

Innovation and Continuity

The Battle of Gods and Giants, *Sophist* 245–249

LESLEY BROWN

PROLOGUE

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The battle of gods and giants forms the theme of this essay at more than one level. Plato's *Sophist* has been something of a battleground for interpreters of his later philosophy. Some have made bold claims for revolutionary methods and results, deriving in part from Plato's new-found interest in philosophy of language, in part from his post-*Parmenides* rethinking of the theory of Forms. Others have insisted on greater continuity of both method and doctrine with the approaches of the middle dialogues, and strongly reject interpretations which represent Plato as abandoning metaphysics for logic or philosophy of language, or which see him backtracking on central theses such as the unchangeability of Forms, or self-predication. Again, the replacement of Socrates as main speaker by a stranger from Elea may be interpreted as bringing major changes in both method and doctrine; some have associated it with an abandonment of genuine dialectic for a more dogmatic laying out of philosophical theses.

Here I focus on the section of the *Sophist* whose high point is represented by Plato, through his chief speaker, the Stranger, as a *Gigantomachia*, a debate about being between materialists and immaterialists, or so-called Friends of the Forms. The materialists, cast in the role of 'giants', hold that only the material (what is or has a body) is or exists. Their opponents, the 'gods', labelled 'Friends of the Forms', take the opposite view; they accord the title 'being' only to the immaterial, to

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'certain intelligible Forms', and relegate to the status of *genesis* (coming to be) those material, changing things the giants champion. In this section, in which the Stranger takes on each party in turn and aims at a *rap-prochement* between them, Plato takes what may be thought of as first steps in ontology, in reflective discussion and argument about what there is and about how one should approach the question of what there is. There is considerable disagreement over the upshot of the whole debate, and especially over whether the discussion of the Friends of the Forms' views concludes with the Stranger advocating a radical departure from the treatment of Forms in the middle dialogues: both Owen and Moravcsik advocate a reading whereby the immutability of the Forms is abandoned.¹ Here I re-examine the *Gigantomachia*, asking what philosophical moves and results it contains. In doing so, I consider what use Plato makes of two innovations in approach which can be detected in the later dialogues, and in particular in the *Sophist*.

The first innovation I label the 'new dialectic'. I use this somewhat grandiose title for a feature common in Plato's later works, but especially prominent in this part of the *Sophist*: the examination of views not of those participating in the conversation, as in the more familiar dialectic of the early and middle dialogues, but of named or unnamed persons whose views are discussed and criticized in their absence. It is often remarked that the Stranger's manner of proceeding is more dogmatic and less inquiring than that of Socrates; that he agrees to discuss the matter in hand in a conversation, rather than a set piece, only on condition he has a pliant and co-operative interlocutor (217d1–3)—which Theaetetus, and later the Young Socrates, duly prove to be. Yet our same Stranger is introduced as one who will visit and question (*elenkhein*) some kind of *theos elenktikos*, god of questioning or refutation (216b5–6).² I shall argue that the *Sophist*, especially in the section on being, does present genuine dialectic or examination of views, even though it does so at second hand. Not that this is novel in the *Sophist*: it is also found in the *Theaetetus*, where there is no pretence that the chief views Socrates challenges in part 1 are beliefs held by the participants, Theaetetus and Theodorus. Just as the true main contenders in the *Theaetetus* are Protagoras and Heraclitus (together with wilder flux theorists, as Theodorus describes them at *Tht.* 179c–180b, and later the

¹ G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present', *Monist*, 50 (1966), 317–40; J. M. E. Moravcsik, 'Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 14 (1962), 23–78.

² E. Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address: From Herodotus to Lucian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3. 4. 1, shows how some idiosyncrasies in forms of address used by Socrates in the Platonic corpus are shared by the Eleatic Stranger and the Athenian Stranger, but by no other interlocutors. This may suggest that Plato did not intend so great a change in *persona* as has generally been assumed.

anonymous author of the theory labelled 'Socrates' dream'), so the stranger takes on several absent opponents in the *Sophist*, most notably in the section discussing theories of being.

The second innovation I label the 'formal approach'. A salient feature of the *Sophist* in particular is its focus on language and its increased use of the formal mode in argumentation, by which I mean attention to forms of expression, to linguistic items, and to certain linguistic usages. It is not just that one of the *Sophist*'s chief topics is that of falsehood, especially of false *logos*, necessitating the close attention to language which culminates in the path-breaking account of the nature of *logos* or statement. It is rather that time and again in the *Sophist* problems are raised and arguments are pursued with explicit attention to, and reliance on, words or expressions, on 'what we say' and on 'what we mean when we say . . .'. The phenomenon is well known to readers of the *Sophist*, and a handful of examples will suffice to illustrate it. Right at the beginning of the work, the problem to be discussed is put in the formal mode: do these three *onomata* (words/names)—sophist, statesman, philosopher—refer to one, two, or three different persons? (217a). The central section is introduced (236e3) with a problem about falsehood and images (in terms of which the participants hope to define the sophist), put in a strikingly complex way: *The problem is and always has been: how should one talk when saying or judging that falsehood really is, and not get caught up in contradiction?* The difficulty is that of the right way of speaking about falsehood. The *aporiai* about *to mē on* ('what-is-not') which follow target the expression, asking: to what should one apply the *onoma* 'what-is-not'? (237c1–4), and conclude that anyone who tries to condemn what-is-not as unutterable or unsayable gets caught up in multiple contradiction (238d–239b). The investigation into being is pursued via attention to what various theorists mean when they say two things *are*, or only one thing *is*—I shall return to this later. Attention to ways of speaking persists throughout the discussion of the greatest kinds, their identity, and their interrelations. Time and again proofs that two kinds are distinct appeal to what can and cannot be said, and to what we mean when we say. . . . A clear example is the proof that the kinds *being* and *the same* are distinct from one another: 'if *being* and *the same* meant nothing different, then in saying that change and stability both are we should be speaking of them both as being the same' (255b11–c1). Famously, the apparent contradiction that 'change is the same and is not the same' is explained by the Stranger saying 'we were not speaking in the same way when we said that it was the same and not the same' and going on to elucidate the difference by a philosophically revealing paraphrase.

This language-centred approach is of great interest and importance in

the *Sophist*, though it must always be remembered that Plato is interested not in language as such but in what it reveals. The manner in which Plato treats language as philosophically revealing is certainly novel in the *Sophist*, despite the earlier *Cratylus*, and deserves fuller study. But in this essay I argue against attempts to give a 'formal' reading to some key points in the *Gigantomachia*, and in favour of a more 'traditional' reading, in particular of the Stranger's proposal that to be is to be capable of affecting or being affected, the *dunamis* proposal.

THE GIGANTOMACHIA IN CONTEXT

The contest between the materialists, or giants, and the Friends of the Forms is the culmination of the inquiry into being, which is sandwiched between the section containing puzzles about not being, or what-is-not, and the constructive section of the *Sophist*. The latter takes its start from a further puzzle, ascribed to certain 'late learners', about how one thing can be called by many names, how something can be what it also is not (e.g. how a man can be good when man is different from good). From here the greatest kinds are introduced with a view to showing just how they combine: just how a kind such as change can be something (e.g. the same) which it also is not.

The Stranger introduces the problems about being with a reference to earlier theorists, among whom we can recognize—though they are unnamed—at least Heraclitus and Empedocles. He claims that all these earlier theorists—whose views are characterized in a colourful, debunking manner—proceeded without due regard for whether their audience followed what they were saying (243a8–b1), and insists that they be called to account. Theaetetus catches his drift: 'It's clear you're saying that *to on*—being—should be the first thing we investigate, to find out what those who say it think they mean by it.' The inquiry that follows could be described as asking for the meaning, or extra-linguistic correlate, of an expression or expressions, or less formally, what the expression stands for. Plato does not confine his attention to the participle expression '*to on*'; he focuses attention on any and every form of the verb '*einai*', with special interest in the question 'What are you saying about a thing when you say that it *is*?' (e.g. 243e2). Later (e.g. 246c5–6), the abstract noun '*ousia*' (being) is used to designate the subject of inquiry, with apparently no significant difference in sense. This focus on what is meant when people say of one or more things (or types of thing) that they are (i.e. exist) may be seen as an early example of what Quine called 'translating [ontological debate] upwards into a semantical controversy'. Quine hastens to add: 'we must not jump

to the conclusion that what there is depends on words'—and Plato would whole-heartedly agree.³

How should we understand the key terms '*on*', '*einai*', '*ousia*', etc.? It is pretty clear that the existential meaning of 'to be' is to the fore.⁴ Plato presents the theories as ontologies, as theories about what there is, what sorts of things exist. However, I have generally avoided the translation 'exist', using instead the plain 'is', odd and obsolete though it sounds. One reason for this choice is that Plato often uses 'to be something' interchangeably with 'to be'. A second reason is that although in most cases the theories are presented as claims about what exists, or what everything that exists can be reduced to, this is not so in the case of the Friends of the Forms' theory. The Friends of the Forms are not represented as seeking to reduce everything to Forms; rather, they recognize grades of reality (as we might call it), such that the lower, what is changing and material, is denied the title of being.

