

Perfect Change in Plato's *Sophist*

Tushar Irani
Wesleyan University

Abstract

This paper examines how Plato's rejection of the friends of the forms at 248a–249b in the *Sophist* is continuous with the arguments that he develops shortly after this part of the dialogue for the interrelatedness of the forms. I claim that the interrelatedness of the forms implies that they are changed, and that this explains Plato's rejection of the friends of the forms. Much here turns on the kind of change that Plato wants to attribute to the forms. I distinguish my view of the sort of change that the forms experience from other kinds of change—such as 'Cambridge change'—that scholars have believed Plato has in mind in rejecting the friends of the forms. On the view that I advance, a form experiences a change (which I call 'perfect change') in its association with another form that distinguishes it as the distinctive being that it is—that is, through its possession of its distinctive properties.

Keywords: Plato, metaphysics, forms, kinds, change, kinēsis, relations, predication, nous, knowledge

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1. Introduction

The unchangeability of the forms is generally considered a cardinal principle in Platonic metaphysics. According to Gregory Vlastos, for Plato to deny this principle 'would have blockbusting consequences for the metaphysical foundation of his whole system: the absolute unalterability of the Ideas'.¹ It is unsurprising, then, that the apparent rejection of this principle in the *Sophist* has met with some consternation among scholars. The puzzlement stems from a part of the text running from 248a to 249b, where Plato argues against the view that the forms are utterly stable and unchanging. That view is ascribed to a group he refers to as the 'friends of the forms' (τοὺς τῶν εἰδῶν φίλους, 248a4) and is presented famously against the backdrop of a 'battle of gods and giants' (γίγαντομαχία, 246a4) who disagree about the nature of being.² Here, in the first recorded dispute in the history of philosophy between materialists and immaterialists, the giants insist that the only things that exist are corporeal, while the gods—the friends of the forms—locate true being in a world of unchanging and incorporeal forms (246a4–c3).

¹ G. Vlastos, 'An Ambiguity in the *Sophist*' ['Ambiguity'], in G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, 2nd edn (Princeton, 1981), 270–322 at 311. The assumption here is that the unalterability of the forms implies their unchangeability. That is an assumption I will be challenging in this paper.

² All Greek references from Plato in this paper are to J. Burnet (ed.), *Platonis opera*, 5 vols. [Burnet] (Oxford, 1900–7). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are drawn from J. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works [Complete Works]* (Indianapolis, 1997), with modifications in places.

Plato's analysis of this dispute, and his own position within it, are peculiar. In the voice of the Eleatic Visitor, who I shall assume with most other scholars is his spokesperson in the dialogue, Plato rejects the materialism of the giants as we would expect. What's puzzling, however, is that instead of aligning himself with the friends of the forms, he proceeds to reject their view as well, and endorses a position between gods and giants: a position he later describes as a compromise between those who assert that being is absolutely unchanging and those who assert that being changes in every way. While the forms retain a sense of stability, according to this position, Plato also grants them a qualified sense of change. As the Visitor puts it memorably: a genuine philosopher must believe 'with the wishfulness of children that being and all things are those things that are unchanging (ἀκίνητα) and changed (κεκινημένα) both together (συναμφότερα)' (249d3–4). Yet it is difficult to make out what this adds to our understanding of Plato's metaphysics, for he leaves unexplained in this part of the *Sophist* how objects that are by nature immutable can additionally be said to experience change.

In this paper, I offer a reading of 248a–249b that explains Plato's rejection of the friends of the forms by showing how this part of the *Sophist* is continuous with the arguments that he develops shortly after the battle of gods and giants for the interrelatedness of the forms. To put it simply, I will claim that the interrelatedness of the forms implies that they are affected, and that this implies that they are changed. This is why Plato cannot accept the view held by the gods that being is entirely changeless. Much will turn here on the kind of affection and thus change that Plato wants to attribute to the forms. Since he frequently makes use of the perfect tense to describe this aspect of the forms (cf. κεκινημένα, 249d4), I will refer to this sort of

change as ‘perfect change’ to distinguish it from other kinds of change—such as ‘Cambridge change’—that other scholars have believed Plato has in mind in this part of the dialogue. On the interpretation that I advance, the change that the forms experience does not consist in them acquiring new relational properties over time. Perfect change in fact requires no reference to time. Rather, the forms are in a permanent state of being associated according to Plato: those forms that associate with one another always do so. And for this very reason, I argue, they are also in a permanent state of having been changed.

According to this view, a form is changed perfectly in virtue of possessing various distinctive properties: those properties that distinguish the form as the distinctive being that it is. In general, for any two forms, F and G , where G is a distinctive property of F , the form F is changed perfectly in being associated with the form G . Perfect change here is a variation that every form experiences in both sharing in the nature of some forms and not sharing in the nature of others. The variation that this implies is not variation over time, but variation over other forms. Hence the change that the forms experience in being interrelated is a kind of aspect-change, where every form bears a conjunction of is-and-is-not relations to other forms and where these relations themselves are fixed and unvarying. Perfect change, on this view, is a necessary concomitant of every form’s association with being and not-being.³

³ W. Lentz, ‘The Problem of Motion in the *Sophist* [‘Problem of Motion’], *Apeiron*, 30 (1997), 89–108 is the only scholar to my knowledge who argues that the forms experience aspect-change in the *Sophist*. His view is also comparable to mine in taking such change to follow from the interrelatedness of the forms. However, he regards the aspect-change that the forms undergo as a limitation that each form

This understanding of Plato's forms is significant because it represents a metaphysical objection to the friends of the forms, based on his understanding of forms as kinds in the *Sophist* and his claim that the forms are interrelated with one another by nature. Plato's point here is that if the forms were incapable of experiencing change, they would be incapable of associating with one another as beings in possession of a rational order, which would make speech and argument impossible. The forms should not thereby be thought to experience alteration. Instead, Plato looks to distinguish change from alteration, and by focusing on the nature of forms as kinds he allows for a way in which the forms are affected by their interrelatedness (and so changed) without undergoing any intrinsic change or alteration. On this view, every form is changed in virtue of the set of is-and-is-not relations it bears to other forms, and change itself as a form plays a vital role in enabling every form to be associated with other forms. A consequence of this interpretation is that it has the benefit of explaining how and why Plato classifies change in the *Sophist* as a 'greatest kind' that pervades all of the forms. As the Visitor often stresses, it is in the nature of the forms to associate with one another (ἔχει κοινωνίαν ἀλλήλοις ἢ τῶν γενῶν φύσις, 257a8–9) and it is due to the greatest

experiences when it is brought into connection with another form. Thus Lentz maintains that the form of beauty undergoes an aspect-change when virtue is described as beautiful, insofar as 'an aspect of the form of beauty has been exemplified by means of its relationship to virtue' (101). It is not clear to me how this represents an aspect-change in the form of beauty, but in any event, my view is quite different: a form experiences an aspect-change, I argue, as a result of *any* association it has with another form, including (and especially) in its essential relationships with other forms. My view here owes much to the observation in G. Fine, 'Immanence' ['Immanence'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 4 (1986), 71–97 at 84–5 that every form is said to suffer a compresence of opposite properties in the *Sophist*, but she does not argue further that this implies that every form must be said to experience aspect-change.

kinds—being, difference, sameness, rest, and change—that these associations are made possible. Plato’s aim in this dialogue is to develop the implications of these ideas by examining the various relations between the forms that provide each of them with its own distinct nature. His position is that every form, as a complete being in its own right, must possess a timeless rational order in association with a set of other forms. My goal in this paper is to show how these relations entail a kind of change.

The argument of this paper falls into three main parts. Section 2 provides a reading of the battle of gods and giants that explains, first, the connection between Plato’s two arguments against the friends of the forms at 248d10–e4 and 248e6–249b6 and, next, the positive account of being that he endorses at 249c10–d4 as an intermediate position between the views of the gods and the giants. Section 3 argues for the crucial notion of perfect change to clarify how the interrelatedness of the forms entails that they are subject to change. Section 4 shows how this view of the forms explains the all-pervading character of the greatest kinds in the *Sophist* and accounts in particular for the status of rest and change as genuine greatest kinds. Section 5 concludes the paper by summarizing these findings and considering their implications.

2. Rejecting the Friends of the Forms

What is problematic about the view held by the friends of the forms in the *Sophist*?

When the Visitor introduces this group, they are said to identify true being (ἡ ἀληθινὴ οὐσία) with ‘intelligible and nonbodily forms’ (νοητὰ...καὶ ἀσώματα εἶδη, 246b7–8),

which is a metaphysical claim. But there is also an epistemological component to their position, for they hold in addition that we access that which really is (ἡ ὄντως οὐσία, sc. the forms) ‘through reasoning (διὰ λογισμοῦ) by our souls (ψυχῆ)’, whereas we access what comes to be (γένεσις) ‘through perception (δι’ αἰσθήσεως) by our bodies (σώματι)’ (248a10–11). In the criticism of this view that follows in the dialogue, it is important to note that the Visitor never disputes the friends’ identification of being with an imperceptible world of intelligible forms. Nor does he take issue with their claim that these forms are the only objects that can truly be said to exist. Instead, what he targets in the friends’ view is the idea that the forms are incapable of experiencing change, a conclusion they draw from the fact that being must remain in a self-same state (see 248a12–13, c4–9; cf. 249b12–c5, 252a7–8).

As G. E. L. Owen observed long ago, the Visitor’s critique of the friends’ position at 248a–249b falls into two separate stages of argument, 248d10–e4 and 248e6–249b6, and I will follow him in referring to these stretches of text as (A) and (B) respectively.⁴

2.1. *Passage (A): The Argument from Knowledge (248d10–e4)*

The Visitor’s initial argument against the friends proposes that to know something is to change it. Thus if the forms were incapable of experiencing change, they would be incapable of being known and so fail to function as objects of knowledge. This argument amounts to an epistemological objection to the friends’ doctrine, yet

⁴ See G. E. L. Owen, ‘Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present’ [‘Plato and Parmenides’], *The Monist*, 50 (1966), 317–40 at 336–40.

whether Plato expects us to infer from it that the forms experience change in some way is an issue of much debate. The key passage, which is one of the most contested in the *Sophist*, is compressed:

ὥς τὸ γινώσκειν εἴπερ ἔσται ποιεῖν τι, τὸ γινωσκόμενον ἀναγκαῖον αὖ συμβαίνει πάσχειν. τὴν οὐσίαν δὴ κατὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦτον γινωσκομένην ὑπὸ τῆς γνώσεως, καθ' ὅσον γινώσκεται, κατὰ τοσοῦτον κινεῖσθαι διὰ τὸ πάσχειν, ὃ δὴ φάμεν οὐκ ἂν γενέσθαι περὶ τὸ ἡρεμοῦν. (248d10–e4)

If to know is to affect [ποιεῖν] something, then it necessarily follows that a thing that's known is in turn affected [πάσχειν]. According to this account, when being is known by an act of knowing, to the extent that it's known, it is to that extent changed [κινεῖσθαι] by being affected [διὰ τὸ πάσχειν], which we say wouldn't come to pass for a thing that's still.

The first thing to observe about this argument is its inconclusive nature.⁵ All that can be inferred from it is that being cannot be both unchanging *and* known, if to be known is to be affected and to be affected is to be changed. Plato thus presents the friends of the forms in this passage with an inconsistent triad of claims:

- (i) the objects of knowledge, forms, are entirely changeless;
- (ii) to be known is to be affected;
- (iii) to be affected is to be changed.

⁵ A point emphasized by W. D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas [Theory of Ideas]* (Oxford, 1951) at 110–11 and by D. Keyt, 'Plato's Paradox that the Immutable is Unknowable' ['Plato's Paradox'], *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1969), 1–14.

