

Plato's Absolute and Relative Categories at *Sophist* 255c14

Beginning at *Sophist* 255c9¹ the Eleatic Stranger attempts a proof that 'being' (τὸ ὄν) and 'other' (τὸ θάτερον) are different very great kinds. The key step in this proof is to group beings (τῶν ὄντων) into those that are themselves in themselves (αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά) and those that are in relation to others (πρὸς ἄλλα). Much effort has been made to understand this distinction between αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά and πρὸς ἄλλα. The prevailing approach takes the former to name the class of 'absolute' terms and the latter to name the class of 'relative' terms,² categories described in Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Plato*.³ Many, however, have argued that this category approach fails

¹ For references, I follow the lineation of Duke, *et al.* 1995. However, they mislabel the key line, 255c14, as '15'. In Burnet 1900 and Diès 1925 it is line c13.

² Since Plato is liable to employ words without regard for the use/mention distinction, and the singular-term/universal distinction, 'terms' covers individuals and properties, subjects and predicates. I adopt 'categories' simply to mean classes of terms that are exclusive and between them exhaust all terms.

³ Defenders of this category approach, who cite Diogenes in support, include Dancy 1999, 45-49 and Malcolm 2006, 277. Owen 1957, 107n27 took this view, but later rejected it. Heinaman 1983, 14 and de Vries 1988, 385 share the above approach, but do not mention Diogenes by name. The category approach is opposed by: Frede 1967, 1-99 and 1992, 397-424; Owen 1970, 223-67; Bostock 1984, 89-119 and Brown 1986, 49-70, all of whom take a semantic approach and hold that the αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά and πρὸς ἄλλα distinction is between two senses or uses of the verb 'εἶναι'. I am in broad sympathy with the category approach, and my reading is a

because some terms, such as ‘sameness’, fit into neither class. In part I of this paper, I show that an alternative manuscript reading can preserve the general category approach, whilst allowing ‘sameness’ to fit into the scheme. Part II defends my alternative reading against the possible objection that certain terms do not fit into the new scheme.

I. The DL Category Reading and the Alternative Category Reading

Those who favour the category approach often suggest that we understand the αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά/πρὸς ἄλλα distinction of *Sophist* 255c14 in the light of the following Diogenes Laertius passage:

Amongst beings (τῶν ὄντων), some are absolute (καθ’ ἑαυτά), others are said in relation to something (πρὸς τι). Those said absolutely are all those which need (προσδεῖται) nothing to be added in expressing them (ἐν τῇ ἐρμηνείᾳ). Examples of these would be man, horse and the other animals... Those said in relation to something (πρὸς τι) are all those the expression of which need something, for example, larger than something, quicker than something, more beautiful and other such things. For the larger is larger than the smaller (ἐλάττονος) and the quicker is quicker than something (τινός) (*Lives* iii 108-9).

version of it. I will not discuss the semantic approach, which has become less dominant over recent years. For a good overview of the literature on this distinction, see Malcolm 2006, 276.

Call this interpretation ‘DL’.⁴ If we apply DL to *Sophist* 255c13-14, two mutually exclusive classes of beings are mentioned in Plato’s text: the ‘absolute’ and the ‘relative’. DL is taken to distinguish absolute from relative terms by saying that relative terms need some additional supplementation to decide their sense. They are therefore ‘incomplete’. The examples given in the Diogenes Laertius passage are comparative adjectives: ‘larger’, ‘quicker’ and ‘more beautiful’. In a typical case, ‘Socrates is larger’ must take a ‘than *Y*’ to determine its significance.⁵ As well as such syntactically incomplete terms, there are semantically incomplete terms like ‘large’: ‘Socrates is large’ may make a syntactic sentence, but one cannot assess the truth or falsehood of it without an additional ‘for a *Y*’ where ‘*Y*’ represents a kind term, for example.⁶ The contrasting examples of terms are ‘man’ and ‘horse’. These do not

⁴The above passage falls at the end of a long series of divisions (*Lives* iii 80-109) which Diogenes reports Aristotle as saying were made by Plato (*Lives* iii 80). Diogenes does not refer to any particular Platonic texts, and the DL reading does not make the historical claim that *Sophist* 255c14 is the source for this distinction in Diogenes. Rather the DL reading uses the distinction as an interpretive tool for looking at the *Sophist*.