The early part of the investigation into theories of *to on* or *onta*, the encounter between dualists and monists, cannot be discussed here. It is clear that the arguments do not represent a serious attempt to understand what the theories in question were driving at; for instance, Parmenides' claim that the one is like a well-rounded sphere (where the simile is designed to convey the notion of homogeneity and absence of differentiation) is taken literally, and he is charged with giving his 'one being' a middle and extremities, hence a multiplicity of parts (244e ff.). After dealing with the dualist and monist theories, the *Gigantomachia* is introduced by a contrast between those who make precise reckonings of being and not-being and those who speak in a different way. This reminds us of 242c6, where the Stranger promised to discuss 'attempts to determine how many and of what kind (*posa kai poia*) are the things that are'. It is now clear that the dualist and monist theories were those which say how many, which make precise reckonings; while the theories which now follow speak 'in a different way' about being—that is, say of what kind it is, what it is like.

³ W. V. O. Quine, 'On What There Is', in *idem*, *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 16.

⁴ 244c8–9, 245c11–d2, 247b1, e3, are all places where 'exists' (or a cognate) is the natural meaning. As well as the plain 'is', the expression 'is something' is often used (e.g. at 246e5, 247a9). M. Bordt, 'Der Seinsbegriff in Platons Sophistes', *Theologie und Philosophie*, 66 (1991), argues against reading the occurrences of '*esti*' in this section as existential, but he is operating with a very narrowly defined definition of the existential. In L. Brown, 'Being in the *Sophist*: A Syntactical Enquiry', *OSAP*, 4 (1986), 44–70, I argue against G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on Not-being', in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), that the complete use of '*esti*' is prominent in *Soph.* and that it can properly be read as existential, provided we accept that for Plato there is a close connection between the complete and the incomplete '*esti*', closer than the modern distinction between the 'is' of existence and the predicative 'is' allows.

(Neither party, we note, paused to ask the vital question: what is being?) From this point Plato stages his mock battle between the two opposing theories, materialism and immaterialism. Now you might think that each of these theories, the materialism of the giants and the immaterialism of the gods, should count as a monistic theory, since each of them holds that there is only one kind of being. Modern materialism is in this sense a monistic theory, in opposition to dualism, which maintains two basic kinds of substance, mind and matter. (Modern idealism is likewise a monistic theory, but is a very different kind of theory from the immaterialism of the gods or Friends of the Forms; the Friends of the Forms are not idealists, since their being (the Forms) is not mind-dependent.) On Plato's strict version of monism, however, neither theory would count as monist, since each admitted a plurality of its favoured kind of entity, bodies and Forms respectively.

THE GIANTS

What do the so-called giants believe? At 246a7–b3 the materialist position is sketched with a striking comparison to the giants' forceful attempts to haul the gods down from the heavens. It is expressed in three theses. The giants (i) insist that only that which offers contact and touch, (ii) mark off⁵ body and being as the same, and (iii) refuse to allow that anything that has no body is (i.e. exists). (ii) and (iii) can be assimilated, though technically (ii) asserts an identity between being and body (i.e. between being and being corporeal), while (iii) makes corporeality only a necessary condition of being. (i), however, is apparently a stronger version of the materialist thesis, since it insists on tangibility as a necessary condition of being. Tangibility is not always considered a necessary property of matter. For the dualist Descartes the defining property of matter was merely extension; while the materialist Hobbes held (as the ancient atomists did) that a thing such as a spirit could be corporeal without being 'visible or palpable'. However, if matter is not to be identical with space (as Descartes' view seems to suggest), but must in some sense be a 'space-filler', then it might seem that it must be at least *in principle* tangible. We must ask whom the giants represent; but first let us see how their theory fares.

With Theaetetus as their spokesman, the giants admit (1) that there are mortal creatures; (2) these are ensouled bodies; hence (3) soul is something. But (4) souls may be just, or unjust, or wise, and so on, and (5) it is

⁵ 'horizesthai' which Owen ('Plato on Not-being', n. 14) interprets as 'define'.

by the possession and presence of justice that just souls are just; so, since (6) whatever can come to be present in a thing is something, (7) justice, wisdom and the rest *are* (i.e. exist). But even giants agree (8) that justice and so on are not corporeal, so (9) some things are (i.e. exist) which are not bodies.

In interpreting this argument against the giants, we have to choose between a purely formal and a more substantive reading of its key premisses, (5) and (6). (Premiss (3), conceding that soul exists, they can accommodate, since they hold that the soul has, i.e. is, a body.) Should we read (5) as a substantive, explanatory claim, or in a more formal, quasi-tautologous manner? If we opt for the latter, the 'formal' reading, then Plato's choice of terms would be irrelevant; the Stranger would simply be arguing from 'X is F' (or perhaps 'X comes to be F') that F comes to be in X, hence, by (6), F is. This would license an entity corresponding to every predicate expression, not merely those such as 'wise', 'just', 'unjust', but also 'popular', 'unpopular', 'imaginary', and so on. But of course we should be reluctant to gloss 'Socrates became unpopular' as 'Unpopularity came to be present in Socrates', since another metaphysically more basic account (in terms of people coming to dislike Socrates) is available. Though the argument signally fails to raise the question of which predicate expressions pick out genuine entities, it must surely assume that not all do. It is fair to assume that premiss (5) resembles some found in early dialogues, and is intended as an explanatory, quasi-causal claim, true for predicate expressions such as 'just' and 'wise', but not for others such as 'popular' or 'imaginary'.⁶ Note that this argument unobtrusively introduces, in premiss (6), a criterion, or at least a sufficient condition of being an entity, one whose connection with the one the Stranger trumpets in the *dunamis* proposal will be addressed below.

Who are the giants? And why do they capitulate so feebly? The reader is bound to feel that the materialists have given in too quickly in conceding immaterial entities such as justice. Indeed, Plato encourages such a thought by making the Stranger start by warning Theaetetus that they must pretend the giants are 'better' than they in fact are, and that their discussion must be with these 'better' giants (246d4–e3). And he concludes by remarking how the true giants sprung from the dragon's teeth would

⁶ For earlier parallels, see *Prt.* 332b–c, where both the dative form 'by temperance' and the preposition 'hupo', indicating a causal role, are used; *Hp. mai.* 287c–d, where from the claim that just people are just by justice (dative) it is inferred that justice is something, and (equivalently) that it is, i.e. exists. In these and similar cases the qualities in question are evidently seen as entities with quasi-causal powers, not as mere abstractions from temperate or just actions and persons. In *Phd.* the generalized principle 'It is by the F that F things are F' (100c–e) is less clear, but I suggest below that we should take seriously the idea that it is the beautiful which *makes* things beautiful.

repudiate the concession, insisting that what you cannot squeeze in your palms does not exist (247c3–7). Whom does Plato have in mind? We can dismiss the suggestion that he had in mind not a school of thought, but ‘the crass unthinking corporealism of the common man’.⁷ I doubt that the common man was a materialist, and it is surely not to the *polloi* that Theaetetus refers with his comment: ‘these are terrible persons you’re talking about; I’ve met plenty of them myself’ (246b4–5). (The comment is especially intriguing in the light of the Stranger’s later remark, discussed below, that Theaetetus will be *unfamiliar* with aspects of the Friends of the Forms’ doctrines). It is a category of thinker, or better, a category of thought Plato is describing; so much is clear. But can we identify the thinkers? Or should we not even try to do so?