There has been much disagreement among commentators on this passage over which of the above claims Plato intends to deny.⁶ Controversy swirls mainly around (i), which has been viewed by some scholars as a thesis so crucial to Plato's theory of forms that rejecting it would leave his metaphysics unrecognisable.⁷ Moreover, soon after he puts forward the above argument, the Visitor *affirms* at 249b–c that all things that are (τῶν ὄντων, 249b9) must be considered at rest (στάσεως, 249c1) if they are to be credited with intelligence (νοῦν, 249c3). On the assumption that rest and change are incompatible, this seems to commit Plato to (i).⁸

⁶ One way out of the inconsistency would be to hold that Plato believes the forms are ultimately unknowable, but this idea has (rightly in my view) been advanced by no one. Those who take Plato to be denying (i) include: J. M. E. Moravcsik, 'Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*' ['Being and Meaning'], *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 14 (1962), 23–78; Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides'; C.D.C. Reeve, 'Motion, Rest, and Dialectic in the *Sophist*' ['Dialectic'], *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 67 (1985), 47–64; C. Thomas, 'Speaking of Something: Plato's *Sophist* and Plato's Beard' ['Speaking of Something'], *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 38 (2008), 631–68; and M. L. Gill, *Philosophos: Plato's Missing Dialogue* [*Philosophos*] (Oxford, 2012), 237–38. Scholars who believe he could be denying (ii) include: W. D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* [*Theory of Ideas*] (Oxford, 1951), 111 and L. Brown, 'Innovation and Continuity: The Battle of Gods and Giants, *Sophist* 245–249' ['Innovation and Continuity'], in J. Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 1998), 181–207. Those who question (iii) include: G. Vlastos, 'An Ambiguity in the *Sophist*' ['Ambiguity'], in G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, 2nd edn (Princeton, 1981), 270–322 at 309–17 and F. Leigh, 'Being and Power in Plato's *Sophist*' ['Being and Power'], *Apeiron*, 43 (2010), 63–85 at 77–9. Keyt, 'Plato's Paradox' (see esp. 2–7) supplies a good assessment of several interpretations of this argument, though I disagree with his own view that Plato is 'wedded' (7) to a paradox he recognizes but is unable to resolve in the *Sophist*. R. Mohr, 'The Relation of Reason to Soul in the Platonic Cosmology: *Sophist* 248e–249c' ['Platonic Cosmology'], *Apeiron*, 16 (1982), 21–6 is even less charitable in asserting that 'the argument is so bad that no doctrinal consequences can be drawn from it' (22).

⁷ See again Vlastos, 'Ambiguity' in n. 1 above, for whom Plato's entire philosophy depends on 'the absolute unalterability of the Ideas' (311). Brown, 'Innovation and Continuity' likewise refers to (i) as the 'cherished immutability' of the forms (197).

⁸ Brown 'Innovation and Continuity', 197–8 (see also 202–3) and P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist* [*Account of Falsehood*] (Cambridge, 2012), 93 both draw this conclusion from the strand of argument at 249b–c.

However, rest and change should not be regarded as incompatible in the *Sophist*. Theaetetus assumes that they are contraries later in the dialogue at 250a8–10 and 252d9–11 when he denies that the form of change associates with the form of rest, but he is clearly wrong, for as has often been noted, every form—including the form of change—must be at rest.⁹ Significantly, the incompatibility claim is dropped at 256b6–c3 in the text, where the Visitor and Theaetetus leave open the possibility that the form of change can associate with the form of rest.¹⁰

Further, Plato never maintains at 249b–c that being must be regarded as completely at rest. The Visitor’s aim at this stage in the *Sophist* is to suggest a middle-ground position between the views of the gods and the giants: having explained his concerns with the gods’ view of being as utterly unchanging, he informs Theaetetus that a view according to which ‘everything is moving and changing’ (φερόμενα καὶ κινούμενα πάντ’ εἶναι, 249b8) must also be rejected.¹¹ What the Visitor seeks is an

⁹ See R. Robinson, *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1953), 44 and I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato’s Doctrines*, vol. ii (London, 1963), 401–10.

¹⁰ I do not agree with Vlastos that there is a ‘disanalogy’ between these two forms, whereby rest is predicable of the form of change, but change is not predicable of the form of rest (‘Ambiguity’, 283 n. 39). Vlastos acknowledges that no such disanalogy is implied in the text. His claim that it can be inferred must be based on a view of the forms as utterly unchanging entities, which I am arguing is unwarranted.

¹¹ The Visitor here associates the materialism of the giants with a Heraclitean ontology of radical flux, though he does not explain the connection. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates mentions a group of ‘uninitiates’ (ἀμήητοι) who insist that ‘nothing exists but what they can grasp with both hands’ (οὐδὲν ἄλλο οἴόμενοι εἶναι ἢ οὗ ἂν δύνωνται ἀπριξ τοῖν χεροῖν λαβέσθαι, 155e4–5) and whose views seem explicable only on the basis of an ontology according to which everything is changing. This group sounds very much like the crude ‘earthborn’ giants as they are initially described in the *Sophist* (see 246e7–b3, 247c5–7) and it may explain why their out-and-out materialist position receives short shrift at 246c9–d9 in favour of the position of the reformed giants at 246e2–247e6.

account of being according to which there are elements of both rest and change. This is expressed at 249d3–4 as the children’s wish that ‘being and all things are those things that are unchanging and changed both together’ (ὄσα ἀκίνητα καὶ κεινημένα, τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν συναμφότερα). The Visitor then immediately underscores his approval of this solution to the battle of gods and giants by asserting that he and Theaetetus have ‘encompassed being in an account’ (περιειληφέναι τῷ λόγῳ τὸ ὄν, 249d6–7).

We should therefore feel no reluctance in accepting a straightforward reading of passage (A) according to which Plato denies (i) and permits the forms to experience change in some way, while holding that (ii) being known involves a kind of affection and (iii) affection is a kind of change. That is, we should conclude from this argument that to know something is to change it and that being, insofar as it comes to be known, is changed. Since, moreover, Plato never disputes the idea in the *Sophist* that the forms are exemplars of being, we should infer that the forms, too, are capable of experiencing change. Many scholars resist making this move because they assimilate claims about the changeability of the forms with claims about their mutability or alterability.¹² It is the second set of claims here that they oppose, and justifiably so, for Plato repeatedly denies throughout the dialogues that a form may suffer alteration. The Greek term for ‘alteration’ (ἀλλοίωσις) etymologically involves the notion of ‘othering’, which can in no way be applied to the self-same nature of the forms. But the Greek *kinēsis*, which I translate as ‘change’ in

¹² Vlastos explicitly equates change with alteration in the *Sophist* (‘Ambiguity’, 310 n. 3) but does not explain why the terms should be assimilated in the dialogue.

this paper, is a wide-ranging term that covers variation in a most general sense.¹³ If Plato could be understood to hold that the forms experience variation without thereby undergoing any intrinsic change or alteration, the justification for adhering to (i) seems to disappear.¹⁴

For those scholars who find in passage (A) an argument for the claim that the forms experience change, the predominant view is that Plato believes the forms experience a kind of relative change: in coming to be known by someone, something becomes true of a form (relative to a knower) that was not true of it previously. I will explain shortly why this proposal does not suffice to discharge the children's wish expressed at 249d3–4. For the moment, the point I want to emphasize about (A) is that the knowing relation between us and the forms that the Visitor identifies in this passage actually falls under a more general principle that he expounds earlier in the text.

¹³ Hence the other common translation of *kinēsis* as 'motion', which connotes variation over place. While there are many passages in the Platonic corpus that deny that the forms experience alteration (see esp. *Phd.* 78d1–7, *Rep.* 479a2–3, *Tim.* 48e6), I am unaware of a passage where Plato denies that the forms experience *kinēsis*.

¹⁴ The attempt by Brown, 'Innovation and Continuity', to uphold (i) by rejecting (ii), while resourceful, is also problematic. She locates a hidden premise in (A): that the forms affect us in being known, rather than the other way around. But beyond the grammatical awkwardness of this view, the line of reasoning in the text reads naturally as a proposal that being is affected (πάσχειν, 248e4) insofar as it comes to be known (γινώσκειται, 248e3). This is not to deny that the forms may affect us in some other way. The point is that the knowing relation is one in which we come to affect them. On Brown's reading, moreover, it is unclear why someone who wished to challenge (i) could not claim that in affecting us, the forms change: once we set our grammatical prejudices aside as she suggests (see 199–201), what reason do we have for thinking that an affecting is not a *kinēsis*? Cf. also Leigh, 'Being and Power', 69–72, who discusses further problems for Brown's reading.

Plato first introduces the knowing relation in the *Sophist* as a way in which we associate (κοινωνεῖν) with the forms when we encounter them through reasoning (διὰ λογισμοῦ) (248a10–11). To clarify what he means by ‘associating’, the Visitor provides Theaetetus with the following account of the term, which I will refer to henceforth as the *koinōnein* relation:

πάθημα ἢ ποίημα ἐκ δυνάμεώς τινος ἀπὸ τῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα συνιόντων
γιγνόμενον. (248b5–6)

An affection [πάθημα] or an affecting [ποίημα] that arises from some power when things come together in relation to one another [τῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα συνιόντων].

The cognitive relationship that holds between us and the forms when we come to know them is an instance of this broader principle of association. The above account is a general one because it covers many more cases of things associating with each other than the case of a form coming to be known. In fact, the way in which we associate with the world of becoming through sense perception also falls under this *koinōnein* relation according to the Visitor.¹⁵ The objection that Plato puts

¹⁵ As noted by Brown, who emphasizes in addition the connection between the Visitor’s account here of κοινωνεῖν and the account of being that the reformed giants are made to accept at 247d8–247e4: that being is nothing other than the power (δύναμις, 247e4) to affect (ποιεῖν, 247e1) something or to be affected (παθεῖν, 247e1) by something (‘Innovation and Continuity’, 190–1). This is the famous *dunamis* proposal, though I do not put as much stock in it as Brown does. The Visitor does identify this proposal with the *koinōnein* relation at 248b2–6, but Brown argues (see 204–5) that the *dunamis* proposal leads Plato to endorse an ontology that accepts the existence of material objects, whereas I take the proposal to be provisional and supplanted by the children’s wish at 249d3–4. The Visitor hints as

to the friends of the forms in passage (A), fully articulated, is thus that the knowing relation between us and the forms constitutes a *koinōnein* relation such that, in being known, the forms are affected, and in being affected, the forms are changed.

Observe, however, that this argument cannot be the only reason that Plato believes the forms exhibit change in the *Sophist*. For the children's wish at 249d3–4 is that being somehow be defined in terms of rest and change, and if the epistemological objection in (A) indicated the only way in which the forms exhibit change, their existence would depend entirely on being known by someone at some point in time.¹⁶ The text tells against such dependence, since the metaphysical picture that the Visitor finally endorses in the children's wish is one according to which being is 'changed' (or, better, 'varied') in the perfect tense (κεκινημένα, 249d3) as part of a

much in concluding his discussion of the giants' position, when he remarks at 247e7–248a2 that another definition of being may appear soon that replaces their view that being is *any power whatsoever* to affect or to be affected. For the giants, anything affected in any way, by the smallest degree and by the slightest thing (247e2, 248c5), should be assigned the property of being. When interpreted in this way, the *dunamis* proposal covers material and immaterial objects, but I see no evidence in the *Sophist* that Plato intends to endorse such a view. Leigh, 'Being and Power', likewise finds no acceptance of a materialist metaphysics in the dialogue: she sees Plato refining the *dunamis* proposal in this part of the text so that it applies only to forms. However, Leigh does not develop this point in the direction that I will here, since she denies that the forms experience change in being affected (see n. 6 above). As I read this stretch of the dialogue, the criterion of being that Plato arrives at by reforming the giants' position is applied to the forms in a qualified sense: the forms are affected, but only with respect to being known and with respect to each other, while the *dunamis* proposal by itself is unrestricted in what it admits into the class of things that are. B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth [Meaning and Truth]* (Cambridge, 2016) argues similarly that the mark of being in the *Sophist* lies in the capacity of the forms to be affected in their association with one another, but he believes that Plato 'leaves it open' whether, in being affected, the forms are changed (108).

¹⁶ This is a problem that Keyt, 'Plato's Paradox', raises for Owen's interpretation of 249d3–4, where Plato would 'be excluding from reality anything that is completely at rest such as a Form that no one apprehends' (6).

completed condition. And far from suggesting that the forms spring into being when they come to be known, this implies that they are rather in a permanent state of having been changed. Indeed, I shall claim in what follows that the knowability of the forms *requires* that they exhibit this perfective kind of change. The Visitor's argument against the friends of the forms at this stage of the dialogue is accordingly incomplete and Plato must have deeper reasons for assigning change to the forms than passage (A). Hence he has the Visitor develop a further objection to the friends' position in passage (B).