⁵Note that the Greek comparative, unlike the English, can be used as syntactically complete to mean that an item has a property only to a limited extent: in Greek, ‘Socrates is larger’ could mean ‘Socrates is somewhat large’. However, it is clear that this is not the sense of the comparative here, since Diogenes specifies that ‘the larger is larger than the smaller’ and that ‘the quicker is quicker than something’ (*Lives* iii 109 3-4).

⁶For this view see Owen 1957, 108-9; Dancy 1999, 49-53 and Malcolm 2004, 284. Even though all the examples in DL are syntactically as well as semantically

require further supplementation to be meaningful: they are complete. But since incompleteness is the mark of relative terms, we should take these other terms, including ‘man’ and ‘horse’, as complete and we can call them ‘absolute’.⁷

As well as exclusive, DL takes the distinction at *Sophist* 255c13-14 to be exhaustive. Plato’s αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά and πρὸς ἄλλα are interpreted as having the same extension as the ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ classes of terms distinguished at DL iii. 108-9. The latter distinction is exhaustive since Diogenes uses the ‘τὰ μὲν...τὰ δέ...’ construction throughout this series of divisions (iii 80-109), to indicate an exhaustive division of a given genus into species. Particularly similar to 108-9 is 107-8, where that construction is used to distinguish the ‘divisible’ (τὰ μὲν μεριστά) from the ‘indivisible’ (τὰ δὲ ἀμερίστα), which is obviously an exclusive and exhaustive contrast. Moreover, in *Lives* iii 109, the ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ categories have proved to be identical with the classes of what we may call ‘complete’ and ‘incomplete’ terms. Since every term is either complete or incomplete, the distinction

incomplete, they take DL to indicate semantic, not syntactic incompleteness, which is not unreasonable: Diogenes’ claimed source for Plato’s view, Aristotle (DL iii 80), slides readily from syntactically incomplete examples (e.g. τὸ μείζον at *Cat.* 6a38) to semantically incomplete ones (e.g. ἔξις, διάθεσις, αἴσθησις, ἐπιστήμη and θέσις at *Cat.* 6b1-3).

⁷ DL might face an immediate problem in maintaining exclusivity in light of the text of the *Sophist*: at 255d3-8, the Stranger suggests that ‘being’ can fit into both the ‘relative’ and the ‘absolute’ class. This suggests that the argument is produced in context to help Theaetetus understand the difference between ‘being’ and ‘other’, and should not be pressed for a general doctrine of ‘being’ and ‘otherness’. I thank Professor Polansky for this suggestion.

between $\alpha\upsilon\tau\grave{\alpha}$ καθ' $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$ and $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλα is also exhaustive. For these reasons, the DL reading takes $\alpha\upsilon\tau\grave{\alpha}$ καθ' $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$ and $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλα to be exclusive and exhaustive categories.

Exhaustivity is targeted by the standard objection to the DL reading (see Frede 1967, 17; Owen 1970, 256; Malcolm 2006, 278). ' $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλα' means 'in relation to other things'. Therefore, any term that ' $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλα' correctly describes cannot relate a thing to itself. This entails that if X and Y are related by a $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλα term, then X and Y are numerically distinct. Call this kind of relative 'aliorelative'.⁸ The *Sophist* passage says that 'other' (255d1-7) is a $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλα term and it is indeed an excellent example of an aliorelative. 'Other' is a relative under the DL reading, because ' X is other' entails that X is other than some Y . Moreover, 'other' is aliorelative, because if X is other than Y , then X and Y are, for that very reason, non-identical.

