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Author(s): Christine J. Thomas

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Speaking of Something: Plato's Sophist and Plato's Beard

CHRISTINE J. THOMAS
Dartmouth College
Hanover, NH 03755-3592
USA

The Eleatic Visitor speaks forcefully when he insists, '*Necessarily, whenever there is speech, it is speech of something; it is impossible for it not to be of something*' (*Soph.* 262e6-7).¹ For 'if it were not of anything, it would not be speech at all; for we showed that it is impossible for there to be speech that is speech of nothing' (*Soph.* 263c9-11).² Presumably, at 263c10, when he claims to have 'shown' that it is impossible for speech to be of nothing, the Visitor is referring back to the Parmenidean puzzles at *Sophist* 237ff.³ The passages from 237b7-239c3 provide the

- 1 λόγον ἀναγκαῖον, ὅτανπερ ἦ, τινὸς εἶναι λόγον, μὴ δὲ τινὸς ἀδύνατον. Italics added. Unless otherwise indicated, I follow the text in *Platonis Opera* vol. 1, E. Duke, W. Hicken, W. Nicoll, D. Robinson, and J. Strachan, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995). I am responsible for translations from the *Sophist*, though I have consulted translations and notes by F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, [PT] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. 1935), 165-331; and I sometimes follow with only minor modification N. White, *Plato: Sophist*, [PS] (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1993).
- 2 μηδενὸς <δέ> γε ὦν οὐδ' ἂν λόγος εἶη τὸ παράπαν· ἀπεφήναμεν γὰρ ὅτι τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἦν λόγον ὄντα μηδενὸς εἶναι λόγον. Even in the case of a false piece of speech (e.g. 'Theaetetus is flying'), the speech is of something, namely Theaetetus (*Soph.* 263c5).
- 3 It is possible that the Visitor refers only as far back as 262e4-7 and means only to recall that he has already 'mentioned' or 'pointed out' that speech must be of something. Of course, readers will then want to know why Theaetetus agrees so readily to the 'small point' articulated at 262e4-7. The answer presumably lies in

only arguments in the dialogue for thinking that speech (λόγος) must be of something (τινός) and cannot be of nothing (μηδενός). The Parmenidean view defended there requires that whoever does not speak of something says nothing at all and is not even speaking. Apparently, then, the Visitor never gives up the something requirement on discourse articulated at 237ff.. Indeed the something requirement — the *tinós* requirement — quickly spreads. Thought too must be of something since ‘thought and speech are the same (διάνοια μὲν καὶ λόγος ταῦτόν) except that what we call thought occurs without the voice, inside the soul in dialogue with itself’ (263e3-5). Thought just is silent speech, and both must be of something.⁴

After close examination of the Eleatic Visitor’s arguments, I shall defend the view that Plato intends the something requirement articulated in the *Sophist* to be a metaphysical condition on significant discourse and contentful thought.⁵ For Plato, whatever is something is some one thing that is. In other words, whatever is something exists as a well-individuated, countable entity. Being and number ‘belong to’ whatever is

the arguments offered on behalf of the conclusion that speech must be of something and cannot be of nothing at 237ff.

- 4 The Visitor is not alone in the Platonic corpus in favoring some kind of *tinós* requirement on speech and thought. At *Republic* 478bff, Socrates and Glaucon agree both that someone who believes believes some one thing (ἐν γέ τι δοξάζει ὁ δοξάζων, 478b10) and also that it is impossible to believe yet to believe nothing. In the *Theaetetus*, at 189a6-8, we are told by Socrates that someone who believes (δοξάζων) has in his belief some one thing (ἐν τι), a thing which is (ὄν). It is not possible to believe what is not, for believing what is not is not believing at all (*Th.* 189a10-13). And again, since belief requires believing some one thing that is, speech must require some one thing that is. For thinking (το διανοεῖσθαι) just is ‘speech (λόγον) which the mind goes through with itself about those things it considers’ (*Th.* 189e4-7). At *Parmenides* 132b7-c7, Socrates and Parmenides agree that thought is of something (τινός) and cannot be of nothing (οὐδενός). See also *Euthyd.* 283e7-284c6. Of course, a *tinós* requirement might very well come to different things across different dialogues. The primary focus of the present paper is the nature of the requirement as articulated in the *Sophist*. For some discussion of passages from other dialogues, see G. Fine, ‘Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V,’ *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1970) 121-39; C. Kahn, ‘Some Philosophical Uses of “to be” in Plato,’ [TB], *Phronesis* 26 (1981) 105-34; and M. Burnyeat, ‘Plato on How Not to Speak of What is Not: *Euthydemus* 283a-288a,’ *Le Style de la Pensée* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres 2002), 40-66.
- 5 M. M. McCabe, *Plato’s Individuals*, [PI] (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994), 192-217, and R. Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato’s Cratylus* (London: Routledge 2001), 192-4, also suggest that the *tinós* requirement articulates some kind of ontological requirement on significant discourse, though our accounts of the substance of the requirement differ.

something. Moreover, whatever is something is self-identical (by sharing in sameness) and different from everything else (by sharing in difference). One of the central aims of the *Sophist* is to articulate and to develop Plato's metaphysics of somethings. We learn in the dialogue that, strictly speaking, speech and thought must be of existing, countable beings that are self-identical and different from everything else. Some qualifications are, of course, in order. There is reason to believe that not simply any apparently contentful piece of speech commits Plato to the somethinghood and existence of the purported subject. For example, the apparent meaningfulness of the sentences 'Pegasus does not exist' and 'Pegasus is winged' does not commit Plato to the somethinghood or existence or being of Pegasus. Or so I argue.

I The Ontological Problem vs. the Semantic Problem

Before turning to the details of the *Sophist*, it will be useful to record some of the main challenges that have been raised for Plato's *tinós* requirement. There is a history of reading Plato as embracing an especially bloated ontology in order to accommodate as meaningful certain types of discourse. W. V. Quine places much of the blame on Plato for the development of a tradition of holding that meaningful names require corresponding objects as referents and for the consequent problem of nonbeing. Quine sees as arising out of the tradition, a problem Quine calls *Plato's Beard*. Plato's Beard is the result of a particular view of meaning according to which a term is meaningful and can be used in meaningful sentences only if the term has a referent.⁶ That this view gives rise to a problem becomes apparent when we consider a sentence such as 'Pegasus does not exist.' The truth the sentence expresses seems to require that its subject term lacks a referent; yet according to the view at issue, in order to be meaningful, the sentence presupposes the existence or being of Pegasus. But if Pegasus somehow is, then how can he be said truly not to be? The problem of nonbeing has the perplexing consequence that negative existence claims quite generally seem to require the being of the very objects they deny. Quine is no fan of Plato's Beard and he warns us that this tangled doctrine frequently dulls the edge of Ockham's razor as it invites the proliferation of ever more lavish ontologies.

Quine is not especially interested in defending his discussion of Plato's Beard as an interpretation of Plato. But there are Plato scholars

6 W. V. Quine, 'On What There Is,' [OWI], in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1953), 1-19

too who suggest that Plato succumbed to the very tendencies that give rise to Plato's Beard. According to G. E. L. Owen, Socrates' claim in the *Theaetetus* that speaking is analogous to perception insofar as both must be of 'some one thing that is' suggests that, for Plato, 'words are given their purchase on the world by being used to name parts of it, and names ... are simple proxies for their nominees.'⁷ This is precisely the idea that is alleged to yield the problem of nonbeing.

Others have taken the matter further. On their view, in allowing the sentence 'Pegasus is winged' to be meaningful, Plato commits himself to the existence of Pegasus. According to Mary Louise Gill, for example, Plato apparently embraces the conclusion that Pegasus exists: '<For Plato>, Pegasus is, since we can describe him,' and 'many more things exist in Plato's ontology than exist in ours.'⁸ Gill is following the work of Lesley Brown here, who contends that in the *Sophist* Plato sees no clear distinction between statements of existence and statements of predication, a deficit Brown attributes to his having a concept of existence somehow unlike our own.⁹ But whether the root of Plato's Beard is identified as an adherence to a referential theory of meaning or as the lack of a clear distinction between predicative and existential statements, the result is thought to be the same: in order to accommodate the claims of fiction, Plato is left mired with an ontology that countenances Pegasus and other such fancies as real.

7 G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on Not-Being,' [PNB], in *Logic, Science and Dialectic*, M. Nussbaum, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1986), 104-37 at 120-2; cf., in the same volume, his 'Notes on Ryle's Plato,' 85-103 at 94. According to Owen, Plato makes important modifications to his theory of meaning in the *Sophist*. Owen argues that the *Sophist* recognizes a distinction between what does not exist and what is not anything at all. Cf. G. Ryle, who suspects that Plato frees himself from the grips of a problematic view of meaning in the *Theaetetus*, 'Logical Atomism in Plato's *Theaetetus*,' *Phronesis* 35 (1990) 21-46. Cf. McCabe, PI, 152-61.

8 M. L. Gill, *Parmenides*, [P] (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1998), 99

9 L. Brown, 'Being in the *Sophist*: A Syntactical Enquiry,' [BSSE], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1986) 49-70, and 'The Verb "to be" in Greek Philosophy: Some Remarks,' [VBE], in *Companions to Ancient Thought 3: Language*, S. Everson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 212-36. Elsewhere Brown allows that Plato distinguishes identity statements from predicative statements, 'The *Sophist* on Statements, Predication, and Falsehood' in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, G. Fine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 2008), 437-62. For discussion of various uses of 'to be' in Plato's writings, see a collection of works by Kahn, including TB, and 'Retrospect on the Verb "to be" and the Concept of Being,' [RVB], in *The Logic of Being*, S. Knuuttila and J. Hintikka, eds. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co. 1986), 1-28.

My starting points differ from the starting points of the commentators whose views I wish to resist. They begin with the assumption that there is, for Plato, a world of meaningful, fictional discourse that requires metaphysical credentials. I begin with the assumption that Plato's metaphysics grounds his semantic theory, and the question is what to do with fiction. If I am right, semantics answers to metaphysics for Plato, metaphysics does not answer to semantics. I do not mean to suggest that others would explicitly resist the priority of metaphysics in interpreting Plato's *Sophist*. I mean, instead, to highlight a distinction between beginning with some semantic data which are taken for granted and proceeding to ask after the metaphysical consequences, on the one hand, and a strategy that, on the other hand, explicitly takes metaphysical commitments as prior and asks after the consequences of such commitments for semantics.

