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Megaric Metaphysics

D.T.J. Bailey

I examine two startling claims attributed to some philosophers associated with Megara on the Isthmus of Corinth, namely:

M1. Something possesses a capacity at t if and only if it is exercising that capacity at t .

M2. One can speak of a thing only by using its own proper λόγος.

In what follows, I will call the conjunction of M1 and M2 ‘Megaricism’.¹ The literature on ancient philosophy contains several valuable discussions of M1 and M2 taken individually.² But there is no discussion of them together, much less of their logical relations. I intend to remedy that lack, and to show why it is a lack worth remedying.

My aims are both philosophical and historical. Inevitably, in saying anything new and interesting about Megaric views, I will be adopting assumptions scarcely free from controversy, and indulging in quite a bit of charitable reconstruction. But the resulting picture is of considerable interest. For it explains why, although M1 and M2 seem to have little to do with one another, it is in fact small wonder that anyone who held one would hold the other, for, as I attempt to show, they entail each other. It explains why the Megarics are associated in the primary literature with the names of such diverse philosophical ancestors as Parmenides and Protagoras. And it explains why, although they are both false, M1 and M2 were claims taken seriously by both Plato and Aristotle, who in developing their own views on modality and language saw reason to mention Megaricism, and to argue against it.

I. The Main Texts

Here are the relevant sources for Megaricism, in order of each conjunct, with

¹ I adopt the convention of using ‘Megarian’ for a citizen of Megara, ‘Megaric’ for a follower of the philosophical trend. But in speaking of ‘Megaricism’ or ‘the Megarics’, I do not intend to imply that there was anything coming from Megara so robustly unified or interconnected as to deserve the name of ‘school’. I do not deny it either. See, most recently, Muller 1988. One of our main sources for M2 is a report from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, in which the position is attributed to the philosopher Antisthenes. Antisthenes was not from Megara (he was an Athenian contemporary of Plato). But some of his recorded claims are close enough to those attributed to born and bred Megarians such as Euclides and Stilpo for me reasonably to include him, for my purposes, under the Megaric banner. For arguments intimately connecting Antisthenes’ general views on language with those of actual Megarians, see Denyer 1991, 27ff.

² For M1 see Makin 1996; Makin 2006, 60-81; Beere 2009, 91-117. For M2 see Denyer 1991.

the most important sentences italicized. The text for M1 is:

- (A) *There are some, for example the Megarics, who say that something has a capacity only whenever it is exercised, and whenever it is not exercised <the thing> is not capable; for example whoever is not building a house is incapable of building a house, but someone building a house is capable whenever he is building. And similarly for the other cases. It is not hard to see the absurdities that follow from <their view>...for neither will there be cold nor hot nor sweet nor in general anything perceptible if things are not being perceived. So it follows that they affirm the doctrine of Protagoras.³ (Aristotle, *Meta.* ix 3.1046b29-33, 1047a4-7)*

The two texts supporting M2 are:

- (B) In one sense each thing has one λόγος, the one belonging to the essence of the thing; but in another sense each thing has many λόγοι, since anything is in a way the same as itself qualified – for example, ‘Socrates’ and ‘Educated Socrates’ (the false λόγος is a λόγος which belongs to nothing without qualification). *For this reason, Antisthenes was being silly when he supposed that there is no point in speaking about anything except by its own proper λόγος, one to one; from which it follows that it is impossible to contradict; and in general follows that there is no falsehood.⁴ (Aristotle, *Meta.* v 29.1024b29-34)*
- (C) Because of their ignorance of these matters, the so-called Megaric philosophers, assuming as a clear premise that *things possessing different λόγοι are themselves different, and that different things are separate from one another, thought they were showing that each thing is separate from itself.* Since the λόγος ‘Educated Socrates’ is one thing, and ‘Pale Socrates’ another, it would follow that Socrates himself is separate from himself.⁵ (Simplicius *In Aristotelis physicorum libros commen-*

³ *Εἰσὶ δὲ τινες οἱ φασιν, οἷον οἱ Μεγαρικοί, ὅταν ἐνεργῆ μόνον δύνασθαι, ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἐνεργῆ οὐ δύνασθαι, οἷον τὸν μὴ οἰκοδομοῦντα οὐ δύνασθαι οἰκοδομεῖν, ἀλλὰ τὸν οἰκοδομοῦντα ὅταν οἰκοδομῆ ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων. οἷς τὰ συμβαίνοντα ἄτοπα οὐ χαλεπὸν ἰδεῖν... οὔτε γὰρ ψυχρὸν οὔτε θερμὸν οὔτε γλυκὺ οὔτε ὄλως αἰσθητὸν οὔθὲν ἔσται μὴ αἰσθανομένων· ὥστε τὸν Πρωταγόρου λόγον συμβῆσεται λέγειν αὐτοῖς.*

⁴ *ἐκάστου δὲ λόγος ἔστι μὲν ὡς εἷς, ὁ τοῦ τί ἦν εἶναι, ἔστι δ' ὡς πολλοί, ἐπεὶ ταυτό πως αὐτὸ καὶ αὐτὸ πεπονθός, οἷον Σωκράτης καὶ Σωκράτης μουσικός (ὁ δὲ ψευδὴς λόγος οὐθενός ἐστιν ἀπλῶς λόγος)· διὸ Ἀντισθένης ᾤετο εὐήθως μὴθὲν ἀξιῶν λέγεσθαι πλὴν τῷ οἰκείῳ λόγῳ, ἐν ἐφ' ἐνός· ἐξ ὧν συνέβαινε μὴ εἶναι ἀντιλέγειν, σχεδὸν δὲ μὴδὲ ψεύδεσθαι.*

⁵ *διὰ δὲ τὴν περὶ ταῦτα ἄγνοιαν καὶ οἱ Μεγαρικοὶ κληθέντες φιλόσοφοι, λαβόντες ὡς ἐναργῆ πρότασιν ὅτι ὧν οἱ λόγοι ἕτεροι, ταῦτα ἕτερα ἔστι, καὶ ὅτι τὰ ἕτερα κεχώρισται ἀλλήλων, ἐδόκουν δεικνύναι αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ κεχωρισμένον ἕκαστον. ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἄλλος μὲν λόγος Σωκράτους μουσικοῦ, ἄλλος δὲ Σωκράτους λευκοῦ, εἴη ἂν καὶ Σωκράτης αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ κεχωρισμένος.*

taria, p. 120, lines 12-17)

II. Stilpo's route to M2

Megaricism is extremely implausible. Rendering it interesting and intelligible will therefore require my saying something about why someone might be disposed sincerely to affirm such remarkable views. I begin with the more obscure claim, M2.