2.2. *Passage (B): The Argument from Nous (248e6–249b6)*

The Visitor's second argument against the friends of the forms, advanced directly after (A), is even more controversial than his first. Lloyd Gerson has said of the interpretation of this passage that it represents 'perhaps one of the most fundamental divides among Plato scholars'.¹⁷ Unlike (A), there exists no agreement on what the Visitor is even suggesting in this argument. It seems best, therefore, to have the text in front of us before we move forward:

ΞΕ. τί δὲ πρὸς Διός; ὡς ἀληθῶς κίνησιν καὶ ζωὴν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν ἢ ῥαδίως πεισθησόμεθα τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι μὴ παρεῖναι, μηδὲ ζῆν αὐτὸ μηδὲ φρονεῖν, ἀλλὰ σεμνὸν καὶ ἅγιον, νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον, ἀκίνητον ἐστὸς εἶναι;

ΘΕΑΙ. δεινὸν μεντᾶν, ὦ ξένε, λόγον συγχωροῖμεν.

ΞΕ. ἀλλὰ νοῦν μὲν ἔχειν, ζωὴν δὲ μὴ φῶμεν;

¹⁷ L. P. Gerson, 'The "Holy Solemnity" of Forms and the Platonic Interpretation of the *Sophist*' ['Holy Solemnity'], *Ancient Philosophy*, 26 (2006), 291–304 at 291.

ΘΕΑΙ. καὶ πῶς;

ΞΕ. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ἀμφοτέρω ἐνόησαν αὐτῶ λέγομεν, οὐ μὴν ἐν ψυχῇ γε φήσομεν αὐτὸ ἔχειν αὐτά;

ΘΕΑΙ. καὶ τίν' ἂν ἕτερον ἔχοι τρόπον;

ΞΕ. ἀλλὰ δεῖτα νοῦν μὲν καὶ ζωὴν καὶ ψυχὴν ἔχειν, ἀκίνητον μέντοι τὸ παράπαν ἔμψυχον ὄν ἐστάναι;

ΘΕΑΙ. πάντα ἔμοιγε ἄλογα ταῦτ' εἶναι φαίνεται.

ΞΕ. καὶ τὸ κινούμενον δὴ καὶ κίνησιν συγχωρητέον ὡς ὄντα.

ΘΕΑΙ. πῶς δ' οὐ;

ΞΕ. συμβαίνει δ' οὖν, ὦ Θεαίτητε, ἀκινήτων τε ὄντων νοῦν μηδενὶ περὶ μηδενὸς εἶναι μηδαμοῦ. (248e6–249b6)

VISITOR: By Zeus! Can we truly be so easily persuaded that change [κίνησιν], life [ζωήν], soul [ψυχήν], and wisdom [φρόνησιν] are not present [παρεῖναι] in that which is completely real [τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι], and that it neither lives nor has sense, but remains changeless [ἀκίνητον], holy and solemn, without having intelligence [νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον]?

THEAETETUS: That would indeed be a dreadful thing to admit, Visitor.

VISITOR: But should we say that it has intelligence [νοῦν...ἔχειν], but does not have life [ζωήν]?

THEAETETUS: How can we?

VISITOR: But are we saying that both these things are in it, and not saying that it has them in a soul [ψυχῇ]?

THEAETETUS: How else would it have them?

VISITOR: But in having intelligence, life, and soul, can it stand entirely changeless [ἀκίνητον...παράπαν], even though it is ensouled [ἔμψυχον]?

THEAETETUS: All of that seems altogether unreasonable to me.

VISITOR: Then it must be admitted that both that which undergoes change [τὸ κινούμενον] and change [κίνησιν] are things that are [ὄντα].

THEAETETUS: Of course.

VISITOR: And hence it turns out, Theaetetus, that if the things that are [ὄντων] were changeless [ἀκινήτων], there would be intelligence [νοῦν] nowhere, for no one [μηδενί], about nothing [περὶ μηδενός].¹⁸

Owen is surely correct that this passage functions as a ‘reinforcing argument’ to (A).¹⁹ But what point does Plato intend it to reinforce?

In anticipating the children’s wish at 249d3–4, passage (B) reads most obviously as an argument to the effect that change or *kinēsis* must be ‘present’ (παρεῖναι) somehow in ‘that which is completely real’ (τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι, 248e7–249a1). David Keyt and Lesley Brown, however, interpret the passage differently: they take the argument in (B) to admit changing *bodies* into the realm of being, because it is directed at things that are ‘ensouled’ (ἔμψυχον, 249a10) and ‘it is only to bodies that

¹⁸ My translation of this passage, particularly the conclusion in the final line, departs significantly from N. White’s version in *Complete Works* and is closer to the translation in C. Rowe, *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist [Sophist]* (Cambridge, 2015). I say more about my reading in nn. 23 and 37 below.

¹⁹ Owen, ‘Plato and Parmenides’, 339.

the word ἔμψυχος can sensibly be applied'.²⁰ The problem with this interpretation is that nothing in the Platonic corpus requires that the term ἔμψυχος be applied to bodies alone. On the contrary, we learn in the *Laws* that the 'nature of the ensouled' (τῆς τε ἐμψύχου... φύσεως, 902b4–5) consists of more than only corporeal life, since it includes actions (904a6–8) and virtues such as justice and moderation (906a8–b3).²¹

Another interpretation of passage (B) does not go as far as Keyt and Brown in ascribing being to changing bodies, but only to a restricted class of changing things, such as (human) intelligence and soul. These things are then 'upgraded', as it were, to the realm of being, with the result that the friends of the forms must abandon their view that every being is unchanging. As Fiona Leigh puts it: 'from 248e onwards the Stranger is best understood as arguing that at least some entities that the friends include in the realm of being—knowing minds—undergo change, thereby falsifying the friends' core thesis that being does not change, and cannot suffer action or passion'.²² Yet it is hard to see what supports this reading of (B), since the subject

²⁰ Keyt, 'Plato's Paradox', 4; cf. Brown 'Innovation and Continuity', 201–2.

²¹ Note, moreover, that even if Keyt and Brown's reading of ἔμψυχος were accepted, passage (B) does not support the strong materialist conclusion they draw from it. Brown maintains that the likeliest explanation of the final lines of the argument is 'that *all* changed things (and not just a favoured few) should count as *onta*' ('Innovation and Continuity', 202; her emphasis). Yet the argument can only secure the existence of *living* bodies on her interpretation—not the sticks, stones, tables, and chairs that should populate the world of any self-respecting materialist. As far as I can tell, the text provides no indication that the friends of the forms are meant to give up their anti-materialist stance.

²² F. Leigh, 'Restless Forms and Changeless Causes', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 112 (2012), 239–61 at 248. This reading of the argument in (B) has a long line of modern defenders in F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato [Theory of Knowledge]* (London, 1935),

of the passage is not individual minds experiencing change, but ‘that which is completely real’ (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν). In fact, the argument contains no mention of ‘knowing minds’ at all, but *nous* as an abstract property. It is in virtue of its possession of *nous* and additional properties (life and soul in particular) that being itself is said to live and to have sense (ζῆν αὐτὸ...φρονεῖν, 249a1), and to be ensouled (ἔμψυχον, 249a10). And it is in virtue of being ensouled that the Visitor and Theaetetus conclude that being itself cannot be entirely changeless (ἀκίνητον ... παράπαν, 249a10).²³

If this is correct, the point of (B) is not to assign being to a class of changing things, but to assign change to being. The argument is that if the friends’ chosen

244–7; H. Cherniss, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, vol. i [*Criticism of Plato*] (Baltimore, 1944), 606–7; Ross, *Theory of Ideas*, 110–11; Moravcsik, ‘Being and Meaning’, 39; Owen, ‘Plato and Parmenides’, 338; S. Menn, *Plato on God as Nous [Nous]* (Carbondale, 1995), 22; V. Politis, ‘The Argument for the Reality of Change and Changelessness in Plato’s *Sophist*’ [‘Change and Changelessness’], in F.-G. Hermann (ed.), *New Essays on Plato: Language and Thought in Fourth-Century Greek Philosophy* (Swansea, 2006), 149–75 at 152–3; Crivelli, *Account of Falsehood*, 92; Gill, *Philosophos*, 97; and (with reservations) C. H. Kahn, *Plato and the Post-Socratic Dialogue: The Return to the Philosophy of Nature* (Cambridge, 2013), 106–7.

²³ I address in Section 2.2.1 below the inferences about life and soul in this argument, but the idea of being itself as a subject of thinking (φρονεῖν) poses a special puzzle in interpreting (B). Observe, however, that the assignment of φρόνησις to being drops out of the Visitor’s line of reasoning at 249a4–b1. The use of the verb at 249a1 has a dramatic flair as part of a rhetorical question at 248e6–249a2, and its pairing with ζῆν strongly suggests that Plato is employing an idiomatic use of the term here that was common in fourth-century rhetoric (Isaeus, *On the Estate of Apollodorus* §§ 1, 36, 43; Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon* § 94) and widespread in poetic literature (Aristophanes, *Wealth*, l. 479; Euripides, *Medea*, l. 1129), where it generally means ‘being in one’s right mind’ (cf. our ‘compos mentis’). As noted in LSJ (s.v. IV), ζῆν and φρονεῖν pairings appear in this context long after the classical period in multiple inscriptions. The Visitor is therefore not seriously asking with his rhetorical question at 248e6–249a2 whether being itself *thinks*, but drawing playfully on a contemporary idiom. My translation of the phrase at 249a1 as ‘neither lives nor has sense’ captures this use.

candidates for that which really is (i.e., the forms) possess *nous*, they must have life and soul, and hence must exhibit *kinēsis* as well. This is roughly the interpretation of (B) held by the ‘ancient Platonic tradition’ according to Gerson, which begins with Plotinus’ reading of Plato in the *Enneads* but has a forerunner also in Aristotle’s understanding of the relation between *nous* and being in *Metaphysics* Λ.²⁴ The trouble with this reading for many modern scholars is that it smacks too much of a ‘mystical view’.²⁵ This of course need not count against the idea that it is Plato’s view. Nonetheless, the significance of (B) according to this tradition relies heavily on Neoplatonic metaphysical doctrines that are difficult to perceive in the text, and which do not fit easily with what Plato says about being and the forms elsewhere in the *Sophist*.

My view is that the ancient Platonic interpretation of (B) is on the right track, but that we need a reading of this passage that better integrates it into the surrounding discussion between the Visitor and Theaetetus in the *Sophist*.²⁶ The passage revolves around the nature of ‘that which is completely real’ (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν)—a

²⁴ Gerson, ‘Holy Solemnity’, 291–7; referring to *Metaphysics* Λ 7, 1072a30–32 and Λ 9, 1074b33–35, 1075a3–5; and *Enneads* 3.8.9, 6.7.13, 6.7.39. See also E. D. Perl, ‘The Motion of Intellect On the Neoplatonic Reading of *Sophist* 248e–249d’ [‘Motion of Intellect’], *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, 8 (2014), 135–60 for a recent elaboration of this reading.

²⁵ See Brown, ‘Innovation and Continuity’, 201.

²⁶ This is not something attempted by Gerson, ‘Holy Solemnity’, who rests his case for the ancient interpretation on the agreement that he finds between Plato’s and Aristotle’s views on being. Perl, ‘Motion of Intellect’, argues that (B) expresses a view of the ‘togetherness or unity-in-duality of intellect and intelligible being’ (135). I think this projects too much Plotinus into Plato, but more importantly, Perl does not explain how such a reading is supported by Plato’s metaphysical views later in the *Sophist*.

phrase that, as Vasilis Politis has observed, Plato uses on only one other occasion in the dialogues, where it describes the reality of the forms in the *Republic* (477a3–4).²⁷ The idea that the forms are ‘ensouled’, however, need not have radically mystical implications. From the fact that the forms possess *nous*, it is natural for Plato to infer that the forms are ensouled. For only a being that has life can participate in *nous*, and only a being that has soul can participate in life.²⁸ The real question here lies in determining what it means for a form to possess *nous*.

2.2.1. *The Kinēsis of Nous* We can make some headway with this question by first clarifying Plato’s general conception of *nous*. Stephen Menn argues in his comprehensive study of this topic that the term *nous* fundamentally denotes a virtue in the dialogues—specifically, the virtue of intelligence or rational order. Construed in this way, *nous* is ‘the universal principle or virtue antithetical to the universal

²⁷ See Politis ‘Change and Changelessness’, 162–3. My reading of (B) differs markedly from Politis’ reading, however, since he takes the argument to generate the conclusion that some kinds of changing things (‘in particular the changing, rationally cognizing soul’, 168) must be regarded as real (see also 153). As I explain below, this cannot be the thrust of the argument, for the point of engaging with the friends of the forms (and the giants) is not to establish what sorts of things have being, but what being itself is in terms of its general properties. This is clearly the Visitor’s interest in questioning the reformed giants at 246e5–247e6, from whom he extracts an account of being with the *dunamis* proposal, and it continues to be his interest in the arguments that he and Theaetetus develop against the friends of the forms until the children’s wish, at which point we learn that being has been defined (see 249d6–7).