An obvious candidate for the giants’ theory is that of the atomists Leucippus and Democritus, whose doctrine was later espoused by Epicureanism, and has its most famous exposition in Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*. But there are some difficulties in the view that the giants represent the atomists, since the criterion of tangibility (i) would not allow being to the insensible atoms of Leucippus and Democritus, let alone to the void (which the atomists themselves called ‘not-being’ or ‘nothing’). Perhaps Plato regarded almost all of the predecessors whose views were sketched initially, with the obvious exception of Parmenides, as holding that only material things exist. Since he will later class the monist Parmenides with the Friends of the Forms (249c11), perhaps he similarly classes as giants the remainder whose views he sketched earlier at 242c–243a (those who believe in two or more basic principles, including Heraclitus and Empedocles). This would fit with Theaetetus’s assertion that they hold the soul to be corporeal. I return in the epilogue to the question of how much it matters to identify the ‘giants’.

What is striking, and puzzling, is the readiness with which the giants are represented as conceding defeat: that is, becoming reformed and admitting some immaterial entities such as justice. A materialist such as Democritus could have treated the qualities of justice and wisdom as he treated the secondary qualities of colour and warmth: things which exist only by convention (*nomōi*), supervening upon all that there is in truth (*eteēi*): namely, atoms in various arrangements and the void. If the materialists are allowed to claim that the soul is material (247b8), they can easily regard the psychic characteristics whose existence the ‘reformed giants’ concede as material. A different challenge could be mounted, again using the idea of what is merely ‘by convention’, against the Stranger’s cool introduction of justice as an entity. Plato was all too aware of the view

⁷ A. E. Taylor, *Plato* (London: Methuen, 1926), 384, quoted with approval by F. M. Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935), 232.

(ascribed to Protagorean adherents at *Tht.* 172b1–6) that justice has no *ousia* of its own, but is merely a matter of men’s opinions or decrees; it could not, on this view, be said to ‘come to be present in’ a person, as premiss (5) blithely assumes.

But it is clear enough why Plato does not give the giants more of a run for their money: to tackle the sceptical position on moral properties would be a lengthy undertaking, and not one which would fit the programme of the *Sophist*, while a view which tried to reduce all psychic properties such as wisdom to arrangements of material entities probably struck Plato as utterly implausible and not susceptible to rational argument. The swiftness of the victory over the giants, though a little unsatisfying, enables Plato’s overall strategy in this ontological debate to stand out clearly: he has no wish to challenge the credentials of the material things recognized by the giants, but compels them (a) to accept a further kind of entity, immaterial things, and (b) to look for a new account of *onta* or *ousia* which will encompass both what the giants originally championed and the newly admitted category. Plato pursues (b) with the *dunamis* proposal, to which we now turn.

THE *DUNAMIS* PROPOSAL

The *dunamis* proposal is put forward by the Stranger in answer to his own demand from the ‘reformed’ giants (247c9–b6). They are to say ‘what it is that in its nature is common to both the bodiless and those things which have body’. This request to identify that which two or more kinds of thing have in common, in virtue of which they are called by the same epithet, is, of course, a well-known part of Plato’s method.⁸ But here we have something new and bold: the attempt to say what all things that we say *are* have in common. Plato here chastises his predecessors for not having troubled to do so, but Aristotle in turn criticizes those who attempt to do so without distinguishing between the different ways in which ‘being is said’: that is, between the different uses of ‘being’ and ‘to be’ (*Met.* 992b18–24, *EE* 1217b25–35). Whatever Aristotle’s criticism, though, we should recognize how path-breaking this move is: how bold to attempt to give a formula which delimits everything that is.

I address three questions about the *dunamis* proposal. First, how is its content to be understood? Second, is it intended as a definition of being, or merely as a criterion, a method of delimiting beings? Third, are we to suppose that Plato intended it as correct, and wished it to stand at the end of the discussion?

⁸ See, among many examples, *Meno* 75a, *Euthphr.* 6e, and cf. *Soph.* 240a4–6.

First, how should the proposal be understood? Two versions are given in swift succession: (i) whatever has any power either to affect⁹ . . . or to be affected . . . really is¹⁰ (247d8f); (ii) the things that are . . . are nothing other than power (247e3–4). Thus (i) says that whatever *has* power is; while (ii) says that what-is is nothing other than power.¹¹ (i) and (ii) are no doubt intended to be equivalent, and we can take (i) to be the more accurate formulation.

How should we understand 'power to affect or to be affected'? Here I consider two 'formal' interpretations, those of Moravcsik and Owen, but argue in favour of a more natural 'substantive' interpretation. Moravcsik notes the use of the verb 'to be affected by' to mean merely 'to be qualified by', 'to have as a predicate'.¹² Earlier, in the argument with the monists, Plato used 'to have the affection of the one' or 'to be affected by the one' to mean simply 'to be one (predicatively)' (see 245a2, 5, b3). Assuming this use of 'to be affected by', whenever F is truly predicated of X, F affects, and X is affected. Thus, on this interpretation, anything exists which is capable of figuring as subject (thing affected) or predicate (thing affecting) in a true sentence.¹³ Though such a use of '*paschein*' and its derivatives, and of '*pathos*', in connection with predication is well-attested in Plato, I shall argue that Moravcsik's 'formal' reading of the *dunamis* proposal is not warranted either by the demands of the argument or by the terminology used. The argument requires that the criterion in terms of *dunamis* which the materialists are offered can capture what they had in mind with their cruder criterion of the bodily, adapted to include the new category of the immaterial. The giants had agreed to admit wisdom (for example) because it can come to be present to a person (thereby, presumably, affecting them in some way). A reading such as Moravcsik's which allows any

⁹ Unlike the English verbs, the Greek verbs used ('*poiein*' and '*paschein*') are not related in form as active and passive, but they are so related in meaning. '*Poiein*', here 'to affect', more commonly means 'to make' as in (1) to create (made a saddle, make wine; cf. 219b, *poiētikē technē*) or (2) make + object + complement (to make the wine warm, to make him mad). The special use translated 'to affect' was perhaps inaugurated by Plato, and derives from use (2) by deletion of the complement: to affect a thing simply means: for some F, to make the thing F (cf. *Th.* 160a1).

¹⁰ (i) can be spelt out as follows: whatever has the power to affect is, and whatever has the power to be affected is, and everything that is has the power to affect or has the power to be affected. Thus, possession of either power is sufficient for being; possession of one or other power is necessary for being. In this form the definition escapes the criticism levelled at it by Aristotle (*Top.* 146a21) to the effect that a thing with one power but lacking the other will both be and not be.

¹¹ Interpretation is controversial; a possible construal reads the text as saying that the *horos* (mark) is *dunamis* (rather than that being is *dunamis*).

¹² Moravcsik, 'Being and Meaning', 37.

¹³ In fact, Moravcsik does not even insist on truth: 'Thus the characterization boils down to saying that anything which can be a subject or a predicate in a genuine assertion exists' (ibid.).

true predication to count as an affection is surely too remote from the idea the giants have accepted. And the terminology used in formulating the *dunamis* proposal suggests a more meaty reading. At its first appearance the criterion speaks of a *dunamis* as being exercised in time ('even if only once'), and when it is recalled at 248b5–6 (for the benefit of the Friends of the Forms), it is put thus: an affecting or a being affected coming about as a result of some power through things coming together with each other (*apo tōn pros allēla suniontōn*). Neither formulation fits well with Moravcsik's proposal, by which 'The whole is one'¹⁴ and 'five is odd' report a *poiēma* and a *pathēma*.