Now, the objectors say, where do we place 'same'? It cannot simply be ignored. It is one of the five 'very great kinds', and it features prominently in the discussion from 254e2 onwards: in particular, the proof that precedes ours picks out 'same' explicitly (255b8-c8). But if, as scholars have urged, we take seriously the logical implications of $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλα, then 'same' will not fall into either category (Frede 1967, 17; Owen 1970 256; Malcolm 2006, 282). 'Same' cannot be in the class

⁸ This is an old term for what are now known as 'irreflexive relations'. I adopt the old term with a new meaning, so as to avoid simply assuming that Plato has a modern understanding of relations. Usually, an irreflexive relation is thought of thus: $\forall x \neg Rxx$. That is, if anything bears an irreflexive relation, it does not bear it to itself. If it is possible for x to bear the relation to itself, the relation is known as 'non-reflexive'. But since Plato does not clearly recognise 'individuals' and 'relations', I wish to allow 'relative' and 'aliorelative' to range over both.

of πρὸς ἄλλα terms, because if *X* is the same as *Y*, they are not numerically distinct. But ‘same’ is relational, in the sense that ‘same’ is an incomplete term: ‘*X* is the same’ must be completed with an ‘as *Y*’. So ‘same’ does not fit into the category of αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά either. Thus the division of terms in this passage is not exhaustive. Since the categories are supposed to be exhaustive under the DL reading, it is argued that the reading must be rejected.

To save the DL reading, we would need a logical class of terms that accommodates both ‘other’ and ‘same’. The natural move for the DL interpretation is to understand πρὸς ἄλλα as describing not only alio-relatives, but all relative terms, perhaps in line with DL iii. 108. 7: that is, to take πρὸς ἄλλα as equivalent to πρὸς τι (‘in relation to something’), which would include alio-relatives, such as ‘other’, as well as non-alio-relative terms, such as ‘the same’. Bostock and Dancy suggest such a move (Bostock, 1984, 93; Dancy 1999, 59). But this reply fails to take seriously the sense of πρὸς ἄλλα, and so fails to answer the objection as posed. Moreover, it is not clear that Diogenes understands πρὸς τι as wider than πρὸς ἄλλα: all Diogenes’ examples of relatives are alio-relatives. We must, therefore, look elsewhere to find a class description of ‘relatives’ that will accommodate both ‘other’ and ‘same’.

Adopting an alternative reading, favoured by one major manuscript family, can do this. At 255c14, the B and D manuscripts read πρὸς ἀλλήλα (in relation to each other), instead of πρὸς ἄλλα (in relation to others). As far as I am aware, no commentator or editor has suggested adopting the B and D reading.⁹ So before discussing the philosophical advantages of the alternative reading, let me make the palaeographical case for it. B and D belong to the same family of manuscripts, while

⁹ Silverman 2002, 165n57 notes that the manuscripts differ, but makes nothing of this observation.

T and W represent two separate manuscript families (Duke, *et al.* 1995, 384; Nicoll 1975, 41). So editors may prefer the T and W reading of *πρὸς ἄλλα* partly on the grounds that two independent readings that agree are more likely to be correct.

However, the B manuscript is reliable for the *Sophist*: of the eight cases where T and W share an error, the B manuscript shares the error in five cases but has the correct reading in three cases.¹⁰ So when it is the minority reading, B is often correct. Second, the error of reading *πρὸς ἄλλα* for *πρὸς ἄλληλα* at 255c14 could have crept into either the T or W tradition by the anticipation of a scribe: ‘in itself’ contrasts naturally with ‘in relation to others’ but less naturally with ‘in relation to each other’. The eight errors shared by T and W in the text of the *Sophist* suggests some degree of contamination between the T and W traditions. So the error could then have been transmitted horizontally from one tradition to the other.¹¹ Note also that *πρὸς ἄλληλα* is unlikely to be a casual scribal error. The relation that beings that are ‘other’ have to each other will again be described as *πρὸς ἄλληλα* at 258e1-2, and we should read that as consistent with 255c14, if possible. Thus, because of the general soundness of

¹⁰ Those eight cases are 224a7; 225b1; 230c2; 233b5; 237c2; 252b9; 252d6 and 253a9. B is preferred over T and W at 224a7; 225b1; 237c2 by Duke *et al.* Burnet is even more likely to prefer B.