²⁸ For this explanation of the relationship between *nous* and soul in (B), see R. Hackforth, ‘Plato’s Theism’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 30 (1936), 4–9, who argues that Plato is consistent throughout the dialogues ‘in discriminating νοῦς, as an ultimate principle, from ψυχή as a derived principle’ (7; referring to *Phileb.* 30b1–e3, *Tim.* 29d7–30b6, and *Laws* 897b7–c9). The point is supported by Mohr, ‘Platonic Cosmology’, and defended thoroughly by Menn, *Nous*, ch. 4.

power of irrationality and randomness'.²⁹ Common translations of the term as 'mind' or 'intellect' are therefore misleading since they imply that *nous* represents the faculty of thought or the rational part of the soul. That use occurs occasionally in the Platonic corpus, yet Menn shows through an exhaustive review of the texts that *nous* refers most frequently not to the faculty of rational thought, nor to the soul or a part of the soul, but to a virtue the possession of which (by a soul) enables the exercise of rationality. Hence the term occurs standardly in Plato in expressions such as *noun echein* and *noun ktasthai*—to have or to acquire intelligence—where *nous* never means 'mind' or 'intellect'. In these expressions, rather, *nous* has the primary sense of a virtue in which a being in possession of a rational order participates. As Menn notes, this is precisely the use of *nous* found in (B), where it appears repeatedly in the idiom *noun echein* (249a2, a4, a7, a9).³⁰ The subject of the passage—the subject to which change must chiefly be said to be assigned—thus cannot be ensouled *nous*, neither individual ensouled *nous* nor cosmic ensouled *nous*. Again, the subject is 'that which is completely real' (248e7–249a1) and the argument is advanced not to show that *nous*, life, and soul must have complete

²⁹ Menn, *Nous*, 17; the abundant textual evidence for this view is cited throughout ch. 3, but see esp. *Phd.* 97c1–2, 99c4–6; *Phileb.* 28c6–8, 28d5–9, 28e3, 30c4–7; and *Laws* 967b5–6.

³⁰ Menn, *Nous*, 21–2. While I am indebted here to Menn, I depart from his reading of the upshot of (B), on which he agrees with the predominant view (see n. 22 above) that the argument seeks to secure the reality of only some changing things. Menn acknowledges problems with this reading and seems to leave open the possibility of my interpretation (*Nous*, 71 n. 4). Yet in any case his central purpose in discussing (B) is not to interpret the argument, but to claim (against Cherniss, *Criticism of Plato*, 606–7) that *nous* in this passage represents something that complete being *has* as a virtue—a point with which I readily concur.

being, but to show that anything with complete being must have *nous* as a virtue, and in having this virtue, must have life and soul, and so exhibit *kinēsis*.

Now, it remains a question how we should understand Plato's inferences about life and soul in this argument. Granting that the subject of passage (B) is being itself, and that *nous* should be ascribed to being as a virtue, the Visitor is nevertheless adamant that the possession of *nous* implies the possession of life (249a4) and of soul (249a6–7). What does Plato mean by these inferences? Lewis Campbell's treatment of this issue over 150 years ago still provides the best entry into the matter. In his 1867 commentary on the *Sophist*, Campbell remarks that Plato's definition of the term ἔμψυχος as that which has an independent principle of *kinēsis*, affirmed in the *Phaedrus* (245c5–246a2) and the *Laws* (894e4–896b3), makes the best sense of the Visitor's claim that being itself is ensouled.³¹ Plato identifies this principle in the *Laws* as the most superior kind of change and, in a notoriously obscure part of the work, refers to it as the *kinēsis* of *nous* (voῦ κίνησις, 897d3).³² We need not go into the intricacies of this view, except to observe that the text is at least clear that anything that possesses *nous* exhibits *kinēsis* in the same way (ὡσαύτως, 898a8), concerning the same things (περὶ τὰ αὐτά, 898a9), and with respect to the same things (πρὸς τὰ αὐτά, 898a9).³³ From this we can infer that

³¹ L. Campbell, *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato [Sophistes]* (Oxford, 1867), 130.

³² Mayhew, R., *Plato: Laws 10* (Oxford, 2008) provides a close discussion of this thorny topic (see esp. 139–46). Its relevance to (B) in the *Sophist* is also noted by R. Bolton, 'Plato's Distinction between Being and Becoming', *Review of Metaphysics*, 29 (1975), 66–95 at 93–4; Gerson, 'Holy Solemnity', 298; and Perl, 'Motion of Intellect', 154.

³³ That which holds in the same way (ὡσαύτως) in relation to the same things (κατὰ ταῦτά) is notably invoked in connection with the forms in the *Phaedo* (80b1–3). But

Plato believes the possession of *nous* confers on a being a certain power in relation to other things with which it is associated rationally and uniformly. The interpretation of (B) that I am proposing follows the same thought. The claim that the forms have *nous* and life and soul comes down to the claim that each of them in its own right, as a complete being, exhibits *kinēsis* in relation to other things according to a single rational order (κινεῖσθαι...ἕνα λόγον καὶ τάξιν μίαν, 898a9–b1).³⁴

2.2.2. *The Two Arguments Together* Unlike other interpretations, the above reading of (B) shows how the argument from *nous* pertains directly to the views held by the friends of the forms. The Visitor wants the friends to agree that *nous*, as the virtue of rational order, is a property of the things they believe have complete being:

the phrases also bring to mind Socrates' method of refuting his interlocutors by showing them how their views fail to apply to the same things in the same way, a method that Plato alludes to in the *Sophist* using exactly these terms at 230b6–8. Socrates' own views are consistent, by contrast, because he always speaks about the same things in the same way: see *Gorg.* 482a6–b1, 490e9–11, 491b5–8.

³⁴ Thus we must simply acknowledge that Plato has a far more capacious understanding of the soul than we might expect. The *Laws* once more supplies ample support for this point (see 904a6–8, 906a8–b3), but see also *Phaedrus* 276a5–9, which identifies dialectic as a kind of speech that is 'living and ensouled' (ζῶντα καὶ ἔμψυχον, 276a8). How can a speech be regarded as ensouled? Socrates' arguments (see n. 33 just above) offer a clue as to what Plato may have in mind here. Alcibiades says in the *Symposium* that anyone who considers Socrates' arguments carefully will discover they are the only ones with any *nous* in them (voῦν ἔχοντας ἕνδον μόνους εὐρήσει τῶν λόγων, 222a2–3). It is difficult to see what he means if we think of *nous* as something possessed by psychological subjects alone. Yet Alcibiades' claim is less odd if he means that Socrates' arguments exert a certain rational force or power, not only on an interlocutor, but in the way they relate to each other as part of an interconnected set: they are the only arguments that make any sense. This is enough to show why Plato's ascription of *nous* to being in the *Sophist* need not lead to a full-blown mystical view on which the forms are assigned the ability to understand or the activity of thinking (cf. n. 23 above). That is to say, *nous* should not be viewed in this specific context as a *cognitive* virtue possessed by a psychological subject, any more than Socrates' arguments should be viewed as psychological subjects in possessing *nous*. I'm grateful to Victor Caston and Roberto Granieri for pressing me on this issue.

the forms. The phrase ‘that which is completely real’ (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν) is simply the Visitor’s gloss on the friends’ category of ‘true being’ (ἡ ἀληθινὴ οὐσία, 246b8) and ‘that which really is’ (ἡ ὄντως οὐσία, 248a11), which they reserve solely for the forms.³⁵ The phrase should not be interpreted to refer to a realm of being or ‘the totality of the real’, which suggests that the point of contention against the friends concerns the sorts of things that have being.³⁶ Most scholars adopt such an interpretation of τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, but this cannot be the focus of (B). For Plato distinguishes carefully at 245e8–246a2 between the way in which the battle of gods and giants will address the issue of being and the way in which he has addressed the issue at 243d6–245e2 in considering theorists who discuss the sorts of beings there are and provide inventories of beings. The aim of investigating the views of the gods and the giants, the Visitor says, is to determine the nature of being itself and what exactly it is (ὅτι ποτ’ ἔστιν, 246a1–2), and marks an approach to the issue that proceeds differently (ἄλλως, 245e8) from the inquiry at 243d6–245e2. If the point of (B) were to get the friends to accept a broader inventory of beings that includes (some or all) changing things as well as unchanging things, the Visitor would be failing to observe this professed aim.

³⁵ Also noted by Politis, ‘Change and Changelessness’, 162. The Visitor is therefore recognising here that the friends have another ontological category of becoming (γένεσις, 246c1) that accounts for the status of objects of sense perception. In this of course they differ from the giants, whose ontology initially countenances only material objects.

³⁶ For the translation ‘the totality of the real’, see Cherniss, *Criticism of Plato*, 607. References to scholars who assume a similar reading of the phrase can be found in n. 22 above.

We cannot, accordingly, accept a reading of the battle of gods and giants on which the outcome is an inventory of beings. The outcome that Plato seeks, rather, is an account of the nature of being itself (see 249d6–7; cf. 247e3–4, 248c4–5). What the friends are pressed to admit is that the forms, if they are completely real, must also, in being rationally ordered entities, experience change. Thus change should be regarded as a property of being itself and the forms. Apart from addressing the friends' position on its own terms, this is the only interpretation of (B) that shows how the passage anticipates the children's wish, where the Visitor states unequivocally that the forms should not be regarded as utterly unchanging.

Notice further how, on this reading, (B) does in fact serve as a 'reinforcing argument' to (A). There are two conclusions the Visitor draws from the line of reasoning he conducts here with Theaetetus to support the argument in (A). First: 'it must be admitted that both that which undergoes change (τὸ κινούμενον) and change (κίνησιν) are things that are (ὄντα)' (249b2–3). On my reading, Plato argues in (A) for the reality of *that which undergoes change* (τὸ κινούμενον), insofar as the forms experience change in coming to be known; he argues next in (B) for the reality of *change itself* (κίνησις) as a property of the forms, insofar as the forms experience change in possessing *nous*. The Visitor then supplements these points with a second conclusion: 'if the things that are (ὄντων) were changeless (ἀκινήτων), there would be intelligence (νοῦν) nowhere, for no one (μηδενί), about nothing (περὶ μηδενός)' (249b5–6).³⁷ Once more, the reading I am offering makes sense of this

³⁷ I thank an anonymous reader for suggesting this translation in place of an earlier version. The revised OCT (though not Burnet) edits these lines in the Greek by

conclusion. Plato shows in (A) how, if being were entirely changeless, there would be intelligence ‘for no one’ (μηδενί), since the forms would be incapable of being known; he shows next in (B) how there would be intelligence ‘about nothing’ (περι μηδενός), since none of the forms would possess its own rational order.

2.3. *The Children’s Wish: A Positive Account of Being (249c10–d4)*

Thus far we have examined Plato’s reasons for attributing change to the forms in passage (A) in his argument from knowledge (248d10–e4) and in passage (B) in his argument from *nous* (248e6–249b6). It is at this point, after the Visitor informs Theaetetus at 249b8–c8 that any being in possession of *nous* must also be at rest (στάσεως, 249c1), that Plato submits his solution to the battle of gods and giants with a positive account of being in the children’s wish. The passage is worth quoting in full:

τῷ δὴ φιλοσόφῳ καὶ ταῦτα μάλιστα τιμῶντι πᾶσα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἀνάγκη διὰ
ταῦτα μήτε τῶν ἐν ἧ καὶ τὰ πολλὰ εἶδη λεγόντων τὸ πᾶν ἐστηκὸς ἀποδέχεσθαι,
τῶν τε αὖ πανταχῆ τὸ ὄν κινούντων μηδὲ τὸ παράπαν ἀκούειν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν

inserting the word πάντων after ὄντων at 249b5. This allows the conditional clause to be read as leaving open the idea that *some* of the things that are remain entirely changeless. However, the appearance of this word occurs in none of our manuscripts of the *Sophist*. The emendation was apparently first proposed by Ludwig Heindorf in the early nineteenth century and has received support from Cornford and others since then (see *Theory of Knowledge*, 241 n. 1), but as Rowe makes clear in his recent translation and commentary (*Sophist*, 182), it is unwarranted when an acceptable interpretation of the text is available to us. See also Perl, ‘Motion of Intellect’, 150–2, who argues that the grounds for this insertion can only be based on a tendentious reading of (B).