That said, there is no doubt that Plato's semantics is intimately intertwined with his metaphysics, so much so that we can find robust clues about his ontology in his remarks about language. I shall suggest that there are good reasons for thinking both that Plato takes meaning for names to require existing referents,¹⁰ and also that Plato takes at least some fictional discourse to be meaningful. At the end of the day, then, there remains for Plato a very open and looming question about how to explain the meaningfulness of such discourse. Plato must face the problem of content, the problem of explaining how discourse containing non-referring terms is meaningful. Such discourse might include fictional discourse, negative existentials, discourse about deceased individuals, and discourse containing non-fictional, nonreferring kind terms (e.g. 'phlogiston').¹¹ A related problem of content arises for thought too. Plato's readers ought to wonder, given the *timos* requirement, how it is possible to have meaningful discourse and thought

10 See *Cratylus* 387a1-c4 and 387d4-8 where the attempt to use a name that fails naturally to divide and to reveal being is characterized as 'accomplishing nothing.' It is not my view, however, that Plato takes the referent of a name to exhaust that name's signification. It is reasonable to view the *Cratylus* as recording Plato's view that names signify real natures 'by nature' and they signify, at the same time, linguistic contents 'by convention' where the total signification of a name is given by both its natural and its conventional signification. For brief discussion, see my 'Inquiry Without Names in Plato's *Cratylus*,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 (2008) 341-64, at 342-7.

11 The commentators whose views I wish to resist tend to focus their discussions on fiction. I follow their example, though I make some brief suggestions about strategies Plato might adopt in order to resolve the problem of content for negative existence statements.

about Pegasus, phlogiston, and Socrates given that neither Pegasus nor phlogiston nor Socrates exist.

I am not alone in interpreting Plato so that he is left struggling with the problem of content. Aristotle seems to think that Plato's metaphysical and semantic commitments are such that Plato will struggle to accommodate discourse and thought about the fictional and the deceased. In *On Ideas* Aristotle attributes to Plato the view that thought requires something that is (τι τῶν ὄντων). Since there is thought about the fictional and the deceased, Aristotle suggests, Plato must be committed to forms to serve as objects of thought in cases where none of the relevant sensibles are available (e.g. when they have perished or are non-existent) (81.25-82.7).¹² Aristotle worries that absurdities will follow from this pattern of reasoning: Plato will find himself unhappily committed to forms for perished particulars (e.g. Socrates) and for the fictional (e.g. hippocentaur and Chimaera) which in no way are (τὰ μηδ' ὅλως ὄντα, 82.1-82.7).¹³ Aristotle's depiction of Plato suggests both that Plato requires beings as objects of contentful thoughts, and also that Plato does not wish to posit referents for fictional names. Aristotle's discussion counts as some evidence — though not decisive evidence — for the thesis that Plato would not cheerfully welcome or embrace a bloated ontology in order to save fiction or thought about the deceased. On Aristotle's view, Plato may nevertheless be forced in that very direction.

Following Aristotle's lead — and arguments from the *Sophist* — I shall defend the view that Plato resists an especially expansive ontology. Plato resists the problem of nonbeing. The *tinous* requirement coupled with Plato's willingness to treat fiction as contentful, however, gives rise to the problem of content. Unlike Aristotle, however, I do not believe that Plato's only recourse for saving fiction is to adopt an expansive ontology against his wishes. There is some evidence that Plato experiments with at least three distinct sorts of 'resolutions,' though he does not seem to settle on any one strategy in particular. None of the strategies Plato entertains addresses the problem of content by expanding Plato's ontology to include 'fictional creatures.' Even if Plato has no single, explicit, or utterly satisfactory answer, we ought at least to consider the possibility that Plato preferred a struggle with the problem of content to the tangled problem of nonbeing. Plato's metaphysics constrains his

12 A useful resource is the commentary on Aristotle's 'object of thought argument,' and the *recensio vulgata* text and translation of Περὶ ἰδεῶν in G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993).

13 Note that Aristotle, at least for the purposes of this discussion, treats kinds and particulars on a par. I will suggest later in the paper that Plato considers both sensible particulars and kinds to count as somethings.

semantics, and the price to pay for a more streamlined ontology is an ongoing engagement with the problem of content.

II The Tinos Requirement in the *Sophist*

The investigation of the *Sophist* is, as the title suggests, an inquiry into the nature of the sophist. The Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus, the main characters of the dialogue, attempt to isolate a complete and accurate definition. The interlocutors come to entertain the suggestion that the sophist is a sort of magician who conjures up illusions and engenders false beliefs in his hearers. The Visitor predicts that the sophist will offer the following line of defense against the charge of trafficking in false beliefs: *Since it is not possible to say or to believe what is not — we have Parmenides to thank for that piece of wisdom — and since false speech and false belief require speaking or believing what is not, false speech and false belief are not possible. But if false speech and false belief are impossible, then the sophist can hardly be guilty of exploiting them. The account of the nature of the sophist according to which the sophist engenders false beliefs cannot be correct.* It is easy to see how the project of the dialogue quickly evolves into an attempt to give an account of falsity. If Plato cannot rescue false speech and false belief, then he will not be able to justify the view that sophists — in contrast with philosophers — deal in illusion and falsity. A lot is at stake.

But let's begin at the beginning. Father Parmenides provides the precedent for the sophist's defense. According to Parmenides, the path of what is not is 'altogether unlearnable, for you could not know (γνοίης) what is not (for it is not to be done) nor could you indicate (φράσαις) it' (fr. 2.6-8).¹⁴ And 'necessarily what is there for speaking (λέγειν) and thinking (νοεῖν) is ...but nothing is not' (fr. 6.1-2). What is not cannot be 'said or thought' (fr. 8.7-9). For what is not 'is unthinkable (ἀνόητον) and unnameable (ἄώνυμον)' (fr. 8.17), and 'never shall this force itself, that things that are not are' (fr. 7.1). If false speech and false belief require speaking and believing what is not, then false speech and false belief are impossible.

Out of respect for Parmenides (and out of sympathy for *some* of his views I think) Plato spends a good deal of time motivating several Parmenidean puzzles on the sophist's behalf. From 237-41, Plato constructs five related puzzles designed to show collectively that what

14 Here I rely on texts in D. Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea*, text and translation with an introduction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1984).

is not cannot be indicated, spoken of or thought of; and since false belief somehow involves believing that what is not is or that what is is not, false belief is impossible.¹⁵ The first three puzzles concern the possibility of discourse and thought of what is not. The fourth puzzle questions the coherence of the very idea of an image or copy. The fifth puzzle explicitly concludes that falsity in words and in beliefs is impossible. Puzzles four and five most directly support the sophist's denial of the possibility of illusion and false belief. And although it is widely believed that the rescue of falsity from Parmenides' banishment is one of the crowning achievements of the *Sophist*, only the denials of naming, speaking and thinking what is not in puzzles one, two and three directly bear on the topics of this essay. We will focus our attention on them.

At 237b-c, The Eleatic Visitor introduces the puzzles by asking: 'Do we dare to utter 'that which in no way is' ('τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν')? ... To what should we apply (ἐπιφέρειν) the name 'what is not' ('τὸ μὴ ὄν')? ... To what and of what kind would one apply the expression? What would one show (δεικνύναι) to someone who wanted to learn about <what is not>?' (237b7-c4). Theaetetus answers, 'This is a difficult question, and almost impossibly confusing for someone like me to answer' (237c5-6). Presumably the question is confusing and impossible to answer because there is nothing to show or to point out to the person who wishes to investigate what is not.¹⁶ There is nothing to which the name 'what is not' applies. The Visitor goes on to say that at least this much is clear, "'that which is not'" must not be applied to something of the things that are (τῶν ὄντων)' (237c7-8). What is not cannot be named or displayed or shown or otherwise indicated to anyone.

As the discussion continues, the puzzles take shape. Consider a fairly literal, logical reconstruction of the first puzzle at 237c7-e6¹⁷:

1. In each case, we apply this 'something' ('τι') to a being (d1-2).
2. It is impossible to say it (i.e. 'something') alone (μόνον), as if it were naked (γυμνόν) and isolated (ἀπηρημωμένον) from all beings (d2-4).

15 I follow Owen in discerning five distinct, but related puzzles, PNB, 117-24.

16 See *Euthyd.* 284b4-5 for the suggestion that there is nowhere that the things that are not are; cf. *Tim.* 52b3-5.

17 Though our interpretations diverge in important respects, my formulations of the first three puzzles share features in common with McCabe's in PI, 193-9, and G. Rudebusch, 'Sophist 237-9,' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29 (1991) 521-31.

3. Necessarily, then, someone who says something (τόν τι λέγοντα) says some one thing (έν τι λέγειν, d6-7).
4. 'Something' is a sign (σημείον) of one thing (ένός); 'somethings' is a sign of a plurality of things (d9-10).
5. And whoever does not say something says nothing at all (παντάπασι μηδέν λέγειν, e1-2).
6. But we must not admit that a person like that speaks; rather he says nothing (e4-5).
7. But in the case of 'what is not' we cannot apply it to a being (c7-8).
8. If we cannot apply 'what is not' to a being, then we cannot apply it to a something (τι, c10-11).
9. Therefore, we cannot apply 'what is not' to a something.
10. If whoever fails to say something says nothing at all, then anyone who attempts to utter 'what is not' is not even speaking.
11. Therefore, anyone who attempts to utter 'what is not' is not even speaking; rather he says nothing.

A few features of the first puzzle are worth remarking on. Portions of the puzzle are concerned with the application of the term 'something,' so that 'τι' is mentioned, not used. We are told that the term 'something' ('τι') just is a sign (σημείον) of one thing (ένός); and the term 'somethings' is a sign of a plurality of things. The word 'something' cannot be said alone (μόνον), isolated from all beings, as if it were somehow naked (γυμνόν). For the term 'something' is guaranteed to apply to some one being. Matters are different, however, with the term 'what is not'. 'What is not' cannot be applied to a being; so it cannot be applied to what is a something. Here Plato is concerned with the application of the name 'what is not,' just as he was when he asked his original question at 237c2, 'What does the name "what is not" apply to?' According to 237c10-11, the term 'what is not' never applies to a something; it never applies to some one being.

But in lines 5. and 10. above, matters are somewhat more difficult. Here we need to look to the mission of the first puzzle as a whole to see how best to translate 'λέγειν τι.' The conclusion of the argument requires that the person uttering 'what is not' is not even speaking. The only reason Plato seems to offer for thinking that this conclusion is true is that 'what is not' lacks application altogether; it cannot be applied to

any being. The person using it is not speaking of even one thing. She is not speaking of something, so she is not speaking. Presumably, then, the person who succeeds in speaking must speak of something, must use terms which have application, terms which signify beings or at least one being. The person who says something (λέγειν τι), then, speaks of something. She uses terms that have application. Whoever speaks of something necessarily speaks of some one thing; and whoever does not speak of something, is not speaking at all.¹⁸ That this is in fact how Plato intends his remarks to be understood is supported by the account of statements (λόγοι) later in the dialogue (262e6-263a10, 263c5-12). Statements must be of something in the sense that at least some of the terms in a statement must apply to beings.¹⁹ In particular, a statement must be 'of something' in that it must pick out an extra-linguistic subject for the statement to be about.²⁰

This first puzzle accomplishes a number of distinct tasks. We learn about discourse that it must be of something and that utterances that fail to be of something fail to count as speaking. We also learn about the extra-linguistic objects of discourse. They are beings, and beings are somethings, and a something is one thing. Whatever is spoken of is at least one being. Plato here links being, oneness, and somethinghood as requirements on the objects of discourse. The results go nicely with the conclusion of the second puzzle.²¹

In puzzle two we move beyond the view that it is impossible to name what is not to discover that any attempt to isolate what is not so as to attribute properties to it is doomed to fail. Any attempt to attach what is to what is not cannot succeed.²² The point is a general one, though Plato's particular example is especially instructive. If anything is among the things that are, numbers are. More strongly, we cannot think or speak

18 See also McCabe, PI, 195-7.

19 For discussion and defense of the *Sophist's* requirement on statements, see M. Frede, 'Plato's *Sophist* on False Statements' [PSF], in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, R. Kraut, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), 397-424. The terms in a statement might name particulars or kinds or both. 'Theaetetus is sitting' is a complex statement in which sitting is said to be among the things that are with respect to Theaetetus. The statement is of Theaetetus, but it contains two terms that pick out beings: 'Theaetetus' and 'sitting.' The terms are related in a certain way to produce a meaningful, truth-evaluable statement.