¹¹A correcting hand on the B manuscript, B² corrects from a source in W’s family, but predates both W and T (Duke, *et al.* 1995, xi and 384). B² does not correct B at 255c14 from *πρὸς ἄλληλα* to *πρὸς ἄλλα*. So it is possible that the archetype of W also read *πρὸς ἄλληλα*. This suggests an error introduced into the W tradition and transmitted to T. I admit that this argument is not probative, as B² is not a very prolific corrector of the *Sophist* text.

the B manuscript, the possibility of contamination between T and W and the ease of reading $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$ in error, from a palaeographical standpoint, $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$ is at least as plausible a reading as $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$.

Not only does the B and D reading make good palaeographical sense, it also makes linguistic sense. It is clear that the expression $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$, when not contrasted with $\alpha\upsilon\tau\grave{\alpha} \kappa\alpha\theta' \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$, can be used to describe the relationships that something has to other items (for example: *Theaetetus* 152d7, 156a8 and 182b5; *Sophist* 248b6 and 258b1). But Plato often uses the expression $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$ to describe a relation that things that are the same have to each other, especially things that are of the same kind (for example: *Theaetetus* 195c8-d1; *Sophist* 228c4, 253a2 and 253b9; *Parmenides* 136b1 and 158d2). Linguistically and palaeographically, $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$ is at least as plausible as $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$.

Philosophically, $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$ is the more plausible reading, since it has a logic that will accommodate ‘same’ and ‘other’. The logic implied by the reciprocal pronoun is what I will call a reciprocal relative. Under the DL view, X is a relative iff X is semantically incomplete, and becomes completed when a relation, R , to some appropriate Y is specified. The reciprocal account adds the characterisation that Y is similarly incomplete and also related to X . This is the sense in which X and Y reciprocate. So we can define ‘reciprocal relatives’ thus: X and Y are reciprocal relatives iff X bears the relation R to Y and Y bears the relation R^{-1} (inverse of R) to X . Inverse relations are defined as follows: where a relation, R , takes an item and links it to a second item, the inverse of the relation, R^{-1} , takes the second item and links it back to the first.¹² For example, if the relation is ‘is larger than’ then the inverse is ‘is smaller than’; if the relation is ‘is a parent of’, then the inverse will be ‘is an offspring

¹² For further reflections on inverse relation see Williamson 1985, 249-262.

of'. There are cases where a relation and its inverse are identical. If X is a neighbour of Y , then Y is a neighbour of X . We could say that X and Y are neighbours $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$.

The B and D manuscript reading, supported by the notion of a reciprocal relative, allows both 'same' and 'other' to fit into one of the two categories. As it happens, the 'same' relation and its inverse are identical: if X is the same as Y , then Y is the same as X . But we can see that X and Y here conform to the definition of reciprocal relatives, so that sameness will fit into a class of $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$ terms: X and Y are the same $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$. $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$ will also accommodate 'other'. Some subject X is other in so far as it is other than something else, Y , where X and Y are non-identical. If X is other than Y , Y is other than X . Again, these X and Y conform to the definition of reciprocal relatives. Hence, if we read $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$, both 'same' and 'other' fit comfortably into the 'relatives' category of terms.

By adopting the B and D manuscript reading we can undergird an alternative category reading. This reading differs slightly from the DL category reading. The DL reading suggests that the dichotomy between $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\kappa\alpha\theta'$ $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$ and $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$ is between absolute and relative terms. Because of the logic of $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$, the relative terms would be read as aliorelative. The B and D manuscript reading also suggests that the dichotomy is between the absolute and relative terms. Like DL, the alternative category reading understands relative terms to be incomplete. But unlike DL, since it reads $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\alpha$ for $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$, the relative class of terms will be reciprocal-relatives. Thus, the alternative category reading is the claim that that there are two classes of terms: those that are complete, and those that come in pairs of incomplete, but reciprocating, terms.