Owen's interpretation of the *dunamis* proposal is related but distinct. He writes: 'The requirement to be met if X is to be said to do something to Y, or to have something done to it by Y, seems to come to no more than this: that there should be statements in which the name of X stands as subject to some active or passive verb, and the name of Y stands accordingly as object or in the instrumental case; and that these statements should be at some time (but not timelessly) true.'¹⁵ He adds: 'The class of verbs is undefined but wide. In particular it contains various expressions for the varying relations between justice and the just Mr. Jones.' I postpone evaluation of Owen's overall interpretation of the passage, which discusses how the *dunamis* proposal is used to discomfort the Friends of the Forms. For now I make three observations. First, while still what I term a 'formal' interpretation, since it is couched in formal terms, referring to active and passive verbs and tensed statements, it is far closer to the text than Moravcsik's, just because it talks of active and passive, and attends to the phrase 'even if only once' in the first formulation of the proposal. But, second, it is far from clear what Owen sees as the connection between the two parts of the definition as he interprets it. Owen holds that the crucial insight of Plato in the *Sophist*, correcting the earlier misconception of the *Timaeus*, is that Forms can figure in tensed as well as tenseless statements; but the example he gives to illustrate this ('The number of congressmen now in gaol is 3' as a tensed statement) fails to fit the characterization of the *dunamis* proposal, since it contains neither an active nor a passive verb. So it is hard to see how Owen derives the point he wishes to find in the *Sophist* from the wording of the *dunamis* proposal. Finally, here is an example which does fit the characterization: 'Not-being is pondered by Theaetetus.' Would Plato really count this, an undoubted instance of figuring as the subject of a passive verb, as showing that not-being satisfies the *dunamis* proposal?¹⁶

¹⁴ Cf. 245a1–5, using '*pathos*' and '*peponthos*'.

¹⁵ Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides', 337.

¹⁶ The example recalls Arist. *Soph. el.* 167a1–2 and *Int.* 21a32–3; he uses the term '*doxaston*' (thought about).

I have now rejected two 'formal' readings of the *dunamis* proposal. One of my reasons for rejecting them is that they do not accord with the wording of the proposal (though Owen's reading comes off much better in this respect). My second reason for rejecting them concerns the sequel to the *dunamis* proposal. The chief attraction of such readings to their proponents is twofold. First, in the debate to come with the Friends of the Forms it is suggested that to come to know is to affect; if this suggestion is to be one that Plato endorses, a weak interpretation of 'to affect' is required. Second, these writers believe that the outcome of the debate with the Friends of the Forms is that they have to concede that Forms, the objects of knowledge, are affected, and therefore changed, when they are known. I shall reject both of these readings, and argue (a) that the suggestion that to know is to affect is not endorsed by Plato, and (b) that the Friends of the Forms are allowed to retain the thesis that Forms are unchangeable.¹⁷ (I shall, however, suggest, if only tentatively, that Plato might none the less think that the Forms satisfy the *dunamis* proposal.) Given the reasons for rejecting the 'formal' interpretations, we can have recourse to a more substantive one. There is no doubt that the language in which the *dunamis* proposal is couched, with its talk of the power of one thing to affect or to be affected by another, and its temporal and spacial connotations,¹⁸ suggests a substantive rather than a formal interpretation. The obvious difficulty is that while the power to affect or be affected, on some fairly natural interpretation, is acceptable as a sufficient condition of being an *on*, it is not very plausible as a necessary condition. (The formal readings, on the other hand, give plausible necessary conditions, but implausible sufficient conditions.) At 238b1, for example, it was agreed that numbers are *in primis* existents (*onta*). But would Plato hold that they have the power to affect or be affected? I shall suggest below that Plato may have allowed Forms the power to affect, and, if so, numbers may also qualify, even on this 'meatier' account of the *dunamis* proposal.

Now for the second question, the status of the proposal: is it offered as (a) merely a criterion of *onta*, giving at best necessary and sufficient conditions (as suggested by Cornford and others) or (b) as a definition of what it is to be? Against those who claim that the *dunamis* proposal is offered merely as giving a mark, not as a definition of being, Owen insisted that it is intended as a definition, an attempt to improve upon the materialists' attempt to *horizesthai ousian*.¹⁹ But I believe that we cannot decide the

¹⁷ I discuss below Vlastos's view ('An Ambiguity in the *Sophist*', app. I in *idem*, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973; 2nd edn. 1981)) (which I also reject) that Plato holds that Forms are affected in being known, but are not changed. Both Moravcsik and Owen assume that Plato holds that what is affected is changed; I agree with them in this, but deny that Plato argues that Forms are affected.

¹⁸ 247e2, 248b5-6.

¹⁹ Owen, 'Plato on Not-being', 229 n. 13.

matter by looking at Plato's terminology. Since '*horos*' can be used to mean definition as well as limit or boundary (suggesting a criterion, rather than a definition), we must seek other clues. The proposal is offered as an answer to the question 'What is it that in its nature is common to both the bodiless and those things which have body with regard to which both kinds are said to be' (247d2-4). But this too is an uncertain guide; although it is a formula often invoked in the search for a definition, it can be read as asking only for that in virtue of which various things can be classed as *onta*, not for what it is to be a being. We should expect Plato to be especially alive to the difference between criteria for being an *on*, and what it is to be an *on*, and it is a pity that he does not make the status of the *dunamis* proposal clearer. For his complaint about his predecessors was (we may assume) twofold: first, they had at most inquired into criteria for being, not asking what being is; second, such criteria as they offered (or could be read as offering) are unsatisfactory, since insufficiently inclusive. But this at least seems clear: if Plato does endorse the *dunamis* proposal (in one interpretation or another), then it can be at best as a criterion of being, not as the *logos* of what it is to be. What it is to be can scarcely be cashed in terms of having this or that power, for (Plato would have insisted, I think) things have powers in virtue of what they are. Though some modern theorists have explored the idea of an ontology whose basic categories are powers, this could not, I think, be acceptable to Plato. So I assume that if in the final upshot the *dunamis* proposal still finds favour, it is at most as giving a criterion for being. But to see if it does find favour, we must proceed to the debate with the Friends of the Forms.

THE FRIENDS OF THE FORMS

The section in which the rival, immaterialist theory of being is stated, ascribed to 'Friends of the Forms', and subjected to criticism is one of the most fascinating in the dialogue. Commentators are divided both on the identity of the Friends of the Forms and on the upshot of the encounter. Are the Friends of the Forms allowed to maintain the unchangeability of their favoured Being, the Forms, or are they forced to concede that Forms change? And what is the fate of the *dunamis* proposal? If the radical interpretation, whereby the Friends of the Forms are forced to concede that Forms are changed is correct, then the Friends of the Forms, like the giants, can accept the *dunamis* proposal (for that which can be changed can be affected), and so the presumption is that Plato intends it to stand. But if (as the text suggests) the Friends of the Forms are allowed—nay, encouraged—to maintain the unchangeability of Forms, can the *dunamis*

definition stand? Can Forms be unchangeable, yet satisfy the criterion of being which the *dunamis* proposal offers: the capacity to affect or to be affected? I discuss two attempts to take this 'conservative' line, and find in favour of one of them which has had less attention than it deserves.

But first, who are the Friends of the Forms? Though some distinguished scholars dissent,²⁰ the commonly held view that Plato is referring to his earlier writings seems manifestly correct. The views which the Stranger ascribes to the Friends of the Forms comprise (1) a distinction between being (*ousia*) and coming to be (*genesis*) (248a7–8); (2) a confining of the status of being (*ousia* or *onta*) to Forms, described as intelligible and bodiless (246b8), material objects being classed as *genesis* (246b9) (the immaterialists equate the bodily with the changing ('ever-moving coming to be')—hence the debate, originally about whether material or immaterial things have being, is transformed into one in terms of changing versus unchanging objects (249c10–d4)); (3) Being—that is, Forms—is 'always in the same state with respect to the same things', while coming to be (i.e. material objects) is 'in different states at different times'; (4) we have communion with (i.e. cognizance of) *genesis* with our bodies through perception, but with *ousia* with the soul through reasoning (a10–11).

The language and content of (1)–(4) are so highly reminiscent of theses to be found in Plato's middle dialogues, notably the *Phaedo* and *Republic*,²¹ that Plato must intend the reader to recall these works. The many correspondences in content and language with a short stretch of the *Phaedo* (78–80) in particular make this verdict irresistible. The Friends of the Forms would then represent any adherent of the views propounded there by Socrates. The likeliest candidate for such an adherent is Plato himself at the time of writing the *Phaedo*, but it is possible that Plato is criticising not his former self but any who uncritically accepted the views Socrates espouses in the *Phaedo*. Though I shall speak of the Friends of the Forms as representing Plato in the middle dialogues, this alternative should be borne in mind.

²⁰ Recently Vlastos, 'Ambiguity', 317, though he makes no attempt at an alternative identification.

