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**EIDOS AND DYNAMIS: THE INTERTWINEMENT
OF BEING AND LOGOS IN PLATO'S THOUGHT**

Titolo della tesi

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To my beloved mother

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Introduction

Writing is like sculpture. I say this in a very precise sense in that something can be brought forth in both writing and sculpture only through removal. Just as the sculptor chips away at the marble, the Platonic interpreter needs to select one possible path and remove many related topics or different ways to address the one selected in order to achieve the final form of the work. As a result, there is but one well-defined figure whose existence excludes many others. The value of such figures, which are, beyond the metaphor, the interpretations, cannot rest on the nonsensical attempt to give one actual form to all the numerous possible figures. This is not possible. By contrast, the value of sculpture lies in the perfection of the shape which the sculptor endeavoured to achieve through chiselling. By this, I am not trivially saying that just one interpretation is correct and therefore it cannot coincide with those it is incompatible with. Instead, I am claiming that the same topic (or set of topics) can be correctly scrutinised in a number of ways, and yet one work assumes its form only if one criterion is used to select what is relevant and how it is to address or connect to other subjects. The present work is one such attempt. In particular, it sets out to understand Plato's view on the nature of reality starting from the linguistic dimension. All the remarks given in this introduction will be extensively discussed throughout the work; therefore, I

shall assume them to be correct in order to set the frame of the entire examination.

The metaphysical framework of Plato's philosophy does not express its priority just from a historical point of view by ushering in the philosophical tradition. It may well also be considered as prior from a theoretical point of view since it initiates a kind of theory which aims to articulate and contemplate the fundamental features that any theory regarding the profound nature of reality, knowledge and language must present. Those three dimensions have already a complex story at the very beginning of Greek thought, and systematising their mutual and peculiar relation will be, among other things, the specific task of Plato's metaphysical effort. However, doubts may be raised, exegetically and methodologically, as to whether it is legitimate to attribute the phrase "metaphysical framework" to Plato. There are two main reasons why Plato's collected works do not present any sort of systematic character. Firstly, because it is extended over a lifetime full of events and reflections, thereby making it unlikely that a monolithic philosophical doctrine is entirely thematised from the beginning and remains unaltered throughout the philosopher's life. Secondly, because of the dramatic form intrinsically characterizing the dialogues, the fragmentary nature of the Platonic discourse is such that not much can be stated with certainty about his doctrine.

The dialogic form itself is so pervaded by theoretical themes that form cannot often be properly distinguished from content. This last statement amounts to a peculiarity of the Platonic texts. Usually, the Protean sense of texts becomes more evident through a stratigraphic metaphor; each text presents an author's point of view in such a way that it emerges from a layer where unspoken assumptions linger. The case of Plato is instead on three levels: The first is the most superficial, full of provocations delivered to the reader and driven by the dramatic need of the literary and protreptic (and, why not, politically critical) composition. The second level is a non-systematic dissemination of arguments belonging to his authentic doctrine. Finally, the third level enshrines the epochal and personal presuppositions of his theorising. The present research sets out to analyse the second level as a way to approach the third. Any analysis of an alleged evolution of Plato's thought will be suspended here, maintaining the basic idea that in his work there is fundamental unity and coherence with regard to the

grounding concept of his thought. This point does not exclude the obvious possibility that through theoretical development previous ideas can be modified and that new directions can be discovered. It is being asserted instead that it is possible to put forward an account of the thought of the philosopher of Athens within a unified framework. This fundamental coherence could also arise from the fact that through more or less varying solutions, Plato's problems have remained predominantly the same. The difference between our philosophical sensibility and Plato's should prevent the modern interpreter from charging him with hideous misunderstandings. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge asserts apropos of Plato himself, «until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding».¹ At the same time, though, I do not think that there is a connection between some *Grundsätze* of our own philosophical theories about the metaphysical status of reality and Plato's epochal theoretical move. I firmly believe that Plato's main interest was essentially pragmatic: how can one attain absolutely certain knowledge of reality? How should one use language to have access to reality? I say that Plato's conception of reality is pragmatic because the notion of reality underlying these two questions is that of something expressing absolute necessity. Reality is the implacable necessity one has to reckon with and which is prior to anything human. In parallel, since cognition is the privileged way to get in contact with reality (we shall see why later in the work), Plato's first philosophical effort is to spell out under which conditions reality can be fully intelligible. In this way, he brings about the notion of εἶδος, Form, which features as the principal metaphysical item of his philosophy.

In this work, I shall not address the question concerning the nature of knowledge in Plato's philosophy. I shall only assume that for Plato knowledge needs to be unerring and always of something that is.² Instead, I shall extensively examine in this work in what sense the ontological dimension bears on the epistemic one. This setting involves another question: how can one speak truthfully of the world? This question requires

¹ J. Engell W. J. Bate (eds.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, VII Biographia Literaria*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1985, vol. I, p. 232. On the relation between Plato and the English Romantics cf. E. D. Kabitoglou, *Plato and the English Romantics*, Routledge, London and New York 1990.

² These two requirements are overtly stated in the *Theaetetus* cf. *Theaet.* 152c5-6 and Chapter Three p. 136.

that the world presents a structure which grounds the possibility of being said and that human being has an instrument able to do this. The linguistic means, however, can be used in many ways, even without understanding its nature or the very fact that reality is one thing and the language used to speak about it is another. Nevertheless, I think that Plato takes for granted that even his philosophical adversary, namely the most ruthlessly relativist sophist, makes broad use of language and is convinced of the force of his arguments. This elementary fact, namely employing language, is never ontologically neutral. In other words, for Plato if one makes use of language, he is already committed to something external to it. Conversely, language seems to be the ontological instrument *par excellence*: according to Plato one can have theoretical access to reality only through the mediation of language. As will be made clear in this work, Plato comes from an archaic view which could not actually sever reality from thought and language. Ingeniously, Plato first thematises the difference between the words and what they refer to, and then he feels the need to reunite the two dimensions in a completely new manner. I think that all this can be put in terms of the power that must be acknowledged to the word. For this reason, Plato's real adversary here is the sophist, namely the theoretical figure who claims that the linguistic dimension is almighty since it is governed only by itself. By contrast, Plato maintains that only reality can work as the measure for discourse, but reality is so effective a measure because it is thoroughly autonomous. The term "autonomous" is here etymologically significant since it expresses that something works as its own source of norms. Hence, the question concerning the power of the word appears to be a genuine Platonic need and a good key for disclosing some aspects of Plato's philosophy that maybe have passed unnoticed. Of course, if so, these aspects have passed unnoticed just like Poe's purloined letter. Therefore, I shall try both to reinterpret some classical issues and to focus on some possibly new themes. However, it needs to be said that the principal goal of this work is not to describe Plato's theory on language. It is not even certain that there is such a theory in his corpus. Of course, Plato often and acutely analyses linguistic phenomena or logical puzzles. Yet the point of the present investigation is to comprehend how for Plato language and being are connected, how language is what puts in motion the ontological questioning and how ontological and metaphysical answers are

essentially meant to account for the phenomenon of truth. Plato's notion of truth has drawn particular attention in recent years since it has been recognised as a philosophical goat-stag. It is simultaneously logical and ontological, it is the truth of the real existing entities, which is what and how Forms are, and the truth which can be spoken in discourse. Plato does not adopt just one of these views, nor does he distinguish them clearly. My final proposition will be that logical truth is the natural product of ontological truth. As we shall see, the continuity between the two derives from the fact that in Plato's view what is objectively real is also purely intelligible.

I now turn to summarising the four chapters of this work. Each one consists of an introduction and four sections. In addition, there is a brief, though important in the general economy of the work, excursus between the third and the fourth chapter. Before the summary I wish only to say that some subjects of research happen to have a tightly entwined texture; and, to be unravelled, it requires a non-linear connection. So, for any of its parts some reference to the following or preceding ones is required. Any chapter of a thesis could be a thesis on its own, and so is recursive because concepts, texts and thoughts constitute a web. Curiously enough, this bears significant resemblance to Plato's ontology as it will appear in this work, and especially in the last chapter. Furthermore, this work is indeed an attempt to follow a precise path bridging several chapters, but it is also meant to provide some interpretations of single passages which might also prove interesting for those who do not find the whole interpretation convincing.

This thesis consists of four chapters, the first of which is quite different from the other three. Whereas the latter follow a classical pattern, i.e. starting from textual places and ending with more general considerations on the topic, the former does not focus on a particular dialogue or set of passages in the attempt to give a shape to the notion of εἶδος with particular regard to the peculiar role that this notion plays towards the cognitive and linguistic dimensions. Thus, the first chapter is essentially programmatic. It should be considered as the exposition of the interpretation of the notion of εἶδος, which is presupposed throughout the discussion of further subjects in the other chapters. The first chapter opens with the exposition of Plato's theoretical background, as reconstructed by the eminent Italian scholar

Guido Calogero. He named the view of the archaic thinkers “the original coalescence of reality, thought and language”. This theory is an excellent exegetical device, which crops up frequently throughout my work. The first chapter goes on with two sections which scrutinise at length the *functional* and *structural* aspects of Forms and how these two dimensions are strictly linked, as much as to be metaphorically labelled Physiology and Anatomy of εἶδος. The last section of the first chapter is devoted to making clear my disinclination towards some traditional ways of interpreting the notion of Form which are based on the substance/property dichotomy. Of course, this would require an entire work on its own, but it is nonetheless useful to give some argument for it. In conclusion, the first chapter is tasked with setting the frame for the interpretation proposed here in a programmatic manner, in such a way as to give better sense to what follows it and to be proved true by it. This is also the reason why this introduction is relatively brief, thereby suggesting that the first chapter also acts as an introduction.

The second chapter deals with the Platonic concept of technique (the dialogues chiefly referred to are the *Cratylus* and *Republic X*) in a very precise sense. It asks: what are the contributions that the technical experience, i.e. that of artisans, artists and experts, can give to ontology? As will emerge in the chapter, the contributions are two. Firstly, the existence of techniques is the most immediate manifestation of some fundamental normativity, also within pre-philosophical experience. Secondly, Plato views technical activities as based on a precise ontology which can also be employed to describe the metaphysical status of Forms. These two aspects are kept together and argued for in three sections which examine three concepts: πεφυκέναι, παράδειγμα, τέλος which mean “natural predisposition”, “original model” and “perfect accomplishment or end”, respectively.³ These three concepts are coherent with the previous treatment of the nature of Forms in the first chapter and address the issue from another perspective. This perspective is both theoretical and operational just like Plato’s conception of τέχνη, i.e. technique. I firmly believe that in this way Forms correctly appear as the ontological source of norms that govern each interaction of human beings with the world. The last section in this chapter shows how the three concepts above can be seen

³ The second of these has drawn enormous attention, but it will be treated only in accordance with the present approach.

as different ways of binding temporality to the radically extra-temporal status of Plato's Forms. To conclude, by treating the relation between technique and ontology, this chapter, on the one hand, expands the analysis of how Forms work and, on the other hand, it builds a bridge to the following two chapters. It can do that because it ends with the recognition of the instrumental value of language. If language is an instrument (and everything that has been said in the chapter is correct), then it needs to respect some ontological fixed source of normativity. So, the chapter concludes with a question: what does it mean to use language? This paves the way to the following two chapters.

The third chapter enquires into the relation between language and becoming, and focuses on the first part of the *Theaetetus*. In this dialogue, the object of research is the nature of knowledge. The first and longest discussion is on definition that knowledge is the same as αἴσθησις, perception. This definition searches for legitimation in a phenomenalist ontology: all there is is whatever actually and presently manifests itself within one's experience and for as long as it is manifest. The main interest of this chapter is to see why phenomenism turns out to be untenable. The lack of objectivity, where objectivity means that something is "thus and so" by itself, and that was the first appealing characteristic of phenomenism, also implies the sheer impossibility of speaking. The first section analyses the first steps of the definition understanding the broader sense of the notion of αἴσθησις as correlated to whatever takes place within experience, thereby being something essentially related to events.⁴ The second section follows the fulfilment of the phenomenalist ontological proposal that puts in the punctual and momentary manifestation the unique criterion of being. The third section, offers an interpretation of the collapse of language engendered by the radical outcome of the definition of knowledge as perception. The main point of this section is to show that without minimal objectivity there cannot be minimal reference or describability either. However, such a minimal objectivity is possible only on the grounds of something that is not an event of a perception. The last section of this third

⁴ An old but still wonderfully sparkling study looking more like a pamphlet than a complete work which has likely exerted some influence on my interpretation, particularly in thinking of Plato's metaphysical duality, is C. Diano, *Forma ed Evento*, Neri Pozza Editore, Vicenza 1952.

chapter analyses a brief but extremely significant excerpt from a later passage of the *Theaetetus*, namely the end of the second definition, where knowledge is compared to the authority of the eyewitness in a trial. This fruitful metaphor gives the chance to spell out a crucial aspect of Plato's philosophy, which I name verificationism (although it is completely different from modern views) and that puts in the cognitive access to something the fundamental result of its ontological nature. To conclude, this chapter aims to illustrate how everything in the sensible domain appeals to something that it can in no way derive from itself.

At this point, I present an excursus that is more general in scope but that focuses on the same subjects relative to the third and fourth chapters, thereby linking the two. This excursus consists of two brief sections. The first section is an attempt to sketch out the nature of sensible things from what has been said about the *Theaetetus* concentrating on the epistemic aspect of dealing with sensible things and events. The main contention in this section is that according to Plato one can never be sure as to whether things actually are as they appear (and this is the reason why they *are not* at all, in the technical sense of "be" which will be better understood during the discussion). Given the strict relation between knowability and metaphysical status, the ambiguous epistemic status of things comes to be their nature. The second section in this excursus is devoted to depicting two types of linguistic reference here called Platonic Indexical reference and Platonic Definitional reference. Reference in general is defined as the linguistic procedure which cognitively delivers the speaker to the subject spoken about. The main contention of this section is that the ontological difference between Forms and things also affects the faculty of language. The distinctive trait of Platonic Indexical reference lies in the fact that it is ultimately related only to sensible particulars whose final individuation is deictic. By contrast, Platonic Definitional reference remains within the dialectical endeavour which relates the speaker only to Forms whose final individuation is a matter of perfect definition. Finally, the theoretical acquisitions of this second section provide the argumentative and conceptual basis for introducing and developing the last chapter of this work.

The fourth and last chapter concentrates on the *Sophist*. This dialogue has been furiously debated. In addition, the dialogue is a very tight series of

arguments which in many cases are significantly interdependent. I have tried to isolate one single path that starts from the question of the power of the word and leads to the relational ontology whose pivotal notion is the kind being.⁵ Therefore, the first section sets up the terms of the discussion by explaining Plato's objectives. Very generally, these objectives are the acquisition of a contentual dimension within language, which is to say that language relates to non-linguistic reality, and to expose the nature of this new correlation between language and reality, which I called "ontologisation". By this term, I mean the theory that reads linguistic sense as the product of how reality itself is structured. The second section deals with the thorny issue concerning the nature of discourse and how it is said to be brought forth thanks to the interweaving of Forms. It will emerge that the weave of Forms is the ground for the truth of any statement regarding sensible things or events without providing that statement with a truth-value. The third section addresses the crucial concept of relationality of reality and how this works as the condition of any linguistic activity. The condition for this ontological theory is to conceive of every existent kind in a selective relation with other kinds. To exist is to be part of a eidetic web and this is answerable to an element of the web itself, namely the kind of being. For any kind, to be is to exist within a set of interweaving Forms, and therefore being is defined as capacity (*δύναμις*) to establish relations.⁶ However, it needs to be said that the fourth chapter culminates with a presentation of Plato's relational ontology with particular regard to the main question of this work, which is the intertwinement of being and language. In conclusion, this last chapter terminates with a final section which describes the consequences of the ontology exposed in the chapter and on how it coheres with the themes discussed throughout the whole work.

I wish to spend some more words on the Platonic secondary literature. As anyone can imagine, it is excruciatingly enormous. In a sense, it starts with Aristotle and it is so difficult to handle that it becomes a philosophical puzzle in itself. Interpreters are currently facing an unprecedented situation.

⁵ I take kinds to be perfectly equivalent to Forms.

⁶ The order of the subjects is reversed with respect to the Platonic text. I structured the chapter in this way because I think it highlights the argumentative sequence more effectively.

The diverse approaches and the accessibility of the sources have broken the national exegetical traditions. Also, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Plato's philosophy is so extended that it can be read through the lens of almost every philosopher or philosophical school coming after him. Given all this, I feel the need to state the criterion I have followed in dealing with the secondary literature. I have prioritised Italian and English sources without neglecting the major studies in German and French (which needless to say are splendid). I prioritised Italian sources because it is the language which formed my philosophical and exegetical sensibility and because I, and many others, consider the studies in Classical Antiquity an Italian excellency. I prioritised English too because it is the language in which this work was conceived and because the English literature on Plato is the most extended and philosophically informed. Furthermore, I preferred the most recent studies for two main reasons. First, if the authors are still living they better defend their reasons (and I believe Plato himself would subscribe to this). Second, more recent studies in theory take into account the older ones when the reverse cannot be. This is the sense I could give to the question of secondary literature, but it is not the whole story. There is a more subterranean way to move through the literature which is intrinsically "rhizomatic", which means like a root. By following interests and possible connections, one follows inspiring references from article to article ranging on different times and approaches, often coming to a dead end and starting again. This approach is not totally random either. In this case, older studies are preferred because after dealing with works that settled the terms of a debate, if one does not agree with a particular approach, he is naturally not driven to delve into the debate possibly engendered by that approach. Finally, the works I have perused have been referred to in accordance with the following criterion. The crucial studies that have provided some indispensable ideas are often quoted or frequently referred to. The studies which I found insightful are mentioned. The studies that have some different ideas which are nonetheless pertinent to my general approach are likewise mentioned and/or discussed. The studies which are unavoidably classical are mentioned as well.

I wish to finish this introduction with some general remarks on Plato and metaphysical realism. This research may be read as an attempt to delineate a Platonic genealogy of metaphysical realism. By metaphysical

realism, I mean that view which considers reality as absolutely independent from any act of cognition towards it. Broadly speaking, Plato's metaphysics of Forms is a philosophical outcome that starts from the need to theorise such an independence. This independence is joined with a pragmatic approach: whatever is real is also cognitively graspable. Language has to be considered as instrumental. To be precise, it has to be considered as that instrument that naturally leads to reality without ever coinciding with it. For us post-postmodern thinkers, it could be normal to problematise the relation between language and reality. Plato assumes this relation. This move is revolutionary because in assuming it he minimally thinks of the two terms as distinct. Then, relation assumed, he draws the consequences as to how reality needs to be. This is so true that he cannot even see this in this way. In other words, he puts forward his view always starting from reality itself and not from the needs of cognition.

However, aside from non-negligible differences, any realist is Platonic in this respect. What anything is does not depend on any cognitive grasp. But there is something more. Why is reality, in a fully realist view and to common sense, nothing but what perfectly fits with all the perfect description concerning it? The question is, in other words, why reality is what is cognised within thought and that is literally said by language. Also today, language is the privileged means of connecting with being. One can never smell or touch something with words, but only through them can one gain access to its being, i.e. what it is, how it works, how it is connected to other things or events. This linguistic practice trespasses the limits of the actual manifestation of things since it is independent of them. Plato's thought is the first radical attempt to thematise this, and, apparently, my work is the first attempt to show it in these terms.

I wish to thank from the bottom of my heart my mentor and friend professor Francesco Aronadio from whose profound and gentle teachings I have extensively benefitted during the many years. These teachings do not just include the most refined theoretical and exegetical lessons, but they also significantly present the quiet and lucid trace of virtue. We have discussed almost every line of this work. I hope one day to be a bit like him.

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I wish to thank my father in being a model of humanity and dignity especially in the darkest hour. One day, I hope to be able to give sense to the lives of the people I love as he does.

I wish to thank my mother, whose last words happened to be about me and this very work, not just for having loved me limitlessly, but also for having given to me τὰ σεμνότατα τῶν ὄντων: ζωή, ψυχή, νούς. I shall always dedicate them to you.

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Chapter One

Function and Structure of the εἶδος

Introduction

This first chapter consists of a programmatic exposition and interpretation of the Platonic notion of εἶδος. It will be assumed that this notion can be framed within a positive theory aiming at solving specific problems. This chapter's main task is effectively exploring the background, the problematic horizon and the outcome of the Theory of Ideas with regard to the linguistic dimension, profitably highlighting how this exegetical direction discloses important facts about the theory of Ideas. This chapter will mainly concentrate on the Middle Dialogues, from time to time also drawing relevant information from the Early and Late Dialogues when it is relevant to understand single arguments. This chapter is divided four sections. The first section is devoted to the exposition of the theoretical background of Plato's theory. In this section I analyse the view of the prominent Italian interpreter Guido Calogero, who bases the beginning of the Greek philosophical thought on a fundamental indistinction between the three dimension of reality, thought and language. This framework proves to be indispensable because it is Plato himself who first felt the need of separating, without completely severing, those dimensions. For this reason, the second section is devoted to the description

of what I name the Physiology of εἶδος, i.e. the examination of the functions performed by Forms. This multiplicity of functions lets us understand how Plato is innovating against his background. In the Physiology of εἶδος the function is fourfold: Forms provide reality with identity, knowledge, definition and reference by possessing perfect conditions of identity, being perfectly knowable and definable, and providing linguistic reference. How does the εἶδος manage to do this? This is the subject of the third section of this chapter, the Anatomy of εἶδος. The psychiatric metaphor lets the reader see how the functions just enumerated are grounded in a metaphysical structure. The Anatomy is precisely the investigation of such a structure, which essentially characterises the εἶδος. In this section we are faced with the notorious classical features of the εἶδος, for instance being itself by itself or being intelligible. Physiology and Anatomy taken jointly give back the multiform reality of the εἶδος, casting light at the same time on their cohesion. The fourth and last section of this chapter deals with the traditional way of understanding the εἶδος within the framework of the substance-property dichotomy. That view is as old as the Western philosophical tradition, and I will not discuss it in detail. Rather, its most basic assumption will be rejected, namely the inescapability of the substance-property dichotomy in conceiving of Forms. This enables us to view more clearly what I take to be the original Platonic issue. This issue will turn out to be the profound *Leitfaden* of my entire work. Just a few more words on this chapter, it may be surprising that a chapter tasked with the full explanation of the notion of εἶδος is put at the beginning of our enquiry. As already stated in the Introduction, this chapter should be taken at face value since it tries to systematise the notion of εἶδος in order to make the subsequent chapters more comprehensible, which in turn are supposed to confirm its correctness and interest.

1) Theoretical Background: from coalescence to cohesion

Reality, thought and language are really logically and linguistically distinct, and yet their mutual relation is neither obvious nor easily understood. Their communion is such that the distinctions operated or recognised within one of them, reverberate within the others. My starting

point is that of Guido Calogero's *Storia della logica antica*⁷, The History of Ancient Logic, which overtly figures as a history of the idea of λόγος, rather than a history of logic conceived of as that part of knowledge aiming at establishing the condition of correctness of thought processes. My purpose here is to make explicit how Calogero's interpretation is operating in the background of the reading of Plato proposed in this work. Despite its age⁸, Calogero's work provides a suitable interpretive framework within which may be deciphered the subtext of Plato's theoretical strategies. According to Calogero, the principal problem faced by archaic thinkers was how to determine the condition of intrinsic intelligibility of reality⁹. In the pre-Platonic archaic stage of philosophical theorising, the problem of the difference between thought and its object is not clearly perceived. Therefore, those laws which belong to the domain of thinking and those which instead express necessity in reality, cannot be properly discerned. This world, where distinctions that will turn out to be obvious must still be acquired, demanded that philosophers undertook the painstaking task of crafting new conceptual devices.

The undifferentiated unity of conceptions about the field of truth and those related to the field of reality constitutes the "original indistinction" as articulated by Calogero.¹⁰ What does it actually mean? Generally, reality is what is determined in itself, whereas truth is the objectively correct mirroring of reality which belongs in some sense to the subjective sphere of consciousness. Hence, the undifferentiatedness in question consists in considering any contemplated thing as existing and manifesting, as being both real and veracious, without making clear the binary relation of both attributes. For the pre-sophistic thinker there is no domain of truth which does not coincide with the clear presence of reality, and, at the same time, no reality evades the manifestation of truth. The epistemic issue seems yet

⁷ G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica*, vol. I: *l'età arcaica*, Laterza, Bari-Roma 1967. From now on, I will refer to the new edition G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica*, vol. I: *l'età arcaica*, Bruno Centrone (ed.), Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2012.

⁸ Although the first edition of the work was published in 1967, the first chapters that deal with the view taken up here were written in the 1930s, also following the teaching of E. Cassirer (especially *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 1923-9) and E. Hoffman (*Die Sprache und die archaische Logik*, 1925).

⁹ Cf. G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica*, volume primo: *l'età arcaica*, cit., p. 23.

¹⁰ Cf. G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica*, volume primo: *l'età arcaica*, cit., p. 44.

to come, and the strength of cognitive acts is due to the fact that the known object is one and the same with the real object. The law of thought is the law of reality and vice versa: the boundaries between logic and ontology blur. For this reason, enquiring about the structure of thought means *eo ipso* recognising the grounding norms of reality. Correspondingly, it is the limits of reality that determine the scope of what is cognitively meaningful. The primeval view belonging to the archaic thinker is thus equally logical and ontological. Such a view must not be thought of as a form of idealism. On the contrary, it is strongly realistic. Another distinction which must still be arrived at is the difference between action and content. In the view analysed here, only the external world properly is, but such being is dictated by thought. What is real can only be found by thinking, and that suffices to make thought the same as reality.

Language must be added to this account as the third element since reality is not only true through thought, but it is also manifest in its linguistic expression.¹¹ Reality is intrinsically and essentially embedded in the words which express it. The veracious concept is not distinguished from its proper expression, thus the incoherencies of the latter are considered as flaws of truth itself. Or, to put it better, language and reality are connected so strictly that they prove themselves to be one in that the impossibility of the latter being flawed rules the sense itself of the former. They merge to the extent that the rule of reality is the same as language and language perfectly expresses reality. The power of things is entirely transferred to words which name them: reality and thought are not distinct, much as the latter has no content but that which is expressed by language. The fact of being merges with the truth of its existence in thought and also with the sense of the linguistic medium of such truth. In being strictly the same, any norming fact about one domain can be totally understood within the others.

Such a view is labelled by Calogero “l’originaria coalescenza di realtà, pensiero e parola” (the original coalescence of reality, thought and language) and may be summarised as follows:

¹¹ Cf. G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica, volume primo: l’età arcaica*, cit., p.48.

- 1) Indistinction between reality and truth. This indistinction amounts to the undifferentiatedness of ontology and logic: the necessary structure of reality is the same as the necessary structure of thought.
- 2) There is no authentic epistemic issue: the self-imposing character of reality is such that it is manifestly evident just because it takes place. Something is real because it is visible to thought, but only that which is effectively real is properly viewed within thought itself.
- 3) There is an uncriticised coincidence between truth in thought/reality and the stated truth. This conversely suggests that the fundamental imposition dictated by the essential aspects of language and found through the exercise of discourse will amount to reality itself.

This view was born as a positive account of the pre-Socratic philosophies, especially Heraclitus' and Parmenides', and it has been debated mainly among their scholars¹². The details of Calogero's interpretation of the pre-Socratics, especially regarding single passages, may well be discussed, if not rejected. It may be contrasted with at least three different options, which need be considered as ideal types, not necessarily corresponding to actual views of interpreters. First, the contrary view: archaic thought enquires over the conditions of intelligibility of reality, but it has perfectly developed the distinction between reality, thought and language. Second, archaic thought is concerned exquisitely with material and physicalist accounts of the world. Third, the work of pre-Socratics philosophers always remains within the bounds of the

¹² Cf. A. P. D. Mourelatos, *Some Alternatives in interpreting Parmenides*, «The Monist», 62 (1979), pp. 3-14, especially pp.3-4 and A.P.D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Parmenides Publishing, Las Vegas Zurich Athens 2008, pp. 51-5, cf. p. 53-4 «The thrust of his [*scil.* Calogero] interpretation is that in Parmenides the argument involves the “objectivizing”, or the “ontological crystallization” or the “hypostatization” of a logical-verbal insight (or rather a confusion); that for Parmenides reality, truth, and language are fused, as they are much of archaic thought». An interpreter who critiques Calogero's thesis about Parmenides is L. Tarán, *Parmenides. A text with Translation, Commentary and Critical Essays*, Princeton 1965. According to A. Graeser, *On Language, Thought, and Reality in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, «Dialectica», 31 (1977), pp. 359-88:363 the “Language versus Reality” problem arises from mistaking any referring expression for a proper name.

mythological worldview. Obviously such views are too categorical to be real. It must be said that, at this stage, a sharp division between speculative and empirical as between logical and mythological is nonsense. Therefore, the only view that is unacceptable here is the first one, since it is being maintained here that the one who originally carries out the distinctions, denied by the first view contrasting with Calogero's, will be Plato. Obviously, Calogero is not claiming that all pre-Socratic reflection is devoted to stating the equivalence between ontology and logic. The point here is just that when it comes to the first ontological insights, those presuppositions are automatically at work.

However, the exegetical endeavour as to how the remaining views are intermingled cannot take place in this dissertation, and, strictly speaking, is not even required. The key thing is, in fact, that the fruitfulness of this complex conceptual background can be showed indirectly through the interpretation of Plato's philosophy. I reckon that the work of the philosopher of Athens consists, *inter alia*, in the attempt to maintain an ideal continuity to the strict interrelation between the aforementioned dimensions. At the same time, under the unprecedented necessity of distinguishing the ontological, logical and linguistic domains from each other, he wants to discover their inner configuration. Among these dimensions the ontological is crucial since on it hinge the others, whereas language is accorded the status of privileged means. The *λόγος* was the core of two opposite conceptions, both of which were considered unacceptable by Plato: Eleatics's philosophy and Sophistic, which used to be too restrictive and too liberal, respectively. Thematising language as such involves primarily recognising its distance from the reality referred to. In a genealogy inspired by the exegetical option put forward by Calogero, Plato eminently represents a philosophically careful view about language and its reference to reality. By this I do not mean that his aim was to provide a semantic theory about meaning and reference nor that, for him, reality becomes ultimately a matter of linguistic constructions. On the contrary, the linguistic means seems to be uniquely the privileged standing-point from which extra-linguistic reality shows itself. The inner intertwinement of linguistic instrument and reality has a much more complex nature that will be extensively analysed later.

To begin with, I think it is appropriate to introduce the central metaphysical item of Plato's speculation, namely the εἶδος, in order to first delineate the speculative horizon we shall be operating in. In the first place, it is useful to present a very brief analysis of the notion out of the Platonic usage. As is well known, the very concept of knowledge in Greek language, as indeed in many modern languages, is related to the visual dimension. One of the most striking examples is the third perfect form of the verb "ὄραω"; it is one of the many verbs denoting the act of seeing: "οἶδα" means "I know", but in the most precise way can be translated as: "I am in the condition of having seen something, I know that something and I know it because I have seen it." Sight is more important than the other senses striking consciousness inescapably. Within sight is captured a unique and instantaneous perspective, temporarily providing a perceptual unity appearing as a field.¹³ The term "εἶδος" denotes, in ordinary ancient Greek, the exterior aspect or the distinctive figure of something. The stem belongs to the semantic sphere of vision as does the synonym "ἰδέα"¹⁴. As in the case of "οἶδα", the term "εἶδος" connects vision and apprehension, playing, for the native speaker, an informational role: the shape or aspect of things consists in the manifestation of a distinctive feature. This distinctive figure can also take an adjectival form expressing a likening through the suffix "-ειδής", whose most common instance is the Homeric "θεοειδής", god-like, employed by the blind poet to characterise heroes as superhuman.¹⁵

The Platonic employment of the term is embedded in this linguistically and metaphorically fertile setting. To fully grasp the Platonic notion of εἶδος, even though it acquires an entirely new logical nature, it is necessary to keep in mind that it does not leave totally aside the original visual value. Not only because Plato easily makes use of the term in its common

¹³ Cf. G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica, volume primo: l'età arcaica*, cit., p. 54-5

¹⁴ Cf. J-F. Pradeau, *Le forme intellegibili. L'uso platonico del termine EIDOS*, edited in W. Leszl e F. Fronterotta, *Eidos-Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, Academia, Sankt Augustin 2005, pp. 75-89; F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche. Dai dialoghi giovanili al Parmenide*, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa 2001, pp. XIII-XV. For a different interpretation cr. F. Aronadio, *Il Parmenide e la sintassi dell'eidos*, «Elenchos VI», (1985), p. 333-355:350.

¹⁵ P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire de mots*, (1968), Klincksieck, Paris 1999, p. 316.

meaning, leaving to the interpreters the hard task of understanding when it is actually the case, but also because its semi-technical¹⁶ sense maintains a visual aspect, although it turns out to be definitely intelligible. The complex issue as to whether, according to Plato, the act of knowing is comparable to a visual apprehension will not be addressed here. What needs to be recognised at this stage is exclusively that the twofold nature of the εἶδος is not just the source of ambiguity concerning Plato's epistemology, namely to what extent knowledge is for Plato propositional or instead essentially resembles a perceptual act, but further the starting point of what may well be considered a peculiar feature of his philosophy: the strict cohesion between logic and ontology.

In order to understand where the difference between coalescence and cohesion lies, the concept of εἶδος must be circumscribed and explored as it is thought of in Plato's metaphysics. Cohesion does not renounce to strict relation, although cohering realities remain distinct, allowing for different accounts of their structures. But what does their unity consist in? The answer proves to be again the notion of εἶδος, which accounts for the relation of language/thought and reality as well as their distinction. From now on, when I do not use the original term "εἶδος" I will employ instead the term "Form", whereas "thing" will designate sensible things.

2) The Physiology of εἶδος

In order to understand what any εἶδος actually is, we are to comprehend its functioning and how it is structured. For this reason, a physiatriac metaphor can be of use, for in thinking of the Physiology of εἶδος, we are bound to admit also the existence of an Anatomy of εἶδος. These two aspects are approached here separately, keeping in mind that they are complementary and constitute a unique core of function and structure. They entertain a very significant relation highlighted by the organic metaphor. The function is possible thanks to the structure, for if it were not for the latter, there would be nothing able to function, and in the way it does function. But, at the same time, the structure expresses its nature in carrying out peculiar tasks. Effectively, the structure is firstly understood

¹⁶ I say that it is semi-technical precisely because the term may be used either way in the same context.

against the background of its functional role. Secondly, and more importantly, what the structure is in itself, is expressed by the functions it is able to perform. In this way, it seems that structure provides an ontological ground to function, whereas function provides a cognisable way to know and justify the structure itself, so that the former turns out to be the *ratio essendi* of the latter and the latter the *ratio cognoscendi* of the former. As we shall see, being and knowability are crucially related throughout Plato's metaphysic. In this section, the manifold role played by the εἶδος will be addressed, leaving the enquiry about structure to the following section. However, it must be said that this organic analogy is and always will be a metaphor, able to convey heuristically an elaborate depiction of the notion of εἶδος, without ever suggesting that Forms are organisms or even something close to it. A metaphor of this kind is worth using for the goal of understanding how complex the reality of εἶδος is.

The εἶδος, or Form, is the ontological item on which hinges any attribution of identity, knowability, definability and reference. From this last statement at least two points emerge: the first of which is the economy of a plurality of functions hinging on only one entity. Only Forms are required for everything to be determinate, knowable, definable and to make linguistic reference possible. Second, even though Forms are necessarily intelligible, the εἶδος is neither merely a concept nor a linguistic paradigm.¹⁷ This plurality of functions can be effectively performed only if the εἶδος exists; that is, it is independent from any subjective perspective and from every single act of relating to it. As we shall see later, the radical independence from any contextual determination and the cast-iron prerogative of being always the content and never a cognitive act, will be the roots of what means being an εἶδος.

The nature of Forms is characterised such that they represent what is for something to be independent. Therefore, if there can be proper knowledge and definition only of what is radically independent since just the latter properly is, then only Forms are knowable and definable. Their relation to the sensible world will be analysed later, but there will

¹⁷ Considering Forms as linguistic paradigms able to rule the correct usage of words, as though they were concepts, was famously endorsed, in discussing a passage in the *Sophist*, by J.L. Ackrill, *Symploke Eidon*, in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, Routledge, London and New York 1973, pp. 199-206.

inevitably be constant reference to sensible things, also considering that Plato himself makes clear the nature of εἶδος by highlighting the deceitfulness of phenomena.

It may now be useful to consider three paradoxes which combine language and ontology, and whose Platonic aftertaste can be shown here. It may be useful for at least two reasons: firstly, because they convey a certain heuristic value, as indeed many paradoxes do, that might have pushed Plato towards the theory of Forms and secondly, because their solution is strictly coherent with what follows in the current analysis and therefore sheds light on the present account of Plato's theory. The paradoxes are summarised as follows:¹⁸

Paradoxes:

Par1) It is possible to think or meaningfully say that are things that are not.

Par2) It is possible to know the way something is, and, at the same time, not to know it under different aspects or, under the same aspect, in future or past states, so that the same thing is both known and not-known.

¹⁸ I am freely inspired by D. Stoljar, *Physicalism*, Routledge, New York 2010, pp. 200-3 who in turn takes over the issue from the Brentanian account of M. Thau, *Consciousness and Cognition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p.49-52 and considers these paradoxes in a totally different context, since he discusses the problem of intentionality framed into a physicalist approach. The puzzles rise mainly because intentionality contrasts with a certain account of the notion of relation according to which any relation requires that

- a) It subsists between two existing entities;
- b) Those entities are particulars;
- c) It is transitive: if Z bears a relation to X and X=Y, then Z bears the same relation to Y.

Since intentionality is a relation, it has problematic outcomes directly conflicting with the assumptions about the nature of relations: there are intentional relations towards non-existing things, general things (as classes and properties), and there is the Fregean problem of the Morning/Evening Star.

However, the Platonic context is sensibly different, and, even though it bears resemblance to modern discussion, the issue must be analysed consistently within its framework.

Par3) It is possible to think of and speak of a common and shared nature as a singular being.

Why are these paradoxes relevant for the present discourse? Because they essentially connect three distinctively Platonic viewpoints. First, the paradoxes refer to everyday sensible objects and our relation to them. Because they are problematic, the paradoxes put forward riddles that force the thinker to excogitate new solutions. Thus, they prove themselves to be etymologically problematic (προβάλλειν, lay before, put forward) by putting forward a conceptual crisis. These puzzles are paradoxical because they cannot be resolved on their own terms; rather, the inception and employment of new conceptual and metaphysical items is required. Such riddles remark how deceitful sensible experience is, for it inevitably bears on questions of identity, knowledge, existence and predication.¹⁹

From here arises the second point: the paradoxes do not rise from an immediate sensory experience, *i.e.* exclusively perceptual. They require a cognitive level which is already linguistic.²⁰ For the puzzles come out once thought and language are considered; in all of them the subject is the possibility of thinking and saying. Only through the employment of thought and linguistic resources does the puzzling nature of sensory experience emerge. Language immediately takes the shape of an instrument. However, such an instrument cannot cope alone with these puzzles without ending up in a state of *aporia*. An ontological response is needed and it must be of an entirely different kind from that causing the paradoxes.

The third and last point seems to be that only Forms can account for the effectiveness of the linguistic means. The specific relation that ties language to reality will be treated extensively later. For now need be made clear that the effectiveness of language has nothing to do, at least not primarily, with moving people to do something the speaker wants them to do or excelling during rhetorical contests. The essential function of

¹⁹ Cf. *Resp.* 523d-524b.

²⁰ Cf. *Theat.* 152b12-c3 where perception itself is conceived as blended with belief cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, Dover Publications, 2003, p. 30 and G. Fine, *Conflicting Appearances*, in Ead., *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, p.161-2. For an explicit statement of the notion of appearance as “blending of perception and belief” (σύμμειξις αἰσθήσεως καὶ δόξης) cf. also *Soph.* 264a-b.

language is stated in the *Cratylus* (388b), where Plato maintains that the name is an ὄργανον διδασκαλικόν καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας, that is an instrument apt to teach and discern being.²¹

Effectively, Forms, amounting to an ontological difference, namely that between being and becoming, do not match the paradoxes. The precise description of the structural nature of Forms will be exposed in the Anatomy of εἶδος. For now, only why and how they solve the paradoxes must be considered. They do it becoming objects of thought and discourse without triggering the paradoxes. The key thought is that just by being immersed in language, a human being has already implicitly gone beyond the limits of the domain of γένεσις, *i.e.* becoming. This is motivated by the fact that through language things can be done that everyday things given in perception cannot account for. By this I do not mean that any competent speaker as such has in mind the entire Hyperuranium, but only that the connection between the two is involved by the capacity to speak.

It is worth noting how the three paradoxes might bear resemblance to the aforementioned dimensions of the original coalescence: reality, thought-truth and language. But now the situation is very different, in that contradiction dwells in the very core of each. The only solution is distinguishing which one between those dimensions bestows the greatest prominence on the ontological pole, and, at the same time, making it fully responsible for the others. It is easy to see why Forms do not succumb to the paradoxes. Forms always are as they are, then they cannot fail to be referred to. Referentiality is a fundamental criterion for testing an authentic ontological prerogative. But their status in providing a reference as their peculiar sort of presence is made possible by their being fully intelligible. So, we would never run into the first paradox if the object of our discourse eternally is as it is since it would never fail to be. Then, in referring to it, we would never find ourselves in the unpleasant situation of saying that it is something that is not.

Forms are changeless, so they would never turn out to be different from how they actually are; that is, given a certain Form, there is no doubt in identifying it. They forestall every equivocation: if a Form is a certain content, there can be no mistake in knowing what that content is. Inasmuch

²¹ This complex topic will be discussed once we have introduced and eventually acquired the notion of technique (chapter 2).

as Forms do not change, they also prevent every possible mistake deriving from the attribution of a fixed description to becoming things. Thus, since Forms avoid any change or equivocation whatsoever, the second paradox tells us that if we knew Forms, which are eternally the same, we would never both know and not know them. Finally, Forms are unities and common natures on a par, able to provide an ontological substratum to general terms, and they do not run into the third paradox, insofar as they are one nature designated by one general term,²² which is partaken of by several things. Hence, the three paradoxes show a typical Platonic thought pattern: the sensible domain raises a problem and language is the place where this problem makes its appearance. Language itself is, as we shall see, the instrument naturally related to Forms, and the εἶδος is the solution. The notion of εἶδος is what is metaphysically required to make sense of reality, and derivatively of appearance/becoming.

For now, it is of the greatest relevance to point out that even if it seems that Forms are, on the one hand, the subjects or objects (in the metaphysically trivial sense of those last terms) of identity, knowledge, definition and reference, and, on the other hand, that they provide these possibilities to sensible things, the two metaphysical “movements” are strictly the same. The εἶδος gives to appearances identity, knowability, definability and possibility of reference precisely because it is *what is, what is known*, and so on.

This section is tasked with the description of the four fundamental functions of Forms in the priority order of ontological, epistemic and linguistic. It will become clear just how closely linked they are.

Identity. A Form determines the identity of a sensible thing because it is its essence. Insofar as a thing displays a certain feature or determination, it cannot do it by violating what is imposed on it by the Form. The term “determination” must be taken, as generally as possible, as a distinctive qualifying trait, without adopting the concept of property in the specific metaphysical sense.²³ Why it should not be done will be explained later.

²² In this context “general” is simply associated with linguistic items. The putative generality of the εἶδος will be accounted for throughout the chapter.

²³ Cf. F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, (Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie - 76) de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2007, pp. 16-17 and n. 30

The issue of the peculiar nature of eidetic causation will be suspended here as well. It is enough to recognise that Forms have a causal role *latu sensu*: Forms are causes because things acquire an identity exclusively in virtue of them. It can be stated as follows:

Eidetic Identity (EI): The event of displaying a certain content, on the part of things, occurs only in virtue of that content. If the displayed determination (character) is that by reason of which the very display²⁴ happens, then whatever a thing happens to be does not depend on it.

The Eidetic Identity involves that, for a thing to come into being in the sensible world, it must be determined in some way grounded in a Form. The Form can play this role because it (re)presents the maximum degree of determination.²⁵ What an εἶδος is, perfectly coincides with what it is in itself. This last statement suggests that nothing but the εἶδος is determined in that way. Raising the question of what a particular thing is means asking about the relative determinant Form this very shift accounts for the asymmetry of identity. If Forms are to be considered as essences, it must be made clear that they are not acting as Aristotelian essences, which, broadly conceived, separate necessary properties from accidental ones. The εἶδος is not an essential property that cannot be lost by a particular thing. For instance, Socrates might have been hooked-nosed instead of snub-nosed, but he could not fail to be a human being. For Plato, any sensible thing

²⁴ I owe the notion of display, in this context, to the insightful work of Michael Frede, who explains the Platonic conception of becoming as follows: «to temporarily take on, or display, or be made to display the outward character or marks of an F, to come to give or to give the appearance of an F. In this way the contrast between being and becoming would be the contrast between what is real F and what just takes on or displays the superficial marks of an F, without being one». Cf. M. Frede, *Being and Becoming in Plato*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988, Supplementary Volume, pp.43 and he goes on at p. 48: «for any predicate “F” which we attribute to the objects of experience, these objects only temporarily take on and display the character of an F without ever being an F. A real F, by contrast, is one which displays the marks of an F because of the nature it has, and not because of the circumstances in which it happens to find itself.» Frede’s account is most interesting with regard to the ontological status of becoming, which will be dealt with later, but, as stated above, the two domains of Plato’s metaphysics are so intermingled that it is not possible to understand one without the other.

²⁵ Cf. F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, op. cit., pp. 32-38 the section is emblematically titled “Sein als Bestimmt-Sein”.

does not possess in itself any property, form, and definition, it rather displays contingently a determination. In the case of Socrates, he is nothing essentially, as long as he communes or partakes of the εἶδος of Human-being, he is bound to display a certain determination according to the nature of the Form in question, without being granted any stability.

For anything to be something or to be the way it is, the presence of a Form is required. Accordingly, it turns out to be impossible to conceive of essence as strictly belonging to a specific singular thing in consequence of the fact that there exists no immutable content able to determine the identity of things which, at the same time, belongs to them. We can conclude from this that identity is in every case a unity transcending the multiplicity of instances taking on their character from it. Hence, since they are not essentially related to any singular empirical thing, Forms can only be general, i.e. abstracted from any context and singularity. By “general” I do not mean anything like Aristotelian universals or properties. Ontologically speaking, the εἶδος is a very peculiar kind of something, a unity that can be known, defined and referred to, and that in no way is comparable to singular phenomena occurring in experience. The genericity of Forms is required by the very task of working as stable conditions of identity. The εἶδος is as general in content as it is singular, since every appearance that displays the character in question is of one and the same Form. This last statement may seem contradictory, but it is not. Platonic Forms are general in content, on the grounds that they are bound to exclude any reference to a particular experiential situation. What it is to be F, where “F” is a general term, cannot be any concrete particular. For, if it were, the very fact of being F would be related to the thing appearing in its particular context which is transitory and hospitable to opposite-predicates. But Forms are singular in a very precise sense because what it is to be F is always the same. The intelligible content providing a determination as a way of being amounts to a unique nature. The first function of Forms is to provide identity to everything that appears in such a way as to make them recognisably ontologically weighting contents. Plato expresses this point by a semi-technical phrase “αὐτὸ τὸ *x*”, that can generally be translated with “what is *x*”, and more precisely “that which is *x*” or “the very (some)thing

that is x ”.²⁶ Further development of this notion will be addressed later in the *Anatomy*, the only thing that needs to be considered now is that Forms are pure contents cogently expressed by the phrase “what something is”. If we consider briefly a passage in the *Phaedo* (75d6) where the particular equals are contrasted with the Equal itself, regardless of any of the many exegetical issues regarding that passage, the phrase is once again “αὐτὸ τὸ ὃ ἐστὶν ἴσον”, which is “what is Equal itself” or “the very thing that the Equal in itself is”. It is also worth remarking the degree of Plato’s self-consciousness in this context:

«...our present argument is no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious and, as I say, about all those things to which we can attach the word “what is” (περὶ πάντων οἷς ἐπισφραγιζόμεθα τὸ ‘αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι’), both when we are putting questions and answering them.»²⁷ (transl. by G. M: A. Grube slightly modified)

Plato is perfectly clear about the linguistic device at issue here. The Form is comparable to the core of content giving ontological weight to everything partaking of it that is independently of the latter. Forms primarily are what x is, where x is a general term,²⁸ and only in this way of being something *is* properly. In virtue of being in such a modus the εἶδος provides identity to sensible things.²⁹ A multiplicity of appearances or

²⁶ Cf. *Phaed.* 75d; *Crat.* 389d7 *Resp.* 597a; *Phaedr.* 247e; *Parm.* 134a Cf. for an extensive and careful analysis of the phrase F. Ademollo, *Plato’s conception of Forms: Some Remarks*, in R. Chiaradonna and G. Galluzzo (eds.), *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2013, pp. 41-85:56-65; C. Kahn, *Some Philosophical Uses of “To Be” in Plato*, «Phronesis», 26 (1981), pp. 105-34 (Rpt. in Id., *Essays on Being*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, 75-109:105-8).

²⁷ *Phaed* 75c10-d3 «οὐ γὰρ περὶ τοῦ ἴσου νῦν ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν μᾶλλον τι ἢ καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ὀσίου καί, ὅπερ λέγω, περὶ πάντων οἷς ἐπισφραγιζόμεθα τὸ ‘αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι’ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐρωτήσεσιν ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἀποκρίσεσιν ἀποκρινόμενοι».

²⁸ Most notably, D. Sedley points out that the phrase cannot be employed without a general term cf. D. Sedley, *Plato’s Cratylus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 82 n. 13.

²⁹ It is also worth considering extensively this other passage from the *Republic* (507b2-7): «We say that there are many beautiful things and many good things, and so on for each kind, and in this way we distinguish them in words. [...] And beauty itself and

exemplifications is not required. If there were only one exemplar (or even none) of a certain nature, the latter would be nonetheless what provides (or could provide) identity to the former. Furthermore, appearances and Forms are in a many-to-many relation: inasmuch as an εἶδος gives determination to many empirical things, so too are things determined by several εἶδη. If what I have argued so far is true, then we are bound to consider the metaphysical role played by Forms as all-encompassing: for any appearing and becoming thing, at least one intelligible entity must be supposed.³⁰

What a thing is (or happens to be) must not be thought of as a collection of the particular conditions of identity which constitute the thing metaphysically and which subsist independently of our knowledge of it. Things and events just display characters that must be taken as the proper object of knowledge. There is no Form grounding particularised truths about the spatiotemporal circumstances of a given empirical entity. To understand this, the notion of being common is helpful. For an identity condition to be genuinely eidetic, it must be thought of as capable of characterise many different things regardless of contextually unique features of its occurrence. There can be no singular essence imagined as the unrepeatable junction of particular characters. Strictly speaking, we ought not to employ the term “entity” when we are referring to things, if a strong ontological commitment is meant by it. The specific nature of the Platonic Form imposes that it is conceived as inevitably generic, regardless of any concrete appearance of it.

Knowledge. The ontological basis of identity is necessary for any act of knowledge. The content of knowledge is always distinctively

good itself and all the things that we thereby set down as many, reversing ourselves, we set down according to a single form of each, believing that there is but one, and call it “the being” of each» («πολλὰ καλά, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἕκαστα οὕτως εἶναι φασί τε καὶ διορίζομεν τῷ λόγῳ. [...] καὶ αὐτὸ δὴ καλὸν καὶ αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν, καὶ οὕτω περὶ πάντων ἃ τότε ὡς πολλὰ ἐτίθεμεν, πάλιν αὖ κατ' ἰδέαν μίαν ἑκάστου ὡς μιᾶς οὐσης τιθέντες, ὃ ἔστιν ἕκαστον προσαγορεύομεν.»). In this passage, it is present the phrase ‘ὃ ἔστιν’, which again is being used knowingly.

³⁰ The debate about the extension of the eidetic domain has taken place through the millennia. As it is well known, Plato himself started off in the *Parmenides* cf. *Parm.* 130a7-e4. Cf. also R. E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1997, pp. 121-8 and F. Fronterotta, *MEΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche cit*, p. 118-124.

determined, dictated by the identity of the known entity. Greek thought is, in general, profoundly objectivistic. The truth of any act of knowledge demands its relative object to be, and, for Plato, the nature of the known object also qualifies the nature of knowledge itself.³¹ As is well known, this last statement plays a pivotal role in interpreting Plato's philosophy. The argument here at stake is not to describe the essential features necessarily characterising any proper object of knowledge. The Anatomy of εἶδος is tasked with this. What is being highlighted here is rather the role played by the object, and its ontological status, in grounding any act of knowledge. Previous to the specific content of the object of knowledge its nature stands out. We are faced with the strict entanglement between ontology and epistemology.

The argument may be summarised as follows:

- 1) An existing object is always required by thought and the difference between sorts of knowledge depends on the objects assumed by that sort of knowledge as its own content.
- 2) When Plato speaks of degrees of reality he means gradualness of being knowable. The essential implication of the Platonic sense of "being" is being knowable: asserting that an εἶδος is more than a sensible thing means, among other things, that the former belongs to a more knowable rank of reality than the latter.³²
- 3) Given (1) and (2), it follows that degrees of reality are a necessary condition for degrees of knowability, whereas degrees of knowability constitute a sufficient reason for the degrees of reality. By recognising different kinds of knowledge it is necessary, according to this parameter, to consider logically many types of reality.³³

³¹ Cf. *Parm* 132b6-c2. See also F. Ferrari, *Conoscenza e opinione: il filosofo e la città*, in Platone, *La Repubblica*, traduzione e commento a cura di M. Vegetti, Vol. IV, Libro V, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2000, pp. 393-420.

³² Obviously, the major knowability is grounded on specific ontological features.

³³ The first classical recognition of the argument is in G. Vlastos, *Degrees of Reality in Plato*, in Id., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1973, pp. 58-75:63 and G. Vlastos, *A Metaphysical Paradox*, in Id., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1973, pp.43-57:49. See also: F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, op. cit., pp. 73-9 from which these three points are broadly inspired.

Knowledge presents, for Plato, two irrevocable properties: first, it always is, as we have seen, knowledge of or about something that is. Second, it is ἀψευδής: infallibly certain, literally speaking “falseless”, not just true but also undeceiving and then indefeasible.³⁴ Given both the objectivist presupposition and the infallibilist one, it is clear that the εἶδος seems to be the only adequate candidate for an authentic form of knowledge. For Forms never fail to be and are totally changeless. Hence, any knowledge of them will literally be about something that is and that constantly is the way it is. Is it then unsound to speak of degrees of knowability? For if the two requirements just stated are compulsory then either something is known or it is not. As a matter of fact, if there is only knowledge of what is, then only Forms are the proper object of knowledge. However, in everyday language the term “know” is used ambiguously in such a way that the many degrees of knowability are different degrees of cognition, whereas knowledge is the perfect one. Forms, thanks to their ontological nature, are a fully reliable object of knowledge, but they are also the only reality that can be fully made sense of. It is worth noting how deeply rooted the paradoxes exposed above are: the εἶδος figures here as the solution to the first and the second paradox. Furthermore, the conditions required by proper knowledge appear to be the epistemic counterbalance of the complementary values of “being”, existential and predicative. Since the former amounts to the infallibility to exist, whereas the latter to the impossibility to change, this means that the terms of the dichotomy, or at least their prefiguration, is already present in the onto-epistemic issue.

Another point must now be made clear. In the present discourse, the access to knowledge constitutes a fundamental factor of ontological evaluation. But it must not be thought of *a parte subjecti*. Knowledge does not depend on the conceptual resources of the thinker, the truth-value is in no way thought of by Plato as deriving from its actual verifiability. So, the second remark above must be understood from a strictly objectivistic point of view: the extent to which something is knowable belongs to the object towards which cognition is directed.³⁵ The peculiarity of being is its

³⁴ Cf. *Theat.* 152c5-6.

³⁵ Cf. J. Szaif, *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*, Alber Symposium, München 1993, p.94 «Vielmehr läuft Platons Position [...] darauf hinaus, daß die erkennbare Welt ein

cognitive accessibility, which does not entail that reality can be easily understood. On the contrary, reality is dramatically complex, but in principle it can be disclosed in any time, place and by any soul wise enough to know it.³⁶ In this way, knowledge is tied to identity: inasmuch as conditions of identity are not in the sensible world since they are intelligible, so too what is intelligible is such that its being intelligible comes from the capacity of being cognitively elaborated. Thus, the very relation that binds Physiology and Anatomy is at work here inextricably binding knowledge to identity. What I know is grounded in what is, and I can recognise what properly is to the extent its nature supports knowledge. The legacy of the ancient coalescence view is at work here.

Therefore, not only do Forms ground the identity of appearance, but also the criterion through which it is identified in cognition. Keeping in mind that Forms can achieve the latter task, for the unique reason that they achieve the former.³⁷ Knowledge emanates from reality figuring as its fundamental discrimination: knowledge is the supreme criterion to discern ontological differences. Certain knowledge entails avoiding the sensible domain, since the known object must have its identity only in virtue of itself and, as we have seen, according to EI, phenomena occur without coinciding with the content they display. This means that sensible things are only contingently characterised and do not allow for real knowledge. Furthermore, there is only knowledge of what is common. By means of general terms, we refer to common features of reality. Those features are not immediately tied to the single instance of their appearance, which is why they are not restricted to it. Their being is common to many circumstances, allowing for the association of many sensible things with

unabhängig vom Denken und Erkennen vorgegebener, ontologisch ausgezeichneten Wirklichkeitsbereich ist, der gerade aufgrund dieser ontologischen Auszeichnungen auch in ausgezeichneter Weise kognitiv erschließbar ist».

³⁶ In my interpretation, I am overtly forestalling any sceptical drift, be it anti-metaphysical or not. An influential instance of the latter scepticism that nonetheless acknowledges that Plato effectively develops a metaphysical view, recently translated in English, is F. Trabattini, *Essays in Plato's Epistemology*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2016. Among other things, the author interestingly conjugates his anti-dogmatic stance with a resolved assertion of the propositional (contra intuitive) character of knowledge in Plato (Chapters 8 and 9), a topic which cannot be treated in this work.

³⁷ For a detailed analysis of the identity/identification distinction especially in the *Meno* cf. F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone (Menone Cratilo Repubblica)*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2002, pp. 21-30 and 40-44.

regard to one specific aspect as well as the delineation of continuity and difference of a single phenomenon through time. If knowing consists in an authentic identification, it means that particular experiences lack epistemic value. They still play a role in the whole cognitive process because they are the first encounter of content in cognitive life. And yet they are unable to meet the requirements of proper knowledge.

In this way definition and reference are delivered to linguistic terms. Effectively, a specific syntax belongs to the discourse which strives to be named science, and which is intended to correspond to the nature of (the best part of) language itself.³⁸ In this way, there cannot be knowledge, in its most general sense, regardless of the linguistic *medium* which displays its innermost nature according to the eidetic structure of reality. The last statement has two meanings. On the one hand, language reveals reality as it is in itself if properly employed. That means that the essence of language rests in its connection to reality and the veracious manifestation that it performs. On the other hand, it also means that the linguistic medium is one reality among others that has room within the eidetic domain. This implies that what language is, is not a linguistic matter more than any other question about identity. Because if we ask what language is in itself we need to look towards its εἶδος. The issue of the nature of language will be extensively discussed later. For now, we must just say that language is required by any question about reality, insofar as such a question is not merely a matter of words, even if it is about the nature of language itself.

Definition. Enquiring as to what something is, is the same as looking for an εἶδος. The two main procedures of linguistic definition presented across the chronological poles of Platonic work, *i.e.* the Socratic enquiry of the early period and the dialectical method of divisions of the late period, share this conviction. The subject is beyond the scope of this section, hence it cannot be broached here. It is enough to say that in both cases the *definiendum* is an εἶδος.³⁹

³⁸ I owe the notion of the syntax of εἶδος to F. Aronadio, *Il Parmenide e la sintassi dell'eidos*, op. cit., pp. 333-55, which will be dealt with later.

³⁹ For a classical alternative account in the case of the early period which, broadly speaking, conceives of Virtue as the explanation of a psychological state rather than a substantial portion of reality cf. T. Penner, *The Unity of Virtue*, «Philosophical

Definition consists in a linguistic translation of identity conditions, inheriting from this the tight ontological cohesion.⁴⁰ Asking for the definition of a given general term first means a systematic rejection of the answers relegated to a particular context or belonging to a partial view of the matter. Definitions are strictly tied to Forms, since any correct definition points out essential characterisations. When a proper definition is stated, it cannot fail to express the defined reality regardless of any context of appearance. As the essence of x determines what it means to be x , so the definition of x expresses linguistically the essential identity of a thing. In this way, the strong relation between the ontological nature of εἶδος, knowledge and definition stands out. The sensible dimension of experience is necessarily delegitimised because it is outside the onto-logical bond. For a definition to be correct in any possible situation, it needs to amount to the essential level, which is intelligible and is not relative to a given context. Only within and through language the vestiges of eidetic reality make their appearance in everyday life. The εἶδος is the ground on which the defining activity hinges: it is for the definition the ontological pole that orients the discursive praxis. This is the reason why the generality of the definition is the logical element corresponding to the absolute independence from the actual experiential context, belonging to the Form. The εἶδος plays the role of centralising the correctness of descriptions. It is, metaphorically speaking, an attractive pole that determines the possibility of every definition by providing form and content to it. Every definition looks for a unique object and its essential qualification. This linguistic capacity emanates from the way the defined object is.

Under the surveillance of Forms, definitions are able to give back the structure of eidetic domain. There can be no definitional and dialectic endeavour without a fundamental condensation of meaning aiming at a unique nature, which is the object of the definition.⁴¹ Such a unique nature

Review», 80 (1971), pp. 35-68 (Rpt. in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 78-104).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Phaed.* 78d1-2 which is worth quoting at length « that reality of whose existence we are giving an account in our questions and answers» («αὐτὴ ἡ οὐσία ἧς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἀποκρινόμενοι» transl. by G. M. A. Grube).

⁴¹ Cf. F. Ferrari, *Teoria delle idee e ontologia*, in Platone, *La Repubblica*, traduzione e commento a cura di M. Vegetti, Vol. IV, Libro V, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2000, pp. 365-92 especially pp. 385-9.

can only be an εἶδος. In every definition there is a unifying move, performed within language, searching for an underlying extra-linguistic reality. It must be made clear that, according to Plato, the form of definition itself is as it is described here because of the nature of reality, and not the other way round.

Forms also provide content to definitions. When we ask what something is, the answer is always the εἶδος of it. In this last statement the term means precisely the distinctive aspect: what is in itself the way of being manifested by a certain sensible thing, which appears in a specific, contextually located experience? The answer to this question cannot be experienced sensorially. Sensorial content and particular becoming things are not expected to meet the requirements of a proper definition. Only within language something can be defined. And only within the discursive practice it is possible to find the criterion that reveals what really exists and how it is characterised. As we shall see in more detail later, reality seems to be naturally connected to language. This does not imply that reality is a productive emanation of discourses. On the contrary, the construction of discourse is the only place where the constraints of reality on human experience are cognised with clarity. Language is meant to be, at the same time, a human faculty and a domain with its own prerogatives. It is the field of the encounter between human being and reality. Language entertains a privileged relation with Forms, and thereby it partially reproduces the nature of Forms. For this reason, it is the best means to discover and depict what is authentically real, namely the eidetic domain. For any linguistic construction there need not be a corresponding part of reality, and yet reality is found only within language. Through definition Forms are made linguistically comprehensible. This involves that the unity of Form is delivered to the composite nature of language. The εἶδος attracts the use and sense of linguistic terms as well as the exercise of knowledge understood as conceptual activity.⁴² It is worth noting how the hybrid

⁴² The ambiguity emerging from the strict relation between ruling knowledge and ruling linguistic definition may underlie the famous criticism to Socratic definition put forward by P. T. Geach, *Plato's Euthyphro: An Analysis and Commentary*, «The Monist», 50, (1966), pp. 369-382, «(A) that if you know you are correctly predicating a given term 'T' you must "know what is to be T," in the sense of being able to give a general criterion for a thing's being T; (B) that it is no use to try and arrive at meaning of 'T' by giving examples of things that are T. [...] If you can already give a general account of

nature of εἶδος comes up here. With respect to knowledge it is, more or less metaphorically, linked to visual experience. Once we get to the discursive level, reality is given in a linguistic fashion. Therefore, the εἶδος is, at the same time, simple, as ontological unity, and complex, since it is given in language that is an essentially compound and complex reality.

Reference. One last functional aspect of the εἶδος needs to be included here: the capacity of human language to refer to sensible things. It relies on the existence of Forms. In everyday life, linguistic activity is employed instrumentally. The true object of reference is concealed by the doxastic nature of common human experience. The primary object of reference are Forms. Their prior claim to reference comes, once again, from the ontological grounding they perform in favour of things. Since things partake of Forms, they display contingently some characters. In virtue of those characters things can be referred to. Only through Forms are there acts of linguistic reference.

The theory of Ideas is not a theory regarding the function and structure of words/names or propositions. Without addressing the difference between conceiving of a theory of language starting either from the concept of name or the concept of proposition, we just state here what in both cases is its

what ‘T’ means, then you need no examples to arrive at the meaning of ‘T’; if on the other hand you lack such a general account, then, by assumption (A), you cannot know that any examples of things that are T are genuine ones, for you do not know when you are predicating ‘T’ correctly». Socrates is ascribed to claim that we must previously know a Form, in order to possess the competence required to use the predicate naming that Form. The problem is that we should have a general and stable knowledge of a Form or a concept to recognise any example or instance of it. Common sense rejects this premise and considers to be possible the correct attribution of a predicate, say, “beautiful” without knowing what beauty in itself is. Such a criticism is broadly Wittgensteinian. It is the denial of the opportunity of a substantive enquiry over identity conditions of meaning, by substituting it with the description of the linguistic use that accounts for the meaning. This philosophical position obviously has its own philosophical value. But it is not exegetically accurate. With regard to the Platonic text, it must be considered that a Form is not merely a meaning. Forms allow the meaning of terms to be constrained, which always turn out to be the means to achieve knowledge and not the goal of knowledge since the latter never derives from linguistic competence of the speaker, instead it comes from the influence exercised on thought by intelligible reality. For a critique of Geach’s paper see the well-known article by G. Vlastos, *Is the “Socratic Fallacy” Socratic?*, in Id., *Socratic Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 67-86.

requirement: the ontological ground. For instance, in the case of name, if we are to describe what it is and how it works, we cannot do it without searching for and knowing a Form. The *Cratylus* is, among other things, an exploration of the nature of names thought of as elementary units of language. But, in this context, the dialogue is folded on itself: the Form of name is employed as an example of εἶδος to point out its general nature and role. Though, at the same time, Forms are required by any act of naming as such. Thus, if the nature of naming requires an ontological extra-linguistic reality, we must also admit that the nature of naming itself is not, strictly speaking, a linguistic matter since to know what naming/name is in itself is already looking for an εἶδος, *i.e.* the εἶδος of name.