II. An Objection to the Alternative Category Reading

The alternative category reading must overcome a version of the standard objection. There are pairs of relatives that fit neither into the αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά class of terms (because they are each incomplete), nor into that of 'reciprocal relatives', since we can use them without their reciprocal partner. An example would be the pair 'animal' and 'foot'. A 'foot' is always the foot of an animal, and is therefore, arguably, a relative.¹³ If so, 'foot' is aliorelative because nothing is ever the foot of itself. But an animal is not always (or perhaps ever) the animal of a foot. So there is no reciprocity between the pair. 'Foot' seems to be *merely* aliorelative. If classes of terms are to be categories, they must jointly exhaust all the terms there are. So, to be a category reading, the alternative reading must show that the αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά and

¹³ Aristotle, at least, would count 'foot' as a relative. At *Categories* 8a13-27 he posits organic parts as relative to the whole organism, which creates problems for his definition. *Categories* 7a4-5, 7a16-17 and 7a21-2 also mention organic parts as relatives. Professor Polansky has pointed out to me that one way to deal with the counterexample would be to generalize 'foot' and 'footed' and say that they are related as part to whole. A part is always part of a whole, so 'part' seems like relative term. It is not immediately obvious that 'whole' is a relative term: it looks absolute. But we can see that, *qua* whole, a whole is a whole of parts. In the same way, we might say that *qua* footed, a footed thing is footed by a foot, even if *qua* animal, it is not footed by a foot. I think that, in the final analysis, Plato does solve this problem with a very similar move, that is, he redescribes the correlative in such a way that it reciprocates. Below, I attempt to show that he has the resources to do this.

πρὸς ἄλληλα classes of terms are jointly exhaustive. And the existence of relatives that are merely aliorelative suggests that they are not.

I have two responses to this objection. First, I will outline the reasons that Plato could have for holding that all relatives are reciprocal relatives, which would entail that there are no mere aliorelatives. Second, I will cite evidence from a passage in the *Parmenides*, one that the B and D reading makes parallel to *Sophist* 255c14, and where Plato is quite clear that all relatives come in reciprocal pairs.

To ward off the objection that there are some mere aliorelatives, we must show that for Plato, if something is a relative of any kind, it is a reciprocal relative. This is accomplished by showing that being a relative entails having a reciprocating partner. A consequence of the definition of reciprocal relatives given above is that only a reciprocal pair of terms can feature in a certain exceptionlessly correct statement. This serves as a test for whether two terms are a reciprocal pair. To illustrate this, take the example of ‘master’ and ‘slave’. We find both Plato (*Parmenides* 133c8 see below) and Aristotle (*Categories* 6b29) asserting that ‘master’ and ‘slave’ are a reciprocal pair.¹⁴ If X is a master, then X is a master of some Y . This shows that ‘master’ is a relative. But what kind of thing is Y ? The reciprocating partner, Y , will bear the inverse of the relation ‘is a master of’ to X . That is to say, it will bear the ‘is a slave of’ relation to X . So Y will be a slave.

Aristotle shows that for any relative term, we can *create* the other expression in the pair that reciprocates with the first (ὀνοματοποιεῖν, ‘to name-make’ *Categories* 7a5-7). This ability to create reciprocating partners is what guarantees that

¹⁴ There is no sign in the *Categories* of Aristotle’s view that the slave belongs to the master in a way that the master does not belong to the slave (cf. *Politics* 1254a8-13).