τῶν παιδῶν εὐχὴν, ὅσα ἀκίνητα καὶ κεκίνημένα, τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν
 συναμφοτέρα λέγειν. (249c10–d4)

For the philosopher, who values all of these things [sc. knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence] most of all, it seems necessary (because of them) not to follow those who say that everything's at rest [τὸ πᾶν ἔστηκός], either as a unity [τῶν ἓν] or even as many forms [τὰ πολλὰ εἶδη], nor again to listen at all to those who say that being changes in every way [πανταχῆ τὸ ὄν κινούντων], but rather to claim with the wishfulness of children that being and all things [τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν] are those things that are unchanging [ἀκίνητα] and changed [κεκίνημένα] both together [συναμφοτέρα].³⁸

This is a decisive moment in the *Sophist*, confirmed emphatically at 249d6–7 in the Visitor's statement that he and Theaetetus have 'encompassed being in an account' (περιεληφέναι τῷ λόγῳ τὸ ὄν). Plato could not be more explicit in the lines above about the need to reject the exclusive way in which the gods and the giants ascribe rest and change to being respectively. A true philosopher must refuse to accept both the view that 'everything's at rest' (τὸ πᾶν ἔστηκός, 249d1) and the view that 'being changes in every way' (πανταχῆ τὸ ὄν κινούντων, 249d2). Furthermore,

³⁸ I take τὸ ὄν and τὸ πᾶν with other scholars to be effectively equivalent in this passage, with τὸ πᾶν supplementing τὸ ὄν at 249d4 (conjoined by τε καὶ) to yield the sense: 'being and all things (sc. all things that are)', the modifier perhaps reflecting Plato's pluralist commitments. Cf. Moravcsik, 'Being and Meaning', 40; Owen, 'Plato and Parmenides', 339 n. 16; Reeve, 'Dialectic', 60 n. 43; M. M. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals* (Princeton, 1994), 204; Gill, *Philosophos*, 98–9; Perl, 'Motion of Intellect', 152–3. The equivalence is verified in the aporia about being that follows this passage at 249d9–251a3, where Plato recasts the children's wish more simply as 'being is change and rest both together' (κίνησις καὶ στάσις ἐστὶ συναμφοτερον τὸ ὄν, 250c3–4). For my reading of this aporia, see n. 46 below.

contrary to those commentators who believe that (A) and (B) do not suggest that the forms experience change, we see the Visitor insist above that being cannot be assumed to be entirely at rest, whether spoken of as a unity (a reference presumably to Parmenidean monism) *or even as many forms* (ἢ καὶ τὰ πολλὰ εἶδη, 249c11–d1). Plato's solution therefore to the battle of gods and giants is that, whether we accept a monistic or a pluralistic understanding of reality, being itself must be defined jointly in terms of rest and change.

The part of the children's wish at 249d3–4 that defines being as unchanging (ἀκίνητα, 249d3) must be Plato's way of affirming the immutability of the forms.³⁹ But on what basis can the forms also be defined in terms of change? The answer lies in (B). For it is here that Plato attributes a kind of change to the forms in virtue of their own nature, due to their possession of *nous*. Let us call this 'perfect change', since this is a kind of change that the forms must possess on account of being completely real (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, 248e7–249a1), and since Plato himself uses the perfect tense in endorsing a view of being as 'changed' (κεκινημένα, 249d3).⁴⁰

What does it mean to say the forms are changed perfectly? While the answer lies in (B), the key to resolving this question is found in the *koinōnein* relation that the Visitor appeals to in passage (A). The argument of that passage, recall, relied on the fact that to know an object entails an association with that object: 'an affection (πάθημα) or an affecting (ποίημα) that arises from some power (δυνάμεώς) when

³⁹ Also noted by Crivelli, *Account of Falsehood*, 93.

⁴⁰ The perfect tense is also used in (B) when the Visitor and Theaetetus deny that being, standing unchanging (ἀκίνητον ... ἐστάναι, 249a9–10), could still have *nous*, life, and soul.

things come together in relation to one another (τῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα συνιόντων)' (248b5–6). This is the basis on which the Visitor claims that the forms change in coming to be known. However, Plato uses the *koinōnein* relation most frequently in the *Sophist* to describe the *blending* that occurs between forms and forms: the interrelatedness of forms is almost always referred to as an association (κοινωνία) that they have with each other (250b9, 251d9 ff., 253a8, 254b7 ff., 256b2).⁴¹ Indeed, the Visitor argues it is in the very nature (φύσις, 257a9) of the forms to be associated in this way (cf. ἔστι κατὰ φύσιν ταύτη, 256c2–3). Plato employs the same term here to describe the cognitive relations that hold between us and the forms and the metaphysical relations that hold between forms and forms.

The importance of this point bears emphasising, for it allows us to connect Plato's rejection of the friends of the forms in the *Sophist* with his views on the interrelatedness of the forms. The Visitor's objection to the friends' position in (B) is that, as paradigms of rational order, the forms must experience *kinēsis*. We learn subsequently in the dialogue that the ability of the forms to be grasped in a rational account depends on the idea that they are associated with one another in a determinate manner (251a5–253e6). This association of the forms underwrites the

⁴¹ See Campbell, *Sophistes*, who says of the account of *koinōnein* at 248b: 'The introduction of this word, which plays an important part in the sequel, should be noticed' (126). Unfortunately, few commentators on the *Sophist* since have followed this advice. Gill has noted the connection (see *Philosophos*, 236–7), but without sufficiently explaining how the forms are affected in being associated and without showing how the Visitor's interest in arguing for the interrelatedness of the forms follows from his argument in (B) against the friends of the forms. As I explain in Section 3 below, while I agree with Gill that the children's wish at 249d3–4 indicates Plato's view that the forms experience change, her understanding of this claim differs significantly from my own.

main project of the *Sophist*, in that it makes possible the Visitor and Theaetetus' hunt for an account of the sophist and the method of division that brings this account to light by the dialogue's end.⁴² As the Visitor says at 227a10–b1, it is for the sake of acquiring *nous* (τοῦ κτήσασθαι ἔνεκα νοῦν) that he and Theaetetus are engaged in the method of division. Understanding the form of sophistry requires that this form be graspable in a rational account, and it is the association of each form with other forms as a rationally ordered entity that enables any form to be grasped in such an account. That is what the possession of *nous* implies for each form: a timeless association with a set of other forms. The change that the forms experience in coming to be known in passage (A) therefore depends upon the more fundamental perfect change indicated in passage (B). To divide by kinds and understand the relations that exist among the forms, it must be presupposed that they are *already* associated in discernible ways as beings in possession of a rational order.

Many scholars believe that for the children's wish to represent a legitimate middle-ground position between the views of the gods and the giants, Plato must treat the two parties symmetrically by retrieving an element from each of their respective positions. It might be objected that my interpretation of the account of being at 249d3–4 cannot satisfy this desideratum, because I take Plato to side with the gods that only the forms have genuine being. From what I have argued, it is true that the children's wish does not accommodate the view that objects of sense perception possess genuine being. However, Plato does achieve a reconciliation with the giants on my interpretation—not with the crude giants of 246a7–b3, who assimilate

⁴² For good discussion of this point, see N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist: Between the Sophist and the Philosopher [Unity]* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. 276–7.

all being to body ‘by force’ (βίᾱ, 246d1) and refuse to enter into debate about their views, but with their reformed cousins of 246e2–247e6.⁴³ I have claimed that the two objections that Plato develops against the gods’ understanding of being in (A) and (B) are both applications of the *koinōnein* relation. Yet the *koinōnein* relation itself is derived from an account of being that is expounded initially in the *Sophist* as the position of the reformed giants (see 247d8–247e4, 248b2–6). It is the giants who are first led to accept a definition of being as anything that has present (παρῆ, 248c4) within it the power to affect or to be affected. The gods start out by denying that this principle is a feature of the forms, which they assume to be entirely stable, but the Visitor challenges them to accept a qualified version of the principle by acknowledging that *nous* and hence change must be ever present (παρεῖναι, 249a1) in the forms. The reasoning here is that the forms’ possession of *nous* requires that they be associated; but if associated, then also affected; and if affected, then also changed. Thus the argument from *nous* leads us to perfect change. This is enough, I believe, to effect a reconciliation between the gods and giants. What Plato retains from the gods’ understanding of being is an element of rest; what he retains from the giants’ understanding of being is an element of change.⁴⁴

Finally, we should note that it is due to a group of forms that Plato calls the ‘greatest kinds’ that those forms that associate with one another do so in the *Sophist*. What

⁴³ Recall that the crude giants, whom Theaetetus calls ‘dreadful’ (δεινούς, 246b4), are dispatched quickly at 246c9–d9 to make room for the reformed giants, who are amenable to discussing their position, the key difference here lying in the willingness of the reformed giants to explain the nature of being in terms of fundamental principles (cf. 246b1–3).

⁴⁴ For more on this reconciliation, see n. 15 above.

distinguishes the greatest kinds is their ‘all-pervading’ character: they are predicable of every form. And the Visitor explicitly identifies rest itself and change itself as two of the greatest kinds.⁴⁵ There is a clear sense in which rest itself is predicable of every form, insofar as every form is immutable (see 249b12–c5). Likewise, the other greatest kinds—being, difference, and sameness—can be straightforwardly understood as all-pervading, insofar as every form exists, is different from other forms, and is self-identical. The sense in which change itself should be understood as all-pervading is left open in the *Sophist*, and I shall return to this question later in this paper. Still, it is worth observing how my reading of (B) provides the framework for an answer. If the forms can be said to experience change not just insofar as they are known, but in virtue of their *own* nature, then we have a way to regard change itself as a genuine greatest kind.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Some commentators have denied this (e.g. Cornford, *Theory of Knowledge*, 277–8), but as Reeve observes (‘Dialectic’, 57), the text is unambiguous at 254d4–5 in classifying rest and change among the greatest kinds.

⁴⁶ I say more about the status of rest and change as greatest kinds in Section 4, but note that the problem with viewing rest and change as incompatible in the battle of gods and giants, observed earlier in Section 2.1, recurs again here. For if rest and change were ‘most contrary’ (έναντιώτατα) to one another, as Theaetetus assumes at 250a8–10, they could not be greatest kinds, since they would not be predicable of each other. However, it is precisely this assumption that leads Theaetetus and the Visitor to an aporia about the nature of being at 249d9–251a3: directly after resolving the battle of gods and giants with an account of being as ‘those things that are unchanging and changed both together’ (όσα άκίνητα και κεινημένα ... συναμφοτέρα, 249d3–4), they are forced to conclude at 250c3–4 that being is not change and rest both together (ούκ άρα κίνησις και στάσις έστι συναμφοτερον τó ðν), but that ‘by its own nature, being neither rests nor changes’ (κατά την αύτου φύσιν άρα τó ðν ούτε έστηκεν ούτε κινείται, 250c6–7). The aporia here has the structure of an antinomy: being must be both unchanging and changed; yet how can being, by its own nature and as a single thing, be two evidently contrary things? The solution consists of two connected steps. The first step, which the Visitor takes up immediately, is to examine more carefully the nature of predicative statements and

Hence I propose that Plato's argument from *nous* in (B) is meant to be read in light of his discussion of the interrelatedness of forms and the greatest kinds that follows in the *Sophist*. The Visitor's objection to the friends of the forms in (A) is that the knowing relation between us and the forms constitutes a *koinōnein* relation such that, in being known, the forms are affected, and in being affected, the forms are changed. His objection in (B), when spelt out, is that the blending relation between forms and forms constitutes a *koinōnein* relation such that, in being associated, the forms are affected, and in being affected, the forms are changed. If this reading of the *Sophist* is correct, we can see not only how (B) serves to reinforce (A), but also how Plato's arguments for the interrelatedness of forms represent a natural conclusion to his efforts to define being in the dialogue and an elaboration of his solution to the battle of gods and giants in the children's wish.

explain 'how we keep calling this very same thing [sc. being itself] by many names' (λέγωμεν δὴ καθ' ὄντινά ποτε τρόπον πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι ταῦτόν τοῦτο ἐκάστοτε προσαγορεύομεν, 251a5–6). The second step is to deny that rest and change are really contraries. Once that assumption is rejected or at least qualified (as it is at 256b6–c3) and the forms are found to be associated with one another by nature at 251a5–253e6, the *aporia* is easily dissolved: rest and change can be predicable of each other and jointly predicable of being itself without contradiction. There is accordingly a parallel on this interpretation between the solution to the *aporia* about not-being at 237b7–239c7 and the solution to the *aporia* about being, signalled by the Visitor at 243b7–c5 and 250e5–251a3: the *aporia* about not-being is resolved when we see how being and not-being can associate (see 240c1–2, 258c6–259b6); the *aporia* about being is left as an open problem at 250d7–e4, but is similarly resolved when we see how rest and change can associate. Reeve, 'Dialectic', and others are therefore right in arguing that the confusion about being at 249d9–251a3 turns on Theaetetus' faulty assumption; cf. W. G. Runciman, *Plato's Later Epistemology* (Cambridge, 1962), 93–6; A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence: A Study of Plato's Metaphysics* (Princeton, 2002), 344 n. 46; Gill, *Philosophos*, 227–9; C. Buckels, 'Motion and Rest as Genuinely Greatest Kinds in the *Sophist*' ['Motion and Rest'], *Ancient Philosophy*, 35 (2015), 317–27, all of whom also argue for rest and change as genuine greatest kinds.