Plato had to acknowledge that most discourses of the common man, and not only his, are about phenomena in space and time. As we have just seen, if Forms are required by any act of reference, it is not because they are theoretical principles able to account for denotation of sensible things, otherwise such things would be a substantial reality. We need to appeal to the opposite view: it is possible to conduct discourses meaningfully in the ontologically defective domain of doxa, because the latter is grounded on a more stable reality. The heavy burden of reality becomes the specific relatum of language since the former provides the measure of the effectiveness of the latter.⁴³

A theoretical and historical contrast may be of use here: in the case of rhetoric, language extinguishes any reference able to justify the notion of truth. It exerts its prerogative in its being persuasive. The effect of discourse as it is conceived of in rhetoric by, say, the sophists (or, at least, according to how they are represented by Plato), leans totally towards psychagogy, that is it determines the conduct of others by force of persuasion. The rhetorical technique of language consists in a skilled manipulation of discourse aiming at turning words into instruments of either personal expressive enjoyment or subtle coercion of other people's behaviour. With respect to this contrast, Plato's theoretical move confers to the notion of reality an ontologically autonomous level that makes reference possible. The sensible thing is ontologically dependent from the

⁴³ Cf. A. Graeser, *On Language, Thought, and Reality in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p.367 «The phenomenal world is cognitively unreliable precisely because it fails to provide for the sort of things that expressions for predicates purport to mean».

Form it partakes of and this dependence is also expressed through the impossibility to refer to sensible things, although they are not directly enquired, without taking Forms into account. But how is it possible that the ontological dependence of the sensible domain also affects its nameability? As we have seen regarding definition, if the question is raised as to what something is, the object and subject of the definitional effort is explicitly an εἶδος. The problem here at stake, though, is understanding how Forms play a crucial role in the relation between things and language beyond the definitional process. To spell it out properly: how is a strict connection between naming a thing and the ontological role of the εἶδος possible, such that the former is determined by the latter? In several places of the *corpus*, throughout different chronological stages of Plato's work, the concept of eponymy occurs: the sensible thing takes on the name of the Form(s) of which it partakes. We can consider two analogous formulations of the eponymy principle:

«It was agreed that each of the Forms existed, and that other things acquired their name by having a share in them.»⁴⁴ (transl. by G. M. A. Grube)

«There are certain forms from which these other things, by getting a share of them, derive their names.»⁴⁵ (transl. by M. L. Gill and P. Ryan)

The possibility of speaking meaningfully is deeply carved into the structure of reality. Any general term names several things by referring to that nature which they have in common. The term directly denotes the common nature and eponomastically the things that derive their

⁴⁴ *Phaed.* 102b2 «ὡμολογεῖτο εἶναι τι ἕκαστον τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ τούτων τᾶλλα μεταλαμβάνοντα αὐτῶν τούτων τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἴσκειν».

⁴⁵ *Parm.* 130e5-6: «εἶναι εἶδη ἅττα, ὧν τάδε τὰ ἄλλα μεταλαμβάνοντα τὰς ἐπωνυμίας αὐτῶν ἴσκειν» further, strictly similar, occurrences of the eponymy principle are at least *Phaed.* 78e1-2, 103b7-c1; *Lys* 220a7-b3; *Parm.* 133d3. For a general analysis of the notion of eponymy (not only in Plato) and a resolute rejection of the thesis that eponymy entails the sharing of a property between the directly named thing and the named-after thing cf. T. W. Bestor, *Common Properties and Eponymy in Plato*, «The Philosophical Quarterly», 28 (1978), pp. 189-207.

determination from it. As we have seen in the case of the other functions of εἶδος the status of One-over-many turns out to be crucial. Some characters may be isolated on the grounds that they are not just in the context of their single appearance. The Form is the entity that grounds all its manifestation within appearance, and its being One-over-many allows for predication⁴⁶. For something to be in a certain way, it is required that its being determinate does not depend on itself. Hence, that way of being is independent from its way of appearing. If the term primarily refers to the way of being, predication is the linguistic device corresponding to such ontological situation. For as the Form characterises, without being the same as, a certain sensible thing, so the predicate may be applied correctly to say how a thing is characterised, without being restricted to that thing. Reference is possible not in spite of the ontological distance between Forms and appearances, but exactly because of it. The problem of the cogent use of language crops up everywhere and it seems to be the first step in the long and difficult way to Forms.

Now, an issue might be raised: if we virtually have a general term for every nature, *i.e.* every εἶδος, are we committed to admitting an εἶδος for every general term we possess? Plato seems to go this way:

«We customarily hypothesize a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name.»⁴⁷ (transl. by G. M. A. Grube rev. C. D: C. Reeve)

The fact that the same name refers to distinct things that entertain a commonality recapitulates at the level of language the specific structure of

⁴⁶ Cf. M. Dixsaut, *Ousia, Eidos et Idea dans le Phédon*, in Ead., *Platon et la Question de la Pensée*, Vrin, Paris 2000, pp. 71-91:86 «En étant participé, l'*eidos* est responsable de l'acquisition et de la possession des propriétés, de l'être ou du devenir quelque chose: il justifie ainsi le nom, et est la condition de toute prédication correcte. Car la Forme n'a pas seule droit à nom, elle est la cause de la rectitude du nom donné aux choses qui participent d'elle. [...] La dénomination n'est correcte que si la Forme, en plus de nom, confère à la chose le droit à cette dénomination, lui confère une structure (*morphè*) telle que la dénomination soit justifiée».

⁴⁷ *Resp.* 596a5-7 «εἶδος γάρ που τι ἓν ἕκαστον εἰώθαμεν τίθεσθαι περί ἕκαστα τὰ πολλά, οἷς ταῦτόν ὄνομα ἐπιφέρομεν». For a clear presentation of the debate concerning the translation of this passage cf. R. Sharma, *On Republic 596a*, «Apeiron», 39 (2006), pp. 27-32.

eidetic reality from which it is legitimised. The quotation seems to suggest that for any general term there is a corresponding unity in reality. But if we look at *Pol.* 262b-e we see that Plato recommends dividing kinds of things according to natural and more proper divisions. To put it succinctly, Plato says that we can divide humanity into Greeks and barbarians as we can divide the numbers into ten thousands and all other numbers. But in this case we would not perform a good cut with our language. It is far better to divide humanity into males and females as the numbers into even and odd numbers. This should mean that a division in reality does not necessarily correspond to any linguistic division. For now, we will suspend the nature of this correspondence here. It is only worth noting that, for Plato, language is not perfect as it is, or at least there are incorrect uses of it. This should not be taken to mean that some divisions are natural and some other are conventional (this could fit with the Greek/barbarian dichotomy but not with numbers), rather it means only that division must be arrived at through an adequate definitional process, understanding the right concatenation of words. In this way, there might be a deep connection between definition and reference, insofar as in a perfectly defined language, where definition requires not just a clear stipulation of the meaning of the term, but also a perfect knowledge of its Form, every general term will have a solid reference.⁴⁸ The metaphor of cutting reality at its joints is already famously present in the *Phaedrus* (265d-e), where the philosopher is compared to the skilful butcher who is able to perform a good cut by its capacity to recognise how to sever the limbs of an animal.

What about the quotation from the *Republic*? If it is read carefully, the verb “hypothesise” (τίθεσθαι: set, assume) turns out to be crucial. Plato is not saying that for every common term there is effectively one Form he is saying instead that for every common term successfully used to refer there need be an εἶδος, and that we have grown accustomed to assuming it (εἰώθαμεν) in every enquiry. Empirical becoming things are named only derivatively, which is the reason why there is no proper name that can be used to describe how things are. Plato’s goal is not to formulate a theory capable of describing how reference works (or, at least, not only that). Rather, he is exposing how reference relies on the ontological assumption

⁴⁸ This must remain only a risky supposition, even though *Parm.* 136a-c seems to go in this direction.

and how reality must have very precise features for reference to be possible.

That is the fourfold function of the εἶδος, every aspect of which is bound to the others and which is properly understood only in connection with them. In this account we have opted to follow a descending order, as a way to highlight the prominence of the ontological pole. But this order may be perfectly reversed: starting from the necessity to refer to the world of experience, then looking for a definition of the general term found in that way. Once definitions are propounded, the necessity of an indefeasible way of being certain about them arises, and, finally, finding the unique condition for this in a state of absolute independence characterising a new understanding of being, irreducible and incommensurable to the one started from. Thus, the original coalescence of reality thought and language has not been shattered, insofar as it is present in the functional manifoldness of a single metaphysical item. To conclude, it must be said that Identity qua pivotal ontological pole enjoys a paramountcy, differently conjugated in the case of each other function of the Physiology. Because of its intentional nature, Knowledge, as we have seen, needs its object, and its authenticity is given by the directness of the contact with reality itself. Definition, thought of as intrinsically linguistic, exists in virtue of the relation of words with each other such a relation, if true, traces back to the relations between Forms.⁴⁹ Finally, in the case of Reference the possibility of getting to something linguistically expressly derives from the multifocally organised texture of reality. In this way, the great theoretical convenience of the notion of εἶδος emerges, insofar as one and the same item is able to account for several tasks through different levels (ontological, epistemic, linguistic), showing great philosophical economy.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ This notion of relation will be properly accounted for in the last chapter.

⁵⁰ This phrase is obviously well-known, since it has been used by H. F. Cherniss, *The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas*, in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, Routledge, New York 1967, pp. 1-12. To put it crudely, he says that Platonic Forms are philosophically economical, in that they provide a solution to both theoretical and ethical problems. It may be worth noting how this philosophical economy might be “backdated” to the primary functional pattern of Forms.

3) The Anatomy of εἶδος

After the composite functional nature of εἶδος, the features⁵¹ that allows for such manifold functions must now be considered. The first thing to point out is how these features need be comprehended for they constitute each Form regardless of its specific nature. Even if they are shared universally by Forms, these structural features cannot be isolated from one another and from Forms. If, as will be argued in a later section, Forms are not properties, accordingly, the structural features of Forms must not be mistaken for properties either. For in their not being separable they are not really properties, but only different aspects in virtue of which Forms perform their functions and in which the same eminent reality can be described. At the same time, they are the only conditions under which anything can be described as real. If that is true, then it is not possible to properly think of one of these features without being directed towards the others. For instance, if Forms are intelligible, then they must be eternal as well. Thus, if they are just by themselves, they must also be perfectly determined and so on. It may seem that whichever way Forms are approached, that is with respect to, say, time, materiality or independence, the feature answered with every time amounts to the same unique and distinctive way of being that can be conceived of as an (anatomical) whole. Furthermore, we are not bound to consider those features of Forms as characterisations comparable to the way Forms determine sensible particulars. First, because Plato does not speak of the Forms of such features. Second, because it would be risky in that it could easily fall victim to infinite regress to the extent which the features could be expected to have features themselves.

The Anatomy of εἶδος is a complex structure similar to an arch, in which each part serves to sustain the vault to the same extent. As part of a system, every feature presupposes and grounds the existence of the others. This metaphor is useful to understand how those features are not

⁵¹ The English term “feature” is particularly appropriate, given that it commonly means the attribute of something that makes a significant contribution to its overall appearance. Consider also the verbal form which means to have something as a prominent aspect, or to give prominence to something. Perhaps, we could verbalise the whole story and say that the Form features its anatomy (as well as saying that the Form features in the sensible domain).

metaphysical concepts in the contemporary sense, they are not separable from the “substance” they are supposed to characterise, that is the Form. Being a Form, and this phrase for Plato is equivalent to being as such, requires a set of peculiar aspects. Inasmuch as they are not separable in thought and reality from each other, so too are they not separable from the single εἶδος they are features of. Being an εἶδος literally consists in enjoying that ontological status which the Anatomy describes.⁵² The Anatomy of εἶδος then expresses a manner of being that does not affect the specific conditions of identity in which any Form consists. Such a manner of being is the requirement of an authentic ontological status able to perform the fourfold function of εἶδος. As stated above, for Forms to accomplish their task they need to be as prescribed by Anatomy, but at the same time only through Physiology does the structural dimension becomes fully perspicuous, however far from the common sense it may be. The theoretical reason of such structural features, which we are about to summarise, rests on the cognitive performance they allow. This is another incisive confirmation of the strength of the heritage of the original coalescence. If we keep in mind that for the original coalescence view the distinctions operated by means of language and thought are the authentic mark of reality, then a more developed view of the same kind may be recognised here. If the measure of being consists in its cognitive reliability, we are still, broadly speaking, following the trail of coalescence. The inseparability of Physiology and Anatomy then bears witness to this background, while it provides an unprecedented proposition that has been named “cohesion”. Reality, thought and language are capable of being connected insofar as they are distinct. Their distinction is necessary to recognise the peculiarity and nature of each one of them. But they are then connected without being either exactly the same thing or perfectly alike. Forms turn out to be the absolute objective measure of any correct exercise of thought and language. I say correct exercise because, for Plato, it belongs to the very nature of both to be directed towards reality as do not belong to them to tell stories or to persuade an audience. This is another piece of powerful evidence of how Plato’s view is evolving from the

⁵² Cf. also A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2002, pp. 15 who connects the possession of some of those aspects to Form’s being an essence.

coalescence view. The εἶδος works as an ontological pole, insofar as it eminently represents the absolutely objective measure of phenomena. With this I am not claiming that Forms merely are perfect criteria for human cognition. I am rather saying that Forms manifest their being ontological grounds by functioning as such criteria. That is why Physiology deals with how Forms work with regard to things and Anatomy deals with how Forms are if they are thought in themselves. Although the latter might require, for the sake of comprehension, that Forms are contrasted with things.

As we have seen, the εἶδος works as the pivot of this connection. The explanation of why it is able to do so will be given in this section. The anatomical features of Forms are so famous that they resound throughout history. My purpose here is to give a new holistic account of them and to reinterpret single details. By the term “holistic” I mean that the relevance of the interpretation put forward here rests chiefly on the new collocation of the anatomical features within the general frame. Old and solid notions may be framed in a new way by letting them play their traditional roles in a new framework.

The anatomical features of εἶδος are as follows:⁵³

αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ. Itself by itself or in virtue of itself. Forms are said to be by themselves. This statement has two intermingled meanings: first, Forms exist just in virtue of themselves. They are not ontologically dependent on anything else except themselves. Since they do not come to be because of anything, they do not come to be at all, that is to say they are utterly extraneous to any form of becoming. Second, the phrase also means that Forms are *what* they are in virtue of themselves. Forms are primarily identity conditions which express a certain determination, e.g. what is Justice or what is Shuttle. Each εἶδος is a certain content taken in itself. Such a content cannot derive its identity from something else, otherwise *that* would be the content in question, *i.e.* it already is that content.

How are these two things connected? The distinction between the existential and predicative use of the verb “be” clearly amounts to this

⁵³ Cf. *Phdr.* 247c4-e2; *Phaed.* 78c6-79a4; for some reference to relevant passages in the *Symposium* cf. last section in this chapter; for a for an exhaustive list of passages where the feature discussed here occur cf. F. Fronterotta, *MEΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, op. cit., p. 43 nn. 48-9.

ontological duplicity. At this point, contrasting the status of the εἶδος with the sensible thing may be of use: as the thing comes to be, thanks to the fact that it contingently receives a determination from the εἶδος it partakes of, so also the εἶδος is totally autonomous and independent, external to any possible experiential context-relativity because it is its own condition of identity. Thus, being determinate is a condition for existence: if sensible things are dependent with respect to their kind of “existence”, namely being events/experiences, because they are not by themselves the content they display, then Forms properly exist, in that they immediately are identity conditions, that is a perfectly determinate content.⁵⁴ This is what being αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ means. The self-determination is total, the nature of an εἶδος comes uniquely from itself and for itself, and it must be taken as an unjustifiable and original datum.

Two relevant consequences must be drawn from this: firstly, such a discourse has an important, needless to say, epistemological outcome. Being itself by itself also designates the status of unconditioned epistemic reliability. As we will see in a moment, the main condition for an epistemic ground is self-identity, but the first requirement is this “itselfness”, since being detached from any possible experience or belief of any knower is the first prerequisite so that the object of knowledge enjoys a complete objectivity.⁵⁵ No act of thinking or single belief is able to affect this kind of objects. Secondly, the αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ does not mean a sort of otherworldly sojourn interpreted analogously to the spatiality belonging to the sensible domain. This just means that Plato did not intend to say that there is a whimsical place populated by an odd collection of things. Forms are no

⁵⁴ This is reminiscent of Vlastos’ Non-identity Assumption: «If anything has a certain character, it cannot be identical with the Form in virtue of which we apprehend that character. If x is F , x cannot be identical with F -ness». Cf. G. Vlastos, *The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides*, in «Philosophical Review», LXIII, 1954, pp. 319-349 (Rpt. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato’s metaphysics*, op. cit., pp. 231-263:235). Although the core of this argument is correct, namely that there is an asymmetry with respect to determination between thing and Form in favour of the latter, I deeply disagree with other two Vlastos’ irredeemable assumptions: that Forms are properties and that Forms self-predicate, that is they are instances of themselves. This will be discussed below.

⁵⁵ For an account that also considers the role of the soul cf. D. El Murr, *Αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ. La genèse et le sens d’un philosophème platonicien*, in D. Doucet I. Koch (eds), *Autos: Idipsum: Figures de l’intention d’Homère à Augustin*, Presses Universitaires de Provence, Aix-en-Provence 2014, pp. 39-56 especially pp. 45-50.

things and are literally nowhere, which is why, as we will see in a short while, they are intelligible.

ἐν. One/single. One single nature presides over a multiplicity of things, which in turn display it. Being one is a fundamental feature of Forms, hinted at throughout the *Physiology* of εἶδος. First of all, a Form must be something, specifically a certain content. But being something is the minimal sense of individuation that is not a unique prerogative of εἶδος. Hence, the Form may be considered a very special and eminent case of individuation. Now, an ambiguity may arise and must be solved. Forms are no individuals in the ordinary sense, namely concrete particulars. A passage from the *Republic*, book X, is crucial:

«Now, the god, either because he didn't want to or because it was necessary for him not to do so, didn't make more than one bed in nature, but only one, the very one that is the being of a bed. Two or more of these have not been made by the god and never will be.

Why is that?

Because, if he made only two, then again one would come to light whose form they in turn would both possess, and *that* would be the one that is the being of a bed and not the other two.

That's right.

The god knew this, I think, and wishing to be the real maker of the truly real bed and not just *a* maker of *a* bed, he made it to be one in nature.»⁵⁶ (transl. by G. M. A. Grube rev. C. D. C: Reeve)

The relevance of this page can hardly be overestimated. Therefore, for now several interesting arguments presented in this passage, for instance the notion of production and how it relates to the use or the ontological

⁵⁶ *Resp* 597c1-d1 «Ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός, εἴτε οὐκ ἐβούλετο, εἴτε τις ἀνάγκη ἐπῆν μὴ πλέον ἢ μίαν ἐν τῇ φύσει ἀπεργάσασθαι αὐτὸν κλίνην, οὕτως ἐποίησεν μίαν μόνον αὐτὴ ἐκείνην ὃ ἐστὶν κλίνη· δύο δὲ τοιαῦται ἢ πλείους οὔτε ἐφυτεύθησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ οὔτε μὴ φύωσιν. / Πῶς δὴ; ἔφη. / Ὅτι, ἦν δ' ἐγὼ, εἰ δύο μόνας ποιήσειεν, πάλιν ἂν μία ἀναφανείη ἣς ἐκείνη ἂν αὖ ἀμφοτέραι τὸ εἶδος ἔχοιεν, καὶ εἴη ἂν ὃ ἐστὶν κλίνη ἐκείνη, ἀλλ' οὐχ αἱ δύο. / Ὅρθῶς, ἔφη. / Ταῦτα δὴ, οἶμαι, εἰδὼς ὁ θεός, βουλόμενος εἶναι ὄντως κλίνης ποιητὴς ὄντως οὔσης, ἀλλὰ μὴ κλίνης τινὸς μηδὲ κλινοποιός τις, μίαν φύσει αὐτὴν ἔφυσεν.»

significance of technique, shall be overlooked and assigned to the next chapter in order to point out the most pertinent ones. Starting from the end, the different senses of individuation are disambiguated. Being the Bed in itself a Form and any bed a sensible thing, we find a contrast between a (certain) bed (κλίνης τινός) and the truly real Bed (ὄντως κλίνης). In English the difference between the definite and indefinite article is important; in Greek it is even more so. The untranslatable adverb “ὄντως” is employed; it is the adverbial form of the participle of the verb “be”, indicating the truly real way of being. But, few lines above, Plato also utilises the aforementioned semi-technical phrase, “ὅ ἐστιν κλίνη”, that is: that which is Bed or the very (some)thing that is Bed in itself. Thus, being something for sensible things is being a certain particular, whereas being something for an εἶδος is being a certain nature. But the difference between the two is still unclear, and can be understood only by means of the anatomical feature of One/Unity/Singularity at issue here.

We now turn to the remaining part of the quotation, where Socrates affirms that there cannot be two Forms of the Bed, since in that case what they both possess would be the Form itself. This assertion is crucial: there cannot be two Forms⁵⁷ if they do not differ in content, that is as to what they are. There are not two Forms of Bed, but there is the Form of Bed and the Form of Shuttle, to use genuinely Platonic examples. In fact, if we take the introductory pronoun “there” in a philosophically significant manner, Forms are not actually there, but just are.⁵⁸ However, going back to the being-one of the εἶδος, we see, to put it in the philosophical jargon, that across the eidetic field there are no numeric distinctions, but only differences in species.⁵⁹ This is precisely a character of the ontological

⁵⁷ For a reading showing how this argument does not fall prey to the Third-Man Regress and how it is even able to cast light on a solution of the regress cf. R. D. Parry, *The Uniqueness Proof for Forms in Republic 10*, «Journal of History of Philosophy», 23, (1985), pp. 133-50.

⁵⁸ F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, op. cit., p. 36 «Was vollkommen erkennbar und vollkommen seiend ist, ist die Bestimmtheit selbst für sich selbst: die Idee. “Sein” bedeutet hier offenbar nicht “Existieren” in dem [...] Sinn raumzeitlichen Daseins. [...] Sein ist für Platon stets mit Bestimmtheit verbunden».

⁵⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Top.* A, 7. The term “species” is useful because it has been used to express the sort of distinction here at stake, namely difference in kind, regardless of numerical distinction. It should by no means suggest that Forms are classes or concepts.

difference between events and essences in general, and between the two ways of individuation discussed here in particular. There are many beds, but there is just one Bed, or, to put it better, just one Bed is. Accordingly, the εἶδος is not even one in the sense of being a unit, it is rather a unity, *i.e.* the state of oneness of a certain content, in which for two given Forms the only way to be distinct is differing as to what they are. In this way, the true meaning of the phrase “One-over-many” becomes clearer: the One⁶⁰ truly is, in the manner of εἶδος (ὄντως), a determinative content in which any distinction would generate a different content,⁶¹ whereas the many, although sharing in the same Form, may be distinct numerically with respect to that Form. This implies that only in virtue of that Form do those many things possibly have something in common. It emerges how the two dimensions of individuation, namely specific and numeric, intersect only through the notions of commonality, sharing, communication and participation. This concept will be developed further in the chapter devoted to the domain of becoming.

The last aim of this section is the attempt to systematise the role of the Form’s being-one with respect to the Physiology of εἶδος. The εἶδος must be One-over-many in identity, knowledge, definition and reference. In the case of identity the Form must be one firstly because it is *a* specific content (recall: “that which is *F*”). This may seem contradictory with the distinction made just now between *a* bed and *the* Bed, but it is not because Forms are not numerically distinct occurrences of the more general Forms they share. This is stated at the beginning of the Anatomy by saying that the anatomical features of εἶδος are not properties. Secondly, Forms being one is entailed by their being not context-relative. As we have seen, a certain content is able to work as identity conditions only if it is independent and determinate *per se*. That requires Forms to be regardless of any possible context of appearance and perspectival-situatedness or embeddedness in experience. Particular things only occur within space and

On the numerical and qualitative difference cf. A. Marmodoro, *Is Being One Only One? The Uniqueness of Platonic Forms*, «Apeiron», XLI (2008), pp. 211-227.

⁶⁰ Just to avoid any misunderstanding, this One is not or is not necessarily the Form of One, but only any Form whatsoever.

⁶¹ Cf. F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, op. cit., p. 35 «Wenn das Seiende überhaupt erkennbar sein soll, muss es unterscheidbar sein. Damit es unterscheidbar sein kann, muss es irgendeine Bestimmtheit haben».

time. Forms are shared in because they are one and the same in each different occurrence, and the occurring thing is capable of being determined by Forms only if the determining content does not intrinsically relate to it. At the same time, the Form is genuinely independent and itself by itself only if it is a unity. Every anatomical feature of εἶδος presupposes and grounds all the others.

As far as knowledge is concerned, again any εἶδος must be one, since it works as that content with respect to which any other thing must be compared, in order to be identified with regard to that content. Through the exercise of knowledge, the identity of the known reality is looked for in such a way that the object of thought is necessarily one. Moreover, for real knowledge to be, it needs its object to be stable and epistemically reliable during the time flow. This in turn strictly implies the One-over-many pattern, since there must be one content remaining the same over many temporal stages or in different situations (then, diachronically and synchronically). Likewise, the One-over-many is crucial in the case of linguistic dimension. In definition, there is the contrast between essential traits and mere examples. So, for instance, many courageous deeds may be mentioned, without saying what Courage is. That is not to say that such feats are not courageous, but only that they are only in virtue of what Courage is. That also casts light on another interesting aspect of the issue, since it implicitly involves that the One-over-many does not coincide with the type/token distinction. If we assert that, say, Justice consists in respecting oaths, this is a type, since many single oaths may be respected. And yet this is not a correct definition, insofar as it is not aiming at the εἶδος and many other things are just.⁶² It seems that in language there is room for hybrid and incomplete structures such as this last one: it formally has the aspect of a definition, but it is not. However, with regard to the present discourse, definition relies on its being One, not only because a definition applies to many single things, but also because, within language, it is one, whereas examples are many. This means that there are many cases where examples are types, not tokens, but still they are not authentic ones, as by contrast any true definition is supposed to be. Definitions

⁶² Cf. *Euphr.* 6d9-e1; *Men.* 72c6-d1.

linguistically individuate real Ones insofar as the defined reality is present, be it the case of examples/types or concrete instances/tokens.

Finally, in the case of reference the One-over-many becomes fully explicit, as language itself is mainly composed of general terms which apply to singular experiences. As we have seen in the section devoted to reference, the very possibility of predication hinges on the applied general term not referring exclusively to a single situation. The general term refers derivatively to things (many) without those things being the reality (One) primarily referred to. To think it of in the genuinely Platonic way, we must consider that in the absence of the εἶδος (One), the many would not be either.

ταῦτόν. Self-identical/Changeless. By possessing their own nature only in virtue of themselves, Forms are constitutionally self-identical. The autonomy of their identity translates into essential inalterability and resistance to change. If they cannot be affected by anything and their content enjoys an ontological priority, Forms just constantly remain as they are. Such a prerogative results in a statement as precise as crucial:

Self-identity of Forms consists in the fact that any Form shall never turn out to be different from the way it has always been.

It is not hospitable to any form of mutation and motion in such a way that it does not just happen that Forms do not change, rather it is utterly impossible, which brings epistemic comfort. Effectively, once something so stable is known, certainty is absolute, for it will ever be identical to what it has been known to be. Knowledge is absolutely certain, and thus indefeasible, just because its object is self-identical in the sense stated here. Once again, it is worth noting how the stability of knowledge comes from the stability of object, or, to put it better, the stability of its identity: the ontological status affects the cognitive outcome. Another interesting equivalence lies in the fact that only immutable realities can be properly self-identical. So self-identity allows no comparison to particular things which can be thought of as remaining identical while undergoing change. Strictly speaking, these things would not be self-identical, since what they

are is ultimately a matter of the situation they are in, at a given time or according to a certain perspective.

εἰλικρινής, μονοειδής. Purity and Completeness. Every Form is perfectly determinate and complete in its definition. The term “perfectly”, or “perfect”, is etymologically meaningful, stemming from the Latin “*perficio*” (to complete, to do thoroughly). The determination of εἶδος is complete, fully accomplished. No part of it is left to chance nor delivered to opacity. The term “definition” has nothing to do here with definitional discourse; rather it is reminiscent of the concept of high definition, to the extent which the specific form of something is completely shaped and visible, being used to designate the limpidity and the clarity which mark the being of Forms. In this way, Plato retains some assumptions of the coalescence view, insofar as being is equal to being clearly shaped in thought and language. Effectively, clarity should be a quality belonging to knowledge or representation, but in this case it characterises entities. Such a clarity derives from the fact that, in the eidetic domain, there can be no ambiguity since the identity of any εἶδος leaves no room to doubt and indecision. Once again, epistemic prerogatives have deep roots in the ontological status and features of the known reality. The deficiency, with regard to knowledge, of the sensible may just be hinted at directly while it is being stated. In order to grasp it properly, it must be seen through that which it does not allow for, namely indefeasible knowledge and perfect ontological definition. This difference is ultimately grasped by experiencing how opinions (as their objects) are defeasible, whereas Forms never are. The reality of events is doubly deficient: it is not just deficient in not supporting knowledge, but also in its being recognised as deficient. That is to say that, on the one hand, Forms are defined such that, not only is their content perfect *ab eterno*, in no need of refinement, but also once they are reached through knowledge it is also immediately clear how reliable they are. On the other hand, the sensible domain is not just uncertain in content but also regarding its status: there may be true opinions and they are equally reliable⁶³ for practical purposes, but one will never be sure

⁶³ Cf. *Meno*. 85c7.

whether they actually are as they seem to be. And that is why sensible things only appear.

As a last implication of Form's being pure and complete, in the case of Forms it must be recognised that there is no prospective multiplicity regarding the conditions of their identity (being) and identifiability (knowledge). For there is not a multiplicity of ways of approaching them and there is no sensible deceitfulness around them. By "deceitfulness" I mean that in the case of a spatio-temporal thing, when we apprehend any of the characteristics it displays, we still do not know many others, and the ones different people have some cognition about may still genuinely be conflicting. The pureness of Form forestall this possibility. The perfection of Forms involves another important fact, namely that there is no development internal to the Forms. Their determination has always been fulfilled.

νοετὰ ὄντα. Intelligible. Forms are entirely immaterial, deprived of any bodily dimension. They may be grasped only through thought, but in no way does this imply that their existence is merely intellectual. This is strictly entailed by the αὐτὸ καθ'αὐτὸ feature not just because independence requires existence, but more deeply because independence becomes the mark of existence itself. On the contrary, intelligibility figures as a fundamental anatomical feature of εἶδος for the reason that only if Forms are intelligible entities characterised by all the other features analysed here, are they reachable within the human horizon. Intelligibility is the only ontological status allowing any entity not to be affected by causal processes belonging to the temporal becoming things. Being outside the physical chain of causality, the εἶδος is able to be genuinely itself by itself, *i.e.* autonomous/independent, since it is determined only by itself (and not by some external cause). It is immutable and self-identical, because it is not affected by causally relevant events that would change its identity. And it is unique as it is a singular shape visible in thought under which a sensible multiplicity can commune.

However, the intelligibility feature, if it implies being outside the world of causally related phenomena, presents us with a very interesting outcome: intelligible beings do not share with sensible things any determination which the sensible thing receive from intelligible beings and display. For

instance, the εἶδος of Fire will be neither hot nor cold, neither shining nor dark in a perceptual sense analogously to sensible things. There is a sense in which the Form of Fire *is* everything that fire must be in itself. This by no means means that the εἶδος of Fire is perceptible, that it can occur in space and time, that it has a role in the chain of physical causation. Contrarily it is purely what Fire is just because it is not committed to physical relations of causality. And this is precisely what being intelligible means. Such an εἶδος is what it really (ὄντως) means for anything to be fire as far as it need be known and defined once and for all.

ἀεὶ ὄν. Eternal/extra-temporal. If the sensible domain is taken to be, not just as the sphere of perception in the mechanical bodily sense, but rather as the place of every manifestation and occurrence of spatio-temporal events, then Forms must be excluded from this domain. The eternity of Forms does not consist in an everlasting duration or longevity, it is rather a pure timelessness.⁶⁴ In the first case, namely everlasting duration, Forms would nonetheless become entities which age, though would remain the same. Therefore, Forms must be detached from any form of temporal extension, which is another reason why they are not perceptible and nobody can come across them through senses. Forms are not events. Inasmuch as spatio-temporal extension and sensory coming to be is essential to phenomena, so also is it essential to Forms to be radically separated from it.

The anatomical sections framed here need be distinguished during the exposition of the analysis, but they cannot be dissociated in the evaluation of their content. For this purpose, it is important to remember how those notions concerning the structure of εἶδος are profoundly interrelated and mutually necessary. These features have been extensively debated by the western philosophical tradition and by the scholarly Platonic literature. The point of the last pages highlights their strong internal coherence and how

⁶⁴ Cf. R. Patterson, *On the Eternality of Platonic Forms*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 65 (1985), pp. 27-46 in which the author recommends a view that agrees with the one presented here against two alternatives: eternity of Forms consists in being changeless for all the time, or it consists in everlasting duration beyond the bounds of cosmic time, but still duration.

they are interpretable, if taken holistically, in a very precise way. I do not think that the eidetic domain is in any way analogous to the sensible one, but eminently possesses the aforementioned features. By means of a geometrical metaphor, I would rather express a diverse possibility: Platonic metaphysical duality of being and becoming should not be given the picture of two parallel domains facing each other; being and becoming must rather be conceived of as two orthogonal planes which are irreducible with regard to their directionality.

The aim of this ontological divarication is strictly theoretical. Plato formulates a series of conceptual constraints that can be applied to the notion of reality, as a way to guarantee some prerogatives to the act of knowing: if reality is to support proper knowledge it should be (i) absolutely independent from any opinion or impression of any subject and (ii) unconditionally self-identical in any point of space and time. This model of absolute objectivity, and its consequent inter-subjectivity, accounts for the concurrence of all the structural features treated in this section.

4) . Critique of the conception of εἶδος as property

The aim of this section is to explain why any account of the nature of Forms which conceives of them through the lens of the substance/property distinction does not fit with the analysis heretofore outlined. Thinking of Forms as properties has been surprisingly uncritically done throughout the magnificent *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Plato's philosophy, from Aristotle to the modern readers and commentators. In particular, the English-speaking interpreters have unhesitatingly taken Forms to be universals, which is the same as property, to which Plato would be conferring a very special status. According to this view, Plato had not resisted positing real entities dictated by the structure of language.⁶⁵ The intuition of this tradition is as correct as it is taken generally: language is the privileged place in which we are authentically committed to reality, but it is not a matter of mere correspondence of the parts of one to the parts of the other. As we have seen, the relation is far more complex. This tradition takes, broadly

⁶⁵ C. J. Rowe, *Plato*, The Harvester Press, Brighton 1984, p. 59; D. Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986, pp. 207-13.

speaking, Forms as properties or universal of a very special sort (and quite often untenably contradictory). The fatal charge, irredeemably Aristotelian in flavour, is that in saying that Forms are properties, they cannot be at the same time the substance or, more generally, the being of things or they will often face aporia. Accordingly, immediately connected to this is the assumption that the theory of Forms is mainly a theory striving to account for linguistic predication. As we have seen, predication seems to be one of several privileged theoretical places apt to drive the knower to an eidetic realm. And there can be no authentic predication without the contribution of the ontological side of linguistic process, but this does in no way imply that Forms should be considered only as the correspondent portion in reality of every predicate, or of some predicate. From a historical and epistemological point of view, thinking that the theory of Ideas is the first attempt to approach the issue of predication is not wrong, it is merely short-sighted. The theory (partially) accounts for this pivotal aspect of any theory about language, or, to put it better, the theory accounts for a series of problems that may alternatively be interpreted, as has been done within the framework of the theory of predication and the substance/property dichotomy. But the two do not completely overlap by necessity.

We will be discussing these arguments insofar as they enter coherently into the textual and conceptual analysis pursued so far. In this section, we will consider briefly and summarily two broader families of the traditional reading of the notion of Form. Both options have many refined sub-theories in numbers. These are the many standpoints of various interpreters, so that the very rough divisions I am providing here remain too vague to be something more than ideally sketched factions. Discussing them in detail would be an endeavour as huge as it is pointless, since the very assumptions underlying them are here being rejected.

We will also consider two significant misunderstandings ascribed to Plato as an instance of the predominant approach. In effect, the ascription of misunderstanding to Plato's theory has ruthlessly been given preference over the uncomfortable choice of getting rid of the substance/property dichotomy.

To understand why it is so uncomfortable, it must only be considered that what I take to be the incorrect interpretation, namely any interpretation that utilises the substance/property framework as perfectly fitting with

Plato's theory, starts from some theoretical assumptions that historically and conceptually derive from Plato's theory of Forms. But this does not at all mean that the later theories stemming from Plato's ideas perfectly capture his philosophical objective. This fact has at least two implications: first, part of the later theories, from which come the mistaken interpretations (in my view), are already embryonically present in Plato's the original theory; second, the story of their diversification may be explored. In this section we will only be touching on the first one.

At least two ways of conceiving of Forms within the substance/property dichotomy may be, and have been, thought. Forms may be conceived either as properties or as paradigmatic particulars instantiating only one property.⁶⁶ The one interpretation solves the problems left open by the other, mutually showing their inadequacy, or, to put it better, showing the inadequacy of their conceptual framework. Taking Forms to be either seems to be textually and conceptually inadequate, evidence of the very articulated scholarly debate on it; it is likewise impossible to take them to be both since it is inconsistent. Most generally, if Forms are not sensible things but rather common nature shared in by a multiplicity of sensible things they will be considered to be properties. But to be independent of the things that instantiate them, Forms are bound to enjoy an absolute ontological self-sufficiency such that it strongly suggests that they should be thought of as a (peculiar) sort of things. As we are about to see, many things I have asserted will have a role within the traditional accounts, which are of course rooted on textual observations. My contention is not that these exegetical options are entirely alien to Platonic discourse, which would be intolerably unfair; rather, the respective success they had is grounded in the fact that both address some convincing aspects of a broader reflection I am trying to depict through this work. The problem is that they do it in an unsatisfactorily partial way. These two ways of interpreting the

⁶⁶ Cf. C. J. Rowe, *Plato*, op. cit., p. 82-3; F. J. Gonzalez, *Plato's Dialectic of Forms*, in W. A. Welton (ed.), *Plato's Forms: Varieties of Interpretation*, Lexington Books, Oxford 2008 pp. 31-84:36 «Plato's language is ambiguous between treating the forms as things possessing properties (or, in other words, as subjects of which a property is predicated) and treating them as identical to these properties.» In stating that Forms are neither, the author infers that Plato has never intended to put forward a coherent theory of Ideas, whereas I think it only demonstrates the inapplicability of the substance/property dichotomy to the Platonic notion of εἶδος.

Forms will now be sketchily examined, without any claim of being exhaustive, but only for the purpose of seeing how the two aspects both seem to be textually undeniable and conceptually insufficient if taken singularly and inconsistent if kept together. To this end, I will concentrate on a well-known text from the *Symposium*, luxuriously rich in poetry and theory, which is among other things, an enquiry into the nature of Love and Beauty. The part I have chosen is the crucial one in the matter of Plato's ontological view and occupies a prominent place in the dramatic rhythm of the work. References to both views may be easily traced throughout the entire *corpus*,⁶⁷ but this passage from the *Symposium* is crucially relevant because within a few lines we have suggestions in favour of both the traditional views and the account presented here. I will provide my own interpretation of the passage (specifically of the second part) after I have briefly illustrated the core-assumptions of the two traditional views.

Forms as properties. Properties may be immanent or transcendent. That is to say, that properties may be independent of the entity in which they inhere or not. A common idea in the English-speaking world is that in the so-called Socratic dialogues Plato conceived of Forms as properties immanent to the many sensible things neither questioning their separate existence nor *a fortiori* requiring them to be separate in order to support knowledge. The later Plato, however, considered Forms as transcendent properties, not only, of course, with respect to human acts of knowledge, but also as ontologically independent of sensible entities that instantiate them. Forms are still regarded as properties, but Plato's increasing interest of in ontological questions rests on the fact that he considered transcendence of Forms as a necessary condition for their working as common characters of things.⁶⁸ Either way, Forms are thought of as universal entities, that is to say common natures, determining many particulars.

In this passage from the *Symposium* (210a-b) there are two statements that speak of the idea of common nature:

⁶⁷ Cf. F. Ademollo, *Plato's conception of Forms: Some Remarks, cit.*, pp. 42-5 and 52-6.

⁶⁸ Cf. for example D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Clarendon, Oxford 1951, pp. 225-30.

«A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies. First, if the leader leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realise that the beauty of any one body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he'd be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same.»⁶⁹ (transl. by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

In this passage there are two statements that taken jointly give us the idea of what we most generally think universals/properties are: firstly, the “beauties” of several bodies are all alike with regard to the bodies’ being beautiful (since they are brothers: τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὁμοῦν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι); secondly, it is nonsense (πολλὴ ἄνοια) not to consider as one what it is in fact one, namely what is one over many beautiful bodies (τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος). Roughly put, if properties are taken to be the ways things are, in the case of transcendent natures, Forms would be otherworldly crystallised properties which through their influence give things the property that Forms eminently are. A reason for such a transcendent conception could be that properties come into sensible experience irretrievably mixed with each other in such a way that they must be taken in isolation, if they are to be known, and this is possible only at the level of intelligibility. This means, of course, that according to the Platonic discourse, intelligible isolated properties are in no way mental constructions, on the contrary, they are considered the one and only authentic reality. An important implication can be drawn: although sensible particulars deprived of any determination coming from Forms, which are comparable to mere substrata without any property, make no sense and would be, at any rate, miserable ontological entities, they still are conceived of as partially autonomous from Forms.

⁶⁹ «δεῖ γάρ, ἔφη, τὸν ὀρθῶς ἰόντα ἐπὶ τοῦτο τὸ πράγμα ἄρχεσθαι μὲν νέον ὄντα ἰέναι ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ σώματα, καὶ πρῶτον μὲν, ἐὰν ὀρθῶς ἠγῆται ὁ ἠγούμενος, ἐνὸς αὐτὸν σώματος ἑρᾶν καὶ ἐνταῦθα γεννᾶν λόγους καλοῦς, ἔπειτα δὲ αὐτὸν κατανοῆσαι ὅτι τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὁμοῦν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι, καὶ εἰ δεῖ διώκειν τὸ ἐπ’ εἶδει καλόν, πολλὴ ἄνοια μὴ οὐχ ἓν τε καὶ ταῦτόν ἠγεῖσθαι τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος».

This view leans towards the logical side of the twofold nature of the εἶδος, in that Forms are considered universals, whose task is to provide us with an ontological ground for predicates, perfectly accounting for the common nature of qualities shared by many particulars. But such common natures, except for the so-called Socratic dialogues, are considered to exist independently of the sensible things, in such a way that they must be acknowledged as a substantial nature, even though they are not substances (given that the issue is inescapably framed within the substance/property dichotomy).

Forms as paradigmatic cases. According to this view, Forms are things enjoying a particular status, *viz.* being eternal, itself by itself, etc., representing the perfection of a certain nature that is only approximated within sensibility. In this way, Forms are ideal particulars of a peculiar nature, but nonetheless comparable to sensible particulars with respect to their being individuals. The sensible particular imitates or derives from the Form and in so doing acquires an imperfect characterisation. The specific interpretation of the notion of imitation on the part of sensible things and that of being models on the part of Forms will be provided, properly contextualised, in the next chapter. For now it is only relevant that both sensible particulars and ideal particulars are individuals differing about the manner of being such, insofar as the former see what they are imposed by something else, whereas the latter are what they are only by themselves.

The following passage, immediately subsequent to the one above, from the *Symposium* (211a-c) speaks of the isolation of Forms. Although it is a bit longer, it is worth quoting entirely:

«First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others. Nor will the beautiful appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anything else, but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in

form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change. So when someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning this very beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.»⁷⁰ (transl. by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

This passage is particularly rich in details about the metaphysical status of Forms. My interpretation will be given soon; for now it is important to pay attention to the fact that the Form is presented not as a property shared in by many, but rather that which ought to be taken in total isolation from anything else, and that is itself by itself and with itself, always being in only one form (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς ἀεὶ ὄν). In this way Forms are better understood as paradigmatic cases: the Form represents in its purity and unilaterality what is being-*F*. All of this harks back to the

⁷⁰ «ἀεὶ ὄν καὶ οὔτε γιγνώμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον, οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε φθίνον, ἔπειτα οὐ τῆ μὲν καλόν, τῆ δ' αἰσχρόν, οὐδὲ τοτὲ μὲν, τοτὲ δὲ οὐ, οὐδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχρόν, οὐδ' ἔνθα μὲν καλόν, ἔνθα δὲ αἰσχρόν, ὡς τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ αἰσχρόν: οὐδ' αὖ φαντασθήσεται αὐτῶ τὸ καλόν οἷον πρόσωπόν τι οὐδὲ χεῖρες οὐδὲ ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὧν σῶμα μετέχει, οὐδέ τις λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη, οὐδέ που ὄν ἐν ἑτέρῳ τινι, οἷον ἐν ζῳῳ ἢ ἐν γῆ ἢ ἐν οὐρανῳ ἢ ἐν τῷ ἄλλῳ, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς ἀεὶ ὄν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα καλὰ ἐκείνου μετέχοντα τρόπον τινὰ τοιοῦτον, οἷον γιγνομένων τε τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀπολλυμένων μηδὲν ἐκεῖνο μήτε τι πλεόν μήτε ἔλαττον γίνεσθαι μηδὲ πάσχειν μηδὲν. ὅταν δὴ τις ἀπὸ τῶνδε διὰ τὸ ὀρθῶς παιδευαστεῖν ἐπανιών ἐκεῖνο τὸ καλὸν ἄρχηται καθορᾶν, σχεδὸν ἂν τι ἄπτοιο τοῦ τέλους. τοῦτο γὰρ δὴ ἐστὶ τὸ ὀρθῶς ἐπὶ τὰ ἐρωτικὰ ἰέναι ἢ ὑπ' ἄλλου ἄγεσθαι, ἀρχόμενον ἀπὸ τῶνδε τῶν καλῶν ἐκείνου ἔνεκα τοῦ καλοῦ ἀεὶ ἐπανιέναι, ὡσπερ ἐπαναβασμοῖς χρώμενον, ἀπὸ ἐνός ἐπὶ δύο καὶ ἀπὸ δυοῖν ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ καλὰ σώματα, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ μαθήματα, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν μαθημάτων ἐπ' ἐκεῖνο τὸ μάθημα τελευτῆσαι, ὃ ἐστὶν οὐκ ἄλλου ἢ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα, καὶ γινῶ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν ὃ ἐστὶ καλόν».

visual dimension of the εἶδος. The very notion of paradigm or model naturally relates to something other than the reality measured against it, showing how this second interpretation of the notion of εἶδος amounts to the visual aspect,⁷¹ whereas the previous one appeared to be on the side of logical aspect. It must be said that this conception of εἶδος can be thought to go in many direction. What each one of them has in common is that the thing any model is a model of depends upon it. All the other things that come to be beautiful share in the Form as an independent reality which is not affected by that participation. Austerely self-sufficient, the immotile Form causes other things to be or become in a certain way. Now, the way in which the partaking things are can be analogous to the way the partaken Form is or is not. In any case, the dependence of things on Forms implies that Forms are the only independent reality. In the quotation we see that things, bodies and deeds can only defer to the eidetic reality, consisting precisely of this their dependence. Once this is accepted, there are at least two options: either the connection is extrinsic or it is intrinsic. In the first case, the connection between thing and Form is a matter of mere homonymy: the beautiful things are named after what is beautiful, not because they have something in common, but just because the former are dependent on the latter. In the second case, the connection subsists because they do have something in common, and precisely because the things resemble the Form.⁷²

The notion of resemblance can be interpreted as similarity or imitation. If taken in the first sense, it is a symmetrical relation such that if the sensible thing is similar to the Form, then the Form is similar to the particular. But if this relation is taken as the copy/original relation, then it does not make sense to say that the original resembles its copies. Of course we can think that the original resembles, in a certain sense, a copy, but we may think that this metaphor is overtly employed by Plato to state the asymmetrical directionality of the grounding relation between Form and thing. This means that this second view allows opposite interpretations in

⁷¹ Immediately above it is stated « All of a sudden he [*scil.* The man who has been guided in matters of Love] will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature » («ἐξαίφνης κατόψεται τι θαυμαστόν τὴν φύσιν καλόν» transl. by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff).

⁷² This distinction is already recognised by Plotin *Enneads* I, 11,2, 4-10 quoted in V. Goldschmidt, *Le paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne*, Vrin, Paris 2003, p. 49.

that sensible things are either minimally independent or completely dependent on Forms. This second view is in potential contrast with the first.

Moreover, reading Forms as things, namely paradigmatic cases of a certain nature, opens the possibility that Forms possess, in a very peculiar way, the property that makes them the paradigm they are. However, if the Form has its property only in virtue of itself, and if its peculiarity is a characterising power, then it might be a temptation to believe that what makes sensible particulars F is also what makes the Form F, that is the Form itself. We are faced with the well-known issue of self-predication that has had a monstrous fortune among the scholars especially in connection to the Third Man Argument (Aristotelian naming) or Largeness Regress (as it is presented in the *Parmenides*). I will not broach this argument that has worried the most illustrious scholarly minds⁷³. Fortunately, avoiding the traditional reading is also the key to escaping the regress. In fact, the present section aims to delegitimise the very framework that allows the regress to make sense.

The texts from the *Symposium* cited here, especially the latter, are suitable for a plurality of reading, which in turn enables the reader to understand how it happened that two mutually inconsistent interpretations, on a large scale, have been given, and which is the correct one consists. What I take to be the correct reading recapitulates the core of the view I have been presenting so far, and as such it is useful to briefly discuss it here. Speaking of what is beautiful in itself begins with the rejection of generation and corruption: what properly is never comes to be since it has always been.⁷⁴ It never passes away, insofar as it never ceases to be.

⁷³ Cf. the seminal works of G. Vlastos, *The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides*, in «Philosophical Review», LXIII, 1954, pp. 319-349; (Rpt. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's metaphysics*, op. cit., pp. 231-263) and R. E. Allen, *Participation and predication in Plato's middle dialogues*, «Philosophical Review», LXIX, 1960, pp. 147-164; (Rpt. in Id. (ed.), *Studies in Plato's metaphysics*, op. cit., 43-60). I refer to these works because I think they represent the two main traditional options with regard to self-predication. Many other interpreters have struggled against this argument, unfortunately they cannot be discussed in this research. For an interpretation of the nature of Forms as paradigmatic cases that claims that they do not run into the regress cf. Cf. J. Szaif, *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*, op. cit., pp. 106-110.

⁷⁴ This conceptual maneuver shall be extensively dealt with in the next chapter.

Moreover, it is said that it is not the case that what is beautiful is not beautiful in some way, or under certain aspects, nor that it is beautiful at one time and not at another. Change is excluded also in relation to other things, as it is in the case of many places and people's opinions. We can see that change is excluded in a plurality of cases:

- a) Substance (generation and corruption, οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον);
- b) Property (ways of being, aspects, οὐ τῆ μὲν καλόν, τῆ δ' αἰσχρόν);
- c) Time (different moments with different properties, οὐδὲ τοτὲ μὲν, τοτὲ δὲ οὔ);
- d) Relation (in relation to other things, οὐδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχρόν);
- e) Space (being different in different places, ἔνθα μὲν καλόν, ἔνθα δὲ αἰσχρόν);
- f) Opinion (for some people in one way, other for others, τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ αἰσχρόν).⁷⁵

At least partially, Plato seems to be alive to categorical distinctions⁷⁶, which however do not play any role in determining the nature of ὃ ἔστι καλόν, that which is beautiful (by itself) since they are all employed to circumscribe what the Forms is not or does not perform. I am not contending, of course, that Plato had at his disposal a fully developed theory about ontological categories. My contention is instead that Plato had, at least discursively, awareness of such distinctions, but, at the same time, that they did not fit into his problematic horizon. This is so because that which is beautiful does not make appearance in the guise of particular bodies or parts of them, nor does it in discourses and knowledge (οὐδέ τις λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη). Even in the highest and noblest of human acts, namely knowledge, that which is beautiful does not coincide with that act.

⁷⁵ It is worth noting how (e) and (f) are connected by using the latter to explain the former. It seems that Plato is not simply denying that Forms do not change in different places, as if they were physical things, but rather he seems to be locating the stability of Beauty with regard to spatial extension within people's experience.

⁷⁶ Similarly V. Goldschmidt, *Le paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne*, op. cit., p. 73 n. 3.

It does not appear in minds, just as it does not appear in bodies. This does not mean that it is beyond the reach of knowledge, but only that it possesses its own ontological weight in such a way that what is known is always independent of the act of knowing it, or, to put it better, of its appearance to the knowing subject. It does not actually appear at all. The term in question is “φαντάζω”, which means “to become visible”, clearly derived from “φαίνομαι” which in turn means “appear” and “come about”. This crucial point will be extensively treated in the third chapter. For the time being, it is enough to maintain that Forms are kept out of the ken of appearance. The passage continues stating that that which is beautiful is never in another thing, whether it be on Earth or in heaven. Contrastingly, it is itself by itself and with itself, always one in form (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ μεθ’ αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς ἀεὶ ὄν), perfectly coherent with the Anatomy of the εἶδος. Sensible things partake of it and they work as signs of this ontologically fully developed nature to which everyone who is apt to know is naturally led. Once again bodies, acts and learnings may be beautiful, but the ultimate knowledge is only of that which is beautiful in itself. There is a recurring technical expression “αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι” denoting how the Form at stake here should be thought of as a pure intelligible content expressing a determination that can be (at least partially) imbricated in the texture of words. We are faced with the attempt to think of an absolute objectivity⁷⁷ which is the requirement needed by any act of knowledge that is supposed to be absolute and indefeasible in its certainty.

It has been stated that the two traditional views are not at all incorrect but only limited in scope. One legitimate question could be: how is it possible that that part of the *Symposium* and the notion of εἶδος can be meant in a third way? In part, the whole work is an attempt to elaborate such this third way, but in part something must be said by the end of this section. The substance/property dichotomy should be translated to a more Platonic way of thinking of that distinction. Forms have at least two features: first, they must explain how it is possible for anything to be in some way and how language can be used to state that way; second, they must represent a sort of absolute independence which means two things: Forms are determined by themselves and the constraints they express are,

⁷⁷ Cf. N. White, *Plato’s metaphysical epistemology*, in *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Richard Kraut (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 277-310: 290-1.

thanks to their self-determination, utterly inescapable. How the two points are two sides of the same coin will be considered in the last chapter of this work. Such a translation of the dichotomy does not forsake the exegetical and theoretical value of the traditional views, but nonetheless does not bind us to accept the dichotomy within Plato's thought. We can say that the dichotomy is not what he was looking for, and, I think, nor, I think, is it what he should have.

This interpretation has been missed, because, as hinted above, there has been a relentless tendency to ascribe misunderstandings to Plato⁷⁸, which mainly regard logical and metaphysical subtle distinctions that Plato allegedly failed to recognise, pursuing to the extreme terms the absurdity deriving from that failure. Beyond any completeness, my point here is not to explore and comment on every proposal put forward so far. Referring to those charges of misunderstanding may be of use since I think they uncritically assume what I take to be the inner sense of this chapter: the strict cohesion of reality and language.⁷⁹ I will shortly consider two samples of the general trend: the position of N. White and that of J. Malcolm.

N. White asserts in his work *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* that Plato's theory of Forms is undermined by, or at least derives from, the problematic indistinction of the modern categories of Sense and Reference.⁸⁰ His argument is double-headed and may be summarised as follows:

⁷⁸ Cf. T. Penner, *The Ascent from Nominalism: Some Existence Arguments in Plato's Middle Dialogues*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht 1987, who uses (p. XIII) the sharp phrase: "Age of diagnosticism".

⁷⁹ In these terms another emblematic criticism raised against Plato is spelt out by G. E. L. Owen, *Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present*, «The Monist», 50 (1966), pp. 317-40:336 «What is wrong, I think, can be put very shortly. It is that to be tensed or tenseless is a property of statements and not of things». According to Owen, Plato tries to lead the distinction between tensed and tenseless statements back to the more familiar distinction between the changeless and the changing. Owen says that this move is utterly wrong, for to be tenseless or tensed is a property of statements and not of things. Such a charge is indeed philosophically sharp and prolific, not only in accusing Plato, but also useful, in a more constructive sense, to highlight the starting-point of his philosophy: the realistic commitment of every cognitive effect that that reality has on it.

⁸⁰ Cf. N. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1976, p141 «It is abundantly clear that Plato thinks that a name may do more than simply direct our attention, as it were, to an object, but may also in some

Plato fails to distinguish Naming and Describing insofar as the notion of Form is supposed to account for two things:

- 1) The fact that a general term is meaningful entails that it refers to an existing entity as if it were a proper name;
- 2) The fact that a general term is meaningful entails that there must be at least one entity of which it must be true.

The entity in question is obviously the εἶδος which is, according to White, named by a general term (predicate) as though it were a proper name. Moreover, the general term is also true of it, that is, such an entity possesses the property referred to by the general term. This is problematic because if the general term is a predicate, that is the term corresponding to properties, the mistake would be that Plato did not recognise how such a term can be meaningful without being compelled to include an entity in our ontology in the same way as proper names do towards named entities. Thus, this ambiguous goat-stag, the metaphysical item εἶδος, is considered, for purely semantic reasons, both a substance and a property since it works like a property but exists like a substance: the sort of objects that populate reality is determined by the nature of the linguistic means which in turn we use more or less consciously.

In the second case it is not at all different; a general term is meaningful only if it is also true of at least one thing. The best candidate is obviously the εἶδος insofar as it is eternal and changeless; then if something is true of it, it will always be true of it. If we join the two misunderstandings we come up with another version of the Self-Predication: for any general term to be meaningful, the existence of an entity which is named by the term must be admitted and then it must be admitted that the property which constitutes the meaning of the term must also be instantiated, perhaps perfectly by the entity itself. So the entity must be both substance and

sense contain some information about features which the object possesses [...] he [*scil.* Plato] tends to think that because the expression “large” can, in his view, be used to refer to the Form of the Large, it must therefore also describe that object, so that our referring to the object by means of that expression forces us to say simultaneously that the Form is itself a large object».

property and those two natures are also related. This happens only for semantic reasons: first, because what Plato is really aiming at is to provide an account of the nature and function of predicates; second, because in doing so, under specific epistemological assumptions, he fails to recognise the fundamental difference between Naming and Describing or Denoting and Connoting.⁸¹

According to J. Malcolm in his detailed work *Plato on Self-Predication of Forms*,⁸² Plato did not fail to distinguish how to properly use words for naming and describing, but at a deeper level he failed to distinguish (at least until the *Parmenides*) universals and paradigmatic cases. In such a way that giving answer to questions about the identity of a certain property is the same as providing a thing which perfectly instantiates that property. Therefore, for Malcolm Plato's theory requires that Forms are both universals and paradigmatic cases, even if they turn out to be inconsistent, strongly relying on the third man regress as a key to deciphering the notion of εἶδος. The Self-predication appears then as a curse and a blessing of the fundamental Platonic endeavour. Relocating the source of confusion at the metaphysical side *contra* White, Malcolm falls victim to the same theoretical prejudice: substance/property dichotomy is simply the only possible framework within which Plato's philosophy makes sense.

I chose those two examples because I think they emblematically represent two intermingled assumptions that I want to reject:

- i) The theory of Forms' main task is accounting for the meaning of predicates;

⁸¹ This kind of objection is seminally opened by the brilliant work of G. Ryle, cf. *Plato's Parmenides*, «Mind» 48 (1939), pp. 129-51: p.148 (Rpt. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, op cit, pp. 97-148) «The name of a quality or relation cannot significantly occur as the subject of an attributive or relational sentence. Abstract nouns cannot assume the roles of proper names or demonstratives». Cf. also G. Ryle, *Systematically Misleading Expressions*, «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society», XXXII 1932, (Rpt. in Id., *Collected Papers: Volume 2*, Routledge, London e New York, 2009, pp. 41-65:49-51).

⁸² J. Malcolm, *Plato on the Self-predication of Forms*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991, where he explores throughout the volume the possibility of whether Platonic Forms are either universals (F) or things or both. He considers whether: Forms are no things at all; Forms are things that are F equivocally with regard to sensible things that are F, and Forms are things that are F univocally with sensible things being F.

- ii) The substance/property dichotomy is so inescapable that it is preferable to take Forms to be both, even if they are inconsistent.

In the case of (i), it must be stated that the theory of Ideas is not tasked merely with accounting for predication. As we have seen in the *Physiology* of εἶδος, predication comes from the entire theoretical building that enquiries over the function of the εἶδος. The whole theory cannot be reduced to a description of the fundamental logical move, however crucial it may be. In a certain sense, we shall see how the possibility of speaking of reality is the basic need of a great part of the Platonic endeavour, but this in no way implies that the theory of Ideas is exquisitely equivalent to a theory describing the basic logical mechanism of predication.

In the case of (ii), the interpretation presented in this chapter overtly figures as a third way. We shall now consider some criticism against the traditional dichotomy before addressing what I consider the right order of problems faced by Plato. To begin with, two distinct deficiencies arise from the statement that sensible things imperfectly resemble or instantiate Forms. Once again the hybrid nature of Forms is at work. These two senses of imperfection may be labelled intensity and extensity.⁸³ A thing may be imperfect because it is F only to a certain degree, whereas the Form is F to a maximum degree. This gradualism does not immediately refer to intensively quantifiable magnitudes in the common sense such as temperature;⁸⁴ the very example from the *Symposium* expresses, in the traditional framework, precisely this point: beautiful deeds or customs are more beautiful than beautiful bodies and the scale ends with the Beauty which is in maximum degree beautiful, and then more beautiful than everything else. In the case of extensity, we are faced with Forms, such as the Form of Bee and the Form of Ox⁸⁵, which do not allow for any gradualism: either something is a bee or it is not. What would then the imperfection consist in? It is a matter of extension in time: sensible things can always change or be destroyed, thus they turn out to be imperfect if

⁸³ There is a foreshadowing of this distinction in A. Marmodoro, *Is Being One Only One? The Uniqueness of Platonic Forms*, op. cit., p. 221.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Phil.* 24b-d.

⁸⁵ Those Forms are genuinely Platonic examples cf. *Men.* 72b and *Phil.* 15a4-5.

compared to eternal beings. It is easy to notice how this ambiguity about the imperfection of the sensible domain amounts to the two traditional conceptions sketched above. The imperfection conceived of as impossibility to reach the perfection of the original fits in the paradigmatic case view, whereas the imperfection as limited duration works under the assumption that Forms are transcendent properties. This makes it harder, if possible, to correctly evaluate the status of sensible things in Plato's theory by making the nature of Forms more ambiguous.

As we have seen in both cases, namely that Forms are either paradigmatic cases, partaken of or resembled by sensible things, or properties existing independently of them, there is one demanding assumption: that sensible things somehow enjoy an ontologically autonomous existence. We will be dealing more extensively with the nature of sensible domain later on, but for the time being it must be stated that thinking of things as partially autonomous with respect to Forms is an Aristotelian anachronism. As we have seen throughout the *Physiology of εἶδος*, strictly speaking, there cannot be anything without Forms. Sensible individuals are not able to exist, or, to put it better, appear/occur in time and space, if they are not somehow determined, and every determination means already undergoing the ontological function of Forms.⁸⁶ An evocative statement of the most basic Platonic assumption may be that there is no presence without identity. The Aristotelian anachronism rests on the fact that once things are thought of as substances the very theoretical purpose of the theory of Forms loses most of its significance. The notion of thing is then broadly problematic, in that what we think things commonly are cannot be shared by Plato, and Forms are no things, not only in the Platonic sense, otherwise his entire project would not make sense, but also Forms are not things according to our conception of what being a thing actually is. Thus, the very notion of thing, like many traditional dichotomies, does not properly frame Plato's philosophy.

⁸⁶ Cf. A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence*, op. cit., p. 144 «Participation between a particular and a Form does not “tie” or “add” a property to an *independently existing object*, an object that would or could exist prior to any Participation in might engage in. Rather, Participation is what gives the particular any and all of its properties; it somehow brings about the particular. Participation, therefore, would not be a relation holding between one *object*, the particular, and a second, a Form».

Even if it were not constrained to change, a sensible thing's precariously quiet determination would not be ontologically autonomous enough to be able to guarantee stable knowledge. The accounts above do not explain properly the feature of "itselfness". As I have just hinted at, many classical dualisms are not applicable to Plato. First of all, the realism/idealism pair. Perhaps by being both, Plato is neither. He is strongly realist of course. As we shall see in the third chapter, even the subjectivist Protagoras is committed to the view that it is nonetheless reality that which always changes, in order to account for the transient experience of living subjects. The objectivistic assumption irredeemably flows through Greek veins. But in the case of Plato, reality is given a primacy to the extent that it supports cognition and ultimately can be known. A flaw of traditional theories is mistaking the need of making sense of the world for propounding a theory of predication, even when the latter is the first move of the former. Making sense of the world means not only saying what it is like but also thematising by which means we say it and how we have arrived at it. One and the same move is conceiving of reality in its purely autonomous form and theorising about the instrument and modality used to reach it, and as a result such an instrument is given a place within that reality itself.

Possibly, an authentic ambiguity or problematic (in)distinction shows in the view labelled at the beginning as "cohesion". There is an inner relation between the meaning of linguistic units and knowledge. Plato is crystal clear when he says that knowledge does not come out of the pure manipulation of words, whether it be etymological or eristic. Contrarily, denying this is one of the main theoretical components of his realism. But delivering every proper content of knowledge to an intelligible dimension, in the definitional practice distinguishing the meaning of the general term from the intelligible reality referred to turns out to be dodgy.⁸⁷ This ambiguity will accompany us until the last chapter, where we will have been provided with the instruments to see whether it can be solved or not. For now, we can notice how this troublesome distinction harks back to the double nature of knowledge, both visual and logical (in a broad sense).

⁸⁷ To formulate it in modern terms: the analytic/synthetic distinction does not apply (at least not easily).