Why would anyone think that M2 is true, when it seems so obvious that a single thing can perfectly well satisfy heaps of names and descriptions, and not just 'its own proper λόγος'? Who on earth would deny that the following truths—'Socrates is clever', 'Socrates is the son of Sophroniscus', 'Socrates has a snub nose'—all belong to one and the same thing, Socrates? Who on earth would affirm instead, as M2 seems to, that since they are three distinct λόγοι, then if they belong to anything at all, they belong to three distinct things?

Aristotle, in passage A, cites one reason for thinking that M2 as formulated expresses a truth, namely, the fact that each thing for which there is a *definition* has exactly one finite λόγος that expresses it. Speak of Aristotle just insofar as he is a human being, and all and only what you have to say of him will be that he is a rational animal, assuming this is his definition. There is therefore a sense in which 'Aristotle is a rational animal' is Aristotle the human being's unique proper λόγος. Any other λόγος must belong to something else if it belongs to anything at all (which it will not, we are told, if it is false).

But this observation scarcely takes you to anything nearly so radical as what the Megarics meant by M2. They were not reflecting on common sense truths about the relations between a definition and its subject matter. Instead, it seems, they were mounting a wholesale attack on the idea that a single thing can satisfy many different predicates; and, conversely, on the claim that a single term can apply to many different things. They opposed our standard semantic one-many assumptions in both directions. If we are to get a sense of why they thought such things, it will be best to examine an example of their assault on the latter: the idea that a single term can apply to many different things. It will turn out that, according to the Megarics, if this is impossible, then it is also impossible for a single thing to satisfy many different terms.

According to a report of Diogenes, Stilpo of Megara had an argument that cast doubt on the intelligibility of common nouns. In the interpretation I offer below, that assault was directed at Plato's Theory of Forms, that theory being, among other things, an attempt to explain precisely that and why one term can apply to many different things. In Stilpo's attack on Plato, the collateral casualty seems, and seems intended to be, predication in general. Here is Diogenes:

As he [Stilpo] was very able in eristic arguments, he even abolished the forms. He also said that someone saying, '[a] human exists' [is saying] 'no one [exists]'⁶; for '[a] human' is neither

⁶ My translation of this clause is influenced by Caston 1999, who takes λέγοντα and εἶναι as

this one here nor that one there; for why should he be this one here rather than that one there? Therefore, he is not this one here either. Or again: cabbage is not what is being pointed to, since there was cabbage a thousand years ago. So this is not cabbage.’⁷ (Diogenes Laertius ii 119.4-9)

Both the text I print, and my translation of it, are controversial, and call for some defence.

In selecting each, I have adopted the following hypotheses, all of which I need to make the interpretation presented here plausible.

(i) The arguments Diogenes here attributes to Stilpo, about ‘human’ and ‘cabbage’, whatever their form or precise conclusions, were the means by which Stilpo ‘abolished the forms’. Whatever his arguments were meant to show about ‘human’ and ‘cabbage’, they were presumably meant to generalize to all other common nouns, and hence to all locutions with which one might attempt to refer to Platonic Forms.

(ii) Stilpo enjoys a reputation as someone hostile to predication, and hence those theories that attempt to explain it.⁸ Plato’s Theory of Forms is one such theory. It would therefore be preferable, if possible, to interpret Stilpo’s arguments as presenting a genuine objection to that theory, instead of saying something with which any sensible proponent of it should *agree*. But most interpretations of Stilpo’s argument treat it as saying something perfectly *consistent* with (indeed, coherent with) Plato’s position. They treat it as saying that if one says ‘human’, one is not speaking of this human here, nor of that human there. That, without further ado, is just the idea that ‘human’ does not refer to any demonstrable human. But any Platonist would surely *accept* that much. In speaking of a form, the F itself, one does not speak of some demonstrable F thing. But something that would be accepted by any Platonist hardly spells the abolition of the forms.⁹

implicit with μηδένα. Caston is translating from Giannantoni’s text, but his translation of the following clause suits much better the text of δ π φ.

⁷ δεινός δ’ ἄγαν ὢν ἐν τοῖς ἐριστικοῖς ἀνῆρει καὶ τὰ εἶδη· καὶ ἔλεγε τὸν λέγοντα ἀνθρώπων εἶναι μηδένα· οὔτε γὰρ τόνδε εἶναι οὔτε τόνδε. τί γὰρ μᾶλλον τόνδε ἢ τόνδε; οὐδ’ ἄρα τόνδε. καὶ πάλιν· τὸ λάχανον οὐκ ἔστι τὸ δεικνύμενον· λάχανον μὲν γὰρ ἦν πρὸ μυρίων ἐτῶν· οὐκ ἄρα ἐστὶ τοῦτο λάχανον. I print the received Greek text, following Giannantoni 1990, but with an important exception that I have italicized: in line 2, I follow the manuscripts δ π φ, which put εἶναι where the received text has λέγειν. I argue for my choice in the main text. Both Döring 1972 and Goulet-Cazé 1999 accept, as I do not, the emendation of Roeper, from εἶναι μηδένα to λέγειν μηδένα in line 2, but otherwise follow the received text in having λέγειν where I adopt εἶναι in the following clause. Therefore, according to them, the force of Stilpo’s claim is ‘when someone says ‘human’, he does not *speaks of* anyone; for he *speaks of* neither this human here nor that human there’. (Giannantoni 1990, iv 105-106 n9 also regards Roeper’s emendation as the most plausible solution to the problem). Again, I give my reasons for rejecting this emendation in the main text.

⁸ For another example of this, see the dispute reported between Stilpo and Colotes at Plutarch, *Adv. Colot*, 1120a3ff.

⁹ So, e.g., among those who accept Roeper’s emendation in line 2: Denyer 1991, 34: ‘Someone who speaks of man does not speak of anyone; for he doesn’t speak of this one, nor of that. For why should he be speaking of this one as opposed to that? It follows that he isn’t speaking of this one.’

(iii) καὶ πάλιν in line 3 conversationally implies, if it does not outright entail, that the force of the two arguments reported here is the same. But the force of the ‘cabbage’ argument is that the *demonstrandum*, at which the proponent of the argument points (*ex hypothesi* some cabbage) is *not* in fact cabbage (οὐκ ἄρα ἐστὶ τοῦτο λάχανον). If the ‘cabbage’ argument is meant to repeat what the ‘human’ argument was supposed to show, then the force of οὐδ’ ἄρα τόνδε in line 3 will not be the true, innocuous ‘this human here is not the referent of the common noun “human”’. It will have the force of ‘not even this one here is [a] human’. I use the assumption that this is so to determine both the wording and the translation of the problem sentence in lines 1-2, καὶ ἔλεγε τὸν λέγοντα ἄνθρωπον εἶναι μηδένα.