3. Kinds of Change

I have suggested two ways in which Plato affirms that the forms experience change in the *Sophist*, corresponding to passages (A) and (B). Each kind of change is an application of the *koinōnein* relation that the Visitor cites at 248b5–6, where a thing is said to be affected in its association with something else. According to the argument from knowledge in (A), when a form comes to be known by a person through an act of knowing, that form is affected and therefore changed. Plato then goes further in (B) in his argument from *nous* and subsequently in his arguments for the interrelatedness of the forms: every form, as a paradigm of rational order, is affected and therefore changed as a result of its association with other forms. I have called the latter ‘perfect change’. Yet what kind of change does Plato have in mind here?

Almost all scholars who have explored the kind of change that the forms experience in the *Sophist* have focused on (A) and agree with Owen that a form, in coming to be known by someone, experiences a mere Cambridge change.⁴⁷ This is a notion drawn from Bertrand Russell’s famous definition of change:

Change is the difference, in respect of truth or falsehood, between a proposition concerning an entity and a time *T* and a proposition concerning

⁴⁷ Owen, ‘Plato and Parmenides’, 337–9; cf. Moravcsik, ‘Being and Meaning’, 40; Reeve, ‘Dialectic’; Thomas, ‘Speaking of Something’, 644; Gill, *Philosophos*, 237–9. For the label ‘Cambridge change’ and the notion of a ‘mere’ Cambridge change, see P. T. Geach, *God and the Soul [Soul]* (London, 1969), cited below.

the same entity and another time T' , provided that the two propositions differ only by the fact that T occurs in the one where T' occurs in the other.⁴⁸

While not clearly stated by Russell, what is key to this definition is that something experiences a change when a predicate is true of it at one time and false at another time. Peter Geach, who dubbed this 'Cambridge change', formulates the idea more perspicuously: 'The thing called "x" has changed if we have "F(x) at time t " true and "F(x) at time t^1 " false, for some interpretation of "F", " t ", and " t^1 ".'⁴⁹ This general formulation of change captures not only the changes that occur over time in a thing's intrinsic properties, as when a snowflake melts, but also the changes that occur over time in a thing's relational properties, as when Socrates becomes shorter than Theaetetus as Theaetetus grows taller (cf. *Tht.* 155b6–c4). While the former are 'real' changes, according to Geach, the latter constitute 'mere' Cambridge changes.

We can see how the change that Plato countenances in his argument from knowledge in (A) might fit with a notion of mere Cambridge change. This would be a change that the forms undergo as they acquire new relational properties over time in different contexts: when a form comes to be known by a knower, a new proposition comes to be true of the form (sc. that it is known by someone) at some time and in one context that was false at an earlier time in another context. Since none of its intrinsic properties change, the form does not experience alteration on

⁴⁸ B. Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (Cambridge, 1903), 469.

⁴⁹ Geach, *Soul*, 71–2.

this reading—it is only changed relatively to a knower—and so the immutability of the forms is preserved.

However, while the notion of mere Cambridge change may explain the line of reasoning we find in (A), it does not explain the kind of change that the Visitor attributes to the forms in the children’s wish, where they are said to be *already* ‘changed’ (κεκινημένα, 249d3) in a way that must be prior to them coming to be known by any individual mind. Nor, more problematically, does it explain the argument from *nous* in (B). For in this passage, change is attributed to the forms insofar as being itself possesses *nous*. This cannot be a change that the forms undergo by means of acquiring new relational properties over time in different contexts, as it would in the case of a form experiencing a mere Cambridge change. Rather, change is regarded in (B) as present (παρεῖναι, 249a1) in the forms invariantly across times and contexts, since *nous* must be present in the forms invariantly across times and contexts.⁵⁰

This last point indicates why the idea of Cambridge change in general is unsuitable as a candidate for the change that Plato takes the forms to experience. The upshot of (B) is that change must be assigned to every form by nature. But Cambridge change is a type of variation that is inherently indexed to time: for anything to experience change, according to Russell, there must be a background condition of

⁵⁰ On the importance of context-invariance to Plato’s understanding of unqualified being, see M. Burnyeat, ‘Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul’, in T. Smiley (ed.), *Mathematics and Necessity: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Oxford, 2000), 1–81, esp. 20–2.

temporality against which that thing changes. So if Cambridge change were the only kind of change that the forms experience, they would always do so in time. Yet that is impossible. Plato's forms are, canonically, abstract objects of thought whose nature is not grounded in anything temporal. The challenge is to explain how the forms are both atemporal *and* experience change, and it is not clear how a view of change that is indexed to time can meet this challenge.⁵¹

Mary Louise Gill has recently appealed to the interrelatedness of the forms as a way to solve some of these interpretive problems. To claim that the forms associate with each other in discernible ways is to claim, among other things, that there are various properties that they possess in different contexts of inquiry. So suppose that a form is discerned at one time and in one context as having a certain accidental property, and discerned at another time and in another context as lacking that property. According to Gill, the form has suffered a mere Cambridge change: 'In a change X remains the same as its earlier self with respect to its nature (X remains X-en), but becomes different from its earlier self with respect to some accidental property'.⁵² Whether such a change occurs depends on the contexts in which a given accidental property is found to apply to a form, which is a task that Plato assigns to the dialectician in the *Sophist* (see 253d1–e2, 259c7–d2). The essential nature of each form remains fixed, on this view, but Gill argues that a form may nonetheless be said to experience change at different times when regarded in different contexts.

⁵¹ I return to this issue in Section 4.

⁵² Gill, *Philosophos*, 234.

Gill supports this view with an example from the start of the *Sophist*, where the Visitor and Theaetetus divide by kinds in an effort to produce a definitive account of sophistry. No single account emerges from their initial divisions, but multiple accounts. In the first account, for instance, the sophist is classified as a kind of hunter; in the second, he comes to lack this accidental property and appears under a new genus as a wholesaler of goods. How do we reconcile these different accounts? It appears the kind 'sophist' itself has changed, though no change occurs in the essential nature of sophistry. The Visitor and Theaetetus are simply exploring the different ways in which sophistry can be considered a kind of acquisitive expertise in different contexts, first with respect to the genus of hunting, then with respect to the genus of wholesaling. As Gill puts it: 'In the first part of the *Sophist*, the sophist seemed to keep changing from one definition to the next, but that was not because the nature of the sophist changed, only because the inquirers' perspective on him changed, encouraging them to divide up the genus in different ways to capture his various features'.⁵³ Still, Gill maintains that the forms *do* experience numerous mere Cambridge changes in relation to one another in different contexts as a result of taking on various accidental features, and she believes this is enough to discharge the children's wish. What the friends of the forms must accept, she asserts, is that 'unless the forms can be affected in relation to us and in relation to one another, we humans cannot grasp them and use them in understanding the world'.⁵⁴

⁵³ Gill, *Philosophos*, 238–9.

⁵⁴ Gill, *Philosophos*, 239.

From what I have said so far in this paper, it should be evident that I agree with Gill that there is a sense for Plato in which the forms are affected (and so changed) in being interrelated with one another. But this change should not be understood in terms of Cambridge change on my reading. To be sure, it is not obvious even on Gill's reading how the interrelatedness of the forms implies the kind of change involved in mere Cambridge change. After all, those forms that associate with each other *always* do so. We may recognize these associations at different times and in different contexts of inquiry, but this is a change that occurs from *our* perspective. No new proposition comes to be true of a form independently of us when it is found to possess different accidental properties. Instead, Plato holds that every form must at all times possess a variety of properties: either a given association always exists or it never does.⁵⁵

The question of how we should interpret the argument from *nous* in passage (B) also remains a major puzzle for Gill's reading.⁵⁶ Again, change is identified in this argument as a property that is present (παρεῖναι, 249a1) in the forms in a timeless and context-invariant way, because every form must always be said to have *nous* on account of being completely real. But the kind of change that Gill believes the forms

⁵⁵ As Victor Caston has pointed out to me, Gill would be able to defend a notion of mere Cambridge change that is applicable to the forms by indexing propositions to times from different perspectives. For instance, when a form is found to have a new accidental property due to a change in an inquirer's perspective, a new proposition comes to be true of the form (*F* is seen as *G* by *S* at *t*) that was previously false. The problem is that the forms cannot be said on these grounds to experience change in virtue of their own nature as things that really are, which is what the children's wish requires. Cf. the objection by Keyt to Owen's reading of 249d3–4, cited in n. 16 above.

⁵⁶ Despite its importance in refuting the friends of the forms, Gill devotes just three sentences to discussing this passage (*Philosophos*, 97).

experience in being associated is one that occurs at different times in varied contexts. Hence even if we accept that the forms are changed by their interrelatedness, as I believe we should, we need more than the idea of Cambridge change to explain the Visitor's argument in (B).

Now, when applied to the interrelatedness of the forms, the *koinōnein* relation must in fact hold timelessly of every form in each of its associations with other forms.⁵⁷ The relation specifies that, in being associated, the forms are affected, and in being affected, the forms are changed. This is a wide-ranging metaphysical principle, so it covers the associations that exist between all of the forms. In particular, it covers the essential relationships that exist between the forms in virtue of each of their distinctive properties, which are invariant across contexts of inquiry. Gill argues that a form is affected merely in the sense of taking on various accidental properties. Yet if she is serious about applying the *koinōnein* relation to the interrelatedness of the forms, then a form must be affected (and so changed) as a result of *any* association it has with another form.⁵⁸ On this view, the interrelatedness of the forms as such must imply that they are changed.

We might think that the meaning of Plato's text has been stretched so far at this point that something has to give. For it is hard to conceive how a form experiences

⁵⁷ Recall that the account at 248b5–6 is a general one: any state of *koinōnia* implies an affection (πάθημα) or an affecting (ποιήμα) resulting from things coming together in relation to one another (τῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα συνιόντων).

⁵⁸ Cf. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, for whom *kinēsis* is “a catchall for the affections of things” and represents “individuation from *without*” (p. 205; her emphasis). As far as I can tell, however, McCabe does not elaborate on this sense of the term.

change on account of features that it possesses permanently. In what sense is the form of snow, say, changed as a result of its association with the form of cold? I believe, however, that we are on the cusp now of understanding the kind of change that Plato believes the forms experience in the *Sophist*. The first step is to replace the idea of Cambridge change with what T. H. Irwin has termed 'aspect-change' in Plato. A thing undergoes aspect-change when it suffers a compresence of opposite properties.⁵⁹ As Irwin notes, this is a view of change assumed in dialogues across the Platonic corpus and it does not require variation over time, just variation over the aspects at issue. So if there were some timelessly true sense in which every form could be said to suffer a compresence of opposites, then every form could be said to experience aspect-change.

We find evidence of this in the crucial metaphysical sections of the *Sophist*, where the Visitor and Theaetetus examine the nature of not-being. Every form, the Visitor insists, both is and is not.⁶⁰ That is to say, for any form to have a distinct nature, it must blend with other forms discriminately, not indiscriminately, by associating with some forms but not others (see 252d2–e8, 253a8–c1, 254b7–8, 256b6–c3). Every form thus bears a conjunction of is-and-is-not relations to other forms and varies

⁵⁹ See T.H. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1977), 1–13: 'x a-changes iff x is F in one aspect, not-F in another, and x is in the same condition when it is F and when it is not-F' (4). Observe that such change only requires that a thing be *F* and not-*F* under different aspects. Irwin refers to this as a compresence of opposite properties, yet the properties involved need not strictly be opposites, so long as a property can be affirmed of a subject under one aspect and denied of that subject under another aspect.