all relatives have one. To create a partner, he coins a new expression that describes the reciprocating partner in a reciprocal pair. For example, Aristotle says, take ‘rudder’ as a relative. Like ‘foot’, it is an aliorelative, as nothing can be a rudder of itself. Nevertheless, we can always make exceptionlessly correct statements involving the relative and its reciprocating partner, by coining the passive verbal noun ‘ruddered’ for the reciprocating partner of ‘rudder’. Moreover, a rudder, *X* and a ruddered *Y*, will conform to the definition of reciprocal relatives, because if *X* is a rudder of *Y*, *Y* is ruddered by *X*. Or, as Aristotle puts it: ‘A rudder is the rudder of a ruddered thing, and a ruddered thing is ruddered by a rudder’ (*Categories* 7a14-15). This ability to coin expressions for the other item in a pair of reciprocal relatives guarantees that any relative has a reciprocating partner, including aliorelatives. This is, perhaps, why Aristotle thinks that all relatives are reciprocal relatives.

But does Plato think the same way? We would have some good evidence that he does if we could show that Plato allows himself to coin new expressions for the reciprocating partner to give exceptionlessly correct statements involving the relative and its partner. In the context of the discussion of relatives in *Republic* IV, Plato says that we can do this with the relative ‘knowledge’. ‘Knowledge’ is a standard example of a relative in Plato and Aristotle.¹⁵ To generate an exceptionless partner for ‘knowledge’ we would choose ‘object of knowledge’: If *X* knows *Y*, *Y* is an object of knowledge for *X*. ‘Object of knowledge’, then, just means ‘whatever knowledge is of’.

¹⁵ Plato: *Republic* 438c-d; *Parmenides* 133c, where the partner is ἀλήθεια; *Charmides* 168b-c, where the partner for knowledge is also τὰ μάθηματα. Aristotle: *Categories* 6b34, where the partner is ἐπιστητόν.

Plato suggests an indefinite reciprocating partner in *Republic* 438c6-9. Knowledge is of learning (τὰ μαθήματα) or ‘whatever one ought to say that knowledge is of’ (ὅτου δὴ δεῖ θεῖναι τὴν ἐπιστήμην). Even if Plato has not yet coined the single-expression reciprocating partner for ‘knowledge’ (‘the knowable’: see below), he, like Aristotle, does not make the reciprocating partner a hostage to natural language. This leaves Plato free to agree with Aristotle that all relatives have a reciprocating partner and so there are no mere aliorelatives, since for any aliorelatives one will be able to coin the term for a reciprocating partner. Thus, we are not forced to admit that there are some mere aliorelatives, and so are not forced to concede the objection that there are relatives that do not fit into the class of reciprocal relatives.

The second response to the objection is that a parallel passage in Plato suggests that all relatives are reciprocal relatives. Once we read *Sophist* 255c14 with the B and D manuscripts, we can see that the *Parmenides* draws a parallel distinction between πρὸς ἄλληλα and non-πρὸς ἄλληλα ways of being spoken of:

Therefore, also, among the Ideas all those which are what they are (εἰσὶν αἱ εἰσιν) in relation to each other (πρὸς ἀλλήλας) have their relation to themselves, but not in relation to those things in our world.

(133c8-d1)

Once we adopt the B and D reading of *Sophist* 255c14, the linguistic similarity is sufficient for the *Parmenides* to be relevant to understanding the *Sophist*’s αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά/ πρὸς ἄλληλα distinction. The ‘what they are’ (αἱ εἰσιν cf. ὅπερ ἐστὶν at *Sophist* 255d7) and in relation to one another (πρὸς ἀλλήλας cf. πρὸς ἄλληλα *Sophist* 255c14) are parallel.

The *Parmenides* passage is textual evidence that Plato thinks there are no mere aliorelatives. This time, Plato uses the examples of a master and a slave

(*Parmenides* 138d8). If he did think that there were mere aliorelatives, ‘master’ would be a good example of one: Plato certainly thinks that no unified agent can be master of himself.¹⁶ So ‘master’ and, we could add, ‘slave’ are each aliorelative. But, in a move we would expect if he thought all relatives come in reciprocal pairs, Plato does not simply let the examples stand individually. They ‘are what they are in relation to each other’, i.e. it is impossible to be a ‘master’ without being master of a ‘slave’, and it is impossible to be a ‘slave’ without being the slave of a ‘master’.¹⁷ Therefore, these putative cases of aliorelatives are not mere aliorelatives. They are, in addition, reciprocal relatives.