I do not expect my readers to find any of (i)-(iii) entirely persuasive taken individually. Taken collectively, though, they are very plausible, and give us a better version of both text and interpretation than the available alternatives.

According to my understanding, Stilpo’s arguments are an exotic combination of two forms of reasoning beloved of Greek dialecticians: namely, indifference reasoning and *reductio ad absurdum*. It is not surprising to see a virtuoso dialectician such as Stilpo attempting to use both these forms at once, however disastrous the consequences of doing so are for the soundness of one’s argument. He aims to derive, from the claim ‘Someone is human’, the universal conclusion ‘No one is human’; and from ‘This is cabbage’, presumably made by someone pointing at a head of cabbage, the conclusion ‘This is not cabbage’. That these are *reductiones* should be clear; how they work using indifference reasoning I now attempt to show.

It will be easiest to start with the ‘cabbage’ argument. I take Stilpo’s indifference premise here, expressed by the observation that cabbage was around ages ago, to amount to the following. There is no more reason for some stuff at which we point, even if we suppose for the moment that it is some cabbage, to satisfy the common noun ‘cabbage’, than other stuff, no less cabbage, that was around ages ago. So either both satisfy ‘cabbage’ or neither do. But (and here we can only guess at Stilpo’s idea) stuff from thousands of years ago no longer exists, and hence cannot satisfy a common noun like ‘cabbage’, or any other for that matter. Therefore, by the indifference premise, neither can the stuff at which we point. Therefore the stuff before us is not cabbage.

Diogenes’ report does not mention Stilpo drawing the obvious conclusion from this: *nothing* is cabbage, or *there is no cabbage*. For presumably the thing at which we point initially was picked as an *arbitrary* example of cabbage. If not even *that* is cabbage, then surely *nothing is*. Now recall hypotheses (ii) and (iii) above. By (ii), Stilpo’s ‘human’ argument is not an attempt to affirm the truth that ‘human’ does not refer to any human. By (iii), Stilpo’s ‘human’ argument is supposed to have the same force as the one about cabbage. It will therefore con-

Goulet-Cazé 1999, 329-330: ‘Il allait jusqu’à dire quand on dit <<homme>>, on ne dit personne, car on ne dit ni cet homme ni cet homme-là. Pourquoi en effet serait-ce plutôt celui-ci que celui-là? Par conséquent ce n’est pas non plus celui-ci.’

clude that any arbitrary thing of which we try to say, 'this is a human' will not in fact be a human. It follows that *no one is a human*.

As we took an arbitrary cabbage, we take an arbitrary human. She satisfies the common noun 'human' no more and no less than any other human. Therefore if we pick some other human, either both satisfy 'human' or neither do. But (and once again we can only guess at Stilpo's reasoning) the thing comprised of both does not satisfy 'human'. Whatever queer object that is, it is not a human being. So neither of its parts are. So, in particular, this human here is not a human. As with the cabbage argument, it follows that *nothing* is human. Or, put another way, no one is a human.¹⁰

Now what has this perverse argument to do with M2? Stilpo seems to have thought that if any expressions *can* be properly predicated, *only* proper names can, the anti-Platonic idea being that no *single* term can apply to *many* items.¹¹ Happily, this point can be articulated by way of a fact my reconstruction has sought to emphasize, that Stilpo's arguments here are *indifference* arguments. For only in the case of proper names will Stilpo be unable to generate an indifference premise analogous to those mentioned above. If you use the expression 'human' or 'cabbage' of something, Stilpo will be able to adduce other things to which 'human', and 'cabbage' apparently apply equally well, with a view to undermining your original claim via considerations of indifference. But in the case of such proper names as 'Socrates' and 'Plato', there is no such thing for Stilpo to adduce. 'Human' may apply to Socrates no less than it does to Plato, and Stilpo can play his games accordingly. But 'Socrates' applies only to one of them. There is nothing else to which Stilpo can appeal, to which the proper name 'Socrates' applies no more and no less.

If the only expressions we can apply to things are proper names, then we are deprived of the ability to make certain sorts of inferences involving existential quantification. Recall the examples from the start of this section: *we* think that the λόγοι 'Socrates is clever', 'Socrates is the son of Sophroniscus', and 'Socrates has a snub nose' are, contrary to M2, three among many other λόγοι belonging to one and the same thing: Socrates. The verbal difference between these three λόγοι does not remotely tempt us into inferring the existence of three distinct entities, Socrates-the-clever, Socrates-the-son-of-Sophroniscus, and Socrates-the-snub-nosed. But that is just because our understanding these three λόγοι as we do is tantamount to our being disposed to infer from them the further existentially quantified claim 'There is someone who is both clever, the son of Sophroniscus, and snub-nosed'. We do *not just* infer: 'Someone is clever', 'Someone is the son of Sophroniscus', and 'Someone is snub-nosed'.

In short, if the only predications you can recognise involve proper names

¹⁰ As the reader will note, quite a bit of guesswork has gone into this reconstruction of what we are told of Stilpo's arguments. But guesswork is involved in any interpretation of this perplexing text. Mine at least respects hypotheses (i)-(iii), which I took to be, at least collectively, plausible.

¹¹ This is inferred even by those who understand the argument in a different way from me, e.g., Denyer 1991. My reading is close to that of Caston 1999.

alone, then you cannot make the sort of crucial inference just described. And if you cannot make such inferences, then you will think that if a λόγος belongs to anything at all, then it belongs to one thing at most. Therefore Stilpo's argument as I have reconstructed it, whose initial target was the idea of *one term* applying to *many things*, leads naturally to the rejection of the converse idea that *one thing* might enjoy *many terms*. But the latter is just one way of expressing M2. In this way, as I understand it, Stilpo's attack on Plato's Theory of Forms lead naturally to his colleagues' affirmation, as reported by Simplicius, of M2.

III. M2 developed

Here is M2 specified more precisely:

M2: For anything you like, there is precisely one λόγος belonging to it; and for any λόγος you like, there is exactly one thing to which it belongs.