20 See McCabe, PI, 197.

21 *Tht.* 188e3-189b3 also links one, being, and something as requirements on perception and belief. Believing, like perceiving, requires some one thing as an object; and that some one thing is a thing which is. Cf. *Rep.* 478bff.

22 Cf. McCabe, PI, 197-9.

of something 'apart from number' (χωρὶς ἀριθμοῦ, 238b6-8; cf. *Parm.* 164a-b, *Tim.* 47a1-b2).²³ What is not, on the other hand, is not even one thing (238b2-3, 238e1-3, 239a8-11; cf. *Rep.* 478b12-c1). But, since what is cannot apply to what is not, and since number is among the things that are, number cannot be applied to what is not. But if number is required for speech and thought, then we cannot speak or think of what is not. What is not is 'unthinkable, unsayable, unutterable and unformulable in speech' (238c9-10).²⁴ In fact, the Visitor seems to identify 'the true source' (τὴν ἀρχὴν, 238a1-3) of the difficulties of speaking about what is not with the fact that we cannot speak or think apart from number. According to Plato, whatever is spoken of or thought of is something to which number somehow applies, is something that can be sufficiently well-individuated to be counted. But, since number does not apply to what is not, what is not can be neither spoken nor thought.

The 'biggest confusion of all' (238d1-3) comes in the third puzzle. At 238d1-239c8, the Visitor explains that if the conclusions of the second puzzle were true, those conclusions themselves could not be meaningfully formulated. For those conclusions rely on the phrase 'what is not' as if it were meaningful, in sentences which deny that what is not can be said or thought. The Visitor says about their discussion of what is not that 'in speaking of it as something inexpressible in speech, unsayable and unutterable, I was speaking of it as one thing' (239a5-6). The conclusions of the second puzzle treat the phrase 'what is not' as if it were a meaningful singular term when it is not. The person speaking correctly, according to the Visitor, should not fix what is not as one or plural, since number does not apply to what is not. (239a8-11). In formulating the second puzzle, then, they have said 'mutually contrary things' (238d5-8). Statements with non-referring terms seem ruled out altogether as nonsensical, including, paradoxically, the conclusions of the second puzzle (e.g. 'What is not is unthinkable and unformulable in speech'). Plato is not unaware of the perplexities facing defenders of the something requirement on discourse. His analysis of the riddle inherent in the problem of nonbeing is crystal clear. Plato recognizes that

23 Plato is not the first to suggest that speech and thought require number. Consider a fragment attributed to Philolaus, 'all things that are known have number (ἀριθμός). For without this it is not possible to think or to apprehend anything whatever.' For some discussion of the fragment and Philolaus' view, see M. Nussbaum, 'Eleatic Conventionalism and Philolaus on the Conditions of Thought,' *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 83 (1979) 63-108; E. Hussey, 'The Beginnings of Epistemology: From Homer to Philolaus' in *Companions to Ancient Thought 1: Epistemology*, S. Everson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 11-38.

24 Here I reproduce White's translation, PS, 27.

anyone who accepts the conclusions of the second puzzle must wrestle with the problem of content for language, the problem of explaining the apparent meaningfulness of speech containing nonreferring terms.

Apparently Plato accepts the results of the first few puzzles. The Visitor's forceful remarks later in the dialogue at 262ff. suggest that Plato nowhere changes his mind about the *tinós* requirement. In the throes of solving the puzzle of false belief, the Visitor reasserts his commitment to the results of the first two puzzles: 'Necessarily whenever there is speech it is speech of something; it is impossible for it not to be of something' (262e6-7, 263c9-11). Plato's dedication to the results suggests that he seems simply to live, for now, with the perplexities noted in the third puzzle.²⁵

If we identify what is not with what does not exist, then the first two puzzles claim that one cannot speak or think of what does not exist.²⁶ The arguments claim, then, that the person attempting to speak or think of what does not exist is not really speaking or thinking. Speech and thought must be of something, of countable beings where beings, on this view, are existing things. But since number only applies to beings (to what exists), only what exists is countable, and only what exists can be spoken of or thought about. The something requirement places a condition on discourse according to which discourse must be of countable beings.

The interpretation of the first few puzzles I have just offered, according to which 'τὸ μὴ ὄν' is equated with 'what does not exist' is not uncontroversial.²⁷ But before I respond to challenges to the interpretation,

25 As I see it, the *Sophist's* solutions to the problems of falsity lie in part in rejecting the reasoning and conclusions of the fourth and fifth puzzles, leaving the first three intact.

26 See R. Heinaman, 'Being in the *Sophist*,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 65 (1983) 1-17 [BS] for defense of the claim that Plato's idea of being in the *Sophist* contains, at least in part, a notion of existence. See also Brown, BSSE, for defense of the view that Plato is concerned with existence (and with nonexistence) at various points in the *Sophist*. For useful discussion of the richness of the notion of being in Plato and in other classical Greek authors, see Kahn, TB and RVB; and M. Furth, 'Elements of Eleatic Ontology,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968) 111-32.

27 For a sampling of discussions and defenses of the view that 'τὸ μὴ ὄν' is not equivalent to 'what does not exist,' see Owen, PNB; J. McDowell, 'Falsehood and Not-Being in Plato's *Sophist*' [FNB], in *Language and Logos*, M. Nussbaum and M. Schofield, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982), 115-34; J. Malcolm, 'Plato's Analysis of *to on* and *to mē on* in the *Sophist*,' [PA] *Phronesis* 12 (1967) 130-46 and 'Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the *Sophist*,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 67 (1985) 162-5; and F. Lewis, 'Plato on "Not"' [PON], *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 9 (1976) 89-115.

I would like to explore in more detail the proposal that the *tinotes* requirement requires that speech and thought must be of existing countable somethings. Recall that at 237d9, Plato says that 'τι' is a sign of one thing (ένός). He also claims in the first puzzle that to speak of something is to speak of some one thing (έν τι), and that in each case where there is something there is being (237d1-2). Whatever is something is one thing and is a being. Such claims are familiar. Plato's *Parmenides* suggests that wherever 'something,' 'difference,' and 'sameness' apply there also 'being' and 'oneness' apply (146c3-4, 146d1-5, 160c5-e7, 164a4-b2). We learn from the dialogue that '<being>' is not distributed into more parts than oneness, but, as it seems, into equal parts as oneness; for neither is being absent from oneness, nor is oneness absent from being, but being two, they are always equal throughout all things' (*Parm.* 144d7-e; cf. *Parm.* 144c4-5, 164a7-b4). Being and oneness are equivalently distributed through all things.²⁸ Whatever *is* is one and whatever *is one* is.

The *Sophist* begins to develop the metaphysics underwriting the *Parmenides*' conclusions when Plato argues in detail for the view that whatever kinds share in being also share in sameness and difference where what participates in sameness is thereby self-identical and what participates in difference is thereby different from everything else, not identical with anything else (254b8-257a11; 258e1; 259a3-b7). The kind change (κίνησις), for example, exists, is different from every other kind, and is self-identical:

<Change> is because it participates in being. (256a1)

<The different> runs through all of <the forms>; for each one is different from the others. (255e3-4).

Nevertheless <change> was the same, we said, because everything participates in that ... when we say it is the same, that is because it participates in the same with respect to itself (256a7-8, 256a12-b2).

Change is not alone in sharing in being, sameness, and difference. Everything that is participates in being and is some one self-identical something that is different from every other being. Every one something — every being — participates in being, difference, and sameness.

28 The appeal to the *Parmenides* raises an interesting question: Why isn't the kind one among the greatest kinds of the *Sophist*? See McCabe, PI, 231-243, for defense of the view that the oneness or unity of a being, in the *Sophist*, is constituted out of that being's basic sameness and difference relations.

Presumably every well-individuated, unified, countable being, as such, participates in being, sameness and difference.²⁹

Finally, at *Sophist* 247a9-10, Plato suggests that whatever can be present to or absent from a thing (παραγίγνεσθαι καὶ ἀπογίγνεσθαι) is something (τι). Souls and virtues, for example, can be present to or absent from things and, so, are somethings. Plato adds later that the capacity to affect something else (ποιεῖν) or to be affected (πάσκειν) is said to be the mark (ὄρον) of being (247e1-4, 248c4-5).³⁰ The notion of affecting something or being affected by something appears to be extremely broad for Plato, so that being affected by something includes being changed in some obvious way, but it may also amount to a mere 'Cambridge change' (e.g. the form of justice might be affected simply in being unknown at one time and known at a later time).³¹ However broadly or narrowly we come to understand the mark of being, it provides yet another clue as to the nature of somethinghood. A something is a being and, as such, it should bear the mark of being by having the capacity to affect other beings or to be affected by other beings. According to Plato's metaphysics of somethings, then, a something is a being, some one countable thing that is self-identical, different from every other being and capable of being affected by or itself affecting other beings. Beings just are countable unities that participate in being, sameness and dif-

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- 29 See McCabe, PI, for extended discussion of a version of this claim. Though I would refrain from endorsing some of the details of her position, I am in agreement with McCabe's basic point that an individuating role is assigned to the 'greatest kinds' of Plato's *Sophist*.
- 30 For an intriguing study of the Stoic notion of something (τι) and its origins in the Stoics' critical examinations of Plato's *Sophist*, see J. Brunschwig, 'The Stoic Theory of the Supreme Genus and Platonic Ontology' [ST] in his *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*, J. Lloyd, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 92-157. Brunschwig appeals to the passages at 247ff., but he denies that the source of the Stoic notion can be found in 237dff.. An excellent discussion of the Stoics can also be found in V. Caston, 'Something and Nothing: The Stoics on Concepts and Universals' in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1999) 145-213.
- 31 For discussion of the 'mark' of being and its implications for the immutability of forms, see J. M. E. Moravcsik, 'Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*,' *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 14 (1962) 23-78; D. Keyt, 'Plato's Paradox that the Immutable is Unknowable,' *Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1969) 1-14; G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present,' repr. in *Logic, Science and Dialectic* in M. Nussbaum, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1986) 27-44; G. Vlastos, 'An Ambiguity in the *Sophist*,' App. I, in *Platonic Studies*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1981), 270-322; and L. Brown, 'Innovation and Continuity: The Battle of Gods and Giants, *Sophist* 245-249,' in *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, J. Gentzler, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), 181-207.

ference. The metaphysics of somethings is a metaphysics of complex, unified, countable, interactive beings.³²

According to the *tinós* requirement, speech is of such beings. The requirement that speech must be of something is a requirement that speech be of countable beings that are self-identical, different from other beings, and capable of affecting other things or being affected by other things. It is reasonable, at least *prima facie*, to suppose that the *tinós* requirement is put forward as a requirement that speech be of what exists. The things that are, are by sharing in being; and it is reasonable to suppose that to share in being is to exist.³³ Moreover, the proposal that something exists only if it is a countable, self-identical something that is different from everything else, and that exhibits some kinds of interactive capacities is an attractive proposal. If the relations between being, sameness, and difference mark relations of equivalence between existence, self-identity and difference from other things, then Plato is putting forward a plausible, appealing metaphysical thesis. He combines that metaphysical thesis with a linguistic one — the *tinós* requirement — to conclude that speech must be of countable, self-identical beings that are different from other beings, yet capable of at least some kinds of interactions with other beings.