²¹ For (1) see *Rep.* 485b and 534a, where the Forms as objects of knowledge are characterized as *ousia*, the many Fs as *genesis*. The dichotomy between unchanging, intelligible *ousia* and changing, perceptible *genesis* is prominent in *Tim.*, whose dating relative to *Soph.* is disputed. For (2) and (3) see *Phd.* 78d–80b, where Forms are described as intelligible (80b1), invisible (79a4), always constant in respect, in contrast to the many Fs which are visible (79a1), not intelligible (80b4), and never the same. Note in particular the phrases 'always in the same state with respect to the same things' (used of Forms at *Phd.* 78d2, d6, d8, 79a9–10, d5, e4, and echoed at *Soph.* 248a12, 249b12) and 'in different states at different times' (used of material objects at *Soph.* 248a12; cf. *Phd.* 78d3). This striking phraseology may be said to be a hallmark of the theory of Forms as expounded in *Phd.* and *Rep.* and provides the clearest proof that Plato is here recalling his own doctrine.

The chief difficulties for the identification of the Friends of the Forms with Plato of the middle dialogues are the small doctrinal differences between the theory as presented in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* and as ascribed to the Friends of the Forms. Some have objected that the earlier doctrine did not deny the existence of sensibles, pointing out that sensibles, as well as Forms, were said to be (e.g. *Phd.* 79a), though only Forms were designated as *ousia*.²² But this does not tell against the identification of the Friends of the Forms' theory with that found in the *Phaedo*, for it is precisely the objection the Stranger will implicitly make: the Friends of the Forms wished to restrict the title of Being to a favoured set of entities, but at the same time they allowed another, inferior set of entities (sensible, material things).²³

The argument with the Friends of the Forms is in two phases, which, following Owen,²⁴ I label A and B. A runs from 248b to 248e5, where there is an abrupt change of tack. B runs from 248e to 249d. One problem is to see how they are connected. For they *appear* to argue for opposite conclusions. Phase A seems to argue that Forms must be changeable, in so far as they can come to be known; while phase B seems to argue that while changing things too must exist, Forms must be unchangeable if there is to be any thought or knowledge. Radical interpretations accept that phase A argues for the changeability of Forms, and reinterpret phase B; conservative interpretations (though they differ on how to read phase A) are united in taking the conclusion of phase B at face value: Forms must be unchanging if there is to be any *nous*.

It is in phase A that the Friends of the Forms are forced to consider the *dunamis* proposal. Since they hold that we have communion with (i.e. cognizance of, *koinōnein*) *genesis* through perception, but with *ousia* through reasoning (a10–11), they are asked to say what is this *koinōnein*, which they hold is common to *ousia* and to *genesis*. In particular, they are asked whether 'having communion with' is an affecting or a being affected. They allow this for sense perception, but deny it for coming to know, on the grounds that being (i.e. that which we come to know) has no share in the power of affecting or of being affected. They thus (we are told) have to

²² A. Diès, *La Définition de l'Être . . . Dans le Sophiste de Platon*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1932), 61 n. 168.

²³ Another slight discrepancy is that here perception is said to be by the body, while at *Phd.* 79c–d it is stated that sensibles (i.e. *genesis*) are perceived by the soul through the body, while Forms (*ousia*) are investigated by the soul itself by itself. But the omission of the soul's role in perception in this passage need not be seen as a major discrepancy in doctrine. It can be put down to Plato's desire to state the Friends of the Forms' theory in a bold and economical way. And the critique will focus on the Friends of the Forms' account of reasoning, not of perception.

²⁴ Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides', 337–8.

reject the *dunamis* account of being.²⁵ Note, though, that it is Theaetetus, who a few lines earlier has been said to be unfamiliar with the Friends of the Forms' views,²⁶ who declares that the Friends of the Forms must say that knowing is neither an affecting nor a being affected.

The Stranger offers the Friends of the Forms a number of options with respect to *gignōskein* and *gignōskesthai*, coming to know and coming to be known (248d4–7). In laying out the options I use, for brevity, the translations 'knowing' and 'being known', but it should be borne in mind that 'coming to know' and 'coming to be known' are to be preferred, as indicating that '*gignōskein*' (unlike 'know', in most of its uses) can signify an occurrence. The options offered are these:

- (i) Both knowing and being known are: (a) a *poiēma*, (b) a *pathēma*, (c) a *poiēma* and a *pathēma* (i.e. each is both).
- (ii) One is a *poiēma*, the other a *pathēma*; that is, (a) knowing is a *poiēma*, being known a *pathēma*; (b) knowing is a *pathēma*, being known a *poiēma*. (Take careful note of (b)!) (iii) Neither is either.

Of these options (ia) and (ib) are non-starters if, as the subsequent argument suggests, it is taken for granted that if one of the two is a *poiēma*, the other must be a *pathēma*. (ic) is a possibility; and indeed the account of perception in the *Theaetetus* suggests that seeing, touching, and so on are envisaged as both affecting and being affected (e.g. 156c–157c). I say more below about analogies and disanalogies between perceiving and coming to know. Each of (iia) and (iib) is also a theoretical possibility. The curious thing about the exchange is that Theaetetus says that the Friends of the Forms must choose (iii), otherwise they would contradict themselves (i.e. their claim that *ousia* is unchanged) (248d8–9). But in fact the argument that follows shows only why they cannot accept (iia) (or, *a fortiori*, (ic)), the suggestion that to come to know is to affect and to come to be known is therefore to be affected, hence changed. (iib) is left untouched by the argument, and that is an option I shall explore.

The Stranger supplies the Friends of the Forms' argument (248d10–e4):²⁷

²⁵ At 248b5–6 the concept of affecting and being affected, recalled from 247d–e, is glossed (as noted above) with strongly spatial and causal connotations (through some power from things coming together with one another); so it is not surprising that the Friends of the Forms will reject it as applicable to Forms. For the verb 'come together' (*sunienai*), compare the description of perception at *Th.* 157a–b.

²⁶ In the epilogue I say more about what we can conclude from Theaetetus's ignorance of the Friends of the Forms.

²⁷ I assume, as most commentators and the editor of the new OCT do, that we should supply '*legousin*' or '*legoien an*' ('they say', or 'they would say') after '*tode ge*' at 248d10. I defend below (against Vlastos, 'Ambiguity') the claim that the whole of 248d10–e4 is ascribed to the Friends of the Forms.

Suppose (what we deny)	(1) to come to know is to affect.
We accept	(2) if (1), to come to be known is to be affected.
so that, if (1)	(3) being is affected in so far as it comes to be known
Since	(4) to be affected is to be changed,
it follows from (1) that	(5) being is changed.
But we maintain that	(6) being is changeless (which is why we reject (1), as leading to a contradiction).

It is vital to note that these lines do no more than give the reasoning that the Friends of the Forms would use to explain why they must insist that knowing and being known are not affecting or being affected. As Keyt remarks,²⁸ they form an indirect proof; Premiss (1) is not asserted, but is shown to lead to contradiction in conjunction with (2)–(6), all of which the Friends of the Forms do accept. And the Stranger, instead of drawing any moral, shifts tack abruptly, and moves on to phase B. There he will refute the Friends of the Forms' view that *only* what is unchanging (*to ēremoun*, 248e5) counts as being. Since the Stranger (and therefore Plato) draws no morals, it is left to the reader to ask what moral should be drawn. I cite some possibilities below.

I. Radical: Forms are changed.²⁹ The moral Plato wishes the reader to draw is that Forms are affected in coming to be known, and, as such, are subject to change (and fall under the *dunamis* proposal). The inquiry into what it is to come to know a Form certainly seems to be driving at this conclusion, and this interpretation reads the crucial lines 248d10–e4 as giving Plato's view that all of (1)–(5) must be conceded, and the cherished immutability of the Forms given up. Though premiss (1) is not asserted, no alternative account of coming to know a Form is offered, suggesting (this view holds) that Plato himself accepted (1), and hence (5), that Forms are subject to change. As Moravcsik pertinently asks (addressing those who read the passage as allowing the Friends of the Forms to retain the unchanging nature of being): 'Why is the suggestion that knowledge is an affection included at all?' (sc. if it is not taken seriously). Another advantage of this view is that it assumes that Plato accepted the *dunamis* proposal, which is what we should hope, given the manner in which it has been introduced. But it is fatal to this interpretation that phase B reasserts the immutability of Forms, as I argue below. Both Moravcsik and Owen

²⁸ D. Keyt, 'Plato's Paradox that the Immutable is Unknowable', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1969), 1–14, gives an excellent account of the argument, noting that its outcome is inconclusive. The solution he thinks Plato should have favoured is that of making Forms subject to change in their accidental attributes.

