical' throughout the dialogue.<sup>25</sup> And he sees no less clearly the difficulties this creates for Plato's account of negation. The basic problem is that simple difference, or non-identity, between two predicates F and G cannot suffice to make one exclude the other; but if F is the negation of G, then F should rule out G (and vice versa). So something else (besides simple non-identity) must be found to do this job of making F rule out G, and G rule out F.

Wiggins considers three possibilities. Perhaps, he says, we must ascribe to *x*, when we say that *x* is F or *x* is not G, the second-order property of having all its first-order properties different from G; or perhaps predicating not-G of *x* is placing *x* in the set of things that are not G. In either of these cases, the problem is that we do not have a familiar use of class or property by which to explain our problem, but must rely on an unusual sense of class or property (see pp. 299–300). A third suggestion Wiggins makes is that the notion of a range of predicates might do the job of the 'ruling out' that is necessary. The problem with this third possible amendment to Plato's theory is that the amended theory would not be a general theory of negation. To borrow some examples from the commentators, the 'not' in 'points do not have size' or '*x* is not musical' cannot be analysed along these lines.<sup>26</sup> We are left, then, with a Plato who did not make provisions for the negation sign to exclude what follows it, and whose theory cannot be amended so that it does make such provision. But on my view of the *Sophist*, this is not at all surprising: Plato's intention is simply to show that being does not rule out notbeing. No wonder, then, that there should be such a lacuna in his theory of negation.

If we now turn to Plato's view of falsity, we find an analogous problem. Keyt has recently examined Plato's treatment of this topic; like Wiggins, he concludes that Plato's text is too vague for us to be able to attribute any specific view to him with certainty; and he too thinks that all the specific views that one might attribute to Plato are philosophically unsatisfactory. The parallel between the conclusions of Wiggins and Keyt is, of course, not at all surprising, in so far as there is a logical link between negation and falsity – not-*p* is true when *p* is false. The question Plato's text poses will come as no surprise – what is it that he thinks rules out false propositions? Keyt outlines the three possibilities as follows (pp. 295–8). One is that it is either a negative fact or a negative property that Theaetetus has that makes 'Theaetetus is flying' false; the second is that all Theaetetus' properties (or all the facts about Theaetetus?) are what render 'Theaetetus is flying' false; while the third possible view is that there is some particular property Theaetetus has in a given range (such as sitting, when 'Theaetetus is flying' is in question) that rules out the false proposition.

Now Keyt is not, in fact, uniformly critical of all these three possible theories of falsity. He certainly does think that all three theories have their disadvantages; but he also finds the second alternative – the alternative that 'Theaetetus is flying' is false because flying is different from every attribute that Theaetetus possesses – the most acceptable. None the less, he is adamant that the text provides no support for ascribing to Plato any one of these three views rather than any other (p. 298).

<sup>25</sup> Wiggins, p. 295 n. 15a: 'the whole project is surely to contrive the explanation of negation with the apparatus provided by the great Kinds'.

<sup>26</sup> See Wiggins, p. 301; Keyt, p. 297.

Strangely, he then concludes that the text is vague. I write 'strangely', because he does cite at one point the view that Bluck takes of the passage – the view that I believe is the right one. In an aside in his article 'False statement in the *Sophist*', Bluck wrote 'A true statement would not of course become false if *any* different predicate were substituted for the existing one, but only if an incompatible one were substituted... it is enough for the Stranger's purpose to show that the substitution of *a* different predicate *can* make the statement false; for his aim is not so much to define falsity as to show that it is *possible* to "say what is not"' (p. 185). This view has not been generally accepted, of course. Indeed, it is very rarely even discussed.<sup>27</sup> None the less, a brief examination of *Sophist* 262–3 will confirm that it is correct.

As I noted earlier, Plato's task in *Sophist* 262–3 is no longer to show that what is being is notbeing, and vice versa. That task has already been accomplished in 257–8. In 262–3, Plato wants to show only that Statement communes with Notbeing. And all we learn from him is that the true statement 'Theaetetus is sitting' says what is about Theaetetus, and says that it is; but the false statement 'Theaetetus is flying' says what is not about Theaetetus, and says that it is.<sup>28</sup> Now we know that what is notbeing is also being, so there is no longer any question of our false statement's being impossible because we have used the expression 'what is notbeing' in our analysis of it. And we further know that 'not' should be analysed in terms of otherness. So what is notbeing can be paraphrased as what is other than being. We can say, then, that the false statement says what is other than being about Theaetetus. But we cannot say much more than this – Plato simply does not tackle the question what rules out, or renders false, the false proposition 'Theaetetus is flying'. Plato's interest here is in 'otherness' – i.e. simple difference or non-identity.

We cannot say any more of any given predicate than that it is non-identical with, or other than, each other predicate. If Theaetetus is pale and sitting, 'sitting' differs just as much from 'pale' as it does from 'flying'. And the true proposition 'Theaetetus is sitting' differs just as much from the true proposition 'Theaetetus is pale' as it does from the false proposition 'Theaetetus is flying'. (There is no question of our working out that Theaetetus is not flying from our knowledge that he is sitting. Not only is there no indication in the text of such a move; it is also totally unnecessary. For we all know that no one can fly!<sup>29</sup> Nor is there any question in the text here of negative properties or negative facts.)

Wiggins and Keyt, then, are right to think that there is a problem in Plato's analysis of negation and falsity: namely, that Plato makes no clear provision as to what he thinks rules out a false proposition or a negated predicate. I hope now to have shown why this is the case: it is not that Plato was just being careless and not saying clearly what he meant. Rather, it is that he was not interested in the question how a predicate F relates to its negation not-F, but in the question how being (F) relates to notbeing (G). And Plato was consequently not primarily interested in showing us how a predicate F rules out its negation not-F (and vice versa), but rather was anxious to show precisely that being (F) does *not* rule out notbeing (G).

<sup>27</sup> It has now been vigorously defended by McDowell, however – though along somewhat different lines from those suggested here.

<sup>28</sup> For the translation of *hōs* here as 'that', see Frede, p. 52; Keyt, pp. 287–293.

<sup>29</sup> This point was also noted by Bluck, p. 183.



*Conclusion*

To recapitulate, then: the *Sophist* is devoted to what seems to be a pair of compresent opposites, being and notbeing. Plato's problem is that of Parmenides, that such compresence of opposites is prima facie self-contradictory. He argues that because being and notbeing are compresent among the five great Kinds, they are not, after all, compresent opposites, but are just compresent non-identicals. The Form Being is shown to be as much notbeing as anything else, and everything that is being is also notbeing.<sup>30</sup>

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