With an outline of Plato's metaphysics of somethings in hand, we can ask, initially at least, about the status of Pegasus. Is Pegasus a some-

32 What sorts of things count as beings, as somethings? Genuine kinds or forms (e.g. difference, justice) clearly qualify. But the mark of being applies to individual souls as well (246e9). Moreover, the speech that is of something at 263ff. is of Theaetetus. Though I cannot defend the proposal here, it strikes me as unsurprising that a generous conception of beings (as any something that participates in, among other things, being, sameness and difference) coincides with Plato's willingness in the *Sophist* to permit the communion of kinds and to commit the philosopher to the view that being includes both the changing and the unchanging (249c10-d4). See McCabe, PI, for discussion of Plato's evolving metaphysics of individuals. On her view, Plato ultimately counts 'forms, particulars, monads, numbers, kinds, whatever' as individuals for which a single, general account of individuation might be possible (301ff.). Moreover, the 'mesh of identity' articulated in the *Sophist* (being, being one, being the same and different, and being able to possess properties) determines basic individuals quite generally. Frede, PSF, appears to allow that somethings are beings and that Theaetetus can count as a something and a being, but not in all of the same ways that a kind counts as a being. Theaetetus can be by being related to other beings (i.e. by participating in kinds). The kind difference can also be in itself; it can be without being relative to other kinds.

33 Being may, of course, go beyond merely existing. For discussion of the view that Plato believes that 'existence-with-predication, or being a subject for attributes, is indeed the most common property, which applies to everything there is,' see Kahn, TB, 123. Cf. Frede, PSF.

thing, a countable, self-identical being different from other such beings and capable of at least some kinds of interactions with such beings? I am inclined, at this point, to answer 'no.' In order to motivate that initial answer, it might prove helpful to review Quine's conclusions regarding mere possibilia:

Take, for instance, the possible fat man in that doorway; and, again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man, or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones? How many of them are alike? Or would their being alike make them one? Are no *two* possible things alike? Is this the same as saying that it is impossible for two things to be alike? Or, finally, is the concept of identity simply inapplicable to unactualized possibles? But what sense can be found in talking of entities which cannot meaningfully be said to be identical with themselves and distinct from one another? These elements are well-nigh incorrigible.³⁴

Given Quine's disdain for Plato's Beard, it is perhaps surprising to discover Plato and Quine embracing similar ontological scruples. But given Plato's proposals thus far, he would seem to regard the prospects for winged horses as no more promising than Quine regards those for the possible fat man in the doorway.³⁵ For it is difficult to understand how Pegasus might inhabit the domain of well-individuated, self-identical, countable beings. Is there just one winged horse captured by Belerophon, or are there many? Are winged horses identical across myths — or tellings of myths or musings about them — or distinct? Which, if any, is *the* Pegasus? And what about centaurs? Exactly how many centaurs are there? That such questions seem absurd for such cases suggests initially that Pegasus and centaurs are not among the beings. Moreover, it is difficult to identify the appropriate interactive capacities for such cases. Pegasus, for example, does not enter into the sorts of interactive relations one would expect of a (winged) horse. 'Fictional creatures' generally do not seem to meet Plato's metaphysical criteria on somethinghood. This initial conclusion will find additional support in the examination of Plato's treatment of fictional discourse in section IV of the paper.

34 Quine, OWI, 4

35 Of course, not everyone is persuaded by Quine's considerations. See, recently for example, G. Priest, *Towards Non-Being: The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005).

III Being and Inference in the *Sophist*

Despite the plausibility of Plato's metaphysical claims, the *tinós* requirement — as I have suggested we construe it — is not uncontroversial. Responding to challenges to my interpretation of Plato provides an opportunity to explore important and relevant themes of the dialogue that have not yet been touched on in the paper. I shall identify three main challenges. According to the first, a more plausible construal of the *tinós* condition says that it is intended merely as a content condition on discourse.³⁶ Here the idea might be that significant discourse cannot be mere nonsense or contradictory in content or otherwise communicatively inert. Note, though, that a content requirement does not all by itself rule one way or the other on an existence or object requirement. My interpretation of the *tinós* condition, for example, proposes to understand it as a content condition according to which there is content only if there is an existing object of discourse.³⁷ If the first challenge is to count as an objection to my proposed understanding of the *tinós* condition, then, it must require that the content condition not be understood as including an existence condition.³⁸

36 A second possibility is that the *tinós* requirement articulates an ontological requirement on significant discourse, but not an existence requirement. Perhaps, for example, discourse must be of an ontological something but, like the Stoics after him, Plato countenances both existent somethings and non-existent somethings. Though this interpretation is distinct from mine, it is not necessarily a competitor of the relevant sort. For even if the somethings include existent and nonexistent entities, the question is whether or not Pegasus is among those entities. The question is 'Is Pegasus a something?' The answer to that question, for Plato (even if not for the Stoics), might still be 'no,' depending on the criteria for somethinghood. For discussion of possible connections between Plato's *Sophist* and the Stoic notion of something, see Brunschwig, ST.

37 Much more is required fully to account for the contents of statements. For example, some one of the things that are must be said of the object of discourse. In the *Sophist's* sample subject-predicate statement ('Theaetetus is sitting'), some one of the beings that are kinds is said to be with respect to a something that is a particular being.

38 I count Owen among those commentators motivating some version or other of this first challenge. He suggests that the first few puzzles rule out talk *not* about the nonexistent, but about subjects which are predicatively nothing, where what is predicatively nothing is what, for any predicate '*F*,' is not *F*. Yet what is predicatively nothing, he argues, is not to be identified with what does not exist. According to Owen, a centaur, for example, does not exist, but it is nevertheless predicatively something since, 'we can describe our centaurs. They have hooves, not fishtails; they are made of flesh and blood, not tin; and they are fictitious, not found in Whipsnade Zoo,' PNB 121.

A second challenge grants that the *Sophist's* puzzles motivate the view that there is no speech about what does not exist, but then insists that the menacing problem of nonbeing arises for Plato when, later in the *Sophist*, he allows inferences from 'X is' to 'X is F' and from 'X is F' to 'X is.' For if Plato allows such inferences, and if 'X is' is equivalent to 'X exists,' then from 'Pegasus is winged,' one can infer 'Pegasus exists.' And perhaps one can infer from 'The round square is contradictory' to 'The round square exists.' If every apparently meaningful predication implies the existence or being of its subject, then in embracing the *tinotes* requirement, Plato is committing himself to the view that sentences of the form 'Pegasus is not' or 'Pegasus does not exist' require the existence (or being) of Pegasus. Despite my introductory claims to the contrary, then, Plato's *tinotes* requirement leaves him mired in the problem of nonbeing.³⁹

Third, there is some concern that Plato simply did not share our contemporary concept of existence.⁴⁰ It is highly unlikely, under such circumstances, that Plato would have formulated the view that it is not possible to speak of what does not exist. Or at least, because of the conceptual scheme in which he operated, Plato would have been ill-equipped to defend the view that subject terms must refer to existing objects without also becoming entangled in the problem of nonbeing.⁴¹

39 I raise this possibility as a potential problem for my interpretation, though entanglement with the problem of nonbeing is, of course, the very position that Quine, OWI, Brown, BSSE and VBE, and Gill, P, seem to think Plato eventually finds himself in.

40 Brown, VBE and BSSE. Cf. Kahn's more general discussions of 'to be' in Plato and in other Greek authors, TB and RVB. Kahn does not straightforwardly claim that what it is to exist in classical Greek philosophy differs from what might be offered in contemporary accounts of existence; rather he focuses on the point that the Greek concept does not permit marking a clear distinction between existence claims and predications, or between veridical uses of 'is' and existential or copulative uses. Moreover, on his view, the copulative use is the core, fundamental use. According to Kahn, there are explicit statements of existence (even if rare) in classical Greek authors; it's just that 'a Greek reader would normally *hear* the existential verb as pregnant with the incomplete copula,' TB, 123, and existential uses of the verb 'to be' serve to introduce a subject for further predication, RVB 9-10.

41 Brown, VBE and BSSE. Interestingly enough, Kahn sees the prominence of the copulative use of the verb 'to be' as insulating Greek thinkers from the problem of nonbeing: 'The functions of *einai* as instrument of predication were so fundamental that the same verb could not easily be seen as forming a self-sufficient predicate. In Greek linguistic intuition, 'There is no Zeus' (*ouk esti Zeus*) means that Zeus is not a subject for any predication, that there is nothing true to be said about him. The Greeks are thus untroubled by the modern puzzle of negative existentials, which

In fact, it is not uncommon to find this final challenge serving to support versions of the first two.

I begin with the first challenge. On the one hand, it is difficult to see why Plato would bother to articulate and to motivate the *tinotes* condition so emphatically if it is merely a content condition on discourse and thought. Was Plato really facing any worthwhile challenge to the view that discourse and thought must be contentful?⁴² Probably not. But the real heart of the first challenge is grounded in what G. E. L. Owen calls 'The Parity Assumption' (PA), an assumption that is thought to serve as a governing principle on any adequate interpretation of the *Sophist*.⁴³ According to PA, Plato's solution to the Parmenidean puzzles must shed *equal* illumination on what is and what is not. The appeal to PA is based on Plato's remark that 'now that both what is and what is not have turned out equally puzzling, this in itself offers the hope that if one of them can be made out to a greater or less degree of clarity, the other can too' (250e5-251a1).⁴⁴ According to Owen, PA is incompatible with any interpretation in which a negative use of 'to be' or 'being' is

arises from the temptation to assume that 'Zeus does not exist' says something which is true of Zeus,' RVB, 12.