My formulation calls for some defence. Aristotle and Simplicius testify to Megaric adherence to the first conjunct, that each thing has its own proper λόγος. In the previous Section, I supplied some extra evidence for attributing this claim to the Megarics, via Stilpo. If you cannot make inferences from plural claims about a single thing to a single existentially generalized claim about that thing, then you will think that if a λόγος belongs to anything at all, it belongs to one thing *at most*. But the second conjunct of my formalization adds an extra ingredient. For it says that any λόγος will belong to one thing *at least*. That claim is not apparently entailed either by Simplicius's report, or my interpretation of Stilpo.

To see the difference between the conjuncts of my formalization, it is helpful to go back to passage (B), and the truth Aristotle admits the Megarics capture accidentally with their bizarre claims: that there will be some single finite *defining* formula for any object susceptible to definition. Aristotle would presumably have accepted that there is a formula in some way associated with his favourite non-existent substance, the goat-stag, namely, the formula saying what the expression 'goat-stag' signifies (see, e.g., *Posterior Analytics* 92b27ff.). But this formula would not be a *definition* of the goat stag; for if it were, 'goat-stag' would name a genuine secondary substance, which is impossible. For Aristotelian secondary substances have to be *non-empty* species or genera (see, e.g., *Posterior Analytics* 83b28-31). On the contrary, a 'definition' of the goat-stag cobbled together from the definitions of goats and stags would strictly speaking be false; and we are told at *Metaphysics* 1029b31-32 (in passage (B)) that 'the false λόγος is a λόγος which belongs to nothing without qualification'.

I include the second conjunct in my interpretation of M2 for two reasons.

Firstly, it is strongly suggested if not outright implied by Aristotle's use of the expression 'one to one' (ἐν ἑφ' ἐνός) in giving us Antisthenes' conception of the relation between things and their λόγοι in passage (B). The idea seems to be that objects and their λόγοι pair up one-to-one, in which case it will follow that each and every λόγος has its own object. In what follows, I shall refer to the objects so

belonging to λόγοι as *monads*. I do so with a view to capturing their uniqueness with respect to their correlative λόγοι, and hence the failure of each monad to have anything in common with a monad belonging to some different λόγος.

Secondly, the second conjunct is hinted at in an argument in the *Euthydemus*, Plato's scornful dramatization of contemporary Sophists, and a work in which several arguments give off distinctively Megaric odours.¹² In one argument, the Sophist Dionysodorus is trying to persuade a young man, Ctesippus, that it is not possible to say something false. Dionysodorus says (283e9-284a1) '[sc. Is it possible to say something false], *when one speaks of the thing about which the λόγος is concerned* or when one does not speak of it?' Dionysodorus is trying to get his victim to pass from (a) the innocuous truth that any formula is bound to have some subject-matter (for even propositions about unicorns are *about* unicorns, and propositions about round squares are *about* round squares) to (b) the blatant falsehood that therefore there is some constituent of the world about which that formula is concerned. This, of course, would be like inferring that since I dreamed of my holidaying in the Bahamas last night, there is therefore some holiday in the Bahamas of mine, of which I dreamed last night. Such moves are sufficient for the scepticism about falsehood that pervaded Sophistic and Pre-socratic thought; and of course Aristotle, in passage (B), is explicit on the point that Antisthenes' doctrine is sufficient for the non-existence of falsehood. It is therefore all the more worthwhile pursuing the logical connections between M1 and M2. For while Aristotle *explicitly* ties M2 to scepticism about falsehood, he *implicitly* ties M1 to the same position, when he tells us in (A) that those who maintain M1 end up affirming 'the doctrine of Protagoras'. This is sufficient, at least for the moment, to include the second conjunct in our formulation of M2.

IV. The Megaric route to M1

Let us therefore turn to M1 and ask as we did with M2 what the claim amounts to and why anyone would be drawn to such a strange view.

M1 is reported in passage (A), a text from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* ix. It is there reported, and understood by Aristotle, as a claim about capacities in particular rather than possibilities in general (see Beere 2009, 93-99). *Capacities* are properties of individuals; by contrast, *possibility* is a property of states of affairs. But in what follows I shall understand M1 as a claim about possibility in general, not merely capacity in particular. In other words, a suitably precise formalization of my interpretation of M1 is:

M1: For all p, p is possible if and only if p: $(\forall p)(\diamond p \leftrightarrow p)$ ¹³

That is, I take the Megarics to be claiming that the actual and the possible are

¹² The *Euthydemus* also contains apparent instances of the first conjunct: see 285e9, where Dionysodorus asks 'Aren't there λόγοι for each of the things that are?'. Note that here I want to make only the weak claim that some Megaric doctrines very likely influenced the composition of the *Euthydemus*; not the stronger claim that Plato had only the Megarics in mind when composing this argument.

¹³ For this interpretation of the Megarics' claim, see Bobzien 1993, 1996.

coextensive. Their view does away with contingency altogether. According to them, no state of affairs is merely possible without also being actual. Following the biconditional in the other direction, anything that is not the case could not be the case.

My reasons for understanding the Megarics thus are as follows. The most persuasive argument for thinking that capacities exist only when actualized readily generalizes to possibilities. It generalizes so readily that it is hard to see how one could hold the narrow view that capacities exist only when actualized, using this argument, without going all the way to the broader view that possibilities exist only when actual.

Beere 2009, 94 affirms, 'The basic motivation [for M1] is not a general opposition to powers and possibilities or a general insistence that the real does not outstrip the actual.' He then turns to the task of showing why anyone might think that a thing has the capacity to ϕ only when it is actually ϕ ing. Following an example attributed to Philo the Dialectician, he invites us to imagine a stick lying at the bottom of the ocean, which, being wooden, is of a nature to burn, but cannot in fact do so given its present circumstances. Given the stick's submerged state, it cannot burn. Now imagine that stick dredged up and dried in the sun. Can it burn now? It is no doubt in some sense *closer* to combustion, being dry and in the presence of oxygen. But still, until something sufficient for its actually burning occurs, it will not burn, and to the extent that nothing sufficient for its burning *is* taking place, a Megaric will have evidence to say that at that moment it *cannot* burn. For precisely the same was true of the stick—that is, nothing sufficient for its burning is taking place—when it was lying on the ocean floor, when we agreed that in some important sense it *could not* burn. As Beere 2009, 97 puts it: 'Only when it burns will the stick be able to burn. For, until that moment, some condition or other that would have been sufficient for the burning of the stick was not fulfilled. If the stick did not burn, then no condition sufficient for the burning of the stick was fulfilled.' He then goes on to imagine (solely for the sake of simplicity) that there is precisely one set of conditions jointly *sufficient* for the stick's burning, each member of which will therefore be *necessary* for the stick's burning. If each is necessary, then the absence of any of them means that the stick then *cannot* burn. But if that is so, the stick *can* burn only when it is *actually* burning, and the Megaric wins his point.