But what is the real problem Plato is facing when he works out his theory? Once predication and substance are excluded as the main goals of his enquiry, what is left? Once again I believe that Calogero's account presented at the beginning of the chapter leads us correctly. Plato is essentially after the ontological conditions of intelligibility of reality. He tries to see how reality must be in order to be comprehensible, pushing this assumption so far that intelligibility itself altogether qualifies being. The range of this conceptual revolution is enormous. Plato managed to establish the systematic discourse as such: how things stand by themselves. His question remains: what does it mean for anything to be real? The entire intelligible domain is built, and it appears to be a logical construction, not in the sense that it only exists in thought or exquisitely deals with the conditions of correctness of inferences; on the contrary, the logical dimension identifies a conceptual/linguistic place where reality shows its own distinctive character. This is the first implication of the intelligibility of reality, namely that language is linked to being in such a way that what we say is naturally a bearing on reality.⁸⁸ This does not mean that whatever we say is true, it rather means that through careful and proper use of discourses we hook up with reality. Recalling the case of White's criticism, the alleged conflation of sense and reference, I believe Plato's point to be the meta-question: not just looking for how things are starting from the fact that we talk about them, but rather why we can effectively talk about them and, above all, why it is only through language and thought that we can grasp them properly. The objectivistic prejudice is so deeply rooted that the reason for this amounts to the nature of reality itself. By this I do not mean that such a prejudice is mistaken; it is, on the contrary, particularly persuasive in that the prominence of reality at the heart of Plato's analysis accounts for the fact -very well-known by the Greek men, who got significantly used and aware of the inscrutability of fate- that reality expresses the constraint of what is out of the ken of human-being. And yet in Plato's case, the indomitability of reality never becomes the alienation of

⁸⁸ Cf. A. Graeser, *On Language, Thought, and Reality in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 368 «What the "Theory of Forms" is meant to do is to answer to some kind of proto-Kantian inquiry into the condition of the possibility of significant discourse in general». In principle, I do not stand against this statement, without ever forgetting, however, that the solution cannot but be ontological.

the tragic hero into obscurity and non-sense. Instead, it traces back to an august and venerable order.

As we shall see better and as we have already hinted at a bit, reality is not only connected to language in that it confers content (that is truth-values) to it, but it also determines its form. What remains the same in different experiences of the same kind is that in virtue of which those experiences appear. It looks as if the generality of terms alone resembles the structure Plato ascribes to reality. If used in a precise way, language delivers us to being. But also the sensible domain itself is at a lower degree expressible since it is caused by the authentic being. In this way sensible things are also describable, as temporarily as they last, damaging in this case any claim to certainty. Forms figure as the answer given to the question about the intelligibility of reality. If the real problem consists in understanding reality in such a way that it is knowable and can plainly be made sense of, the real solution is a new way of being, which is the εἶδος. Possibly, Plato's metaphysics appears to be a phenomenology of "itselfness" qua absolute independence. In my humble opinion, what is commonly missed is precisely the fact that to Plato's eye to have a determination *is* an ontological task. In other words, the constraining norm of reality consists above all in determining what is, *i.e.* how to determine, everything that appears or in general may be experienced. Being constrains any relation we entertain with it, *especially* at the level of cognition. That is why technical endeavour turns out to be heuristically and theoretically remarkable. In the next chapter, a deeper analysis of the foundations of the theory will be made. At the same time, an examination will be led to into how these foundations emerge from a theoretical evaluation of both technical knowledge and practice.

Chapter Two

A way into Plato's Ontology: Nature and Technique

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold: on the one hand, it sets out to cast light on the most profound level of the ontological difference which is the basis of the εἶδος/appearance distinction. In order to do that, three interconnected aspects of the notion of εἶδος shall be considered all of which are specific combinations of nature, time and presence. The notions in question are the verb in the perfect form “πεφυκέναι” denoting the way in which nature is ontologically prior to any activity or belief; the well-known notion of παράδειγμα, which means model, employed by Plato to express, more or less metaphorically, the role of original played by Forms once they are replicated by sensible things; and τέλος, the goal aimed at by sensible things or in everyday activity which presents an explicit ontological function. It will emerge how those three notions share a common ground. Moreover, in treating the semi-technical notions employed by Plato in this context, it will emerge how deeply rooted the prominence of metaphysical realism is in his philosophy.

On the other hand, the subject of the ontological value of Plato's conception of technique will be broached.⁸⁹ This concept is of immense value to Plato because technical activity first illustrates paradigmatically the mode and effects in regulating cognition of any εἶδος whatsoever, and then because the technical activity itself expresses a strong normativity recognised by common sense and requiring ontological attention. A provisional definition of the Platonic notion of technique could be as follows: a procedure performed according to fixed natural principles whose steps are optimised and outcome certain. The effectiveness of the products, which derives from having followed the rules of the procedures according to fixed principles, is the first appearance, still within the scope of sensible things, of the necessity in which reality consists.

Technique is double-sided in being at the same time a poietic activity and a recognition of intelligible (and then theoretical) principles underlying that activity. Thus, the theoretical need for the εἶδος falls twice in the scope of τέχνη: firstly, because, in technical endeavour, real necessity guides the poietic act. Rules must be followed in order to succeed. Technique represents how things stand metaphysically also regarding non-technical realities because it shows how reality needs to be considered as a source of normativity. Secondly, because the first appearance of objectivity is given within human experience on operational and pragmatic grounds: to experience the effectiveness of the technical rule-following process makes the souls wise enough to notice it, aware of the need to account for it theoretically (and hence metaphysically). Only that which is done according to the nature of what is, is able to exert an effect in the world.

The double task of the present chapter does not derive from mere juxtaposition. The two threads are textually and theoretically intertwined. In this chapter, I focus on the first passages of the *Cratylus* because this dialogue is representative of a broader Platonic conception concerning

⁸⁹ I have chosen the term “technique” instead of “art”, “skill” or “craft” for the Greek term τέχνη in order to keep together two semantic aspects of the term: the specific knowledge of certain principles or forms required by any properly technical activity and the expertise deriving from knowing those principles as belonging to a realistically objective dimension. For a very detailed examination of the term τέχνη cf. A. Balansard, *Technè dans les Dialogues de Platon: l’empreinte de la sophistique*, Academia, Sankt Augustin 2001, pp. 13-45. For a very remarkable study regarding the concept of technique in Plato cf. G. Cambiano, *Platone e le tecniche*, Einaudi, Torino 1971.

Forms and technique. As will be clear in a short while, Plato, in treating his conception of instrument and intelligible principles of technical activity, resorts to the three notions hinted at above. Thereafter, we shall turn to the *Republic*, especially book X, already touched on in the last chapter, which is terminologically and theoretically significantly analogous to the first part of *Cratylus*; proof of this is also the presence in both contexts of the user/producer distinction which will be properly dealt with. However, it must be kept in mind that the following pages are not meant to be only an interpretation of those textual places, but rather the explication of ontologically fundamental features of the εἶδος derived from a complex and prolonged Platonic cogitation on ontology and technique. The last task of this chapter is a final brief survey as to how, within technical experience, the many themes previously treated are conjoined to the extent that such experience conveys a precise metaphysical view significantly consistent with the notion of εἶδος.

1) Πεφυκέναι

To begin with, we consider a passage from the *Cratylus*. As is well-known, in this dialogue are contrasted two views regarding the nature of names and of naming, traditionally labelled conventionalism and naturalism,⁹⁰ maintained by Hermogenes and Cratylus, respectively. In this earlier passage of the dialogue Socrates is arguing with Hermogenes, maintaining that the names that we use cannot be merely a matter of convention. By contrast, everything has its name “naturally”. To cut a long story short, the concept of nature is crucial to Plato’s thought (and to this section) as it is in the context of the dialogue; however, although it seems that the Platonic discourse winks at the naturalism defended by Cratylus⁹¹, mainly for the sake of rejecting Hermogenes’ conventionalism as the final part of the dialogue will demonstrate, Plato’s and Cratylus’ points of view are unredeemably and incompatibly different. The part that we are about to

⁹⁰ For a more cogent labelling of these theories in terms of intrinsicness (naturalism) and extrinsicness (conventionalism) of names with respect to the named thing cf. Platone, *Cratilo*, Introduzione e note di F. Aronadio, Laterza, Bari-Roma 2008, p. XIII.

⁹¹ T. Baxter contends that the difference lies in that “Cratylus stresses the objective correctness of names, Socrates emphasizes the objective reality of the *nominata*” cf. T. Baxter, *The Cratylus: Plato’s Critique of Naming*, Brill, Leiden 1992, pp. 38-9.

discuss is one of the few valuable parts, and indeed, the fewer the more valuable, where Plato clearly introduces some of his deep convictions. In associating conventionalism—the view according to which names are given purely by a conventional, and then reversible at will, stipulation—to Protagoras’ view, Plato is exploiting the present context to reject relativism or subjectivism about reality.⁹² Protagoreanism claims that “things are to me as they appear to me”. Plato needs this view to make more explicit his realist stance, conceived of precisely as the strict denial of the view that how things are depend on a particular experience or opinion about them. Plato introduces his own doctrine about a stable reality able to lead judgements to the truth of how things stand. Consider this first quotation:

«But if neither is right, if it isn’t the case that everything always has every attribute simultaneously or that each thing has a being or essence privately for each person, then it is clear that things have some fixed being or essence of their own. They are not in relation to us and are not made to fluctuate by how they appear to us. They are by themselves, in relation to their own being or essence, which is theirs by nature.»⁹³
(transl. C. D. C. Reeve)⁹⁴

The views opposed by Socrates are as untenable as they are opposed to each other. If everything that is is how it appears to be to someone, and if everything that is has every attribute in such a way that no one is wrong about it, then there is no way in which one belief is better (preferable, more reliable) than another. The first view goes back to Protagoras; the second view goes back to Euthydemus who in the homonymous dialogue contends

⁹² Plato’s critical encounter with Protagoras will be treated of in the next chapter, focusing on the more developed version of the latter’s doctrine as it is presented in the *Theaetetus*. It is worth noting that the ontological reflections conducted in the *Cratylus*, if we take, as I do, the *Cratylus* to be an earlier dialogue than the *Theaetetus*, together with the reference to Protagoras, show how the critical effect of the sophist is extended in time and how the conceptual resources in matters of ontology are already present in the earlier dialogue.

⁹³ *Crat.* 386d8-e4 «οὐκοῦν εἰ μήτε πᾶσι πάντα ἐστὶν ὁμοίως ἅμα καὶ ἀεὶ, μήτε ἐκάστῳ ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ἐστίν, δῆλον δὴ ὅτι αὐτὰ αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ἔχοντά τινα βέβαιόν ἐστι τὰ πράγματα, οὐ πρὸς ἡμᾶς οὐδὲ ὑφ’ ἡμῶν ἐλκόμενα ἄνω καὶ κάτω τῷ ἡμετέρῳ φαντάσματι, ἀλλὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ πρὸς τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ἔχοντα ἢπερ πέφυκεν».

⁹⁴ All the translations of the *Cratylus* in this chapter are Reeve’s.

that everything that we say is true since falsity, coinciding with saying that which is not (or is not the case) is utterly impossible since under Eleatic assumptions not-being is impossible. This reference is once again relevant because the same problem will be dealt with by Plato in the *Sophist*, showing how strictly issues in ontology, epistemology and linguistic reference are related, ranging across the entire production of the philosopher of Athens across the decades. Overseeing the detail of Plato's argument against those views, it is worth noting how the only possibility left is that reality has in itself some fixed being. This realist stance is Plato's starting-point leading straightaway to Forms. The third option which acknowledges that reality has a stable essence hinges on the notion of nature. Notoriously, the term for nature in Greek is "φύσις", a noun derived from the application of the suffix -σις (called *nomen actionis*) to the stem of the verb "φύω" which means both "to bring forth" and "to grow". It is worth noting the more immediate connection of the noun with the verb, if compared to modern languages. Scholarly debate has been vast;⁹⁵ for the present purpose, we should just consider that "φύσις" can mean at least three things: a specific process, the outcome of that process and the criterion according to which that process has happened. The process copes with the dynamic of growth or generation.⁹⁶ From the very beginning the Greek concept of nature acquires, among others, the value of criterion and measure of what dwells in the realm of becoming and, at the same time, is not immediately affected by that becoming.

Stability occupies the central position in the quotation. Employing a phrase Plato uses few lines above in the *Cratylus*, we are faced with the

⁹⁵ For the etymology of the term and a discussion of its single occurrence in Homer (*Od.* X 302-3) cf. G. Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2005, pp. 11-14.

⁹⁶ These two values of the term that at first glance seem too heterogeneous are in fact smartly connected by A. Macé, *La naissance de la nature en Grèce ancienne*, in S. Haber A. Macé (eds), *Anciens et Modernes par-delà nature et société*, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, Besançon 2012, pp. 47-84, who says that the distinctive character and the process of growth are connected, insofar as the growth follows a pattern and the pattern is expressed by (or consists in) the stable recursions of the growing reality. The author also presents a different discussion of the unique occurrence of φύσις in Homer that I agree with more.

βεβαιοτήσ τῆσ οὐσίας,⁹⁷ stability of being/essence. The only valid alternative to either delivering to single experiences everything that is or conceiving of reality as populated by impossible contradictions is assuming that reality enjoys an absolute degree of independence. Reality is not relative to us as to what it is, and it is not determined by τῷ ἡμετέρῳ φαντάσματι, *i.e.* its semblance to us or the way it is represented in/by us. We shall address the complex notion of appearance/manifestation in the next chapter. The οὐσία is ascribed to things (πράγματα) that are (as they are) καθ' αὐτὰ, by themselves. We obviously recognise the semi-technical phrase discussed in the Anatomy of εἶδος. The last word of the quotation appears to be crucial and radically innovative with regard to the discourse already presented in the last chapter. The word in question is “πέφυκεν”. It is the perfect form of the verb “φύω”. Most notably, among the many differences entertained by the ancient Greek language and modern European languages is the fact that ancient Greek prioritises the grammatical aspect. The aspect is a grammatical category expressing how an action or an event, denoted by a verb, extends over time: «aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation».⁹⁸ The perfect form of the verb is the kind of temporal constituency in which the action is already completed but whose effect still has an influence on the present situation. We have already seen⁹⁹ a significant instance of the perfect form of the verb “ὄρώ” (to see), recall “οἶδα”, which means “to know”. The effect of having seen in the past is so significant that the perfect form means “(now) I know that/of”.

So, the question is now: how philosophically significant are the semantic field of the verb “φύω” and the perfect form as it is instantiated by the term “πεφυκέναι” taken jointly? The common meaning of “πεφυκέναι” in the *Liddell Scott Jones* is “to be formed or disposed by

⁹⁷ *Crat.* 386a4 cf. also Platone, *Cratilo*, Introduzione e note di F. Aronadio, op. cit., p. XXXIV; F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, p. 87 who reads “stability” to be a metaphor for “subject-independent, objective”. The term “βεβαιοτήσ” comes from the perfect form “βεβήκειν”, which means “to stand”, of the verb “βαίνω”, which means “to walk, step”, and is consistent with our treatment of the perfect form of “φύω” in this section.

⁹⁸ C. Comrie, *Aspect*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976, p. 3, who in turn refers to J. Holt, *Etudes d'aspect*, Acta Jutlandica 1 5.2, 1943, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Cf. Chapter One p. 21.

nature”, but it is also employed impersonally to mean “it happens naturally” or “as is natural” (ὡς πέφυκε). As we have already seen in the case of the εἶδος, Plato takes over the common meaning of the term without ever severing the connection that his technical meaning entertains with the common one. Thus, the general meaning of being disposed by nature turns into a specific value, pregnant with philosophical implications.¹⁰⁰ There is a significant occurrence of “πέφυκέναι” in that passage of the *Phaedrus* where Socrates is talking about the correct procedure of enquiry:

«This, in turn, is to be able to cut up each kind according to its species along its natural joints, and to try not to splinter any part, as a bad butcher might do.»¹⁰¹ (transl. by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

The way in which the natural joints of reality are natural is expressed by “ἢ πέφυκεν”, where we see how the ontological priority of the natural predisposition is the key thought on which hinge two sides of the argument: on the one hand, the possibility of a classification or in general an ordered

¹⁰⁰ As far as I know, the subject has been given small relevance in the literature except for F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone (Menone Cratilo Repubblica)*, op. cit., pp. 141-49, and a hint in F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., p.99 n. 10, where the author compares the value of “ἐπεφύκει” to “a sort of timeless present” (the intuition is of value, but as we shall see in a moment, it is rather to be conceived as a timeless past) and D. Frede, *Forms, Functions and Structure in Plato*, in R. Patterson V. Karasmanis A. Hermann (eds.), *Presocratics and Plato: Festschrift at Delphi in Honor of Charles Kahn*, Parmenides Publishing, Las Vegas 2012, pp. 367-390:376 n. 18; the subject has also been treated tangentially in the first part of B. Calvert, *Forms and Flux in Plato’s Cratylus*, «Phronesis», 15 (1970), pp. 26-47:26-34 and E. Heitsch, *Platons Sprachphilosophie im Kratylus: Überlegungen 383a4-b2 und 387b10-390a8*, «Hermes», 113 (1985), pp. 44-62; for an agreeable discussion of the last paper cf. F. Aronadio, *I fondamenti della riflessione di Platone sul linguaggio: il Cratilo*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2011, p. 61 n. 77; for a brilliant comparison with Aristotle cf. M. Isnardi Parente, *Techne. Momenti del pensiero greco da Platone ad Epicuro*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1966, pp 118-121.

¹⁰¹ *Phaedrus* 265e «τὸ πάλιν κατ’ εἶδη δύνασθαι διατέμνειν κατ’ ἄρθρα ἢ πέφυκεν, καὶ μὴ ἐπιχειρεῖν καταγνῶναι μέρος μηδέν, κακοῦ μαγείρου τρόπῳ χρώμενον». The crucial relevance of the cutting metaphor is being set aside here. We are concentrating here just on the being-natural (phrase that is strictly speaking redundant) of reality compared to animal’s limbs. For a presentation of the essential literature on the later Method of Division with regard to this passage cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, Translation by Robert Waterfield, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, pp.99-100. Cf. also N. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, op. cit., pp. 117-130.

reality, and, on the other hand, the possibility of error and inadequacy of distinctions. There are some things that are by themselves, and, in enjoying such status, the way those things are is, in pure autonomy, only determined by their nature, unrelated to any other factor but how they happen to be in virtue of themselves. This is the general characterisation of the εἶδος already given.

What new thing is taken into account? In the context of the *Cratylus* Socrates draws an inference: if something has its own nature, then any action, which is a way of dealing with it, has in turn its own nature.¹⁰² Let us consider then how Plato's discourse in the dialogue proceeds:

«So an action's performance accords with the action's own nature, and not with what we believe. Suppose, for example, that we undertake to cut something. If we make the cut in whatever way we choose and with whatever tool we choose, we will not succeed in cutting. But if in each case we choose to cut in accord with the nature of cutting and being cut and with the natural tool for cutting, we'll succeed and cut correctly. If we try to cut contrary to nature, however, we'll be in error and accomplish nothing.»¹⁰³

Previous to any possible (inter)action towards the world, the world itself must have definite conditions of identity able to rule whatever activity that relates us to it. Consider the first line: «κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν ἄρα φύσιν καὶ αἱ πράξεις πράττονται, οὐ κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν δόξαν.» Actions perform something (with the paronomasia: αἱ πράξεις πράττονται, actions act) only under the *prescription*¹⁰⁴ of nature (κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν ἄρα φύσιν, in this case Plato employs the noun “φύσις”). To make it more complex, the term itself

¹⁰² D. Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*, op. cit., p. 57; V. Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le "Cratyle"*, Vrin, Paris 1982, pp. 55-6.

¹⁰³ *Crat.* 387a1-8 «κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν ἄρα φύσιν καὶ αἱ πράξεις πράττονται, οὐ κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν δόξαν. οἷον ἐάν τι ἐπιχειρήσωμεν ἡμεῖς τῶν ὄντων τέμνειν, πότερον ἡμῖν τμητέον ἐστὶν ἕκαστον ὡς ἂν ἡμεῖς βουλώμεθα καὶ ᾧ ἂν βουληθῶμεν, ἢ ἐάν μὲν κατὰ τὴν φύσιν βουληθῶμεν ἕκαστον τέμνειν τοῦ τέμνειν τε καὶ τέμνεσθαι καὶ ᾧ πέφυκε, τεμοῦμέν τε καὶ πλέον τι ἡμῖν ἔσται καὶ ὀρθῶς πράξομεν τοῦτο, ἐὰν δὲ παρὰ φύσιν, ἐξαμαρτησόμεθά τε καὶ οὐδὲν πράξομεν;»

¹⁰⁴ I write in italics the prefix “pre-” because it expresses, from the Latin word *praescriptio*, the sense of being written/determined *in advance*, that is precisely the sense in use.

for thing in ancient Greek is “πράγμα” which is the *nomen rei actae* of the verb “πράσσω” (or “πράττω” in Attic, which is Plato’s dialect), that is to say that the very notion of achievement is inscribed into the morphology of the term. Such a notion, as we have seen, is contrasted with that of opinion: what we believe. The Greek term in question is obviously “δόξα”. We shall look at it more closely in the next chapter, but for now it is worth recalling that the term “δόξα” is the noun of the verb “δοκείν” that mainly means “to seem”. It is obviously connected to the term “φάντασμα” present in the first quotation. Thus, the initial contrast of nature and opinion/impression¹⁰⁵ is legitimised in the evaluation of the action’s outcome. If an action is performed according to its fixed nature, then something is *really* being done/performed.¹⁰⁶ Otherwise, the pretention to reality of the practice in question remains at the level of mere *appearance*. One believes that she is doing something but in fact she is not. Contrary to nature, there is no possibility of doing anything. In the last quotation there is one occurrence of the term “πεφυκέναι” (ᾧ πέφυκε), related to the tool naturally predisposed for a certain activity.

It is worth noting how precisely Plato specifies how nature regulates any activity as much in the active diathesis as in the mediopassive. If nature regulates a certain activity, it is one and the same as nature’s determining as well what happens in (or is acted on by) that activity. This correlation has a very long and complex development in Plato’s dialogues that we will be touching on later in connection with the notion of δύναμις. For now, it must only be made clear that everything in practical endeavour is ruled by specific conditions of identity belonging to natural predispositions. To conclude this first part of the analysis of the notion of πεφυκέναι, one more quotation must be included. As hinted above, in the *Cratylus* names are literally considered as instruments, in such a way that the arguments put

¹⁰⁵ I take the term “impression” to be a suitable translation for δόξα, since it retains a bit of sensory aspect and at the same time figures in expressions of belief such as “my impression is that...”. An interesting translation is the German *Meinung*, which echoes the personal pronoun *mein*, stressing the personal aspect of belief. So Hegel in the *Einleitung* of the *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. REFERENCE. For the sake of completeness, I would add that a good Italian translation could be “parere” because it is both a verb of appearance and a noun whose meaning is “opinion”.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., p 98 who states that Plato considers here only the radical alternative between succeeding and not succeeding in cutting something.

forward about cutting also fit perfectly in the case of names. We will consider this equivalence below; for now I want to focus on the framework of the argument:

«Then will someone speak correctly if he speaks in whatever way he believes he should speak? Or isn't rather the case that he will accomplish (ποιήσει) something and succeed in speaking if he says things in the natural way to say them, in the natural way for them to be said, and with the natural tool for saying them? But if he speaks in any other way he will be in error and accomplish (ποιήσει) nothing?»¹⁰⁷

The structure of the argument is basically the same: the action of saying/speaking (a few lines later the same will be said of naming) qua action requires a fixed extra-doxastic identity which rules how we say things and how they are to be said. But here there is another term: “ποιήσει”. Frequently the term “πράσσω” and the term “ποιέω” have the same translation, that is “to do/make”, but the latter also means “to craft”.¹⁰⁸ The distinction at issue here may express the difference between act and product, that will come up, significantly because it is problematic, in our discussion of the notion of τέλος. For now, it should be noted that in the last two quotations there is a shift from the requirements of a real action and the production of a real outcome. If we take the verb “ποιέω” to mean “to produce” or “to craft”, then we see how an act of speaking really produces something, that is meaningful names, only if the natural requirements for that act are met. Thus, the last two passages differ only in the emphasis put, on the one hand, on what conditions entitle an action to be really an action, and, on the other hand, on what conditions entitle a product to be really a product.

One more thing may be added, the verb “ποιέω” is also significant in this context because Socrates is talking about words. Still the English word

¹⁰⁷ *Crat.* 387b11-c4 «πότερον οὖν ἢ ἂν τῷ δοκῆ λεκτέον εἶναι, ταύτη λέγων ὀρθῶς λέξει, ἢ εἰ μὲν ἢ πέφυκε τὰ πράγματα λέγειν τε καὶ λέγεσθαι καὶ ᾧ, ταύτη καὶ τοῦτο λέγει, πλέον τέ τι ποιήσει καὶ ἐρεῖ: ἂν δὲ μή, ἐξαμαρτήσεται τε καὶ οὐδὲν ποιήσει;».

¹⁰⁸ The notorious Aristotelean distinction between the two focuses on an aspect that is also relevant in this context cf. *Etic. Nic.* 1139a35-b4.

“poetry” echoes its ancient origin: the prime example of the form of production is ποιητική, poetic. To the ancient Greek speaker, this connection is vividly at hand. Indeed, the ancient Greek poet is the prime example of one producing something, insofar as he speaks, because the preeminent form of production is accomplished by means of words. But, of course, Plato’s point of view is irredeemably distant from the traditional or Sophistic conception he is struggling against. The main message delivered in the *Cratylus* is probably that words are productive insofar as one is deriving them from reality. To actually accomplish something is then both on the side of acting and on the side of what is produced in that act. Therefore, the structure of the argument may be summarised as follows:

- 1) Actions do something only if they respect the nature of everything connected to them as independent of the very existence/occurrence of those actions.
- 2) The nature of actions is that of doing something.
- 3) Then, there is no real action apart from that which respects/is in accordance with the nature of everything connected to it in practice.

In these three points the key thought is the affirmation of realism. Experientially, one notes that reality constrains one’s activities, in particular technical work, that is when one is to operate within the world and aims at modifying it or producing something from it. The effectiveness of the product works as a test. What is asked for is the condition of a real act. In this way, act and product are inevitably connected and both acquire their legitimation through the naturally predisposed reality of their connection: an action is really that action if its product has a real effect; the real effect of the product is possible on the basis of the correctness of the action/production, which in turn is the case only if the natural predisposition of its context is respected. All of this makes sense only if we assume that both action and product have their own nature, which is something utterly independent from anything else, let alone human intendments and desires. Now we are more clearly faced with the role of this natural (pre)disposition precisely expressed by the term “πεφυκέναι”. If my reconstruction of the argument is correct, everything that is in the power of human beings is pervasively constrained by reality and what

human beings can do is somehow already present in the very nature of what is before it (in the double sense of before: previous in time and in the face of). If one undertakes to do something, that something is a certain event or, in the case of poetic activity, is a certain manifested thing; however, if we take it by itself we will be faced with its Form understood as the identity conditions described in the first chapter.

Anything that has been made, or better, the fact that it exists implies that the criterion according to which it has been made is not the made thing itself. And not only because everything that is made does not exist before being created, but also because, as emerges from the passage quoted, the nature of technical activity requires that (the content of) knowledge necessary to production is logically prior to the productive process and, above all, is not created at all. By this I do not mean that in every practical or productive activity everything need be clearly stated and reckoned with, but only that for anything crafted to work it must be made according to the objective nature of the purpose it is meant to accomplish. The objectivity of such content is maximal in that it depends only on itself and is not altered by any belief. So the best way to accomplish something is aiming at the content that enables one to judge whether any produced thing is suitable enough for the purpose it was created for. That intelligible purpose is prior to any concrete execution.

Now, what does this priority consist in? I think that Plato introduces a philosophically remarkable innovation. He spelt out a new way of intersecting nature and the past by articulating it by means of the perfect form of the verb.¹⁰⁹ Being predetermined or predisposed does not refer to a chronological past at all. There is no time when activities, materials and

¹⁰⁹ For the use of the perfect form of the verb close to the one under examination here cf. *Men.* 85e9 and 86a8. In this text there are two occurrences of the verb *μανθάνω* in the perfect form, where Plato maintains that if the soul is to be able to know, it must recollect something it has always already learned, even before being incarnated (i.e. before entering time and space). By this, I am not suggesting that Plato's theory of recollection is an implicit part of his elaboration of the notion of *πεφυκέναι* or vice versa, although at prima facie they seem to go the same direction. Advocating such a claim would need a dissertation on its own. The only thing I want to highlight is how the same linguistic device is made use of concerning a quite separate subject and at the same time it conveys a similar concept. Similarly, on the doctrine of recollection in the *Phaedo* cf. Platon, *Phédon*, présentation et traduction par M. Dixsaut, Flammarion, Paris 1991, p. 103.

instruments have acquired their nature, their determination, that is their inalienable identity in providing conditions, rules for their coming to be in single human endeavours. Even for the first Promethean man, who first discovered a certain action or invented a certain art, the necessity ruling the possibility and actualisation of that action or art was somehow prior to it, prior even to its discovery or invention.¹¹⁰ What I mean by this is that any single act is something determined in such a way that its being successful is possible against certain conditions, which are not in turn determined or caused by that very act. In fact, they are not caused by anything at all since every cause or production happens according to and in virtue of prior natural conditions.

It is not surprising that the only item, metaphysically speaking, that is bestowed upon such an ontologically prior status is the εἶδος. The Anatomy of the εἶδος entails that it is naturally predisposed. Forms constantly express that they are before everything we say, believe or do. As we have already said, being absolutely objective consists, among other things, in not being affected, with regard to the known content, by any cognitive event or act. The mentioned “being before” acts, whether they be practical or theoretical, must be characterised as non-chronological. I think that the unique junction of the perfect form of verbs with the specific semantic field of nature aims precisely at this: the εἶδος is something that is always already fully accomplished by nature. This obviously connects with the Anatomical feature of perfection as thorough completion. As it does with another Anatomical feature, namely Self-identity, insofar as the verbal perfect form sets forth that the process of completion has always already happened. For, as we have said, Self-identity states first of all that an εἶδος will never turn out to be different from what it is and has been. And if a Form’s identity is always already completed, then it is always going to be self-identical. Now, we can see that it is the case because the Form πέφυκε, viz. is as it is because it is so by nature, and at any time we grasp it we see that it already was as it is. To put it more clearly, the ontological priority belonging to the εἶδος plays at least two roles:

¹¹⁰ Similarly on this point cf. D. Frede, *Forms, Functions and Structure in Plato*, op. cit., p. 374.

- a) For any act, poietic, practical and theoretical, Forms constitute whatever norm¹¹¹ qualifies and rules the good success of it.
- b) For any experienced content, if it is known to be true, whatever it will turn out to be, it will have always been as it has turned out to be.

We must consider both points as strongly realist claims. And this is so because both points rely on the strongest notion of independence. In the case of (a), it is strongly realist because it considers the inner core of reality in its priority in constraining any operational endeavour. Whatever we do or believe is useful and successful as long as we act in accordance with external conditions of identity that regulate our production and give a measure to judge the goodness of our products. We shall see this point under a different light later in the chapter; for now, it need only be recognised how this task of reality is denoted and understood under the label of *πεφυκέναι* that can now be translated, in the specific case of the *εἶδος*, like this: being predisposed and determined by something's own nature.¹¹² As we have seen, one *Leitmotiv* of the present interpretation and, if it is indeed true, of Plato's philosophy, is the strict relationship between how being supports epistemic/cognitive acts and its metaphysical prerogatives. This aspect has weight also in the context at hand. That is the reason why I introduced point (b). In order to understand this point, it needs to be made explicit what I consider to be a pillar of philosophical realism, which I think is quite plausible. We can name it Priority of Reality Assumption (PRA):

If one experiences how things are/stand, and later she finds out that she was mistaken and that they actually stand in some other way, the basic realist intuition consists in the fact that the second way things stand has always been truly the case, even if she did not believe so, and that she was mistaken rather than that reality has changed.

¹¹¹ Cf. V. Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le "Cratyle"*, op. cit, p. 58, who chose to translate the term "νόμος" with the French term "norm".

¹¹² It is worth noting how this notion of nature is quite different from materialistic and physicalist accounts of nature as they are criticised by Plato himself cf. *Laws*. X 889b-c.

Suspending the discussion on the applicability of the notion of fact or state of affairs to Plato's ontology, and using the term "thing" loosely and not as denoting specifically sensible things of Plato's ontology, my contention is simply that the concept of *πεφυκέναι* is somehow related to this basic realist assumption. We will be analysing more thoroughly later on this assumption and how it relates to other issues such as the nature of experience and of falsity (both are fundamental elements in the argument). Here the focus is on the notion of ontological priority that makes the argument possible. Tying the *πεφυκέναι* to (PRA) makes sense in that in the former the perfect form of the verb, metaphysically taken, precisely expresses the realistic core of the latter. For anything to be it must be determined in some way; its identity is, in a general realist framework, independent of any belief regarding it. Looking at (PRA) we see that in rectifying a belief we are bound to consider the way things are as rectified in the new belief as if it has always been the case even when the believer did not know it or believed that something else was the case instead. This "has always been the case" is a kind of past utterly outside the becoming processes and in general the flow of time,¹¹³ because change is likely considered as change from previous conditions, but this ontologically prior conception of the past implies that there is no previous condition to it. It is already as it has always been. The perfect form, also present in the English

¹¹³ In modern jargon we could say that it is explanatorily and not temporally prior. However, I think in Plato's context it is best conceiving of it as strictly ontological since he is spelling out, using time as a metaphor, the prominence of being over becoming. In addition, in the formulation of PRA reference to time is mandatory insofar as there must be a change on the epistemic side. One passage where there seems to be a reflection upon the notion of explanatoriness in *Euphr.* 10a when Socrates asks whether the pious is being loved by the gods because it is pious or it is pious because it is loved by the gods. This argument has also caught the attention of the contemporary debate about Metaphysical Grounding cf. F. Correia B. Schnieder, *Grounding: an opinionated introduction*, in F. Correia B. Schnieder (eds.), *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 1-36 : 2-4. Furthermore, it is also reminiscent of the notorious Aristotelean phrase "τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι" as essential and/or timeless determination cf. *Metaph. Z*, 4; P. Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*, Puf, Paris 1962, pp.460-72; J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1951, pp. 180-88; G. Giannantoni, *Problemi di traduzione del linguaggio filosofico: il τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι aristotelico*, in S. Nicosia (a cura di), *La traduzione dei testi classici: Teoria Prassi Storia*, Atti del convegno di Palermo 6-9 Aprile 1988, D'Auria, Napoli 1991.

expression of the concept, denotes once again this past prior to the present, but, at the same time, neither passed away nor vanished. One could also object that a past event which is causally relevant to the present still plays a role in that it occupies an influential place in the causal chain. But the past at stake here has never happened, it has always been as it is at the end of the day. It is not a single event in the world and it is not extended in time.

This conception is the basis for a realist view of the world by providing knowledge with an ontological substratum for the known content or object. I think that this last thing is precisely the goal of Plato's manoeuvre in the development of theory of Forms. Being does not change because we change our mind about it.¹¹⁴ We still have something similar in our world-view. If we take universal statements, statements about natural kinds, laws of nature, or in general abstract entities, we see that the depicted reality does not change when we see that our theory or description is wrong or incomplete. Probably because such abstract entities do not change at all. But also in the case of descriptions of facts or states of affairs that occur in time, something similar stands out. For, if we believe something about concrete particulars, and we remain in a most general realistic conception of the world, they do not change because our belief about them changes. Also in the case of particulars, if they are allowed to have certain identity conditions, the fundamental "shift" of the perfect form of being contributes to the knowing process. If I see a person approaching and I think he is Theodorus, and then I see that he is Theaetetus, if we are to remain within a realist perspective, it is hardly the case that Theodorus has actually turned into someone else. It is a change which never happens and comes from a past out of time. In the core of whatever is real rests such a prominence of the past, or to put it more correctly, the prominence of the predetermination of what is with respect to our cognitive or operational efforts towards it.

Turning back to Plato's view, we still have to ask: how do (a) and (b) relate? Once again we see at work the peculiar intermingling of ontological conditions and epistemic conditions. If the kind of norm discussed in this

¹¹⁴ Plato himself ironises about the followers of Heraclitus by saying that they unwarily whirl around and think that reality constantly changes cf. *Crat.* 411b3-c6 and 439b10-d1. Cf. Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1998, Introduction pp. xliv-xlvi; F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., pp. 449-51.

section essentially characterises the ontological status of the εἶδος, and only the latter is the proper object of knowledge, then the behaviour expressed in (b) is true only of the subjects spoken of in (a), namely the untarnished conditions of identity constraining singular acts or events. If we think of facts as being concerned with what happens in time, this suggests that there can be no knowledge of facts, and in general of anything that can happen, only because it is immersed in time and cannot enjoy such an ontological “before”. I take this junction of (a) and (b) as particularly relevant in the economy of Plato’s thought. First, because in his view sensible particulars are not allowed to have definite identity conditions. As we have seen by treating the paradoxes coming from the application of language to the sensible world, any kind of event or thing which owes its existence to its being immersed in temporal processes admits of aporia. Second, because this kind of ontological past best explains the ontological difference things and Forms entertain, preventing possible misunderstanding concerning the “temporal” priority of Forms over things. To link (a) and (b) must be comprehended as follows: what the sensible thing has always been in itself, taken in its pure independence, before any interaction with human belief and activities, can only be the eternal norm that rules it and which is the Form the thing defers to.

To conclude this section, only two further implications of this rich notion of πεφουκέναι must be considered. First, it is not restricted to artefacts. As we will see in a while, technique is used by Plato to clearly illustrate its ontology, which does not mean that only Forms of artefacts exist, a view that is obviously not maintained by any interpreter, nor that only non-artefact Forms exist and that Forms of artefacts are utilised exclusively for didactic goals, a view that is instead maintained by many, ancient interpreters included.¹¹⁵ The objective nature of the instrument that enables the knowing subject to absolutely evaluate whatever concrete tool he faces likewise characterises every εἶδος. The ontological prominence of natural predisposition is at work: whether it be a good action with regard to the Form of the good or an empirical shuttle compared to the Form of shuttle. This connects to the second implication, the critique of the Forms

¹¹⁵ Effectively the Accademic tradition was quite unanimous against the existence of Forms of artefacts cf. Alcinous *Didaskalikos* IX, 163, 24 30, cf. F. Forcignanò, *Il problema delle idee di artefatto in Platone*, «Méthexis», XXVII (2014), pp. 61-93.

of *artefacta*.¹¹⁶ The academic tradition itself considered implausible the existence of Forms of artefacts since particular artefacts come to be from the contingent work of human mind, thereby resulting excluded from the group of the original ontological causes/principle of reality. If singular tools make their appearance in a specific moment in history, and in addition to that this appearance is contingent, it seems that there can be no eternal Form to which those tools correspond. And yet, if we keep in mind what has been argued so far in this section, another option arises. If the predisposition of the nature determining any singular act or product is utterly distinct from the chronological past,¹¹⁷ then, once a new invention first appears, for the very fact that it appears, its identity is deferred to objective conditions that as such get over the singular and transient context of appearance. This involves an assumption that it is clear by now I consider deeply Platonic: for anything to be it must be determined, and this determination, if true, is objective and thus independent of the singular context within which it came to light. This sounds complicated, but it also respects a common intuition (I am not saying that it is true), namely that the first man who crafted, say, a shuttle had to refer to the nature of weaving in order that its own activity could make sense. The norm of the perfect weaving had to be considered, as long as the first concrete shuttle should have been brought to light. As we shall see in the last part of this chapter, the concept of use will turn out to be crucial. But now I shall turn to a second concept strictly tied to the “πεφυκέναι”.

2) Παράδειγμα

In the last section, we have seen how Forms dwell in an ontological past able to preserve untouched whatever is truly real. Only the inescapable necessity, which determines what everything that exists consists in, enjoys this perfect past. Yet this is not enough. Human beings are able to reach such a reality which therefore needs to be somehow apprehensible, or in general graspable. In the same way as Forms are peculiarly in the past, they

¹¹⁶ V. Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le “Cratyle”*, op. cit., pp. 69-73.

¹¹⁷ This last argument is also consistent with the eternity of Forms inasmuch as the latter is conceived of as being out of time and not as everlastingness. Cf. Chapter One p. 55.

also have access to the present. What kind of present is constitutively out of time? Forms are said to be *παραδείγματα* in relation to which anything that appears is an imitation.¹¹⁸ The term “*παράδειγμα*” is the *nomen rei actae* of the verb “*παραδείκνυμι*” which means “indicate”. It is interesting because it comes from the addition of the preposition “*παρά*” to the verb “*δείκνυμι*”. If the latter means “to show, to point out”, the addition of the former results in a nominal form something like “that against which one shows (or is able to show) something”. It can also be put “that in respect of which, etc.”. The etymology of “respect” is itself useful in that it comes from *respicere* “to look back at/to regard”. The *παράδειγμα* is to be looked upon, it is prior to any imitation and must be regarded. Once again, this view is only metaphorically sensorial. It is now useful to get back to the text from the *Cratylus* under investigation in the last section.

Even though the term “*παράδειγμα*” does not occur in the selection of passages from the *Cratylus* which are commented on in this chapter, its theoretical presence is not just latently there. Let us consider how the discussion goes forth in the *Cratylus*:

«Where does a carpenter look in making a shuttle? Isn't it to that sort of thing whose nature is to weave?

Certainly.

Suppose the shuttle breaks while he's making it. Will he make another looking to the broken one? Or will he look to the very form to which he looked in making the one he broke?

¹¹⁸ There are at least two notable uses of the concept of *παράδειγμα* in the dialogues of Plato. The first use is to consider Forms as models in relation to things. The second use is a peculiar terminological inversion: things are considered examples, *παραδείγματα*, which analogically represent how things stand among Forms. This second sense is quite interesting with particular regard to the understanding of the relation between things and Forms, because it shows how deep in trifling subjects a net of relations can be charted that translates the eidetic reality and leads upon it. We can name the first sense as metaphysical and the second sense, with Goldschmidt (see below in the note), as metaphorical-translational in the etymological sense of something that leads upon something else. In this section, only the first sense will be dealt with. I refer to a study exquisitely devoted to the second task V. Goldschmidt, *Le paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne*, op. cit. For a very detailed analysis of probably the most developed paradigm in this second sense cf. D. El Murr, *La symplekte politike: le paradigme du tissage dans le Politique de Platon, ou le raisons d'un paradigme "arbitraire"*, «Kairos», 19 (2002), pp. 49-95.

In my view, he will look to the form.

Then it would be absolutely right to call that what a shuttle itself is.»¹¹⁹

What we have here is, among other things, another strong instance of how representative of Plato's conception of reality is the whole process of technical endeavour. The example here is the shuttle and the action connatural to it, namely weaving. From these few lines we draw much information. The subject is an artisan who needs to look at something in order to accomplish anything at all.¹²⁰ This vision is expressed by the participle “βλέπων”, specifically meaning in this context “to look to something”, that is directing one's sight to something expecting guidance and answer. According to our account of making, any activity requires norms which rule its accomplishment independently of its coming to be. The carpenter must look to that certain being whose nature is to weave. The natural disposition is expressed by the term we have come to know by now: “ἐπεφύκει”. Plato is not trivially saying that the reality looked to is something that one can actually grab and make use of manually. Rather, its disposition is natural in that it determines, for any act of weaving, what this must be in order to accomplish what it is meant to.¹²¹ And such a natural disposition determines that it is no less and no more than what is weaving. The phrase “in order to” is of interest here because it expresses purposiveness, but it also refers to an order. We shall see in the next section the correct ontological interpretation of such a purposiveness. As far as order is concerned, the very notion of ordered reality appears to be pleonastic, insofar as order and its consequent intelligibility are the measure of reality itself. So, the reality looked to by the carpenter is that which has always been by natural disposition what weaving consists in. However, this looking provides the carpenter with a present grasp of that naturally disposed reality. What is at stake here is the peculiar sort of presence that connects the present of the knower with the known reality.

¹¹⁹ *Crat.* 389a6-b6: «ποῖ βλέπων ὁ τέκτων τὴν κερκίδα ποιεῖ; ἄρ' οὐ πρὸς τοιοῦτόν τι ὁ ἐπεφύκει κερκίζειν; πάνυ γε. τί δέ; ἂν καταγῆ αὐτῷ ἢ κερκίς ποιοῦντι, πότερον πάλιν ποιήσει ἄλλην πρὸς τὴν κατεαγυῖαν βλέπων, ἢ πρὸς ἐκεῖνο τὸ εἶδος πρὸς ὅπερ καὶ ἦν κατέαξεν ἐποίησε; πρὸς ἐκεῖνο, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ. οὐκοῦν ἐκεῖνο δικαιοτάτ' ἂν αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκίς καλέσαιμεν;»

¹²⁰ Cf. *Resp.* 596b6-9

¹²¹ F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., p 126

Sight, though metaphorically taken, gives the idea of a cognitive contemporaneity amidst which the noetic grasp, which is the uttermost knowing act, takes place.

Getting back to the last quotation, we see that the carpenter might fail. This has at least two implications: firstly, actual failure and the possibility of mistake characterise any human endeavour whatsoever. Secondly and derivatively, there need to be conditions relying on the knowledge of which we can test whether something has been correctly crafted or not. If the carpenter who breaks the shuttle he is making is to craft a new shuttle, he will look to the Form he looked to while he was making the first shuttle. This statement is worth emphasising because it shows how inappropriateness is on the side of the artisan and not on the model: if one fails he must look at the same reality he was looking to when he failed, and must not look for another one. This does not just tell us that the blame of imperfection falls on the agent, but also that there is constitutively no limit to the multiplicity of physical shuttles that can be made, whereas the model is but one. The form constantly referred to in the crafting process is obviously the εἶδος. In this way the connection of the ontologically prior dimension of the πεφυκέναι is explicitly linked to Forms. The Form of the shuttle cannot be broken. On the contrary, it and only it deserves the name of shuttle. This statement has a great weight in a dialogue devoted to the issue concerning the correctness of names. The semi-technical phrase is once again “αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκίς”, *i.e.* that which is a shuttle in itself, or the very thing that is a shuttle.¹²² We are faced with a fully canonical εἶδος. A particular shuttle has been properly crafted and is able to work, inasmuch as it matches the model. Its practical effectiveness is the proof of its having been brought forth within a vision of the εἶδος.

As hinted in the previous section, the passages treating of ideas of artefacts are highly controversial within the literature. If we take them literally, in addition to the problem of Forms of artefact (satisfactorily solved in the last section) there is the issue of how to distinguish the knowledge any artisan has from the peculiar knowledge philosophers are supposed to have. This distinction is accounted for by the differentiation between use and production, which will be introduced below. For the time

¹²² Cf. Chapter One p. 30.

being, we can only recognise the more basic insight that the model is a metaphor that exerts its relevance in particular with regard to the criteria of judging sensible things and guiding the crafting subject during the crafting process. These last two things are connected in that one is able to correctly craft something only if he is able to properly judge his product at each stage of the crafting process. One is able to do this because of the paradigm's being one and original, whereas the many are plenty and derivative.

The paradigmatic metaphor is one of the most debated topics in any account of Plato's theory of Ideas. Not only because of its richness, but also because it crops up throughout Plato's work. Beyond any claim of exhaustiveness, I now consider two passages for two main reasons: on the one hand, the first text is at the very beginning of Plato's thought, whereas the second is at the place traditionally considered as the beginning of Plato's late production, thereby showing how the metaphor remains unexhausted through decades of reflection; on the other hand, I regard these two texts as perfectly illustrating the two concepts Plato wants to express.

The first text is a passage from the *Euthyphro* already referred to in the first chapter:

«Tell me then what this form itself is, so that I may look upon it and, using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not.»¹²³

The subject of this early dialogue is the attempt to define what it is like to be pious, and what would be that which is pious in itself. The eponymous interlocutor is a perfect instance of the obtuse proponent of traditional culture who remains entangled in examples without ever providing a real definition. In this case, the model retains its visual way of frame of reference, i.e. the reality one looks upon in order to be able to correctly judge whether a particular action is in a certain way. The model figures then as a criterion in an ontological sense: that which in reality itself

¹²³ *Euphr.* 6e3-6 «ταύτην τοίνυν με αὐτὴν δίδαξον τὴν ιδέαν τίς ποτέ ἐστιν, ἵνα εἰς ἐκείνην ἀποβλέπων καὶ χρώμενος αὐτῇ παραδείγματι, ὃ μὲν ἂν τοιοῦτον ἦ ὧν ἂν ἢ σὺ ἢ ἄλλος τις πράττη φῶ ὅσιον εἶναι, ὃ δ' ἂν μὴ τοιοῦτον, μὴ φῶ».

divides what it is like to be pious from what is not. It is a criterion, which means something that enables one subject to separate (sorts of things) or discern (κρινεῖν, διακρίνειν). Let us now turn briefly to a second quotation from the *Parmenides*.

«These forms are like patterns set in nature, and other things resemble them and are likenesses; and this partaking of the forms is, for the other things, simply being modelled on them.»¹²⁴ (transl. by M. L. Gill and P. Ryan)

This passage is strongly ontological in character. First, we are struck by the phrase “ἐν τῇ φύσει” (in nature) said of the models. One is able to understand properly the natural constituency of the patterns only through the peculiar dimension of the πεφυκέναι.¹²⁵ Second, it is stated that the kind of relation connecting sensible things to Forms consists in bearing resemblance to them. This notion of resemblance is related to the well-known problems briefly exposed in the last chapter regarding the paradigmatic case view: such a resemblance seems to require that models and likenesses symmetrically share a quality, the difference consisting in the fact that the model does it unqualifiedly, whereas the sensible thing does not, and, consequently, that the model is an instance of itself. The very context of the *Parmenides* might be regarded this way as this theoretical option is compared to the Largeness Regress (i.e. the Third-man Argument).¹²⁶ This is much debated but fortunately we can avoid

¹²⁴ Parm 132d1-4 « τὰ μὲν εἶδη ταῦτα ὡσπερ παραδείγματα ἐστάναι ἐν τῇ φύσει, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τούτοις εἰκέναι καὶ εἶναι ὁμοιώματα, καὶ ἡ μέθεξις αὐτῆ τοῖς ἄλλοις γίνεσθαι τῶν εἰδῶν οὐκ ἄλλη τις ἢ εἰκασθῆναι αὐτοῖς».

¹²⁵ Contrast with the phrase “ἐν ἡμῖν” (by us) in *Phaed.* 103b5 cf. F. Fronterotta, *Φυτοργός, δημιουργός, μιμητής: chi fa cosa in Resp. X 596a-597e?*, in Platone, *La Repubblica*, traduzione e commento a cura di M. Vegetti, vol. VII, Libro X, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2007, pp. 173-198:p. 189 n. 20.

¹²⁶ Whether Plato takes the criticism raised in the *Parmenides* to be valid is a harshly debated matter cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, Kegan Paul, London 1939, pp. 92-5 who contends that Plato’s argument is fallacious and that Plato must have been aware of it; R. E. Allen, *Plato’s Parmenides*, op. cit., pp. 179-93 especially p. 186 where Allen argues that the likeness relation is not symmetrical; S. Scolnicov, *Plato’s Parmenides*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2003, pp. 64-8 who poses the resemblance after relevant aspects at the core of Plato’s conception of

discussing this matter, given the different perspective we are starting from.¹²⁷ The theoretical role played by the notion of *παράδειγμα* amounts to the following two points:

- 1) The model enables the knower to discern whether something is like it or not;
- 2) The model is ontologically prior because it is original.

The rest of this section is devoted to extensively framing those two points. In doing this, I will make reference to texts extracted from the *Republic* for at least two reasons. First, the dialogue is in the chronological middle between the *Euthyphro* and the *Parmenides*. Second, it is one of the principal places where Plato exposes his theory and it is strongly consistent with the parts of the *Cratylus* we are focusing on.

I shall now consider the first point. What does it mean that something is like its model? If misinterpreted, it risks running into the dilemma sketched at the end of the last chapter, namely that sensible things resemble the model either through a degree of approximation or fully but temporarily, whereas the model timelessly is as it is.¹²⁸ Clearly, I think neither is the case. To determine whether something is in a certain way, we must first know what this way of being is. This priority of the Form over the thing is expressed by the metaphor of the resembling copy. Thus, if one happens to experience something, the paradigm enables the one who is experiencing the given thing or event to see whether the thing or event in question deserves the name or the definition originally belonging to the paradigm.

Two further points can be raised. First, Plato feels the need of Forms because of the inability of things to ground their own truth and identity. One thing can always change or appear differently in relation to something else. In this case, it would no longer deserve to be named and defined as before. To determine the identity of a thing is an infinite procedure which by itself suffices to downgrade the ontological status of the thing. For Plato

image, which is consistent with the argument *infra* n. 151; contra cf. F. Fronterotta, *Guida alla lettura del Parmenide di Platone*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1998, pp. 52-70.

¹²⁷ For a very valuable and detailed account of the topic as a key for the entire Platonic building cf. R. Patterson, *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1985, especially chapters 3 and 4.

¹²⁸ Cf. Chapter One p. 55.

this crucial difference between things and Forms amounts to an ontological difference that differentiates the two terms not only in degrees of perfection, but also, and more importantly, with regard to their nature.

All of this might seem to be showing a peculiar conception of language: it must be judged whether anything that appears can be named in a certain way. This depends upon the determination that the sensible thing displays. A thing appears in our perception by giving a certain impression about itself. Any appearing thing is something determinate: it is in a given way. As we said, that way must be taken as ontologically independent and conceived as providing an epistemic ground enabling one to correctly judge whether the appearance of the thing is as it seemed in the first place. A common-sense realism dictates a basic intuition: it should be asked whether anything that appears to one's experience is in itself as it seems. Therefore, the epistemic parabola would be thus: the knower starts from the sensory impression, goes through the vision of eidetic paradigms and finally turns back to the sensible thing confident of having acquired the instruments to disclose how that thing is in itself. Unfortunately, this view is untenable because an issue needs to be raised: are sensible things in Plato's account allowed to enjoy this "itselfness"?

We have come to the second point about (1). The complex matter of the "ontology" of the sensible domain will be addressed in the next chapter, but it must be briefly looked at in advance if we are to understand properly the notion of παράδειγμα. We shall consider right away a first text from the *Republic* (472):

«Then it was in order to have a model that we were trying to discover what justice itself is like and what the completely just man would be like, if he came into being, and what kind of man he'd be if he did, and likewise with regard to injustice and the most unjust man. We thought that, by looking at how their relationship to happiness and its opposite seemed to us, we'd also be compelled to agree about ourselves as well, that the one who was most like them would have a portion of happiness most like theirs. But we weren't trying to

discover these things in order to prove that it's possible for them to come into being.»¹²⁹(transl. by G. M. A. Grube rev. C. D. C: Reeve)

In this programmatic text, the reader is faced with another clear employment of the notion of model. What strikes the reader in the first place is the last sentence: if one is enquiring into the nature of Justice or the just man, he is not really concerned with understanding whether those items are capable of occurring in space and time (γίγνεσθαι).¹³⁰ Once one has a proper understanding as to what any Form is, he will be able to develop a true opinion about the becoming things in some way connected to that Form which he will come by in his everyday experience. However, this does not mean that things in space time are “in themselves”. Only the paradigm is what the thing is in itself. Which is equivalent to say that sensible things are not in themselves: sensible things are not completely independent of the experience within which they occur or, at least, of the specific context they happen to inhabit. Things always leave something uncertain and unspoken about their nature: their pretention to be frequently ends in a pretence. But it is not only a matter of uncertainty. Things are also limited. The metaphor of resemblance is a distinctive way of expressing this limitation.

In a parallel structure, we might think that the pictured man is to actual men what the latter is to the Form of man. It can be said that the pictured man captures just one aspect of what being an actual man means, namely the visual aspect; it can also be said that an actual man does not exhaust what the Being of man is. Nobody is able to get an answer from a picture of a man. And the range of the many possible men is structurally not represented by just one of them. To consider another example, I cannot fill a pictured jar with water as I can do with an actual jar, and according to Plato, I cannot look at an actual jar to know what being a jar is, which is the

¹²⁹ *Resp.* 472c4-d2: «παραδείγματος ἄρα ἕνεκα, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, ἐζητοῦμεν αὐτό τε δικαιοσύνην οἷόν ἐστι, καὶ ἄνδρα τὸν τελέως δίκαιον εἰ γένοιτο, καὶ οἷος ἂν εἴη γενόμενος, καὶ ἀδικίαν αὖ καὶ τὸν ἀδικώτατον, ἵνα εἰς ἐκείνους ἀποβλέποντες, οἷοι ἂν ἡμῖν φαίνονται εὐδαιμονίας τε πέρι καὶ τοῦ ἐναντίου, ἀναγκαζόμεθα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ὁμολογεῖν, ὅς ἂν ἐκείνοις ὅτι ὁμοιότατος ἦ, τὴν ἐκείνης μοῖραν ὁμοιοτάτην ἕξειν, ἀλλ' οὐ τούτου ἕνεκα, ἵν' ἀποδείξωμεν ὡς δυνατὰ ταῦτα γίγνεσθαι».

¹³⁰ Cf Platon, *La République*, traduction et présentation par G. Leroux, Flammarion, Paris 2002, pp. 637-8 n. 94.

being of every actual jar, or to know how to craft and use one properly. To better explain how it is possible that the unique model is the being of the many jars we must consider what was stated above: things are not in themselves and only the model represents the thing's itselfness. This gives also back the sense of the peculiar nature of the present of the paradigm. The being of each thing has nothing to do with the singularity of the situation in which it occurs. That is why things cannot be thought of and thus known as independent unities.

Forms are somehow always present, external to the boundaries of sensoriality and graspable only in thought. The last sentence of the quotation above becomes clearer: the point is not to question in what measure the model can enter the domain of happenings and events, of concrete people and things; rather to understand that the model, in its difference from the thing which is correlated to it, is always present. The paradigm is always already present. And yet it is no part of the thing; it cannot be found by cutting and burning it. It is nowhere, but it is always already there. Only in virtue of that model can the concrete thing or instrument express a form or have an effect, and only in virtue of it does the thing become knowable. This does not mean that the thing is in itself knowable, but rather that the thing defers to its model which only enjoys an ontological status that is properly knowable.

Forms are whatever is in itself and that is deferred to by the sensible domain. We have come to the second point above: the issue of the original being of the model. Reality is what is original. And the original being acts as a paradigm for everything that derives from it. It must not be forgotten that Forms do not possess, strictly speaking, a figure or shape. To tell the truth, the double visual/logic nature of Forms retains a margin for ambiguity at least with respect to its formulation. Nonetheless, I think that the Platonic concept of paradigm is explicitly worked out in order to have something that can be metaphorically pointed to while remaining completely intelligible; in other words, that it cannot be represented figuratively without giving up the deictic dynamic.

To examine how this issue is developed in Plato's thought, the beginning of the tenth book of the *Republic*¹³¹ (596b-598d) seems to be a

¹³¹ Which I take to be a genuine and relevant piece of Platonic thought. For a different view cf. J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1981,

good starting-point. We shall consider a number of texts, trying to follow the Platonic *Gedankengang* and commenting on it. Again, the examples taken into account are picked out of the set of technical beings. Thus, in the case of tables and beds, whoever is to craft one of those must look to the Idea (πρὸς τὴν ιδέαν βλέπων), which no artisan could have made.¹³² If we think of someone who is able to make everything that is on Earth, plants and animals, someone able to create himself, Earth itself and the Heaven, he would be the most sapient of men (Πάνυ θαυμαστόν σοφιστήν). The term mostly employed in this context is the verb “ποιέω”. As has been said above, the verb that mainly means “make/do/craft” is also at the base of poetry considered as the eminent form of production. As is well known, the first half of *Republic X* is devoted to critiquing the claim to truth that classical poetry has.¹³³ What is not immediately seen is that the critique of poetry can only pass through the critique of production and through , broadly speaking, a phenomenology of the crafting endeavour. So, what single person can make by himself that which is made by many technicians? Who is this wondrous clever artisan-poet? The irony is already clear: this man is so powerful that he can create himself. The answer is at hand: if you grab a mirror and point it towards the sun and the things in Heaven you will create (ποιήσει) all the beings.

Obviously, Socrates’ interlocutor reacts to this assertion saying that only appearances (φαινόμενα) would be made in this way. Like the man who holds a mirror, the painter creates something that has the semblance of a bed but that is not a bed.¹³⁴ The bed-maker makes an actual bed, but, as

p. 335. For a brief discussion of the various positions among the literature cf. Platone, *Repubblica*, a cura di M. Vegetti, BUR, Milano 2015, pp. 215-18; P. Natorp, *Plato’s Ideenlehre. Eine Einführung in den Idealismus*, Verlag von Felix Meiner, Leipzig 1921, pp. 217-21. Against its connection to the first part of the *Cratylus* cf. V. Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le “Cratyle”*, op. cit., pp. 77-82.

¹³² Cf. *Resp.* 596b4-8.

¹³³ On the problems arising from reading consistently the tenth book of the *Republic* and the third that we will leave untouched cf. J. Tate, *Plato on ‘Imitation’*, «The Classical Quarterly», 26 (1932), pp. 161-169; A. Nehamas, *Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic 10*, in J. Moravcsik P. Tenko (ed.), *Plato on Beauty, wisdom, and the Arts*, Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa 1982, pp. 47-78; E. Belfiore, *A Theory of Imitation in Plato’s Republic*, «Transaction of the America Philological Association», 114, 1984, pp. 121-146.

¹³⁴ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, a new translation by Robin Waterfield, Oxford World’s Classics, Oxford 2008, p. 446 «A painter is like a mirror-holder metaphysically speaking».

said above, he does not create the Idea, or that which is Bed (ὅ ἐστι κλίνη). The truth of the last statement is assumed, but if we think that any crafting process has some conditions, and these conditions are Forms as identity conditions, then these Forms could never have been created.¹³⁵ Therefore, the craftsman

«...doesn't make the being of a bed, he isn't making that which is, but something which is like that which is, but is not it. So, if someone were to say that the work of a carpenter or any other craftsman is completely that which is, wouldn't he risk saying what isn't true?»¹³⁶

This quotation does not add any truly new information, but it is worth quoting entirely in order to focus on the terminological choice made by Plato. If the craftsman is not making that which is (ὅ ἐστιν), maybe an alternative translation could be: he is making something that is not ὅ ἐστιν, he is not making τὸ ὄν, being, but something like τὸ ὄν because the work (ἔργον) of the craftsman is not completely (τελέως) the being (τὸ ὄν), the adverb “τελέως” is crucial. We explore this subject in the next section; for now it is enough to say that it means “in the manner of that which is fully constituted, complete, final”.

Compared to truth (ἀλήθειαν), the actual work of the craftsman proves to be obscure (ἀμυδρόν).¹³⁷ This last statement is of interest for at least two reasons: first, truth seems to be a mark of being and not of something else (thought, propositions, etc.)¹³⁸; second, the use of the term “ἀμυδρός” which means “*difficile à distinguer*” and then “*vague, indistinct,*

¹³⁵ Cf. in this Chapter p. 86.

¹³⁶ *Resp.* 597a4-7 « οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ ὁ ἔστιν ποιεῖ, οὐκ ἂν τὸ ὄν ποιοῖ, ἀλλὰ τι τοιοῦτον οἷον τὸ ὄν, ὄν δὲ οὐ: τελέως δὲ εἶναι ὄν τὸ τοῦ κλινοῦργοῦ ἔργον ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς χειροτέχνου εἴ τις φαίη, κινδυνεύει οὐκ ἂν ἀληθῆ λέγειν;»

¹³⁷ *Resp.* 597a10-11 «μηδὲν ἄρα θαυμάζωμεν εἰ καὶ τοῦτο ἀμυδρόν τι τυγχάνει ὄν πρὸς ἀλήθειαν».

¹³⁸ Consider the significant phrase “ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων” in the *Phaedo* (99e) and in the *Cratylus* (438d7-8). Cf. M. Vegetti, *Quindici lezioni su Platone*, Einaudi, Torino 2003, p. 153 «La forma di esistenza delle idee è quella di criteri o norme di descrizione e valutazione *vere* degli oggetti e delle azioni; nel caso delle idee, e solo nel loro caso, *esistenza* e *verità* coincidono perfettamente.»; for a more careful interpretation cf. B. Centrone, *ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΛΟΓΙΚΑ, ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΟΝΤΟΛΟΓΙΚΑ ΙΝ ΠΛΑΤΟΝΕ*, «Méthexis», (XXVII), 2014, pp. 7-23; B. E. Hestir, *Plato and the Split Personality of Ontological Alētheia*, «Apeiron», 37 (2004), pp. 109-50.

imparfait”¹³⁹. The measure of truth is the brightness intended as a lack of vagueness. In this account the visual metaphor plays the central role and the indeterminacy characterises the actual work of the craftsman as opposed to that which is fully determinate (now the meaning of “τελέως” is clearer). In the passage from the *Republic*, Plato states that only a god could have created the Bed in nature (ἐν τῇ φύσει);¹⁴⁰ I take this only to indicate the irreducibility of the Bed in nature to the acts of men, and not that any god has actually crafted any of the Forms because this would intolerably engender textual and theoretical incoherence.¹⁴¹

Painter, bed-maker and god are capable of doing and are acquainted with (ἐπιστάται)¹⁴² three different species of bed.¹⁴³ The text continues with

¹³⁹ P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire de mots*, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *supra* n. 125.

¹⁴¹ *Resp* 597b4-6. Cf. H. Cherniss, *On Plato's Republic X 597B*, «The American Journal of Philology», 53 (1932), pp. 233-242. In this article, Cherniss intimates that the god creates the ideas because Plato is dramatically distinguishing creators from imitators and saying that the God imitates the Forms in creating the sensible world (as in the *Timaeus*) would have made the argument much less effective; M. Isnardi Parente, *Techne. Momenti del pensiero greco da Platone ad Epicuro*, op. cit., pp. 11-5; A. Nehamas, *Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic 10*, op. cit., p. 73 n. 32d; F. Fronterotta, *Φυτουργός, δημιουργός, μιμητής: chi fa cosa in Resp. X 596a-597e?*, op. cit., pp. 173-195; but G. Leroux warns against easy dismissal cf. Platon, *La République*, traduction et présentation par G. Leroux, op. cit., p. 716 n. 6. For Waterfield to assume God's creation of Forms along with the latter's eternality does not fall into contradiction cf. Plato, *Republic*, a new translation by Robin Waterfield, op. cit., pp. 446-7. It is worth recognising that throughout this passage there are many occurrences of the verbs “φύω” and “φύτεύω”, which are used to express a sort of production-generation intrinsically linked to nature.