²⁹ Moravcsik, 'Being and Meaning'; Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides'.

argue that this reiteration in part B of the immutability of the Forms is qualified; while essential truths about justice are unchanged and indeed timeless, the fact that you or I can come to know justice shows that in that respect it is capable of being changed. But the problem for this interpretation is that no such qualification is entered when the Stranger insists on the immutability of objects of *nous*.

II. Conservative, with a subtle distinction: Vlastos suggests that Plato's solution is to accept that Forms are affected (*paschein*) when they come to be known, but to deny that they are changed.³⁰ In other words Plato denies premiss (4), which only the Friends of the Forms accept. By rejecting (4), Plato can maintain the changelessness of Forms, yet allow (1), which brings the Forms under the *dunamis* proposal. This solution would have some attraction if 'power to affect or to be affected' were given one or other of the 'formal' interpretations discussed above. As we saw, Moravcsik read 'is affected by' to mean simply 'to have as a predicate', and on that reading of 'is affected', the inference from 'is affected' to 'is changed' is scarcely compelling. But I argued above in favour of a more naturalistic, substantive interpretation of the *dunamis* proposal, and on a natural interpretation of '*paschein*', to be affected by, it is just as odd to say that a thing is affected by coming to be known as to say that it is thereby changed. Vlastos's idea that Plato (unlike the Friends of the Forms) could resist the inference from 'is affected by' to 'is changed by' is unconvincing.

More seriously, the support Vlastos finds for his interpretation in the text is disputable. It relies on an alleged distinction in the text between the status of premiss (4), which the Friends of the Forms but not Plato (in the guise of the Stranger) are committed to, and premiss (5), which Plato (as well as the Friends of the Forms) endorses. Vlastos finds this signalled in the change from indirect speech to direct speech at 248e4 (*ho dē phamen* . . .). But such a shift from indirect to direct speech constructions is common in what is clearly still reported speech;³¹ we should read the whole of 248d10–e4 as ascribed to the Friends of the Forms. How much of it the Stranger, or Plato, would endorse cannot, *contra* Vlastos, be established from the text.³²

Of course, it might still be the case that Plato's favoured escape from the impasse is to reject premiss (4) and allow that Forms are affected, while

³⁰ Vlastos, 'Ambiguity'.

³¹ Kühner-Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der Griechischen Sprache* (Hanover and Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1898), ii. 556–7 cites many examples, including *Prt.* 322c and 338b.

³² The new (1995) OCT Plato vol. i represents the whole of 248d10 after '*tode ge*' to the end of e5 as direct speech of the Friends of the Forms, by placing inverted commas around it. While I agree that the whole is ascribed to the Friends of the Forms, I do not think it necessary (or easy) to construe it all as direct speech.

denying that they are changed. But in the absence of any hint of this in the text, we should need independent motivation for it. The plain facts are that (i) it is just as odd to say that to come to know a Form is to affect the Form as to say that it is to change the Form; and (ii) Plato's earlier thought made Forms *apatheis* (incapable of being affected) as well as incapable of change.³³

III. Another 'conservative' reading: Forms are unchangeable, but satisfy the *dunamis* proposal, because they have the power to affect, while immune from being affected. This solution deserves serious attention. Glanced at by Cornford, it is developed in some detail by Ostenfeld.³⁴ Its kernel consists of two very natural ideas, one about Forms, the other about coming to know. First, if Forms are to be brought under the *dunamis* proposal, it is surely preferable to credit them with the power to affect than with the power to be affected. *Phaedo* 100d5 famously claimed that nothing else makes (*poiei*) a thing beautiful but the presence in it of the beautiful.³⁵ So Forms are naturally thought of as capable of *poiein*.³⁶ Now for the second idea: is it not far more plausible to think of coming to know something as being affected by it, rather than as affecting it? Owen rightly acknowledged 'the sheer prima facie absurdity of saying that coming to know anything changes it',³⁷ though he went on to give a reading of the whole passage which had Plato advocating just that. (And I have argued above that the absurdity is not lessened by saying that to come to know a Form is to affect it.) But it is surely far less absurd to think that I am the one who is affected, and, if you like, changed, when I get to know justice, say, or Pythagoras's theorem.

Vlastos dismissed the possibility that Plato could hold this (option (iib) above) with an argument from grammar: he deemed it out of the question that *to gignōskein* (active) should be a *pathos* (passive) or that *to gignōskesthai* (passive) could be a *poiēma* (active).³⁸ How good is the argument from grammar? I shall maintain that it should not carry weight. It is true that when Plato urges a principle about correlatives in the *Gorgias*

³³ Vlastos, 'Ambiguity', cites this important objection by Keyt, 'Plato's Paradox'. Vlastos himself assumes that the Friends of the Forms do not represent adherents of the theses of *Phd.*, but hazards no alternative identification.

³⁴ Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*; E. Ostenfeld, *Forms, Matter and Mind* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982).

³⁵ Nearer at hand, at *Soph.* 247a, the existence of justice has been established by observing that it can come to be present in someone's soul, and thereby, one assumes, affect it; hence the *dunamis* proposal is intended to include as beings such things as justice, despite their incorporeality. But we cannot be sure that these are intended to be Forms.

³⁶ Though Vlastos wrote in 1973: 'Nowadays no one would think of the Platonic Form as an active entity' ('Ambiguity', 132).

³⁷ Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides', 338.

³⁸ Vlastos, 'Ambiguity', 312.

(476a–d), he illustrates a thesis about *poiein* and *paschein* with active and passive forms of transitive verbs—examples such as ‘to strike’ and ‘to be struck’, ‘to burn’ and ‘to be burned’. But he is happy to go on to say (476d) that ‘paying justice’ (*dikēn didonai*) is a suffering, not a doing, despite the active (indeed transitive) verb. And we only have to think of an alternative verb to know, *epistasthai*, which is a middle verb and so shares most tenses with the passive form, to realize that Plato is unlikely to have used surface grammar as his yardstick.³⁹ Here again I reject an argument based on ‘formal’ criteria (the assumption that an active verb can signify only an affecting, not a being affected).

If we want a reading according to which Plato accepts his *dunamis* proposal, and therefore wishes to bring the Forms under it, and if one or other *dunamis* is actualized in a Form when it comes to be known, then it is surely far more plausible, once we have rid ourselves of the influence of surface grammar, to conceive of coming to know a thing as being affected by it, rather than as affecting it. And I think Plato may well have thought so too. When sketching a theory of sense perception in the *Theaetetus*, Plato labelled the thing perceived ‘the agent’ (*to poioun*), and the thing which perceives the ‘patient’ (*to paschon*).⁴⁰ I grant that the theory there is not his own, and also that Plato was perhaps usually more impressed by the differences between perception and knowledge than by their similarities. But the very starting-point and premiss of the debate with the Friends of the Forms is that they acknowledge that we have cognizance of both material things (by perception) and immaterial ones (by reasoning (*logismos*) or coming to know them (*gignōskein*)); in other words, their attention is drawn to the similarity between perception and knowledge and to the illogicality of accepting an account for perception which they do not accept for coming to know (248a10–b3). This permits us, perhaps, to think that in this case he could expect the reader to notice a similarity between perceiving and knowing: namely, that in both cases it is the object of the transitive verb that does the affecting. I grant too that Plato tended to picture thought (and therefore knowledge?) as an active process of the mind. But it is one thing to picture the mind as active in thinking, quite another to hold that the mind acts on and affects the objects of knowledge. The notion that they act on the knowing mind, on the other hand, seems to me thoroughly Platonic, not to mention Aristotelian.

³⁹ Ostenfeld, *Forms*, 294 n. 82 agrees that we cannot rely on grammatical grounds. My example of *epistasthai* supplements his instances of morphological variety in verbs of perception, some of which are active, some middle.