- 42 On Owen's view, Plato is addressing those who would agree that 'τὸ μὴ ὄν' should be understood as equivalent to 'τὸ μηδενῶς ὄν' (at 237b7 and 237c2) or 'that which isn't anything at all.' According to Owen the puzzles arise from the equation of "'what is not' not with 'what does not exist' but with 'what is not anything, what not-in-any-way is': a subject with all the being knocked out of it and so unidentifiable, no subject,' PNB 122. In response to Owen's proposal, Heinaman records perplexity about Plato's apparent dialectical opponents, those interested to defend the possibility of speech that is of an unidentifiable subject, 'One wonders who these strange people may have been and what their motives were,' BS 3n.7. My own view is that Owen is on the right track in one respect. Plato in fact identifies what is not with what in no way is; but, *pace* Owen, Plato also identifies what in no way is with what does not exist. The puzzles reveal clearly that the *reason* one cannot speak of what does not exist is that what does not exist in no way is. There is no identifiable object in the case of what does not exist. What does not exist has no properties and lacks any sort of being whatsoever. What does not exist is nothing. There is no speaking of what does not exist. Plato is then left to address the problem of content for discourse containing empty terms. In maintaining the various elements of my interpretation, I am defending a version of what Owen calls a 'common-place view,' PNB, 108.
- 43 Owen characterizes PA in PNB, 108-9. Though there is by no means agreement about how to formulate what I am calling 'the first challenge,' Owen's PNB provides the *locus classicus* for commentators who wish to deny that the *Sophist's* puzzles arise out of difficulties concerning speaking of what does not exist. For further discussion, see works cited in notes 26 and 27.
- 44 I follow Owen's translation here with slight revision, PNB, 229.

left enshadowed, but the corresponding positive use is illuminated. If, for example, Plato clarifies positive predications, then negative predications must be clarified too. Likewise, if positive existence claims are illuminated, then negative existence claims must be illuminated too. PA requires 'joint illumination.'⁴⁵

By PA, any interpretation that posits clarification of positive existence claims in the *Sophist*, must allow that negative existence claims are clarified too. On my interpretation, however, there is no account, in the *Sophist*, of negative existence claims. The claim 'X exists' is accounted for by appeal to the relevant subject's participation in being, but the *Sophist* offers no positive analysis of 'X does not exist.' My interpretation appears to constitute a violation of PA. Indeed, according to the first challenge, an adequate account of the *tinós* requirement cannot posit that speech must be of what exists since the *Sophist* records no prospect of joint illumination for positive and negative existence claims. Plato must intend his *tinós* requirement, then, to be understood without appeal to existence or nonexistence. The *tinós* condition is simply a content condition.

Though there are independent reasons for thinking that the *Sophist's* first few puzzles are indeed existence puzzles, I will defer for now to the cases made by other commentators and focus in particular on re-

45 Owen goes on to claim that it is only incomplete sentences (sentences which require complements) of the form 'X is...' and 'X is not...' that are clarified in the solution to the puzzles, so it is incomplete uses of 'to be' that are at issue in the original puzzles. Unlike Owen, Frede does not consider the two uses of an incomplete 'is' to divide into the uses of 'is' in predication and identity statements, PSF. Rather, he thinks, Plato attributes two ways of being to things. Something can be what it is by itself or it can be by being appropriately related to something else. Like Owen, however, Frede suggests that the puzzles at 237ff. rest on confusing what is not with what is nothing whatsoever (but *not* with what does not exist), and that Plato's resolution of the puzzles saves discourse about what is not by rejecting the identification. See also Kahn, TB, 130 n. 18, and RVB, 21. My view, on the other hand, is that the first three puzzles rely on an identification of what is not with what does not exist (i.e. with what is nothing at all), and that Plato embraces their results: there is no naming or attributing properties to what does not exist. Plato nevertheless saves false statements (and false beliefs), in part, by showing how statements are not simply complex names and how false statements, then, are not simply complex names of what does not exist. Plato also makes clear that there are many ways of understanding the claim that a false statement is discourse concerning what is not. As far as the analysis of false statements is concerned, one could follow Frede and accept that, for Plato, to speak falsely is 'to say something that is not altogether nothing, but something that is; in fact, it can only be called 'not being' insofar as it is, namely different from what is with reference to the given subject,' PSF, 421.

sponding to the argument against an existence requirement from PA.⁴⁶ To start, we should note that the commitment to PA should itself come under scrutiny. For it is difficult to interpret Plato's remarks about joint illumination. PA might articulate the strong requirement that there must be point-for-point illumination so that no claim about being lacks a corresponding claim about nonbeing. Or it might be that a moderate reading is better, according to which some clarity about particular types of being (existence, property possession, identity) requires some clarity (any at all) about those very same types of nonbeing (nonexistence, lacking a property, nonidentity), though there need not be one-to-one correspondence among points of clarification. Once a moderate and a strong version of PA have been distinguished, however, the interpretation I favor can be said to satisfy the moderate version, though not the strong version.⁴⁷ But then it is not at all clear that *any* interpretation will meet, or ought to be expected to meet, the strong version.

It is reasonable to suppose that a moderate version of PA is satisfied. The dialogue clarifies, at least in some respects, both existence and nonexistence. Something exists if it has a share in being. Certainly when Plato first begins to distinguish and identify the various kinds, he looks to be claiming that those kinds exist. In saying that difference and sameness are, for example, he looks to be claiming that difference and sameness exist. What explains their existence? Their participation in being. Change is because it participates in being (256a1). What holds for change holds for all of the kinds. Anything that exists does so by participating in being (256e3-4). Moreover, consider again what Plato's formulation of the puzzles at 237ff. tells us about nonbeing. Plato's remarks in puzzles 1-3 at 237ff. suggest that Plato believes that there is no discourse of or about what does not exist; nothing can be said to characterize the nonexistent. There is no illumination to be had, beyond what Plato has already provided: there is no speaking of what does not exist. But to learn this fact is to learn to give up any expectation of illumination concerning the nonexistent. That lesson, however frustrating, involves learning something 'about' nonbeing even as nonexistence. Nowhere in the *Sophist* does Plato argue that the nonexistence of *X* can

46 As part of a defense of her view that Plato makes and clarifies some existence claims in the *Sophist*, Brown offers several responses to Owen, BSSE, 61. Heinaman, BS, also defends the view that appeals to being in the *Sophist* are sometimes appeals to existence.

47 PA might also, even naturally, be read to articulate only the weak claim that our capacity to become utterly confused about what is and what is not provides some hope that any clarity achieved *at all* will shed some light on both. My interpretation would satisfy a weak version of PA.

be explained by *X*'s participation in nonbeing. That notable omission suggests that there is no such account to be offered. We achieve some clarity, then, about nonbeing as nonexistence in the *Sophist*. And since participation in being explains existence, we achieve some clarity about both existence and nonexistence. The moderate version of PA is satisfied.

The strong version of PA, on the other hand, is simply not satisfied on my interpretation of the *Sophist*, since there is a positive account of existence and existence statements to be offered, but no corresponding positive account of nonexistence or negative existence statements. But of course, that is exactly what one should expect given the interpretation. The result of Plato's arguments, on my view, is the conclusion that there are no positive characterizations of what does not exist. What is cannot be attached to what is not, so there are no positive claims to be made about what does not exist. What does not exist in no way is. Given the result, the task of accounting for negative existence claims is one Plato is left needing to address.

But in its strong version, PA comes to seem far less reasonable both as an interpretation of Plato's remarks concerning joint illumination and as a constraint on any adequate account of the *Sophist*'s arguments. Consider the case of having and lacking properties, and of positive and negative predications. The *Sophist* does not offer point-for-point clarity concerning positive and negative predications. But surely, if any statements are ontologically accounted for, positive predications are accounted for in Plato's *Sophist*. The sentence 'Theaetetus is sitting' is accounted for by spelling out the relevant ontological relations: sitting is among the things that are with respect to Theaetetus. And a predication that states truly that Theaetetus possesses some property 'says those that are, that they are' about Theaetetus (*Soph.* 263b4-5). Yet negative predications (e.g. 'Theaetetus is not sitting') receive much less — if any — explicit clarification.⁴⁸ Certainly there is not point-for-point equality in the treatment or clarity the *Sophist* provides concerning positive and negative predications. The price to pay for advocating the strong version of PA, then, might very well involve giving up the prospects of *any* kind of illumination of being and nonbeing whatsoever in the *Sophist*. That price, it seems to me, is too high to pay. If we cling to PA at all, we

48 For discussion of whether or not negative predications are illuminated in Plato's *Sophist*, see Frede, PSF; Lewis, PON; McDowell, FNB; and D. Bostock, 'Plato on "is not,"' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984) 89-119. Frede attempts a reading of the *Sophist* according to which a strong version of PA might be satisfied. But even on his interpretation, the dialogue's proposed analysis of negative predication is largely extrapolated from its texts and not explicitly on display.

ought to cling to it in its moderate version. In its moderate version, the interpretation I defend is in compliance.

There remains one more point from Owen that we should consider, which will lead us directly into a discussion of the second challenge to my interpretation. Owen rejects the suggestion that participation in being is Plato's account of what it is to exist. He suggests interpreting the passages I have cited above as exhibiting paradigm cases of the elliptical use of 'X is.' Plato's claim that 'Change is' is simply elliptical for the claim 'Change is many things and is not indefinitely many things' as is evidenced by Plato's willingness to move from the claim that 'all of the kinds are because they participate in being' to the claim that 'in the case of each of the kinds there is much that it is and indefinitely much that it is not' (256e6-7). The idea seems to be that any move from the first sort of claim to the second would be implausible as an inference from one complete claim to another.⁴⁹ The first claim is better read, then, as elliptical for the second.

On the contrary, however, there are a number of reasons to suppose both that the interpretation according to which the second claim is inferred from the first is plausible and also that the inference is semantically valid and well-defended by Plato.⁵⁰ Instead of reading the move from 'X is' to 'X is many things' as a move to fill out an original, incomplete ellipsis, one can read the move from the first to the second remark as an inference from one complete claim to a second complete claim. Lesley Brown defends a version of just such an interpretation. On her view, we can understand claims such as 'Change is' and 'Difference is' as complete uses of the Greek verb 'to be' in 'weakly existential' statements. On her view, unlike on Owen's, a complete use of a verb is 'a use where there is no complement (explicit or elided) but which allows a complement.' The sentence 'Jane is teaching' displays a complete, non-elliptical use of its verb. The statement implies, though, that Jane is teaching some subject or other. So the move from 'Jane is teaching' to 'Jane is teaching physics' is legitimate so long as Jane in fact teaches physics. The fact that the first sentence *allows* a complement does not suggest that it involves an incomplete use of its verb. Complete uses of some verbs allow for complements without requiring complements.