¹⁴² It is worth noting how, although it is one of the most theory-laden terms in Plato's technical vocabulary, this use of the verb expresses the original idea of knowledge with a practical orientation cf. P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire de mots*, op. cit., p. 360 and J. Hintikka, *Plato on Knowing how, Knowing that, and Knowing what*, in *Knowledge and the Known*, The New Synthese Historical Library (Texts and Studies in the History of Philosophy), vol 11. Springer, Dordrecht 1991, pp. 331-49 : p. 331

¹⁴³ Cf. A. Marmodoro, *Is Being One Only One? The Uniqueness of Platonic Forms*, op. cit., p. 217 who recognises that Plato thinks of the three species of bed as beds. This means that the representation of a bed is in a certain sense a bed and not a only an image. Similarly, A. Nehamas, *Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic 10*, op. cit., p. 61, argues that Plato speaks of a painter not making a picture of x, but an x that seems to be. A seeming of a Bed is in a way (a) bed, better a bed that seems to be. This view bears a crucial witness on Plato's assumptions. Everything that has a certain aspect such

the argument that we already presented in the subsection of the Anatomy of εἶδος devoted to the analysis of the feature of being one.¹⁴⁴ The Bed in nature can only be one in that, if there were two, both of them would commune in one character for the very fact of being beds. It is worth quoting the passage in its entirety:

«Now, the god, either because he didn't want to or because it was necessary for him not to do so, didn't make more than one bed in nature, but only one, the very one that is the being of a bed. Two or more of these have not been made by the god and never will be.

Why is that?

Because, if he made only two, then again one would come to light whose form they in turn would both possess, and that would be the one that is the being of a bed and not the other two.

That's right.

The god knew this, I think, and wishing to be the real maker of the truly real bed and not just a maker of a bed, he made it to be one in nature.»¹⁴⁵

Assuming the nature of the argument regarding the fundamental feature of being one belonging to Forms as exposed above, it becomes clearer why the eidetic items can work as models. They are prior to anything else, not just in the past, as we saw when dealing with the πεφυκέναι, but also in the present. The One-ness of the Form admirably accounts not only for the One-over-many metaphysical structure, but also provides the theoretical basis for a metaphysical notion of model. If we consider the theoretical

that it can commonly be called with a certain name presents, even if in a minimal amount, a character which leads back to the Form. The depicted bed, although it is at three removes from reality, still has something of the Form of Bed and not of others (the capability of being discriminated is again the key point). We come then to appreciate how Plato's discourse works: degrees of presence qualify the ontology of the presented content. Presence is, on the one hand, always visual: the illusion, the sensible thing and the Form are different visualised figures. On the other hand, the presence is not actualised only within vision, but also by allowing specific interactions with what is presented at the sight (obviously, in the case of Forms the vision is exquisitely intelligible).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Chapter One pp. 48-52.

¹⁴⁵ For the Greek Text see *supra* n.56.

shift that structurally leads the thinker from two forms of bed to the one truly real Form of Bed which can only be one for the reasons we have already seen, we are faced with the attracting force of the model that is just one and that is prior to everything else in the present. This metaphysical priority is the mark of true being: to be a model means to be always already “there” prior to anything else but always present. Anything that displays a character and therefore resembles one model derives this character from the latter. The proof is that in order to know what the displaying thing is, one is led towards the paradigm.

Turning back to the text, the god, though metaphorically, is really a demiurge, or to put it better, is a demiurge of what is truly real (ὄντως) because he has produced everything that is by nature (φύσει).¹⁴⁶ The human carpenter is the crafter of an actual particular bed. The painter, on the contrary, does not deserve the name of demiurge; he is instead a μιμητής, an imitator. Such an imitator is third in rank coming after the truth and the maker, and he is third by nature (πεφυκώς) because he does not imitate that which is in nature in its singularity (αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν τῇ φύσει ἕκαστον)¹⁴⁷, but rather the works of the artisans (τὰ τῶν δημιουργῶν ἔργα).¹⁴⁸ This last

¹⁴⁶ *Resp.* 597d6-7. The inversion of true act and true product will play a central role in the next section, but it is worth pointing out here as well. The reality of the act becomes indistinguishable from the reality of the product: one is really doing something if he is doing something real. Cf. A. Nehamas, *Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic* 10, op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁴⁷ *Resp.* 598a2.

¹⁴⁸ The whole passage from *Republic* X is rather close to a passage in the *Sophist* (233d9-234e-2) where the sophist is compared to the one who claims to produce everything that is, even the Sea, the Earth and the Heaven. Here the argument is particularly interesting because Plato has a specific assumption. The sophist claims to produce every truth only by means of the word and the discourse. For Plato this means that to do this he must be able to produce (ποιεῖν) everything that is. In this way, truth becomes indissolubly tied to the originality of reality: strictly speaking truth coincides with being, which is autonomous (this last adjective is etymologically pregnant: being is autonomous insofar as it gives itself its norm). The similarities between the two passages are in number: for instance, the interlocutor of the Eleatic stranger reacts thinking that the latter is making fun of him, and to designate the many natural beings Plato employs the substantivised adjective “φυτός”. This time, however, the critical target is not the archaic poet, but rather the brand new figure of the sophist. The briefly discussed figure of the painter is immediately associated with the sophist which produces εἰδῶλα λεγόμενα, spoken images, only able to confuse the minds of young people. The only solution to the mesmerism of the sophist is to undergo many happenings and troubles dictated by necessity eventually grasping that which is

distinction is decidedly interesting because Socrates asks whether the painter depicts a particular bed as it truly is or as it appears. To ask this, he relies on the different perceptual perspectives in which any three-dimensional object can be approached. It seems initially that Socrates is drawing a distinction in the middle of the sensible thing between the thing as appears to someone and the thing as it is in itself. We have, on the one hand, the different sides from which the bed is looked at, which are actually different perspectives, and, on the other hand, we have the particular bed as it is in itself. Unfortunately, this view is untenable.¹⁴⁹ The distinction from which this example arose was between being in nature and the works of the artisans, when we were told that the painter imitates the latter. Therefore, the appearances object of the “art” of the painter coincide with the particular bed in its physicality. That is why the product of any imitator is an imitation of an imitation, as the famous Platonic statement sounds. What do we evince from this? First, no representation can preserve the being in nature.¹⁵⁰ This does not mean that images and analogies cannot be made use of heuristically, but rather that there is no exact portrayal of reality, whether it be figurative or poetical.¹⁵¹ Second, if the works of the artisan are in fact an imitation, this imitation does not aim to produce an image. Single artefacts are images of Forms in virtue of the fact that they can be used. That use is the reason which is the basis for their appearance.¹⁵²

(εφάπτεσθαι τῶν ὄντων). The reflection conducted in the *Sophist* proves to be more mature, or at least more developed, compared to the one put forward in the *Republic* since the notion of imitation is being made object of closer inspection by distinguishing two kinds of imitation and by reflecting more thoroughly upon the ontological status of the copy and of the technique required to produce it (For A. Nehamas, *Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic* 10, op. cit., p.63 the view propounded in the *Sophist* is inconsistent with the *Republic*). For the sake of succinctness we shall not broach these questions in this section. Cf. the first section of Chapter Four.

¹⁴⁹ Contra cf. E. Belfiore, *A Theory of Imitation in Plato's Republic*, op. cit., pp. 131

¹⁵⁰ Similarly, cf. Plato, *Republic*, a new translation by Robin Waterfield, op. cit., p. 447; contra cf. the many references of interpreters who contend that art can reproduce Forms reported in A. Nehamas, *Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic* 10, op. cit., p. 76 n. 60. Nehamas contrarily asserts that “to ‘imitate’ the Forms is a request that it is logically impossible for the artist to satisfy” (p. 60).

¹⁵¹ That is so because it is in the very nature of portraying reproducing some qualities to the detriment of others, as the argument of the two “Cratyluses” shows cf *Crat.* 432b-c and D. Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*, op. cit., p. 46 n.44.

¹⁵² The apparently problematic relation of the notion of use with not ordinarily usable beings will be broached in the next section.

The art of the painter produces imitations of the physical features of the thing conceived of as the manifold aspects under which the thing appears. The work of the painter, or of any imitator as such, is third in rank because the depicted reality is not as usable as, instead, the concrete sensible thing is.¹⁵³ And in turn to use a particular shuttle is not the same as to use the Shuttle itself, but knowing how to use the particular shuttle is linked to the Shuttle itself. Thus, to create a particular shuttle and to use it requires different visions of the same eidetic unity. The concept of use is at hand, and it will be examined in the next section, but now two arguments are still worth considering to conclude the present one.

In the first place, it must be stated once again that the pivot is played by the epistemological metaphysics we have come to know by now. The two senses of the παράδειγμα are connected predominantly in virtue of it. The paradigm is capable of performing the role of measure which enables the knowing subject to correctly judge whether something is in a certain way because it is truly and originally that way. At the same time, the being-original of the paradigm can be thought of precisely in virtue of its epistemic role. The very notion of the model-paradigm has in itself the reference to the act of discerning what is original from what is not. The technical activity is once again valuable in making explicit Plato's view: it is only in the cognitive process of crafting something or using it properly that the eidetic reality stands out. The notion of paradigm shows a complex inversion of the commonsensical view. On the one hand, as I have tried to demonstrate, sensible things are not in themselves. On the other hand, images and appearances exist to a lesser degree, but do not coincide with absolute not-being. Both hands rely on the fact that Plato's metaphysics develops on three levels. As in a game of refractions and mirrors, sensible things look like Forms if compared to pictorial images and like shadows if compared to Forms. However, there is one thing that only Forms are capable of: Forms inhabit a sort of non-immanent presence. This, I think, is the meaning of the paradigm metaphor. A timeless present, beyond the

¹⁵³ This point is recognised by E. Belfiore, *A Theory of Imitation in Plato's Republic*, op. cit., p. 135 who says that a painting of a couch is a mere apparent couch in that it is useless (at least with regard to the proper use of a couch). Cf. also C. Janaway, *Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts*, Clarendon, Oxford 1995, p. 115.

boundaries of space and time, which is always, without occurring in any experiential-perceptual horizon.

3) Τέλος

One last notion needs to be included in the present investigation concerning the possibility whether the technique possesses the ability to disclose the eidetic architecture of the world. It is the notion of τέλος that can be translated as “goal” or “end”, but also as “achievement” or “fulfilment” and “limit”. It must be said that this concept has not been made extensive use of by Plato like the πεφυκέναι, nor has it been explicitly put forward like the παράδειγμα. Nevertheless, I am robustly persuaded that we are faced with a genuinely Platonic conceptual item. To begin with, we briefly analyse the closure of the earliest book of the *Republic* (I, 352d9-354c2)¹⁵⁴ where Socrates introduces two terms entertaining a characteristic relation, ἔργον and ἀρετή, mostly meaning “work-function” and “virtue-excellence”, respectively. The employment of these terms is crucial to Plato’s psychology. However, we are exquisitely concerned with the general structure of the argument regardless of its significance within the scope of psychology and moral theory.¹⁵⁵ The context precedes the insertion of the theory of Ideas, and yet we have a hint of a highly developed view. The argument can be summarised as follows:

- a) The function (ἔργον) of anything is that which one can do only with it or do best with it;¹⁵⁶
- b) For anything that has a function there is also a virtue (ἀρετή);¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ For a good analysis of the passage cf. H. S. Thayer, *Plato: The Theory and Language of Function*, «The Philosophical Quarterly», 14 (1964), pp. 303-318.

¹⁵⁵ The part of the text which starts at 353d2 up to the end of the first book. We are focusing just on the first “methodological” half. For an entire monograph devoted to the relation between τέχνη and moral theory cf. D. Roochnik, *On Art and Wisdom: Plato’s Understanding of Techne*, Penn State University Press, University Park 1998.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Resp.* 353a9-11.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Resp.* 353b2-4.

c) Any function can be rightly performed only if the thing the function is assigned to performs it by means of its peculiar virtue.¹⁵⁸

What are we to do with this argument? We first note that everything has a function and therefore everything has also a virtue-state of excellence that enables the thing to perform its own function. If we consider the things Plato refers to in explaining these three points, we see that for the most part they are not artefacts (he also speaks of the pruning knife) such as the horse, the eye and the ear, ending with the soul itself. The equivalence between artefacts and natural beings is something we have seen throughout the chapter. The naturalness is conferred by the ontological status and nothing else. Second, function and virtue are indissolubly tied in such a way that the virtue is nothing but the perfect performance of the function and at the same time that which makes the function possible.

It might be argued that the ἔργον has acquired a different meaning since the last section: if in the latter book of the *Republic* analysed in the previous section it meant work and product, in the earliest book it was used to designate the function of something.¹⁵⁹ To understand this ambiguity it seems appropriate to resort to the insightful work of Jakko Hintikka, *Knowledge and its Objects in Plato*¹⁶⁰, where the author coins the phrase “telic structure” that could explain the uncertainty. According to Hintikka, a faculty and its result seem to be confused.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Resp.* 353c5-7.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. E. Belfiore, *A Theory of Imitation in Plato's Republic*, op. cit., p 135 n. 36 who states, following N. White, that Plato uses ἔργον to say function in *Republic* I, whereas in *Republic* X he uses χρεία. In the latter book ἔργον refers not to function but to the product made by a craftsman. As we are about to see, this ambiguity will acquire a positive value.

¹⁶⁰ J. Hintikka, *Knowledge and its objects in Plato*, in J. M. E. Moravcsik (ed.), *Patterns in Plato's Thought*, Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht 1973, pp. 1-30 who describes the nature of knowledge in Plato's thought starting from the notion of δύναμις. We shall not embark on the discussion about knowledge and we shall reserve a detailed analysis of the Platonic use of the δύναμις to the last chapter. With regard to knowledge, it must be said that Hintikka maintains that there is a conflation in Plato between a certain cognitive faculty and the objects which one's knowledge or opinion are about being somehow analogous to the products of a craftsman's skill (p. 9) and that this can be proved by the difference of the products themselves. My use of the ratiocinations of this brilliant paper is instead on the ontological side. He also knowingly considers the ambiguity seen in the case of ἔργον (p. 8).

«If in any event, thing, or phenomenon the essential feature is its end or aim or product or outcome, all talk of it will amount to talking of this end or outcome, this *telos* or *ergon*, and the difference between what is said of the phenomenon itself and what is said of its *telos* or *ergon* tends to be overshadowed.»¹⁶¹

How can these lines be read ontologically? I firmly believe that for Plato the essential aspect of everything functions as its goal. This can be drawn from the very way in which Plato has presented his conception of technique: in any crafting process it aims at producing something. But it is not just this. This objective is only derivatively the end and goal of the poietic series of acts. The true goal is the use that the crafted thing can be made of. That is why from now on, I shall focus only on the *τέλος* since the *ἔργον*, even though it may also designate the final result, mainly refers to the material outcome of the technical activity contrasted with the *εἶδος*.¹⁶² And as we have seen and the end of the last section, the work is not completely the being. In addition, in the passage from *Republic* I, the *ἔργον* had to be accompanied by the *ἀρετή*, the virtuous excellence which made the function possible. This excellence is the ontological pole able to lead not only the technical skill but also the thing itself. The much celebrated teleological mind-set of Greek philosophers¹⁶³ should not be comprehended as an extrinsically providential tendency comfortably guiding human feats and mundane happenings. It is rather a more deeply rooted modus of thinking of how reality is grounded in its limits and delivered to its excellent goal.¹⁶⁴ The notion of limit is decidedly positive in that it secures

¹⁶¹ J. Hintikka, *Knowledge and its objects in Plato*, op. cit., p. 7. Cf also A. Balansard, *Technè dans les Dialogues de Platon: l’empreinte de la sophistique*, pp. 51-55, especially p. 55.

¹⁶² Cf. Platone, *Cratilo*, traduzione e introduzione F. Aronadio, op. cit., p. 157 n. 40 who translates *ἔργον* with “execution” and relates it to the material constitution of the outcome of the craftsman.

¹⁶³ Cf. also Aristotle *Metaph.* Δ 1021b12-1022a3.

¹⁶⁴ Similarly H. S. Thayer, *Plato: The Theory and Language of Function*, op. cit., pp. 307-8, except that he links the word “τέλος” to the “providential” teleology, whereas we use it to label the ontology of function and excellence. I deem some crucial pages in the *Phaedo* (96-99) to be consistent with the view set forth in this section, i.e. an ontological and non-providentialistic reading of Plato’s teleology. I think the same

determination and clearly defined shapes. Thorough and non-perfectible determination is the mark of the εἶδος. Ontologising Hintikka's verdict, we could say that every sensible thing comes to be in relation to its goal which is an ordered reality that casts light on its temporal existence and which functions as structural telic entity deferred to by the sensible things. How is this relation possible? Once again we are faced with two points, where one is closer to the knowledge-side of it and the other to the ontological side:

- 1) The τέλος as goal regulates the use of every sensible thing.
- 2) The τέλος as perfect end impinges on the sensible thing which comes to be only "towards" it.

Plato's metaphysical epistemology is double-headed in this occasion as well. We start with the side directly related to human actions and operations. To properly understand point (1) a famous distinction discussed by Plato needs to be introduced. It is the user/producer distinction. Basically, Plato's thought is that the user is entitled to judge the aptness of what is crafted by the producer. That is so because the user is meant to be in connection with reality in order to be able to properly use whatever instrument he is using. This bestows on him the ability to evaluate the correctness of the producer's work. To stress the strong coherence of the Platonic places paralleled in this chapter, it is worth noting how this distinction is mostly spelt out there. In the *Cratylus* (388b13-390e4), names are considered as instruments; therefore, as in the case of shuttles, ships and lyres, so also for names there must be one who sets/produces them and one who utilises them (at least as ideal roles).¹⁶⁵ The one who utilises names and is supremely able to judge the correctness of their constitution is the dialectician intended as the one who is able to raise questions and give answers (390c10-11). For the time being, we shall not focus on the copiously debated matter of the identity of dialectician and his privileged relationship with names. The fulcrum of the present discourse is the

counts for the notorious central books of the *Republic* (VI-VII) where the ontological function of the Good (in the allegories of the Sun and the Cave) is overtly asserted. I shall not deal with all of this here.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., pp. 138-144 who considers the parallel between the *Cratylus* and *Republic* X and gives an agreeable account of the figure of the dialectician in the context.

fundamental distinction between user and producer and how it amounts to an ontological structure: this distinction somehow mirrors the ontological priority the end-goal has over the means by which it can be achieved.

That is what I take to be the proper way of conceptualising under an ontological respect the notion of τέλος to the extent that the thing that can be made use of is related to its τέλος, in an ordinary sense of use:

- a) The εἶδος is the sum of characters that gives an instrument its own usefulness;
- b) Usefulness is that in view of which the instrument is employed.¹⁶⁶

The εἶδος is the ultimate source of identity, it is the sum of the characters which provide any instrument with its usefulness. The use itself of the term “ultimate” partially renders what is being discussed in this section. For anything to be, a definite identity is required, but a genuine source of identity must be definitive. *Definiteness* and *definitiveness* are

¹⁶⁶ I render almost word for word what F. Aronadio says in Platone, *Cratilo*, op. cit., n. 42 p. 158 «L’*eidos* è quindi da intendersi come quel patrimonio di caratteristiche che conferiscono allo strumento la sua utilità» and n. 34 p. 155 «per utilità è da intendersi il “ciò in vista di cui” dello strumento». I have chosen “that in view of which” for “ciò in vista di cui” because it is more literal and also because it retains the visual aspect that we have known to be crucial to Plato’s notion of εἶδος. Similarly to the Heideggerian phraseology in *Being and Time*, this phrase connects with at least two other expressions: i) *Worumwillen* and ii) *Woraufhin*. “Ciò in vista di cui” is an Italian translation of the German i), whereas a common English translation for it is “that for the sake of which”. This concept expresses what is the ultimate source of ends. This applies to the present situation insofar as the ultimate end consists in the reality looked at (intelligibly) and not human being (which is the case of Heidegger’s *Dasein*). The question of ii) is more complicated: its meaning is mainly “on the basis of which” and “in terms of which”, though it also means something like “that with respect to which” (resembling the classical Italian translation), or “that upon which” (one is led). In the original Platonic notion at stake here, the crucial concept is that of the “towardness” any appearing thing entertains with its eidetic grounds. Regarding the Heideggerian distinction, I would say that Plato conflates the two: it is sensible things themselves that appear for the sake of Forms, which in turn are both that on the basis of which anything can appear and that upon which one is led, whether it be in the case of technical endeavour or in any instance of proper knowledge. For the English translation of the phrases cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1962, p. 522; M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, Albany 1996, pp. 439 and 477. For the classical Italian translation cf. M. Heidegger, *Essere e Tempo*, a cura di F. Volpi sulla versione di P. Chiodi, Longanesi, Milano 2009, pp. 611-2.

thus connected and their theoretical connection, where the finiteness as a positive factor translating the Greek τέλος clearly resounds, is the first step of Plato's telic ontology. Any actual use structurally requires something in view of which it is performed. That something is independent of the actual success of the performance, as we have seen in the case of the broken shuttle, but the usefulness connects user and reality for the very fact that the user is making use of an instrument. The goal determines the identity of any actual occurrence of a use and *eo ipso* determines the appropriateness of the means employed for it, as well as its success. It is only because of the εἶδος that any instrument can be used and reality as inflexible source of norms first appears in the operation of the technician and in the rules dictated by the user. This fine ontological view does not impose that to use one instrument one must know its use in the strong sense. Many people use many instruments. The emphasis is not put on the act, but rather on the result. If one is to produce some effect, she must know the purpose and the nature of the instrument, or at least have a correct opinion about it. This last statement sheds light on a further aspect of the telic structure of reality in that the most important thing is the result, which is what is at the end and is the end of the series of acts.¹⁶⁷ The closer these effects are to the excellence of the function, the more correct is the use of the instrument.¹⁶⁸

Hence, it can be said that the εἶδος gives to every instrument its usefulness, the use of any instrument delivers the user to the purpose that enables her to know how to bring about real effects, and such a purpose is the τέλος qua goal and end(ing) of the use which comes to coincide with the εἶδος itself. This seems to be Plato's discourse, but at least one question seems legitimate: what about things which cannot be used, in an ordinary sense of "use"? It is now that the notion of excellence introduced at the opening of the section proves to be crucial. In this way, it can be seen how,

¹⁶⁷ Perhaps there is something here of the same mentality of the culture that gives birth to the tragedy in which the only thing the disgraced protagonist pays for is the result of his mostly unwarily performed actions led by inscrutable necessity.

¹⁶⁸ In the case of names cf. ¹⁶⁸ Cf. F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., p 142: «To be sure, names may be used by other people for other, less sophisticated purposes. But their ultimate purpose, the highest function they can serve, and hence (from a strongly teleological perspective) their function *simpliciter*, is to teach and separate being; and the dialectician is the one who can use them for that purpose».

on the one hand, the technical model provides a very comprehensible analysis of how things stand, also concerning non-technical beings and how the treatment of the τέλος has to be broadened; on the other hand, this conceptual broadening helps to correctly qualify the treatment of technical being we have begun with. To this end, it must be considered a remarkable passage in the *Republic X*, right at the end of the part commented on in the last section, which is strongly related both to the first book of the dialogue and to the part of the *Cratylus* in which the distinction user/producer is introduced. The part in question is a bit long, but worth reading in its entirety:

«That for each thing there are these three crafts, one that uses it, one that makes it, and one that imitates it?

Yes.

Then aren't the virtue or excellence, the beauty and correctness of each manufactured item, living creature, and action related to nothing but the use for which each is made or naturally adapted?

They are.

It's wholly necessary, therefore, that a user of each thing has most experience of it and that he tells a maker which of his products performs well or badly in actual use. A flute-player, for example, tells a flute-maker about the flutes that respond well in actual playing and prescribes what kind of flutes he is to make, while the maker follows his instructions.

Of course.

Then doesn't the one who knows give instructions about good and bad flutes, and doesn't the other rely on him in making them?

Yes.

Therefore, a maker—through associating with and having to listen to the one who knows—has right opinion about whether something he makes is fine or bad, but the one who knows is the user.»¹⁶⁹ (transl. by G. M. A. Grube rev. C. D: C. Reeve)

¹⁶⁹ *Resp.* 601d1-602a1 «περὶ ἕκαστον ταύτας τινὰς τρεῖς τέχνας εἶναι, χρησομένην, ποιήσουσαν, μιμησομένην; /ναί. οὐκοῦν ἀρετὴ καὶ κάλλος καὶ ὀρθότης ἑκάστου σκεύους καὶ ζώου καὶ πράξεως οὐ πρὸς ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν χρεῖαν ἐστίν, πρὸς ἣν ἂν ἕκαστον ἦ πεποιημένον ἢ πεφυκός; /οὕτως./ πολλὴ ἄρα ἀνάγκη τὸν χρώμενον ἑκάστῳ

In this text there are at least two points: one is epistemological and one is ontological, and the former derives from the latter. Regarding the epistemological side, there are three arguments. First, as we have seen in the last section, it is said that there are three τεχνῖται: the user, the maker and the imitator.¹⁷⁰ This triplet is crucial¹⁷¹ and leads to the devaluation of the last figure which represents ignorance. Second, as we have briefly seen in the *Cratylus*, the user is the one entitled to judge the fineness of the product in such a way that the producer must follow the user's instructions. Third, that is so because the user, for the fact of being such, has access to knowledge, whereas the producer can only afford right belief. It is worth pointing out that in this context the term for belief/opinion is “πίστιν”, i.e. something that expresses a reliance.¹⁷² One can rely on a belief that may have been developed on the basis of practice and that may also be correct as in the case of the maker who effectively brings something forth. And yet this belief is not knowledge because it lacks the evidence characteristic of the latter. We cannot push this discourse any further, it must only be said that in this context the one who knows is able to know because of his role of user.

ἐμπειρότατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἄγγελον γίνεσθαι τῷ ποιητῇ οἷα ἀγαθὰ ἢ κακὰ ποιεῖ ἐν τῇ
 χρεία ᾧ χρῆται: οἷον ἀλλητῆς που ἀλλοποιῶ ἐξαγγέλλει περὶ τῶν ἀλλῶν, οἱ ἂν
 ὑπηρετῶσιν ἐν τῷ ἀλλεῖν, καὶ ἐπιτάξει οἷους δεῖ ποιεῖν, ὁ δ' ὑπηρετήσῃ. /πῶς δ' οὐ;/
 οὐκοῦν ὁ μὲν εἰδὼς ἐξαγγέλλει περὶ χρηστῶν καὶ πονηρῶν ἀλλῶν, ὁ δὲ πιστεύων
 ποιήσει; /ναί./ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἄρα σκεύους ὁ μὲν ποιητῆς πίστιν ὀρθὴν ἔξει περὶ κάλλους τε
 καὶ πονηρίας, συνὼν τῷ εἰδότητι καὶ ἀναγκαζόμενος ἀκούειν παρὰ τοῦ εἰδότος, ὁ δὲ
 χρώμενος ἐπιστήμην».

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, a new translation by Robin Waterfield, op. cit., p. 448 who says that the three figures correspond to type/instance/representation and that one cannot use a type; therefore, Plato is talking about knowing how to illustrate the peculiarity of any kind of knowledge in general.

¹⁷¹ It is worth mentioning the magniloquent and indeed true statement by G. Deleuze: «Soit la grande trinité platonicienne: l'usager, le producteur, l'imitateur.» in *Logique du Sens*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1969, p. 297. Cf also D. Frede, *Forms, Functions and Structure in Plato*, op. cit., p. 373 who comments on how this differs from the preceding passage as follows: «The creative role has without comment or justification been transferred from the divine maker to the human user.»

¹⁷² This obviously connects to the second segment of the line of the renowned metaphor in the *Republic* (511e1) and in general with the meaning of the term which is general “trust”, “credence” and “credit”. Cf. Platon, *La République*, traduction et présentation par G. Leroux, op. cit., p. 719 n. 23.

It is already clear that this notion of use oversteps the ordinary sense of “use”. And this is also clear in the pivotal argument of the citation that represent its ontological core. Plato holds that excellence, beauty¹⁷³ and correctness (ἀρετὴ καὶ κάλλος καὶ ὀρθότης) of any kind of thing, whether it be artificial or natural in the ordinary sense, is (in relation to nothing but) the use (τὴν χρείαν) towards (πρὸς) which it has been made/done/crafted (πεποιημένον) or is naturally predisposed (πεφυκός). In a curious chiasmus excellence opens the closure of the *Republic* as it closed its opening. This may be a signal both of the strict coherence of the work and of the profound permeation of the ontological value conveyed by technique. Excellence is associated with fineness and correctness¹⁷⁴, and the three concepts try to describe the state of complete perfection of the εἶδος that determines instruments and natural beings on a par. Not just because Plato speaks of manufactured items, living beings and actions, but also because of the occurrence of the most significant natural disposition.¹⁷⁵ We have now come to the point (2) above. My contention is that any kind of thing comes to be “telicly” pointing at its eidetic reality which constantly represents its goal. This goal is the excellence which constitutes its nature. For the εἶδος, although it is not concretely achievable as a goal, perfectly is that which many things seem to be and thus towards which those many things ontologically tend to without ever reaching it. The particular thing never coincides with its goal for the same reasons that we have seen keeping Forms from things: The use of any instrument is not restricted to a particular instrument, but belongs to its kind.¹⁷⁶ As we have seen at the beginning of the section, everything has its function which is in virtue of its ἀρετὴ. The function is not restricted to instruments. One possible question

¹⁷³ Note that such a beauty is not a mere pulchritude but a more essential fineness qualifying good products. Cf. the terms “καλόν” and “καλῶς” in *Crat.* 390d1-8 and F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., p 140. Cf. also *Resp.* 353a4

¹⁷⁴ This entails that here correctness is strictly conjoined to excellence and then that it does not allow gradualness. Contrarily, it seems it does in *Cratylus* cf. Platone, *Cratilo*, introduzione e note di F. Aronadio, op. cit., introduzione pp. XXXVI-VIII.

¹⁷⁵ I take this doubling as a reinforcing use of the perfect form, because, strictly speaking, the natural disposition is regardless of the ordinary distinction of artificial and natural.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Crat.* 389e1-390a2 where Plato states that the smiths willing to transpose in matter the same instrument for the same employment do not use the same iron: they assign the same idea to different pieces of iron.

my argument seems to raise is, what does the notion of use have to do with all this?

I suggest that there are at least three relevant connections between use and end. Firstly, use is a particularly intuitive metaphor extracted from the discourse on the ontological structure of instruments that help show how things actually stand concerning any set of things, whether they be ordinarily used as instruments or not. This thought accords with the passage from *Republic* I where function and excellence were ascribed to horses, organs and souls. After that, we have two derivative senses of use that connect to this telic way of thinking of reality. On the one hand, if names are taken as tools employed to discern and inform about being, and Forms are such a being which consists in the excellence that determines anything that appears as its goal, then to use names precisely is discerning the intrinsic teleonomy¹⁷⁷ of anything, i.e. its ontological goal. On the other hand, a political-ethical value of this connection is also conceivable, insofar as the knower is able to dictate whether in the polis something is properly used or properly regarded. In this last case, the use of anything, including living beings, means how everyone is to interact individually and collectively with that thing respecting the purpose of harmony in the polis. These last two ways of dealing with the connection of goal and use are derivative because they connect the use of one instrument (names) or set of deeds (policy) with the goal of everything which is set by nature. We shall not address the second derivative interpretation and we shall reserve the first one to the next section. The first ontological interpretation should instead be developed because at least one objection can be raised, that the notion of use inevitably reminds of a subjective pre-comprehension.

However, I think this concept of *χρεία*¹⁷⁸ should not be read under anthropocentric assumptions. Of course, one can say that thinking of reality

¹⁷⁷ I adopt this term, etymologically perfectly fitting, from J. Monod *The Chance and the Necessity*, which means something like “internal end-directedness”.

¹⁷⁸ It is with a feeling of awe that I give the following suggestion. The concept of *χρεία* could be reminiscent of the well-known fragment by Protagoras of the *homo mensura*. In the first sentence of the fragment, Protagoras claims that man is the measure of all things. I definitely do not want to face this troublesome topic. I restrict myself to pointing out that the term used by Protagoras is “*χρῆμα*” which means a thing (mainly but not exclusively, that one needs or uses) and which is the *nomen rei actae* of the verb “*χράομαι*” (to use). The term “*χρεία*” shares the same stem. This connection is theoretically, if not textually, consistent: Protagoras claims that man is the measure of

as a telic structure is anthropocentric, but this does not mean that the use Plato is talking about is the use that human beings can make of it. Everything has its function, this function aims for its excellence which is thought of as use because—as in the case of instruments which work if they have been created under the guidance of one who knows their use—thus every particular structurally aims for its nature conceived as a goal if it is to have an effect in the world.¹⁷⁹ This is the true teleology of Plato and it is double-headed: the “reality” of a thing is in its effects, and these effects are made possible by the Forms which feature as the perfectly definite goal of those things.¹⁸⁰ In both cases, technique is supremely iconic as it represents both the effectiveness of the product and the purposiveness of the act as separate from it. Finally, there is one last aspect, because it is not just a matter of effectiveness; the effectiveness of, say, the crafted items derives in turn from the fact that the use is a source of order. Likewise, non-instruments are characterised by their goals. These goals are not factual predeterminations of what those things are heading into. It only determines what they are and not what is going to happen to them.¹⁸¹ This distinction is crucial. As the perfect use of an instrument determines how it is to be employed and what effects it can exert, but does not determine how it is

what he happens to use, or in general of the things he comes in relation to; Plato replies that the independent nature of the use of each thing is the measure of the relation man entertains with it. Cf. the use of “χρήματα” in *Crat.* 440a7;d2.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. D. Frede, *Forms, Functions and Structure in Plato*, op. cit., p. 375 who says «the use of an animal therefore consists rather in the fulfilment of the conditions of its own nature». The author goes further, saying that both mathematical entities (p. 383) and summa genera (p.390) must be interpreted as functions. Although I find her paper particularly insightful and correct on many points, especially when she affirms that the goodness of things in the sense of being-good-at performing/having an effect on something is also what makes them intelligible (p. 386) or her interpretation of the Platonic Good as overall fittingness of all things (385-6), I believe that she tends to reverse the correct order of the dichotomy use-τέλος: everything strives for its natural goal (Form) as order conferring it with its nature and *then* giving usefulness to instruments; the ordinary notion of function to apparently functionless Forms should not be applied. She correctly appeals to the concept of power (p. 383), which however is terribly complex and which we shall extensively touch on in the last chapter of this work.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. D. Sedley, *Creationism and its Critics in Antiquity*, University of California Press, Berkley 2007, p. 108 (discussed by D. Frede, *Forms, Functions and Structure in Plato*, op. cit., p. 381).

¹⁸¹ This could be the major difference with regard to Aristotelian teleology: Platonic τέλος can never be an actual state of the thing.

actually going to be used or crafted, so the ontological goal is the “orderedness” which warrants temporal identity to the particular thing which tends to it and resolves in it as its cognitive graspability. In being τέλος-directed, any sensible thing displays a temporary order that gives it its effectiveness. Moreover, this order is intelligible, and its being ordered is intrinsically connected to intelligibility and perfection.¹⁸² There cannot be something authentically intelligible without its fulfilling an order. Further, the very notion of best-x is teleological, I think that Plato denies that there could be a best-state which is not worth pursuing. If the empirical domain has something that can be recognised through thought, it is nothing but its mirroring of the eidetic conditions in the empirical outcomes which are temporary and context-relative, but nonetheless restrictedly effective. The εἶδος is that towards which any appearance tends and is that which is known by the user. As we shall see in a short while, there could be no such knowledge regardless of the most important tool of all: the word and the discourse. The expert concerned with those tools is the dialectician, who

¹⁸² There are strong similarities with an earlier dialogue, namely the *Gorgias*. In *Gorgias* 503-6, Plato neatly exploits the technical metaphor in order to reject Callicles’ hedonism. Of interest here is the methodological part, leaving aside Socrates’ views on pleasure and pain. In this passage, there are three things worth highlighting. First (503e1-504a1), the figure of the craftsman is introduced. He looks at his work (ἔργον) and acts to apply one form (εἶδος) to the thing he is working at. Once the craftsman has compelled the parts of the work to fit together (ἀρμόττειν), the result is a settled and orderly thing (τεταγμένον τε καὶ κεκοσμημένον πρᾶγμα). These verbal perfects do not have the metaphysical depth of the πεφυκέναι, but still express an achievement of completeness. Second (504a8; b4), that which is ordered is said to be good. The term used is “χρήσιμος” which means “useful”, “serviceable” and “good for its kind”, and, once again, stems from the verb “χράομαι”. To say that something is good, Plato employs a term that also expresses serviceability, and such a goodness is the same as being an ordered reality. As confirmation and third point, we consider a sentence a few pages below (506c5-e2) where, continuing the conversation on the topic, Socrates gives a definition of ἀρετή as that order, organisation and configuration given to things. On this part of the *Gorgias* cf. L. Franklin, “*Technē*” and *Teleology in Plato’s “Gorgias”*, «Apeiron», 38 (2005), pp. 229-255 who speaks of a teleological theory (p. 246); A. Macé, *Gorgias, le Gorgias, et l’ordre de l’âme*, in M. Erler L. Brisson (eds), *Gorgias – Menon*, Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum, Academia, Sankt Augustin 2007, pp. 83-9 and J. Hintikka, *Plato on Knowing how, Knowing that, and Knowing what*, op. cit., p. 37; on 506c5-e2 cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary by E. R. Dodds, (1959) Clarendon, Oxford 1990, p. 333. According to M. Canto, there are no proofs that in this passage Socrates is talking about Forms cf. Platon, *Gorgias*, Traduction inédite, introduction et notes par Monique Canto, Flammarion, Paris 1987, pp. 345-6 n. 175.

can connect definition to function/goal¹⁸³ and judge the effectiveness of everything that appears.

To conclude this section, just a few more words must be included. I think that it is not a mistake to assert that for Plato truth is the end, and it is true what's true in the end. Given that truth is strictly speaking ontological,¹⁸⁴ it is the end of reality in that everything tends to it, but it is also its delimitation since nothing can stand beyond the ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων. We are now faced with a tenet, specular to the Priority of Reality Assumption (PRA) introduced in the first section, which could be named Telicity¹⁸⁵ of Reality Assumption (TRA):

If one experiences how things are/stand, regardless of whether she be correct or mistaken, things in the present will always have been as they are going to prove/reveal¹⁸⁶ to be.

Needless to say, the only metaphysical item able to guarantee this principle is the εἶδος. We can speak of telicity because TRA can work only if the reality in question is perfectly complete in itself as we have plentifully seen by now. This telic structure also has a reflection on the epistemic side: in the process of knowledge, which in itself constitutively aims at something, it is now true what is going to prove to be true in the end. Hence, it could be said that the telos is always already in the future. As in the case of PRA, there is no actual change between what it seems to be now and what it will reveal to be later. When we see how things actually stand, they will always have been as we will have uncovered them in the end. That is the reason why only the εἶδος admits of knowledge. If one thing partakes of a certain nature, it will be the only thing always totally

¹⁸³ Cf. H. S. Thayer, *Plato: The Theory and Language of Function*, op. cit., p. 310 «We might suppose that non-vacuous statements of functions will in general serve as definitional descriptions of various sorts of functional things. By speaking of “definitional descriptions” I merely mean that in stating what is the function of horses, knives, eyes, etc., we are not only supplying information about these objects (say, that knives can cut), but that the description is to be regarded as a statement of the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be a horse, a knife, an eye, etc».

¹⁸⁴ Cf. *supra* n. 138.

¹⁸⁵ The term “telicity” is employed in linguistics to connote verbs or sentences that have a clear endpoint cf. C. Comrie, *Aspect*, op. cit., pp. 44-48.

¹⁸⁶ The double term is useful to highlight the double linguistic/visual nature of the Form.

determined regardless of the particular vicissitudes or contextual features of the sensible thing. Authentic knowledge differs from correct opinion in that it upholds such conclusiveness. This works as a presupposition of the more intuitive aspect of conclusiveness belonging to knowledge. Knowledge is absolute when, once we know something, we are also sure it will never be different from how it is. How does the infallibility of knowledge connect with TRA? The infallibility of knowledge is: once something is known it is also known that it will not change. TRA is: ontologically speaking, things already stand as they will reveal to be. In this way, TRA works as ontological prerequisite of any act of knowledge: reality always already thoroughly is before any act of the knower.¹⁸⁷

As the past of the natural predisposition was before any possible time in the past, and the paradigm was always already present before any imitation of it, so the τέλος cannot be reached by extending into the future. It instead consists in the structural goal-centred deferment towards reality's always already reached perfection.

4) Ontology and technique: some remarks

The time has come to draw some conclusions from what has been said thus far. Essentially, we have addressed and explored three concepts which textually and theoretically make their appearance after both the epistemic and ontological sides of the technical endeavour have been thematised. To experience technique first gives way to a double mark of reality: firstly,

¹⁸⁷ This is stated by Plato himself as he criticises the ontology of the flux in the *Cratylus* (439e2-440a4): « Then if it never stays the same, how can it be something? After all, if it ever stays the same, it clearly isn't changing—at least, not during that time; and if it always stays the same and is always the same thing, so that it never departs from its own form, how can it ever change or move? / There's no way. / Then again it can't even be known by anyone. For at the very instant the knower-to-be approaches, what he is approaching is becoming a different thing, of a different character, so that he can't yet come to know either what sort of thing it is or what it is like—surely, no kind of knowledge is knowledge of what isn't in any way. («πῶς οὖν ἂν εἴη τι ἐκεῖνο ὃ μηδέποτε ὡσαύτως ἔχει; εἰ γὰρ ποτε ὡσαύτως ἴσχει, ἐν γ' ἐκείνῳ τῷ χρόνῳ δῆλον ὅτι οὐδὲν μεταβαίνει: εἰ δὲ ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχει καὶ τὸ αὐτό ἐστὶ, πῶς ἂν τοῦτό γε μεταβάλλοι ἢ κινῶιτο, μηδὲν ἐξιστάμενον τῆς αὐτοῦ ιδέας;/οὐδαμῶς. / ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ' ἂν γνωσθεῖη γε ὑπ' οὐδενός. ἅμα γὰρ ἂν ἐπιόντος τοῦ γνωσομένου ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλοιον γίγνοιτο, ὥστε οὐκ ἂν γνωσθεῖη ἔτι ὁποῖόν γέ τί ἐστὶν ἢ πῶς ἔχον: γινῶσις δὲ δήπου οὐδεμία γινῶσκει ὃ γινῶσκει μηδαμῶς ἔχον»).

technique delivers the subject to an ontologically proper modus of framing reality; secondly, within a technical process the elementary bounds of necessity arise through the constraints reality exerts in any attempt at operating upon it. That is the reason why the craft analogy, the τέχνη and rationality, *mutatis mutandis*, radically and omni-comprehensively pervade all the stages of Plato's philosophising.

The three notions presented in this chapter are strongly tied in virtue of technique. The πεφουκέναι supplies the conditions against which everything acquires its identity and every act its legitimacy, the παράδειγμα represents the irreducibly original reality that anything derivative approximates and that leads one's discernment in judging it, and finally, the τέλος defines the perfect completion that qualifies the use and excellence of everything. It is easy to note how technique keeps them together: technique always has prior conditions as to its material, instruments and procedures; technique also takes place looking towards a model that gathers together all the salient traits needed by the technical series of acts; lastly, technique has its final goal in the use of its products. However, how do these notions trace back to the tenets of Plato's metaphysics that we have examined in the first chapter?

To begin with, it needs to be recognised that the three notions at stake here are essentially the same reality seen under the three temporal dimensions. We cannot broach the thorny problem of how difficult it has been, linguistically and conceptually, to develop current commonplace temporal distinctions.¹⁸⁸ Thus, keeping at most general notions of times, the first thing that must be considered is that the three notions have the same ontological core and unfold it in three different manners which match with the different temporal dimensions. The three notions correspond to temporal dimensions insofar as they represent a particular way of eluding the respective temporal dimension associated to each of them. This elusion may also be expressed by the timelessness of the temporal dimensions represented by the terms. The πεφουκέναι stands for the past. It is the absolute priority of that which comes before anything else. To do this, it is a timeless non-chronological past never reachable by going back in time since it systematically comes before any reached point. With the language

¹⁸⁸ Consider just how distant the multiple versions of the Homeric phrases denoting past, present and future are cf. for instance *Il.* I, 70 (έόντα τά τ' έσσόμενα πρό τ' έόντα).

of events, we are bound to consider it as if it has always already happened. Turning to the παράδειγμα, we are faced with a sort of non-immanent present, by this I simply mean a present that never occurs in space and time. The time of the paradigm is a present without duration¹⁸⁹ that does never come to be since it is always already present and that does not coincide with anything that takes place in one's experience. This provides the paradigm with a special status of originality that explains its priority in working as original being that gives likenesses their determination. In the case of the τέλος, we are faced with something that is always already in the future. This third temporalisation requires a bit of explanation. The essential aspect is that in its being always already in the future the perfection and completeness of every nature slips away the contingency of events and therefore it never occurs in space and time, but is, with respect to sensible domain, a structural tension of things towards their ontological completion which they can never reach. It is a future that will never happen. Hence, the three notions are three different ways, different inasmuch as approached from the diverse temporal dimensions, of cognising eternity as pure timelessness. They always are and do not appear; therefore, they are not in time, but their difference traces the peculiarity of each temporal dimension. To interact with reality, under the condition of being at least minimally effective, conducts to Forms. Time flows into being which stands beyond the boundaries of temporality.

We come then to a second thing shared by the three notions: they express different aspects of the same normativity. In all three marks of reality we find the same degree of independence because in each of them the conditions they represent are independent of the single cases they rule. The πεφυκέναι is the natural condition of identity characterising everything before the action, the παράδειγμα is that condition taken as original unity, the τέλος is the natural condition which represents the perfection in nature. I take these three concepts to manifest the ontological status of the εἶδος if grasped by a temporal and temporary being as the human (more precisely:

¹⁸⁹ Alas, it is not possible here to enquire into the connection of this present to the Platonic ἐξαιφνης in *Parm.* 156d. Suffices it to say that the view considering the theoretical movement that condenses reality to a punctual form and that which leads to timelessness are one and the same, and bear significant resemblance to the present context.

human's embodied soul). Ontological normativity features as a natural necessity which constrains everything that appears. It is worth explicating that Plato's Forms are not quiet reified criteria banned from the everyday world waiting for the comfortable sight of the wise man. Rather, they are the powerful necessity constraining the world.¹⁹⁰ I take the unconditioned normativity to be the mark of Plato's being. Unconditioned means something very precise: reality is not affected by any act, be it epistemic-theoretical or poietic-operational. The three notions exposed in this chapter represent this maximum degree of non-affectedness. As we have seen, in each case there is a sort of priority to any act or event; the content of this prioritised norm regulates any interaction with it. Be it cutting or burning, medicine or sailing, mathematics or politics, everything has its own nature that distinguishes it from everything else and that supplies identity and rules of interaction regardless of any actual recognition of it. Though conjugated in timeless past, present and future, we are faced with the same essential normativity of reality. And yet Plato's metaphysical epistemology gives this strongly realist tenet a peculiar character. The three notions at the same time show how the epistemic prerogative permeates Plato's ontology. As we have seen in discussing PRA, the *πεφυκέναι* accounts for the stability of the objective side in the case of epistemic change, and this is thought of as a mark of being. Likewise, because the *παράδειγμα* is original, it is put in relation to its imitations in representing that by means of which imitations can be objectively judged. Finally and similarly, the *τέλος* is the perfect completion of everything that appears, and its objectivity grounds the fundamental epistemic assumption that what we ultimately come to know has always been all along. What we have here is, among other things, a further confirmation as to how, according to Plato, the way anything supplies cognitive attitudes is the measure of its reality.

Another issue that frequently emerges is the equivalence of norm with regard to nature and art. If the unconstrained status of the norm is embraced as a mark of what is, there is no real distinction between artificial and natural beings. The Form of bed determines particulars beds exactly in the same way as the Form of bee determines particulars bees. Possibly, for this reason terms originally related to the scope of craft and action as *ἔργα* and

¹⁹⁰ Cf. the Necessity that guides the sky in Parmenides fr. B 10.

πράγματα are equally employed to speak about natural things and about craftsmen's works. This could also emphasise that sensible things enjoy their limited degree of reality insofar as they have an effect, which at any rate does not belong to them because things only happen to display it.

However, it must be said that the Anatomy of the εἶδος stands inescapably on the background, given that whatever is to act as natural predisposition, paradigm and complete perfection needs to present the entire set of features discussed in the first chapter. Moreover, the One-over-many principle is decidedly conveyed by technique since there is always one set of rules for a plurality of products, uses, acts. The same counts for language in that, as we have seen, the One-over-many principle essentially informs it. For the three notions to make sense, an ontology of (natural) kinds is needed, which in turn presupposes an entirely new conception of being whose specificity lies in its connection to language. The next two chapters are devoted to this topic. To conclude this section, we must consider one last point which has cropped up more than once thus far, without being directly approached.¹⁹¹ Consider this statement:

«So just as a shuttle is a tool for dividing warp and woof, a name is a tool for giving instruction, that is to say, for dividing being.»¹⁹²

I take these lines to be a genuine piece of Platonic thought. I shall not discuss the interpretation of this passage with regard to its dramatic context.¹⁹³ The “didascalical” nature of names derives from the diacritical one. This is the typical Platonic declaration of the authoritativeness of the expert. The one who is able to discern being is also entitled to impart lessons about it. I want to conclude this chapter with this dense citation for the following reasons: first, according to Plato the name is a tool. This

¹⁹¹ Cf. Chapter One p. 26.

¹⁹² *Crat.* 388b14-c1 «ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστὶν ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας ὡσπερ κερκὶς ὑφάσματος».

¹⁹³ To frame the passage in its context cf. F. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary*, op. cit., pp. 107-114 and D. Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*, op. cit., pp. 59-61. For a brilliant analysis on the one hand of how names work and how they bring reality to manifestation, and on the other hand of how their instrumental status is crucial ontologically speaking cf. F. Aronadio, *I fondamenti della riflessione di Platone sul linguaggio: il Cratilo*, op. cit., pp. 45-65.

means that all that has been said about the ontological commitment deriving from tools and the τέχνη also applies to names. As said above, names are part of reality and then their correct use, nature and excellence is not “merely” a linguistic matter. Second, if names are tools their use is governed by a technique and this technique has one task: discern being. To recapitulate, if something is governed by a stable norm, then the norm is ontological. Names are part of reality since they conduct to αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα.¹⁹⁴ However, names/language are not like the other parts of reality. And that is the reason why the last quotation is relevant here. If language is the instrument designated to discern being, this means that it is the only thing by means of which one can have access to reality as it is. Reality can never be arrived at sensorially. This prerogative of language stems from how things stand on the part of reality, which means that not only is there a Form of name among the other Forms, but also that it is in virtue of how reality structures itself that it is altogether describable. This also implies that because of natural predisposition, language holds a privileged position with respect to being, and this is tenuously mirrored by its form. In the next two chapters, we shall first examine why sensible world is not able to meet the ontological requirements of the foundation of language, and second, we shall see the unique intertwinement of language and being.

¹⁹⁴ *Crat.* 389d6-7; cf. T. Baxter, *The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming*, op. cit., pp. 41-8.

Chapter Three

Language and Becoming

Introduction

One must always act carefully when dealing with Platonic dialogues given their compositional intricacies and the lack of programmatic clarity concerning their intent. The *Theaetetus*, however, deserves a special mention because, more frequently than not, appears to be a burdensome morass as to its correct interpretation, the extent the author considers its arguments to be genuine and who is meant to be its privileged interlocutor. That is why, more than ever, in our interpretation a very specific angle will be given, from which some parts of the dialogue will be addressed. The main topic of the present chapter is the relation between language and becoming. To put it better, this chapter is tasked with giving an answer to a very specific question: why is the sensible domain not able to ontologically support and ground language? For this reason, the first part of the dialogue is analysed here, leaving aside the analysis of the rest of the dialogue (with some exceptions) which would seem to be more overtly devoted to the discussion of the active role of language in characterising knowledge. This is so because what we are specifically interested in is not Plato's theory concerning the role language plays in his account of knowledge. In lieu thereof, we attempt to understand to what extent the possibility of language

features as the fundamental requirement of any theory about reality and its nature. In the previous chapter, language in the form of its components, specifically names, was considered an instrument. Previously, it emerged that any instrument commits one to natural predispositions and its perfect use. When one's need is to speak about the world, it may be asked: what can I actually perform with words and discourse? And most importantly: what can I learn about the nature of the world by means of these words? The original question remains how the world can be made sense of. This question derives from the trouble of exiting without betraying the coalescence view. If the question is how one can speak about the world, the starting point is the immediate experience of it. Once this option falls apart, one is not surrounded only by ashes. Contrariwise, he is led to a new path. This chapter deals with the *pars destruens*, leaving the *pars construens* to the following chapter, just as the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* follow one another. The point coming up is then: what is the power of the word? But in order to address this issue, we need first to discuss the initial part of the *Theaetetus*, which will prove to be crucial to the question of the power of language, after a rather prolonged and detailed discussion.

Why this part of *Theaetetus*? Because it is radical in exploring the nature of becoming through an extreme formulation. In this way, the analysis of the specific needs of the dramatic context can be omitted. It looks like an ontological enquiry even though it does not mainly refer to being (and never to Forms), in that it attempts to capture in its purest form what a phenomenon is and how it relates to the singular experiential frame belonging to each subject. The problematic status of becoming is addressed by passing through a gnoseological questioning. Cognitive process and cognised thing are inevitably linked. Once again, we are faced with Plato's peculiar metaphysical epistemology. The nature of a portion of reality acquires its qualification thanks to the kind of cognitive activity it supports and, at the same time, there can be no correct question concerning knowledge which does not commit to the reality one has knowledge of. That is why I take the dialogue in question to be an aporetic display of the need for ontology in any enquiry into the nature of knowledge. This point of view is largely recognised, though perhaps not so widely shared.¹⁹⁵ The

¹⁹⁵ For a brief, though pertinent, survey of the various interpretations among the critics cf. L. Brown's Introduction of Plato, *Theaetetus*, translation by J. McDowell, notes by

question here is neither whether Plato thinks that this view concerning sensible domain is correct, albeit partially, nor whether he thinks it is not at all correct and only belongs to other thinkers he is critiquing, and if so which ones are they supposed to be. Contrarily, I think Plato's point is to show a crucial inconsequentiality which derives from assuming the linguistic instrument in supporting a view about reality which does not meet linguistic functionality's own ontological requirements. The present chapter consists of four sections. The first section is a close analysis of the first definition of knowledge as *αἴσθησις* where I will discuss in detail what this term means and how it connects to appearances and becoming. The second section continues with an examination as to what extent Plato is presenting us with an ontology of events. This section attempts to show how the first definition of *ἐπιστήμη* flows into an ontology which is concerned with whatever is intrinsically temporal and which, on these grounds, will not strictly deserve the name of ontology.¹⁹⁶ At the end of this second section, I try to explain a first set of implications in connection to some concepts of the second chapter.

The third section examines the dialogue's final argument on the first definition of knowledge, namely the collapse of language. This crucial part of the dialogue brings to its end Theaetetus' first proposition by showing its impracticability: according to its "ontological" view, this proposition is not able to state itself. As we shall see, this does not merely depend on how things stand, but rather on the fact that things *stand* and do not become. The fourth section takes into account a very brief though significant part of the text right at the end of the second definition (which will not be touched on here), namely the example of the eyewitness in a trial. This example is used by Plato to make clear the difference between knowledge and true belief. The discussion of this page is important because it makes us understand, on the one hand, a relevant character of the sensible domain that was under examination in the former sections and, on the other hand,

L. Brown, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. XVII-XXVI. Cf. also T. Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus*, Academia, Sankt Augustin 2004, pp. 16-24.

¹⁹⁶ This has been my first step into the arduous route of Plato's exegesis. Many of the analyses presented in the section have already been shaped in my *Su aisthesis e genesis nella prima definizione di episteme nel Teeteto*, «Fogli di Filosofia», 6 (2015), pp. 33-52.

what we have named a verificationist assumption in Plato's conception of reality.¹⁹⁷

Finally, this chapter is followed by a brief excursus consisting of two sections. In the first section, I outline an interpretation of the reality of sensible things in Plato, restricted to what has been said about the *Theaetetus*. In the second section of the excursus, I analyse two different notions of reference underlying Plato's view which are answerable to the profound structure of the world and which may be labelled Indexical and Definitional reference. Their difference shows what I consider to be the most fundamental point that differentiates sensible things from Forms and also paves the way for what will be argued in the last chapter of this work.

1) Experiences and appearances

In this section, I shall focus on the increasingly radicalised arguments pertaining to the nature of becoming. I shall suspend, however, the analysis of the dialogical subtleties of the progressive introduction of all the elements of the final vision under scrutiny here.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, I shall assume that the final vision put forward during the analysis of the first definition of knowledge is the main scope of the entire discussion of the first thesis itself. Furthermore, this section has drawn considerable attention with regard to the types of change, relational predicates and causal relations. I shall not focus on these discussions, not because they are wrong, but because they may lead us astray. Obviously, I have considered those interpretations which will be extensively referred to during the discussion, but my attempt is to follow a new path by not developing those themes as essential to reading this part of the dialogue. To be honest, I do not even think that what goes on in the definition is a formulation of a theory of perception in the modern sense.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Chapter One pp. 33-4.

¹⁹⁸ On the necessity of interpreting as a progression the series of arguments of the first part of the first definition cf. F. Aronadio, *Il parametreisthai e il trattamento platonico della tesi dell'anthropos-metron*. *Theaet. 154b1-6*, in Id., *L'aisthesis e le strategie argomentative di Platone nel Teeteto*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2016, pp. 131-72.

The first definition begins by asserting the perfect coincidence of knowledge and perception.¹⁹⁹ The term in question is αἴσθησις, which is mainly translated as “perception” or “sensation”. I shall adopt the former as it is the most common among the English-speaking interpreters and is employed by McDowell whose translation²⁰⁰ of the dialogue is used throughout the present chapter, when not indicated otherwise. Nonetheless, it will be clear in a short while that the term acquires in this context a very specific value which depends on the series of equivalences between the term itself and other relevant concepts put forward in the first part of the dialogue. The literature has extensively recognised the broad semantical status of the term.²⁰¹ To say that knowledge is perception is to say that I am allowed only knowledge of what I can directly encounter in my experience. That is the reason why I would recommend that the Greek term be translated with “experience”, under the condition that we understand it as the event of directly experiencing something rather than developing cognitive attitudes or habitudes (as the term “ἐμπειρία” may mean instead). Right after the statement that knowledge is nothing but αἴσθησις, Socrates’

¹⁹⁹ It is a synallagmatic relation cf. M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1990, p. 10 «Now the thesis that knowledge is perception breaks down into two propositions: (1) all perceiving is knowledge, (2) all knowing is perceiving».

²⁰⁰ Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1973.

²⁰¹ Without any claim of exhaustiveness, I refer to two important interpreters particularly apt to clarify this matter cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, Dover Publications, New York 2003 (1934), p. 30 where he says: «in ordinary usage *aisthesis*, translated perception, has a wide range of meanings, including sensation, our awareness of outer objects or facts, feeling, emotions, etc.», cf. also M. Frede, *Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues*, in Id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 3-8:3 who notices that in its ordinary sense «It [*scil.* The term “aisthanesthai”] can be used in any case in which one perceives something by the senses and even more generally in any case in which one becomes aware of something, notices something, realizes or even comes to understand something, however this may come about». Both quotations grasp a relevant aspect of the notion at stake here: the former its broad status that is not exquisitely sensorial, the latter the fact that the αἴσθησις essentially is a becoming-aware process which “settles” (even though, as we shall see, very momentarily) as appearance/opinion (the double nature of this pair is the key thought). Cf. also Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., pp. 117-8; J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2001, pp. 48-50. Cf. also *supra* n. 20.

first move is to conceive of the statement as the same as Protagoras' Man-Measure thesis. As we have also similarly seen in the last chapter, Protagoras' most famous assertion is that "a man is the measure of all things: of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not."²⁰² Thus, from the first move the verb "be" is inserted, albeit critically treated throughout the definition. Although from the next line being will be resolved into becoming, the problem is framed within a purely Platonic manner: there can be no definition of knowledge without referring to the ontological status of the known reality.

Suspending the issue as to what this thesis is supposed to mean for the historic Protagoras, we have quite extensive information about what it means for Plato, who, referring to Protagoras, says:

«And he means something on these lines: everything is, for me, the way it appears to me, and is, for you, the way it appears to you; and you and I are, each of us, a man?»²⁰³

Each thing (ἕκαστα) is as it is only as long as and thanks to the fact that it appears (φαίνεται). Right at the beginning of the definition we come up with the verb "φαίνεσθαι" which in general means that something is appearing, manifesting itself. This appearance is not such as to be objectively sensorial or spatial, but rather it designates how anything appears inasmuch as it seems to me to be "thus and so".²⁰⁴ The actual presence of experience makes me sense and experience reality. It seems to

²⁰² Cf. *Theaet.* 152a3-4. I suspend here the discussion concerning the value of the verb "be" in the Man-Measure principle. L. Brown interprets it as predicative cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, Translation by J. McDowell, notes by L. Brown, op.cit., p. 116.

²⁰³ *Theaet.* 152a6-7 «οὐκοῦν οὕτω πῶς λέγει, ὡς οἷα μὲν ἕκαστα ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τοιαῦτα μὲν ἔστιν ἐμοί, οἷα δὲ σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ αὖ σοί; ἄνθρωπος δὲ σύ τε κἀγώ;».

²⁰⁴ As any proper classical Greek reader knows, the verb "φαίνεσθαι" presents two constructions: either with the participle or with the infinitive. In the first case, it means "being manifestly x", in the second case "seeming to be x". Interestingly, John McDowell deploys this distinction in a non-exegetical epistemology essay cf. J. McDowell, *Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge*, in Id., *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1998, pp. 369-94:386 n. 32. In the context at hand, Plato seems to be conflating both uses of the verb: the only thing objectively manifest is that which seems to be. Cf. also G. Fine, *Protagorean Relativism*, in Ead., *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected essays*, op. cit., pp. 132-159 : pp. 133-4 n. 6.

be a quite indubitable common-sense standpoint, yet it is also the first step towards epistemic conflicts between men since the world of experience is from the very first moment marked by the diverging ways it appears to different people.

Theaetetus' first definition is immediately compared to Protagoras' thesis and the latter is paraphrased as above. To explain this statement, an example is given: it is a commonplace experience that the same wind feels both cold and warm to different people.²⁰⁵ The answer is that everything is, for someone, in the way, and (for) as long as, it appears to him to be so. As stated above, an appearance of something suffices for it to be considered real. Appearance is philosophically interesting because it keeps together phenomenality, which is the minimum degree of externality of manifestation, and belief, which is the most inner state of awareness of one's mind, in such a way as to be indiscernible. This is a hint of why, for Plato, this view is worth both examining and rejecting in that it is a radically alternative answer to a question Plato himself tries to give answer to: the correlation of world and cognitive means that we have seen in the first chapter coming from the archaic coalescence view. This could be an interpretation of Plato's statement that the "φαίνεται" is the same as αἰσθάνεσθαι.²⁰⁶ Consider the following lines:

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Theaet.* 152b7-8. This line has been broadly debated. I think that the argument demonstrates that there is no difference between saying that something is entirely A to one person and non-A to some other person and saying that there is no such thing as "something in itself" (we find the phrase αὐτὸ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ at 152b6 which bears some resemblance to the usual semi-technical phrase αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό; the goal of the different preposition, if any, may be to aim at adumbrating the "intentionality" relation which will play a central role throughout the *pars construens* of the discussion of the first definition. However, it must not be forgotten that the classical phrase will be present in the exposition of the "secret doctrine" below). Therefore, I do not believe that Plato is speaking of a wind as a substratum neither cold nor hot. On the same lines cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., p. 119. Cf. also Platone, *Teeteto*, traduzione e note di M. Valgimigli, introduzione e note aggiornate di A. M. Ioppolo, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2006, p. 226 n.30 and J. Day, *Perception in Theaetetus* 152-183, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 15 (1997), pp. 51-80 : 71-2. Contra cf. D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1988, pp. 43-4.

²⁰⁶ Cf. *Theaet.* 152b12.

«So appearing and perception are the same, in the case of that which is hot and everything of that sort. So it looks as though things are, for each person, the way he perceives them.»²⁰⁷

The equivalence of appearing and perception means both that for any perceived thing it has been manifesting itself in one's experience and that there can only be manifestation within one's experience. Consequently, αἴσθησις and φαντασία are the same (ταυτόν). The latter term shares the stem φαν- that expresses the semantic field of manifestation and strictly means the quasi-objective appearance (in the sense of external) contrasting with the homonymous modern term, which means either the mental production of images or the fictional mental activity. In the present context, it simply means appearance, apparition.²⁰⁸ This equivalence implies annihilating any difference between that which seems to be and any present perception of it. Ultimately, the possibility that one perceives something and at the same time entertains a wrong belief about it is thereby erased. In fact, there is no distinction between the two moments: one always perceives that which is manifest (in the way it does) and it manifests itself only that which presently takes place in one's experience. It must be added that the reference to "that which is hot and that sort of thing" does not mean that Socrates is restricting the current discourse to perceptual properties. At most, he is employing perceptual properties as intuitive instances of what he wants to apply to everything else as well. The equivalence in the second line then is the key to the preceding one.²⁰⁹ The final inference, which has

²⁰⁷ *Theaet.* 152c1-3 «φαντασία ἄρα καὶ αἴσθησις ταυτόν ἐν τε θερμοῖς καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς τοιούτοις. οἷα γὰρ αἰσθάνεται ἕκαστος, τοιαῦτα ἐκάστῳ καὶ κινδυνεύει εἶναι».

²⁰⁸ Therefore, not having the negative significance of terms like "φάντασμα" and "φάσμα" both sharing the same stem and both present in the text. Cf. *Theaet.* 155a2.