⁶⁰ On the difference between this sort of compresence in the forms and the problematic sort of compresence that Plato locates in objects of sense perception, see Fine, 'Immanence', 84–5.

over other forms by participating in being with respect to some forms but not with respect to others. The *Parmenides* offers support that Plato takes such a conjunction to imply aspect-change. In that dialogue, from the hypothesis in the fifth deduction that the one both is and is not, Parmenides infers that ‘the one that is not has been shown to undergo change (κινούμενον), since it has been shown to change (μεταβολήν) from being (τοῦ εἶναι) to not-being (τὸ μὴ εἶναι)’ (162c4–6).⁶¹

Notice that if a form failed to possess such a conjunction of relations, it would fail to be distinguishable in its own right as the thing that it really is, for to be discerned as a being with its own rational order, every form must have some properties that are true of it and other properties that are not true of it. Not-being, now identified as the form of difference, therefore comes to play a critical role in the *Sophist* in establishing the being of every form, allowing each of them to have a distinct nature:

κατὰ πάντα γὰρ ἡ θατέρου φύσις ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένη τοῦ ὄντος ἕκαστον
οὐκ ὄν ποιεῖ, καὶ σύμπαντα δὴ κατὰ ταῦτα οὕτως οὐκ ὄντα ὀρθῶς ἐροῦμεν,
καὶ πάλιν, ὅτι μετέχει τοῦ ὄντος, εἶναί τε καὶ ὄντα. (256d12–e3)

⁶¹ κινούμενον ἄρα τὸ οὐκ ὄν ἐν πέφανται, ἐπεὶπερ καὶ μεταβολὴν ἐκ τοῦ εἶναι ἐπὶ τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἔχον. Whether Plato endorses the ‘is’ of predication in the *Parmenides* as he does at 255c12–13 in the *Sophist* is a debated issue: see G. Vlastos, ‘The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*’, *The Philosophical Review*, 63 (1954), 319–49; C. Meinwald, *Plato’s Parmenides* (Oxford, 1991), esp. ch. 3; B. Frances, ‘Plato’s Response to the Third Man Argument in the Paradoxical Exercise of the *Parmenides*’, *Ancient Philosophy*, 16 (1996), 47–64; S. Peterson, ‘Plato’s *Parmenides*: A Principle of Interpretation and Seven Arguments’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34 (1996), 167–92; Gill, *Philosophos*, 51–5. The important point is that Plato does not find it unusual here to assume that the assignment of both being and not-being to a subject implies *kinēsis*.

That's because, for all of them [πάντα], the nature of the different makes [ποιεῖ] each of them not be, by making [ἀπεργαζομένη] each of them different from that which is [τοῦ ὄντος]. And we're going to be right if we say all of them are not [οὐκ ὄντα] in this same way. And on the other hand we're also going to be right if we call them beings [ὄντα], because they have a share in that which is [τοῦ ὄντος].

Consider the ramifications of this picture. For each form to be distinguishable as the thing that it really is, it must have its own timeless set of distinctive properties: it must share in the nature of some forms but not share in the nature of others. No form accordingly will possess exactly the same set of is-and-is-not relations as another form, because of what it is. So Plato's thought in holding that each form is *affected* as a result of its association with other forms is that, if it were not for this association, the form would *fail to be what it distinctively is*. The form of snow bears a timeless and essential relationship to the form of cold, and each of these forms has its own nature. Now, it is in the nature of snow to melt in the presence of heat. Yet it is because it shares in the nature of the cold, and the fact that the form of cold and the form of hot are contraries, that snow melts when it is heated. The form of snow is affected (and so changed) due to its association with the form of cold in the sense that, were it not for its association with the form of cold, the form of snow would be something other than what it is. This is an aspect-change that the form of snow experiences by participating in being with respect to the form of cold but not with respect to the form of hot. In its association with the form of cold, the form of snow is thus changed perfectly, for it is a permanent feature of what it is to be snow that snow is cold and not hot.

From these considerations, we can draw the conclusion that for every form F , it is a timeless truth that F experiences change by both *being* (sharing in the nature of) some forms and *not being* (not sharing in the nature of) other forms. For each form, the collection of such truths captures what is distinctive about that form. Plato therefore appears to be identifying relations of definitional dependence among the forms in affirming that the forms are changed perfectly. This is because it is the set of is-and-is-not relations that a form bears to other forms that explains what it is to be a form of a certain kind. The nature of the form of snow depends on it having an association with the form of cold, but the form of cold does not depend in the same way on an association with the form of snow, insofar as what it is to be cold does not depend on what it is to be snow in the way that what it is to be snow depends on what it is to be cold. We can generalize this idea: for any two forms with an essential relationship, where the form F is changed perfectly due to its association with the form G , the nature of F *qua* F is definitionally dependent on the nature of G . Since the nature of F is explained in part by the nature of G , we can claim further that the nature of F is determined in part by the nature of G . However, the determination involved here is logical, rather than temporal: we cannot know the nature of F without first knowing the nature of G . The nature of each form is fixed, according to this picture, by the variation that it exhibits as a result of the complete set of is-and-is-not relations that it bears to other forms.

What would it mean if the friends of the forms were right and the forms were incapable of experiencing change? It would mean, fundamentally, that each form would lack a distinct nature, for each form would be incapable of being affected by the form of difference and hence would not differ from other forms. No form would

possess its own rational order as a being that is different from other forms and from a singular form of being. The Visitor is clear about this point: the nature of the different affects (ποιεῖ, 256e1) all of the forms and makes each of them 'not be' (sc. something else) by making them different from the form of being. Difference is the changer that distinguishes every form on this view. So if the friends were right, the forms would be deprived of the properties that distinguish them as the distinctive beings they are: each form would dissolve, as it were, into a primordial soup of monadic being, something very much like the Parmenidean 'one'.⁶² Every form must, then, exist in a permanent state of having been changed by participating in being *and* not-being if it is to be understood as a being with a distinct nature and a paradigm of rational order.

This picture fits with Plato's analysis of change in the *Timaeus*. We learn in that dialogue that *kinēsis* always occurs under conditions of nonuniformity (ἀνωμαλότητα) between a thing to be changed (τὸ κινησόμενον) and a thing that does the changing (τὸ κινῆσον) (57e3–58a1).⁶³ Significantly, this analysis of change

⁶² This would explain the correspondence that the Visitor frequently draws in the *Sophist* between the views held by the friends of the forms and Parmenidean monism (esp. at 249c11–d1, 252a7–8). The rejection of the friends thus entails a certain pluralism about being. The ground for this idea is already laid earlier in the dialogue in exploring a problem for Parmenides' view of being, where the Visitor argues that if being is one, it must be nonidentical to the one: 'For if being (τὸ ὄν) is somehow affected (πεπρονθός) by being one, it won't appear to be the same (ταυτόν) as the one, and everything will actually be more than one' (245b7–9). (The perfect tense here is once more notable; also at 245a5, c1.) The point is made just before the battle of gods and giants, so it may be a way of priming Theaetetus for a world of intelligible beings, against Parmenidean monism. I'm grateful to Christie Thomas for sharing this insight with me.

⁶³ I owe the reference here to Gill, *Philosophos*, 230–1. She connects this understanding of change, as I do, with the *koinōnein* relation in the *Sophist*, though

makes no reference to time. The basic idea in this passage, rather, is of extrinsically-grounded change: a variation that results from one thing being acted on by another thing.⁶⁴ Timaeus also identifies inequality (ἀνισότης) as the cause (αἰτία) of what is nonuniform (58a1). Whatever else this suggests, it requires at least that the subject of any change possess a certain distinctiveness in relation to other things. The interrelatedness of the forms implies such change, since every form as a subject with a distinct nature must be affected by the form of being and the form of difference in bearing a conjunction of is-and-is-not relations to other forms—that is, in sharing in the nature of some forms but not sharing in the nature of others.

Thus, against the friends, we can interpret change consistently with the *Timaeus* as a context-invariant property of the forms, insofar as it is a timeless truth that every form both participates in being in relation to some forms and does not participate in being in relation to other forms. And so we can say, due to the aspect-change that every form experiences in varying over other forms, that every form is changed perfectly in its association with other forms. Change here is essentially a concomitant of every form's association with being and not-being, a result of the network of is-and-is-not relations that a form bears collectively to other forms.

Unlike passage (A) in the *Sophist*, which is an epistemological objection to the friends of the forms, this is a metaphysical objection, and it follows from passage

again, Gill applies it to the way the forms undergo change only in possessing various accidental properties, while I claim that it covers any of the associations that a form has with other forms.

⁶⁴ My thanks to Sam Levey for discussion and for suggesting 'extrinsically-grounded change' as a term that indicates the view of *kinēsis* that is operative in this passage.

(B).⁶⁵ Once the forms are understood as having changed independently of us and in virtue of their own nature as beings in possession of *nous*, we can make sense of the positive ontology that Plato endorses in the children's wish as an alternative to an ontology of complete stability and an ontology of complete flux. A genuine philosopher must hold, with the children, that being is unchanging and changed. Each form—as an exemplar of true being—remains unchanging in itself as the stable subject of permanent features, and so does not change 'in every way' (πανταχῆ, 249d2). Hence it remains the case that the forms are immutable. Nonetheless, each form must be said to experience extrinsic change as a result of sharing in the nature of some forms while not sharing in the nature of others. Furthermore, since the interrelatedness of the forms must be presupposed for a form to possess *nous* and to be grasped in a rational account (see 259e5–6), each form must exist in a state of perfect change. No form, as the Visitor puts it in (B), can be 'entirely changeless' (ἀκίνητον...παράπαν, 249a10) if it is to be an exemplar of true being. The chief point about the forms that Plato insists on in the *Sophist* is that they are at all times associated (κεκοινωνηκένοι, 254c1), and in being associated, they are at all times changed (κεκινημένα, 249d3).

4. The Greatest Kinds

⁶⁵ Notice, however, that the way in which the forms undergo change in the argument from knowledge in passage (A) also falls under the category of extrinsically-grounded change, insofar as the forms experience variation in different contexts due to their interaction with knowing minds. I leave open whether this is best characterized as a mere Cambridge change. The point I wish to stress is that it is not a perfect change.

A new initiate into Plato's theory of forms might suppose that the being of every form can be explained simply in terms of the fact that every form participates in the form of being. The above considerations show that such an assumption would be a mistake. Every form does of course share in the nature of being in the *Sophist*, and so the form of being has an all-pervading status among the forms. Yet we have seen how the nature of being cannot, by itself, do all the work required for a form to be. For it is necessary to the being of every form that it have a distinct nature, and to have such a nature—to have a set of properties that make it distinguishable as a being—every form must share in the nature of not-being or the different.⁶⁶ Indeed, the Visitor emphasizes that the form of being itself must also always be associated with the form of difference, since 'it is itself one thing' (ἐν...αὐτό ἐστίν, 257a5) and is not the other forms. This is why the form of difference, like the form of being, has a special status in Plato's ontology as one of his greatest kinds. It pervades all of the forms (διὰ πάντων...διεληλυθυῖαν, 255e3–4) given that 'each one of them is different from the others, not because of its own nature but because of sharing in the form of difference' (ἐν ἑκαστον γὰρ ἕτερον εἶναι τῶν ἄλλων οὐ διὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ μετέχειν τῆς ἰδέας τῆς θατέρου, 255e4–6).⁶⁷

Strictly speaking, therefore, what is great about the greatest kinds is not their all-pervading status in associating with every form, but their power to enable every form

⁶⁶ Accepting here of course the identification of not-being with difference: see 257b3–4 and esp. 258d5–e3, where the form of not-being and the form of difference are explicitly classified as the same thing.

⁶⁷ Again, the use of the perfect tense is significant: the form of difference must be understood as already having pervaded (διεληλυθυῖαν, 255e4) each one of the forms for each of them to be viewed as distinct. I take it that the same holds for the other greatest kinds.

to associate with other forms.⁶⁸ In being predicable of every form, they are responsible for the ability of each form to enter into subject-predicate relations with other forms. And we should go further than this. For we can now maintain that what sets the greatest kinds apart for Plato is that, taken together, they enable each form to be distinguishable as a being. I have just explained how this is true of the form of being and the form of difference. The form of sameness is also easily classified in this manner as a greatest kind, since it makes each form the self-identical subject that it is. Every form must consequently share in the nature of sameness to be distinguishable as a being, for no form other than *F* can be identical to *F*.