But thought experiments such as this, especially when developed in the language of such utterly general concepts as *necessary and sufficient conditions*, do not tell us something about powers *alone*. Whatever they tell us about powers, they tell us about state of affairs quite generally. If your thought is that p can happen only when conditions sufficient for p have occurred, then without further argument your claim is true of conditions wider than those expressed by such sentences as 'x can ϕ '. Accordingly we are taken back to the idea, earlier rejected by Beere, that M1 *is* an insistence that the real does not outstrip the actual. It is not simply that there is no capacity unaccompanied by its actualization; rather,

there is no genuine possibility unaccompanied by its actuality.¹⁴

Perhaps an illustration will make my point clearer. Let us take an example Aristotle would accept, of an event's being possible, even though its being actual would *not* be a matter of some capacity being exercised. That is, the relevant sense of $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\tau\acute{o}\nu$ in this illustration applies solely to states of affairs: the example concerns 'possible' but not 'can', in the sense in which the latter signifies a capacity. We will see that an argument exactly parallel to the one about the submerged stick can all too easily be formulated.

Consider an occurrence involving luck or chance, such as the one imagined by Aristotle at *Physics* 196b30ff. Presumably, it is *possible* for me, quite by chance, to bump into my debtor in the market place. It is possible for me to meet him *as luck would have it*. When such events actually occur, they are lucky, for the Aristotelian reason that, although they were not brought about intentionally (for I did not go to the market place to collect my debt), they are among the sort of event that typically otherwise would be brought about intentionally. Note, though, that nothing actualizes a relevant *capacity* or power when I bump into my debtor *as luck would have it*. For if this event so described could be accounted for as the actualization of some capacity—any capacity, whether rational or non-rational—it would not in fact be lucky (for it would then be the sort of thing that happens always or for the most part).

Now the Megaric can all too easily argue thus, along the lines of the argument Beere offers about the sunken stick. Is the state of affairs of my meeting my debtor in the market place *as luck would have it* a possible one? Not if we live on different continents all our lives: we shall never meet then. Suppose then that we live in the same town: can we possibly meet *as luck would have it* now? Again, not if neither of us goes there (suppose I am agoraphobic); even more importantly, not if either of us goes there typically with the intention of extracting, or settling, debts. Just as in the case of the stick burning, my debtor and I cannot meet *as luck would have it* unless conditions sufficient for this happening occur. But therefore, there will be just as much reason to infer that it is *impossible* for us to meet *as luck would have it*, unless we do *actually* so meet, as there is to assume that a stick *cannot* burn, unless it does *actually* burn.

In short: if the reasons Beere offers the Megarics for holding M1 were their actual reasons, it would be extraordinary if their view *fell short of* my interpretation of it, as $(\forall p)(\diamond p \leftrightarrow p)$. If those were their reasons for making a claim about $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\tau\acute{o}\nu$ as a predicate of individual objects, they are just as good reasons for

¹⁴ Beere 2009, 96 concludes his illustration with this remark: 'In order for the stick to burn, conditions that are sufficient for the burning of the stick have to be fulfilled. If sufficient conditions are not fulfilled, then, obviously, the stick does not and cannot burn. But these considerations are not especially connected with sticks and flames. They apply to anything's performing any action.' One might add, in defense of my reading of M1: 'But these considerations are not especially connected with things actualizing their capacities by performing actions; that is, with things and their intrinsic modal properties. They apply to anything that can occur whatsoever; that is, to states of affairs quite generally and their modal characteristics.'

making a claim about δυνατόν as a predicate of states of affairs.¹⁵

V. The Material Equivalence of M1 and M2

Surprisingly, M1 and M2 as I have interpreted them entail one another.

That M2 entails M1 is reasonably easy to see. Megaric monads as I have described them above have no hidden aspect to them. All and only of what there is to them is encoded in their own unique formulae. Therefore, in a universe populated exclusively by such monads, nothing could enjoy the further aspect of having some unactualised potential. Anything that *could* be true of such objects *would* actually be true of them. The point is perhaps helpfully put the other way. If something were possible but non-actual for some Megaric monad, then something would hold of it besides the predicates it actually satisfies. There would therefore be more than one way of describing or thinking about such an object: one in terms of what is *actually* true of it, another in terms of what *could be but is not* true of it (and a third, of course, in terms of both). Put even more simply: the same object might have plural λόγοι. But M2 prohibits such plural descriptions of anything. Therefore M2 entails M1.¹⁶

It is slightly trickier, but not by much, to see that M1 entails M2. Let us begin by asking ourselves the following question: if something were *actually* all it *could* ever be, all at once as it were, could there be multiple descriptions of the same object? The answer, surprisingly, is no. For suppose that some arbitrary object is actually all it could ever be. That is, it actually satisfies all values of F that are possible for it to satisfy. Included, then, in its actual properties will be the way in which it is *described*.¹⁷ There will not be some other way in which it is *describable*, for then, by M1, it would be so *described*. If there were anything else to say about it, that would just be part of its description. For example, it would not be possible to speak of Socrates-the-clever, and omit to speak of

¹⁵ Of course it is possible for someone to infer Q from P; for P to entail R as well; but for that person not to affirm R as well, through thoughtlessness, inattention etc. But to accuse the Megarics of this is not charitable, and Beere 2009, 91 admits that interpreting *Meta.* ix 3 requires some charity towards them. Mine would no doubt be unwarranted if it pulled too much away from that due to Aristotle. But it does not: Aristotle's arguments are effective against M1 as I interpret it as well.

¹⁶ That may seem too quick for some, so I offer a brief example. Consider the following object: *a*-the-red-at-*l*, the monad whose λόγοις is 'a is a red object at location *l*'; and another object, *b*-the-blue-at-*l*+5-in-*d*, the monad whose λόγοις is 'b is a blue object at location *l*+5 miles in direction *d*'. It is tempting to think that these monads—'a' and 'b' for short—each enjoy some unactualized potential: for among other things, they could be closer or further apart than they are, in the same or different directions. But if this were so, then by M2 their formulae would have to be different. *a* would have some such different formula as 'a is a red object at location *l* which might be but isn't actually at location...'. But that is *not* its formula, *ex hypothesi*; and if it were, it would be a different monad altogether, *not* our first monad with some unactualized potential now revealed in its formula.