49 See, for example, Malcolm, PA, 165, who suggests that such an inference would be 'flagrantly fallacious.'

50 Heinaman regards the inference from the existence of a form to its having many properties as 'perfectly correct' BS, 7-8. Brown, BS and VBBE, interprets the move as an inference, though one that leads to paradox in some cases. Where she thinks the inference is problematic, I agree with Heinaman that it is explicitly defended by Plato as metaphysically grounded and correct.

When Plato says 'Change is' and 'Difference is,' we can understand him to be making complete existence statements though, Brown thinks, the statements clearly allow for completion since Plato goes on to infer from 'Change is' that 'there is much that it is and indefinitely much that it is not.'

Though Brown's proposal allows us to interpret important portions of the *Sophist* as making claims of existence and nonexistence, it also gives rise to the second challenge to the interpretation I wish to defend. For on Brown's view of Plato, any meaningful statement of the form 'X is' licenses inferences to an indefinite number of predicative statements of the form 'X is F' and 'X is not G'; and one can infer from meaningful statements of the form 'X is F' to statements of the form 'X is.'⁵¹ If Brown is right, then from the statement 'Pegasus is winged,' we can infer that 'Pegasus is' where the latter is an existence claim. Indeed Brown seems to think, as does Gill, that Plato in fact explicitly allows the inference (i.e. it seems he would not be surprised or bothered by it). Brown attributes Plato's willingness to allow the inference to his possession of a concept of existence unlike our own, a concept that does not allow Plato to see clear semantic differences between statements of the form 'X is F' and statements of the form 'X is.' She says, '<Plato> was not quite clear about the distinction between <statements of existence and statements of predication> for the reason that the linguistic and conceptual scheme within which he spoke, thought and wrote did not contain the distinction.'⁵² A striking piece of evidence that Plato did not clearly distinguish expressions of existence from predication, according to Brown, is that 'Plato has no idea of solving the problem of not-being by allowing that X is F need not entail X is, no wish to allow that only a subclass of things that are F are things that are (i.e. exist).'⁵³ On her view, the *Sophist* contains complete statements of existence of the form 'X is'; but since those statements allow complements, it was no part of Plato's argumentative strategy to identify an explicit distinction between complete and incomplete uses of 'is.' According to Brown, Plato sees no fundamental difference between existential uses of 'is' and copulative uses.

51 See also Kahn, TB and RVB. Kahn does not consider passages from the *Sophist* in any detail; but he defends the view that Greek authors generally, and Plato in particular, saw existential uses of 'to be' as pregnant with predicative uses. 'X is' can unfold, then, 'naturally and non-fallaciously' into 'X is F' for select, but unspecified values of F, TB, 130 n. 18.

52 Brown VB, 226

53 Brown BSSE, 68. Cf. Owen 'Aristotle on the Snares of Ontology' in LSD, 264-5.

I disagree with Brown on two main points. First, Brown and I part ways in thinking that, on Plato's view, the inference scheme from 'X is F' to 'X is' holds quite generally, for all apparently acceptable substituends of 'X' and 'F.' Though I agree with her that there is such an inference pattern in Plato's *Sophist*, so far it holds only for select values of 'X' and 'F.' And in *those* cases the inferences are not the result of a foreign or fuzzy concept of existence, but come with well-articulated metaphysical guarantees.⁵⁴ The eligible substituends for 'X' are names of things that exist, names of countable, self-identical somethings that participate in being; thus far the permitted substituends include the names of the greatest kinds ('being,' 'sameness,' 'difference,' 'change,' 'rest'), names of other kinds, and possibly names of souls and of sensible particulars. The substituends for 'F,' so far, are only names of that small cluster of kinds or properties in which every single being participates, namely 'being,' 'sameness,' 'difference,' 'something,' and 'one.'⁵⁵

Plato goes to great lengths in the *Sophist* to provide the metaphysical credentials underwriting the permissible inferences, to show that whatever shares in being is also self-identical and different from everything else (and possibly at rest and changing). Whatever shares in being shares in sameness and difference, and is one something (257a8-9, 259a4-7). We know that whatever is is not in many ways insofar as whatever exists is different from every other thing that exists. So far, then, the metaphysics of the *Sophist* licenses inferences from 'X is' to an indefinite number of negative identity statements and to a small number of positive predications, and *vice versa*. The metaphysics of beings preserves truth across such inferences by grounding the mutually entailing conditions captured in the inferences. The legitimate inferences are limited in their scope precisely in virtue of the appealing, but limited scope of the *Sophist's* metaphysical conclusions.

But suppose we expand the range of substituends for 'F' to include names of all of those kinds in which a given being might participate. The substituends for 'F' will then include names of any beings that are actual beings or kinds. In order to analyze meaningful, truth-evaluable statements, Plato does seem to require that both 'X' and 'F' name somethings that are beings.⁵⁶ On a slightly more liberal interpretation of the inference pattern, then, 'Theaetetus' and 'sitting' can serve as sub-

54 Heinaman appears to make a similar point in the appendix to BS, 16.

55 And possibly 'change' and 'rest.'

56 For defense and discussion, see Frede, PSF.

stituends for 'X' and 'F' respectively.⁵⁷ Given the metaphysical conditions on meaningful discourse, we can infer from the meaningfulness of 'Theaetetus is sitting' to 'Theaetetus exists' and 'Sitting exists.' But notice that, at this point, the truth-preserving inferences are no longer bi-directional. We can infer from 'X is F' to 'X is' and to 'F is' (even if 'X is F' is false); but we are no longer metaphysically guaranteed to preserve truth quite generally in inferences from 'X is' to 'X is F.' We cannot infer, while preserving truth, from 'Theaetetus is' to 'Theaetetus is flying' even if flying is among the beings (i.e. is itself an existing kind). Even those who interpret the *Sophist's* inference pattern as applying more liberally than I do would not welcome a result according to which Plato permits inferences from 'X is' to 'X is F' for any substituent of 'F.'⁵⁸ Some constraints must apply.

Likewise, Plato need not permit the inference from 'X is F' to 'X is' for simply any apparently acceptable substituent of 'X.' The inference from 'Pegasus is winged' to 'Pegasus exists' is not obviously metaphysically guaranteed. If 'Pegasus' fails to name a countable being, then we have no reason to believe that the term can figure in statements for which the inference patterns of the *Sophist* hold. Whether or not the term 'Pegasus' is a legitimate substituent for 'X' depends on the metaphysical status, if there is any, of Pegasus. If we assume that Plato would view discourse about Pegasus as fictional or mythological, then we should resist inclinations automatically to plug the term 'Pegasus' into statements to which the *Sophist's* metaphysically grounded inference pattern is intended to apply.

I depart from Brown in a second respect in that I am not convinced that there are a plurality of concepts of existence out there to be had, which brings us to the third challenge to my interpretation. According to the third challenge, Plato simply did not possess the requisite concept of existence to defend the complex of claims I present him as defending.⁵⁹ Brown seems to think that if Plato did have our concept

57 Assuming the context of the dialogue, a context in which Theaetetus and sitting both exist.

58 Brown characterizes the inference as moving from 'X is' to 'X is something.'

59 Brown suggests that Plato's concept of existence is somehow different from our own, such that his concept licenses inferences from 'X is F' to 'X is' and from 'X is' to 'X is F' (or 'X is something'), but ours does not. I am not sure I fully understand the proposal. But she seems to suggest that Plato's concept differs from ours in allowing completions where we would not. So, if the sentence 'Pegasus is' (i.e. 'Pegasus exists') is complete in the way that Brown suggests it is, then it allows for completion in the same way that 'Jane is teaching' allows for completion. When Jane tells us she is teaching, we can ask, 'Oh really, what are you teaching?' She

of existence he would have availed himself of it to make the point that there can be discourse about what does not exist without ontological commitment to what does not exist. I disagree with Brown's apparent presupposition that clearly distinguishing existence statements from predications allows one to solve the problem of nonbeing by allowing one to distinguish in the class of things that are *F*, a subclass of things that do not exist. On the contrary, I follow Plato in thinking that there is no such subclass. Moreover, the fact that Plato does not make the points she cites is easily accommodated by the thesis that, for Plato, there is a clear and considered commitment to the view that discourse is ontologically committed and there is no discourse about or of what does not exist.⁶⁰ Not only is the commitment there, Plato develops a series of arguments in the *Sophist* to defend that commitment (237ff.). He reasserts his commitment to the results later in the *Sophist* when he requires that speech must be of something; it cannot be of nothing (262e-26311).

Moreover, it seems to me that there is only one concept of existence available to be had for philosophers and nonphilosophers, past and present alike, what Peter van Inwagen aptly calls 'the concept of existence.'⁶¹ When I say 'tigers exist' I take myself to mean something like 'there is at least one tiger.' When I claim that 'centaurs do not exist,' I take myself to claim something like 'the number of centaurs is zero' or

might respond 'physics.' But it is difficult to make sense of the idea that an existence claim can be completed, given the model. When someone says 'Pegasus exists,' we cannot ask 'What does Pegasus exist?' or 'What is Pegasus existing?' To be fair to Brown, she acknowledges that there seems to be no parallel question to ask in the case of existence, but she takes this as further evidence that Plato's conceptual scheme is different from our own. Brown VBBE, 225. See also Kahn, TB and RVB.

- 60 Ultimately Plato has some resources for countenancing contentful fictional discourse that is not of or about the nonexistent. Here my results differ also from those of, for example, Owen, Frede, and Kahn. They see Plato as simply rejecting as confused the idea that 'what is not' could be understood as 'what is not *F* for any value of "*F*.'" My view is that Plato intends moderately to clarify the general notion of what is not as including at least three elements: what does not exist, what is not *F* for select values of *F*, and what is not identical with something else. Moreover, Plato wishes clearly to claim that there is no discourse or thought of what does not exist where what does not exist is to be identified with what is not *F* for every value of '*F*.' On my view, then, he embraces the results of the first two puzzles of the *Sophist* and he is left struggling to resolve the third puzzle (while he resolves the fourth and fifth puzzles). One advantage of this approach is that it preserves a minimal parallelism of three elements — existence, predication, and identity — in his discussions of both what is and what is not.
- 61 See P. van Inwagen, 'Reply to Reviewers,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993) 709-19.

'there are no centaurs.' Plato's notion that beings are countable somethings, that number must apply to being, that whatever is is at least some one thing, matches quite nicely. It might be suggested that Plato does not isolate existence statements from other kinds of statements because he could not have had the concept of existence we post-Fregeans, post-Russellians possess, a concept intimately linked somehow with developments in quantificational logics. But Plato, or anyone else for that matter, need not have anticipated contemporary quantificational logics to possess the concept of existence. Sophisticated logics may reflect or articulate features of the concept in their formal structure, but surely the concept came first.⁶² Even if we allow that the concept of existence, across distinct time periods or languages, is more or less closely tied with the view that what exists must have properties (even very particular properties) or stand in certain logical or metaphysical relations, differences in those ties need not essentially alter the concept itself.