²⁰⁹ I find the use of the verb "κινδυνεύειν" in the last part of the sentence very interesting, which, to be true, is not really considered by the critics, and is, indeed, difficult to handle. It is commonly used to express danger and risk. It also has an impersonal construction expressing chance, which mainly means "may possibly/probably happen". So far *Liddell Scott*. However, if we keep to what has been said in the dialogue, such an impersonal use of "κινδυνεύειν" cannot express probability or possibility. If one perceives something it surely is as it seems as long as it does. What is the point of using this term then? I think it expresses some degree of contingency, which is present in the English translation above through the term "happen". Everything that is perceived is a happening; in this context it is used to make the meaning of the verb "be" weaker.

been already touched on in the first chapter, as we introduced the function of knowledge in the Physiology of εἶδος,²¹⁰ is the last step of the preliminary equalisation of perception and knowledge:

«Perception, then, is always of what is, and unerring—as befits knowledge.»²¹¹ (transl. M. J. Levett, rev. M. Burnyeat)

I suggest that this statement ought to be taken as bearing witness of Plato's own view about knowledge. I shall not discuss at length the many interpretation since the debate has raged on for a long time.²¹² It is enough to say that for Plato for anything to be knowledge it must be intentionally directed to something that is and it needs to be unerring. It is important to discuss here how this statement contributes to spelling out the ontological features of becoming through the lens of the sort of cognition reserved to it, namely the αἴσθησις. The ambiguity deriving from mistaking the real knowledge which has to be infallible and indefeasible, a condition warranted by knowledge's necessary relation to something that is, with the absolute certainty about punctiform manifestations proper to perception makes this clause suitable for Theaetetus' proposition. In a certain sense, this statement about knowledge is not actually precise since in the case of the αἴσθησις there is a perfect coincidence between the cognitive activity and the object it is about. There is no room for the act/content dichotomy. There are only φαντασίαι, thought of as phenomenal cores in which external apparitions and cognitive activity are indistinguishable. Obviously, such an existence is not an objective fact, but rather any certainty about the

²¹⁰ Cf. Chapter One pp. 31-4.

²¹¹ *Theaet.* 152c5-6 «αἴσθησις ἄρα τοῦ ὄντος ἀεί ἐστιν καὶ ἀψευδὲς ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα». I chose this alternative translation because it seems to put the conditions for being knowledge in the clause as a direct expression of Plato's thought.

²¹² For a detailed and embraceable analysis of the statement and a commented survey of the diverse views of the critics cf. F. Aronadio, *Hos episteme ousa*, in Id., *L'aisthesis e le strategie argomentative di Platone nel Teeteto*, op. cit., pp. 107-130.

existence of anything lasts as long as it presently takes place.²¹³ The equivalence of perception and appearance harbours one further thought

²¹³ How this view should be labelled remains a problem. I want to consider three possibilities: Relativism, Infallibilism and Phenomenalism. The first view held by M. Burnyeat in *Conflicting appearances*, «Proceedings of the British Academy», 65 (1979), pp. 69-111, rpt. in Id., *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy: Volume I*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 275-315 : p. 284 where he says: «we may gather that no sentence of the form ‘x is white’ is true as it stands, without a qualifying clause specifying a perceiver for whom it is true» and *Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato’s Theaetetus*, «The Philosophical Review», 85 (1976), pp. 172-195:172. Unfortunately we shall not discuss, if not marginally, the very famous refutation of Protagoras. Cf. also M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, op. cit., p. 15. Relativism is the view that any property of any object is only in a private relation to some perceiver. Although Burnyeat recognises that the definition does not aim at a mechanical interpretation of perception (p. 284), he still thinks the theory mainly to be a gnoseological survey on perceptual properties, which in fact it is only in part. As Burnyeat is right both in not acknowledging any objective fact of the matter to perceptions and in recognising that some sort of acquaintance essentially characterises them, I think he is wrong about one important point: all of this is not a matter of pure sense-data. It is true that Plato will eventually distinguish the perceptual intake from the sphere of judgement, but here they are irretrievably tied for ontological reasons. The main problem is the ontology of manifestations, that is the way things come to be under the constraints dictated by the nature of temporality and “evenementiality”, and the role they play once tested on the bench of cognition.

The case of Infallibilism has been put forward by G. Fine in both *Protagorean Relativism* (PG) and especially in *Conflicting Appearances* (CA) (both already referred to in this work). She interprets Relativism as the view that belief do not conflict because none of them claims to be absolutely true (PG p.141), but if this is so she maintains that it would make no sense appealing to an Heraclitean ontology as Plato is about to do in the dialogue (PG p. 142). The contrast is then between public constantly changing objects and private objects. Hence, Infallibilism is the view that the object really is, and really changes, as it every time seems to be, where “really” means absolutely-objectively (CA pp. 180-1), and even if those changes are always in relation to some perceiver they are nonetheless objective. It is named Infallibilism because Protagoras’s outcome is a theory in which the experiencing subject can but be absolutely certain about what he perceives and according to Fine this can be granted only by a “classically” objective ontology, albeit a flux ontology. I find Fine’s argument quite convincing if one is to consistently include the necessity of Heracliteanism in Plato’s argument. But I do not think it is completely right. For if she is right in feeling the need of getting involved in ontology, the alleged objective status of phenomena is not at all acceptable.

On these grounds I suggest a different view because I deem both interpreters to have missed the pivot of Plato’s argument: the temporality-phenomenality of sensible things. Everything that is perceived is absolutely objective *as long as* it is perceived and manifests itself. This is the scandal, that objectivity can be relative (and maybe this last sentence conflates what is acceptable in Relativism and Infallibilism). Given that the objective stability of phenomena as well as the diachronic unity of the subject will be

which underlies Plato's own view: the relation of opinion and sensible world. Through this equivalence Plato is able to critique belief and perception at the same time. How is it possible to criticise both the view that one's beliefs are all true only thanks to the fact that he believes them to be true and to criticise the unreliability of sensations? Only by connecting them ontologically. What we are exploring in this section is precisely this connection which is the merging of phenomenality-manifestation with spatio-temporal unfolding. In the first definition this is spelt out in its most radical form insofar as one's perception of something is one and the same with the things's manifestation.

Now the time has come to directly address the ontological issue by thematising the very peculiar nature reality must present in order to account for the definition of knowledge and its requirements:

«I'll tell you. It is certainly no ordinary theory: it's to the effect that nothing is one thing just by itself, and that you can't correctly speak of anything either as some thing or as qualified in some way. If you speak of something as big, it will also appear small; if you speak of it as heavy, it will also appear light; and similarly with everything, since nothing is one—either one thing or qualified in some way. The fact is that, as a result of movement, change, and mixture with one another, all the things which we say are—which is not the right way to speak of them—are coming to be; because nothing ever is, but things are always coming to be.»²¹⁴

eroded later in the dialogue, this makes impossible to retrieve a content that is no longer manifest. This kind of “objectivity” leads the view to be called Phenomenalism since this label makes it immediately clear that the fundamental Platonic opposition underlying the discourse is that between what comes to manifestation and what is stable but external to manifestation. This takes into account one more thought: man is the measure because everything is for him as it seems him to be, not as he decides it to be. Men are never wrong as to how things are, but that in no way implies that how things appear is a matter of pure arbitrariness or whim.

²¹⁴ *Theaet.* 152d2-e1 «ἐγὼ ἐρῶ καὶ μάλ' οὐ φαῦλον λόγον, ὡς ἄρα ἐν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ οὐδέν ἐστιν, οὐδ' ἄν τι προσείποις ὀρθῶς οὐδ' ὅποιονοῦν τι, ἀλλ' ἐὰν ὡς μέγα προσαγορεύῃς, καὶ σμικρὸν φανεῖται, καὶ ἐὰν βαρὺ, κοῦφον, σύμπαντά τε οὕτως, ὡς μηδενὸς ὄντος ἐνὸς μήτε τινὸς μήτε ὀποιουοῦν: ἐκ δὲ δὴ φορᾶς τε καὶ κινήσεως καὶ κράσεως πρὸς ἄλληλα γίνεταί πάντα ἃ δὴ φαμεν εἶναι, οὐκ ὀρθῶς προσαγορεύοντες: ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτε' οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίνεταί.»

We are now faced with the so-called Secret Doctrine for it is said that Protagoras reserved this doctrine for some selected disciples. This figures as a clear description of the ontological underpinnings of what has been said thus far. The first remark is that nothing is one just by itself (ἐν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ οὐδέν ἐστιν). Having in the background the Anatomy of εἶδος, this assertion is most significant. This means that things lack the degree of independence that we have seen characterising anything that is by itself. But in this context it is worth noting that this first line is translated into the impossibility of speaking of a thing as something or saying something further of it (προσείποις). It is also significant here that speaking of something and qualifying it in some way are kept together.²¹⁵ The mention of correctness (ὀρθῶς) is quite peculiar within a view where, as everything appears to be to someone, so it is for him. This remark which gives a hint of the contradictoriness of the view being presented is a first touch of irony. There is correctness if and only if one can be wrong about something, a condition denied by the definition itself.

According to this view, there is no room for a stable identity which claims to be independent of the series of experiences-manifestations following one another. Whatever appears leaves its place to anything else providing that the latter takes place. Manifestation becomes the norm of reality: one knows what is the case when it is present in front of him. This entails that no identity bound can overwhelm the time of its manifestation not leaving any room whatsoever to certainty in cognition which is not in the present.²¹⁶

Since nothing is one or qualified in some way, continues the Secret Doctrine, if you speak of something as x , it will also be non- x . The interpretation of this passage is crucial, and a major ambiguity needs to be disposed of. There is no objective and actual change in the sense that for any individual person there is a private world which consists of objective states of affairs on which it is possible to formulate true judgments. There

²¹⁵ This could be read in at least two ways: either Plato means that there can be nothing without determination qualifying it or he means by “τι” what something is and by “ὀποιοῦν” qualities intended as non-essential features. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., p. 122.

²¹⁶ Cf. also *Theaet.* 164a5-7.

is only, and with total certainty, what seems to be *now*. But this is no determination in re, rather a manifestation which coincides with the temporal extension of a belief. Of course, this is articulated in sentences, but this does not seem to have any weight. What matters to Protagoras' Secret Doctrine is the immediate awareness one has about a state of affairs in the world when it seems to be the case to him. This point will be better comprehended throughout the discussion of Theaetetus' definition.

For now the Secret Doctrine states that we have been speaking wrongly because the things we say that are actually are not. That is not the right way to speak because things become. Once again we see an exercise in irony: the view that states that man is the measure of everything that is –because as things appear to be to him, so they are for him– states at the same time that one can actually be wrong. But there is also a deeper point. To use the verb “be” is a mistake because nothing is (and everything always comes to be/comes into being)²¹⁷, as a consequence it is only within language that this error takes place. The erroneous presumption of stability nests within language thanks to predication. This is “the things which we say are” (πάντα ἃ δὴ φαμεν εἶναι). In a world whose deepest nature is the becoming, things apparently are only because we mistakenly say they are. However, this assertion is also a sign of the final confutation which will significantly hinge on the ontological commitment of language. On the contrary, those things are a result of movement, change and mixture. Before understanding what these last terms mean, it needs to be pointed out that the last argument presents some implications of interest.

The Secret Doctrine states that the world has a certain nature and that we think it is in some other way (becoming vs false being). I do not want to restate that this is contradictory if the Man-Measure thesis is assumed. It is crystal clear by now and will be fully developed in occasion of the refutation of Protagoras.²¹⁸ My point is understanding two different concepts of appearance:

²¹⁷ On the complete/incomplete use of the phrase cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., p. 123.

²¹⁸ I believe the part devoted to refuting Protagoras to be profoundly consistent with my account and to have been crucial in developing it. I will deal with its interpretation in a future work.

- 1) Secret Doctrine ontological notion of appearance: all things seem to be stable, but in fact they become because they never are by themselves. So we have this very peculiar situation where the being (stable) of things is their appearance and the fact that they are becoming phenomena is their real being.
- 2) General epistemological notion of appearance: things immediately and autonomously appear in some way, then it must be discovered whether they really are as they appear.

The problem is that the Secret Doctrine also tries to encompass (2) in saying that things are in appearance only, and by themselves are nothing but appearances since they always come to be. As a result, we have a way in which things appear, which is being, and a way things truly are, which is appearances, and this is quite a mess! But what is the difference between the ontologised appearance (1) and the epistemic appearance (2)? Theaetetus' first definition was appealing because it affirmed that what seems to be in the first place is also what actually is. Such an appeal derives in turn from the fact that in Theaetetus' first equivalence happens something there that we could call *epistemic relief*, which can happen thanks to an *ontological commitment*.²¹⁹ Such an ontological commitment, however, is not like the authentic connection between language and being which makes linguistic reference possible, and that we shall see in the next sections. It should be called a "genesiological" commitment in that error is banished in favour of the undeniability of the event of belief/perception.²²⁰ Man cannot be wrong because what appears to him also is and this way of being is a temporal event of manifestation. The specificity of Socrates' development of Theaetetus' definition is that the event of manifestation, which is the immediate mundane actualisation of one's belief, is also everything that exists. From this, we better understand in this context the value of the semi-technical phrase "αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ". If only the experience

²¹⁹ Cf. J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, op. cit., p. 49 who seems to go the same direction: «Protagoras suspendiert einen objektiven Wahrheitsbegriff und mithin die Wahrheitsdifferenz als Kriterium von Urteilen. Und der ontologische Grund besteht darin, daß Überzeugungen nicht in der Weise auf eine objektive Wirklichkeit bezogen sind, daß sie auf diese entweder zutreffen oder sie verfehlen können».

²²⁰ Cf. again *Theaet.* 152c1-3.

annexed to belief exists, then there is no space left for the object those beliefs are about. In other words, there is no room for an object that by itself, i.e. independently, works as a content external to the present series of experiences concerning it.²²¹ Such an object could enjoy identity regardless of any appearance within the horizon of one subject. Protagoras' view does not properly supply for the act/content distinction. To reckon with conflicting appearances, any stability which transcends the present seeming of what is believed is cast off. The next step of the series of arguments, though, namely the Secret Doctrine, is the contradictory one of saying that reality is by itself that which is not by itself. To tell the truth, it should be added that (1) in a sense is not contradictory. If the Secret Doctrine is not what most people believe, then what they believe, namely the commonplace stability of things, needs to be accounted for, given the assumption that whatever people believe is also for them.²²² If possible, this makes the whole thing even more tortuous because this need to account for the unthematized opinions that autonomously emerge within experience and which in fact experience consists of is the main reason for (2). To convert a view which pledged to stand at the immediate layer of experiences to a view which instead undertakes to account for this first layer through a deeper one is not only a confutational strategy, but also an unavoidable mind-set Plato is bound to. The most significant reason why Plato adheres to this (thing which is probably one of his immortal merits) is that separating appearance from reality is a theoretically fruitful option to provide reality with Identity, Knowledge, Definition and Reference, in a word the Physiology of εἶδος of the first chapter.

If in the *Theaetetus* Plato is dialectically thematising the proper place of knowledge and language along with their relation to being, here he is subtly forging the epistemic dimension by giving space to the possibility of error and by reserving to being an entirely different ontological level. The appearance should not be ontologised because as we have seen with the Priority of Reality Assumption (PRA) whatever reveals to be in a way, it has always been so. Perceptions/appearances never are. They just happen or come to be, and this is more than nothing. Plato's standpoint is then neither (1) nor purely (2) as we would accept it today. Obviously, it is not

²²¹ Cf. *Theaet.* 153d10-e2 and 153e4-154a3 commented on hereunder.

²²² As will be clearer during the discussion of *Theaet.* 156c-e below.

(1) since it is directly criticised in the dialogue. But it is not (2) either. As we have seen in the section on the παράδειγμα in the last chapter, there is a sense in which sensible things are only their own temporal manifestations and what they are in themselves already is their Form. But this is possible only if Plato's view presents us with a third way in which appearance is not everything that is, but reality is completely different in nature. As a result we see how the epistemic stages of cognition are not only mental events but are also commingled with the event of their manifestation. To this extent, I think that Plato accepts the analysis of this part of the *Theaetetus*: appearances too affect the perceiver as something external to him. Only, they do it in terms of temporality and phenomenality, whereas Forms do it in their own peculiar that is in a privileged communion with language. However, for any cognition to have an object which is external to it, even in the case of perceptual experiences, linguistic reference needs to be given enough space. That is why the first definition of knowledge will prove to be wrong, leading language to collapse. Turning back to the last passage, we still have to analyse the concept of becoming.

The last part of the first statement of the Secret Doctrine asserts that nothing ever is, but things are always becoming (ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτε οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίγνεται).²²³ Becoming is whatever happens, takes place: it structures itself temporally and therefore temporarily. I firmly believe that Plato cannot, and does not want to, detach temporality and temporariness. One reason is the specific form of the verb γίγνεσθαι which individuates two semantic cores: birth and change. The usual concept of change is misleading. This is something like the transition from a state A to a state B of something which in a certain respect has to remain the same. The concept of radical alteration may as well be thought of as a provisional passage from one state to another, whether they have something in common or not. On the other hand, the idea of birth implies an abrupt appearance. The verb γίγνεσθαι keeps together three conceptual movements: to give birth, to be born and to become/coming to be.²²⁴ Most

²²³ It is worth noting the use of the continuous form plus “always” to translate the present of γίγνεσθαι since the present aspect mainly expresses a continuative action, whereas the aorist would better express the momentary coming (in)to be(ing) and be borne which the verb also means.

²²⁴ Perhaps the richly manifold meaning of the term is at the base of this modern English duality.

notably, the verb γίγνεσθαι translates the verb “be”, insofar as it means happenings, events and in general something that takes place.²²⁵ The relative noun is “γένεσις” and it means the spontaneous self-generation and the change of form on a par. This concept is to understand without keeping the two senses apart.

Becoming things are by definition subject to mutation and every alteration is the birth of a new determination; thus, becoming is a process of steady generation and, in perfect coincidence, of temporal unfolding. This lets us better understand why the Secret Doctrine asserts that everything that is small will also appear big and so on. This is not a matter of a necessary compulsion to objective change. If anything appears to be in some way only within a certain phenomenal-experiential context, it will be in some other way in an other context.²²⁶ The different contexts can be so synchronically and diachronically.²²⁷ The same wind is now cold to me and warm to someone else, or it is cold to me now and warm tomorrow. In any case, according to the Secret Doctrine this is not the same wind. Since the Secret Doctrine states that nothing is by itself, it makes no sense saying that the thing appearing in the two contexts *is* the same thing.²²⁸ Therefore, that thing will only be as it appears in a singular context and precisely *this* way of being actually²²⁹ is the γίγνεσθαι. This is why I think becoming should not be thought of as a rhythmic change, but rather as the ontological counterpart of the infallibility of phenomenalism. Thus, the αἴσθησις is the name for man’s connection to this temporal, self-manifest and volatile conception of the world. This means that what is generated are the experiences themselves. Given the early equivalence above, according to which everything is as it seems and whatever seems to me is also my

²²⁵ I we look back at the function of Identity in the Physiology of εἶδος, cf. Chapter One pp. 27-31, we see that this notion of becoming somehow requires the contribution of Forms. In other words, some problems arising from this account of reality genuinely lead the philosopher towards Forms.

²²⁶ Cf D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p. 44 who interprets this point in terms of relativity of properties and relativity of change.

²²⁷ This difference has been clearly spelt out by T. Irwin under the labels of self-change and aspect-change cf. T. Irwin, *Plato’s Heracliteanism*, in Id. (ed.), *Plato’s Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Garland Publishing, New York 1995, pp. 23-36 : 26-7.

²²⁸ Contra cf. M. Matthen, *Perception, Relativism and Truth: Reflections on Plato’s Theaetetus 152-160*, «Dialogue», 24 (1985), pp.33-58 whose main contention is that objects objectively exist and that their properties arise relationally.

²²⁹ In this adverb symbolically lies all the contradictions of the Secret Doctrine.

αἴσθησις of it, whatever things are strictly coincides with our experience of it. What everything is is the same as the singular experience of it.

There follow some captious arguments whose ontological value is not relevant. Right after that, in two long remarks²³⁰ Socrates draws some implications from the Secret Doctrine which can be summarised as follows:

- a) If we consider, say, the colour white, it is not itself (αὐτὸ) either as something outside the eyes or in them. No fixed location (χώραν) can be assigned (ἀποτάξις) to it since otherwise it would not occur within becoming (ἐν γενέσει γίγνοιτο).
- b) In the case of colours, it appears (φανεῖται) that they have been begotten (γεγεννημένον) from the coming across (ἐκ τῆς προσβολῆς)²³¹ of the eyes with the appropriate motion (it will soon be clear what this means). Hence, colours are neither what comes across nor what have been come across (οὔτε τὸ προσβάλλον οὔτε τὸ προσβαλλόμενον ἔσται), rather something that has occurred (γεγονός) in between (μεταξύ) and are peculiar to each case (ἐκάστῳ ἴδιον).

These two complex remarks help to clarify Socrates' concept of becoming. Before discussing them, it needs to be said that I do not believe this passage to be a theory concerning colour or vision in general. I do not

²³⁰ *Theaet.* 153d10-e2 and 153e4-154a3

²³¹ The translation of this term is quite problematic. Cf. C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, «Phronesis», 61 (2016), pp. 243-59:250 n. 16 where the author discusses the other options and convincingly puts forward the calque “thrown toward”. It is, however, worth considering the occurrence of the term in *Soph.* 246a11 and *Tim.* 46b6, even though I think the meaning of the term is quite plastic and therefore specific to the context.

I make my attempt with the verb “come across” because it gives the idea of contingency of bumping into something, and last but not least of coming across as to give an impression/to be perceived. Moreover, if we consider the couple of terms not as a phrasal verb, it can still express the idea of movement, of crossing (from one side to the other). I believe that the Greek term gets enriched by the series of arguments in such a way that encompass all these senses. Cf. also . J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, op. cit., p. 61 who translates the term with “Zusammentreffen”.

think it is an anticipation of modern optical²³² theory. Starting with (a), the colour is not in itself; this means that it is not something external to the eyes. The explanation of this is worth the entire reference to this passage. It is said that it has no location, i.e. an external extension such that it objectively stands somewhere regardless of its manifestation to someone. Of course, during the manifestation process things appear to be located, but exactly like any other characteristic it does not outlive its present appearance. This is expressed by the final paronomasia of “not coming to be within becoming”.²³³ If a colour had a fixed location it would not occur as entirely coincident with its temporally structured manifestation to some observer. There is no extra-phenomenal extensional stability.

The second remark is the consequent clause of the first argument. Socrates tells us that phenomena are generated in the process of thing and perceiver coming across one another. The complex description of this movement will be analysed in a short while in putting forward the doctrine of the κομψότεροι. For now it is only important that the two come across each other. The text reads: the colour appears as begotten, in other words they come to manifestation (φανείται) as generated. It is crucial to recognise the perfect form of this begetting (γεγεννημένον). since it gives the idea that in any perception phenomena have always already been generated as we see them. This conveniently coheres with the term “φανείται”, that is an aorist; their conjunction then expresses a punctiform apparition based on an already concluded generation process. Furthermore, the perfect form of γίγνεσθαι can be compared to the Platonic πεφυκέναι which, as we have seen, better corresponds to Plato’s needs. The opposition of γένεσις and φύσις is total: the perfect form of the former is that of having always occurred, which means for only one moment, whereas the latter, since it is what has always been by nature as it is, belongs to eternity.

However, this perfect form is of use here because there is no moment in which colours have been generated but they are already becoming. The manifestation of the colour is neither the object nor the perceiver. It is rather something that has occurred (γεγονός, once again the perfect participle) in between and is peculiar to each case. These two last remarks

²³² Cf. what McDowell says about *Theaet.* 156e1-2 Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., p. 139.

²³³ Cf. D. Bostock, *Plato’s Theaetetus*, op. cit., p. 60.

are worth discussing. Phenomena are always in between. This in between stands for the encounter which constitutes experience itself. The original and punctiform correspondence of object and perceiver is an aesthetic (obviously stressing the etymology of the term) event. This has to take place in-between if it is to be the original generating point of everything else. As we will see in a moment, the final part of the positive theoretical construction on the notion of αἴσθησις is meant to deal with that. The event of perception is said to be peculiar/private as well. The duplicity of ἴδιον is significantly in between the peculiar (objective) and the private (subjective) status. Anyway, to be peculiar/private has a very specific sense: given that what reality is perfectly coincides with its occurrence in space and time, it only makes sense in relation to the singularity of how it is being experienced by someone.²³⁴ Once more, there is no gap between cognition and cognised reality, thereby rendering each experience or phenomenon incommensurable with any other because the only way of knowing something is directly experiencing it, i.e. the event of perceiving it.²³⁵ The very possibility of stating the Secret Doctrine is a debt the payment of which will demand the rejection of the Doctrine itself. Before this, though, the Doctrine has to be more radicalised.

2) The radical temporality of the sensible dimension

One last passage from the first definition is left in order to fully present the complexity of Plato's discourse on becoming and perception. We are forced to leave aside a number of interesting parts of the dialogue, for instance, the one that divides the Secret Doctrine from the doctrine of the

²³⁴ Cf. . J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, op. cit., p. 66 who correctly asserts that the privacy emerges from the co-dependence of the poles which meet one another.

²³⁵ Experience is so private as to be considered unrepeatable even for the same subject (which will actually never be considered strictly the same) cf. *Theaet.* 154 a-8. Cf., Plato, *Theaetetus*, translation by J.McDowell, notes by L. Brown op. cit., p. 118 who expresses some perplexity about the view that two perceptions can never be the same. This perplexity arises because one forgets that for Plato epistemic assumptions occur most naturally prior to any pre-comprehension concerning the nature of objects, even if he is discussing another's view. In this case this view is "nearer to truth", as McDowell translates "μᾶλλον μοι δοκεῖ" (which I would translate "seemingly more so"), given the infallibilism/phenomenalism assumptions.

κομψότεροι. What we gain through this mutilation is a more succinct view concerning Plato's evaluation of the ontological weight and nature of appearances.

The passages we are about to present and comment on show us a radicalisation of phenomenalism such that the poles concerned with the cognitive process, specifically subject and object, are not allowed to endure the punctuated series of manifestations. It will become increasingly clearer that it is not merely a matter of epistemological justification. The interweaving of knowledge and reality remains Plato's criterion, even if it is employed in discussing the farthest view to his eye. In this case then there is no gap at all between the act of knowledge and its object in such a way that, strictly speaking, something's happening and knowledge of it are exactly the same. It should be clear by now that the last statement is not to be interpreted as a declaration of empiricism, which is that there can only be knowledge based on what has been experienced. Rather, it means that I am able to know what is happening only in the moment in which it occurs *and* its occurrence is the same as my developing an opinion about it.²³⁶

The most radical form of this view is advocated by the κομψότεροι, more refined thinkers who believe that:

«The universe is change and nothing else. There are two kinds of change, each unlimited in number, the one having the power of acting and the other the power of being acted on. From their intercourse, and their friction against one another, there come to be offspring, unlimited in number but coming in pairs of twins, of which one is a perceived thing and the other a perception, which is in every occasion generated and brought to birth together with the perceived thing.»²³⁷

²³⁶ It is also clear from the fact that later in the dialogue, *Theaet.* 161c2-3, it will occur a switch of the verb φαίνεσθαι with δοκεῖν cf. Platone, *Teeteto*, a cura di Franco Ferrari, BUR, Milano 2011, p. 295 n. 119.

²³⁷ *Theaet.* 156a4-b2 «ὥς τὸ πᾶν κίνησις ἦν καὶ ἄλλο παρὰ τοῦτο οὐδέν, τῆς δὲ κινήσεως δύο εἶδη, πλήθει μὲν ἄπειρον ἐκάτερον, δύναμιν δὲ τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν ἔχον, τὸ δὲ πάσχειν. ἐκ δὲ τῆς τούτων ὁμιλίας τε καὶ τρίψεως πρὸς ἄλληλα γίνεταί ἕκγονα πλήθει μὲν ἄπειρα, δίδυμα δέ, τὸ μὲν αἰσθητόν, τὸ δὲ αἴσθησις, αἰὲ συνεκπίπτουσα καὶ γεννωμένη μετὰ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ».

Everything in the world is²³⁸ change which divides into two species (εἶδη). What differentiates them is the kind of power (δύναμιν) they have. The concept of δύναμις is crucial. It will be pivotal in the *Sophist* and our discourse will most significantly hinge on it. For the time being, it is the power/possibility for movements to intersect with each other giving rise to phenomena. Such an intersection sees two roles: active and passive or, to put it more literally, of acting (ποιεῖν) and being acted (ὑπὸν) (πάσχειν). It characterises movement as such. It is worth remembering that Greek thought considers the objective pole to be the active one, not much like the modern age in which activity is seen as the creativity and spontaneity of the subject.²³⁹ In this context objects effectively exert power, so much that they are considered active, even when phenomenalism is at stake. An unlimited number of perceptions are always twinned by correlating the perceived thing (αἰσθητόν) and the act of perception (αἴσθησις). We have been arguing that such a distinction is not required, but now the theory of the more refined thinkers seems to be dealing with the need for this common-sense distinction by radicalising the phenomenalist account. In addition, it appears to be useful to account for the everyday experience of the subject in a world of objects (and other subjects). Furthermore, in this first passage the verb “γίγνεσθαι” and many other words stemming from it are luxuriously present.²⁴⁰ The semantic field of generation is coupled with that of temporal becoming making the two of them literally indistinguishable. Once again, the phenomenalism presented here is not merely sensorial.²⁴¹

²³⁸ In the text Plato utilises the imperfect of the verb. Cf. *supra* n. 113.

²³⁹ This has been recognised by M. Heidegger, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* (1938), in Id., *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 5, *Holzwege*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1977, pp. 75-114:102-16.

²⁴⁰ In particular “γίγνεται”; “ἔκγονα”; “γεννωμένη” in the quotation and “γένος”; “ὁμόγονον”; “συγγενῆ” in the following lines. Cf. *Theaet.* 156b7-c3.

²⁴¹ In the immediately following text, *Theaet.* 156b2-c3, this is most clearly asserted in that along with seeings, hearings and the like, Socrates includes pleasures, pains, desires, fears and the like which are overtly related to things and sensations but also have to include beliefs. For another treatment of Broad/Narrow Protagoreanism cf. D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism*, op. cit., pp. 49-53. It is also said that among them there are “ἀπέραντοι μὲν αἱ ἀνόνομοι”, that is numberless which are nameless. I believe this addition to be rather subtle. It should be remembered that this phenomenalism is indeed an uncommon theory about reality, but it relies so much on immediate appearance that it has to encompass common experience. Thus, there are many appearing things which we ignore. If we cannot name it, it does not mean that we are

Now we may raise the question of whether αἴσθησις was meant to give an answer to what is knowledge by eliminating the difference between the αἴσθησις and its object. Contrarily, we are told that the perceptual process provides for both the act of perception and the perceived thing. This can by no means imply that there is a fixed external reality since otherwise all phenomenalism would collapse.²⁴² Therefore, I think that the two items fall

not directly experiencing it. It is enough that it somehow affects us. This betrays a conception of knowledge that is very different from a conscious account of what has been experienced. This, in fact, would involve a definitional activity such that an extra-phenomenal level would be required. That is so because to experience something is not to be fully aware of it, at least, it does not commit the subject to a widespread naming activity. Furthermore, this reference to names is meaningful since it is connected to the archaic view that the unique linguistic items are the names and the main linguistic act is naming. Cf. *Crat.* 383a; 390e.

Nevertheless, this reference to names is problematic because the absolute degree of certainty expected of infallible phenomenalism may not be consistent with these remarks, since to experience something may in turn require naming it, given the equivalence of manifestation and cognitive framing of phenomena. However, the point is not developed, and although the rejection of the first definition is based on another problem arising from the definition's impossibility to account for language functionality (the impossibility to refer vs the problem of giving a name to everything that appears), the linguistic dimension has already become troublesome.

²⁴² On this point, a further passage must be considered in extension, *Theaet.* 156c8-d3: «All those things are involved in change, as we were saying; but there's quickness or slowness in their changing. Now anything that is slow keeps its changing in the same place, and in relation to things which approach it, and that's how it generates. But the things which are generated are quicker because they move, and their changing naturally consists in motion.» («ταῦτα πάντα μὲν ὥσπερ λέγομεν κινεῖται, τάχος δὲ καὶ βραδυτῆς ἐν τῇ κινήσει αὐτῶν. ὅσον μὲν οὖν βραδύ, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πλησιάζοντα τὴν κίνησιν ἴσχει καὶ οὕτω δὴ γεννᾶ, τὰ δὲ γεννώμενα οὕτω δὴ θάπτω ἐστίν. φέρεται γὰρ καὶ ἐν φορᾷ αὐτῶν ἢ κίνησις πέφυκεν.»). The text states that there are two modalities of change: slow and quick. Before giving my own interpretation I want to consider two main exegetical options: Phenomenalist Interpretation (PI) and Causal Theory Interpretation (CTI), I take up these labels from C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, op. cit., p. 244 who follows Day who in turn follows Crombie. Cf. J. Day, *Perception in Theaetetus* 152-183, op. cit., p. 65. The two views differ in that CTI claims that slow motions are comparable to physical objects and that they generate quick motions, whereas PI holds that quick motions are the basic items which compose the slow motions only thought of as aggregates. The opposition is then «whether the theory in the *Theaetetus* makes perceptions depend on subject and object as a causal theory does, or whether it makes subject and object themselves arise from perceptions, as does phenomenalism» (Day p. 69). Day maintains (pp. 65-70) that neither of them squares with everything in the text, for a different reason in each case (in a nutshell, against CTI, slow motions cannot be physical non-perceptual objects, whereas against PI the movement between the slow motions cannot be metaphorical),

into place *within* αἴσθησις itself. Plato is here relying on the remarkable plasticity of the term which can concurrently mean the whole of experience and the act of experiencing inside it. At the same time, though, he wants to show the αἴσθησις to be the gap between act and thing which divides the conventional poles of subject and object. In the moment of becoming, the αἴσθησις self-differentiates into the two poles thereby making the event of experience a unique differing core which unquietly tears itself apart. Moreover, the event of correlation of the poles is the unique authentic knowledge. The dynamics of experience is then described as follows:

«When an eye, then, and something else one of the things commensurable with it, approach one another and generate the whiteness they do, and a perception cognate with it—things which would never have come into being if either of the former pair had

but PI seems so be better. By contrast, Buckels argues in favour of CTI by maintaining that slow motions are not the same as the powers of acting and the power of being acted on such that those powers are slow motions which generate quick motions which in turn compose (what we call) sensible objects, thereby showing that CTI is not bound to include physical objects (p. 255). Buckels (p. 256) recognises that this view compels to consider the original powers to be, at least minimally, independent of any perception, even though those powers fully rely on these perceptions in order to come to be. Yet finally, he argues that if those powers are to be commensurable to give rise to perceptions, just as it will be affirmed in the next quotation, then they must have an objective status which man can be no measure of. Thus, Buckels proposes a view, as it were, symmetrical to Day's view: both CTI and PI are untenable, but the former is better.

As far as my interpretation is concerned, I must say that I do not think that Theaetetus' definition is meant to be a theory of perception (for a comparison with the theory of perception presented in the *Timaeus* cf. M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, op. cit., p. 17). I think it is a dialectical survey on the ontological status of events/experiences which tests their epistemic "affordance". I think that both interpreters got something right but failed to see it because each missed what the other had noted. Firstly, it is worth remembering that the theory must somehow account for ordinary experience. Slow motions and fast motions, still remaining motions, give the illusion of stability by displaying a difference in velocity. As Buckels seems to recognise (p. 255), every experience needs to be conceived as something new, each time spreading out afresh both slow and fast motions. On the other hand, Day is right in saying that those motions are all mutually interdependent (p. 69). They occur within relations of generation but are actually not generated. If we keep together these two remarks, one can supply what the other lacks. My point is that the private momentariness of the becoming experience is the only "ontological" source in such a way as to entirely put into mutual relation of motions their manifestation and to sever every experience from another producing a new world at any new experience.

come up against something different—then at that moment, when the seeing, from the eyes, and the whiteness, from the thing which joins in giving birth to the colour, are moving in between, the eye has come to be full of seeing; it sees at that moment, and has come to be, not by any means seeing, but an eye that sees. And the thing which joined in generating the colour has been filled all round with whiteness; it has come to be, again, not whiteness, but white—a white piece of wood, or stone, or whatever it is that happens to have that sort of colour.»²⁴³

The eye and the seen thing share a symmetry (συμμέτρων), that is the fitness of their encounter. This generates a quality and a perception which are cognate (σύμφυτον), born together in nature. Once again, the reference to nature is partly ironic.²⁴⁴ At any rate, we are not compelled to think of this symmetry as pre-empting the manifest perception. Since Socrates' point is to emphasise above all the dimension of present manifestation, we could think that the fitness of the terms put into relation comes from, and is not the basis of, the event of relation itself. Likewise, perception and quality move in between (μεταξὺ φερομένων) and this movement is not physical, which is the same as saying that spatial extension and location only occur phenomenally.²⁴⁵ The symmetric components of experience are, for instance in the case of sight: the eye which involves its faculty, that is

²⁴³ *Theaet.* 156d3-e7 «ἐπειδὴν οὖν ὄμμα καὶ ἄλλο τι τῶν τούτῳ συμμέτρων πλησιάσαν γεννήσῃ τὴν λευκότητά τε καὶ αἴσθησιν αὐτῇ σύμφυτον, ἃ οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἐγένετο ἑκατέρου ἐκείνων πρὸς ἄλλο ἐλθόντος, τότε δὴ μεταξὺ φερομένων τῆς μὲν ὄψεως πρὸς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, τῆς δὲ λευκότητος πρὸς τοῦ συναποτίκτοντος τὸ χρῶμα, ὃ μὲν ὀφθαλμὸς ἄρα ὄψεως ἔμπλεως ἐγένετο καὶ ὄρᾳ δὴ τότε καὶ ἐγένετο οὐ τι ὄψις ἀλλ' ὀφθαλμὸς ὄρων, τὸ δὲ συγγενήσαν τὸ χρῶμα λευκότητος περιεπλήσθη καὶ ἐγένετο οὐ λευκότης αὐτῷ ἀλλὰ λευκόν, εἴτε ξύλον εἴτε λίθος εἴτε ὄτρωον συνέβη χρῆμα χρωσθῆναι τῷ τοιούτῳ χρώματι.»

²⁴⁴ As it the reference to the πεφυκέναι at *Theaet.* 156d3.

²⁴⁵ Cf. J. Van Eck, *Moving like a Stream: Protagoras Heracliteanism in Plato's Theaetetus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», (36), (2009), pp. 199-248 : 218 who interprets the phrase to express a process going on between observer and object. Moreover, he smartly points out that Socrates' discourse must count for touch as well (p. 217) which makes a literal reading of this phrase problematic. Contra cf. J. Day, *Perception in Theaetetus* 152-183, op. cit., p. 68 who considers the “μεταξὺ φερομένων” an insurmountable obstacle to the phenomenalist interpretation. But if we consider the broad account of experience that includes non-immediately sensorial sorts of experience, how would they be reduced to mechanical locomotion of things?

sight, then sight is always the sight of something and this always has some qualities “of the same nature” as the perception. However, those components cannot come to be in isolation. The experience would have never come to be (ἐγένετο) without their encounter; this can also remark the privacy of the encounter and the consequent unrepeatability. As the example goes, the eye never is mere seeing, it is rather an eye that sees (ὀφθαλμὸς ὀρῶν). This present participle is remarkable because it shows how the presence of perception is extant and can only come to be (ἐγένετο) like that. In the same way, that which has come to be together (συγγενῆσαν) with the eye in generating the experience of colour, namely the perceived thing, comes to be something coloured and not mere colour. It should be noted that the perception is a fast motion with regard to its slow motion, i.e. the subject, whereas the perceived thing is a slow motion with regard to its fast motion, i.e. the quality. This asymmetry may prove two things: firstly, it shows once again that one of the main objectives of this theory is to account for everyday experience. To be more precise, experience illusorily settles on perceptions on the part of the subject and on objects and not their qualities. In other words, the subject (slow) is resolved into the fragmentary series of its particular perceptions (fast), whereas the qualities of objects (fast) are always incorporated into the objects that have them (slow) without ever floating in the air. We can think this to be common sense to the ancient Greeks, insofar as subjects and qualities are more abstract notions than perceptions and things. Secondly and accordingly, even in discussing phenomenalism, Greek thought remains object-centered. The eye is an eye that sees: perceptual activity is cut out of the sentient presence of the subject. Qualities cannot enjoy independence within appearance and then are each time ascribed to things. That is so for every object (χρῆμα)²⁴⁶ that happens (συνέβη) to be coloured. One statement can be ventured: realism turns out an epiphenomenon of phenomenalism. How the latter two differ from each other is a question which makes no sense in the context.

One last statement is needed to complete the phenomenalist view, namely the thorough prominence of the temporal presence. The text goes forth:

²⁴⁶ Interestingly, this terms recurs cf. *supra* n. 178.

«We must think of the other cases, too, in the same way: we must take it that nothing is hard, hot, or anything, just by itself—we were actually saying that some time ago— but that in their intercourse with one another things come to be all things and qualified in all ways, as a result of their change. Because even in the case of those of them which act and those which are acted on, it isn't possible to arrive at a firm conception, as they say, of either of them, taken singly, as being anything. It isn't true that something is a thing which acts before it comes into contact with the thing which is acted on by it; nor that something is a thing which is acted on before it comes into contact with the thing which acts on it. And what acts when it comes into contact with one thing can turn out a thing which is acted on when it bumps into something else.»²⁴⁷

The ontology of happening and becoming, which in fact does not deserve the name of ontology, is now complete. The world of both subjects and objects does not pre-exist to the presence of their reciprocal relation. Stressing the Heraclitean character of the doctrine, we could say that the differentiation of all the slow and fast motions is also the moment of their maximal cohesion: so-called reality is nothing but a matter of differences of differently moving motions which are given originally and do not need to be accounted for by anything else. However, nothing is by itself and everything occurs as part of becoming, or, to put it better, everything is that which comes to be for as long as it does. The encounter comes *before* the terms which come into contact through it and the latter receive their power to act and to be acted on thanks to the former. Whatever is active can turn out to be passive and vice versa. Hence, any event proves to be the simultaneous spreading out of subject, perception, quality and object. This is the last step because any present experience, for the very fact that it occurs, becomes its own punctiform self-foundation.

²⁴⁷ *Theaet.* 156e7-157a7 «καὶ τᾶλλα δὴ οὕτω, σκληρὸν καὶ θερμὸν καὶ πάντα, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὑποληπτέον, αὐτὸ μὲν καθ' αὐτὸ μηδὲν εἶναι, ὃ δὴ καὶ τότε ἐλέγομεν, ἐν δὲ τῇ πρὸς ἄλληλα ὁμιλίᾳ πάντα γίνεσθαι καὶ παντοῖα ἀπὸ τῆς κινήσεως, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ ποιοῦν εἶναι τι καὶ τὸ πάσχον αὐτῶν ἐπὶ ἐνὸς νοῆσαι, ὡς φασιν, οὐκ εἶναι παγίως. οὔτε γὰρ ποιοῦν ἐστὶ τι πρὶν ἂν τῷ πάσχοντι συνέλθῃ, οὔτε πάσχον πρὶν ἂν τῷ ποιοῦντι: τό τε τι συνελθὸν καὶ ποιοῦν ἄλλω αὐ̄ προσπεσὸν πάσχον ἀνεφάνη».

Finally, Protagoras's view as it has been developed so far leads to a linguistic reformation such that any term that implies whatever stability should be set aside.²⁴⁸ Whatever reference too is excluded since nothing is stable enough to be something that stands outside becoming. Among those banished terms there is the verb "be", but also demonstrative adjectives "this" and "that", pronouns like the indefinite "τι" (some thing/some one) and terms expressing possession.²⁴⁹ According to the nature of things, one must only say²⁵⁰ that they become. Only two further arguments need to be briefly discussed before drawing some conclusions. We must yet understand some implications of the desubstantialisation made by phenomenalism. This has two aspects: the erosion of the self, and the loss of the substantiality of things. As far as the erosion of the self is concerned, the argument gets started by the case of altered states of consciousness (dreams, sickness, madness).²⁵¹ The doctrine imposes sheer peculiarity to every phenomenon, which entails that for every difference any two phenomena display they are two distinct and incommensurable things.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Theaet.* 157a7-c1.

²⁴⁹ For an analysis of this prohibition, which is consistent with my account of the collapse of language in the third section, cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., p. 142.

²⁵⁰ Interestingly, the Greek term is "φθέγγεσθαι" which means "to utter", employed to stress the happening-side of discourse which is in contrast with the content of what one says. Cf. *Crat.* 429e8-9 where the term refers to the emission of meaningless sounds produced by barbarians.

²⁵¹ *Theaet.* 157e2-3.

²⁵² Cf. *Theaet.* 158e7-159a8. The argument is structured as follows:

- 1) If something differs from something else, it is not allowed to have its power/capacity (that is: how it specifically acts and/or is acted upon). Therefore, it has nothing identical with it.
- 2) If something is different (ἕτερόν), it is also dissimilar (ἴμοτον).
- 3) If something becomes similar or dissimilar to itself or to something else, as it becomes similar it becomes identical, as it becomes dissimilar it becomes different.
- 4) Therefore, if A is dissimilar to B in just one aspect, then A and B differ completely and then they are incommensurably distinct (e.g. Socrates in health only differs from Socrates when he is sick, but they are two incomparable "realities" because they differ in one aspect and thus are not identical).

Cf. J. Day, Perception in *Theaetetus* 152-183, op. cit., p. 61. For an interpretation that tries to preserve the diachronic unity of things involved in different relations cf. J. Van Eck, *Moving like a Stream: Protagoras Heracliteanism in Plato's Theaetetus*, op. cit., pp. 222-30. Cf. also Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., pp. 148-50; J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

like the case of healthy Socrates and ill Socrates, since they differ in one qualification, they are two incommensurably different “realities”. After all, the present characterisation of being sick is quite another thing from the present characterisation of being in health, and one can seem to be just one at one time *because* they are different. Thus, altered states of consciousness are in no way less true than the ordinary ones in that the two sets are not comparable. In this way, each of Socrates’ states is ontologically self-sufficient in constituting a whole (ὅλον).²⁵³ Consequently, each pole, active or passive, takes part in making each relation unrepeatable and incomparable with the other. I call this view “erosion of the self” because any substantial conception of the self falls into a countless number of experiential pieces. This is significant for at least two reasons: firstly, it is problematic when it comes to memory and forecast; secondly, it makes second-order perceptions like one’s reflection on one’s own past experience impossible. Once the experience is departed it is as if that experience has never been. This is also a reason for not ascribing objective existence to experiences, otherwise the fact of having experienced something would be objective and it would have a stable existence beyond its present occurrence. There is no “aboutness” of any doxastic act which is not about the present.²⁵⁴

As far as the desubstantialisation of things is concerned, there is one further remark of interest. Right after the banishing of the language of being, Socrates states:

«And we ought to speak that way both in individual cases and about numbers of things taken together in collections, to which people apply the name man, stone, or any animal or kind of thing»²⁵⁵

Additionally, it is quite interesting how this argument is reminiscent of my interpretation of the Three Beds argument given in the Anatomy of εἶδος cf. Chapter One pp. 48-50.

²⁵³ Cf. *Theaet.* 159b-7.

²⁵⁴ Cf. *Theaet.* 163e1-164a2.

²⁵⁵ *Theaet.* 157b8-c1 « δεῖ δὲ καὶ κατὰ μέρος οὕτω λέγειν καὶ περὶ πολλῶν ἀθροισθέντων, ᾧ δὴ ἀθροίσματι ἀνθρώπων τε τίθενται καὶ λίθον καὶ ἕκαστον ζῴον τε καὶ εἶδος».

As Brown notes, in referring to the main interpreters,²⁵⁶ those aggregates can either be individuals or kinds. In the one case, the aggregated parts would be singular perceptions or qualities making up particulars, whereas, in the second case, aggregated parts would be ready-made individuals forming kinds. The point of the argument is that whatever we consider as unitary is nothing but the by-product of perspectival illusion of some gathered parts. Just like a mosaic, we think that there is a figure when there is only a group of tiles arranged in a certain way. Now, if I were to choose either, I would opt for the aggregate as individual view. Yet I believe that this exegetical opposition should be maintained as problematic. I think that this substantial individual/species distinction makes no sense with regard to the phenomenalist account. According to common sense, the unity of the individual through time is none of its singular manifestations, but rather that which keeps them together as belonging to the *same* thing without ever appearing. This means that the unity of the individual is never perceived and never comes to be as a percept. Likewise, that partaking of which makes distinct particulars belong to the same kind is no phenomenon. The unity of the species is none of its members and a fortiori none of their temporal stages. Again, that which makes two particulars be of the same sort is by definition no peculiar character of one experience.

My contention is that that which makes numerous appearances refer to the same thing is one and the same with that which makes distinct individuals belong to the same kind. I do not simply mean that both individuals and Forms should partake of the Form of Identity in order to have identity, but also that any individual, say a stone, is *one* stone for the same reason that the many stones are *stones*. To think of an entity as an extra-phenomenal unit requires minimally thinking of *what* it is. What the thing is singularly, is precisely what defines it at the level of its species.

²⁵⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus*, Translation by J. McDowell, notes by L. Brown, op. cit., p. 120. The most representative of the two contrasting standpoints are for the aggregates as individuals view, J. Day, Perception in Theaetetus 152-183, op. cit., pp. 60-1, and for the aggregates as kinds view, L. Brown, *Understanding the Theaetetus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 11 (1993), pp. 199-224 : 206-9. Cf. also Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., pp. 143-5 and R. M. Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge. A Commentary of Plato's Theaetetus*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg 1992, pp. 99-100 who keeps together both interpretations.

This does not entail that in order to refer to one thing one must also have properly defined it. Instead, this just means that sensible things acquire their temporary substantial unity in virtue of the unity of the kind they partake of. It is not by chance that here Plato does not use the term “ὅλον”, that is “whole”,²⁵⁷ which indeed indicates a collection but also includes a precise nature bounding its parts,²⁵⁸ and uses instead the term “ἄθροισμα” which means “aggregation/assemblage”. This part then results in a good way to enjoy a see-through view of some hidden Platonic ideas.

After the prolonged discussion of this most excitingly difficult part, it is now time to see whether more general information about Plato’s thought can be drawn from it. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Plato wished to find a form of knowledge that of course prevents the knower from being wrong, but never at the cost of preventing every cognitive act of whatever sort from possibly being erroneous. With regard to this, Plato contemplates two options. I firmly believe that this is one profitable way to interpret the thorny issue of Plato’s dualism.

Plato seems to have two significant assumptions: firstly, to understand that which knowledge is of requires an ontological enquiry. Secondly, this knowledge has to be indefeasible.²⁵⁹ I do not think the two are joined arbitrarily. For anything to be or happen it needs to be in some way. It would never affect us if it were not for its being something (different from something else). It seems that the constraints reality exerts on us are independent of our will/opinion insofar as it has its own identity, i.e. it is determined only by itself. Now, if reality is to be the source of normativity of our interaction with it, as seen in the last chapter, our cognitive activity is directly affected by its ontological status and, at the same time, the indefeasibility-requirement can only derive from the fact that knowledge must be of something that is and, consequently, that authentic knowledge is

²⁵⁷ As we have just seen, the term was reserved to designate the self-sufficiency of temporal stages.

²⁵⁸ Cf. B. Centrone, *Il concetto di holon nella confutazione della dottrina del sogno (Theaet. 201d8-206e12) e i suoi riflessi nella dottrina aristotelica della definizione*, in G. Casertano (a cura di), *Il Teeteto di Platone. Struttura e problematiche*, Loffredo, Napoli 2002, pp. 139-55; V. Harte, *Plato on Parts and Wholes: the Metaphysics of Structure*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002.

²⁵⁹ It is reminiscent of the clause at the beginning of the enquiry stated cf. this Chapter p. 136.

always of something that is. That is so, because the same irrevocability of the constraints reality delivers to us should be mirrored by any authentic act of knowledge. The ontic-towardness grants knowledge indefeasibility and indefeasibility represents the inescapability of reality.

Given that, Plato is faced with two options which are two extremely radically diverging kinds of presence: on the one hand, the transient presence of events; on the other hand, the transcendent presence of Forms. I am persuaded that this is a fruitful way to set the question regarding the difference between being and becoming. Plato seems to be posing an alternative: for something to be present, either it is manifest within experience, but then it is intrinsically temporal and then temporary; or it is thoroughly stable and then it has to be transcendent. This last term can be properly understood right after the discussion concerning those Protagoras inspired doctrines which convincingly are to be understood as an enquiry into the epistemic power of immanence, which proves to be defective. Consequently, transcendence commits one to an utter impossibility of being manifest, in other words, whatever is (transcendent) is something that never happens, is never manifest, is not perceptible. It will be obvious by now that this way of being perfectly befits Forms. This opposition of manifestation contra objectivity encompasses the pair act/content. Becoming, opinion and αἴσθησις represent the sum of all the acts and experiences as well as the things manifest within them.

The content, purely understood as the existent object of knowledge, dwells in a different plane with regard to nature and ontological features. Without such an object, reality would collapse on its punctiform manifestation losing its truth. This is what the *Theaetetus* aims to bear witness to. The dialogue is meant to show the need for Forms by recognising that cognitive acts cannot work as the source of their own truth. The first epistemic principle of Plato's realism is that there is no truth merely in virtue of the fact that one believes it. Given the archaic coalescence view origin of Plato's thought, truth and objective being are so strictly linked that in order for Plato to think a radical phenomenalism the moment of belief has to be one and the same with the manifestation of its content.

However, what is the problem with Theaetetus' first definition? There are at least two: firstly, phenomenalism cannot account for the functionality

of language. This point will be dealt with in the next section. Secondly, it cannot account for falsity. Provided that a two-plane view of reality is not at hand, and that knowledge has to be infallible, there can be no error within experience since it is all there is. Therefore, presence is taken as the source of actuality and there is no definitional justification of it because only the fact of the actualisation of experience is the only ground for it really to be. If only the fact of believing is enough to make that belief true, then no belief can be false. This clearly contrasts with the Priority of Reality Assumption (PRA) in the previous chapter.²⁶⁰

The epistemic change of things which is only on the part of experience and which (PRA) excludes from the stable identity of things becomes real throughout the first definition. By “epistemic change”, I mean that change concerning the way the object of cognition seems to be, which in a realistic framework is not supposed to affect the identity of the known object. For instance, I spot someone from afar and I think Silenus is approaching, and then I find out he is Socrates. As we have seen with (PRA), one does not tend to think that Silenus has actually turned into Socrates. Epistemic change is this kind of change. However, phenomenism makes epistemic change the only “actual” thing in the world. If how things appear is also how they actually are, the change of their manifestation can only concern them intrinsically. This means that (PRA) is completely reversed.²⁶¹ This requires that the only ungrounded thing that grounds everything else is change itself as a process of generation.²⁶² Phenomenism is the view that no belief can reveal to be wrong because that which the belief is about is what is manifest as the belief takes place. Hence, if the phenomenon the belief is “about” had not happened, there would have been no belief at all. This lets us better understand that Plato somehow adopts this view on

²⁶⁰ (PRA): If one experiences how things are/stand, and later she finds out that she was mistaken and that they actually stand in some other way, the basic realist intuition consists in the fact that the second way things stand has always been truly the case, even if she did not believe so, and that she was mistaken rather than that reality has changed. Cf. Chapter Two p. 88.

²⁶¹ Similarly D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism*, op. cit., p. 43.

²⁶² This coherently conflicts with *Theaet.* 155a2-b2, the so-called section of ὁμολογήματα (shared axioms) where Plato seems to adopt some assumptions which he can genuinely agree with and which essentially assert the priority of changelessness over change, that is to say that the latter is to be justified, not the former. Unfortunately, we cannot afford a detailed examination of this section here.

phenomena, both contrasting it with the new plane of being that is able to remain stable and reserving to events whatever is experiential and every epistemic change. Epistemic change takes place within temporality and never at the level of Forms.

Furthermore, if we look back at the three paradoxes which seemed to inspire Plato's theory of Forms, Theaetetus' proposition attempts to solve them, or at least the first two (recall that things both appear to be and not to be and both to be known and not to be known).²⁶³ For any perception is of something that is, albeit momentarily, and has full knowledge of it, albeit just as momentarily. The case of the third paradox is more complex because language will be the ruin of the equation of perception and knowledge. At any rate, it was worth recalling these paradoxes because intentionality plays a crucial role in this definition of knowledge as perception. The relation with its object is most indispensable to any act, which is the reason why Plato cannot renounce presence, whether it be transient or transcendent.

We are faced with a new (with respect to the archaic background) possibility of terms like error, event/being dichotomy and time. Therefore, it is worth mentioning, even briefly, one succeeding argument of the dialogue. I am extrapolating this argument because I think it helps highlight some implications of interest. In *Theaet.* 178b9-c2 a Protagoras *redivivus* is asked: what about the future? Are the present beliefs an infallible criterion as to what will happen in the future? Strictly speaking, namely in the terms of the κομψότεροι doctrine, this question makes no sense, because nothing exceeds the present. However, even in a milder account, the notion of prediction, which is commonly associated with knowledge, especially in connection to arts and techniques, for instance medicine (Socrates' example submitted to the fictional Protagoras' scrutiny) and navigation, is troublesome to phenomenism. *Theaetetus'* discourse on expertise and the analyses of the last chapter may likely come together. What is relevant here is the ontological implication. Any false prediction is at first, as any prediction is, either correct or wrong, the manifestation of something which is not yet, and then, if the prediction turns out to be incorrect, the not-being of the past manifestation. This is the case of maximal divergence between

²⁶³ Cf. Chapter One p. 24.

truth and appearance, without appealing to Form's separate being. Being is required to make sense of appearance. If one is to predict something, and there is the actual possibility of being right or wrong about it, then there must be something in the moment of prediction that enables one to correctly (perhaps not with total certainty) predict something. Here we are faced with an implication of the other principle of the previous chapter: Telicity of Reality Assumption (TRA).²⁶⁴ If some prediction turns out to be wrong, it must be considered that there has always been something that has determined how things have proven to be, which actually would have enabled one to correctly predict what would happen, had he known of it. This, which can be deduced from (TRA), exactly like the case of (PRA), is something that phenomenalism cannot think of and thus admit of. Some sort of ontological stability is required if there is to be truth and objectivity/effectiveness in the domain of experience, but this stability must necessarily be *outside* experience.

3) The collapse of language

The *Theaetetus* is a masterpiece of tightly tied stringency and provocation, thereby exemplarily representing the Platonic art of composition. In this work, though, the dialogue cannot be approached frontally, given the extended ramifications of its arguments. The parts commented on in my work fall within the attempts the work is making to follow the *Leitfaden* as to how being and language are intertwined in Plato's thought. That is the reason why I shall not attempt to systematically give my own interpretation of all the many interesting arguments put forward by Plato. Even so, this section plays the pivotal role of examining why, for Plato, the domain of becoming as it has been thought of so far does not suffice to ground the functionality of language. This assumption casts light on the nature of Plato's commitment to the conclusions concerning appearances-experiences arrived at in the last section. I do not think that Plato regards the sensible world as the asphyctic series of utter singularity deriving from Theaetetus' definition, Protagoras' doctrine and

²⁶⁴ To recall: If one experiences how things are/stand, regardless of her being correct or mistaken, things in the present will always have been as they are going to prove/reveal to be. Cf. Chapter Two p. 121.

Heracliteanism taken jointly. Yet I believe *Theaetetus*'s phenomenalism to be a sort of mental experiment as to what would happen if appearance had been the only dimension of the world. The result is total collapse and utter impossibility. This emerges partly during the refutation of Protagoras, but then it is clearly achieved in the subsequent part we are about to address. To avoid any misunderstanding, in this section the verb "be" will be used more loosely and not specifically regarding Forms, although for Plato this verb will eventually prove to be inescapably tied to them.

Language is the testing bench of ontology. Only by undertaking dialectical enquiries are human being able to get access to being. The merit for this is on the part of reality itself which, as I hope to show in the next chapter, is thought of so as to be structured as a language and therefore to make our language possible. The fact that Forms are required in order to define and refer to things is a reflection of the fact that Forms are required for things to display an identity. The development of the dialogue could be considered as the progressive thematisation of the scope of judgment and the peculiar kind of stability it requires: referentiality. This view also accounts for the fact that the dialogue commits its analyses to an increasingly prominent role played by discourse and linguistic explanation. The first step is to see that the name is one thing and what is being named is another.²⁶⁵ To refer to a thing requires the act of referring and the referred thing to be distinct. If the thing is to be referred to, it is required to be minimally stable through time and for different subjects at the same time. Phenomenalism is incompatible with this because it is not able to admit of such stability and therefore tends to remove the content-dimension of thought/language as such. According to phenomenalism, the event of believing makes the belief true. This does not mean that every belief has a private content which makes it true.²⁶⁶ This is too developed. As we have

²⁶⁵ Cf. *Theaet.* 177e1-2 where it is said that one should not speak about the name, but rather look at the thing being named. To think that these lines, so clear in our age, are the product of centuries of cogitations is dazzling. Cf. also *Crat.* 430a.

²⁶⁶ For this reason, the term "ἀληθής" (true) is introduced in *Theaet* 160c7 right after the discussion of the final doctrine of becoming. These few lines work as a recap of Protagoras' thesis and as a turning point in the development of the definition. In these lines we are presented with the term "οὐσία". This suggests the tight connection between truth and being. Significantly, the term "ἀληθής" recurs in *Theaet.* 163b1-7 where Socrates, in the case of spoken and written words of a language that we do not know, contrasts knowledge of sounds and marks which are percepts with knowledge of

seen, the view is that any belief is related to something that appears so as to be indistinguishable from it, and the event of their junction is experience and this is everything there is in the world.²⁶⁷ That is why I think the interpreter²⁶⁸ who puts it in terms of truth does not understand that the only way to regard phenomenalism as plausible is not having considered the linguistic dimension.²⁶⁹ And that is why thematising language, because of its ontological commitment, *eo ipso* undermines phenomenalism. For this reason, I have considered any reference to linguistic normativity throughout the definition as inconsistent with the doctrines themselves, and the particular emphasis put on it by Plato the writer as ironic.

Most generally, the argument is something like this: if reality only consists of events, it is not even possible to describe what takes place when it does. We shall now see how Plato sets forth the argument. Plato introduces the distinction between two kinds of change: movement (φορά) and alteration (ἀλλοίωσις). The former is local movement in space, the latter is qualitative alteration, in matter of colour or compactness for example,²⁷⁰ Socrates argues that if any stability is to be denied, then everything must undergo both kinds of change. Interestingly, Socrates states that everything must undergo both kinds of change since if something only moved locally then it would remain the same through that

their meaning. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., p. 160. I think that all the refutation of Protagoras is a progressive thematisation of judgements. Opinions are said to be true throughout the central arguments both resuming and rejecting Protagoras' view cf. *Theaet.* 167a6-8; 170c3-5; d4-8; 171a6-b2. Without this new setting which includes the cognitive notion of content, which in turn allows reference to be spoken of too, most of the refutation would make no sense. In this section devoted to the collapse of language, the strategy is more radical: it shows that phenomenalism requires the distinction which makes its impracticability explicit.

²⁶⁷ Cf. A. Silverman, *Flux and Language in the Theaetetus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», (18), 2000, pp. 109-52:116.

²⁶⁸ Cf. for example M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, op. cit., p. 50.

²⁶⁹ By this I am not saying that truth is a prerogative of language cf. note on ontological ἀλήθεια, but still it is in some relation to language.

²⁷⁰ Cf. *Theaet.* 181b8-182a2. These types of change might be paralleled with the twins of *Theaet.* 156d-e. In favour of this parallel cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, op. cit., p. 49; D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism*, op. cit., p. 92; contra cf. Platone, *Teeteto*, traduzione e note di M. Valgimigli, introduzione e note aggiornate di A. M. Ioppolo, op. cit., p. 242 n. 123; Cf. J. Day, *Perception in Theaetetus 152-183*, op. cit., p. 64 and J. Van Eck, *Moving like a Stream: Protagoras Heracliteanism in Plato's Theaetetus*, op. cit., pp. 242-4.

movement.²⁷¹ By contrast, he does not consider the reversed situation in which something changes qualitatively but remains stationary in space; an object could hardly be said to remain the same just because it lingers in the same spot while altering. This hint helps to uncover what the argument is aiming at: the connection of qualification, objectivity and language.

The most common interpretation argues that the total flux view does not hold because if one is to say how things are, they have already changed. At the same time, it is frequently noted that this way of paraphrasing Theaetetus' definition is inconsistent with its earlier formulations, especially with regard to two central assumptions of the doctrines: the utter privacy/peculiarity and the fact that each experience constitutes a whole.

We are faced with five theses:

- 1) Being, appearance and experience coincide.
- 2) Experience is singular/peculiar/private.
- 3) Everything is in universal flux, i.e. at any time everything differs from how it was.
- 4) There is actual qualitative change (quality: what something is like).
- 5) Actual reference and ascription of qualities are possible.

The first three have been argued in the first part of the exposition (treated in the first two sections). The last two are put forward in the part of the dialogue discussed here. It is worth noting that the addition of (4) and (5) transforms the meaning of (3). Early in the dialogue, "to become" meant the original force of change which made every experience diverse, unrepeatable and private. Conversely, it now means alteration. We are to understand what this notion of alteration is or why Plato considers it to be inescapable. Consider now this passage:

«Socrates: Whereas since not even this stays constant, that the flowing thing flows white, but it changes, so that there's flux of that very thing, whiteness, and change to another colour, in order not to be convicted of staying constant in that respect—since that's so, can

²⁷¹ Cf. *Theaet.* 182c8-11.

it ever be possible to refer to any colour in such a way as to be speaking of it rightly?

Theodorus: How could it be, Socrates? Indeed, how could it be possible to do so with any other thing of that kind, if it's always slipping away while one is speaking; as it must be, given that it's in flux?»²⁷²

The compulsion to change is so ubiquitous and efficient that everything does not remain the same as itself not even for a moment since everything is to flow (ρέϊν).²⁷³ The gist of these lines is that if there is no stability whatsoever, then no one can refer to things (προσειπεϊν) nor properly call them (προσαγορεύειν),²⁷⁴ and if no one can correctly speak of something then there is no minimal objectivity at all. Objectivity and reference are mutually interdependent. Theodorus' answer is more complex than it seems at first. He rhetorically asks how it is possible to say something of it if every object constantly escapes from one's reference into flux. As far as perceptions are concerned, they go through the same fate. If everything is to flow, any perception could not be the same as itself for more than a moment.²⁷⁵ If we look at the state of the discussion now, we note that there are two important differences with respect to the previous account: qualitative alteration is bound to happen at any minimal timespan and this timespan is so minimal as to not allow anyone to refer to things. Especially the latter conflicts with the original doctrine which was the epistemic triumph of presence over everything else. The two are closely entwined. This once again asserts the junction of objectivity qua stability and linguistic functions, both reference and description. The fact that the presence of something that appears is not sufficient to describe it is connected with the fact that it must alter at every moment. Now, it must be

²⁷² *Theaet.* 182d1-7 «ἐπειδὴ δὲ οὐδὲ τοῦτο μένει, τὸ λευκὸν ρεῖν τὸ ρέον, ἀλλὰ μεταβάλλει, ὥστε καὶ αὐτοῦ τούτου εἶναι ῥοήν, τῆς λευκότητος, καὶ μεταβολὴν εἰς ἄλλην χροάν, ἵνα μὴ ἀλῶ ταύτη μένον, ἀρὰ ποτε οἶόν τέ τι προσειπεῖν χροῶμα, ὥστε καὶ ὀρθῶς προσαγορεύειν; / αἱ τίς μηχανή, ὃ Σώκρατες; ἢ ἄλλο γέ τι τῶν τοιούτων, εἶπερ ἀεὶ λέγοντος ὑπεξέρχεται ἅτε δὴ ρέον;»

²⁷³ This term appears now, perhaps signing a turning-point.