⁴⁰ e.g. *Tht.* 157a, 160a. As noted above, the details of the account in *Tht.* suggest that both perceiver and perceived thing affect and are affected by the other. But for all that, the label ‘that which affects’ is regularly used for that which is perceived, naturally enough.

Of these three interpretations which allow the outcome of the debate with the Friends of the Forms to preserve the *dunamis* proposal, the third seems to me much the most attractive. It is true that Plato does not draw attention to the possibility that it is coming to be known, not coming to know, which is an affecting, or to its corollary that the Forms can preserve their cherished immutability while satisfying the *dunamis* proposal in that they can affect (but not be affected, nor therefore changed). How serious an obstacle one finds this will depend on how much one is prepared to assume Plato left to the reader to figure out. But once we free ourselves from reliance on surface grammar, from the assumption that ‘to know’, because it is an active, transitive verb, must represent an affecting and not a being affected, we can take seriously what turns out to be a satisfying alternative.

The remaining possibility is a verdict of *aporia*; the Friends of the Forms are shown to have a problem, but no solution is in sight. At all events, attention swiftly turns to the most objectionable aspect of their view, their (unwitting?) exclusion of knowers from the realm of what is.

The abrupt shift to phase B of the debate with the Friends of the Forms seems to be occasioned by the reminder that they confine the title ‘being’ to what is unchanging, *to eremoun*. On any account of this section, the Stranger’s aim is to force the Friends of the Forms to accept into their ontology not just Forms—whether or not these retain their status as unchanging—but (some or all) changing things as well. He does this by showing them that they are committed to according the title ‘being’ to at least some changing items: namely, souls and what is ensouled (i.e. living bodies, presumably). Since the Friends of the Forms insist that their Forms can be known, they must also acknowledge the being of that which has intelligence and knows the Forms.

Thus, the Stranger redirects his critique from the nature of that which is known to that which does the knowing. And he does so in a very strange way, using some high-flown and mystical language quite unlike the matter-of-fact tone used so far. He asks whether motion, life, soul, and wisdom are present to *to pantelōs on*, what completely is. This suggests a mystical view according to which what-is has all these attributes (as in Neoplatonism); but it turns out that what the Stranger wishes to assert is that these attributes belong to things that are (rather than to some mystic whole). At 249a4–10 he then argues that *to pantelōs on* has intelligence, therefore life; therefore it has them in a soul; therefore it is ensouled; therefore it cannot be unchanged; therefore what is changed and change are, *contra* the Friends of the Forms. We should note that not only is the reality of soul insisted upon, but also the reality of what is ensouled, presumably a body, since it is bodies that are typically described as ensouled. Thus, from the admission of intelligence and life to what-is (i.e. that what

is intelligent and living is a thing that is), it follows that some things subject to change—ensouled bodies, presumably—are things which are.

In interpreting 249a–b, we can dismiss both the ultra-radical view of Moravcsik, who holds that this passage argues that intelligence changes its objects,⁴¹ thereby reinforcing his interpretation of the upshot of phase A, and the ultra-conservative interpretation of Cherniss, who supposes that it is only psychic change, not bodily coming to be, which is raised to the status of being.⁴² The Friends of the Forms are forced to accept as *onta* some things subject to change: intelligence, souls, and what ever possesses them—to *empsychon*. And the likeliest explanation of 249b2–3: ‘they must agree that that which is changed, and change, are beings’, reads it as insisting that *all* changed things (and not just a favoured few) should count as *onta*. This, then, is the real concession the Friends of the Forms have to make, and it mirrors that exacted from the giants. The former had to admit that immaterial as well as material things exist; the Friends of the Forms must now admit that changing (as well as unchanging) things are *onta*. (As remarked above, the debate which was introduced as one about the material or immaterial character of being, turned, unremarked, into one about whether only unchanging things exist, on the unspoken equation of the material with the changing.)

If the symmetry between the parties is to be perfect, then each group is shown reason to extend the title ‘being’ to what it formerly excluded (for the giants, the immaterial; for the Friends of the Forms, the changing and material), while the title of its originally favoured candidate is untouched. This confirms the natural reading of the second part of phase B. After persuading the Friends of the Forms that if everything is unchanged there can be no *nous*,⁴³ the Stranger insists that *nous* equally requires that there be unchanging things (as the objects of *nous* which alone make knowledge (and/or perhaps, thought) possible). He does so in language which clearly echoes the Friends of the Forms’ characterization of Forms (cf. 249b12–c1 with 248a12): ‘that which is in the same respect and in the same manner and concerning the same thing’. Several writers, believing that the aim of phase A was to force the Friends of the Forms to abandon the immutability of Forms, have to qualify this insistence on the unchanging character of the objects of *nous*; they think Plato is insisting that Forms remain unchanged in their natures, their essential properties, though subject to change in other respects. But it is hard to read this qualification in the

⁴¹ 249a9–b3 concedes that intelligence and its possessors must be subject to change, not, as Moravcsik, ‘Being and Meaning’, requires, agents of change.

⁴² H. F. Cherniss, ‘The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato’s Later Dialogues’, repr. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 1965), 352.

⁴³ I accept Badham’s conjectured addition of ‘*pantōn*’ to line 249b5–6, adopted by the new OCT.

emphatic reassertion of the need for the objects of *nous* to be unchanging; and, as I have shown, the outcomes of the two encounters, that with the gods and that with the giants, have a pleasing symmetry if the sole concession drawn from each is an acknowledgement that the attempt to restrict the title ‘being’ to one favoured kind of thing means that they overlook the claims of another type of entity they themselves, on reflection, have just as much reason to acknowledge. The symmetry would be spoiled if, in addition, the Friends of the Forms had to accept a modified account of their original candidates for being, unchanging immaterial Forms.

My reading of the encounter with the Friends of the Forms is this: though phase A appears to be driving to the conclusion that Forms are affected in so far as they are known, that conclusion is not drawn. Instead, to counter the insistence that being is changeless, the Stranger shows that some beings, intelligent ones, must be subject to change; this is the crucial concession from the Friends of the Forms. The status of the objects of intelligence as unchanging is not challenged, but rather reinforced. This leaves the fate of the *dunamis* proposal uncertain. Either it has been shown to be wanting, since Forms, which are *in primis* beings, do not satisfy it. Or, if we seek a way of reading the episode which leaves the *dunamis* proposal intact, the alternative, not explicitly canvassed, that Forms affect but are not affected (becoming known being one manner in which they affect) is the most promising.

EPILOGUE

It is time to draw together the threads of this re-examination of the *Gigantomachia*, to discuss its philosophical importance, and to evaluate the role of the two features of Plato’s method in the *Sophist* which I highlighted earlier. Take first what I labelled the ‘new dialectic’. Though by no means confined, in the *Sophist*, to the *Gigantomachia* (the discussion of the ‘late learners’ theory at 251–2 is an obvious further instance), it is especially prominent there, with some intriguing features. While we find it hard to give a precise identification to the materialists, the teenage Theaetetus has met plenty of them, and can confidently draw, on their behalf, an important distinction.⁴⁴ By contrast, he is excused from answering a question put to the Friends of the Forms on grounds of unfamiliarity with their views.⁴⁵ Yet the Stranger knows them well, and so do we.

⁴⁴ 247b7–c2; the giants assert that soul ‘has a body’ (i.e. is material), but deny this for justice, wisdom, etc.

⁴⁵ Does Theaetetus’s unfamiliarity with the Friends of the Forms’ views suggest that these cannot be meant to be seen as Plato’s? Not at all; if we consider the dramatic context,

How does this indirect approach further the aims of the section on views about being? One of these aims is made clear at the start: those who pontificate about *onta* or *ousia*, enumerating basic principles, or declaring being to be confined to a certain kind of thing, owe us an account of their theorizing. They must give at least criteria for counting something in or out, or, better still, an account of what it is to be. Now it is highly likely that most of the theorists whom Plato takes to task did not in fact conceive of themselves as giving any sort of account of being.⁴⁶ Parmenides, and Plato himself, are the two obvious exceptions to this. It is as if Plato's message to the others is: nowadays we expect such thinkers to be more self-critical, to state and defend their criteria for *being*, even to say *what it is to be*, before plunging into extravagant theorizing on the number and nature of beings (*posa kai poia ta onta*). Metaphysics and ontology should replace cosmology.