¹⁷ I here refer the reader to the argument of the previous section. For Aristotle, 'being described in such and such a way' is not a genuine capacity or power of any object (nor, indeed, would being described in a new way, even truly, constitute a *change* in that object according to him: see *Categories* 4a10-b25). But I have already argued for the legitimacy of taking M1 as intended by the Megarics to be a claim about possibilities quite generally.

Socrates-the-son-of-Sophoniscus, unless one could not speak of Socrates-the-son-of-Sophoniscus. But if one could not speak of Socrates-the-son-of-Sophoniscus, that would just mean that Socrates was not actually the son of Sophroniscus: that would be a case of the formula 'Socrates is the son of Sophroniscus' being false, and belonging, as even Aristotle agrees, quite simply to nothing. So if you spoke of a thing at all, you would have to use all and only those predicates satisfied by the object. Leaving some out would have you potentially but not actually describing it in a different way, contrary to M1. On the contrary, if M1 is correct then any object enjoying a description at all enjoys precisely one; that is, M2 would be correct too.¹⁸

So in a world in which all states of affairs possible for an object are actual, all at once as it were, objects and descriptions pair off with each other 'one to one', just as Aristotle in (B) reports the Megarics as holding. Therefore this much at least can be said for Megaricism: whatever its faults, it is startlingly coherent insofar as its two claims, which initially seem to have nothing to do with one another, are not just mutually supporting, but mutually entailing.

VI. M1 entails monism

According to Simplicius in passage (C), the Megarics intended their views about language to have an explosive consequence: 'each thing is separate from itself', and hence the world splinters up into as many Megaric monads as there are distinct λόγοι.

But it is easy to see that there is no less a sense in which Megaricism is implosive, for M1 entails monism; actually, Parmenidean monism, the thesis that there is precisely one thing. Megaricism is both explosive and implosive.

Consider an arbitrary extended object of finite size. That object is either continuous or discrete; that is, as the Aristotle of the *Physics* would have it, either it has parts joined together at a common boundary, or it is comprised of indivisibles that, while they may be in contact, cannot share a common boundary. Now consider Aristotle's illuminating remark at *Physics* 212b4-6: 'So whenever the homogeneous thing is continuous, its parts are *potentially* in a place; but when the parts are separated but touching, as in a heap, they are *actually* in a place.'¹⁹

¹⁸ That may seem too quick for some, so again I offer a brief example. The reason it might seem too quick is that you might think the following: 'if an object is correctly describable with, say, a conjunction, won't it therefore be correctly describable in two quite different ways, namely, by each conjunct individually? Those ways are bound to be different since the conjuncts of conjunctions are always different from those conjunctions. Why, if an object *a* is *actually* F and G, can it not be described by at least *three* different formulae (i.e., by 'Fa ∧ Ga'; by just 'Fa'; or by just 'Ga')?' The answer is again simple. According to M1 as I interpret it, nothing can be possible without being actual. So in particular, nothing could *both* be describable with the conjunction 'Fa ∧ Ga' *and* just by the first conjunct alone, 'Fa'. For if anything were actually describable by the first conjunct *alone*, then by M1 it would be so described *alone*; but then it would not *also* be described by the conjunction 'Fa ∧ Ga'; but therefore, according to M1, it *could* not be so described.

¹⁹ διὸ ὅταν μὲν συνεχὲς ᾖ τὸ ὁμοιομερές, κατὰ δύναμιν ἐν τόπῳ τὰ μέρη, ὅταν δὲ χωρισθῇ μὲν ἀπτηται δ' ὡσπερ σωρός, κατ' ἐνέργειαν.

Suppose our arbitrary object is continuous. Then by M1, the fact that it is *possible* for each of its non-denumerably many parts to occupy a place entails that all of them actually *do* occupy a place. In that case our object, according to Aristotle's criterion, will have non-denumerably many parts separated but touching. But in that case it will be infinitely big, contrary to the hypothesis.²⁰

So by M1 our object cannot have continuous parts, parts joined together at some common boundary. So it must be a discrete object; it must have parts capable of contact no more intimate than touching. It must, as Aristotle suggests, be like a heap. But the parts of a heap, not sharing a common boundary, are capable both of touching one another and of being dispersed, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that can be now fitted together in the solved puzzle, but now spatially separated from one another as far away as you like. By M1, since both of these incompatible circumstances are possible for the parts of our object, both will be actual for it. Therefore our object will be both complete and dispersed, exploding while it is imploding. But that, of course, is impossible. So by M1 our arbitrary object cannot have discrete parts, parts capable of touching and not touching. But the only ways for a thing to have parts is for those parts to be either continuous or discrete. Therefore our arbitrary object, according to M1, cannot have any parts. The argument generalizes: by M1, no object can have parts. And it generalizes further to show that if there were a partless object, there could not be more than one. For if there were two partless objects, then again they would be the parts of some further whole comprising the two, of which they would be either continuous or discrete, and about which we might re-run the *reductiones* of this paragraph.

Therefore by M1, if there is anything, there is just one partless thing. That is Parmenidean monism.

Now consider the two kinds of motion fundamental to Greek physics, locomotion from one place to another, and local motion around some axis. M1 rules out either of these occurring. For being capable of locomotion entails being in one place but potentially being in another. And being capable of local motion entails being in one position relative to an axis but potentially being in another. M1 says that, wherever an object is, it cannot be anywhere else. For by M1, an object *here* could not be *here* but possibly *there*. For if it is possibly *there* it is actually *there*, in which case it is both *here* and *there*, which is impossible. Nor can an object bear the relation R to an axis but possibly be R* to that axis (where R and R* are incompatible), for then it will actually be R* to the axis, and hence both R and R*

²⁰ You might object that it need not be infinitely big if there is no lower limit on how small these separate, touching, non-overlapping parts can be. There is no problem about a body of finite size being composed by infinitely many bodies that get infinitesimally small. But Aristotle would surely deny that any point that has gone far enough into actuality to be located in the manner of the parts of a heap *could* be arbitrarily small. For him, there surely *would* be a lower limit on the size of *actually* separated points: and non-denumerably many of these will require any body they compose to be infinitely big. And that is quite consistent with his insights into the nature of continua generally. On this, see his remarks about continua and actuality at *Physics* viii 263a23-b3.

to the axis; which is again impossible. Similar considerations show that M1 denies the existence of change altogether: for if anything is F but potentially un-F, or F but un-F at some future time, it would now be both F and un-F. So if anything in M1's world is ever F for some value of F it is always F.²¹

It is therefore small wonder that when Diogenes Laertius introduces us to the first Megaric philosopher, Euclides of Megara, he tells us immediately (D.L. ii 106.3) that Euclides studied the writings of Parmenides (οὐτος καὶ τὰ Παρμενίδεια μετεχειρίζετο). Euclides did more than study them. For he and his followers affirmed claims that entail Parmenides' grandest conclusion.