²⁷⁴ Both terms have the preposition προσ- as suffix thereby meaning some kind of towardness and relationality.

²⁷⁵ Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., p. 182.

comprehended why Plato thinks that this new version of doctrines discussed earlier is their natural outcome and why both present outcome and previous form are untenable. Firstly, I want to focus on Theodorus' reply. What kind of movement is it to slip away even before the formulation of a judgment? Plato is speaking of a change which has already taken place every time one utters something. Throughout the definition the reader was told that according to Protagoras nothing is one by itself. This means that nothing is A more than not-A every time it appears to be so. The general argument in favour of the universal flux seems to be as follows:

- a) Everything is as it appears (to be) to someone, or to put it better is *the event* of this appearing.
- b) Every appearance is numerically distinct from other appearances.
- c) If appearances are distinct, that is so because they differ as to how they are like.
- d) Then: at any new experience something changes, because otherwise it would not be a new experience.

However, it must be recognised that the argument in the last quotation does not speak of an objective movement that at any time can be correctly stated. Otherwise this could conflict with Theodorus' reply. Whatever we say, the thing has *already* changed, not allowing anyone to state something correctly, thus the conclusion of the argument would maintain. Therefore, Plato's view is that if the identity of things had depended on people's many appearances/beliefs as phenomenalism claims, things would be nothing in themselves and thus nothing even in their appearing to someone. Since this is an ontological question and given the profoundly objectivist assumption of Greek thinkers, this is stated by saying that objects are characterised in themselves as changing. According to perpetual mobilism nothing is A rather than not-A. Hence, substantial change, which is the same as locating the change within things themselves, prevents them from having any identity at all.²⁷⁶ The most important thing to highlight is that the current argument does not resolve in an unfortunate delay of knowledge with

²⁷⁶ A. Silverman, *Flux and Language in the Theaetetus*, op. cit., p. 137.

respect to faster change in reality. On the contrary, things themselves, since they are exquisitely made of the events of encounter with subjects, are unstable as to what they are. This is the meaning of having already changed before any reference to them. That is so because phenomenism cannot think of a plane of objectivity which is independent of events and then, not thinking of the itself-dimension, conceives of that instability as a perpetual and incalculably fast change.

An inversion seems to have occurred: earlier we were told that for any alteration the new appearance would be a new whole. Moreover, there was no difference between the described thing and the act of believing something to be determinate in that way. Now, Plato is saying that this implies that for something to be distinct it must differ in itself. Plato's goal is to show that whatever appears within the encounter with the world, it cannot only be qualified thanks to that encounter. In other words, there is nothing in the event of experiencing or believing something that can supply things with their identity. Therefore, for things to be qualified in some way they have to *be*, even momentarily, that way.

Thus, the total flux is above all the collapse of the identity of phenomena. Although the final version of the doctrine of phenomenism prescribed that both object and subject arose from the event of their encounter, it used to consider any phenomena as the determined and manifest qualification of something, for instance a white stone. Now, when Plato says that whiteness changes into other colours, this does not mean that it *actually* changes into other determinate colours, and so on, perpetually and subliminally. In fact, he is saying that nothing is white since white, or black or *any* other colour are themselves nothing. That is so insofar as there is no determinate nature in reality on the grounds that it is nothing but change, viz. it has no identity at all. The phenomenist needs to accept this argument because despite ascribing total momentariness to experiences, his main contention is that in the moment of their appearing phenomena display absolute certain conditions of identity. Thus, either the phenomenist recognises that his own view does not countenance language, but in that case he contradicts himself by claiming to state it meaningfully, or he thinks that his view does countenance language. However, if the phenomenist assumes that he is able to say how things constantly come to be, the only way to keep mobilism is to sacrifice the

determination of experiences themselves.²⁷⁷ In this way, whiteness is no more white than anything else, without running into the embarrassing problem of thinking whether whiteness turns into just other colours or also other kinds of things like a sacred goat or a throwing discus.²⁷⁸ That is the same for the statement about perception that follows in the text. As we have seen, perceptions too would change if there is no stability. Does it mean that seeing actually turns into hearing, to use the examples in the text? Plato is not here speaking of synaesthesia, he is not making Heracliteanism lysergic, however alluring it might be. The text goes: for any perception, one should not *call* (προσηρτέον) it seeing more than not-seeing.²⁷⁹ Since nothing has its own nature it is not qualified and thereby it does not deserve any name more than the name of the opposite thing. Thus the text goes on:

«Well, our attempt at perfecting our original answer seems to have turned out admirably! We were eager to show that all things change, so that it might become clear that that answer was correct. But what has in fact become clear is, apparently, that if all things do change, then every answer, whatever it's about, it is equally correct: both that things are so and that they're not so, or, if you like, both that things come to be so and that they come to be not so, so as not to bring those people to a standstill by what we say.»²⁸⁰

The unfortunate result is that for any question any answer is equally correct. This is fatal to Theaetetus' definition as well as any other. Nothing can be said to be determined, whether it be a perceptual state of affairs or a definition concerning the nature of knowledge. This means not only that the Man-Measure thesis is objective even if no one believes it, as

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Thaet.* 182a-c.

²⁷⁸ For this interpretation cf. for example R. M. Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge. A Commentary of Plato's Theaetetus*, op. cit., p. 158.

²⁷⁹ Cf. *Theaet.* 182e4-6.

²⁸⁰ *Theaet.* 183a1-8 «καλὸν ἂν ἡμῖν συμβαίνοι τὸ ἐπανόρθωμα τῆς ἀποκρίσεως, προθυμηθεῖσιν ἀποδείξαι ὅτι πάντα κινεῖται, ἵνα δὴ ἐκείνη ἢ ἀπόκρισις ὀρθὴ φανῇ. τὸ δ', ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐφάνη, εἰ πάντα κινεῖται, πᾶσα ἀπόκρισις, περὶ ὅτου ἂν τις ἀποκρίνηται, ὁμοίως ὀρθὴ εἶναι, οὕτω τ' ἔχειν φάναι καὶ μὴ οὕτω, εἰ δὲ βούλει, γίνεσθαι, ἵνα μὴ στήσωμεν αὐτοὺς τῷ λόγῳ».

Protagoras self-refutation would suggest. Also, the last passage aims at stating the self-inconsistency of a world uniquely made up of events and the possibility of linguistic functions in that world. So, it is not only to recognise that whatever definition, including knowledge-is-perception, do not receive an answer by just one experience concerning one singular manifestation of a particular thing, but also that that thing could not be determined only thanks to the event that it is manifest to someone. The possibility of declarative propositions is then the key to judging the fitness of the theoretical reconstruction pertaining to the nature of the world. If the equation of knowledge and perception required that everything changes, this in turn is ruinous for that specific definition as well as for every definitional endeavour.

Reference and description are the measure by means of which one can test if something is the case. Beyond the bounds of identity nothing can be named and called.²⁸¹ One could contend that experience is not at all capable of being put into words, but still to experience something remains pure knowledge. According to Plato, this is not possible because as the text shows, if it were so, any single experience/appearance would not be as it appears to be, but also what experience itself generally is would not be what it actually is.²⁸² For Plato, if something is, it is capable of being referred to linguistically. This is one further confirmation as to how objectivity and language necessarily involve each other.²⁸³ This also shows that the privacy of perceptions is not a reliable source for the identity of

²⁸¹ Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, p. 182.

²⁸² Cf. N. Thaler, *Plato on the Importance of 'This' and 'That'*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 45 (2013), pp. 1-42. This article is the typical example of a very brilliant work which unfortunately went astray. Apart from many secondary correct arguments, the main contention is this: phenomenalism does not in any way forbid general statements, viz.. statements concerning general notions, but only statements about particulars. The collapse would amount to the fact that there can be no statement about abstract concepts in a world if it is not possible to produce determinate assertions about particulars in that world. Unfortunately, Plato is not Rudolf Carnap. The priority should be reversed: one is not able to speak about particulars without Forms, and not the other way round. If the first definition of knowledge can work for a while it is not because it allows for statements about concepts. It is so focused on the peculiarity of experience that it does not even thematise language as such (which is the same as seeing that language requires a level which is strictly speaking ontological, i.e. relating to being) because if it had done so, it would have immediately realised its own untenability.

²⁸³ Cf. J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, op. cit., pp. 121-4.

phenomena. For if things have determinate conditions of identity and therefore are temporarily “thus and so”, they are so determined *even though* they are mostly accessed privately and not because they are.. If minimal determination entails minimal objectivity, then the source of a thing’s identity is in no way peculiar to some private experience of it.²⁸⁴ As we shall see, this does not concern a thing’s actual knowability (assuming that things can be known), but the fact that they are as they are. What can be said of phenomena is directly linked to being. As a consequence, what remains private in one’s experience, namely the absolute singularity of making experience of something, does not contribute to what things are. This is clear from the fact that for two experiences to be distinct they must differ in one character or other, but then it leads us to regard as relevant only *what* takes place within experience and not the fact that it occurred and which is each time peculiar. Act and content of perception or belief are then distinguished from each other.

The earlier discourse on experiences is forced to turn into the present one because the only thing phenomenism cannot give up is the fact that it is composed of singular manifestations of something which was the content of belief, unthematized as such, and the “actual” appearing phenomenon. For this to be possible, the phenomenon must be something. And this, as we have seen, is inconsistent with phenomenism itself. Moreover, no experience can work as an answer to any question whatsoever, there must be something describable in it to be given as an answer, but then it requires

²⁸⁴ This outcome shows that it is not even possible to consider the ontology of objects given within private perceptions as a trope nominalism cf. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato’s Theaetetus*, op. cit., p. 251. This comparison is useful because it highlights Plato’s point here. That is so for at least two reasons: firstly, as Buckels puts it, according to the Secret Doctrine this whiteness and that whiteness can be qualitatively indistinguishable and still be distinct. Now, this would imply that they differ as to what they are thanks to their respective apparition to someone. Which cannot be the case. Secondly, what describes them, if it is supposed to elude experiential singularity, cannot be both descriptive and peculiar because descriptive means not being peculiar. If something is capable of description then what is being used to describe it can also be used to describe something else, and this is enough to consider it as *being* independently of the things described. Trenchantly, I would say that the very notion of trope is nonsense for Plato: if something is describable, then what describes it does not belong to the peculiarity of its manifestation.

that that something is.²⁸⁵ As far as something is to be thought and spoken, it must relate to being. We are faced with the introduction of the two Platonic tenets which can be considered as the two essential features of metaphysical realism:

- i) The independence of reality from belief/experience/perception;
- ii) The interdependence of being and the capability of being referred to linguistically.

As will be argued in the subsequent excursus and throughout the next, to be and to be referentially accessible will amount to the same profound ontological structure. For this reason the collapse of language sounds horribly terminal and phenomenalism is doomed to failure:

«Yes, Theodorus, except that I said ‘so’ and ‘not so’. One oughtn’t even use this word ‘so’, because what’s so wouldn’t any longer be changing; and, again, one oughtn’t to use ‘not so’, because that isn’t a change either. No, those who state that theory must establish some other language, because as things are they haven’t got expressions for their hypothesis: unless, perhaps, ‘not even so’, said in an indefinite sense, might suit them best.»²⁸⁶

Phenomenalism forbids declarative sentences whether they are definitional or they concern things and events. The double ban of the word “so” and the locution “not so” is highly significant and supports the present interpretation. The ban is open to two interpretations: first, nothing is either one way or the opposite way. Second, no one is allowed both to state how things stand and how they do not stand, even if they are not literally contrary. Both ways work. For the first says that nothing is determined in itself and therefore neither A nor not-A. The second focuses on the types of

²⁸⁵ Partly recognised by N. Thaler, *Plato on the Importance of ‘This’ and ‘That’*, op. cit., p.31 n. 54.

²⁸⁶ *Theaet* 183a10-b5 « πλὴν γε, ὦ Θεόδωρε, ὅτι ‘οὕτω’ τε εἶπον καὶ ‘οὐχ οὕτω.’ δεῖ δὲ οὐδὲ τοῦτο τὸ ‘οὕτω’ λέγειν—οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἔτι κινοῖτο τὸ ‘οὕτω’ —οὐδ’ αὖ ‘μὴ οὕτω’ — οὐδὲ γὰρ τοῦτο κίνησις—ἀλλὰ τιν’ ἄλλην φωνὴν θετέον τοῖς τὸν λόγον τοῦτον λέγουσιν, ὡς νῦν γε πρὸς τὴν αὐτῶν ὑπόθεσιν οὐκ ἔχουσι ῥήματα, εἰ μὴ ἄρα τὸ ‘οὐδ’ οὕτως’ μάλιστα δ’ οὕτως ἂν αὐτοῖς ἀρμόττοι, ἄπειρον λεγόμενον».

declarations, both positive and negative, and, by banishing both, it still implies that reality is so undetermined that it cannot be approached in either linguistic way.

If one wishes to linguistically interact with such a changing reality, he would have to set up some other language. Significantly, the term for “language” here is “φωνήν”, literally “voice”.²⁸⁷ This is significant in that there remains nothing of the utterer’s voice in the content of the voiced thing. Voice is thoroughly and necessarily a part of the event of an utterance and it gives no contribution to the identity and truth of what one is talking about. Surreptitiously, Plato is suggesting that whatever language fits with flux, it can only be a voice. This voice could only be saying that what appears is not even how it seems and this needs to be intended indefinitely since it is an “ἄπειρον λεγόμενον” which means both something whose sense is indeterminate and a spoken thing which does not make sense.

Additionally, it helps clarify an aspect of the original Platonic opposition of transient and transcendent. There is no pure immanence because the series of present experiences following one another are the least reliable sources of truth. Immanence collapses without ever acquiring enough determination to be awarded a stable identity. We shall touch on the nature of sensible things in the first section of the excursus, but one of the few things that can be stated with a fair amount of certainty about Plato’ metaphysics is that sensible things receive the identity they display from Forms. I think that this part of the *Theaetetus* is orthogonal to the classical problem of the relation between Forms and things. The dialogue is setting up, from the first experiential resources one has, the need for an intentional structure of any cognition along with the ontological structure this requires. Once this conceptual ground is gained, it can only match the ontological status of Forms. This could be one of the reasons why the *Theaetetus* ends in aporia.²⁸⁸ No experience, even the ones described in the definitions which follow in the dialogue, is able to correspond to the

²⁸⁷ According to the *Liddell Scott* dictionary, it means both sound and speech, but when it refers to linguistic sounds it always deals with articulating sounds and pertains to the communication of a message.

²⁸⁸ As A. Silverman clearly states at the end of his paper, *Flux and Language in the Theaetetus*, p.152.

requirement of pure intentionality/objectivity (both epistemological and ontological) set by knowledge. This is the same as saying that Forms are the only reality to which one can be in a cognitive relation without any ambiguity or partiality. Forms are purely objective, whereas experience is always on the part of the subjects, and in the case that one subject grasps a Form, what he experiences is systematically less real than that entity. This seems to derive from an evaluation of the definition as a whole. Furthermore, this part is also revealing with regard to the nature of sensible world. As we shall see in the next section, the access to the thing directly comes from its nature. What has been said about appearance will still have a role in comprehending Plato's sensible domain, but the account that has just ended cannot be taken as a description of the sensible world as Plato conceives of it because Theaetetus' definition is the overt conception of a reality *without* Forms. For he explicitly reduced being to the presence of singular manifestations. As a consequence, this is a first attempt to understand, *per via negativa*, what to be by itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό) is like.

To conclude this section, one last part of the dialogue needs to be taken into account at least generally, namely the part devoted to the exposition of the κοινά, i.e. common things/features, in *Theaetetus* 184b3-187b3. This portion of the text is one of the most intriguing and modern of the entire corpus. Therefore, it will not be analysed at length; we shall only consider some aspects of it cursorily, in particular concentrating on the ontological implications of the argument, leaving aside the problematic interpretation of the last critique of perception together with the nature of perceptual judgement²⁸⁹ and the role bestowed on a new conception of mind/soul.²⁹⁰ To summarise the content of the κοινά section, first Socrates suggests that

²⁸⁹ On this topic, consider the classical studies of M. Burnyeat, *Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving*, «The Classical Quarterly», 26 (1976), pp. 29-51 and J. M. Cooper, *Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge* (Theaetetus 184-186), in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato, Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 355-376.

²⁹⁰ Cf. F. Aronadio, *Il tema dei koina nel contesto prospettico del Teeteto*, in Id., *L'aisthesis e le strategie argomentative di Platone nel Teeteto*, pp. 173-206 who correctly maintains two points: first, that the κοινά are the last step *before* the elaboration of judgement, and second, that only the soul can get access to those "common features" thanks to its indefatigable activity of comparing memory and prevision. This point is strictly coherent with my account in that the comparison performed by the soul is the only way to let what is common to the compared experiences emerge. In this sense, common contrasts with private.

senses are instruments which take in sensible things and which lead to a central unity, which is the soul, which in turn organises them. Every sense has a specific nature and a proper kind of object, for instance seeing is to see things and so on. However, if we say that something is, is the same as, or is different from something, does a perception correspond to this cognition? The answer is that no perception can grasp by itself what is common (κοινόν) to any perception, e.g. the fact that it is. It is the soul/mind by itself that is able to investigate what is common and regards all things. The soul can do this by comparing (ἀναλογιζομένη) past and future experiences,²⁹¹ purporting to find being (οὐσίαν). Then Socrates asks: is it possible to come by truth, which is the prerequisite of knowledge, if one does not attain being? Obviously, the answer is negative. And since perception does not attain being because the latter is common to many experiences and can be accessed to only by comparing those experiences, perception is not knowledge. One final remark is that knowledge does not lie in the affections of sensation but in their connection.²⁹²

There are only a few things I feel authorised to say at the level of a such rough report of the text. First, the very notion of what is common. It wholly contrasts with what is peculiar or private. Being is the first “common feature” and it coincides with the correct way of conceiving of the objective plane of content which enables one to speak of *what* takes place in experience.²⁹³ This stability-objective dimension of being makes the

²⁹¹ Interestingly, as noted before cf. *supra* n. 188, the temporal dimensions are put in terms of τὰ γεγονότα και τὰ παρόντα πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα (*Theaet.* 186b1). I say this because by those terms, or at least the first two, it is about experiences since τὰ γεγονότα are the things that have taken place and τὰ παρόντα are the things that presently exist.

²⁹² Cf. *Theaet.* 186d2-5.

²⁹³ That this may bear resemblance to the problem of predicative being is here a secondary issue. I would rather put it in the following terms: to what extent are phenomena? Phenomena are not by themselves, so they manifest something. This thing is somehow qualified. As we have seen in this section, this requires the plane of being. Also, one can say that it is really as it seems to be. In other words, that it is as phenomena bring to manifestation. This too requires the plane of being. In addition, the two roles of being are related to each other. For to really be what it seems to be a thing must be determined. Correspondingly, there is determination only of what is determined in reality and not only in appearance. Cf. F. Ferrari, *Verità e Giudizio: il senso, e la funzione dell'essere tra αἴσθησις e δόξα*, in G. Casertano (a cura di), *Il Teeteto di Platone. Struttura e Problematiche*, Loffredo, Napoli 2002, pp. 156-174 who correctly

reference and ascription of qualities possible. This ending is consistent with the former analyses insofar as to escape the singularity of appearance, the reference to being and the possibility of linguistic reference all contribute to the defeat of Theaetetus' first definition and lay the ground for the second definition, viz. knowledge is true opinion (therefore something linguistic). Second, when it is said that there is more knowledge in connecting affections rather than within affections themselves, this subtly precognises the role of being as connection which will be dealt with in the last chapter. Before this, though, there are some more arguments that will enrich the picture and that still have to be considered.

4) Platonic verificationism: the Trial example

The present work has constantly been referring to a verificationist aspect of Plato's view about knowledge and reality, so much that it can be considered the main character enabling one to judge the kind of entity one is facing. It should be remembered that the more something can be grasped truthfully and the more stable is the truth grasped, the more that entity deserves the name of being. As has already been suggested, this label is not to be confused with its modern meaning as it has been employed by philosophers like Moritz Schlick and Michael Dummett. The Modern sense and the Platonic sense of verificationism are irreconcilable. Platonic verificationism is neither the empirical verifiability of logical positivism nor the anti-realistic evaluation of truth that resolves it in actual verifiability constrained by the epistemic situation one happens to live in. By Platonic verificationism, I mean that the cognitive access essentially characterises the mode of being of the object offered to one's cognition. This means that the real capacity of something to be known univocally rests on the side of objects. This view deserves the name of verificationism because the nature of reality is above all distinguished with regard to its cognitive access, which translates into the actual possibility of any subject grasping its truth. In other words, the mark of reality itself is the manner and the "intensity" with which its truth is characterised. An immediate by-

recognises the link between being and language, though giving strong emphasis to the predicative aspect of this link.

product is the actual verifiability or grasp performed by the soul which relates to it. This means that the more something is knowable as it is, the more it literally is. This by no means implies that the known reality is *easily* grasped. On the contrary, it requires a longstanding training and the purest efforts of the mind.²⁹⁴ The direct fruition of the clear appearance of things is as much commonly intuitive as recognised as such by traditional Greek culture. A good instance of this is one of the founding acts of history, conceived of as a way to investigate reality, as it was spelt out by Herodotus. The first predicament of the Ionian historian is the autopsy, literally “witnessing/seeing with one’s own eyes”. If one is not able to do this, then he is allowed to accept hearsay. As we shall see in this section, it is not by chance that this argument lies at the heart of historical knowledge.²⁹⁵

This mind-set was operating during the discussion of Theaetetus’ first definition. At first, the best advantage of phenomenalism was its direct access to the “reality” of the appearing things. Once the level of linguistic judgement is reached, together with its ontological requirements, the dialogue moves on to discuss the possibility that knowledge be true judgement. Right after the proposal, the discussion turns to the examination of the concept of false judgment which turns out to be problematic. In this section, we shall not comment on this. Only the final page of Theaetetus’ second definition will be closely read because it is remarkably revealing of both the concept of verificationism hinted at above and the status of sensible domain. Theaetetus’ last attempt to define knowledge as true judgment is contrasted by Socrates with the case of a trial. A robbery or some other violent offense has occurred. Many parties have a confrontation in front of a judge and jury who have not taken part in the event. The forum is the realm of persuasion and the creativity of speech-makers. The whole matter is constrained by time which hardly is a guarantee of the veracity of response. Apparently, the argument is tasked with deprecating the prerogative of persuasion against the authenticity of knowledge. It looks as

²⁹⁴ Cf. *Theaet.* 186b11-c5.

²⁹⁵ The stem of the term “history” itself is kin to the verbs of vision cf. P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire de mots*, op. cit., p. 779. Cf. also *Soph.* 267e1-3 where the Stranger contrasts two ways of imitating something: one supports it by belief or he does it by direct experience, which is known as “ἵστορικὴ”.

though, with enough time and attention, the jury could attain knowledge concerning the crime. Indeed, for Plato any chance to downgrade persuasion needs to be taken, but the substantive part of the text is the ontological learning one can draw from it.²⁹⁶ Here are the decisive lines:

«So when jurymen have been persuaded, in accordance with justice, about things which it's possible to know only if one has seen them and not otherwise, then, in deciding those matters by hearsay, and getting hold of a true judgement, they have decided without knowledge; though what they have been persuaded of is correct, given that they have reached a good verdict. Is that right?»²⁹⁷

I do not think that this argument is to be read as an instance of canonical epistemological enquiry. Plato is not trying to describe to what extent a discursive knowledge of a fact needs to be justified in order to be much the same as being an eyewitness or whether it is possible at all. This is clear from the fact that all of a sudden the jury is said to be persuaded according to justice. Yet there still remains a difference between an account of the robbery based on hearsay (ἐξ ἀκοῆς)²⁹⁸ and one from an eyewitness to the fact when it occurred. Thus, the question is not whether the jury is justified in believing a reconstruction of a fact, since it is assumed that what the jury has been led to believe is in accordance with justice. The argument is that true belief is not knowledge because one can have a true belief about something without having knowledge of it. This derives from the assumption that there are some things which one can *only* know if he has actually seen them. Obviously, the kind of thing under the scrutiny of

²⁹⁶ The paradoxicality of the sides of the argument has been recognised by M. Burnyeat in M. Burnyeat and J. Barnes, *Socrates and the Jury: Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction between Knowledge and True Belief*, «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society», Supplementary Volumes, 54 (1980), pp 173-191+193-206:176-80. For an attempt to solve the twofold nature of the argument in terms of the subject attaining truth by means of his own agency (taken as philosophical *trait d'union* between genuine learning and being an eyewitness) cf. T. Nawar, *Knowledge and True Belief at Theaetetus 201A–C*, «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», 21 (2013), pp. 1052-70.

²⁹⁷ *Theaet.* 201b8-c2 «οὐκοῦν ὅταν δικαίως πεισθῶσιν δικασταὶ περὶ ὧν ἰδόντι μόνον ἔστιν εἰδέναι, ἄλλως δὲ μή, ταῦτα τότε ἐξ ἀκοῆς κρίνοντες, ἀληθῆ δόξαν λαβόντες, ἄνευ ἐπιστήμης ἔκριναν, ὀρθὰ πεισθέντες, εἶπερ εὖ ἐδίκασαν;»

²⁹⁸ On this phrase cf. F. A. Lewis, *Knowledge and the Eyewitness: Plato "Theaetetus" 201a-c*, «Canadian Journal of Philosophy», 11 (1981), pp. 185-197:185 n. 1.

the jury is that kind of thing. Therefore, the term “δόξα” leans toward the linguistic description of an event rather the epistemic force of one’s conviction. The jury can describe the event and being correct about it without having knowledge of it because to have knowledge of an event amounts to one’s being present when it occurred. I do not want to put the question in terms of kinds of certainty or privileged cognitive contact. For now, one must keep in mind that a true account of an event and being an eyewitness to an event are not alike in that the latter enjoys a direct access to the event which the former does not. This is the basis of the difference between true opinion and knowledge. On a minimal ontological level, wherein does the difference concerning the cognitive access lie? In the case of the eyewitness, he has experienced the present manifestation, the occurrence of the singular event. In this case, then, the cognitive access to the presence of the thing/event is the essential factor in defining one’s claim to know something.

If the presence of the known thing is the crucial factor in knowledge, then a difference in presence will have repercussions on the kind of cognition one has of the thing in question. This is an additional thought from the argument: it also informs us about the kind of access one has in the case of events. Either one experiences an event or at most he can have true opinions regarding it. Exposure to events is temporary because their mode of being present is temporary. To put the matter in a more orderly way, the page can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Knowledge depends on the cognitive access one has of the known thing/event.
- 2) The cognitive access to the thing depends on the way the thing/event is present.
- 3) The ontological mode of being of anything principally characterises the nature of its presence.
- 4) Therefore: the type of knowledge one can have of a certain reality reveals the nature/mode of being of that known reality.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ This stance involves a very precise interpretation of the most controversial passage in *Resp.* 477-480: Plato states that for two cognitive capacities to be different they must be directed to different objects whose difference accounts for the relations. Therefore, I agree with the analysis of F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone (Menone Cratilo*

In this way, the Trial example is an instance of the reasoning of these four points. It shows to what extent the access to the presence of the known thing is the ground of knowing it.³⁰⁰ However, the argument is most revealing since it also sheds light on the specific kind of knowledge one

Repubblica), op. cit., pp. 195-201 for a survey of the literature also on the value of the verb “be” cf. pp. 196-9 n. 47; 48; 52 among which, given its fortunate reception and its contrary interpretation, it is worth naming G. Fine, *Knowledge and Belief in ‘Republic’ V*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 40 (1978), pp. 121-139. For an alternative account cf. N. Smith, *Plato on Knowledge as Power*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», 38 (2000), pp. 145-168. Cf. also Platone, *La Repubblica*, traduzione e commento a cura di M. Vegetti, Vol. IV, Libro V, op. cit., pp. 28-34; Platon, *La République*, traduction et présentation par G. Leroux, op. cit., pp. 647-9.

³⁰⁰ To better understand what this concept of presences amounts to, there is an excerpt of the dialogue that is worth a look. Before submitting the Trial example, Socrates says (*Theaet.* 200e7-201a3): «Well, Theaetetus, the man who was leading the way across the river said, apparently, ‘It will show for itself.’ The same goes for this: if we go on and search into it, perhaps the very thing we’re looking for will come to light at our feet, but if we stay put, nothing will come clear to us.» («ὁ τὸν ποταμὸν καθηγούμενος, ὃ Θεαίτητε, ἔφη ἄρα δείξειν αὐτό: καὶ τοῦτο ἐὰν ἰόντες ἐρευνῶμεν, τάχ’ ἂν ἐμπόδιον γεγόμενον αὐτὸ φήνειεν τὸ ζητούμενον, μένουσι δὲ δῆλον οὐδέν.») I find this passage magnificent. Not just because it is one of the first examples of the rhetoric of engagement: one must engage in something in order to achieve a result, but also because it helps bring out what is at stake with the notion of presence. This is crucial: on the one hand, the example gives a hint concerning the interaction with sensible things, on the other hand, a more general account of reality. Firstly, no one can know with absolute certainty whether he is going to cross the river safely. Only in the case that this event has actually taken place could one know it has. This dependence upon singular actualisation in time essentially characterises sensible things and events. Secondly, in the second part of the quotation, Socrates says that only through the research will the very thing we search for manifest itself, otherwise nothing will come clear (δῆλον) to us. I regard “come clear” to be an excellent translation in that it designates the symmetric counterpart of “show”: somethings’ offering itself to one’s vision as it is (on this kind of ostension cf. Platone, *Cratilo*, traduzione e introduzione di Francesco Aronadio, op. cit., pp. XL-XLI). In the case of Forms, the “thing itself” will come clear in a completely different manner compared to the crossing of a river. Nevertheless, they share a minimal trait: both the identity of what is and of what comes to be is autogenous with respect to what we believe about it. In other words, in this context the notion of presence (under the strict opposition of transient and transcendent) accounts for the fundamentally realist stance that the world has its own identity/determination or qualification and that to have access to it is one and the same as “letting it show itself”. I find embraceable the remark in Platone, *Teeteto*, a cura di F. Ferrari, op. cit., p. 483 n. 304 according to which the emphasis on the direct engagement means that the enquiry concerning the nature of knowledge is not capable of being addressed outside of the activity of knowing itself, thereby making process and outcome indiscernible.

can have about events and in general sensible things, facts and whatever one is able to find within experience (I firmly believe that Plato does not admit to any proper knowledge of non-eidetic entities; therefore, before making the difference clear in this section, the term “knowledge” will be used non-technically, i.e. not exclusively relating to Forms). The Trial example points out that whoever was not present at the fact cannot claim to know it. Only the eyewitness is. To be an eyewitness of something means to be present at an event to the degree that it is manifest to the ones who take part in it or assist. This is an experiential engagement. By means of the example, we see that such experiential engagement succumbs to the transitory nature of its objects. Harking back to Herodotus’ golden rule, one is a historian once he has seen with his own eyes what has happened. From an epistemological point of view, this means that the truth of a significant part of human experience arises from the temporary exposition to its presence. No one can really know what happened in that robbery but the one who was there. From an ontological point of view, this means that there is an entire set of entities which, since they are limited in time, are also limited in being. A by-product of this is limited epistemic reliability. If the ontological constitution of events makes impossible to know them beyond a very restricted window of time and space (to be in the right place at the right moment), this is detrimental to their being. This makes those events, according to Plato, less objective.

Therefore, it could be said that whatever is historical (both in the modern and the etymological sense) is not totally objective because its mode of being does not supply an absolute access to itself, which is a plain display of its own identity. The dichotomy of transient being and transcendent being spelt out above has now become clearer. For any process unfolds in time, and since it is temporary, it is temporarily true as well. This view seems to be most unintuitive to the modern eye. The modern view tends to think that any truth concerning events that are not ultimately attainable should nevertheless be considered deserving of the same treatment of universally attainable truths. Nowadays, no one but a philosopher (this because philosophers are predominantly the ones who bother to harass the comfortably safe haven of the obvious, as thankfully they always have) would deny that if something has actually taken place

the truth of this fact will be eternal regardless of its actual verifiability.³⁰¹ I do not think that Plato would subscribe this view. Since being is inseparable from its cognisability, a lesser degree of the latter downgrades the former. On these grounds, the name of verificationism makes sense in this context; always keeping in mind that it is never a matter of resources available to the subject in certain epistemic situation. Contrarily, events themselves are always situated in space and time and the context relativity

³⁰¹ Cf. some classical places where facts about the world are acknowledged an absolute/eternal degree of objectivity: G. Frege, *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, Verlag von Wilhelm Koebner, Breslau 1884, §26; W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1960, § 41. On this subject, it is inevitable to consider J. Hintikka, *Time, Truth, and Knowledge in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, «American Philosophical Quarterly», 4 (1967), pp. 1-14. The main contention of the paper is that among Greek thinkers (the example is Aristotle) sentences are temporally indefinite, i.e. their truth depends on the time of their utterance (p. 2). The time of utterance cannot be referred to in the content of the proposition so as to make that utterance an eternal sentence. At the same time, though, two utterances of the same temporally indefinite sentence carry the same meaning even though they are uttered at two different times, which is counterintuitive to the modern thinker. Hintikka states that Aristotle would have not recognised the notion of proposition, i.e. the objective content of acts of thought/language, sticking to actual thoughts of people (p. 3). For this reason, the only way that a statement can always be true about something is if something is not capable of changing, thereby ensuring that what has been said will always remain true, if it is indeed true (p.7). This is common both to Plato and Aristotle. Hence, an authentic claim to truth needs to develop a tenseless use in such a way that the sentence does not refer to a specific moment in time but to something that assumes the timelessness of what is stated (p. 10). This issue will be addressed in the excursus following the present chapter.

I find Hintikka's paper insightful because it grasps the peculiar connection between the moment of actual thinking and stating invariable truths. The article correctly recognises that this invariability depends on the relationship that the object of the statement has with time. Furthermore, I think that the Trial example enables us to better understand what prevents one from adding temporal information to a statement to make it an eternal sentence. This perfectly fits with my concept of Platonic verificationism: what eternal truth can be "attached" by means of a semantical addition if the reality one is speaking of is not eternal? If one is not actually able to attain the truth of that statement, by not directly relating it with the object it is about, at any time and place with the same certainty as if he were attaining that truth as though he were exposed to the presence of that reality, then proper unerring knowledge of it is by principle unattainable. For classical Greek thinkers, if the truth of temporally indefinite sentences is variable, it derives from the fact that the reality they are about is no less variable. The reason why Plato cannot think of a semantically objective variability, as in the case of giving temporal references, is a consequence of the fact that there can be no objective truth without objective attainability of that truth. Cf. *Tim.* 29b4-c3, where it is asserted that the truth of a discourse and the nature of its object are similar.

qualifies their own mode of being. This being undifferentiated of truth and being is precisely what is at stake with the notion of ontological ἀλήθεια. Does all this mean that for Plato one can know, however poorly, sensible things and the events that regard them? I do not think so. The Trial example should be taken as revealing about the many things said so far. It should also be taken as a metaphor of real knowledge which never concerns deceitful things, as sensible things are. As we have often seen, sensible things deceive as to their identity because they may appear differently to different people and turn out different at any time. This morning, the man who stepped out of the mist was not Theodorus as I had thought when he was still scarcely visible; in fact, he is Theaetetus. The direct erroneous perception is no less direct than the veracious perception. As a consequence, the page in question is not really asserting the possibility of the proper knowledge of facts. Even in the most optimistic case, which is that one is correct in judging an event, as the man who successfully leads the way across the river, one can in principle be correct (or wrong) about it only once it has happened. And afterwards, the fact is not beyond any doubt *even if* it has actually happened. As we shall see in a moment, it is not a matter of being right or wrong, rather it is a matter of being uncertain, aiming at elucidating the difference of what knowledge is from what is not. If this is true, then knowledge is authentic only when it is properly related to its object, just as the eyewitness is when compared to the true judgment of the jury.

It is not possible to focus here on the nature of this relation.³⁰² Our objective has been to clarify Plato's verificationism and a first account of

³⁰² An article that directly addresses the subject is F. Aronadio, *Epilogo: l' analogia del tribunale (201a4-c6)*, in Id., *L'aisthesis e le strategie argomentative di Platone nel Teeteto*, op. cit., pp. 227-48. The author argues that the passage constitutes good evidence for a non-procedural self-validating conception of knowledge. Particularly remarkable is the suggestion that the characters of the tribunal represent the heterogeneous cognitive components of the soul itself (p.233). On the concept of self-validation of knowledge cf. F. Aronadio, *Plat. resp. 509D-511E: la chiarezza dei contenuti cognitivi e il sapere diretto*, «Elenchos», XXVII (2006), pp. 409-24. Contra cf. F. Trabattoni, *Theaetetus, 200D–201C: Truth without Certainty*, in A. Havlíček F. Karfík Š. Špinka (eds.), *Plato's Theaetetus*, Proceedings of the Sixth Symposium Platonicum Pragense, OIKOYMENH, Prague 2008, pp. 250-73 who indeed recognises a direct intuitive character of knowledge but reads the page framed within a sceptical view: one has direct knowledge of perceptual matters and discursive knowledge of universal matters when one ought to have direct knowledge of universal matters,

the two different modes of being, namely events/facts/things and Forms. Sensible eyewitnessing metaphorically stands for knowledge. Consequently, there is only knowledge of that mode of being that is described by the Anatomy of εἶδος whose feature make up a presence which is always and in any case attainable at the cost of being banished from phenomenal manifestation. Accordingly, there can be no certain knowledge of an event since it cannot be “seen” in the ontological potency of the present. The perspectivity belonging to events equates to the event of perspectivity. Those two modes of being are paired with ἐπιστήμη and δόξα. The δόξα is an actual act of thought and language through which an opinion is brought forth. The proper object of opinion is that entity which occurs within space and time, whereas knowledge entertains an intentional relation to that type of entity which is a never-changing nature intelligibly beyond the scope of sensoriality. If that is so, how is one to attain being, given that it never enters experience in the same way as things? This is possible thanks to language. The ontological difference between things and Forms is mirrored by the diversity of language use, for instance, the difference between the two statements “What is x?” and “Did Xerxes build a pontoon bridge across the Hellespont?”. These statements have a difference in syntax. To better understand this point along with a broader treatment of the mongrel ontological status of sensible things, I reserve for these topics a brief excursus that takes inspiration from the parts of the *Theaetetus* touched on thus far. I consider this excursus to be consistent with my interpretation of the *Theaetetus*, though its scope is more general.

namely a direct insight of Forms (p. 266). Although I strongly disagree with his account, the author correctly notes that for Plato there is no genuine knowledge of historical facts (p. 259). Also M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, op. cit., p. 127, though critically, considers this outcome.

Excursus

I. The nature of things: existence without truth

The complex issue of the nature of sensible things would require a work on its own. However, it can be of use to try to draw some conclusions concerning the “ontological” status of things and appearances which can form the background of our analysis of the *Theaetetus*. The brief remarks of this section will lead to the second part of the present excursus which attempts to set the question with regard to linguistic functions. Let us begin with the following question. What kind of reality is due to sensible domain according to Plato’s view? I think the answer is something like an existence without truth.³⁰³ Plato does not think that sensible things are not anything at

³⁰³ Cf. Platone, *Sofista*, a cura di Francesco Fronterotta, BUR, Milano 2007, pp. 112-22 particularly 119-20 who claims that Plato maintains a strong principle of bivalence (for any proposition, it is either true or false, regardless of the proposition’s actually being known). My account of the relevant parts of the *Sophist* is delayed to the next chapter. However, I am not strictly denying bivalence, at least as long as something appears to be the way it is. It is worth remarking anew: according to Plato, truth is never a matter of actual verifiability by one subject. Instead, it is the nature of sensible things themselves which does not allow us to eternalise the truth of the propositions that describe them. Therefore, bivalence is peculiarly maintained: only as long as things appear to be “thus and so”, it is also true that they are like that. Thus, we are faced with not being able to decide on two orders: on the one hand, one cannot decide whether something is truly or falsely as it appears; on the other hand, one cannot decide whether

all. Nor does he think that things and the facts which concern them are always false. The problem is rather that any cognitive attempt to univocally grasp them goes astray. Opinions about things are neither univocally true nor univocally false. Such an undecidability that translates into indecisiveness is the problem. But given the complex marriage of metaphysics and epistemology peculiar to Plato's thought, a problem concerning knowledge actually amounts to a feature in nature. Does the Trial example have anything else to teach us? If we stay with the fictitious robbery of the example, Plato is not saying that if we do not know whether it has happened it actually has not, which would almost resemble phenomenalism. Instead, he is saying that if it is that kind of thing which can take place, one can never be sure about it even if he is judging it correctly because of its mode of being. After all, Plato allows any opinion to be possibly true, and this is precisely what the final rejection of Theaetetus' second definition amounts to. Epistemic undecidability regarding the sensible domain assumes at least three forms:

- i) The impossibility of being univocally certain about an event which one has not attended, i.e. discursive reconstruction.
- ii) The impossibility of being univocally certain that something one has directly experienced will not turn out to be different.
- iii) As in the case of wading across a river, which one can be fairly certain has happened since he is still living to tell the story, whatever knowledge one developed during the crossing is not able to go beyond the temporal boundaries of that event (on the understanding that it can be subject to (ii) at any time).

These complexly related points have contributed to make the discourse on the Platonic concept of δόξα one of the most difficult parts of Plato's metaphysical view. I cannot address the whole matter here, so I shall focus on how the topic has been treated in the *Theaetetus*, which is not inconsistent with the treatment in other places of the corpus. The intermediate status of sensible things becomes clearer by contrasting it with

a certain event is *truly* deceiving or reliable. In other words, a perceiver is not only unsure about the truth or falsity of an appearance, but he is also unsure whether it makes sense to be unsure about it or not.

phenomenalism. Things are determined so as to make both correct description and error possible since they are minimally objective enough to work as content of cognitive acts, and so are differentiated from those acts. This was the interpretation of the arguments concerning the collapse of language in the last chapter. However, sensible things are intrinsically temporal. This means that any knowledge concerning them is subject to the three points above. The mode of being specific to things is less stable than that proper to Forms and more stable than the becoming held by phenomenologists. The access to the truth of things/events is not literally private but still requires the subject to inhabit a certain experiential context. And yet those things/events are describable by means of that instrument which can be used to describe everything else, namely language. Since things are objectively describable there is the chance of entertaining a true opinion and a false opinion about them. Herein lies the departure from phenomena as thought of by phenomenalism.

The misfortune is that no one can ultimately discern whether things really are as they appear to him, because they never reach that real being. Things are not at all in themselves without the contribution provided by Forms, which is why by asking what a thing is by itself, one is already trying to define the thing's Form. Therefore, phenomenalism is most revealing with regard to Plato's sensible things. Albeit mistakenly, phenomenalism brings to the fore two fundamental aspects of sensible things: the context-relativity qualifying the experience one has of them and the impermanence of their existence. If these two features are taken in isolation experience collapses, but this does not mean that they must be jettisoned in the correct description of the world. For this reason, throughout the chapter events and things have been constantly likened. Things are the uncertain and temporary display of most objective natures. To spend some further time on the three points above, (i) has been sufficiently reckoned with through the concept of Platonic verificationism. As far as (ii) is concerned, we see that sensible things are always subject to epistemic bafflement. Things can appear to be different at any time. This is an instance of epistemic change. Since phenomenalism has been rejected, no one thinks that the person who is approaching in the mist is Theodorus and after some moments *actually* turns into Theaetetus. It seems then that the Priority of Reality Assumption (PRA) holds. In addition, when we see a

person approaching in the mist, we know that he will always have been whoever he turns out to be. In this way, the Telicity of Reality assumption (TRA) also holds. However, the junction of both principles, if associated with uncertain identity conditions, has a sceptical outcome: if it is true that which will reveal to be so, there is no assurance about the truthfulness of the present experience. It looks as if sensible things try to host the requirements of being, but their nature structurally fail to meet these requirements.

As far as (iii) is concerned, we are faced with the epistemic problems deriving from actual change and not epistemic change. In wading a river, the fact that it has actually worked once does not mean that it is going to work again because the sensible states of affairs regarding the river might have changed. Thus, the correct opinion we had at the time of the first wading is not necessarily still appropriate. This too obviously derives from the fact that the river is a temporal complex of things and has its own “history”. I consider (iii) the most optimistic scenario because there is actually something happening, however uncertain it might be. This is related to the evaluation of instruments and tools of the second chapter. In that place, the discourse was that there are effective uses of instruments whose effectiveness comes from the fixed nature of their predisposition and application. Within the scope of δόξα there is room to act efficaciously in the world. This does not conflict with the problematic nature of sensible domain; only through looking to Forms can one judge events and things correctly within the epistemic limits set in (i) and (ii). What imperatively needs to be recognised is that the problematic status of sensible things (by “problematic” I mean all that was seen to be paradoxical in the first chapter)³⁰⁴ can be seen first of all as an *ultimate indistinction* between (ii) and (iii).³⁰⁵ The perspectivity of things and events leads us to recognise that the many ways things arise from relations to subjects or aspects of other objects. The same thing is both small and big if looked at from far away or close up.³⁰⁶ The constitutional indefiniteness³⁰⁷ of things lies in the

³⁰⁴ Cf. Chapter One p. 24.

³⁰⁵ I think that this indistinction was already at work during the presentation of phenomenalism. At the time, it was not possible to distinguish between objective change and difference in manifestation to the perceiver.

³⁰⁶ Cf. *Soph.* 235d-236a.

middle of epistemic and objective change: events always concern things and subjects somehow depending on a certain perspective without allowing the absolute degree of certainty that, as we have seen, is characteristic of phenomenism.

This suggests that only philosophers can see that opinion is not truth, whereas common men do not distinguish between the two and take what they believe to be the truth. The perspectivalness of sensible things means that they belong to becoming because the boundaries between real and epistemic change blur. I think that this protean nature of becoming things is summarised in the concept of *context-relativity*. Things appear and become, in doing this they display some features that can be described by language. Whatever they display occurs in relation to a context in which the subject plays an important role.³⁰⁸ This is why the specific aspect of things, namely their singularity, has to do with the limited time of one's experience. Finally, point (iii) is connected with the fourth function of the Physiology of εἶδος, namely Reference. The partial and temporary, yet correct, description of states of affairs and things is possible thanks to Forms, proof of this is the fact that we use the names of the Forms to talk about things. To conclude this section, I present a few remarks: firstly, any opinion or judgement concerning historical things/events cannot aspire to the rank of knowledge (as we have seen, "historical" indicates both what can be seen now and what unfolds in time). Secondly, the reason not to consider such

³⁰⁷ I find very interesting F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, op. cit., pp. 53-8, who argues that the lack of definition concerning sensible things lies in that things do not alter discretely. By means of the concept of instant in Plato's *Parmenides* he claims that things become because they are constantly coming to be without determinate steps of alteration. That is the reason why things are both what they are and what is different from them. By his words (p. 57): «Identität und Alterität sind beim Werdenden nicht voneinander zu trennen, sondern dialektisch miteinander verbunden. [...] Das Werdende schlägt um und wird anders als es selbst, ohne dass der Umschlag die Kontinuität seines Selbst-Seins unterbräche». McDowell considers fleetingly the continuity/discontinuity of change in commenting on Protagoras Secret Doctrine cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell, op. cit., pp. 129.

³⁰⁸ Cf. F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone (Menone Cratilo Repubblica)*, op. cit., p. 206 n. 61 where the author recognises that the scope of the δόξα does not enjoy an absolute degree of being since it amounts to the partiality and perspectiveness of the way human beings partitions reality. He, too, in the body of the text, speaks of reality as a continuum which can be carved up correctly or mistakenly, which correspond to dividing reality in accordance with its independent eidetic unities and their net of relations or to deformed doxastic images of it.

things as knowable is altogether pragmatic. I think that pragmatism is the true reason of Platonic verificationism. Only that which is actually reachable and undoubtedly sure is a good ground for philosophical speculation and political reform. The uncertain epistemic state of things and events is, first of all, a matter of their mode of being. More specifically, the extent to which a thing differs from a Form is highlighted by a fundamental difference in language, as we shall see in the second section of this excursus.

II. Indexical Reference vs Definitional Reference

Many subjects have been raised throughout the chapter, a trace of which emerged from the cunningly embroidered texture of the *Theaetetus*. Ultimately, this third chapter has had two objectives: on the one hand, it attempts to delineate some main features of the sensible domain by paying particular attention to their connection to the human dimension of experience; on the other hand, the chapter highlights to what extent the best way to outline the nature of things is by investigating to what degree they allow for the human faculty of language. The collapse of language showed that without an entirely new plane of being which works as objective dimension, whatever enters human experience would not even be able to appear as itself, let alone be referred to linguistically. If the issue is first of all ontological, the connection between being and language is so strict as to elect language as the most proper instrument of ontological enquiry.

Furthermore, the Trial example first pointed out the relevance of the access to knowledge as privileged ontological marker, then it exploited this key to disclose the peculiar nature of sensible things. If both interpretations, of the collapse of language and the Trial example, are correct then equally peculiar linguistic type of performance will appertain to the intermediate status of becoming things. The intertwinement of being and language stands at any level of the linguistic practice and in addition accounts for the difference between those levels. The *Theaetetus* may be seen as a survey of the potentiality the sensible domain has to allow thought and language within its boundaries. This adequately accounts both for the fact that the *Theaetetus* is aporetic and that the immediately subsequent *Sophist* provides a solution to this. The next chapter will be devoted to the analysis

of how being and language intertwine for Plato. The last element of this recapitulation is to focus the sort of linguistic function which has mainly been at stake in the present chapter, namely reference. We have seen that the (degree of) stability of the object and the possibility of reference are one and the same thing. As a consequence, reference is that linguistic function which essentially delivers the speaker to the reality referred to by means of the linguistic instrument. But if the nature of the cognised reality, given the specific way one can get access to it, brings about a certain sort of cognition, it may be reasonable to assume that this will also affect the kind of linguistic reference to the reality one performs. Thus, the difference between referring to things and referring to Forms is not just that the former are temporary whereas the latter are eternal. On the contrary, the difference in nature between things and Forms actually modifies the way one can speak of them. More generally, the two natures seem to be represented by the opposition between transient things and transcendent beings. More specifically, these two kinds of presence of the object of reference support two different ways to speak of them. The dualism consists of that which is manifest (i.e. appears between the subject and the world) and temporary, and that which is transcendent (i.e. something one cannot come across) but timeless. So, the question is: how can the speaker be delivered to the type of reality referred to by the linguistic means employed by him? In the last section of the second chapter, an issue was left open, it regarded the instrumental value of names and how they connect with the ontology of the named realities. Before we attempted to answer that question, at least with respect to the linguistic practice concerning sensible things, it was necessary to follow the path of Plato's enquiry into the nature of becoming. This means that this section works as an interpretive frame of what, according to Plato, language is able to when it comes to connect itself to reality by means of the referential function.

My proposition is to name these two different types of reference *indexical*³⁰⁹ reference and *definitional* reference, respectively.³¹⁰ The

³⁰⁹ Irrespective of the question concerning how the dual nature of reality bears on the linguistic dimension, the deictic force of names in Plato's thought has also been recognised by L. M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam 1984, pp. 265-70.

³¹⁰ For one case of the use of the term "definitional" cf. A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence*, op. cit., pp. 177 and cf. *infra* 403.

meaning of these terms needs to be adjusted to the present context without either completely severing them from the common meaning or plainly adopting it. I shall start with the indexical reference. Commonly, the term “indexical” designates uses of language whose meaning depends upon the context of utterance. If one says “I” it has a contextually different meaning for at least each person who happens to utter the pronoun.³¹¹ This is in a way true to the etymology as well. Ancient Greek has a verb sharing the stem of the term, namely “δεικνύναι” which means “indicate” (which in turn comes from the same stem). The active intention of indicating something cuts the indicated thing out of the background. This way of showing may be opposed to the self-movement of something coming to be clear by itself which in Plato amounts to the verb “δηλοῦν”.³¹² It is the difference between one who is pointing at something and something that becomes clear by standing out. The Platonic indexical reference belongs to the first sort of showing. Now, we shall try to “platonise” the notion of indexical.

Platonic indexical reference has two fundamental aspects which bear some resemblance to the common meaning. Firstly, it occurs in one person’s experience who refers to something within it. Thus, Platonic indexical reference remains partly arbitrary in the sense that what is referred to and how depends on the speaking subject, which makes it emerge from the context. This point connects to the subject-relatedness of the δόξα. By this, I do not mean that one can decide what seems to be the case to him, which is impossible. Nor that linguistic acts of reference depend on the subject’s cognitive faculties as to their actual execution and form. Which is true, but not enough. Rather it means that the things one can refer to in this way are unavoidably related to the context of one’s experience. One can say: “Lysistrata is a virtuous wife” or one can be quite doubtful about it. The way one refers to the person Lysistrata follows from the way the person has made her appearance in the context of one’s experience, the way in which she seemed to be. By means of the sentence “Lysistrata is a virtuous wife”, the speaker is delivered to the presence of the “fact” that that person appears to be virtuous to the one who actually

³¹¹ Cf. the online entry “Indexicals” of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³¹² This opposition is crucial in the *Cratylus* and has been correctly and fully explored by F. Aronadio cf. *supra* n. 300.

happens to believe it to be the case. This kind of fact always occurs in a context: it depends on he who speaks that Lysistrata is referred to precisely in that way and not different ways; the very fact that one believes her to be virtuous is one and the same with the fact that she actually seems to be virtuous. The same thing would not hold for what virtue is by itself. With respect to this aspect, sensible things are much like the phenomena discussed in the third chapter: they are as they appear to be, but differently to the phenomena in *Theaetetus*' first definition without any epistemic warrant about their appearance. Instead, what virtue is by itself is not in one way only because it seems to be such, even if only for the time needed to seem so to at least one person. Therefore, the first feature of Platonic indexical reference is as follows: the event of a thing displaying some qualities and the event of the thing appearing to be so are the only basis to refer to that thing and to speak of it as somehow having some qualification. This does not mean that one is only able to refer to things which presently appear to him. Indexical reference deals with things which occur in space and time and have access to manifestation. Recalling the Trial example, the jury can speak about an event they have not witnessed to. Nonetheless, the mode of being of that event is precisely that it has occurred in space and time, and that it was manifest to someone (those taking part and the eyewitness). The contextuality of indexical reference is such that the same crime can properly be referred to in different ways which are different and which do not necessarily make sense in every context and still be legitimate. Keeping the same example, the same act of violence can be both just and unjust. A man was killed, which is wrong, but he was a ruthlessly cruel tyrant and then to prevent him to kill people is right. The point at stake here is not a question of moral matters. Provided that the event of the crime is both just and unjust, the possibility one has to refer to it depends on whether and how it happens with respect to a plurality of points of view. Secondly and most importantly, the things one can refer to through Platonic indexical reference are only particulars, individuals, singular things or collections of them. This second point has to be considered as having great relevance because it deals not only with individuals, but also with their individuation. For Plato, the linguistic form of any statement referring to sensible things amounts to this: that thing is "thus and so" (whether it be referred to by a strict deictic term or by a description), where "that thing"

necessarily picks out a particular or a collection of particulars. In turn, this has two main implications. First, things are singular in such a way that the only way to ultimately refer to them univocally (i.e. referring directly to their singular status) is by means of gestures or demonstratives. This is in accordance with the Trial example. The eyewitness is the only one able to refer properly to the things which occurred during the event of the robbery. Moreover, the extreme Heracliteanism, as it was represented by the historical Cratylus, only admitted of a pointing activity under constant change.³¹³ Perhaps, this is what remains of the privacy of experience: the singularity of sensible things is given only by the fact that one presently faces them and this kind of referentiality stands as the linguistic counterpart of the ontological situation. One can already see the difference between the two Platonic types of reference. If one has to say whether a thing is “thus and so”, the only way is by experiencing it (Trial example), but given all the limitations considered in the last section we can scarcely aspire to it being knowledge. To be sure, however, one can never say what something is by perceiving it or by pointing at it. To know *what* anything is, to perceive a thing is never enough to know it. It is now clear why the Platonic notion of reference has been defined as that linguistic act that delivers the speaker to the sort of reality (although things are not genuinely realities) referred to. The peculiar way sensible things are singular is such that they cannot be described: the ultimate way to refer to *one* thing is by pointing at it, whether by means of demonstratives or bodily appendices.³¹⁴

³¹³ Cf. Aristotle *Metaph.* 1010a10-15 which is the well-known part where Aristotle presents Cratylus’ criticism against Heraclitus regarding the impossibility of stepping into the same river twice: Cratylus is said to have claimed that it cannot happen even once. Right before that, Aristotle says that Cratylus was so radical that one should not talk about anything, limiting himself to moving a finger (τὸν δάκτυλον ἐκίνει μόνον). Furthermore, this way of thinking of reference fits particularly well with an archaic conception of reference which coincides with naming and which we have hinted at during this work. It could be labelled “onomasticism” in virtue of the fact that names/words are considered to be the essential elements of language and that the only way to refer to things is to juxtapose onomastic labels to them. This view is still the main frame in the *Cratylus*, but it is crucially and implicitly debated in the *Theaetetus* and is phased out in the *Sophist*.

³¹⁴ Accordingly, phenomenalism in its most triumphant stage (*Theaet.* b-c) forbids the following expressions in this order: “to be”, “something”, “belonging to something”, “this and that”. As we have seen, without these notions phenomenalism itself, and any other definition and description, is impracticable. All of them are connected in that for

Whenever one speaks about sensible things, he is stating under which qualifications those things make their appearance in his experiential context. This way of speaking of things is strongly coherent with the reference by means of demonstratives: if the demonstrative picks out a particular that is present in one's perceptual experience or in general among things which come to be manifest, the only way to speak of it is by saying that it is qualified in some way. Take the white stone we are by now familiar with. One can say *how* it is,³¹⁵ for instance white, hard, partly covered in moss. Even if one asks about the sensible stone what it is, the only meaningful answer is that *that* particular thing is a stone, is white, hard and partly covered in moss.

Thus, the second implication of the second point regarding Platonic indexical reference is that the realm of δόξα only includes particulars and vice versa one can only entertain δόξαι every time he refers to particulars. The same counts for collections of particulars: the deme of Prospalta is essentially referred to just like as one refers to each one, e.g. Euthyphro, of its pugnacious³¹⁶ inhabitants. This helps to better understand that Platonic indexical reference does not exclusively deal with particulars or strictly sensorial items. In fact, it is a matter of those things (particulars or collections of them) which derive their singularity from a context of things,

something to be it must minimally be referred to by means of demonstratives and this makes one and the same with ascribing some quality to it. Also, the denial of unity which recurs in the most programmatic lines of phenomenalism becomes the main prerequisite of any cognitive intercourse with the sensible domain. The unity of sensible things is the same as the possibility of referring to them demonstratively, which is also shown by the fact that the denial of unity directly leads to the impossibility of correctly using “this” and “that”. Forms are required, even though one is not speaking about them. Forms grant things enough to be referred to and spoken of without them being able to work as proper objects of knowledge. On the fact that in this context demonstratives are exquisitely designed to “particular objects of experience” cf. N. Thaler, *Plato on the Importance of ‘This’ and ‘That’*, op. cit., p. 15.

³¹⁵ Cf. *Theaet.* 183a10-b5, the already seen closure of the collapse of language. The final collapse of language consists in the inability of even saying either “οὕτω” or “οὐχ οὕτω”, “thus” or not “thus”. The ascribability of a quality to a thing is a proof of the thing's partial stability.

³¹⁶ Cf. *Crat.* 396d5 for the reference to Euthyphro of the deme of Prospalta. Testimony to the pugnaciousness of the inhabitants are the fragments of Eupolis' play Προσπάλτιοι. On the theoretically arduous question of Plato's treatment of the notions of whole and sum, I can only refer to the important studies already mentioned cf. *supra* n. 258.

the access to which is grounded on a direct experience of their manifestation/appearance. In this way, the ascription of qualities remains a description of what things happen to be. Now, one must avoid a possible misunderstanding: Platonic indexical reference is deictic only broadly speaking. I am not claiming that everything that occurs in one's experience is context-relative, and that singulars allows to be spoken of exclusively by means of indexicals. For Plato, too, to speak of the sensible world includes definite descriptions. However, these recently refined philosophical tools are not what Plato is aiming at. Nevertheless, the type of reference one can perform towards Platonic sensible things still deserves to be labelled "indexical" because the ultimate way to refer to that kind of thing and to account for their specific way of being singular is by means of indexicals, especially demonstratives. The singularity of that which is referred to by this type of reference is only given by identifying it within the experiential context. Things owe their singular status to the fact that they come to be manifest in one's experiential horizon.

To say that a thing is "thus and so" is not like saying that a Form is "thus and so". In spite of the grammatical similarity, the profound syntactic level of sentences referring to Forms never relates to states of affairs concerning events and things.³¹⁷ By the "what is" question, one never

³¹⁷ It is worth quoting entirely a famous passage from the *Timaeus* (37e5-38a6): «For we say that it [*scil.* everlasting being (ἀίδιος οὐσία)] *was* and *is* and *will be*, but according to the true account only *is* is appropriately said of it. *Was* and *will be* are properly said about the becoming that passes in time, for these two are motions. But that which is always changeless and motionless cannot become either older or younger in the course of time—it neither ever became so, nor is it now such that it has become so, nor will it ever be so in the future. And all in all, none of the characteristics that becoming has bestowed upon the things that are borne about in the realm of perception are appropriate to it.» («λέγομεν γὰρ δὴ ὡς ἦν ἔστιν τε καὶ ἔσται, τῇ δὲ τὸ ἔστιν μόνον κατὰ τὸν ἀληθῆ λόγον προσήκει, τὸ δὲ ἦν τό τ' ἔσται περὶ τὴν ἐν χρόνῳ γένεσιν ἰοῦσαν πρέπει λέγεσθαι—κινήσεις γὰρ ἔστων, τὸ δὲ αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχον ἀκινήτως οὔτε πρεσβύτερον οὔτε νεώτερον προσήκει γίνεσθαι διὰ χρόνου οὐδὲ γενέσθαι ποτὲ οὐδὲ γεγενῆσθαι νῦν οὐδ' εἰς αὐθις ἔσεσθαι, τὸ παράπαν τε οὐδὲν ὅσα γένεσις τοῖς ἐν αἰσθήσει φερομένοις προσῆψεν»). I think Plato to be most clearly exposing a difference concerning the profound syntax of two types of statement. The temporality of things is mirrored by the tenses we use to speak about them (he also speaks of the coincidence of temporality and change). The eternity of Forms prevents them from having any character of things. This is in turn mirrored by the tenseless present of the "is" which is the first requirement of every definition and mathematical proof. Regardless of the specific interpretation of the passage, I want to make the point that Plato reckoned

investigates singular manifestations. This is the broader nature of the typical Socratic criticism of exempla. To the “what is” question, one can never point at some phenomena in order to give an answer, for the same reason why the fact of experiencing something is never sufficient to know *what* (is that which) has happened.³¹⁸ If one perceives a natural phenomenon, the fact that it occurred does not provide one with knowledge of it. One can describe it, yet this is not enough to know what it is. One needs language to arrive at what the thing is. This needed language (or to put it better that specific function of language), though, is not the same as that needed to describe the event where the natural phenomenon in question has taken place. In everything that comes to be, there is the “presence” of the Form, otherwise the former would not even come to be. Among other things, this presence is accounted for in virtue of the fact that for anything that one can describe, one can also ask what it is, thereby being delivered to the logical/metaphysical space of being. No manifestation or collection of manifestations enables one to commune with being. Only through a specific use of language, which by the way also constitutes language’s innermost nature, can one get access to being. Linguistically speaking, the ὄντα only admits of definitions.

If we recapitulate the provisional definition of “reference” as that linguistic function that delivers one to the presence of the reality referred to, the second claim of this section is that through correct definitions one is able actually to refer to a Form. We are now faced with the Platonic definitional reference. One is able to pick out a Form and focus it as a singular item, in the case that one correctly defines it. The linguistic device

language to be so plastic as to reflect fundamental ontological diversity (a further meaningful passage for this argument is the already mentioned *Tim.* 29b4-c3 cf. *supra* n. 301). For a reference to the main interpreters of the passage cf. Platone, *Timeo*, a cura di F. Fronterotta, BUR, Milano 2003, pp. 212-3 n. 123. For an analysis of context of the passage in connection with the some significant passages regarding time in the *Parmenides* cf. M. Dixsaut, *Le temps qui s’avance et l’instant du changement (Timée, 37C-39E, Parménide, 140E-141E, 151E-155E)*, «Revue Philosophique de Louvain», Quatrième série, tome 101 (2003), pp. 236-264.

³¹⁸ This could be taken as a radical critique of the very notion of imitation/representation (the other sense of μίμησις). If there can be no figural representation or manifestation of being, then no indication of particulars can do since sensible things are seen as representative imitations of Forms. To venture a translation in German, a thing is a *Darstellung* (dis-play) because it also is a *Vorstellung* (representation); however, in being so, it is also a *Verstellung* (pretence).

proper to this sort of reference is the “what is” question. To define something, one is required to say what something is and what something is not by understanding to which other realities the defined thing is connected. Once again, it is a matter of relations in a context. However, the context of relations entertained by the Forms never depends on one’s *experiential* context,³¹⁹ overcrowded in particulars, but the latter may be required as first step on the path for knowledge.³²⁰ It is an entirely new kind of relation. According to the last words of the second chapter, names were said to be instruments able to teach and to discern being.³²¹ Concentrating on the latter, the essence of names rests on the way they separate the thread of being, as the shuttle does with fabric. The ontological precondition for it will be the subject of the last chapter of this work.