It is not necessary, then, to posit ontological promiscuity or a plurality of concepts of existence in order to appreciate the arguments of the *Sophist*. Plato systematically employs and defends a principled pattern of inference from one kind of statement to another where that pattern of inference is grounded in the metaphysical relations obtaining between existing objects and their properties. The way the world is explains why those inferences are truth-preserving. And the way the world is determines which substituends for 'X' and 'F' will license such inferences. Our way of speaking, on the other hand, might mislead us into thinking that the inference pattern applies in cases where, in fact, it does not. We might be led to infer that the Fountain of Youth exists when we hear the utterance 'The Fountain of Youth is elusive.' But if 'The Fountain of Youth' is not an acceptable substituend of 'X,' if the Fountain of Youth is not in fact a countable something (i.e. if there is no such thing), then, alas, we would be mistaken in our inference. Plato's *Sophist* is, in part, an effort to motivate the view that the way the world is determines which objects are available for discourse and thought. The way the world is determines which inferences the *Sophist*'s particular pattern licenses as truth-preserving and which it does not.

The results of our study of the *Sophist* are important. We have recovered Plato's metaphysics of somethings and its relations to his *tinotes* requirement on discourse and thought. In the process we have discovered that Plato's *Sophist* offers no account of the contents of nonrefer-

62 See P. van Inwagen, 'Meta-Ontology,' *Erkenntnis* 48 (1998) 233-50, for a defense of, among other things, the following three claims: (i) being is the same as existence, (ii) being is univocal, and (iii) the single sense of being is captured in the existential quantifier of formal logic.

ring terms. If our results are correct, two traditions of interpreting the dialogue have mistakenly concluded that discourse containing terms such as 'Pegasus' would have been deemed unproblematic by Plato. The first tradition (Owen's) does not regard the *tinós* condition as an existence condition. The second tradition (Brown's) agrees that the *tinós* condition includes some kind of existence condition on discourse, but then concludes that Plato must count Pegasus among the existing beings. On my account, the *tinós* condition is an existence condition on contentful discourse; but Plato makes no ontological or semantic provisions in the *Sophist* for nonreferring terms. He acknowledges but does not solve the problem of content for empty terms. Still, I think the account defended here is to be preferred to one that leaves Plato with the burden of a bizarre affinity for the fictional, an affinity according to which Pegasus and centaurs exist (apparently) just as you and I do, by participating in being. Interpreting Plato so that he is struggling to save content in the absence of an utterly unconstrained ontology is to interpret him so that he is left in a philosophically more respectable position, a position that fits well, as we shall see, with what he says about fictional content in other dialogues. Aristotle, for one, agrees with the results. As I mentioned in section II, he predicts that Plato will struggle with the problem of content in part because of an aversion to an ontology of the fictional.

IV The Problem of Content

Suppose that Plato accepts the *tinós* requirement on discourse and thought, and that the *tinós* requirement insures that meaningful discourse is ultimately discourse of existing, self-identical, countable somethings. What are we to do with fiction? Are there creatures of fiction that are countable somethings on Plato's view? If not, is fiction, strictly speaking, meaningless? Plato certainly treats fictional discourse as meaningful. He often makes use of myth, mythological characters, and apparently fictional stories to motivate various points in the dialogues. Moreover, he sometimes remarks on the potential dangers of myths and poetry where those dangers consist, in part anyway, in communicating what is false. If at least some of the claims in myths and poetry are false, then those claims are meaningful.

There are a number of interpretative options to adopt at this point. First, there is the not so remote possibility that Plato's practice and his theory conflict. Perhaps, although Plato acts as if fictional discourse is meaningful, his theoretical commitments render it meaningless. Or second, perhaps Plato views fictional discourse as a non-paradigmatic (and deviant?) form of discourse for which some special, nonstandard

account of meaning has to be developed in addition to the standard semantic theory. Plato is certainly willing at times to depict mythical or poetical discourse as somehow second-rate. Third, perhaps there is some sense in which mythical discourse in fact meets the *tinós* requirement but does not require an overly expansive ontology. If workable, none of the first three options requires an especially bloated ontology. But finally perhaps Plato wields the something requirement in such a way that he is simply committed to an extravagant metaphysics including fictional and nonfictional somethings. I shall suggest that, at different points outside the *Sophist*, Plato is attracted to versions of options two and three.⁶³ At no point, however, does Plato seem to plump for the final option. At no point does he recommend or explore an ontology containing the merely fictional.

At *Republic* 376ff., in his discussion of education in the ideal city, Plato tells us that under the category of education in music and poetry children will be told true stories (λόγοι). As things actually stand, in the non-ideal city, myths contain both truth and falsity, and education makes use of both. Socrates says 'we first tell myths (μύθους) to children ... these myths, taken as a whole, are false though they have some truth in them' (377c4-7). But it is a serious problem 'when a story gives a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the things he is trying to paint' (*Rep.* 377d2-e3).⁶⁴ According to Socrates, the gods are not warring or jealous, as the poets' depictions of them suggest. The misleading stories are problematic because of their potential to encourage fear and vice.

Notice that Plato does not object to the idea that gods and heroes are the *subjects* of myths.⁶⁵ He objects to false things being said about them. Indeed, the subjects of the mythical discourses considered in the *Republic* are subjects Plato seems to have thought existed in a very straightforward way, just as some of the objects a painter might attempt to depict exist. In the end, the subjects of such discourses are not fictional, though

63 The discussion offered here is by no means a complete survey of Plato's treatment of mythical or poetic discourse. I mean only to establish that there is a good deal of evidence for thinking that Plato's strategies for accounting for meaning in myth are complex and varied, but do not require or even suggest an utterly unconstrained ontology.

64 I follow the Grube-Reeve translation with minor revision, *Plato: Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1992)

65 Portions of my discussion of myth in Plato are indebted to Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth-Maker*, G. Naddaf, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998). Cf. K. F. Moor, *Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America 1982).

what is said about those subjects is not true. The types of subjects of the mythical discourses used in education are outlined quite explicitly in the *Republic* to include gods, spirits, heroes, and men. The names of mythical subjects considered are names of individuals or groups of individuals that are endowed with rational, immortal souls. In other words, the subjects of the educational myths in the *Republic* can be said to exist either as animate individuals or as immortal or divine souls. Here 'mythical' discourse satisfies the *tinotes* requirement very straightforwardly. Such discourse is of existing, countable somethings, even if it is sometimes false. Indeed Socrates and his interlocutor agree that 'everything said by poets and storytellers <is> a narrative about what has happened or what is or what is about to happen' (*Rep.* 392d2-3).⁶⁶

The idea that myth tracks reality at least to some extent is also displayed in the second manner of treating myths. Plato sometimes suggests that myths are a convenient tool to communicate truths across generations about actual events or series of events in the distant past.⁶⁷ Of a series of three myths in the *Statesman*, for example, Plato says:

All of these <stories> originate from the same event, and so do hosts of others yet more marvelous than these. However, as this great event took place so long ago, some of them have faded from man's memory; others survive, but they have become scattered and have come to be told in a way which obscures their real connection with one another. No one has related the great event which is the origin (*αἴτιον*) of all of them; it is this event which we must now recount. (269b5-c3)⁶⁸

Plato then goes on to provide a cosmological account of the origins of the revolutions of the heavens. That event is the origin or cause (*αἴτιον*)

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- 66 See also *Sophist* 262d2-3, where we are told that the person uttering a name 'gives an indication about what is, or comes to be, or has come to be, or is going to come to be.' The point seems to be that it is possible to name past, present, and future objects, that they are available somehow, at present, to be named as members of the ontology; cf. Heinaman, BS, 12-13. The treatment of the educational myths of the *Republic* does not offer a strategy for dealing with truly empty terms, then, but it does suggest how Plato might deal with some negative existence claims, such as 'Socrates does not exist.' The sentence is, strictly speaking, false since Socrates exists so long as his immortal, rational soul exists. Still, the sentence is of something and might be used, then, to express something true about Socrates, namely that he is disembodied. Presumably the sentence 'Pegasus does not exist' will need to be handled in some other way.
- 67 Plato's allegorical discourse might be analyzed in a similar fashion, not as preserving information about a particular event, but as communicating more general truths about, for example, the human condition.
- 68 Translation is J. B. Skemp's with revisions by M. Ostwald, *Plato: Statesman* (Indianaapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1992).

of all of the distinct stories (cf. *Stat.* 270b4-5). The various myths act to relay information about the very same actual event or events.

Elsewhere, in *Timaeus*, Plato writes:

And so also among your people the tale is told that Phaethon, child of the Sun, once harnessed his father's chariot but was unable to drive it along his father's course. He ended up burning everything on the earth's surface and was destroyed himself when a lightning bolt struck him. This tale has the form of a myth (μύθου), but the truth (τὸ ἀληθές) behind it is that there is a deviation in the heavenly bodies that travel around the earth, which causes huge fires that destroy what is on the earth across vast stretches of time. (22c3-d3)⁶⁹

What really and truly grounds the myth of Phaethon is an astronomical event, the parallax of the bodies in the heavens around the earth. Once again, myth is used to transmit information about past objects and events. And once again, the mythical is not automatically about or of the nonexistent. In these cases the *tinós* requirement is met but, as distinct from the passages from Plato's *Republic*, the true subject of the discourse is not immediately discernible. Accounting for the content of the discourse *appears* to involve a change of subject, though there is not actually such a change since the subject under discussion just is the past event that is the cause and origin of the myths. The tale from Plato's *Timaeus* is not really a tale of a child named 'Phaethon'; rather it is a story about heavenly bodies and some past astronomical event. Likewise the relation of the *Statesman's* myths to each other and to the actual event that is the origin of them all is obscured in the myths themselves and requires clarification. Plato's second method of dealing with mythical discourse allows that myths satisfy the *tinós* requirement, even though the true subjects of the myths are somewhat obscured.

That is not to say, however, that there is no mention at all of the more fanciful subjects of fiction in Plato. And this brings us to the third strategy Plato seems to employ to account for meaning in myth. Consider two discussions, one from the *Republic* and one from the *Phaedrus*. At *Republic* 588c-e, Plato mentions characters from legends, including Chimaera, Scylla, and Cerberus. He tells us at 588c1-5 that legends create or fabricate by making it seem as if many different kinds of things 'have grown together naturally into one' (συμπεφυκυῖαι ... εἰς ἓν γενέσθαι). The suggestion is that *in fact* the different kinds do *not* naturally grow into one. He tells us that we can fashion in a similar way by imagin-

69 The translation, with revision, is from D. Zeyl, *Plato: Timaeus* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 2000).

ing different kinds of naturally occurring beasts and then 'joining <the different kinds> together into one kind' so that the result is a creature in which different kinds seem 'somehow to grow together naturally' (588d7-8). The passage draws a contrast between images of what is actually, naturally one and images that only *seem* to be about what is naturally one. At *Republic* 488a4-7, Plato suggests that some fictional stories involve constructing images by gathering together (συναγαγεῖν) material from many sources (ἐκ πολλῶν), 'just as painters paint goat-stags by mixing together the features of different things.' The Chimaera, for example, was 'lion in front, serpent in the back, and she-goat in the middle' (*Iliad* 6.181). We can imagine the Chimaera because we can first imagine a lion, and then a serpent and finally a she-goat. Those elemental images of naturally occurring unities are then fused together to form a complex image.⁷⁰ Unlike the simple images, however, the complex image is not an image of anything; it is simply a fabrication.