VII. M2 entails monism

It takes a few more moments to realize that M2 entails monism too, and not just because it is materially equivalent to M1, according to my argument. This should sound shocking: for we have seen repeatedly how M2 entails the fragmentation of everything into as many monads as there are λόγοι, of which there are presumably as many as you like. Of course nothing about any single monad entails that there have to be other monads, and whatever M1's singleton is, it is monadic at least insofar as it is partless and indivisible. But equally certainly, M2 seems constitutively *pluralistic*: remember those *two* strange, separate creatures, Socrates-the-clever and Socrates-the-son-of-Sophoniscus.

Plato's reflections in the *Sophist* show how M2 also entails monism. In that dialogue Plato seems to be developing the view that for no value of F can anything be *just* F and nothing else besides. Anything you like, merely in order to belong to a domain over which one can quantify with 'Anything', needs to have more by way of metaphysical grain than a single property. More precisely, anything you like must blend with at least some of the five greatest kinds: being, motion, rest, sameness and difference. Generalizing from the Stranger's demonstration of the blending of kinds at *Sophist* 255e-256d, anything you like, if it is to exist at all, must be the same as itself, different from everything else, and either at rest or in motion. But no Megaric monad can enjoy any such properties, for then it would have as a constituent something shared by everything *else*, which M2 rules out: each Megaric monad enjoys *only* what is captured by its own proper λόγος. According to Plato, the property of *difference-from-all-other-things* is a constituent of absolutely everything. But according to Megaricism, there can be no such constituents, for monads cannot share anything among themselves. Therefore in such a universe everything again collapses into one thing at most. The would-be explosiveness of M2, recorded by Simplicius in passage (C), is ultimately an implosion towards monism, so drastically impoverished are the monads involved.

I conjecture that Plato detected this consequence of Megaricism. We have already seen briefly, at the end of section 3, that Megaricism (specifically M2)

²¹ For corresponding claims in the philosophy of the historical Parmenides: the universe is without a beginning and an end (Parmenides Fr. 8.5-21); not divided (8.22-25); unchanging (8.26-33).

was likely to have been one of his targets in composing the sophistic moves displayed in his dialogue *Euthydemus*. At *Euthydemus* 303d8-e1, Socrates is listing the sort of outrageous positions for which Euthydemus and Dionysodorus like to argue, one of which is that there is no difference whatsoever between one thing and another (μηδὲ τὸ παρόπαν ἑτέρων ἕτερον). That is, they sometimes argue that if there is anything at all, there is just one thing. Precisely that is entailed by *both* conjuncts of Megaricism.

VIII. Megaricism and the *Theaetetus*: knowing and not knowing

We have thus seen one reason why it is natural to associate the Megarics with Parmenides, as Diogenes does: their views entail Parmenidean monism. I now turn to their association with Protagoras, mentioned in Aristotle's report of M1. In what follows I assume that the Protagoras Aristotle had in mind is best treated as the Protagoras of Plato's *Theaetetus* rather than the historical figure (see Makin 2006, 66).

Consider an argument from the second section of the *Theaetetus* that purports to show that it is not possible to make mistaken judgements:

1. For all x either you know x or you do not (188a1-2, a5-7).
2. If you know x you will not make mistaken judgments about x (188b1-5).
3. If you do not know x, you cannot make any judgments (and hence, *a fortiori*, any mistaken judgments) about x (188b7-10).

In the context of the *Theaetetus*, this argument is treated as a threat, providing a serious challenge to the idea that it is possible to judge falsely (188c5-8). And yet it is itself weird (188c4, τέρας) that this argument should be treated as a threat. For a structurally similar one from *Meno* 80d-e is *not* treated as a threat, even before it is answered (Socrates is avowedly unimpressed by it: see *Meno* 81a3); and it is shown to be unsound by multiple distinctions, none of them particularly hard to make (e.g., the distinction between recollected and un-recollected knowledge; or the distinction between knowledge and true belief). This is the argument that purports to show that it is not possible to inquire, the premises of which are:

- (1'. For all x either you know x or you do not.)²²
- 2'. If you know x you cannot inquire into x.
- 3'. If you do not know x, you cannot inquire into x.

Why is the argument from the *Theaetetus* apparently more threatening than the one from the *Meno*, given their structural similarity? The answer is that only in the *Theaetetus* do we find Megaricism and the ontology to which it is committed taken seriously. Find Megaricism as I have developed it at all attractive and you will be equally attracted to the conclusion that it is impossible to make false judgements. For, as I shall now show, an ontology of Megaric monads as

²² I bracket 1' because unlike 1 it is not explicitly affirmed in the text; but like 1 it is required for the argument to be valid.

described above is necessary and sufficient for the argument from knowing and not knowing to be sound.

On learning the true λόγος 'Socrates is clever', one is now acquainted, according to M2, with a special object to which that λόγος belongs, which I shall designate with the name 'Socrates-the-clever'. That object is a wafer-thin monad: there is absolutely nothing to it other than whatever is encoded in the formula 'Socrates is clever'. Hence by being acquainted with it at all, you know absolutely all there is to know about it. It is not like ordinary fat or perspectival objects; it has no further aspect, which can go unnoticed or unconsidered when you think of the thing.²³ It is not even like ordinary thin objects, for they too can have extrinsic properties that can go unnoticed or unconsidered when you think of them, without that fattening them up metaphysically. You can think of metres while being wholly unaware that, e.g., the reference of their common noun 'metre' was fixed in relation to a platinum-iridium bar in the French Academy of Sciences in Paris. There are no such extrinsic properties had by Socrates-the-clever; there is, according to M2, only what you get in the λόγος. Hence, if the thing has so much as entered your thoughts, you cannot make mistakes about it; nor is there any aspect of it about which you might remain ignorant.