For the time being, the point is to understand that the transcendent presence of Forms means that they can only be grasped thanks to language because they never come to be (in the sensible domain) since they have always been. As soon as one has defined what a Form is through dialectical endeavour, he is delivered to the presence of that nature. This situation accounts for the fact that the best discourse on reality is the one that makes perfect sense. To refer to a Form, then, it is not enough to name it. One needs to *say* how it connects with other natures. Once the right definition has been found, then one knows the Form in question and then he is referred to that reality. One properly refers to a Form when he is referred to it. The dialectical enterprise is to be justified no further: once the procedure of definition has been carried out and the reference is secured, it is the actual access to the presence of the Form which puts an end to the definition.³²² The access to the presence of the Form enquired into is precisely this: a Forms has been sufficiently defined when one can make sense of its definition as it is shown by the thing itself. This is reminiscent of the simile of a person who is wading a river. One will know that it has

³¹⁹ A good instance of an experiential context is at *Theaet.* 160a-b.

³²⁰ This seems to be consistent with the distinction made during the discussion of the common notions between the investigations that the soul carries about by means of the senses or through itself. Cf. Chapter One pp. 174-6.

³²¹ Cf. Chapter Two p. 126.

³²² Cf. F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone (Menone Cratilo Repubblica)*, op. cit., pp. 160-9.

happened once he has done it.³²³ Likewise, for Plato one will know he has defined it as soon as he has done it. This is possible only on the basis of the constant (and thus transcendent) presence of the reality attempted to be defined. In turn, this requires that language by itself leads to reality in virtue of the way it *is*,³²⁴ as we shall see in the fourth chapter. As we saw in the first chapter,³²⁵ the fact that human language mostly consists of general terms is already an indication of its communion with being and with being's peculiar linguistic status that we are trying to capture through the idea of definitional reference.

To conclude, we see that the concept of reference also acquires a particular meaning: the way one is able to come in contact with things or Forms. This contact is a direct access to the presence of the items in question. Language remains strictly speaking at the instrumental level. This is supposed to be coherent with the concept of cohesion we put forward at the very beginning of the present investigation.³²⁶ Though distinct, language and reality stand in the strictest cohesion. This is so true that the best way to understand Plato's notion of being is by comprehending how far it is intrinsically linguistic.

³²³ Suggestively, this fits very well with the etymologically informed notion of method (μέθοδος) and procedure (πορεία, in the sense of one proceeding along some path) of research as it is presented in the *Republic* (532b4 and 533b3, respectively).

³²⁴ I think that by distinguishing the two Platonic sorts of reference one can better reckon with the more traditional issue concerning the values of the term "be" in Plato. Without presenting even the minimal terms of the debate, I just lay the suggestion that for Plato it is not a matter of existential, predicative or identity value of the verb "be". Instead, the matter has to do with the opposition between ascription of qualities to things and the definition of what means to be that way. Of course, this way of setting the question bears some resemblance to the classical debate, but this does not mean that the two are perfectly overlapping.

³²⁵ Cf. Chapter One pp. 40-3.

³²⁶ Cf. Chapter One pp. 16-22.

Chapter Four

Language and Being

Introduction

This final chapter is tasked with the arduous attempt to expose the peculiar relation that language entertains with being. The very first step of the present study was the programmatic examination of the archaic coalescence view, the view that reality, thought and language are not distinct. Plato's main manoeuvre is the attempt to emancipate himself from that framework without betraying its spirit: language and reality are different things, but they are connected in such a way that one can attain the latter through a proper use of the former. As we saw in the second chapter, the concept of use and the relative concept of technique have a philosophically remarkable import on ontology. Through its use, one is committed to a normativity which regulates the use of one instrument by stating the conditions for its good use, in virtue of the fact that this normativity in turn constitutes the nature of the instrument. Furthermore, names themselves appeared to be instruments whose specific task was discerning being (and teaching about it). Hence, to start with, it appears that language's connection with being is twofold: on the one hand, in *being* an instrument, language has its own structure and its proper use; on the other hand, in being *that* specific instrument, it connects its user with being. It

does it by enabling one to discern (being). From the very beginning, to connect with being is a matter of discriminating, i.e. making distinctions. This chapter will show, among other things, the ontological import of such distinctions with regard to the possibility of a meaningful language. Furthermore, the notion of production seemed to be a key access to the priority of what is objectively real over what is not. As we have seen, there is a sense in which the poetic word is maximally poetic and which Plato wishes to reject. Yet this does in no way mean that Plato does not wish to acknowledge that words and discourse have a specific power. His innovation will only consist in thinking of language as the ontological instrument *par excellence* and of being as the power that establishes connections.

In the third chapter, the main acquisition was the cognisance that the transient presence of phenomena does not allow the minimal objectivity to state what happens in them. Identity of things collapses and so does language. One can actually speak about the world, this is not only a matter of fact, it is also one entailment of the rejection of the collapse of language. The only way for something not to be capable of being spoken of is by not being determined, which is to say not being at all. So, the third chapter first recognised that objectivity, however minimal (that is in the case of sensible things), is the condition for language to be meaningful. By “meaningful”, I do not mean a particularly refined theory, but only the fact that language entertains an effective relation with what is spoken of. It is never the case that something is and that it cannot be said or shown within language (without failing to acknowledge the diverse nature of reference seen above). However, this required the introduction of a plane of being which is not something that appears but in which dwells the capacity of being said. This objective plane goes across the diversity of experience, granting a common ground to different people and at different times.

This last chapter tries to reunite the threads of the Chapters two and three, which were basically analyses of different sides of the Platonic assumption of the complete objectivity of reality. The natural place for this is the *Sophist* since the nature of the production of the discourse and the correct application of discourses with regard to being and things are discussed there. In this chapter, I shall be dealing with the relational conception of reality that is the great Platonic proposal. As is obvious,

much more is going on in the *Sophist* in such a way as to demand the huge number of comments and commentators that the dialogue has had. As is equally obvious, I shall wisely elude the many labyrinthic arguments that are tied to my main thesis, but that are not essential to it. Like the case of a rope, the many threads interlace but each one follows its own path. Forms provide a solution to how it is possible to describe the world. As I shall try to show, my interpretation connects the metaphysical view exposed in the first chapter, the problem left open on the third and the Platonic text.

Therefore, this last chapter will attempt to follow a very precise path, namely the one which starts from the question regarding the power of the word and leads to the conception of being as δύναιμις and of reality as intrinsically relational. This concept of being and reality is one of Plato's well-known fundamental theses in ontology. What I take to be the original side of my analysis of it is my way of approaching the central view of the *Sophist*: the thesis of being as communication is directly connected, on the one hand, to the problematic frame of the issue concerning the power of word and language (prerogative of the sophist), on the other hand, to the λόγος as generated by the interweaving of Forms. The solution is that words have power as far as being is the power of communing between kinds (Forms). This is so, because the λόγος is actually derived from Forms' selective communion with each other. The price is that the power of the word is irretrievably changed, it is no longer the way the sophists used to produce those realities which turned out to be fake images. Instead, language is the only instrument that supplies access to being because if properly used it lets reality show itself as it is in itself.

Hence, the chapter is structured as follows. The first section introduces the attacks led by the sophists to the possibility of truth. In this section, the Platonic goal of acquiring a dimension of the content of discourse and the relative privileged connection discourse has with being is analysed. The subsequent two sections follow a reverse order with respect to the Platonic text in order to highlight the concatenation of arguments. Therefore, the second section addresses the crucial question concerning the nature of discourse and how it needs to assume the weaving of Forms as its ontological ground. The third section scrutinises the inner relation between the linguistic dimension and the relational ontology of kinds put forward in the central part of the *Sophist*. This section concludes with the analysis of

the notorious definition of being as δύναμις with exclusive regard to ground that Plato's relational ontology provides to the possibility of discourse. Finally, the chapter concludes with a fourth section that is meant to present some brief remarks regarding the ontological view discussed in this chapter and its points of contact with the entire work.

1) The power of the word

The overall objective of the *Sophist* is to seize the mendacious figure of the sophist. This objective requires a tremendous theoretical effort since, in order to grasp what the sophist is, one must be able to unravel the nature of being and falsehood. The hard task is left to a Stranger coming from Elea. The dialogue starts with a number of attempts at defining the identity of the sophist. None of them is final.³²⁷ This does not imply that they are wrong, but only that they all miss the focal determination of the identity of the sophist. Already this unhappy situation seems to make the point of the sophist: reality, even the sophist's, remains a matter of perspectives. The sophist challenged the finest intellect in Athens,³²⁸ who in response will rage against the sophist's Protean nature. The final definition of the sophist will be provided by the very end of the dialogue; but already at the opening of the last definition, Plato will introduce his metaphysical tenets and arguments. In this way, to discuss the nature of the sophist becomes the chance to settle fundamental philosophical issues. Yet this chance is not merely occasional. Like in the first definition of the *Theaetetus* where the possibility of speaking is assumed, even in the case of the doctrine which leads to the collapse of language, so in the *Sophist* the sophist can talk without meeting the burden of proof. This may also be a product of the coalescence view: the philosophical goal is not to demonstrate the fact that everybody can talk to each other more or less apparently referring to the world. It is to understand in which way it can properly be performed, which

³²⁷ Cf. *Soph* 231b9-c2.

³²⁸ Which is Plato. To tell the truth, they say Plato used to call, most humbly, Aristotle "ὁ Νούς". Cf. *Filoponus, De aetern. mundi* VI 27 and *Vita Marc.* 7, quoted in I. Düring, *Aristotele*, Mursia, Milano 1966, p. 15 n. 37.

is to say what bearings extra-linguistic ontological parameters have on discourse.

My point is not the plain exegetical fact that according to Plato the truth of single statements is in some way derived from how things stand extra-linguistically. The goal of this chapter is rather to focus how the condition for this, viz. that the truth of single statements depends on extra-linguistic reality, is itself ontological. In other words, *the possibility to speak about the world is the effect of how the world itself is structured*, in particular this possibility is present thanks to that part of reality which performs the structuring. As we shall see, the way Plato conceives of being is a matter of communication. Being is considered as one kind of a number. Particularly, that kind which puts all the other kinds into selective communication. Only thanks to this unique role played by the kind being, the reality one speaks of by means of discourse actually makes sense. Even in this preliminary place, this point is worth remarking, as it will be developed throughout the chapter. Language is somehow connected to reality. This general statement is shared by everyone who thinks that something like truth exists. The coalescence view prescribed a total coincidence between reality and truth (thought/language). These dimension are now separated for the first time. However, Plato feels the need to think of the condition of the connection of language with reality as a part of reality itself. Even more, that part of reality which is responsible for this connection is the kind being. This is interesting because to the modern eye the fact that the reason of the connection between language and the world is part of that same world sounds unfamiliar.

For this reason, I believe that in Plato's thought it is not really a matter of ontology, neither in the modern sense of recording an inventory of the entities which populate the world nor in the Aristotelian sense of a science whose subject is being qua being (let alone the theology of the most eminent substances). In its stead, Plato's aim should be thought of as an onto-logisation. This concept means at least two things, which are two sides of the same coin. First, focusing on the "dynamical" aspect of the ontologisation, Plato's attempt is to bind together pre-philosophical reality

and the notion of being.³²⁹ Second, focusing on the double nature of the onto-logisation (we are helped by the hyphen), Plato's move is to both distinguish and connect being and language. To make experience the place where there is identity, knowledge, definition and reference, being, in the guise of the εἶδος, is required. This was the task of the first chapter of the present work. Does it contrast with the fact that the existence of discourse and mutual comprehension is somehow assumed? It does not. At most, that assumption only shows that everyone is already committed to reality, whether they recognise it or not. Now, the second side of the ontologisation is being addressed. How can reality be significantly verbalised? Not in the way the sophist claims. It is never a matter of production because, as we have seen, what is most real also shows itself during the productive process precisely as what can never be produced and that regulates the process in question. The "science" of the sophist is doxastic, i.e. it is a way to produce opinions and appearances, and not truth itself.³³⁰

The sophist is an expert in disputes; he is said to be given to contradictions, the term is "ἀντιλογικός"³³¹ which literally means "the one who sets discourses against someone else's". At the same time, it can also mean "the one who is against the discourse", the anti-logical person. The two meanings taken jointly give the precise meaning of the term. It designates the person who raises numerous objections to one's thesis such that the discourse is devoid of any sense. What does the sophist exert his expertise on? He is able to contradict to discourses concerning everything: things which come to clear on Earth and Heaven and on the affairs of the polis, the laws and customs. He can contradict in the case of the private discourses on generation and being (γένεσις τε καὶ οὐσία)³³² and on the technical field of any expert. The question concerning the "on-what" of the sophist's anti-logical discourses may be an apparently innocuous indication of the direction of the whole philosophical examination. For the time being, the Eleatic Stranger maintains that the technique of disputation (ἀντιλογική

³²⁹ This might also account for the fact that Plato reckons with both the sophists and the pre-Socratic philosophers (with the significant absence of Democritus) in the same work.

³³⁰ Cf. *Soph.* 233c10-1.

³³¹ Cf. *Soph.* 232b6.

³³² Cf. *Soph.* 232c8.

τέχνη) has the capacity (δύναμις)³³³ of being performed towards everything. As is said a few lines below in the text,³³⁴ this capacity of the sophistry is wondrous (θαῦμα). In this context, the Eleatic Stranger is talking about a δύναμις conceived as a skill of a verbose trickster, whereas it will come to name being itself later in the dialogue.

The main argument is one the reader is already familiar with,³³⁵ the sophists claim that he is able to make and produce all things: people, animals, plants and in general natural things; everything on Earth, sea and sky, including the gods themselves.³³⁶ The irony is that this omnipotent being, namely the sophist, sells off all the things he produces, which fills Theaetetus, once again playing the role of the young interlocutor of the dialogue, with indignation. The argumentative procedure is close to the one we saw. The skill of the sophist is paralleled to painting. The painter deceives young minds by creating pictorial representations of things, and by naming both the products of imitation and reality with the same names he looks as though he can do whatever he wishes. Likewise, there is a technique whose objects are discourses and whose products are εἰδωλα λεγόμενα, spoken images.³³⁷ A complex theory on the nature of images and their representational reliability is presented in this part of the work. I shall not address the issue here, given the particular focus of my analysis. I shall also neglect the discussion as to whether sentences are genuine instances of pictorial representations. However, the concept of spoken image is still of interest, regardless of the complex question concerning the diverse nature of images.³³⁸ If seen through the lens of what has been said in the third chapter, the question remains: is anyone able to produce being by the act of speaking? The relation between being and language is assumed by the sophist. He is an illusionist who contends that whatever he produces

³³³ Cf. *Soph.* 232e2-4.

³³⁴ Cf. *Soph.* 233a8-9.

³³⁵ Cf. Chapter Two pp. 101-9.

³³⁶ *Soph.* 233c10-234a7.

³³⁷ Cf. *Soph.* 234c5-6.

³³⁸ For a discussion on this topic cf. L. Palumbo, *Mimesis in the Sophist*, in B. Bossi T. M. Robinson (eds.), *Plato's ›Sophist‹ Revisited*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2013, pp. 269-278; P. Kalligas, *From Being an Image to Being What-Is-Not*, in R. Patterson V. Karasmanis A. Hermann (eds.), *Presocratics and Plato: Festschrift at Delphi in Honor of Charles Kahn*, op. cit., pp. 391-409; S. Rosen, *Plato's Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, (1983), St. Augustine's Press, South Bend 1999, in particular pp. 147-69.

actually is. His contention is revealed to be unfounded. This revelation requires a prolonged series of experiences in order to give reality its right place.³³⁹

How is it possible to recognise what's wrong with the mind-set of the sophist? By following the path of the third chapter, we see that the main claim of the sophist is to evince the truth of that belief from the undeniability of the experience or the event that comes with any belief. The countermeasure for this is to keep apart an (event of) belief and the content of that belief. This is also the first step of the strategy to neutralise the formidable argument of not-being. As is well known, in the *Sophist* Plato reckons with Parmenides' prohibition concerning not-being: since what is

³³⁹ This fundamental statement of realism immediately follows the mention of the εἰδωλα λεγόμενα. It is so meaningful that it is worth reproducing entirely. *Soph.* 234d2-e2: «Well, Theaetetus, once enough time has passed for the majority of those young listeners, as with increasing maturity they encounter things as they are from close up, and are compelled through their experiences to get a clear grasp of things as they are, won't they inevitably change the beliefs they formed earlier, so that what was big is now clearly small, what was easy is now clearly hard, and all the appearances contained in the words they once heard are completely overturned by the realities borne in on them as they act out their lives?» (translated by C. Rowe, I shall use his translation throughout this chapter) («τοὺς πολλοὺς οὖν, ὃ Θεαίτητε, τῶν τότε ἀκουόντων ἄρ' οὐκ ἀνάγκη χρόνου τε ἐπελθόντος αὐτοῖς ἰκανοῦ καὶ προϊούσης ἡλικίας τοῖς τε οὔσι προσπίπτοντας ἐγγύθεν καὶ διὰ παθημάτων ἀναγκαζομένους ἐναργῶς ἐφάπτεσθαι τῶν ὄντων, μεταβάλλειν τὰς τότε γενομένας δόξας, ὥστε σμικρὰ μὲν φαίνεσθαι τὰ μεγάλα, χαλεπὰ δὲ τὰ ῥάδια, καὶ πάντα πάντη ἀνατετράφθαι τὰ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις φαντάσματα ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν ἔργων παραγενομένων;»). I believe this part to be crucial because it summarises at least three fundamental Platonic arguments. First, it is a matter of necessity (ἀνάγκη; ἀναγκαζομένου) that sooner or later some of the sophists' hearers come in contact with real things. They have to undergo many hardships (παθημάτων). The things that are (τῶν ὄντων) are approached and grasped (ἐφάπτεσθαι) palpably or visibly (ἐναργῶς). Second, the epistemic dynamic requires invariable things and the change (μεταβάλλειν) of those opinions (δόξας) which came up (γενομένας) earlier. This second point is a plain explanation of the Priority of Reality Assumption (PRA). The process of forming opinions just happens and then those opinions change with respect to what reality imposes. Third, those appearances (φαντάσματα) which dwell in discourses are rejected by the actual results (ἔργων) of the actions which take place (παραγενομένων). This third point does not mean that any discourse heralds falsehood, but rather that (one relevant sort of) appearances come to be within discourses or, which is the same, that falsehood is only in relation to discourses. On these grounds, this passage from the *Sophist* looks like a recapitulation immediately opposed to the mischievous sophist as though Plato could not contain his contempt. In any case, the first two points remain in the background, whereas the third is the main subject of the whole dialogue.

not is not, it is hostile to any thought and name that try to grasp it because there is nothing to grasp. I consider as the plainest, i.e. not at all contentious, interpretation that Plato in the *Sophist* conceives of not-being as strictly speaking a being, which is referred to by means of the expression “not-being” and which is not the same as absolute not-being. All of this is so general as to be easily acceptable, but already in minimally looking into the details the most diverse interpretations have been undertaken.³⁴⁰ The point I want to make does not directly concern not-being but rather its premise. Parmenidean not-being cannot be spoken or thought of because it lacks existence and identity. One can only refer to something that is. This is so true that the solution Plato thinks up to solve the impasse put forward by the sophist is to consider not-being as being no less than any other kind (being itself, identity, motion and rest). Thus, the premise is the bearing that being has on language in such a way that terms are meaningful only thanks to the being of Forms (or the being that Forms represent).

The arguments by which the discussion concerning the impossibility of not-being is ushered in have a problematic outcome. The Eleatic Stranger first asks what the phrase “not-being” refers to. It does not refer to anything since not-being is not. The outcome is paradoxical in that if the first argument is true, it is not even possible to state that not-being cannot be said because by denying it the statement contradicts itself. What is relevant here is the part of the argument which links being to stating something. The phrase “not-being” (μὴ ὄν) cannot refer to beings (ὄντα), but the Eleatic stranger further argues that Parmenidean not-being cannot be associated with anything since the very word “something” (τι) is always said in relation to being. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Plato does not subscribe the Parmenidean view on not-being, yet he inserts some side-

³⁴⁰ Cf. some very representative classical studies as G.E. L. Owen, *Plato on not-being*, in G Vlastos (ed.), *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Doubleday, Garden City 1970, pp. 223-67 (Rpt. I G. E. L. Owen, *Logic, science and dialectic. Collected papers in Greek philosophy*, Cornell University Press, New York 1986, pp. 104-37); D. O’Brien, *Il non essere e la diversità nel Sofista di Platone*, Atti dell' Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche, 102 1991, pp. 271-328; Id., *Le non-être. Deux études sur le Sophiste de Platon*, Accademia, Sankt Augustin 1995; Id., *La forma del non essere nel Sofista di Platone*, in W. Leszl e F. Fronterotta (eds.), *Eidos-Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, op. cit., pp. 115-160; Id., *A form that 'is' of what 'is not': existential einai in Plato's Sophist*, in G. Boys-Stones D. El Murr C. Gill (eds.), *The Platonic Art of Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, pp. 221-48.

arguments which reveal something of his own view. For anything that is said, it is somehow in relation to being. It is not possible to say that which is not since it is opposed to that which is. Not-being cannot be said by means of the word “something” because this word is always said towards that which is (ἐπ’ ὄντι).³⁴¹ It is not possible to say “something” as though it were isolated and somehow stripped of any relation to the things that are. This statement can mean at least three things. Firstly, it can mean that for each “something” that we utter, there needs to be one existent thing which we refer to. Secondly, it can mean that we must predicatively attach the word “something” to something else that we firmly consider as being. This is the case of the grammatical number as is discussed in the *Sophist*. For instance, we establish that unity and plurality are as the entire collection of numbers is.³⁴² As a result, “something” can be apposed to number because number is, whereas not-being can be neither unitary nor plural since it does not allow to be apposed to being (number). Thirdly, it can mean that the being one refers to by means of the word “something” is in relation to the things that are and cannot be taken in isolation. For now, I do not think that these three options are really in opposition. The statement is vague enough to secretly host Plato’s solution, which does not take the three interpretations to be radically different. Particularly with regard to kinds, the first and the third interpretations are as strictly conjoined in that the being of the kind referred to will be one and the same as the connection it entertains with other kinds.

However, someone who states not-something (or maybe does not state something)³⁴³ states nothing. At this point, some ambiguities arise. To

³⁴¹ Cf. *Soph.* 237d1-4. For a clear exposition of this argument under the correct assumption that Plato is tackling the question concerning the difference between ontological truth, which does not allow falsehood as its opposite, and logical truth cf. J. Szaif, *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*, op. cit., pp. 327-343.

³⁴² Cf. *Soph.* 238a11.

³⁴³ Cf. *Soph.* 237e1-2. On this and on many other points I have benefited from the reading of F. Aronadio, *L’articolazione argomentativa di Plat. Soph 237b7-239a11 e la natura del medamos on*, (forthcoming), who profoundly recognises the referential nature of this section of the *Sophist* and provides good reasons to interpret “μὴ τὶ λέγοντα” as meaning “stating not-something” instead of “not stating something (meaningful)”. To tell the truth, one could legitimately think that Plato deliberately left this textual place ambiguous. On the value of “λέγειν τι” cf. J. M. E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, «Acta Philosophica Fennica», 14 (1962), pp. 23-78:24 n. 3. Pro cf. L. M.

begin with, the nature of this “something” raises a question: is it what is meant by the person who is speaking or what that person refers to through the act of speaking? In brief, should it be considered as intensional or extensional? In other words, the something the Eleatic Stranger is talking about could be either the extra-linguistic thing or the conceptual content of the linguistic act.³⁴⁴ As we have briefly seen, everything seems to be pointing to the referential sense of the word. This in turn has some implications. First, the thing referred to is literally *said* by phrases and sentences. What we say in our discourses is precisely the same as the reality we refer to when we say it. This fits squarely on the one hand with the coalescence view Plato emerges from; on the other hand, it squares with his own view that what is truly real is intelligible. According to our modern sensibility and terminology, we could say that in this way Plato does not commit a categorial error in that our cognitive means and the reality they are about share the same ontological nature.³⁴⁵ By this, I do not mean that reality is made up of words or concepts; to the contrary, I mean that the objectively extra-linguistic reality naturally corresponds to language. Second, this referential interpretation of the linguistic “something” is problematic insofar as it seems to commit one to considering any “something” he phrases as real. In fact, this problematic outcome is being used in the typical sophistic argument stating the impossibility of falsehood: every time one states something meaningful, the phrase or the sentence is supposed to draw its meaningfulness from the reality referred to. As a result, everything that makes sense is also true.

Obviously, Plato does not subscribe to this view. As hinted at above, he conceives of not-being as difference in such a way that it can account for falsehood. Not-being is not an absolute lack of existence and determination, it is just *being* different from something else. As we shall see in a short while, falsehood is connected to not-being in that any false

De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, op. cit., p. 85 contra cf. Platone, *Sofista*, a cura di Francesco Fronterotta, op. cit., pp. 313-5 n. 121.

³⁴⁴ Cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, op. cit., p. 205.

³⁴⁵ I think this is the nature of the *συγγένεια*, which is the kinship between the mind/soul and reality cf. for example *Resp.* 490a8-b7. For a detailed account of this concept and its important role in the overall economy of Plato's thought, including an analysis of the many occurrences of the term in the corpus cf. F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone* (Menone Cratilo Repubblica), op. cit., pp. 221-44.

statement is at any rate committed to things that are; particularly, it is committed to the kind of difference since it states that something is “thus and so”, when in fact it is in some other way. Thus, a false statement says something *different* from how things actually stand and this is intended as a reference to the nature of difference, which is one among the beings. It must be added that the nature of difference is somehow parasitic to other beings, to be different is always to be different *from* something else.³⁴⁶ Any false statement is related to difference, and difference is always in relation to the things it is different from. In this way, any statement, though false, indirectly leads to being. The details of the argument are rather troublesome, the point of interest here is the inevitable commitment to being that linguistic acts imply.

In refusing the view of the sophist, Plato does not abandon the strong referential value of the discourse. However, the perfect coincidence of intension and extension belonging to the archaic view and exploited by the sophists is no longer sustainable. Although Plato retains the strong referential value, in the case of false statements he is forced to minimally detach cognitive content from the reality referred to. Any false statement refers to something, but the speaker does *not* know what the statement refers to insofar as he does not know that what he states is false, i.e. he believes it to be true.³⁴⁷

This quick survey serves me only to show that language’s commitment to being is more complex than the immediate assumption of existence for any meaningful phrase or sentence, a view that in fact is held by the sophists. What Plato proposes instead is a radically alternative view which is, in a strict sense, onto-logical, i.e. a view which first considers a new sort of interrelation of being and language. I should like to call Plato’s main innovation in this context the acquisition of contentual dimension. This relates immediately to the main acquisition of the third chapter, namely the new plane of being which structurally eludes the event of its manifestation

³⁴⁶ Cf. *Soph.* 255c-d. This part has drawn considerable attention, but I shall not address it here.

³⁴⁷ This could bring in an aspect of priority of language over thought since language naturally relates to being even in the case of false belief. To tell the truth, thought is defined by Plato as inner and silent dialogue. Therefore, I would rephrase the previous assertion as follows: within thought, the linguistic or referential “component” has the priority over realisation or cognisance.

to the person who experiences it. Irrespective of whether one refers to sensible things or Forms, any veritative use of language entails, as we have seen, such an ontologically committing plane of objectivity. The two types of reference considered in the excursus account for the difference of dealing with the diverse nature of the content (things or Forms). As I show in the rest of this chapter, the nature of this contentual dimension best unfolds within the eidetic dimension, and it only derivatively involves the possibility that things come to be the content of assertions.³⁴⁸

If we linger a bit longer on the notion of reference as it has been depicted heretofore, we first note that thanks to the stability described by Anatomy of the εἶδος, Form qualifies as a perfect object of reference. Eternal and immutable being secures reference: if one refers to something according to the definitional syntax, one is sure that he singles something out (in the worst case, viz. he is wrong, he is referring to the kind of difference). This is the correct way, I think, to interpret the classical issue concerning the definition of the meaning of general terms in the case of Socratic definitions or, in general, the Platonic need to secure a fixed meaning to general terms. It is never a matter of mere meaning, it is a matter of objective reality referred to, the mistake arises from the fact that this objective reality is intelligible. The difference is not at all negligible. For to forget this difference often brings the interpreter to fail to understand that Forms are not only the source of meaning of terms, but also the object of any act of knowledge. The Form of man not only governs the correct use of the term “man”, it first and foremost establishes what it *is to be* a man. Proof is that one can correctly use the term “man” without ever knowing what is to be a man in general. By contrast, the philosopher who knows what the Form of man is would not ever fail to use the term “man”. I must concede that according to Plato one must be able to recognise whether something is a man in order to know what “man” means. Yet this does not entail that he actually knows what the Form man is. This last consideration is interesting because it elucidates the difference between Definition and Reference as they were presented in the Physiology of εἶδος. The singular thing which comes to be a man does it in virtue of the Form of man, so one refers to the particular man thanks to the fact that *that* thing is the display

³⁴⁸ Cf. also L. M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, op. cit., pp. 194-6.

of that Form (among many others). This, however, is different from the definition of the Form of man, even though both are possible in virtue of the εἶδος (according to what has been said in the excursus, Reference and Definition can be rephrased as Indexical reference and Definitional reference).

Therefore, Forms do not limit themselves to giving meaning to general terms. They also represent the source of substantive knowledge about the reality named by the general term. The differentiation between Reference and Definition or Indexical reference and Definitional reference serves as radical alternative to the meaning/reference distinction. In Plato it is always a matter of reference, provided that one can distinguish types of reference relative to a specific ontological divarication, namely the distinction between thing and Form. For one thing is to say that in a certain situation a given thing is “thus and so”, and another thing is to say what it is to *be* that way. In this way, Forms provide general terms with meaning for the very fact that they also are the sources of substantive knowledge concerning the reality named by the general term.

Furthermore, the fact that reality is in itself both extra-linguistically objective and intelligible justify the fact that the world naturally offers itself to human language and cognition. As a consequence the best way to name the world is also the best way that leads to the proper grasp of its being. But it is not just that. One of the most significant problems in philosophy is still how to justify the fact (if it is a fact) that language/thought and reality fit with each other. In Plato, this fitness is somehow assumed. Beyond the isomorphism of language and world, for Plato, what is there is also what there is to know, under the condition that the more stable that knowledge is, the better the known reality qualifies as being. This is, of course, a strong residue of the coalescence view, but also an honest testament to the Greek pragmatic mentality.

Going back to the sophist, it must be seen that he relies on the fact that his discourses make sense; but he cannot account for that sense without resorting to ontology. Once again the incoherence of the one who speaks without recognising what that act requires and concedes stands out as Plato’s privileged refutation strategy. As a matter of fact, that we can speak and make sense of the world does not only make philosophy possible, but

requires it. Our examination moves to analysing the example Plato gives of meaningful statement, tracing it back to its ontological foundations.

2) The nature of λόγος and its relation to being

As most likely appeared to any reader of the *Sophist*, the dialogue proposes a strict concatenation of arguments, on the one hand ranging between ontology and logic, and on the other hand dealing with some notable philosophical predecessors. As said above, the present chapter aims to follow just one thread in a number. On these grounds, it seems appropriate for our analysis to reverse the sequence of the arguments in the Platonic text in order to best capture what is at stake in this work, namely the unique nature of the intertwinement of being and language in Plato's thought. To begin with, this section is devoted to Plato's treatment of the structure and function of λόγος, which is possible in virtue of the ontological relationality characterising Forms, which in turn is made possible by a precise understanding of the nature of being. This reversed order helps to focus the precise point I want to make without irretrievably denaturising the argumentative connection. The reversed order has one further benefit because it starts from the only one premise also shared by the sophist, namely the assumption that anyone can speak. From this, one can ascend to the ontological foundation of discourse itself. This part of the *Sophist* (ca. 259-264) has extensively drawn attention because of its similarity to some theses of the founding fathers of analytic philosophy. It needs to be said that the present chapter has one main objective: to understand how the possibility of meaningful discourses is a product of the way reality itself is structured. Many complex, and indeed most interesting, topics are here being treated only through the lens of the just mentioned main objective, e.g. Plato's theory of propositional truth, the precise nature of the parts that make up the discourse, or the details of the tormented relation between not-being and false statements.

The section of the *Sophist* under scrutiny here starts with two significant claims:

- 1) «If one separates each thing off from everything, that completely and utterly obliterates any discourse, since it is the

interweaving of forms that gives us the possibility of talking to each other in the first place.»³⁴⁹

- 2) «So that we can have speech as one of the kinds among the things that are. The most important consequence, if we were to be deprived of this, is that we'd be deprived of philosophy; but also, in the present context, one of our tasks must be to reach agreement about what speech is, and if it had been taken from us, so as not even to be at all, I suppose we'd not be able to say anything further. But it would indeed have been taken from us, had we conceded that there was no mixing of anything with anything.»³⁵⁰

The first statement in (1) could seem cryptic, but it will be properly understood in the next sections. For the time being, suffice it to say that every λόγος disappears if there is no connection among things. As a consequence the Eleatic Stranger says that the λόγος has come to us through the mutual interlacement or interweaving (συμπλοκήν) of Forms. This powerful metaphor has deep roots which have been partly enquired into.³⁵¹ The major point is that both reality and language are thought of as a web or a net. To put it better, the λόγος comes to be for us (γέγονεν) through the interweaving of Forms. This perfect form is interesting because it means at least three things: first, the λόγος has come to us with regard to what has been said so far in the dialogue, namely the discussion of the greatest kinds and their communication; second, since discourses are said to derive from the interrelation of Forms, the perfect form of the verb tells us that they have already come to be, provided that there is such an interrelation; third, the verb “γίγνεσθαι” suggests that discourses are temporal products which occur on the basis of the interrelation of Forms.

³⁴⁹ *Soph.* 259e4-6 «τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων: διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν».

³⁵⁰ *Soph.* 260a5-b2 «πρὸς τὸ τὸν λόγον ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἐν τι γενῶν εἶναι. τούτου γὰρ στερηθέντες, τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, φιλοσοφίας ἂν στερηθεῖμεν: ἔτι δ' ἐν τῷ παρόντι δεῖ λόγον ἡμᾶς διομολογήσασθαι τί ποτ' ἔστιν, εἰ δὲ ἀφηρέθημεν αὐτὸ μηδ' εἶναι τὸ παράπαν, οὐδὲν ἂν ἔτι που λέγειν οἰοί τ' ἦμεν. ἀφηρέθημεν δ' ἂν, εἰ συνεχωρήσαμεν μηδεμίαν εἶναι μεῖζιν μηδενὶ πρὸς μηδέν».

³⁵¹ Cf. W. Cavini, *L'ordito e la trama: il Sofista platonico e la tessitura del λόγος*, «Dianoia», 14 (2009), pp. 9-25. This metaphor was also at the heart of the parallel between name and shuttle in the *Cratylus*.

As far as (2) is concerned, something more is stated. The discourse is not only something that comes to be it is also one kind among the things that are (τῶν ὄντων ἓν τι γενῶν). Coherently with his ontological tenets, Plato thinks that if something comes to be it can only do it according to fixed principles. Thus, the first reason to consider the λόγος as a substantive part of reality –partaking of which particular λόγοι acquire their identity– should not provoke scandal, all the more so that a precise theory about the identity and function of discourse is provided a few pages below in the dialogue. Why should that part of experience, i.e. particular statements, enjoy identity? In fact, this last problem, apart from being revelatory on the ontology of λόγοι, helps us to recapitulate one fundamental claim that has hopefully become clear since the first chapter. There is no real difference between things having a stable describable identity and reality being eidetically structured. What identity could λόγοι have, namely being always composed of at least one name/noun and one verb, without this being *what* a λόγος is? The task of this chapter is to understand why for Plato the eidetic ontology is naturally delivered to language, or, to put it in more Platonic terms, why and in what way the λόγος is the natural outcome of how reality is in itself. Moreover, as we have seen at various times, in the *Cratylus* names were considered as instruments, things which entail some relevant ontological conditions, not to mention the fact that in the same dialogue the εἶδος of name is overtly brought to the fore. In that case, names were granted one rightful place among the beings as is done in this case as well.³⁵²

Quotation (2) goes on to say that without discourse we would be deprived of philosophy. Philosophy entertains a special relationship with discourse; to say that without discourse philosophy would cease to be amounts to saying that language is the specific instrument or, more neutrally, the specific medium of philosophy. If that is so, one could argue that the excellence of discourse lies in its philosophical employment. This is relatively plain. But the second argument in the quotation is crucial. In

³⁵² Contra cf. Platone, *Sofista*, a cura di Francesco Fronterotta, op. cit., pp. 463-4 n. 260, who says that the λόγος is a reality which mediates between what is sensible and what is intelligible also referring to *Tim.* 29b4-5, a place already mentioned in the excursus cf. *supra* n. 317; cf. also S. Rosen, *Plato's Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, op. cit., pp. 294-5.

order to test λόγος' claim that it is part of reality we should ask what it is and try to grasp its being. However, this can be done only by means of λόγος itself. To ask what something is can only be performed through λόγος, also in the case that the object of enquiry is λόγος itself. In turn, according to what we have seen with regard to the ontological commitment of instruments, if the λόγος used to discern the being of x is to be effective, there needs to be an ontologically fixed nature governing the use and giving the structure of that λόγος, even in the case that x is a discourse. On these grounds, Plato can say that the one who wishes to enquire into the nature of λόγος must minimally assume its reality. Thus, the Eleatic Visitor states in (2) that they still have to understand what λόγος is, but they already need to consider it as being for the reasons given just now. What is the nature of this argument? Does Plato suggest that language is a formal frame which serves as a precondition to any meaningful cognitive interaction with the world? Definitely not. This argument is strictly ontological for at least two reasons. The first generic one is that the argument is a perfect instance of the Telicity of Reality Assumption (TRA).³⁵³ The nature under investigation is so determined that it already is as it will (turn out to) be. In the case of λόγος this assumption is uniquely perspicuous in that one can divide the λόγος whose nature is under examination from the λόγος employed to perform that examination only to discover that the λόγος used to examine owes its effectiveness to the reality of the λόγος the object of the investigation. This respects the priority of being on use and cognition. On Plato's ontologically minded view, this formal priority of discourse on content is one further ground to locate λόγος within reality.

The second reason for conceiving this argument as strictly ontological lies in the last lines in (2). If there were no blending among that which is, discourse would be lost. I think this is precisely on the same lines of (1): an ontological system of relations is the real precondition for the reality of discourse. As we have seen, the reality of discourse does not only accounts for the discourse's structure, but also for the effectiveness of its many employments. Therefore, language is never conceived as a normative field

³⁵³ To recall: If one experiences how things are/stand, regardless of whether she be correct or mistaken, things in the present will always have been as they are going to prove/reveal to be. Cf. Chapter two p. 121.

whose validity is detached from ontological matters. On the contrary, the necessity of assuming the λόγος even in the case of discussing its nature and existence emphasises an ontological status of the λόγος.

Now, the phrase “συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν” needs further analysis because it raises three different orders of questions which can be summarised as follows:

- I. One can ask whether the εἶδη are actually Forms and, if so, whether their weave, since it is mentioned with regard to discourse, is the ontic relation they entertain or whether their weave is the way Forms are connected in language by the speaker.³⁵⁴
- II. One can ask whether Forms are a precondition to any discourse in that they establish the conditions of meaningfulness of statements or whether they are required because any statement needs to refer to one or more Forms.
- III. One can ask whether the συμπλοκή remains exclusively at the level of Forms or includes particulars as well.

To opt in favour of one side of each one of these quandaries imposes specific limitations on the choices concerning the others, which is why the many interpreters have chosen particular patterns in attempting to settle these questions.³⁵⁵ I shall not explore all the structural possibilities of

³⁵⁴ This second choice needs to assume that the συμπλοκή is not the same as the “blending” mentioned in (2).

³⁵⁵ The literature is huge. I report the classical studies: F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, op. cit., pp. 300-1, who maintains that Forms are objects of reference in discourses and that particular things take part in it; J.L. Ackrill, *Symploke Eidon*, in R. E. Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, op. cit., pp. 199-206, he notoriously claims that the weave determines the condition of meaningfulness of statements in terms of incompatibility of the qualities ascribed to things; R. S. Bluck, *False Statement in the Sophist*, «Journal of Hellenic Studies», 77 (1957), pp.181-6, this interpreter takes the expression to mean the linguistic conjunction of terms and not as the ontic relation, he also thinks that particulars should be unpacked into the Forms they partake of, thereby maintaining that the συμπλοκή involves Forms only; J. M. E. Moravcsik, *ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΕΙΔΩΝ and the genesis of ΛΟΓΟΣ*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 42 (1960), pp. 117-129 who contends that also in the case of statements concerning particulars a plurality of Forms is involved because each such statement minimally partakes of being and the Form of the characteristic it has; a good survey of traditional studies, some of which are referred to here, is A. L. Peck, *Plato's "Sophist": The συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν*, «Phronesis», 7 (1962), pp. 46-66; M. Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage. Platons*

coherently combining (I), (II) and (III), thereby limiting myself to expose my own view, however ungratefully hard it may be to provide an ultimate interpretation on such a crucial matter. To begin with, I think that the easiest one to resolve is (I). I consider the εἶδη put in the συμπλοκή to be rightfully Forms and that the latter occurs at the ontic level. The συμπλοκή concerns Forms by themselves and is not performed by anyone. This solution is good for two reasons. On the one hand, it better fits with the context of the dialogue, as we shall see more clearly in the next section; on the other hand, it better respects the priority of ontology over cognition because it locates the structural condition of λόγος into reality. As far as (II) is concerned, I believe that both sides are partly correct, but they need to be further developed in understanding the particular Platonic aspect of it. In general, I think that the συμπλοκή at stake here concerns Forms which ground the possibility of speaking truly or falsely about sensible things. Forms perform this role neither by being concepts which have specific compatibility or incompatibility nor by only being referred to by the terms used in the statement. Forms explain why something that is true about a thing or an event is true and how this is at all possible. As a consequence, with respect to (III) the weaving never includes particulars and is performed only by Forms. To develop this argument and to show the correctness of my last assertions it is necessary to enlarge the portion of the text under scrutiny. Hence, after stating that the λόγος is one among the kinds that are, the Eleatic Stranger needs to understand whether not-being communicates with the λόγος as a way to ground the possibility of false statements. The only way to do this is by analysing the structure of the λόγος, of its constituents and how they fit together (συναρμόττειν).

The Eleatic Stranger says that the words which, after being said one after another, mean (σημαίνοντα) something actually fit together, whereas those which, in the succession, do not mean anything do not fit together.³⁵⁶ One can say that a succession of words is an instance of this “fitting together” only if that succession is actually successful in meaning something. If a succession of words does not mean anything, those words

Gebrauch von „...ist...“ und „...nicht ist...“ im Sophistes, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1967, pp. 43-4. Cf. also P. Clarke, *The Interweaving of Forms with one another: Sophist 259e*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», (12) 1994, pp. 35-62.

³⁵⁶ *Soph.* 261d9-e2.

do not fit together. This is not a mere rewording. The fact that a succession of words succeeds in meaning something is the proof and the effect of the fitting together of the words put into succession. So, the first point is that one has immediate cognition of the meaningfulness of the statements which is the way to know if some given words fit together or not. This way of putting the matter is consistent with an assumption stated above, namely that both Plato and the sophist as is depicted by Plato assume familiarity with meaningful discourse possessed by any competent speaker as such. The expression of something meaningful is the condition that –if obtains– shows that the words fit together. The rules which govern this process are independent of any single utterance or writing and constitute what it is to be a λόγος.³⁵⁷

At any rate, the structure which, if displayed, makes any statement meaningful is minimally composed of two sorts of vocal (τῆ φωνῆ) ostension³⁵⁸ about being (δηλώματα περὶ τῆς οὐσίας), namely names/nouns (ὀνόματα) and verbs (ρήματα).³⁵⁹ Verbs reveal actions or states and names/nouns reveal subjects. These linguistic elements reveal being for the reason that they name it. This claim is itself significant since it suggests

³⁵⁷ It has been argued that meaningfulness intended as condition for a statement to be true or false derived from the logical/syntactical well-formedness could solve the main aporia concerning not-being discussed in the Sophist. This is so because the distinction between meaningfulness and truth is precisely what the sophist does not grasp when he says that to say something meaningful one must refer to something in reality, which therefore must be, otherwise there would be nothing to be referred to. In this way, at the level of discourse not-being would only be a false statement and the meaningfulness of a statement would come from a criterion different from truth, namely the structure of statements. Cf. Platone, *Sofista*, a cura di Francesco Fronterotta, op. cit., pp. 472-3 n. 270. I do not think that this correctly respects Plato's intentions. I perfectly agree that for Plato statements acquire their meaning in virtue of a linguistic structure. Yet it needs to be said in the first place that this structure of the λόγος is not a linguistic matter because it is something which is (fixed) in nature. In other words, for anything to be a λόγος it must be composed of specific elements which fit together in a particular way and this depends on none of the single utterances (linguistic events) about any subject. Second, the structure of the λόγος is enough to distinguish the value of not-being as falsehood from the kind difference, but it is not able to ground the former in the latter, which is the main point of this section.

³⁵⁸ I adopt this translation following the Italian translation put forward in Platone, *Cratilo*, introduzione e note di F. Aronadio, op. cit., pp. XL-I. Cf. also L. M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, op. cit., p. 197.

³⁵⁹ For an analysis of the two terms cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 223-4.

that one can only reveal something that is and that naming is a kind of revealing. Do names/nouns (or verbs) perform an ostension of being by themselves? Only if these components fit together is sense produced. A discourse is never composed of succession of just names/nouns or just verbs. The Eleatic Stranger gives some examples: “walks runs sleeps” is no statement; neither is “lion stag horse”. Most significantly, the Eleatic Stranger explains the matter as follows:

«...no more in this case than in the other does what has been voiced indicate action, or lack of action, or the being of something that is, or of something that is not, nor will it until someone starts blending the verbs with the names. Then they fit together, and the first interweaving is at once speech, almost its most elementary and smallest manifestation.»³⁶⁰
(slightly modified).

This should not be taken as an anticipation of the Fregean context-principle, according to which linguistic elements acquire their meaning only when they are part of a proposition. Plato says through the voice of the Eleatic Stranger that happens a linguistic revelation of, among other things, being (οὐσία) of something that is (ὄντος) or something that is not (μὴ ὄντος) only if names and verbs mingle. Thus, the principle of any ostension or revelation of being lies in the proper connection of the linguistic components. Given that names/nouns and verbs were said to be vocal items revelatory of being, and now it is said that without connection the things uttered (φωνηθέντα) do not perform any revelation, how ought this tension to be considered? One could set the matter in terms of names/nouns and verbs having meaning, but this could be misleading.

Put in terms of modern views on meaningfulness of terms, either one maintains that names/nouns and verbs acquire their meaning only when they fit together, thereby implying that “stag”, say, has no meaning because it is not connected to a verb; or he maintains that names/nouns and verbs have meaning in isolation, but there is no ostension if they are kept

³⁶⁰ *Soph.* 262c2-7: «οὐδεμίαν γὰρ οὔτε οὕτως οὔτ' ἐκείνως πράξιν οὐδ' ἀπραξίαν οὐδὲ οὐσίαν ὄντος οὐδὲ μὴ ὄντος δηλοῖ τὰ φωνηθέντα, πρὶν ἂν τις τοῖς ὀνόμασι τὰ ῥήματα κεράσῃ. τότε δ' ἤρμοσέν τε καὶ λόγος ἐγένετο εὐθὺς ἢ πρώτη συμπλοκή, σχεδὸν τῶν λόγων ὁ πρῶτός τε καὶ μικρότατος».

separate. Without the conjunction of names/nouns and verbs there is no revelation of the being of anything. In other words there is access to the being of that which is and that which is not only when names/nouns and verbs mingle and then only when meaningful λόγοι are produced. Thus, terms have meaning by themselves, but only in conjunction with each other do meaningful names/nouns and verbs reveal being. Apparently, both horns of the dilemma do not square with Plato's view because either names/nouns and verbs have no meaning or, if they do, this makes no contribution to the revelation which takes place by means of statements. This is enough to see that the ostension of being is a literal and direct revelation of reality, which is to say that words are meaningful if they are correctly used (which means according to the nature of discourse) and do fit together, thereby showing a part, however minimal, of reality itself, without the mediation of representations or meanings (in the modern sense). So, the point is not whether lists of names/nouns or verbs can be understood by a community of speakers. The point is rather that being can be revealed by means of names/nouns and verbs as long as these mingle or fit together thereby producing linguistic sense. In this way, the fact that a sequence of words means something serves as proof for the fitting together of those words and ultimately for a singular revelation or ostension of being. The requirement of connection is of the greatest relevance, and is significantly highlighted by the new occurrence of the term “συμπλοκή”.

The first and simplest discourse (τῶν λόγων ὁ πρῶτος τε καὶ μικρότατος), namely the one which connects one name and one verb, brings about a “fitting together” of these terms (ἤρμοσέν) *and* (τε καὶ) immediately (εὐθὺς) the λόγος becomes (ἐγένετο) the first weaving (ἡ πρώτη συμπλοκή), or, rephrasing it more incautiously, the first weaving takes place as λόγος. This sentence is a formidable piece of exegetical obscurity. I would interpret it as follows: words fit together (linguistic level) *and* without mediation a minimal connection of Forms (ontological level) comes to be in the form of discourse. I have italicised the conjugation “and” in order to highlight the fact that “τε καὶ” cannot be epexegetical. The sense would then be that the fitting together (of words) is performed and the weaving which we first saw to be exclusively consisting of Forms now becomes a λόγος, or takes place (keeping in mind the peculiar and rich characterisation of the verb γίγνεσθαι explained in the

third chapter) as λόγος. The presence of that “immediately” is noteworthy since it suggests that the well-formedness of sentences straightaway gives a λόγος able to reveal something about being, provided that there is the fundamental connection of its elements and that the revealed being is a minimal weaving of Forms. According to this interpretation, there is a revelation of being as a direct consequence of the connection of the parts of discourse which derivatively can be called συμπλοκή not just because discourse structurally is a conjunction of names/nouns and verbs, but also because through the fitting together of the latter the λόγος reveals the ontic συμπλοκή. This would suggest that the fitting together of names/nouns and verbs is one thing, and the συμπλοκή which takes place in a λόγος whose components indeed fit together is another, even in the case of the simplest sort of discourse. All of this sounds highly interpretative since the text is vague and extremely brief. Though, this vagueness itself perhaps counts as an argument: the versatility of the metaphor of weaving across ontological and linguistic structures discursively shows a structural analogy. In any event, at a more general level, it can less contentiously be held that any λόγος is unproblematically linked to reality as long as it respects its essential and structural constraints. This will be made clearer throughout the discussion.

The text continues with a further explanation:

«Presumably because it [*scil.* the smallest discourse] is now giving an indication of things that are or are coming into being, or have come into being or are going to; they are not merely naming but accomplishing something, by weaving together verbs with nouns. That is why we described them as saying, not just as naming, and why we used the name ‘speech’ for this combination.»³⁶¹

In this dense quotation there are a number of arguments that I shall briefly analyse. First, the quotation opens with the fundamental distinction between revealing something that is (περὶ τῶν ὄντων) and something that

³⁶¹ *Soph.* 262d2-6: «δηλοῖ γὰρ ἤδη πού τότε περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἢ γιγνομένων ἢ γεγονότων ἢ μελλόντων, καὶ οὐκ ὀνομάζει μόνον ἀλλὰ τι περαίνει, συμπλέκων τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς ὀνόμασι. διὸ λέγειν τε αὐτὸν ἀλλ’ οὐ μόνον ὀνομάζειν εἶπομεν, καὶ δὴ καὶ τῷ πλέγματι τούτῳ τὸ ὄνομα ἐφθεγξάμεθα λόγον».

comes to be, has come to be or is going to come to be (ἢ γιγνομένων ἢ γεγονότων ἢ μελλόντων). We see here that the λόγος can be employed both ways and before the significant distinction between the two sorts of reference, Indexical and Definitional as exposed in the excursus, which will be of use in a short while, the fundamental requirement of a minimal conjunction of elements is necessary in order to reveal something, whether it be something that is or that comes to be/happens. This is important because if we find that the connection characterising λόγος is answerable to something in reality, this part of reality will ground any discourse concerning both being and becoming things or events. Second, the assertion that by connecting names/nouns and verbs one accomplishes something (τι περαίνει)³⁶² is consistent with an instrumental and operational view on λόγος whose ontological tenets have been explained in the second chapter. The person who speaks is actually performing something and like any activity or procedure has some rules which govern it. These rules are already given and one can accomplish something if he follows them. The accomplishment is expressed by a verb that has a telic meaning; therefore, to accomplish something means bringing something to an end according to given rules or previous conditions.³⁶³ Third, the λόγος is said to be συμπλέκων verbs to names/nouns, i.e. weaving those items, thereby showing that the λόγος actually weaves together names/nouns and verbs, whereas the συμπλοκή predominately concerns the interweaving of Forms. This is not dangerous for my interpretation because I do think that to a certain extent reality and language have the same Form without being committed to an extreme isomorphism.³⁶⁴

In addition, as we have seen, it is useful to Plato's argument to use terms from the same stem in speaking about reality and language if he is to show how the two are intertwined. Moreover, the λόγος is also said to be something twined (πλέγμα) showing a variation insisting on the textile image and on the same linguistic stem (συμπλοκή, συμπλέκων, πλέγμα). Further, if one recalls the etymology of λόγος, which is "bond", the affinity

³⁶² On the use of the verb "περαίνειν" cf. L. M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, op. cit., p. 201.

³⁶³ Cf. *Soph.* 262e1-2 where the term ἀπεργάζομαι occurs cf. Chapter Two p. 105.

³⁶⁴ As also suggested by the lines following in the dialogue where the things which selectively combine and the fitting together of names are paralleled. Cf. next section and Platone, *Sofista*, a cura di Francesco Fronterotta, op. cit., pp. 479 n. 278.

becomes more evident. Fourth, there is an essential difference between naming and saying, such that one should not name saying “naming”.³⁶⁵ This distinction, if interpreted as the acknowledgement that names and sentences do not refer in the same way, has been one of the major tenets of modern logical atomism.³⁶⁶ However, Plato gives no hint about any allegeable diversity of relation to reality between naming and saying, nor about diverse sorts of entities put in relation to the two, e.g. objects and facts. Irrespective of this illustrious *Wirkungsgeschichte*, for Plato the difference between naming and saying lies in the fact that only through the latter things or being are revealed, which is the same as saying that which can be achieved by naming does not coincide with that which can be achieved by saying and that being entertains a particular relation with the latter.

What is the nature of this relation? A first statement sounds quite familiar since the Eleatic Stranger asserts that it is a matter of necessity that any λόγος, if it is λόγος at all, and whenever it is so, it is *of* (or about) something (τινὸς).³⁶⁷ The outcome of this sounds familiar because we saw that the “τι” is always said towards something that is.³⁶⁸ Does this mean that whatever one says must be? This cannot be the case since it is precisely the point of the sophist that Plato wanted to reject. Another option is to think that reference is secured by the name regardless of the truth or falsity of the statement in which it features. As a consequence, this interpretation regards any statement where the name does not refer to anything as neither false nor true.³⁶⁹ One further interpretation will be given

³⁶⁵ It is interesting, not just the provocation of mixing the terms, but the fact that language is the subject of the present discourse. One should not *name* saying “naming” since the two are different things. This is another great Platonic piece of thought because he is applying the distinction he is explaining *while* explaining it. Names/nouns are assigned with respect to how things are, and to say how things are (or are not) is different from naming them.

³⁶⁶ Cf. B. Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Routledge, London and New York 2010, pp. 13-4. For an extensive treatment of the difference between naming and saying also relating the present context with other dialogues cf. L. M. De Rijk, *Plato’s Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, op. cit., pp. 217-322.

³⁶⁷ Cf. *Soph.* 262e6-7.

³⁶⁸ Cf. this Chapter p. 209.

³⁶⁹ This is argued by P. Crivelli, *Plato’s Account of Falsehood*, op. cit., p. 229 at point (6). Cf. also C. Thomas, *Speaking of Something: Plato’s “Sophist” and Plato’s Beard*, «Canadian Journal of Philosophy», 38 (2008), pp. 631-667 especially 633-7; D. O’Brien,

in due time, for now one needs only to keep in mind that names/nouns and verbs reveal being, and they are able to do it once they fit together.³⁷⁰

Right after this remark, the Eleatic Stranger rhetorically asks whether statements are of a certain quality.³⁷¹ This quality is either truth or falsity. It is worth noting the employment of the term “ποιόν” which Plato elsewhere contrasted with essential determination. It is noteworthy because it suggests that statements are not essentially true or false,³⁷² whereas they must have a certain structure in order to be so. However, as soon as this quality of discourses is mentioned, the Eleatic Stranger gives two examples which have been a blessing and a curse for the interpreters. Those examples are two instances of simple statements which can be translated as follows:

- a) Theaetetus is sitting/sits/is seated.
- b) Theaetetus, with whom I hold conversation, flies/is flying.³⁷³

I tend to favour the continuous form of the verb.³⁷⁴ In any case, Theaetetus recognises that both statements refer to him and that (a) is true and (b) is false. The Eleatic Stranger explains the truth and falsity respectively as follows:

A) «The true one says the things that are, as they are, about you»;

La forma del non essere nel Sofista di Platone, in W. Leszl e F. Fronterotta (eds.), *Eidos-Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, op. cit., p. 144.

³⁷⁰ It needs to be said that the conjunction in the parenthetical element at 262e-6, “ὅτανπερ ἦ”, generally has two meanings: either “whenever” possibly with a sense of recurrence or a more hypothetical value as “in case that”. In this context, the phrase can then mean at least three things: first, “if the (kind) λόγος is”; second, “if the (single) λόγος is (actually a λόγος)”; third, “every time one λόγος is”. The first case states that the ontological structure of λόγος needs to present the condition which follows in the text (being *of* or *about* something). The second case states that the single λόγος if λόγος at all must respect that condition. The third case states that whenever a particular speech takes place it is about something. I tend to favour the second translation, since it refers to singular λόγοι but at the same time enunciates structural conditions. Furthermore, the ambiguity between the second and the third case is meaningful in itself because it returns the major ambiguity of the passage: does any λόγος imply the reality of its content or for any λόγος it is really a λόγος if it is about something (real)?

³⁷¹ Cf. *Soph.* 262e9.

³⁷² Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood*, op. cit., p. 234.

³⁷³ Cf. *Soph.* 263a2 and 9.

³⁷⁴ Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood*, op. cit., p. 234 n. 43.

B) «Whereas the false one says things that are different from those that are».³⁷⁵

The interpretation of these lines has engendered an enormous debate, with particular regard to the sense in which the false statement says something different from the things that are.³⁷⁶ I do not wish to go into the details of the analysis of the different options nor to put forward a markedly original view. Instead, I shall present the one I find most convincing (which apparently is also the most common) and try to draw some original consequences from it, in fact adapting it to the general undertaking of this work. This interpretation goes by the name of the Oxford interpretation, and reads as follows: “the false statement says, speaks of, something other than *any* of the things that are, that is, something other than any of the things that are in relation to the given subject”.³⁷⁷ Thus, assuming that sitting and flying are kinds the falsity of statements consists in the fact that one says things that are (kinds), but which are not in relation to the subject named in the statement insofar as that subject does not partake of those kinds; so, for instance, since Theaetetus does not partake of the kind flying he is not actually flying and consequently the kind flying is *not* in relation to the particular man named Theaetetus. However, (B) is still vague in that saying the things that are other or different from those that are (in relation to Theaetetus) does not necessarily commit one to speaking falsely. For this reason, the Eleatic Stranger adds a remark:

B₂) «In which case it says the things that are not as if they are.»³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ *Soph.* 263b4-4 and 7: «λέγει δὲ αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν ἀληθῆς τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ» and «ὁ δὲ δὴ ψευδῆς ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων».

³⁷⁶ A very clear presentation of the proposals of the interpreters, especially the most influential ones (Oxford interpretation, incompatibility interpretation, quasi-incompatibility interpretation and extensional interpretation) is offered by P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood*, op. cit., pp. 238-42.

³⁷⁷ M. Frede, *The Sophist on false statements*, in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, op. cit., pp. 398-424 : 420; cf. also J. McDowell, *Falsehood and not-being in Plato's Sophist*, in M. Schofield M. Craven Nussbaum (eds.), *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982, pp. 115-134.

³⁷⁸ *Soph.* 263b9: «τὰ μὴ ὄντ' ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει».

Therefore, if one claims that the things that are not in relation to something actually are in relation to it, i.e. that something partakes of them/is characterised by them when in fact it does not, he commits a mistake and then speaks falsely. One further implication of this view is that both the subject named by the ὄνομα and the action or state named by the ῥῆμα exist, even in the case that their alleged relation does not. In this way, the connection of terms with parts of reality is saved. Also, the erroneous connection at the basis of false statements remains exclusively on the part of the speaker. At a given time, a particular appears to be “thus and so”. According to the view of the *Sophist*, there are a number of things of which that particular partakes and a number of which it does not partake. These relations are objective and the error, which subsists only within the experience of the subject amounts to the fact that things which are not in relation to one subject are taken to be in relation to it. So, the difference between the things to which the subject partakes and the things it does not partake of grounds the possibility of false statements, thereby showing that discourse partakes of not-being. Everything seems to fall into place. I do not think that all of this is incorrect, but the matter is more involute and there is much more at stake here. Before discussing the matter properly, I need to consider some arguments put forward by two scholars, whose interpretations of the whole Theaetetus sits/flies section (which is fundamentally coherent with the classical Oxford interpretation) I find more congenial. They are Denis O’Brien and Francesco Fronterotta,³⁷⁹ and the arguments relevant to my view are the following:

Contingence and the two senses of not-being (O’Brien). The things that *are* are the Forms partaken by Theaetetus, conversely the things that *are not* are the Forms not partaken by Theaetetus. The things that are and things that are not (i.e. sitting and flying) are by themselves beings, but in this context they are or are not with regard to the subject named within the statement. For this reason, the conjunction of name/noun and verb is vital:

³⁷⁹ Particularly, D. O’Brien, *La forma del non essere nel Sofista di Platone*, in W. Leszl e F. Fronterotta (eds.), *Eidos-Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, op. cit., pp. 137-56 and F. Fronterotta, *Theaetetus sits – Theaetetus flies. Ontology, predication and truth in Plato’s Sophist (263a – d)*, in B. Bossi T. M. Robinson (eds.), *Plato’s ›Sophist‹ Revisited*, op. cit., pp. 205-224.

only the linguistic connection is able to specify which beings need to be considered as being or not-being.

On these grounds, the distinction between things that are and things that are not (true and false), in the case of Theaetetus, is a *contingent* matter, which is to say that it is relative to what Theaetetus is actually doing at a given time. This means that the example of flying is infelicitous insofar as it cannot possibly be the case (unless there are portentous divine interventions). However, the logical structure of Plato's argument also holds in the case of "Theaetetus is standing". The main point is that if one refers to mutable things like Theaetetus, the set of the things that are and the set of the things that are not with regard to Theaetetus changes because Theaetetus does. Furthermore, the exegete sees that there are two irreducibly different criteria to address not-being. First, the absence of identity, which is the distinction of every kind from the others. Being is not sameness, sameness is not rest, etc. Second, the absence of participation, which is the fact that things or persons do not partake of some existing Form, e.g. Theaetetus is not flying. O'Brien argues that the two are different because, with respect to kinds, they differ even when they participate in one another, and then the absence of participation could not guarantee their distinction. With regard to things, it would not be possible to ground the contingent and temporary fact that Theaetetus is sitting and is not flying (or standing) in the fact that both sitting and flying are not-beings (since they differ from every other kind) because the two differ regardless of the situation in which Theaetetus happens to be. As we shall see in a moment, this last point remains too vague and conceals a significant distinction.

Two kinds of truth of the λόγοι (Fronterotta). One can ask what is the sense of the "things that are" that are said about a subject, and what is this subject. This is connected to the interpretation of the συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν and to what extent the Eleatic Stranger is talking about relations between kinds or between kinds and particulars. Given that in the case of any statement exclusively concerning kinds this problem does not arise, thereby giving a first hint of the natural fitness of language and Forms, in the case of the example above, we are faced with two options in the case of both true and false statements. In the first option (1), the statement "Theaetetus

is sitting” indicates “the kind man partakes of the kind being seated” and it is irrelevant whether the specific individual is sitting or standing. Conversely, “Theaetetus is flying” will be false because the kind man does not partake of the capacity of flying conceived as a kind, but in the case of the false statement saying that Theaetetus is standing while he is in fact sitting, the communion of kinds would give no contribution insofar as the kind man is compatible with both standing and sitting. In the second option (2), the statements actually regard the individual called Theaetetus and the communion of kinds is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the truth of the statement concerning sensible things or persons. Thus, presumably, one could know that Theaetetus is not flying without empirical verification because the kind man does not communicate with the kind flying, but in the case of sitting or standing, which are both compatible with the kind man, the only way to ascertain that occasional and transitory truth will be an empirical act of verification. The exegete has an embraceable proclivity for (2). Coherently with O’Brien’s view, there is a fundamental contingency characterising truths concerning sensible things.

Obviously, the insightful articles of the two scholars here barbarically summarised present many other aspects of interest. What is crucial to my interpretation are two points that both works recognise: on the one hand, the contingency which is inseparable from things in space and time; on the other hand, the recognition of a sort of duality, in the former case with regard to not-being, and in the latter with regard to both true and false statements. On contingency, I can only deeply agree. My account of the two types of reference, Indexical and Definitional, can count on this passage of the *Sophist* as possible evidence. There is a fundamental difference if one speaks about kinds or sensible things. In the former case, the stability of the truth describing the relations between kinds owes its stability to the stability of those relations, granted by the peculiar metaphysical status of those items. In the latter case, the truth of statements concerning sensible things is irretrievably contingent because the way things happen to be changes and is always linked to a context or a situation which forces the knower to experience its presence directly.³⁸⁰ The

³⁸⁰ As has already been discussed in the excursus, cf. *supra* n. 303, F. Fronterotta seems to deny any verificationist interpretation of Plato’s philosophy. But I think that my way

specificity of my proposal on the two types of reference is the further step of considering this fundamental ontological divarication (kinds/Forms and things) as mirrored by the two manners of referring.³⁸¹

We now come to the second point: the acknowledgment of the duality. As O'Brien correctly recognises, the truth of the statement describing the *event* in which Theaetetus is not standing because he is in fact sitting can be grounded in no kind, whether it be the kind man, sitting or difference. Does this imply that there is no relation between the not-being regarding Theaetetus (at a given time) conceived of as the set of all the Forms of which he does not partake and the not-being conceived of as the non-identity that makes each kind different from the other kinds? This question brings to the fore one of the major ambiguities of the *Sophist*, namely the multiplicity of the senses of not-being. Likewise, in the case of Fronterotta's account, he is right in dividing (1) from (2), i.e. the truth of the statements regarding kinds from the truth of the statements regarding things and events, but he does not answer to the truly Platonic point: how does (1) ground (2)? In other words, in what sense do kinds ground propositional truths concerning sensible things? The requirement of contingency forestalls that the truth value of the statements concerning things or events comes from the relations between pertinent kinds (man, sitting, etc.). I think that this requirement is precisely one of the reasons for the dramatic epistemic unreliability of sensible things. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which any statement that refers to sensible things owes its

of interpreting the term as the fact that the nature of a thing is expressed by the cognitive access it admits of (tenet that Fronterotta himself seems to accept) fits very well in this context and in the interpretation that the interpreter provides. At. F. Fronterotta, *Theaetetus sits – Theaetetus flies. Ontology, predication and truth in Plato's Sophist (263a – d)*, in eds. B. Bossi T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Sophist Revisited*, op. cit., p. 209, the author signally suggests Plato's commitment to bivalence as a mark of strong semantic realism. However, at pp. 218 and 219-20, he recognises that the nature of sensible things implies the need for empirical verification, see for instance the end of page 220: «The error of judgement entailed by the false λόγος [*scil.* in the case of statements concerning sensible things] does not depend, then, on logical calculation, but on the very nature (changing and becoming) of the (sensible) things involved in this case and from the perspective, which is also changing and becoming, of the judging subject (who is also a changing sensible body), so that true and false are posited now as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, but only in relation to an identical section of time, because they become complementary with the passage of time».