Plato's remarks here are interesting because they suggest that fictional images — whether in paintings or in 'words' — are created by the efforts of an agent which can fashion them. The agent does the joining (συνάπτει) and fashioning (πλάττει), though there is not a naturally occurring kind to correspond to the image fashioned. Creating images in this case requires drawing on previously acquired resources, namely images of actual kinds. But those original, elemental resources are the product of naturally occurring kinds or individuals. Lions and goats are each naturally one, and images of them are images of natural unities. Fictional images, on the other hand, are characterized as complex, as having been mixed together to make it seem as if they represent a single, naturally occurring unity, when in fact they do not. The fashioning agent is required to engage in its fabricating efforts precisely because there is no extralinguistic, natural unity to serve as the source of the fictional image.

Passages from the *Phaedrus* support the ontological commitments of myth identified thus far. At 229cff., Phaedrus asks Socrates if he is persuaded by mythical stories (μυθολόγημα). Socrates immediately provides an example of how a mythical story can be explained in terms

70 David Charles attributes a similar position to Aristotle. Aristotle is said to account for a compound thought with the 'kind' goat-stag as its content by appeal to the combination of simple thoughts involving the kinds goat and stag. See D. Charles, 'Aristotle on Names and Their Signification' in *Companions to Ancient Thought 3: Language*, S. Everson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 37-73; and D. Charles, *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), 78-109. See also D. Modrak, *Aristotle's Theory of Language and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), 47-8.

of naturally occurring events and things. The myth that the daughter of an Athenian king was carried off by Boreas, the personification of the North Wind, can be explained by saying 'a gust of the North Wind blew her over the rocks where she was playing ... and once she was killed that way people said she had been carried off by Boreas' (*Phdrs.* 229c8-10). Though the myth of Boreas seems to be accounted for as the Homeric myths of the *Republic* (i.e. the myth is of a countable, existent something even if it reports falsely about the girl), Socrates goes on to suggest that for any mythical story — including stories of Hippocentaurs, the Chimaera, Gorgons, Pegasus and other monsters — a reductive account (λόγος) can be provided.⁷¹ And he countenances the possibility of utterly fictional images when he goes on to contrast the more complex (πολυπλοκώτερον) fictional characters (e.g. Typhon, an unnatural creature composed of parts from different animal species) with simpler (ἀπλούστερον) natural animals (ζῷον, 230a3-6).

Fictional 'names' do not refer to real unities. 'Typhon' and 'Chimæra' do not name particular creatures or real kinds. The human soul is prompted to entertain complex images of its own fashioning when it hears those terms, and those images are constructed from images of actual unities. Still, there are no real unities corresponding to the terms. The Chimaera is not a something or a being for Plato. There is no such thing. If some terms in fiction do not name extralinguistic, extramental unities, then there are no corresponding countable beings to act as the somethings named in that fiction. For oneness does not apply in such cases, and if oneness does not apply, then being does not apply. As the *Sophist* tells us, if being does not apply, then the criteria for somethinghood cannot be satisfied. Pegasus too, it seems, falls into this category. Our images of Pegasus are complex images cobbled together from images of actual entities, kinds or traits. But there is no unity, being or something to answer to the name 'Pegasus.' If, for Plato, some fictional terms lack referents, then his ontology is significantly less full than it is often thought to be.

But then how does Plato deal with the problem of content for such cases? If some fictional terms fail to satisfy the *tinotes* requirement, is Plato forced, against his liking, to give up such discourse? Not obviously. Plato's remarks in the *Phaedrus* and *Republic* suggest a strategy for accommodating fiction. Plato can begin by maintaining the view that fiction is not about what it purports to be about. Discourse relying

71 Socrates remarks that he is more concerned with self-knowledge than with undertaking the unenviable task of generating such accounts for popular myths. Aristotle also recommends against analyzing myths, *Meta.* 1000a5-18.

on the term 'Pegasus' is not about or of Pegasus. There is no such thing after all. Nevertheless, the discourse is meaningful so long as the term 'Pegasus' calls to mind contents or mental images associated with real unities that can then be cobbled together. The term 'Pegasus' is not, strictly speaking, a name since it lacks application; but the term can be used meaningfully since it is associated with a collection of names or descriptions which do have application (e.g. 'horse,' 'creatures with wings'), terms which do satisfy the *tinós* requirement. A fictional term like 'Pegasus' can appear as a meaningful term in a sentence, though it does not itself actually name anything; its meaning is parasitic on the meaning of terms that do pick out somethings. 'Chimaera' need not itself obscurely refer to goats, lions, and serpents; rather it can be a nonreferential term. Discourse relying on the term can be meaningful nonetheless, so long as the term is ultimately suitably related to existing objects or kinds.

If Plato were to appeal to this final strategy for accommodating fiction, then it seems he would allow a qualification to the semantic requirements outlined in the *Sophist*. It seems, that is, that a term is meaningful when either it satisfies the *tinós* requirement itself, or it is suitably related to terms that satisfy the *tinós* requirement. It is by no means obvious that Plato embraces the qualification or, if he did, that he could adequately explain how one term is 'suitably related' to another. Still, if the revision were to be embraced by him, his way with fiction would continue to avoid an expanded ontology. 'Fictional creatures' are not countable somethings on Plato's view, so they have no home in his ontology. Plato has something to say, however, when faced with the problem of content for even the most fanciful discourse. The term 'Pegasus' can be used to call up contentful thoughts even though there is no actual unity named by 'Pegasus,' since the soul can fashion a complex mental image by joining together contentful images of actual, extramental unities. There may be times when speakers are unable to distinguish nonreferring terms from referring names or the merely fashioned, complex mental images from the images of real unities. Still, the distinction obtains.

Plato's emphasis on the complexity and constructed nature of some mental images suggests that he is not inclined to find a referent, even a surprising one, for associated fictional terms. Rather, he warns against tendencies one might have to infer from an apparently unified image or an apparent singular term to the existence of a corresponding, real, extramental unity. At the same time, he seems interested to explain how there might be content in the case of fictional images and fictional language. He seems interested, that is, in the possibility of mental and semantic contents without ontological commitments to every apparent object of thought or discourse. 'Pegasus is winged' might, then, mean

something like 'There is a marvelous steed with wings.'⁷² The paraphrase does not obviously capture all that seems meant by the original sentence. Moreover, the paraphrase and consequently the original sentence would be, strictly speaking, false even when, according to the fiction at least, Pegasus does have wings. But perhaps we should expect some difficulties in accounting for such cases, given that, although 'Pegasus' might look very much like a referring singular term, its appearances are deceiving. When we consider fiction, we consider a special kind of discourse after all, a kind of discourse in which language 'built for' the actual world is employed for special, nonparadigmatic purposes.⁷³ Plato's remarks also suggest a strategy for accounting for meaning in the case of negative existentials, though it is not clear that he explores the possibility himself. 'Pegasus does not exist' can be understood truthfully to mean 'there is no marvelous steed with wings.' Again, the idea is to provide an account of the content of such language without supposing, paradoxically, that Pegasus is a being.

72 This final strategy for accommodating fiction is a sort of prototype of Russellian and Quinean paraphrase and carries with it the advantages and disadvantages of a paraphrase approach. According to Quine, 'If in terms of pegasizing we can interpret the noun "Pegasus" as a description subject to Russell's theory of descriptions, then we have disposed of the old notion that Pegasus cannot be said not to be without presupposing that in some sense Pegasus is,' OWI, 8. The result for 'Pegasus does not exist' is useful, since we can understand the sentence truthfully to express something like 'It is not the case that there is a marvelous steed with wings.' But the results for 'Pegasus flies' are less satisfactory. Although the sentence meaningfully expresses 'There is a marvelous steed with wings and it flies,' the sentence is false, despite the fact that it reports accurately about the content of the fiction. 'Pegasus is fictional' is perhaps more difficult, since it is not clear how exactly to paraphrase the sentence to capture either the anticipated meaning or the anticipated truth-value. Plato does not account for content to the point of perfect clarification of nonexistence claims, claims within fiction, or claims about the fictional status of some purported object. As I have suggested, Plato's efforts to deal with the problem of content are limited. Still, I hope to identify some tendencies in his dialogues that make it possible to uncover his views of the ontological commitments wrapped up in fictional discourse. For a different strategy altogether, see M. Durrant, 'Plato's Quinean Beard: Did Plato Ever Grow It?' *Philosophy* 73 (1998) 113-21. According to Durrant, Plato develops the view that sentences containing empty terms can be meaningful, despite failing to express propositions. He speculates that Plato adopts a view according to which a simple subject-predicate sentence expresses a proposition only when it meets a requirement of presupposition (i.e. only on the presupposition that there is a corresponding true existential proposition).

73 That Plato conceives of language as largely a tool for dialectical inquiry into being is partly supported by his discussion of the function of names in the *Cratylus* (388b10-390d5).

V Conclusion

Fairly early on in the *Sophist*, Plato expresses a *tinós* requirement on significant discourse and thought. Talk and thought must be of something, of self-identical, individuated, existing unities. At no point in the dialogue does Plato give up that requirement. On the contrary, he reiterates it emphatically later in the dialogue, and our understanding of what the requirement involves becomes increasingly informed and enriched as the dialogue continues. The *Sophist's* readers are treated to a remarkable collection of arguments outlining the metaphysics of somethings, of beings, the sorts of entities that can serve as objects of discourse and thought.

But the *tinós* requirement generates difficulties. How are we to explain mythical or fictional discourse? How are we to accommodate negative existence claims and apparently meaningful claims about the emptiness of 'what is not'? There are no straightforward resolutions to such difficulties in the *Sophist*. Indeed, Plato may nowhere offer a single, decisive response. But there are a variety of rich suggestions in other dialogues, none of which requires an ontology replete with 'fictional creatures.' Plato eschews the problem of nonbeing and chooses, instead, to wrestle with the problem of content. There is an interesting history, however, of casting Plato among those hopelessly tangled in the infamous problem of nonbeing. Perhaps the result is unsurprising since Plato is certainly not enamored of desert landscapes, and he publicly struggles to achieve clarity concerning what is and what is not. But when we take the *Sophist's* metaphysical efforts seriously, when we heed its warning not to be overly 'facile' in our use of language (242c4ff.), and when we glean what we can from Plato's treatment of myth, we can see that although Plato's ontology is plenty full, it is not so bloated as to include Pegasus and his ilk. Plato's Beard is not quite as tough on Ockham's razor as Quine and others have led us to believe.⁷⁴

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