Conversely, if you did not know the λόγος 'Socrates is clever', and hence were thoroughly unacquainted with the wafer-thin monad Socrates-the-clever, you could not *also* be in a position to make mistakes about it. For it simply does not enter your thoughts for you to be mistaken about it. You could no more be in error with regard to Socrates-the-clever than a child who had never even heard of Socrates could make a mistake about him; or than Homer could have made a mistake about Socrates. And of course, if everything is a wafer-thin object, then indeed error will be impossible. For anything you like, either one will be acquainted with it, in which case one will know all there is to know about it; or one will be sufficiently unacquainted with the thing for it not even to enter one's thoughts at all. Mistaken judgement is impossible in a world exhausted by wafer-thin monads.

So the ontology of Megaricism is sufficient for the soundness of this argument from the *Theaetetus*. But it is also necessary. For what the argument requires in order to be sound are objects of knowledge such that (i) *any* familiarity with them whatsoever suffices for knowledge of absolutely *every* fact about them; and consequently, (ii) ignorance of *any* fact about such objects suffices for complete and utter ignorance of the object in question. Only wafer-thin monads in the sense here described could satisfy (i) and (ii). Ordinary fat or thin objects could not: for unlike wafer-thin monads, they are all capable of entering one's thought in different ways. As such, one can know something about them without knowing every-

²³ Consider Frege's example of the mountain Aphla, which, like every other mountain, can be referred to and thought about by people familiar with only one feature of it. It seems to be that such items as Aphla's being able to enter one's thoughts in one way does not merely *allow for*, but *requires* there to be other ways in which it might enter one's thoughts. The example is from an undated letter of Frege's to Jourdain reproduced in Frege 1980.

thing about them (or conversely, one may be ignorant of some fact about them while still being able to have them in mind).

IX. Megaricism and the *Theaetetus*: the Secret Doctrine

Megaricism has already figured significantly in the *Theaetetus* by the time we reach the argument from knowing and not knowing. In developing the Secret Doctrine, Socrates argues that when a perceiver and a perceptible object encounter one another, their union produces twins, a perception and a perceived quality (156a-157c); he then goes on to eliminate perceivers and perceptible objects, and replace them with, respectively, bundles (ἄθροίσματα) of perceptions and perceived qualities. The resulting picture makes each person an infallible and omniscient authority over a world utterly private to them. It follows from this that the contents of other worlds cannot enter my thoughts; nor can the objects of my thoughts figure in someone else's thinking. I can no more think and talk about whatever someone else thinks and talks about than I can sneeze their sneezes or have their haircuts. For good reason this is sometimes called the Twin theory: no Siamese twin in one pair could be sibling to a twin in a different pair.

By placing the Twin theory alongside the offerings of the first section of the *Theaetetus*, we end up with a coherent but false philosophical position represented by a triptych. M2 as I have developed it is the semantic panel of that triptych; the Twin theory is the psycho-metaphysical panel, and Protagoras' Measure Doctrine the epistemological panel. In each case the idea is that two apparently distinct entities pair off with one another, 'one to one' to use Aristotle's helpful phrase from (A), in such a way that they are (i) *ontologically dependent* on each other and (ii) *informationally restricting*—they, as it were, lock in one another's content, to the exclusion of everything else. In particular, the semantic twins of M2 are ontologically dependent: there is no λόγος-less thing, and no thing-less λόγος. And they are informationally restricting: a thing's λόγος contains all and only the information about it.

Such claims are obviously associated with M1 as well. Hence Aristotle says that if M1 were correct then 'neither will there be cold nor hot nor sweet nor in general anything perceptible, if things are not being perceived'. The names Aristotle uses here, 'hot', 'cold', and 'sweet', are among those that the *Theaetetus*'s Twin theory recommends banning for 'making things stand still' (157b5, ὄνομα ὅτι ἄν ἴσται). On the contrary, whiteness, 'hot and hard and everything' (156e7-8) are not freestanding items according to the Twin theory, but are dependent for their becoming on co-dependent perceptions of them, just as M1 seems to say that capacities (at least) are co-dependent on their actualization. It is thus easy to see that M1, like the Twin theory, makes perceived qualities ontologically dependent on their being perceived. But it is not obvious why a proponent of M1 would make, as the Twin theory does, perceptions *private* to individual perceivers. In this respect does the Secret Doctrine go further than M1?

No: once again only a moment's thought shows why someone maintaining M1 would have to go as far as the Twin theory does in making the objects of percep-

tion utterly private to their perceivers.

For suppose that, on looking at a sunset, I am having a red-orange sensation if and only if there is some red-orange quality. Intuitively, it seems that someone other than me, looking at the same sunset, might have a token sensation whose intentional object is numerically identical to the object of my sensation. It is not obvious that M1 eliminates this possibility. M1 says (on any reading, even one narrower than mine) that such things as sunsets cannot be *disposed* to look red-orange to someone without *actually* looking red-orange to someone. But cannot such things as sunsets actually look red-orange to more than one person?

The Megaric has a reason to deny that this is possible. For in such circumstances, by the transitivity of 'if and only if', if someone else perceived the same red-orange quality as me, then my red-orange sensation would cease when and only when hers did. But that we perceive collectively is hardly something one should be forced into by the Megaric idolization of the actual and suspicion of the occult that M1 expresses. Whatever counter-intuitive consequences Megaricism has, there is no need for them to include the thesis that human beings perceive collectively. Hence it would be very natural for anyone propounding M1 to add that perceived qualities are private to perceivers. Hence it would be very natural for anyone propounding both conjuncts of Megaricism to propound just the view Plato describes as the Secret Doctrine in his *Theaetetus*.

In short, the privacy of perception affirmed by the Secret Doctrine need not be a quirk of Plato's invention. For there is good reason for anyone affirming such a claim as M1 to accept it.

X. Conclusion

I have attempted to show that, with some imaginative reconstruction, there is a good deal more to Megaricism than meets the eye. While the position is doubtless false, there are nevertheless reasons for being sympathetic to its conjuncts, especially if one has, as some philosophers still do, a fetish for the actual and a perplexity about the indefinite, whether the indefiniteness of the modal or that of the non-particular. I have shown how anti-Platonism about common nouns of the kind evinced by Stilpo makes M2 seem better considered than at first. And I have shown how scepticism about possibility without actuality, from which later logicians such as Diodorus and Philo felt they could not stray too far (see Bobzien 1993, 1998), makes M1 seem better considered than at first. Moreover I have demonstrated the impressive coherence of Megaricism, insofar as its conjuncts, as I interpret them, are both mutually entailing, and each in their ways both Parmenidean and Protagorean. Megaricism is wrong, but sufficiently intriguing and well integrated to make it worthy of serious consideration.²⁴

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²⁴ An earlier version of this article was read at a Colloquium in the Philosophy Department at

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