³⁸¹ Which bear some resemblance to Fronterotta's notion of exegetical nature of λόγοι cf. *supra* n. 352.

truth to Forms, even though the Forms involved have nothing to do with the single event whereby they are displayed.

Inasmuch as things can be spoken of, described or referred to, so also there needs to be the intervention, or presence, of eidetic items. This does not only translate into the fact that the philosopher who wants to explain how discourse works is forced to unravel the mystery of falsehood by solving fundamental ontological issues. More deeply, the relations linking kinds are required by any single situation where things appear to be determined. To start with the case of not-being, the event that Theaetetus is now sitting and not standing is that which bestows the content upon the statement, as one says truly that Theaetetus is sitting and falsely that Theaetetus is standing (to say it as O'Brien does, that sitting is among the beings connected to Theaetetus, whereas standing is among the not-beings, given that taken by themselves sitting and standing are and are not because both participate in being and difference). In turn, in some way this must be grounded in the interweaving of Forms. The only way one can say falsely that Theaetetus is standing while he is sitting depends on the fact that sitting and standing *are* different regardless of that particular situation. Of course, sitting and standing remain different when Theaetetus either stands up or sits down, but the very condition under which one can be wrong when he mistakes one for the other is that they are different kinds. The fact that one can never know whether a particular thing is in relation to one or to the other only by knowing those kinds does not entail that one can be wrong about the particular thing only thanks to the difference between those kinds. On the contrary, that difference is required. How could one ever be wrong in saying that *x* is *E* when it in fact is *F* if *E* and *F* were not different things (in this case ways of being)? After all, for any subject that sits or stands, sitting and standing have different conditions of identity. Regardless of who is sitting or when, the falsity of the description of an event is possible thanks to the more fundamental fact that *what* the thing or person in question is like differs from *what* that thing or person is said to be.³⁸² In this way the falsity of a description of an event depends on a difference between kinds which gives no contribution to the “evenemential” content of the statement.

³⁸² Cf. *infra* n. 419.

What about being? This way of dealing with not-being can shed light on being as well.³⁸³ To properly understand Plato's concept of being as worked out in the *Sophist*, we shall have to pause until the next section. For now, we consider what can be drawn from the comparison with not-being. If a particular happens to display some determination, i.e. it temporally or under a certain perspective appears to be in some way, which is what it is as one kind among others independently of that particular, the truth of the proposition which truly describes that event does not depend on the kind with regard to the particular "eventual" content. Yet the autonomous determination which characterises every kind and the communication with being of the participated kind constitute the ontological ground for the participation of the sensible thing in the kind and the possibility that this participation can be said. Irrespective of whether one thing partakes of one kind, that kind is and, as we shall see in a short while, as a consequence of its being is put in selective communication with other kinds. Thus, just like the possibility of being wrong about things or events amounts to the actual difference between mistakable kinds, so also the possibility of describing phenomena rests on the real being of the kinds which are involved even in the case of the simplest statement (i.e. "Theaetetus is sitting"). This being takes the shape of a web of relations, in a word συμπλοκή.

This lets us better understand Plato's conception of the requirement of being *of* something of every discourse. In the case of a statement concerning kinds, which is in the context of a Definitional reference, names/nouns and verbs refer to kinds and try to describe their relations. Therefore, even if the statements are false, this would concern only the alleged relation between the two and not the existence of the kinds. Also in the case of particulars, that is in the context of an Indexical reference, reference is secured by the punctual indication of something presently appearing in one's experiential horizon. If one connects in a false statement the name referring to the indicated particular with the verb referring to a kind, again the two are given, albeit in different modes of being, whereas their relation is not. This is so, because any kind is by itself and the indicated thing is in virtue of some other kinds which are not the one it was connected with by the statement. So, the exegetic device of the two types of

³⁸³ Cf. *Soph.* 250e5-251a3.

references satisfactorily accounts for the being-of/about-something requirement that Plato takes as a precondition of any statement.

Even so, the possibility of describing phenomena requires that being should not only be considered a fixed and necessarily existent element that can be referred to by means of the elementary components of a statement. Being is also what makes that connection possible and that which intervenes in every meaningful linguistic connection. This is the most important point of the present analysis and we can understand it by contrasting it with the analysis of not-being. Keeping aside the procedure to ascertain the truth value of a statement concerning an event or a thing, *if* that statement is false, its falsity is grounded in the eidetic “fact” that what it says of the thing differs from what the event or the thing happen to be. Conversely, my contention is that true statements work similarly. A particular statement concerning a thing or event is *de facto* true only with respect to the situation, but its truth is grounded in the eidetic fact that the way of being represented by the kind referred to by the verb actually *is*. This does not reduce to the warrant of an existing reality referred to, it literally means that the kind in question communes with the kind being. As we are about to see in the next section, the subsequent crucial point is that to communicate with being is *eo ipso* to establish relations with some other selected kinds. Thus, the possibility that a particular is said to be “thus and so” depends on the existence of kinds and their relations. Both existence of kinds and their relations amount to the same ontological item, namely the kind being.

Before addressing this final ontological issue, the reason why things and events are at all describable only thanks to kinds needs to be better explained. This also explains why there is actual revelation of being only when names/nouns and verbs are connected. As we have seen, when one says that a particular is *F* or it *Fs*, this is possible because the kind *F* itself is. One could ask: what is the difference between the event of a particular happening to display the Form *F* and the fact that that event is describable? I believe that the correct answer is that there is no difference. This was the outcome of the ruinous collapse of language examined in the third chapter: the objectivity of characterisation, however temporally minimal, coincides

with the describability of the thing.³⁸⁴ The very event of something acquiring some Form is the ground of the describability of that event. And, as we have come to know by now, the Form is that in virtue of which its very display appears; therefore, that which gives identity to things (the Form) is also what is responsible for the describability of the thing/event. Now we are faced with the reason of this fundamental fact. For Plato, the only way to say that *a* is *F* is to consider that *F* is something that is common to many things and that is independent of the many things which have it in common. This was the outcome of the first definition of the *Theaetetus*, phenomena can be determined thanks to some common notions that can be recognised only from the comparison between many singular experiences. Moreover, everything that appears is so mixed with linguistic structures that it looks like a judgment coming from perception.³⁸⁵ So, the question can be reworded as follows: what is the relation between the temporary being *F* of a particular and the being of *F* as εἶδος? We seem to be faced with two ways of being. On the one hand, the way a particular is *F*, on the other hand, the way *F* itself is. There is a sense where this distinction is plain because it has this work in the background. Individuals and Forms are two modes of being that I tend to understand as the event-based dimension of singularity, appearance and display of heteronomous contents and the essential autonomous dimension of displayed contents. As the point of contingency above shows, the truth of statements concerning events is irremediably partial and context-situated. Nonetheless, the fact that any given thing *is* in some way in the event of its appearance (in a way that must be ascertained empirically and about which one can never be sure), which is also the reason that made phenomenalism collapse, relates to the being of the Forms involved in that appearance.

In the example presented in the *Sophist*, we can focus three points:

- a) The event that Theaetetus is sitting can happen because the kind sitting is something, i.e. because the kind sitting represents some

³⁸⁴ Cf. Chapter Three pp. 170-3.

³⁸⁵ Cf. *Soph.* 264a4-6 where Plato uses the term “φαντασία” in a manner that is strictly coherent with its treatment in the *Theaetetus* although in this dialogue the notion was criticised as a genuine source of knowledge. This closure of Plato’s discourse is very significant because it shows how pervasively the linguistic structure, which is the reflection of the ontological structure, is diffused.

specific conditions of identity which the individual *must* display otherwise he would *not be* sitting.

- b) Analogously, the statement “Theaetetus is sitting” can be true only thanks to the conditions of identity represented by the kind sitting because only if these conditions are respected the statements says the things that are as they are.³⁸⁶
- c) This is also granted by two factors. First, the eponymy of the Forms. Every time one says that something is *F*, where *F* is the name of a Form, he is already involving the identity conditions represented by that Form. Second, as we have seen, in any statement at least one word refers to a Form.

The same item seems to be the grounds of both the event and the truth of the statement describing it, provided that this ground is not thought of as grounding the truth-value of the statement. In other words, Forms are required by any statement regarding events and things because only with respect to Forms can one know the ontological conditions that the thing needs to display in order to be true, but one can never know with respect to Forms *whether* it is true. I do not think there is a real difference between being the ground for an event and for the truth of the statement describing it: *that which makes something be is precisely that which makes it true to thought*. Therefore, this requires a distinction: on the one hand, the truth-value of the proposition; on the other hand, the truth-ground represented by the Form which grounds both the identity of the thing and the truth of the proposition concerning it, and the two roles cannot be distinguished because the Form is both absolutely real and intelligible. That which gives identity to things is one and the same as that which makes the event where a thing or a person display that identity describable. This is also the reason why any possible description requires the introduction of at least one kind, even in the most common case where non-philosophers describe things or events. If one excludes every description, which is any minimal linguistic inclusion of Forms, one is only able to point at things without speaking a word.³⁸⁷ At any rate, this twofold role of Forms, namely grounding ontic

³⁸⁶ Cf. *supra* n. 375.

³⁸⁷ The minimal involvement of Forms in the simplest empirical sentence can count as a form of reference *latu sensu* principally because for anything to appear it needs to

identity and propositional truth (which I think is double to our modern eye),³⁸⁸ is possible only thanks to the peculiar *nature* of language in that, in any statement, at least one term refers to a Form. Once again, exiting the coalescence view is hard won and it leaves its traces. To know what the identity conditions are by themselves, one must abandon the context of the event in which Theaetetus is sitting and needs to understand for anything that might be sitting what that way of being is, i.e. what that way of being is connected with and what it differs from. However, the reference to the *Theaetetus* reminds us that Plato thinks that if something is determined, however minimally, that determination enables one to refer to the thing and describe how it appears to be. So, for some one thing to be is to take on the being of many Forms, and the being of each Form is the net of relations which establish with the strictest accuracy *what* that Form is. In the next section, I shall elucidate how Plato considers the web of kinds as the ultimate condition for the speakability of the world. Therefore, we can conclude that each thing is describable insofar as it is determined and that the contingent truth of the statements regarding events is nonetheless grounded by the Forms involved in the event which literally *are* that determination.

This is the scope of the ontologisation introduced in the first section of this chapter. Plato provides a solution to the aporia of not-being and falsehood, in so doing he also places in the metaphysics of kinds the ontological requirement of every meaningful discourse or truth. The world is onto-logised insofar as language by itself commits every speaker to being and truth (and to not-being). This, I think is the answer to the question concerning the nature of the *σμπλοκή*, the weave of Forms. Every discourse is the product of the weave of Forms because each discourse is an ostension of being which is in itself articulated as a web. Therefore, with respect to the canonical interpretations, the *σμπλοκή* neither includes particulars, e.g. Theaetetus, nor merely establishes the meaning of the

display some determinate content. This seems to be partially consistent with a rigid way of naming particulars. Reference to particulars is given by their sheer singularity, whereas any description is on account of Forms.

³⁸⁸ Cf. *Thaet.* 186c7 where Plato states that it is impossible to connect with truth without connecting with being as well.

terms employed in the statement.³⁸⁹ One question arises: what is the being revealed by names/nouns and verbs when they are defined as “δηλώματα περὶ τῆς οὐσίας”? There are at least three options: (i) the being of the event described, in a word, that which gives the truth-value; (ii) the being involved, i.e. the kind which characterises the event or the thing; (iii) the kind being. We do not have much information, but I do not think that this is a real alternative. The being of the event is how it is determined, what is going on in it, but this is the effect of the Forms involved which in turn *is* only thanks to the kind being. The difficulty of this line of thought is the product of the complexity of the relation of (i), (ii) and (iii).³⁹⁰ One could

³⁸⁹ For a good and partially embraceable analysis cf. C. Shields, *The Grounds of Logos: The Interweaving of Forms*, in G. Anagnostopoulos F. D. Miller (eds.), *Reason and Analysis in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Essays in Honor of David Keyt*, Philosophical Studies Series 120, Springer, Dordrecht 2013, pp. 221-30. The main critique towards this paper is that it, even though it recognises the eidetic dimension not as merely logically structured, it still thinks of it as an intensional sense structure. For this reason, he needs to say that «for *logos* to be possible, whether in the exterior realm of language or in the interior realm of thought, freestanding *metaphysical and semantic relations* between Forms must obtain» (p. 224). I do not think that there is a real distinction between metaphysical and semantic relations and that Forms are just meanings; Forms are much more insofar as they are that in virtue of which something can actually appear to be “thus and so”. They ground language first and foremost because they ground things. While commenting on Shields’ paper, B. Hestir gives some indications coherent with my analysis cf. B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016, p. 178: «The argument in the *Sophist* about statement establishes that there must be some ontological structure, which Shields (taking a cue from Katz) has called an intensional sense structure, between forms that ground their availability as attributes as well as semantic objects that are necessary for the possibility of statement. This structure requires the combination of forms. For instance, that sitting is available as a form means that it must combine with at least being, the same, and different. Such combination is necessary for sitting being a being, having the capacity to combine, and having stable identity conditions and uniqueness. That sitting holds of Theaetetus requires these combinations in addition to the straightforward participation of Theaetetus in sitting».

³⁹⁰ The present interpretation could give way to an highly interpretative option, which is to conceive of any false statement as an *instance* of the kind not-being and conversely any true statement as an *instance* of the kind being. The reason is that any false statement is an occasional occurrence of difference: what I say is contextually different from what is the case, whereas the kind difference is perfect in that the differences between kinds are given once and for all. Likewise, any true statement says what is, but only occasionally and in a given context, whereas the kind being is perfect in that it connects the kinds once and for all. This interpretation will not be developed any further. For an interpretation that goes in a similar direction, connecting this point to the existence of the kind of discourse as authentic eidetic unity cf. K Lorenz J. Mittelstrass,

ask: how do particulars participate, if at all, in the kind being? A particular thing is as long as it participates in (at least) one Form and that Form gives that particular an identity. What is the contribution of being to this relation? Being is nothing but *the* relation, precisely that which enables one to say with truth that some phenomenon *is* “thus and so”. The further step is to think of the participation of one thing in a Form as the participation to the kind being with regard to that Form, thereby committing any particular which is in relation to a Form to the specific weave that *constitutes the being of that Form*. In this way, one can explain why Plato resorts to his metaphysical theorisation starting from the fact, shared by the sophist, that one can *speak*. We have seen why things are speakable, the answer is: thanks to the absolute dependence they have towards Forms. The next section is tasked with explaining Plato’s fundamental metaphysical view that connection between Forms is the ontological requirement of language and the peculiar concept of being that makes it possible.

3) The relationality of reality and the notion of δύναμις

The first aim of this section is to understand Plato’s argument that if there is no connection between beings, then any discourse becomes altogether impossible. The second aim is to examine the well-known definition of being presented in *Sophist* 247d-e under the assumption that this definition, irrespective of its argumentative role within the context, is crucial to Plato’s conception of reality. The notion of connection between beings needs to be understood in the frame of Plato’s metaphysical view. The beings in question are the Forms, or kinds in the context of the *Sophist* (I hereby make explicit an equivalence assumed throughout the chapter). Glancing back at the end of the last section, we see that a dual structure stands out: a way in which Forms are contingently, phenomenally and temporarily mixed in supplying phenomena with cognisable content and a way in which Forms essentially and extra-temporally selectively relate to each other. Further, the latter way was said to be the condition of the former and was somehow assumed during the discussion in the last section. That is so because the correct order of the arguments in the text has been

Theaitetos fliegt. Zur Theorie wahrer und falscher Sätze bei Platon (Soph. 251d — 263d), «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 48 (1966), pp. 113-52:147.

reversed here in order to highlight a precise aspect of Plato's cogitation. Again we are faced with events and essences. To put it roughly, the participation of Forms in each other is a result of their own nature, whereas things happen to partake of some Form and they thereby are able to change, and if there were no fixed structure of relations between identity conditions set in nature, it would not be possible to say meaningfully that some particular appears to be "thus and so". Also, being comes to clear only by means of and within language, whether it be in the derivative truth concerning things or events or in the fundamental truth of the essential relations among kinds that ground it. The treatment of the nature of λόγος opened with the weave of Forms that gives birth to discourse. The last section ends with the attempt to show that the weave is the web of Forms and that it is required in any truth statement concerning things. That is so, it emerged, not because Forms provide truth-values to statements concerning things or events. On the contrary, Forms constitute the truth-grounds for any statement for two reasons: first, because things appear to be "thus and so" only in virtue of Forms; second, because for anything that one says Forms represent the conditions that things need to display for the statements that describe them to be true. This is possible thanks to the mutual relations that Forms entertain with each other, and now we must understand how Plato brings it to the fore.

As is well known, a prominent part of the *Sophist* is devoted to the description of the mutual relations entertained by some all-embracing kinds, also called the greatest kinds (μέγιστα γένη).³⁹¹ These kinds are Motion, Rest, Being, Identity and Difference, or at least the last three. Their relation, the way Plato deduces them dialectically and the nature of Difference in relation to not-being are among the most difficult puzzles in Western philosophy. Needless to say, due to space limitations, I shall not address these questions here. I shall only focus on the sense of Plato's argument that if there is no communication between Forms then language is altogether impossible, and on how this sets the basis for a precise conception of (the kind) being, which in turn is perfectly met by the definition provided at 247d-e. These greatest kinds have been interpreted

³⁹¹ Cf. *Soph.* 254d4-5.

most variously, as conditions of individuation,³⁹² as semantic concepts or as the attempt to disambiguate the values of the verb “be”.³⁹³ This exegetical trend has long been interrupted and the kinds have been returned to their ontological status of Forms. I am not claiming that the alternative views went completely astray. To a certain extent Plato’s view takes into account some specific semantical or logical aspects, though I do not think one can maintain that Plato abandons the strong ontological commitment of the theory of kinds. However, my view is that Plato’s main task was to express a metaphysical theory in which absolute conditions of identity are given in order to grant perfect knowledge and linguistic access. This last point, linguistic access, is so important that it is granted by no less than the way reality itself is structured. It has been argued that Plato aims at distinguishing two types of concepts, namely sort- and form-concepts. Roughly put, some concepts relate to each other according to relations of inclusion or exclusion, whereas other concepts govern those relations themselves, and their sole function is to structure the concepts of the other type. Given that Forms are not to be conceived as mere concepts, this distinction does not hold either. As we shall see, the μέγιστα γένη pass through all other kinds and nonetheless they are kinds. This means that the most shared part of reality is the metaphysical structure which enables any Form to be the specific nature it is by itself (i.e. the particular conditions of identity it represents). The very notable fact is that the greatest kinds are *primi inter pares*. That which makes reality as it is is in itself part of that reality. This remarkable view makes sense only within the eidetic ontology and it is worth highlighting with regard to the kind being as will be clear in due time. The eidetic domain is populated by elements which commune selectively. They are in so much as they combine, and this is considered the ground of any meaningful linguistic articulation. Let us now turn to the development of the argument in the text.

³⁹² Cf. M. M. McCabe, *Plato’s Individuals*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994, pp. 221-57.

³⁹³ Cf. some classical references J. L. Ackrill, *Plato and the Copula: Sophist 251-9*, in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics*, Routledge, London and New York 1973, pp. 207-18; C. Kahn, *The Verb ‘Be’ in Ancient Greek*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 2003; L. Brown, *Being in the Sophist. A syntactical enquiry*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 4 (1986), pp. 49-70.

The argument is opened right after a short pause in the enquiry concerning two views facing each other which privileged motion or rest as fundamental ontological dimensions. The Eleatic Stranger recognises that being is a third item because if it were either this would make the other impossible given that motion and rest are incompatible. Thereafter, he notoriously states that being and not-being are somehow correlated and that one cannot uncover the nature of one without understanding the other as well. This launches the investigation concerning being. Notably, this investigation starts by asking in which way one can say the same thing through many names as in the case of one man that is said righteous. I say notably because the examination of the nature of being is immediately linked to naming in a pluralistic account: any thing can be spoken about through a plurality of linguistic elements. The gullible people who claim that one can only call the man “man” and the righteous “righteous” without mixing different words in constructing discourses are only to be ridiculed. Those people are commonly called “the late-learners” mainly because the one who holds this view is either young and naïve or has come to this pseudo-knowledge belatedly. This passage has received a number of interpretations.³⁹⁴ Here, it must only be kept in mind that the problem of being opens with the question concerning the possibility of speaking of one item by means of a variety of words. Then, when it comes to settling the question, the Eleatic Stranger envisages three jointly exhaustive options (*Soph.* 251d5-e2):

- i) Nothing is attached to anything else, and everything is put in the discourse as unmixed (ἄμεικτα) since it is impossible (ἀδύνατον) for all things to partake of one another.
- ii) Everything is drawn together as the same since it is able (δυνατά) to commune (ἐπικοινωνεῖν) with everything else.³⁹⁵
- iii) Something can mix with something else, other things cannot.

³⁹⁴ The main options are the distinction of identity from predication, the speech act of naming and the essentialist predication as they have been summarised with splendid clarity by P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood*, op. cit., pp. 105-9.

³⁹⁵ The reference to the sameness of everything is interesting. Does it mean that it participates in the kind sameness with respect to everything else or that each kind combines with every other in such a way that they are perfectly interchangeable?

We need to understand how the impracticability of (i) and (ii) depends on reasons whose nature is ambiguously both semantic and ontological, and how Plato's notion of being in the *Sophist* is the condition for (iii). At this preliminary stage, it is worth noting that the question concerning being is immediately put in terms of speaking of things through many names and then it switches back to the ontic connections between realities. The two dimensions, linguistic and ontological, seem to be two faces of the same coin. The young Theaetetus opts to examine the consequences of each possibility, starting from (i). Interestingly, the Eleatic Stranger rephrases (i) as the scenario where nothing has any capacity (δύναμιν) of communication (κοινωνίας) with anything else. Throughout these crucial passages the term “δύναμις”, verbal and adjectival forms included, is pivotal. Again, the examples are Motion and Rest, and the Eleatic Stranger asks whether either of them is (or can be) if it does not communicate towards (προσκοινωνοῦν) being (οὐσίας). The meaning of being is a very controversial matter which will only be touched on here. However, I think there is a good explanation of the communication with being in the subsequent passage in the text. Plato refers to two ideal factions of thinkers (though Plato would ascribe the appellative of thinkers only to the second), namely the offspring of Earth and the Friends of Forms which think that reality is only what our hands impact or some forms which stand beyond the sensory sphere, respectively. These two are the most opposed mind-sets which equated being with Motion or with Rest, which in turn are the two items which begin the section concerning the greatest kinds. The Eleatic Stranger also briefly mentions monism as that thought that makes everything one. At any rate, all groups of thinkers unknowingly presuppose a relation:

«In a single moment, then, it seems, with this admission everything is turned upside down, whether for those who have everything changing, for those who bring it to a rest by making it one, or for those who reduce the things that are to forms that remain forever exactly as they are; for all of these people add in being, some of them

saying that things really are changing, the others saying they really are at rest.»³⁹⁶

The first part of this quotation asserts that everything is turned upside down thanks to the non-communication with being in the most diverse cases, whether mobilism or monism or the Friends of Forms. The reason is that all options add in being *because* it is *said* (λέγοντες) that things *really* (ὄντως) move or rest, respectively. Why should it sound like a great innovation? The explanation presents at least two aspects. First, the reference to language. Being is introduced because in all options those who support them say that the option in question is (everything that is in motion or at rest, for example). Second, the way the supporters have to say it is that being *really* or *actually* moves or is at rest. Being is added in whenever one says that something is and the effect of this insertion is that the only condition for stating for example that being is motion (only that which comes in contact with the body exists) is assuming that this is *actually* the case. Thus, the communication with being shows up every time one's thesis is expressed and when the presupposition of this statement is that it really is as is stated. Hence, the real onto-logical issue is not when one is to decide whether things move or are at rest, in other words, whether there exists only that which moves or rests; rather, the authentic onto-logical issue is the use of that “ὄντως”. Whatever one says, being is called in, but not in the sense that the inflexion of the verb “be” is used to predicate. The terse example of the Eleatic Stranger, for instance, is “things move” and it is said that they really (ὄντως) do. So, whatever one says, he is committed to being as long as he claims that it really or truly is as he says. This view is ground-breaking. The ontological issue becomes literally onto-logical. To understand being, one needs to understand what it means to really be and this is one and the same as the reality everything needs to possess if one speaks of it truly. Therefore, the point is not whether some or all things move or are at rest; rather, it is to understand what makes them really move or rest and above all if some nature is responsible for the

³⁹⁶ *Soph.* 252a5-10: «ταχὺ δὴ ταύτη γε τῆ συνομολογίᾳ πάντα ἀνάστατα γέγονεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἅμα τε τῶν τὸ πᾶν κινούντων καὶ τῶν ὡς ἐν ἰστάντων καὶ ὅσοι κατ' εἶδη τὰ ὄντα κατὰ ταῦτὰ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντα εἶναι φασιν ἀεὶ: πάντες γὰρ οὗτοι τὸ γε εἶναι προσάπτουσιν, οἱ μὲν ὄντως κινεῖσθαι λέγοντες, οἱ δὲ ὄντως ἐστηκότ' εἶναι».

ontological function expressed by the adverb “ὅτωζ”. The last excerpt from the text is followed right away by another which looks symmetrical and whose conclusion is even more overtly linked to language:

«And what about those too who put all things together at one time and divide them at another, whether it’s an unlimited number of elements being united into one and then derived from one, or whether it’s a limited number they’re dividing into and putting things together from – no matter whether they posit the two processes as occurring alternately or going on all the time? All of this would be nonsense if nothing is actually capable of mixing with anything else.»³⁹⁷

Plato seems to be listing all the different thinkers who before him addressed the question concerning being and whose reflections and views he exposed and criticised earlier in the dialogue. They are likely to be identified with Empedocles and Anaxagoras. The key thought is that these thinkers do not escape the fate of the other thinkers mentioned above. These thinkers have various theories about reality. And yet all of them can articulate those theories through the same faculty, which is language. In addition, they assume that what they say really is (as they say). As we have come to know by now, what is expressed in the last two sentences, namely that every theoretical effort relies on language and that any act of language measures against reality, is one and the same fact. As a consequence, the ontological issue solves the problem of how this is possible. It is worth cursorily noting that Plato does not think of the solution to this problem as an investigation of those structures within reality, which are likely to be the greatest kinds, which make it possible to speak regardless of what is spoken of. On the contrary, for any species of phenomena that one makes the objects of his discourse, the relative Form is theoretically needed to account for the meaningfulness/truth of the speeches concerning that Form or those phenomena. The conclusion of the quotation is complementary to

³⁹⁷ *Soph.*252b1-6: «καὶ μὴν καὶ ὅσοι τοτὲ μὲν συντιθέασι τὰ πάντα, τοτὲ δὲ διαιροῦσιν, εἴτε εἰς ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς ἄπειρα εἴτε εἰς πέρας ἔχοντα στοιχεῖα διαιρούμενοι καὶ ἐκ τούτων συντιθέντες, ὁμοίως μὲν ἐὰν ἐν μέρει τοῦτο τιθῶσι γιγνόμενον, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐὰν ἀεὶ, κατὰ πάντα ταῦτα λέγοιεν ἂν οὐδέν, εἴπερ μηδεμία ἔστι σύμμιξις».

the conclusion of the previous passage: if there were no mixing together, then those thinkers would not say anything/they would speak of nothing. The phrase renders “λέγοιεν ἄν οὐδέν” and correctly can be taken to mean “to be nonsense”.³⁹⁸ This assertion is strong and also coherent with what has been said thus far. Irrespective of what actually takes place in the physical domain, one should ask what conditions need to be met in order to describe actual physical processes. The ontological question amounts to that condition.

One misunderstanding could arise, namely to consider this argument as proto-transcendental. In other words, to think that according to Plato ontology deals with the conditions of meaningfulness of the linguistic instrument and after that any philosophical enquiry relates to the pertinent portion of (sensible) reality. This misunderstanding must be averted. We have seen how in a certain sense the contingent events in which things manifests themselves cannot be known, if at all, by looking at Forms. However, I think that the conditions of the employability of the linguistic instrument are so ontologically laden that this implies that for every sensible happening one already needs to presuppose the relevant portion of the eidetic weave that happening defers to. At any rate, any kind of philosophical enquiry would be nonsense without communication. What communication is that? Is it with the kind being or with other kinds? This section attempts to show how according to Plato this is a false opposition. Inasmuch as something communicates with being, so it also entertains relations with other kinds. The comparison with the previous thinkers is crucial because it makes clear the extent to which the communication effectively accounts for the reality of what is put in communication. If something is to be real, it has to be in communication with being. This is the same as being real with respect of what is alleged in one’s discourses. This communication, however, involves a holistic interweaving, which we shall see by the end of this section.

Most ridiculous are those who claim that something cannot be spoken of through the communication of something else’s affection,³⁹⁹ which is to say through the name not of the named thing but the name of something the thing is in communication with. Here, the Eleatic Stranger is talking about

³⁹⁸ Cf. *supra* n. 343.

³⁹⁹ Cf. *Soph.* 252b8-10.

the late-learners, those who claim that one can only say that a man is man or that righteous is righteous. This stance is self-refuting, and results in the charge of greatest ridiculousness, because those late-learners are powerless to to not use some connective terms or phrases like “be”, “separate”, “of others” or “by itself”, etc., and not join them together (συνάπτειν) in discourses.⁴⁰⁰ The force of this argument relies on the assumption that one cannot use these phrases to create meaningful statements in the absence of ontic communication.⁴⁰¹ Therefore, the capacity of speaking as such is grounded on the communication of kinds. This is enough to exclude (i), which is the total absence of communication. The late-learners are ludicrous because they do not understand that one can say something only if what he talks about is put in a plurality of relations. One can say what something is only insofar as one can say what it does communes with or not. Thus, one can say something precisely thanks to and not despite of calling something in virtue of something else’s affection. If there were no communication then no one would be entitled to say anything at all. But if that communication obtains, by necessity a plurality of words can be meaningfully joint together.

As far as (ii) is concerned, which is the option that everything is connected with everything else, the matter is rapidly solved, yet revealingly. Again, this is spelt out by asking whether everything has the capacity (δύναμιν) to intercommunicate (ἐπικοινωνία) with everything else.⁴⁰² This time Theaetetus gathers up enough courage to answer. If everything had communed with everything else, then Motion would rest and Rest would move. This formulation is infelicitous since it suggests that kinds are things which move or stay at rest. This is not discussed in the

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. *Soph.* 252c2-9. The use of the verb “συνάπτειν” recalls *Soph.* 252a9 where Plato used the verb “προσάπτειν” to say that the previous thinkers add in being when they claim that things really move. The act of combining together parts of the discourse in order to create meaning is analogous to the real connection between realities (and, remarkably, this is first exhibited through linguistic consonance).

⁴⁰¹ Cf. J. M. E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, op. cit., p. 59 where the author recognises that semantical atomism is a necessary condition for ontological atomism «for if some words which designate can be combined meaningfully, then some parts of reality are related, and ontological atomism cannot hold». This is indeed true but needs to be pushed a bit further to at least touch on the reason why ontological matters reverberate on semantic matters so as to make the latter a way to understand the former.

⁴⁰² Cf. *Soph.* 252d2-3.

text, but it should be taken to mean that the nature of Motion itself will contemplate being at rest and vice versa or, alternatively, that things which move are also resting and vice versa. This problem cannot be addressed here and it has received a broad discussion.⁴⁰³ Suffice it to say that Plato's thought is that if there is total intercommunication nothing can be said to be A more than not-A even in the case of the strongest necessity which sets against two opposite realities such as Motion and Rest. In this way, the most fundamental dimension of being which is to be determined, in order to represent most certain and defined conditions of identity, would in turn collapse because nothing would be something more than its contrary.

Hence, (ii) is easily disposed of. From the untenability of (i) and (ii), the third option stands out. This is first explained by means of two analogies. With regard to its selective combination reality bears some resemblance to grammar and music.⁴⁰⁴ In grammar and music some elements are connected with some others, whereas some other associations do not work. To linger a bit longer in the analogy, it must be said that reality is not like the actual musical performance or the single

⁴⁰³ Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood*, op. cit., pp. 120-7. The author in general discusses the possible difference in speaking about kinds between attributing some properties to those kinds or considering whatever instantiates one kind also instantiates some other kind (pp. 120-2). It is also worth highlighting the distinction Crivelli proposes with regard to the nature of sentences that he calls "ordinary" and "definitional" readings of sentences (pp. 123-7). This distinction, in particular the use of the term "definitional", shares some fundamental features of my distinction between Indexical and Definitional reference. To neglect the referential value of my distinction, the principal analogy is that the definitional dimension deals only with kinds (Forms) and is meant to give an answer to the What-is question. By contrast, Crivelli's pair of terms as I understand them is mainly concerned with solving the problem of determining under what conditions kinds instantiate properties or instead are identical to some other kind(s) which give a complete description of their nature. I think that there is something correct in Crivelli's definitional reading, yet I do not think this is a matter of identity but rather of combination. In addition, he applies the two readings of sentences to kinds, whereas I present my distinction as the linguistic mirroring of Platonic ontological difference between Forms and things. He does so in order to disambiguate the cases where things are said of kinds as entities from cases where those kinds are defined by their identity relations to other kinds. I am not convinced that this is a real problem, but I shall not argue that here. Cf. also F. Leigh, *Restless Forms and Changeless Causes*, «Proceedings of Aristotelian Society», CXII (2012), pp. 239-61.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. G. Ryle, *Letters and Syllables in Plato*, «Philosophical Review», 69 (1960), pp. 431-51; J. R. Trevakis, *The megista gene and the vowel analogy of Plato*, *Sophist* 253, «Phronesis», 11 (1966), pp. 99-116; S. Rosen, *Plato's Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, op. cit., 245-68.

grammatically correct utterance. Reality is like the fixed rules which constitute the nature of the disciplines and which are given before any single play or utterance. That is why the discourse turns to the necessity of a science that like grammar and music is able to discern the correct relations of communication and exclusion of the fundamental components of reality, i.e. kinds. This science is compared to the techniques to correctly combine the grammatical or musical elements. This gives a hint of the science appointed to discern the selective combination of kinds is, on the one hand, analogous to some technique and, on the other hand, is carried out through language. The very possibility to speak about the world emanates from how the world is and the best way to discern how the world is is by using the linguistic instrument.⁴⁰⁵ Consequently, to be the technician of being and to be that of language amounts to the same theoretical figure.⁴⁰⁶ The science in question is the one whose possessor is able to know both which kinds combine and the most general kinds through which all the others become able to combine (συμμείγνυσθαι δυνατὰ) and by which the other are divided. This science is called “διαλεκτική”, dialectic, the science of those who are free and it divides according to kinds without mistaking the same form for a different one and vice versa.⁴⁰⁷ The text goes on with a final clear statement:

«The person who can do this is then surely well enough equipped to see when one form is spread all through many, each of them standing separately, or when many forms that are different from one another are embraced from the outside by one; or again when one is connected as one through many forms, themselves wholes, or when many forms are completely divided off and separate. This is all a

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Chapter Two pp. 126-7.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Platone, *Sofista*, a cura di Francesco Fronterotta, op. cit., pp. 410-1 n- 218. Naturally, the technician in question is the one who *uses* language. In the language of the *Cratylus* then it would be the dialectician and not the nomothetes/lawgiver cf. *Crat.* 388e-391b.

⁴⁰⁷ For a brilliant analysis of the task of the dialectician and the nature of dialectics cf. M. Dixsaut, *Métamorphoses de la dialectique dans le dialogue de Platon*, Vrin, Paris 2001, pp. 151-207.

matter of knowing how to determine, kind by kind, how things can or cannot combine.»⁴⁰⁸

This quotation is a detailed account of the ontological dynamics, where a variety of significant cases are considered.⁴⁰⁹ There is the one Forms spreading through many, which is for instance any among the most general kinds. The many kinds through which one given form is spread are said to stand separately, i.e. independently. It is also said that many differing Forms are embraced from the outside by one Form. With regard to the weaving metaphor, this language is noticeably precise. In the weaving of a web, the threads are connected in constructing the entire net without damaging the integrity of each thread. The whole of the web is built on the joints which dovetail. In communing with many Forms, any given Form remains a unity, a whole, as do the Forms communed with. Finally, within the ontological weave some Forms are divided off since they do not combine. To know which relations obtain in reality, the dialectician needs to determine for every kind its capacity to communicate with the other kinds.

To recapitulate, if there is no connection at all, nothing can be said (even that nothing can be said). If everything communicates with everything, nothing is A more than it is not-A, so nothing in reality can have any identity whatsoever. The only solution is a selective communication. It would seem that the first option excludes semantic relations, whereas the second option excludes ontological relations. In fact, both options exclude both semantic and ontological relations. If nothing communicates, nothing can be because nothing communicates with being (which is that part of reality, one kind, everything needs to communicate with if it is). Likewise, if everything communicates, nothing can be said because there is no real content one can think of and refer to as he speaks.

⁴⁰⁸ *Soph.* 253d5-e2: «οὐκοῦν ὁ γε τοῦτο δυνατός δρᾶν μίαν ιδέαν διὰ πολλῶν, ἐνὸς ἐκάστου κειμένου χωρίς, πάντα διατεταμένην ἰκανῶς διαισθάνεται, καὶ πολλὰς ἐτέρας ἀλλήλων ὑπὸ μιᾶς ἔξωθεν περιεχομένης, καὶ μίαν αὖ δι' ὅλων πολλῶν ἐν ἐνὶ συνημμένην, καὶ πολλὰς χωρίς πάντα διωρισμένης; τοῦτο δ' ἔστιν, ἢ τε κοινωνεῖν ἕκαστα δύναται καὶ ὅπη μή, διακρίνειν κατὰ γένος ἐπίστασθαι».

⁴⁰⁹ For a clear demonstration that one should not refer this passage back to the method of division used to define the sophist cf. A. Gómez-Lobo, *Plato's Description of Dialectic in the "Sophist" 253 d 1-e2*, «Phronesis», 22 (1977), pp. 29-47.

Hence, either option is impracticable because of its linguistic and ontological untenability. Once again, semantic and ontological issues are so much inextricably tied that the same theoretical solution works for both of them, namely selective communication.

Now, one crucial consequence of the overall argument must be delved into and can be spelt out with a simple question. As we have seen, Forms get their being from the participation with being, but they do not get *what* they are from it. In other words, each Form has to communicate with the kind being in order to be, but this relation in no way bestows its content upon a Form. So, one could ask, what is this being? And what function is it meant to perform? In order to answer this question, one last tile needs to be added, i.e. the analysis of the controversial definition of being that Plato elicits at *Soph.* 247d8-4 and according to which being is nothing but δύναμις. Before examining it at length, let us spend some words on the concept of δύναμις. There are a few concepts in Ancient Greek as wonderfully polysemic as δύναμις. It means “possibility”, “power”, “potency”, “capacity”, “ability” and has fully developed adjectival and verbal forms. Aside from Plato, one can think of the extensive and technical use made by Aristotle.⁴¹⁰ However, the non-philosophical forms of knowledge, especially ancient medicine, also make significant use of the concept.⁴¹¹ As far as Plato is concerned, there are at least two philosophical uses of the concept of δύναμις. First, one can conceive any εἶδος as a specific power that is exercised over things. Second, the very precise definition of being as δύναμις as is discussed in the *Sophist*.⁴¹² We shall

⁴¹⁰ Cf. for example J. J. Cleary, “Powers that Be”: the Concept of Potency in Plato and Aristotle, «Méthexis», (XI), 1998, pp. 19-64.

⁴¹¹ Cf. the classical study of J. Souilhé, *Étude sur le term δύναμις dans le dialogues de Platon*, Alcan, Paris 1919.

⁴¹² This use of the concept of δύναμις is particularly complex since it brings in two relevant aspects which are not under scrutiny in this work. The first aspect is the causal role played by Forms towards things. Cf. the second part of F. Fronterotta, *La notion de δύναμις dans le Sophiste de Platon: κοινωνία entre les forms et μέθεξις du sensible à l'intelligible*, in Michel Crubellier Annick Jaulin David Lefebvre Pierre-Marie Morel (eds.), *DUNAMIS. Autour de la puissance chez Aristote*, Editions Peeters, Louvain-la-Neuve 2008, pp. 187-223:213-223. For an interpretation of the definition in the *Sophist* from a “causalistic” point of view cf. F. Leigh, *Being and Power in Plato's Sophist*, «Apeiron», 43 (2010), pp. 63-85. This interpretation addresses the question from a very different angle but it recognises the mediating nature of being also in the case of things participating in Forms: «If being is understood as *defined* as the power to act and be

exclusively focus on the second sense of δύναμις in order to see how the question concerning the power of the word leads more or less straightforwardly to conceiving being as power.

We have seen that the term “δύναμις” crops up throughout the texts under scrutiny in this section. It has been always associated with the relation of communication between kinds. It emerged from the analysis of the three options that the only suitable solution is the selective communication of kinds with each other. The ultimate ground for this ontological selective communication is to conceive being as *the capacity the kinds have to commune*. This is possible thanks to a specific reading of the following passage:

«I say, then, that a thing genuinely is if it has some capacity, of whatever sort, either to act on another thing, of whatever nature, or to be acted on, even to the slightest degree and by the most trivial of things, and even if it is just the once. That is, what marks off the things that are as being, I propose, is nothing other than *capacity*.»⁴¹³

This quotation can hardly be overestimated. It offers to a plurality of interpretations and has had a remarkable history which appeals to a more straightforward reading that takes it to recognise the ontological weight of

affected, and if Plato is read as treating Forms and their participants as falling within the scope of the definition, as I have argued, then any case of participation is thereby also a case of participation in Being. A thing that possesses the characteristic of being beautiful, e.g., is a being because it participates in Being. It is just that one way to participate in Being is to participate in Beauty» (p. 82).

The second aspect is the modal value of the concept of δύναμις. In remaining within the frame of the relation of participation, one could say that the Form is the power necessarily already set in nature of which things needs to partake if they are to display some identity. The δύναμις also indicates the *possibility* that this display happens. In this sense, the phrase “τυγκάνει ἔχον/ὄν” could express the contingency of the relation. Cf. for example *Phaed.* 102b8-c4. At any rate, the term “δύναμις” seems to harbour diverse modal meanings. Obviously, this is only a suggestion and it will be pushed no further here.

⁴¹³ *Soph.* 247d8-e4: «λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὅποιοι οὖν τινα κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἴτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὀτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἴτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κἂν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπαξ, πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι: τίθεμαι γὰρ ὄρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις».

anything that plays a causal role, however minimal in might be.⁴¹⁴ This reading is not necessarily astray,⁴¹⁵ but it is not the only one available. The complex exegetical move consists in extracting the definition from its context⁴¹⁶ and applying it to the communion of kinds. This move has already been convincingly accomplished.⁴¹⁷ Thus, the first step is to see how well this definition fits with both the notion of selective interrelation

⁴¹⁴ For a causalistic interpretation cf. A. Macé, *Platon, philosophie de l'agir et du p tir*, Academia, Sankt Augustin 2006, pp. 134-9. The causal interpretation has had good fortune among the Stoics, cf. *S. V. F.*, III 203 and II 1047, and in the modern debate as well cf. D. M. Armstrong, *Universals and Scientific Realism*, Vol. II, *A Theory of Universals*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1978, pp. 45-7.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. L. M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, op. cit., pp. 328-30 who states in commenting on a passage from the *Protagoras* (p. 329): «Here the *dynamis* seems to be something like a specific nature which characterizes each sort of being and makes us assign different names to each of them».

⁴¹⁶ For some good discussions of the definition with regard to its argumentative context cf. F. Fronterotta, *L' tre et la participation de l'autre: une nouvelle ontologie dans le Sophiste*, «Les  tudes philosophiques», 3 (1995), pp. 311-53:317-31; L. Brisson, *La d finition de l' tre par puissance un commentaire de Sophiste 247B-249D*, in Michel Crubellier Annick Jaulin David Lefebvre Pierre-Marie Morel (eds.), *DUNAMIS. Autour de la puissance chez Aristote*, op. cit., pp. 173-185; B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, op. cit., pp. 107-143 and for a bibliographical survey of English sources on the controversies concerning whether Plato subscribes to the definition cf. p. 109 n. 9. Cf. also M. Dixsaut, *Plato-Nietzsche. L'autre mani re de philosopher*, Fayard, pp. 87-111.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. F. Fronterotta, *La notion de δ ναμις dans le Sophiste de Platon: κοινωνία entre les forms et μ θεξις du sensible   l'intelligible*, in Michel Crubellier Annick Jaulin David Lefebvre Pierre-Marie Morel (eds.), *DUNAMIS. Autour de la puissance chez Aristote*, op. cit., p. 203: «Etant donn  que (1) l' tre est d fini suivant une δ ναμις τοϋ ποιεΐν καὶ τοϋ π σκειν ("est" tout ce qui est dou  de la capacit  d'agir et de p tir), que (2) la communication des genres est  tablie   partir d'une δ ναμις τοϋ κοινωνεΐν (les genres communiquent entre eux dans la mesure o  ils poss dent une δ ναμις de communiquer), et que (3) la communication elle-m me est con ue comme une forme d'action et d'affection d termin es par une capacit  lors de la rencontre entre des termes diff rents ("communiquer", " tre communiqu " ou "subir la communication" sont des formes d'agir et de p tir), il faut alors conclure que la capacit  d'agir et de p tir qui d finit l' tre de ce qui est, d finit aussi la structure de la communication, dont elle constitue la condition essentielle et d termine le d veloppement (c'est ce qui est dou  d'une capacit  de communiquer et de subir la communication, c'est- -dire une capacit  d'agir et de p tir, qui communique ou qui subit la communication; mais tout ce qui poss de une capacit  d'agir et de p tir est r ellement; donc, tout ce qui peut communiquer est r ellement). De ce point de vue, l' tre de ce qui est co incide avec le fondement ontologique de la κοινωνία».

of kinds and with the structure of λόγος as was presented in the last section.⁴¹⁸

In the first case, the capacity to act and to be affected is associated with the capacity of communicating. To be is to affect and to be affected. If one applies this definition to the scope of Forms, this affection cannot be an event since this requires spatio-temporal development. Therefore, it must be a structural condition that relates all the items involved and that by necessity requires a plurality. The best way to interpret the issue is by connecting the combination of each kind with the others to the capacity of acting and being affected. In this way, for any kind to participate in being means to have the capacity to combine with other kinds. We have seen that the combination of kinds cannot be horizontally pervasive, otherwise nothing could have its own identity. This does not mean that some kinds do not communicate with being. Every kind needs to communicate with being in order to be, and this is the same as establishing further communications with other kinds. To put it better, every kind *exists*, i.e. is a substantive component of reality (though, as we have seen, this cannot be spatio-temporal existence) insofar as it partakes of the kind being and *therefore* is put in selective communications with other kinds. To be is the same as to exist as one among many kinds put in selective communication. This way of putting the matter makes sense only if the kind being is distinguished from the conditions of identity that in each case every kind represents. For being confers upon every kind the *capacity* to combine, but the actual combinations are not determined by the kind being. The combinations are determined in each case by *what* the kinds involved are. So, for instance both Motion and Rest are, which means that they have the capacity to combine with some other kinds. The eidetic “fact” that Motion does not combine with Rest can only derive from the fact that *what* Motion and Rest are does not allow their combination. As a result, whatever is in motion is by the strongest necessity never at rest (at least in the same respect). Likewise, in the case of Theaetetus, he can only be sitting or standing, and one can be right or wrong about this event first because both sitting and standing are, then because they are different realities and finally because

⁴¹⁸ This way to read the definition also establishes interesting connections with *Phdr.* 270c-d and *Parm.* 135c, which unfortunately cannot be analysed here.

they do not combine.⁴¹⁹ Before seeing to what extent this notion of being as capacity of communing adapts to the nature of λόγος, we need to understand why it is consistent with Plato's metaphysics. Every kind needs

⁴¹⁹ This formulation remains vague with regard to the distinction between merely being different (something that each kind is with respect to each other by participating in the kind difference/otherness cf. *Soph.* 256d11-e4) and not combining. So, "Theaetetus is a human being" is as true as "Theaetetus is an animal" is. The kinds Human being and animal combine, but at the same time are two distinct/different kinds, i.e. either of them is *not* the other. It could be suggested that in order to have false statements the non-combination of kinds is required. In other words, one can be wrong about things only if what he says does not combine with what is the case with regard to that thing. So, for example sitting does not combine with standing and then if one says that Theaetetus is sitting while in fact he is standing, one is wrong. However, if we consider "Theaetetus is talking", he could be speaking while sitting or standing. Of course, talking does not combine with being quiet just like sitting excludes standing. I see that this is highly interpretative, but I think that one can say that Theaetetus is talking *regardless* of whether he is standing or sitting because the kinds talking, sitting and standing are *different* from each other. Therefore, also in the following sense the kinds ground the truth of propositions concerning sensible things: if Theaetetus is both talking and standing the difference between the statements "Theaetetus is talking" and "Theaetetus is standing" is grounded in the difference between the kinds talking and standing, also when they combine. This, however, opens a new problem. It is easy to interpret the combination of kinds as that of Human being and Animal, i.e. essential determination. Though, this is dangerously reminiscent of genus-species relations. Anyway, what about talking, sitting and standing? We know that sitting and standing do not combine and we know that one can talk while sitting or while standing. Does it mean that the kind talking combines both with the kinds sitting and standing? I am not completely sure, if at all, about the issue. I have a proclivity for a positive answer for at least two reasons. First, this is consistent with the last section's analysis according to which the συμπλοκή of Forms is a condition for truths that obtain contingently. Second, if we consider another example like the relation between human beings and virtue, it is nearly impossible either to admit that every human being is virtuous or that the kinds Man and Virtue do not combine. It seems that with regard to sensible things combination of kinds means possibility and non-combination of kinds means impossibility, whereas with regard to themselves all the relations are necessary insofar as they always remain as they are. This last interpretation also better explains the modal nuance I think is implicit in the notion of δύναμις. However, this interpretation faces the difficulty of being unable to discern the essential traits from the unessential ones: does the kind Virtue combine with the kind Justice as it combines with the kind Human being, given that within experience one man can be virtuous, whereas just deeds can only be virtuous? One possible answer could be that Human being combines with both Virtue and what is opposed to it (which is the specific part of the kind difference which is opposed to virtue), whereas Justice does not. At any rate, all of this remains highly hypothetical. Most likely, the genuine Platonic interest is understanding how the eidetic dimension is structured, partially irrespective of the consequences. Cf. L. M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, op. cit., pp. 348-50.

to participate in or commune with being in order to be. To commune with being means that one kind establishes selective relations with other kinds. The selection of relations derives from the kind's autonomous conditions of identity and nothing else. Every kind can combine insofar as it is and the fact that it is is given by the peculiar combination it performs towards the other kinds. This is the ultimate ontological ground for the most fundamental nature of Forms, namely that of being perfectly determined: *any kind is insofar as all the relations with every other reality are given once and for all*. In other words, for the very fact of being, a nature that is supposed to be fully determinate automatically combines or not with the other natures. There is no aspect of its nature that remains obscure. All the kinds are and thereby selectively combine, no relation remains suspended. All eidetic relations hold *ab aeterno* and in this lies the perfect determination belonging to every εἶδος. This also makes the value of the most general kinds clearer: one can never know the totality of natures in detail, but thanks to those greatest kinds one has cognisance of the fact that each nature is (and then establishes selective relations), is the same as itself and is different from all other natures. This strongly coheres with the nature of the argument against absolute not-being because for whatever the nature enquired into might be, one will always know that it is, that is the same as itself and different from everything else.

Since the nature that makes communication possible is one among the natures put in communication by it, one difficulty could lie in the first communication with being itself. What would that first communication be, if any capacity of combining issues from that first communication? This objection, however, misses the point, and in fact sheds light on Plato's most profound conception of reality. There is no time, not even logical priority, in which Forms commune with being and then selectively combine with each other. All the kinds and their relations are given together, as a structured whole in such a way that being comes to mean the relationality intrinsic to web of Forms. Those Forms establish relations according to their nature which structurally demands combination.⁴²⁰ In this sense, the kind being is that very special kind which represents the ontological "structuredness" of reality.

⁴²⁰ Cf. *Soph.* 257a8-9.

Now we need to see why this view is also apt to justify the nature of λόγος and conversely how the λόγος helps to understand the inner sense of the communication of kinds. Keeping in mind the definition of being (the capacity to act and to be affected), it is clear that there is being whenever there is a connection. This was also the nature of λόγος itself. As we have seen, there must always be a minimal conjunction of two terms and the result is *an ostension of being*. At the linguistic level, there is truth and ostension of being only if there is a relation just like on the ontological plane there is being wherever there is structural communication. From this textual evidence, I present a twofold proposition:

- 1) This weaving structure common to λόγος and being is that which makes λόγος function in speaking of reality.
- 2) The relation between statements and reality is not merely a matter of correspondence. Instead, the kind being is the kind that represents the *intrinsically logical nature* of reality. In other words, it is the kind being that makes reality at once speakable since it is the kind that is responsible for the articulation of reality itself.

Impressively, to be and to make sense (in the precise sense of discussed throughout this chapter) become coextensive. In this way, there is no need to justify how statements are able to hook on the world because the truth of the statements appears to be the natural continuation of the ontological truth of being. It needs to be said that this does not mean that reality is caught by language literally, as Cratylean naturalism would accept.⁴²¹ This notion of being detaches the sense of discourse from the present utterance and the immediate form of expression. An example is the main argument of the *Sophist*, namely the nature of not-being. There is a distance from language and reality as in the case of those who mistake not-being for absolute not-being when the only ontologically legitimate referent for “not-being” is the kind of difference. The eidetic unity of nature which characterises things that share in it may also be thought of as keeping together the number of utterances of the same statement which describes

⁴²¹ It is the doctrine according to which the name *is* the thing, or at least is an inner property of the thing, including the phonetic appearance. This doctrine has been ascribed to Cratylus in the homonymous dialogue cf. *Crat.* 383-4.

the relation of one thing with one nature and that if true is true for any of those utterances. The connection between being and language that is granted by Plato's relational ontology is never the pure coincidence of uttered statements and reality, but rather the more highly developed ontological view that language and reality are not the same but that are inevitably delivered to each other. Some discussion and evaluation of this way of interpreting Plato's ontology is reserved to the conclusive section of this chapter and of this work.

4) Concluding remarks on Plato's notion of being in the *Sophist*

Aside from the intrinsic difficulty of the concepts and texts under scrutiny, the main difficulty of this chapter has been the attempt to follow one of a number of paths, particularly that which leads from the question concerning the power of the word to the conception of being as power. The difficulty lies in the fact that each text is a strictly tied texture and any part receives its sense thanks to its place in the whole structure. Perhaps, something like Plato's own theory on reality. For this reason, the operation that I attempted is structurally condemned to partiality, insofar as the choice of selecting one thread assumes its hidden relations to the other. Any interpreter needs both to assume the consistency of what he says with what he does not say and to recognise the partiality of the result of his efforts. However, the textual coherence that each interpreter is fully responsible for is that of his *own* text.

Therefore, before drawing some conclusions from the last two sections I wish to very briefly highlight the connections of the relational ontology of kinds with both the exiting from the coalescence view and the functional and structural features that I labelled the Physiology and the Anatomy of εἶδος. The coalescence view considers reality, thought and language as basically the same dimension. Whatever is real coincides with its veracious presence to the mind and is entirely articulated in language. I interpret Plato's main goal as the attempt to save the purest clarity and the untamed power of reality from all the paradoxes yielded by the coalescence view. The result is not an ontology of particular substances. Instead, it privileges the common structures that traverse one's experiences and which better correspond to the true nature of language. Consequently, Plato accepts the

fracture between language and reality, thereby allowing for falsehood, but he retains the strongest cohesion between the two dimensions. Nowadays, we would, perhaps, consider Plato's reality *as structured like a language*. Anyway, it emerged that Plato tries to "ontologise" the world, which is to give a stable ground to everything that appears *and* to make the use of language as the instrument that reveals being possible. All this is possible thanks to a very special part of reality: the kind being. Being is that part of reality which is the ground of all the relations established by the kinds and has two fundamentally related results: firstly, being is that in virtue of which all the natures express *what* they are since the latter prescribes what each kind combines with. By embedding each kind in a web of relations, being is able to overcome the unity and simplicity of each Form without betraying them since *what* each Form is ultimately becomes a matter of its selective relationality with the others. Secondly, this ontic side of the function of the kind being also makes each Form a logical subject. If it were not for the kind being, as we have seen, nothing could be said. I think that all this relies on a single, though huge, and profoundly Greek presupposition: that to be is to be determinate. Thus, the kind being is that determinate part of reality which lets everything else unfold their own determination. This makes sense only within an eidetic ontology. In a world populated of objects or facts, which one of them could ever be responsible for the determination and describability of all of them? This would hardly make sense at all.

One could ask: why does the full determination that all the kinds have through the kind being (and, to tell the truth, through the other μέγιστα γένη as well) entail their describability? On the one hand, this is considered by Plato as a given. The λόγος is an instrument which has a certain nature, function and excellence; therefore, it again depends on how reality is made: among the kinds there is the nature of discourse which is predisposed by nature to speak about reality. On the other hand, and maybe this is the main residual of the coalescence view, the web of Forms is a structure which is both *absolutely intelligible and relational*, in a word, something that, according to Plato's sensibility, is that which most of all offers to cognition. The two requisites (intelligibility and relationality) play crucial roles. As we have seen at the end of the second section of this chapter, kinds ground both the identity of things and the truth of the statements

concerning them. For instance, Theaetetus is *really* sitting only if he displays the Form of sitting and the statement “Theaetetus is sitting” is true not just because Theaetetus is sitting, but also because in the statement a kind is named in such a way that it gives the condition of identity according to which the statement can be *de facto* true. The proof is that one can (meaningfully) say that Theaetetus is sitting when he is in fact standing because the one who utters the statement is naming a fixed conditions of identity that are what they are regardless of any person who is sitting or standing. All of this is possible because Forms are both objectively real and intelligible. Moreover, as far as the relationality requirement is concerned, given that being is the relationality of the entire frame of reality, and that discourse is by nature thought of as a minimal weave, it emerges how in its essence the λόγος *reproduces* the relationality of reality. This does not mean that for everything that the λόγος says with truth there needs to be a correspondent part of reality. On the contrary, it means that *by reproducing the fundamental trait of reality, which is being, the λόγος becomes able to reveal, always partially and from a specific angle, reality itself*. Plato separates reality and language and sees, maybe for the first time in Western philosophy a notion of absolute independence from cognition (which thereby becomes inevitably instrumental as can be evinced from the second chapter of this work). At the same time, though, this move is so groundbreaking that Plato develops it in a direction that is partly our own and partly different.

We now come to the Physiology and the Anatomy of εἶδος, which figure as the criteria of Plato’s ontologisation: each reality must perform the fourfold function and present some very specific anatomical features. I think that this harmonises with Plato’s relational ontology. With particular regard to the Physiology of εἶδος, we have seen that the relationality granted by the kind being is the condition of the identity of kinds. Therefore, it is only thanks to being that Forms can work as sources of identity, knowledge, definition and reference within the sensible world. One needs a perfect web of related items in order to see that a certain display is a display of some determinate identity and that this identity works as the ground of knowledge of that identity, to define what something is and to refer to something that takes it on. As far as the Anatomy of εἶδος is concerned, many of its features seem to be consistent

with the account of Plato's notion of being in the *Sophist*. As we have seen, the extra-temporality of the Forms is required by the peculiar concept of relationality in question. The perfection of the Forms, however, requires the completeness of relations that do not leave anything obscure as to what each kind combines with. Unity and independence are themselves assumed since each kind is one and inalienably "possesses" its nature. All of this suggests that Plato's metaphysical thinking flows into the ontology of the *Sophist*.

To consider the issue concerning the dual nature of reality, I put it along the following lines: on the one side, there are the truly existent conditions of identity that each Form represents; on the other, the countless number of events in which those conditions are contingently and qualifiedly displayed. Events or things are not just nothing, but they lack any identity of their own. So, for instance, if there were not the kinds Man, Sitting and all those which ground the phenomenal "being" of Theaetetus, he could not be anything at all. However, the contingent, epistemically feasible, transient and unique agglomerate which comes to be the actual Theaetetus is totally heteronomous as to its identity, but nonetheless it is something. How is this connected to the linguistic dimension? At the end of the second section of this chapter, it emerged that the truth-value of the statements regarding events and things are contingent and they thereby cannot be found at the level of kinds. Nevertheless, as we have seen, all statements concerning things or events are grounded in the interweaving of Forms. Significantly, the contingency and uncertainty of the sensible domain can also be expressed by the "semantic" fact that the truth-grounds of the statements concerning it does not coincide with their truth-value, or, more correctly, that does not provide the knower with their truth-value. What about the kinds? This way of viewing the whole matter seems to suggest that the metaphysical priority of Forms over things is reflected in this context as well: *any statement concerning kinds describes the conditions of identity which make it possible; as a consequence, that which grounds the statement's truth is also that in relation to which one can know its truth*. In other words, the same portion of reality provides the truth-ground and the truth-value of a statement. I take this point to be coherent with Plato's dual conception of reality. This helps to better understand that Plato's theory is not a dualism *stricto sensu*. Instead, it appears to be a dual

evaluation of the capacity to attain truth. The linguistic means is the sole privileged instrument that from experience leads to essence. And the latter bears on the former so intensively that *one can never speak simply of things*. Forms are always involved.

Οὐσία and γένεσις are two modes of being present, namely transcendent and transient. By transcendent I mean that way of being which systematically evades from the singular actual presence within experience and is by itself. If one speaks of οὐσία or γένεσις he is speaking of two aspects of the same reality, i.e. what one can be absolutely sure about and what at the end remains irretrievably uncertain. Here, the essentially pragmatic nature of Plato's thought stands out. It is brought forth by the question of how one is to reckon with the necessity of what is real and what one can do and rely on. In turn, this is determined by the way reality is present to us. Plato distinguished two sorts of presence and made one the ground of the other. One suggestion I cannot expound upon in this work, is to conceive the value of the verb "be" as *presential*. The concept of presential grants a number of benefits. It is minimally and inevitably objectivistic since presence is always *of* something. It is shared by what is transient and what is transcendent since *ex hypothesi* these are two sorts of presence. And most importantly, it accounts for the fact that the transcendent presence of Forms grounds the transient presence of things because the way of being of Forms is that of an *intelligible absolute present*.

This notion of presential value of being has interesting consequences in the case of not-being as well. To start with falsehood, reality needs to have an articulate structure for one to be wrong *about it* since in falsity he refers to it without exactly reproducing its internal relations. At any rate, false beliefs are not nothing. In a slogan, I would say that falsity never is, it just happens. This is to say that false beliefs do not present real events involving things or actual relations between kinds as their content; nonetheless, those beliefs are insofar as they take place as cognitive acts, thereby making experience the place where both right and wrong beliefs take place and consequently raising the need for an external reality that enables one to discern which is which. This cannot be done without the kind of difference. Each false statement, as we have seen, is grounded in the kind of difference since what is said of a subject is different from what

that subject actually participates in. And yet the *situation* depicted by the false statement, for instance the flying Theaetetus, is only envisaged by whoever entertains such a false belief and is not an actual part of what really happens. What about absolute not-being? I believe that the following few lines are wonderfully explicative:

«So do you see that it's impossible, correctly, to express or to say or to think what is not in and by itself; it's unthinkable, unsayable, inexpressible, and unaccountable.»⁴²²

Within Plato's relational ontology, to be means to be a kind. Not just this. Something needs both to be a kind and to participate in the kind being which *eo ipso* is to be inserted in the global interweaving of the selectively combining kinds. Hence, the ontological question concerning not-being is not reduced to how one can meaningfully utter "not-being". The question is rather: is there some unique and fixed nature which is τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό? This question opens to two orders of implications. First, one could ask: can there be some nature by itself that does not partake of the kind being and that therefore does not mix with anything else? The answer is no because this hypothesised nature would be totally unthinkable and unsayable.⁴²³ Second, one could wonder: is there a kind, which has a unique and independent nature, of what is *by itself* unthinkable, unsayable, inexpressible and unaccountable? Again, the answer is no. Being, in virtue of its very nature, entails thinkability and sayability and therefore, whatever comes to presence, however minimal, is already delivered to thought and language. As a result, the actual not-being is the pure absence of determination and sense and has no access to presence.

I wish to end this work with a further provocation. Being and λόγος are coextensive in the sense of the onto-logisation introduced and discussed in this chapter. Does this provide a solution for the dilemma of participation?

⁴²² *Soph.* 238c8-11: «συννοεῖς οὖν ὡς οὔτε φθέγξασθαι δυνατόν ὀρθῶς οὔτ' εἰπεῖν οὔτε διανοηθῆναι τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἀδιανόητόν τε καὶ ἄρρητον καὶ ἄφθεγκτον καὶ ἄλογον;».

⁴²³ This does not run into paradox as the sophist would wish because the syntagm αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό suggests that this quotation can be read through the lens of the ontology of kinds (even though the context presents the paradox of the sophist, many layers are mixed as is usual in Plato).

In other words, does the “logicity” of being as the ground of any statement concerning things and Forms give an answer as to what is the relation between things and Forms, given also that throughout this work things have always been thought of as radically “insubstantial”? Obviously, this issue would require a work on its own. However, I think that all I have argued for points to showing how for Plato being implies perfect cognisability and as a consequence how the partial cognisability of things could *exactly* be the same as their participation in Forms.

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