However, in the *Parmenides*, unlike in the *Sophist*, Plato mentions a pair of relatives that apparently do not reciprocate: ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ (*Parmenides* 134a3-4). On the face of it, ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ are not related as ‘master’ is to ‘slave’: although it is impossible to know without knowing truths, it is perfectly possible for there to be a truth that is not known. Put another way, the inverse of the ‘is knowledge of’ relation is the ‘is an object of knowledge for’ relation. The inverse of ‘is knowledge of’ has nothing to do with ‘truth’. ‘Knowledge’ and ‘truth’ may be more akin to the ‘foot’ and ‘animal’ case, a case that appeared problematic for the alternative category-reading. To be a reciprocal pair, these should be ‘knowledge’ (ἡ ἐπιστήμη) and the ‘knowable’ (τὸ ἐπιστητόν), which are the terms Aristotle uses (*Categories* 6b34). Does this show that Plato does not have a view of relatives where all relatives are reciprocal relatives?

¹⁶ cf. *Republic* 431a where the definition of σωφροσύνη as self-mastery is dismissed on these grounds.

¹⁷ cf. *Categories* 7a31-7b9. In this passage, Aristotle points out that ‘master’ is the only proper correlative of ‘slave’.

I suggest that the counterexample which ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ present to the claim that all relatives are reciprocal is merely apparent. ‘Truth’ should be understood here as ‘object of knowledge’ or ‘the knowable’. At *Theaetetus* 201d2-3, Theaetetus recalls the term ‘ἐπιστητός’ (knowable) as a surprising coinage by an anonymous third party. This suggests that Plato is uncomfortable with the term. It is likely that when he wrote the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*, dialogues perhaps slightly earlier than the *Theaetetus*, he was shy of using the neologism. As we saw, at *Republic* 438c3, Plato prefers to refer to the reciprocal partner of ‘knowledge’ as ‘learning’ (τὰ μαθήματα), and the use of ‘truth’ (and ‘beings’ at 134a8-b1) in the *Parmenides*, I suggest, is another example of Plato still feeling his way with the terminology, and avoiding ‘ἐπιστητόν’.

Finally, the *Parmenides* argument does not require a more specific partner for ‘knowledge’, so Plato does not use one. The argument is supposed to show that the Forms are unknowable to us. In so far as that is the aim of the argument, it focuses only on the term ‘knowledge’ and can leave its reciprocal partner less well specified: *Parmenides* needs only the claim that our knowledge cannot have an object that is in the realm of the Forms, and it does not matter whether the reciprocal partner of knowledge is ‘truth’, ‘beings’ or ‘knowables’. Plato recognizes in this argument that ‘knowledge’ is a relative, and has a reciprocal partner, but, because nothing turns on what the partner is, he leaves it indefinite.

III. Conclusion

I began with the DL category reading, which made two main claims. First, that all relatives are incomplete terms. Second, that the categories of αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά and πρὸς ἄλλα are exhaustive. The second claim was found to be incoherent when we

tried to place ‘same’ in the scheme. I argued that we could save a category reading by dropping the *πρὸς ἄλλα* category in favour of the *πρὸς ἀλλήλα* category suggested by the B and D manuscripts. The logic implied by the reciprocal pronoun, as we saw, accommodates ‘same’. I was able to show, by appealing to both philosophical and textual considerations, that this reading is not vulnerable to the objection that there are some mere (i.e. non-reciprocal) aliorelatives. This left us with a position where, first, all relatives are incomplete, second the ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ categories are exhaustive and third, all relatives come in reciprocal pairs. The latter is a view shared by Plato and Aristotle (e.g. at *Categories* 6b28-35). If this is the case, it prompts the question: what further similarities might there be between Plato’s and Aristotle’s conceptions of relatives?¹⁸

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