A second aim, exemplified particularly in the *Gigantomachia*, seems to be to show that theories which exclude a certain category from being are denying something they have reason, within the spirit of their own theory, to accept.⁴⁷ Thus the materialists were coaxed into accepting justice, wisdom, and the rest, since they can come to be present and thereby affect. This is made to seem a natural extension of their own criterion of the tangible/bodily. In turn, the Friends of the Forms were shown how unpalatable is an ontology which contains *noēta eidē*, intelligible Forms, but nothing capable of knowing them, leaving those Forms *semnon kai hagion*, solemn and holy, but remote. And once they see reason to include *some* things subject to change as *onta*, they are left with no grounds for excluding any *kinoumena*. This upshot is an all-inclusive ontology, neither party having good grounds for its former exclusivity.

Theaetetus, a young mathematics student, has met Socrates for the first time the previous day (i.e. on the occasion of the conversation reported in *Tht.*). And the meeting in any case pre-dates the dramatic date of *Phd.*, the key source (as I have argued) of the Friends of the Forms' views. Note also that at 239e1 the Stranger exclaimed that Theaetetus had never met a sophist!

⁴⁶ E. Hussey, *The Presocratics* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 150, writes: 'In one passage (*Soph.* 242c–243a) Plato even suggests that all the Presocratics were really metaphysicians who wrapped up their ontologies in the dress of cosmologies. This suggestion is thrown out in passing, and may not be meant seriously; but it shows how a growing philosophical sophistication leads almost inevitably to distorted views about the previous history of thought.'

⁴⁷ There is a difference between the exclusivity of each party. The giants (presumably) thought that they could give an account of everything (including soul) in material terms; their thesis is a reductionist one. The gods, by contrast, did not deny material, changing things, or try to reduce them to the immaterial; instead, they privileged one type of thing to which alone they accorded the title 'being'. I find no suggestion in this text that Plato now advocates any such privileging of one type of being (*contra* M. Frede, 'Die Frage nach dem Seienden: Sophistes', in T. Kobusch and B. Mojsisch (eds.), *Platon, Seine Dialoge in der Sicht neuer Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996); indeed, the treatment of the Friends of the Forms suggests the opposite.

What is gained, or lost, by conducting this encounter with *absent* theorists? Though we miss the vivid characterization of participants such as Thrasymachus or Meno, this is compensated for in part by the lively descriptions of the various parties to the dispute.⁴⁸ And though I remarked that a reader may feel unhappy that the giants do not put up more of a fight, the same response is felt by readers of the *Republic* when Thrasymachus, say, seems to be denied a fighting come-back. The device of asking Theaetetus to pretend that the giants are reformed is perhaps a way of ensuring that the reasonable man at least, in the person of Theaetetus himself, agrees, even if the true (unreasonable) giants would assert their materialist dogma through thick and thin. The essence of the dialectic is the same: a set of beliefs, whether actual or possible, is examined for consistency, found wanting, and improved upon. What is striking is the result that, with the help of the eirenic *dunamis* proposal,⁴⁹ an outcome apparently acceptable to all parties, an all-inclusive ontology, is arrived at.⁵⁰ Contrast this result with Socrates' forecast (no doubt ironic) at *Theaetetus* 181a–b. There, an investigation of the views of both flux theorists and their antagonists, who contend for one unchanging being, is promised.⁵¹ After declaring that if either party (flux theorists or Parmenides) proves convincing, they will adopt that view, Socrates adds: 'And if neither side seems to be saying anything reasonable, it will be absurd for us to think that inferior people like us can say anything useful, after we've disqualified men of their great antiquity and wisdom.' The *Sophist* shows otherwise: in refuting the opposed views, a satisfying alternative is arrived at. Real progress is made by probing the rationale which each party has for its exclusive ontology. It is not necessary to represent the adherents of the views in person for the reader to be convinced that each party has been shown to be committed, by its own views, to a more generous ontology than it had espoused. And if my reading is right, both parties can accept the *dunamis* proposal, though it comes more naturally to the giants to do so than to the gods.

⁴⁸ e.g. 242c–243a (debunking description of earlier theorists), 246a–b (the giants), 246b–c (the gods), 247c (unreformed giants).

⁴⁹ At 247e8 the Stranger issues the caveat that the parties may later think better of the *dunamis* proposal and replace it. But as this never happens, we cannot be sure that Plato did not mean it to stand.

⁵⁰ The final upshot of the section on being is the well-known *aporia* casting doubt on the conclusion arrived at, that the changed and the unchanged together make up being. Though J. Roberts has contested it (see her 'The Problem about Being in the *Sophist*', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 3/3 (1986), 229–43), I share the view that the argument purporting to overturn this conclusion is deliberately fallacious, and that the discussion following the late learners' theory is designed to show what was wrong with it. Thus we need not abandon the outcome of the *Gigantomachia* in the face of the alleged *aporia*.

⁵¹ But once the flux theory is refuted, Socrates cries off examining the monist, no-change theory; the confrontation is in effect postponed to *Soph.*

This brings me to the second feature I mentioned and labelled the 'formal approach'. We saw that in the section on being the Stranger couches his inquiry in formal terms,⁵² and the discussion (especially with the dualists and monists) continues to make heavy use of the formal mode. We have seen too that the overall conclusion to the debate seems to favour an all-inclusive ontology, to the extent that attempts to be exclusive are shown to be wanting. Now one could produce a 'formal' argument for an all-inclusive ontology; indeed, Moravcsik did just that in interpreting the *dunamis* proposal in a purely formal way: 'the characterization boils down to saying that anything which can be a subject or a predicate in a genuine assertion exists.'⁵³ But though Plato could have used a purely formal argument of the kind Moravcsik finds to arrive at his conclusion favouring an all-inclusive ontology, close attention to the text in the *Gigantomachia* shows that he used more traditional arguments. His insistence on justice as an entity surely derives from more than the mere fact that we can truly say 'X is just'. And I argued against the two 'formal' readings of the *dunamis* proposal, each of which cashed it in terms of one or another kind of true statement. The proponents of these interpretations, Moravcsik and Owen, each sought a reading of the *Gigantomachia* which had Plato radically revising his views and coming to deny the immutability of Forms. Instead, I have defended an unfamiliar version of a conservative reading, one which is faithful to the text, which allows Plato to maintain two theses to which he appears attached and which *seem* incompatible (the *dunamis* proposal that what-is is what is capable of affecting or being affected, and the immutability of the Forms), and finally one which has considerable philosophical appeal, invoking the idea that the objects of thought and knowledge affect the knowers rather than vice versa. To do this, I contended that Plato would have argued on the basis of the nature of knowing (and the analogy with perceiving); he would not have slavishly followed surface grammar and held that 'to know, an active verb, cannot be an affection'. For all his new-found attraction to the formal approach, Plato relies, in the *Gigantomachia* at least, on traditional metaphysical arguments, and on good old dialectic, albeit in a new, or newish, guise.⁵⁴

⁵² 243d-e, esp. d4-5, d8-e2.

⁵³ Moravcsik ('Being and Meaning', 38) also refers to the formulation given at 249d, which he translates (p. 40) as 'the totality of existents is that which is moved and that which is unmoved'—as a tautologous answer to the question: what exists?

⁵⁴ J. Brunschwig, 'The Stoic Theory of the Supreme Genus and Platonic Ontology', in *idem, Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), offers a most instructive comparison of Stoic thinking with the arguments of the *Gigantomachia*; he suggests convincingly that *Soph.* 'played a seminal role in the formation of the Stoic ontology' (p. 125). His detailed discussion repays careful study, though I cannot accept his reading of the outcome of the encounter with the Friends of the Forms, where he makes two claims I have disputed. Like Moravcsik, he holds: (a) that Plato defines

acting (*poiein*) in such a way that anything that can be expressed by an active verb (such as to know) passes for action (i.e. an affecting) (p. 122); (b) that the concession extracted from the Friends of the Forms (from the 'reformed Friends of the Forms') is that 'the Forms may provide objects for the cognitive movement [i.e. are changed in being known], meanwhile remaining immutable in every other respect' (ibid.). But once (a) is conceded, not only knowing but much else besides, such as forgetting, ignoring, copying, resembling, etc., will affect Forms, a far more serious diminution of their immutability.