Commentators have often only been willing to induct being, difference, and sameness into the class of greatest kinds, and so they leave matters here.⁶⁹ Yet once we recognize that the being of every form requires that it be interrelated with other forms, we see that none of these three kinds, by itself, gives every form its own distinctive being. The form of difference makes every form *different* from other forms, but this does not explain fully the distinctiveness that every form exhibits in virtue of being associated with other forms. For that, we need the notion of perfect change:

⁶⁸ For the importance of this point, see V. Harte, *Plato on Parts and Wholes: The Metaphysics of Structure [Parts and Wholes]* (Oxford, 2002), 152–4. G. Ryle, 'Plato's 'Parmenides' (II.)', *Mind*, 48 (1939), 302–25, refers to the greatest kinds for this reason as 'syncategorematic' in nature (see esp. 312–13). Gill, *Philosophos*, calls them 'structural' kinds (29).

⁶⁹ See Cornford, *Theory of Knowledge* (cited above in n. 45); D. Wiggins, 'Sentence Meaning, Negation, and Plato's Problem of Not-Being', in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, i. *Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Garden City, NY, 1971), 268–303 at 288–91; J. M. E. Moravcsik, *Plato and Platonism* (Oxford, 1992), 182–6; and Crivelli, *Account of Falsehood*, 114–19. The interpretive problem is noted by Reeve, 'Dialectic', 57–9 and Harte, *Parts and Wholes*, 154.

to have a distinct nature, every form must bear a conjunction of is-and-is-not relations to other forms, and thus vary over other forms, such that the pattern of variation for each form is unique to that form. However, the set of is-and-is-not relations possessed by any form cannot vary over time and must remain fixed to be discernible invariantly across contexts of inquiry. For that, every form must share in the nature of rest. The status of rest and change as greatest kinds is accordingly consistent with the children's wish. No form would be distinguishable in its own right as a being, were it not always associated with these two forms. This is presumably why Plato holds that anyone who values knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), wisdom (φρόνησις), and intelligence (νοῦς) must be committed to a view of being as both unchanging and changed (see 249c6 ff.). For it is because rest and change, together with the other greatest kinds, are always predicable of every form that we can reason about how things are by nature at all.

Now, famously in the *Sophist*, the Visitor claims that the form of being functions as a greatest kind in two ways: all the forms possess being 'themselves by themselves' (αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά) and every form must also be said to be in relation to other forms (πρὸς ἄλλα) (255c12–13). That is to say, every form has being by itself in its own right and every form has being by being other things: for example, the form of snow *is* and the form of snow *is cold*.⁷⁰ By contrast, the Visitor says, the form of difference

⁷⁰ This reading of 255c12–13 in the *Sophist* has been developed cogently by L. Brown, 'Being in the *Sophist*: A Syntactical Enquiry', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 4 (1986), 49–70 (see esp. 52–9). I have no desire here to wade into the interpretive morass that surrounds the distinction between being *kath' auto* and being *pros allo*, nor is it necessary for my argument in what follows, but for a thorough summary of the debate over this passage, see Gill, *Philosophos*, 173–6.

functions as a greatest kind in the second way alone: a form can only be said to be different in relation to another thing (*pros allo*), never by itself (*kath' auto*) (255d1–7). This passage has led some scholars to ask how the other greatest kinds may be predicable of every form. C. D. C. Reeve has argued that the form of change, like the form of difference, operates *pros allo* as a greatest kind: every form is changed in relation to some other thing. But in relation to what do the forms experience change? Reeve claims that the forms can only be said to experience change independently of us with respect to time: 'They are all accumulating longer and longer histories'.⁷¹

The idea of change *pros allo* in Plato's ontology corresponds with the understanding of perfect change I have developed in this paper. Reeve's reading also has the merit of making change a genuine greatest kind. Even so, his interpretation does not capture the spirit of the children's wish, since it requires a view of change that is indexed to time.⁷² That is a characteristically modern understanding of change (assumed, for instance, by Russell) but it is not taken for granted among philosophers in antiquity. For recall that passage (B) in the *Sophist* identifies change as a property that is present (παρεῖναι, 249a1) in the forms simply in virtue of their timeless possession of *nous*. The *Definitions*, a list of philosophical terms that

⁷¹ Reeve, 'Dialectic', 59. Buckels, 'Motion and Rest', argues in a similar vein that every form experiences change *pros allo* in being knowable (326), but this makes it a contingent matter whether a form associates with the form of change, whereas to be a genuine greatest kind, change must always be predicable of every form.

⁷² This view is also assumed by Gill, *Philosophos*, for whom change and rest 'presuppose time' (233), and Hestir, *Meaning and Truth*, who claims that change and rest are 'intrinsically grounded in temporality' (125).

circulated in the early years of the Academy, defines time (χρόνος) as ‘the *kinēsis* of the sun, the measure of its course’ (ἡλίου κίνησις, μέτρον φορᾶς, 411b3), and Aristotle is explicit in the *Physics* that the concept of change is logically prior to time.⁷³ According to this view, time may not be the only measure of change, and a broader notion of change as variation need require no reference to time.

On the reading of Plato’s theory of forms that I have suggested, we can accommodate the idea of change *pros allo* in his ontology without relying on a view of change that is indexed to time. For we can affirm that the forms are changed independently of us given their interrelated nature, which they exhibit timelessly by varying over other forms. As we observed in the last section, when we say that the form of snow is cold, we assume an association between the form of snow and the form of cold such that the form of snow bears a conjunction of is-and-is-not relations by sharing in the nature of the cold and not sharing in the nature of the hot. Thus the form of snow exhibits variation by participating in being with respect to the form of cold but not with respect to the form of hot. And thus the form of snow is changed *pros allo*. The task of the philosopher who seeks to understand the nature of any form is to identify the complete set of is-and-is-not relations—the complete network of *koinōnein* relations—that gives each form its own distinctive being.⁷⁴

⁷³ See U. Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV.10–14* (Oxford, 2005), esp. ch. 2; referring to *Physics* 4.11, 219a8–10.

⁷⁴ Cf. K. Corcilius, ‘Ideal Intellectual Cognition in *Timaeus* 37a2–c5’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 54 (2018), 51–105 (esp. 71–4, 94–6) for a very similar account of the work of ideal intellectual cognition based on Plato’s view of the cognition of the world soul in the *Timaeus*.

If this is correct, the notion of perfect change is an especially useful conceptual device for Plato in mapping the interrelatedness of the forms. A philosopher must, the Visitor states, ‘know how to discriminate by kinds how things can associate and how they can’t’ (ἢ τε κοινωνεῖν ἕκαστα δύναται καὶ ὅπη μὴ, διακρίνειν κατὰ γένος ἐπίστασθαι, 253e1–2). The claim that there are only some associations that a form can enter into with other forms entails that there is only a certain set of is-and-is-not relations that result in a form experiencing perfect change. The form of snow by its own nature has no association with the form of justice or the form of dirt. Hence the form of snow does not experience a perfect change on account of its relations to these forms. In coming to be known by someone, the form of snow does not enter into a timeless association with an individual mind. Hence the form of snow does not experience a perfect change in relation to being known.⁷⁵ A form experiences perfect change in its association with those forms that distinguish it as the thing that it is—that is, through its possession of its distinctive properties, which are invariant across contexts of inquiry.

One might wonder how this allows us to account for a form’s apparently accidental properties. Consider again Gill’s view, according to which the forms experience mere Cambridge changes in relation to one another in varied contexts: ‘when an entity changes it remains the same as its earlier self with respect to its nature but becomes different with respect to some accidental feature’.⁷⁶ Dryness is not a feature of the form of snow by nature, but under some conditions snow can be

⁷⁵ Though we can still say that the form of snow changes *pros allo* (extrinsically) in relation to being known: see n. 65 above.

⁷⁶ Gill, *Philosophos*, 234.

classified as dry and under other conditions it can be classified as wet. According to Gill, the form of snow itself takes on different predicates in such conditions. On my view, this does not imply a perfect change in the form of snow, since its association with these different predicates is context-dependent. But how should we explain such predications?

In fact, Plato can account for such predications easily through his understanding of forms as kinds. Context-dependent properties of a kind should be regarded as the distinctive properties of a subkind that falls under a generic kind. The subkinds 'powder snow' and 'packing snow', for example, fall under the generic kind 'snow'. Subkinds share in all the properties of their generic kind, but they have additional distinctive properties of their own. So the form of powder snow and the form of packing snow each have an essential relationship with the form of cold in being subkinds of the form of snow. Yet while dryness is a distinctive property of the form of powder snow, and wetness is a distinctive property of the form of packing snow, neither dryness nor wetness are distinctive properties of the form of snow. Each of the subkinds has its own unique nature with a distinctive set of properties, and this is enough to explain the respects in which they take on different predicates from the form of snow in varied contexts of inquiry. Once we observe how forms can be classified as subkinds under generic kinds, the accidental properties of the forms that concern Gill can be explained without difficulty.

We need look no further than the *Sophist* itself to find support for this view. In the early stages of their discussion, the Visitor and Theaetetus' inquiry into the nature of sophistry results in six accounts of sophistry using the method of division, but it is

only at the end of the dialogue that they develop an adequate definition. From 221c until 231b, the first through to the sixth accounts do not specify the distinctive properties of the sophist *qua* sophist, but identify the sophist *qua* hunter, the sophist *qua* wholesaler, the sophist *qua* retailer, etc.⁷⁷ Theaetetus accordingly expresses his confusion at this point as to what the sophist ‘really is’ (ὄντως εἶναι, 231c2). By the conclusion of the dialogue, however, once the distinctive properties of the sophist *qua* sophist have been clarified, the different kinds of sophistry in the earlier part of the work can be reclassified as subkinds under the generic kind identified in the final and definitive seventh account.⁷⁸ The Visitor prompts Theaetetus to do this at 232b1–12 by observing how a property noted in the fifth account—the ability of the sophist to engage in disputation (ἀντιλέγειν)—seems to exhibit the kind most clearly. This suggests that the form of sophistry is already latent in the fifth account: to be skilled in disputation, the Visitor claims, a person must be capable of appearing

⁷⁷ See the Visitor’s summary of the six accounts at 231c8–e6. L. Franklin, ‘Dichotomy and Platonic Diairesis’ [‘Platonic Diairesis’], *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 28 (2011), 1–20 provides a good discussion of the problem of assimilating the sophist’s expertise to other familiar crafts in these early accounts (see esp. 6–7).

⁷⁸ Such reclassification is also suggested by Franklin, ‘Platonic Diairesis’, 5. I believe an exception should be made here, however, for the sixth account—the so-called ‘noble’ sophist—who does not fall under the generic kind ‘sophist’ at all. The Visitor hesitates at 230e5–231a6 before calling the individual named in this account a sophist. When the seventh account emerges, it is more obvious that the sixth account does not identify a subkind of sophist, insofar as the noble sophist seeks to remove false beliefs, while a genuine sophist seeks to produce them. This is close to the view of Notomi, *Unity*, 275–8, who refers to the individual in the sixth account as ‘an *apparition* of the sophist’ (277, his emphasis). See also J. Beere, ‘Faking Wisdom: The Expertise of Sophistic in Plato’s *Sophist*’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 57 (2019), 153–89 at 185, who distinguishes carefully in this regard between sophistic refutation and Socratic refutation; and I. Jeng, ‘On the Final Definition of the Sophist: *Sophist* 265a10–268d5’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 72 (2019), 661–84, who claims that part of Plato’s project after the sixth account is to ‘define the sophist appropriately so that he can be isolated from the Socratic philosopher’ (668).

wise, and hence be capable of convincing others that he knows things he does not actually know. That is in part how the nature of sophistry is defined in the seventh account. Each of the subkinds of sophistry therefore possesses all of the properties specified in the final account, but each of them also possesses its own additional distinctive properties as a subkind.

Importantly, Plato develops his final account of sophistry only after he has the Visitor and Theaetetus investigate the core epistemological and metaphysical issues of the dialogue. The emergence of the form of difference in particular is key, since it makes the work of dividing by kinds possible throughout the *Sophist*. This is a consequence of its logical role in the dialogue as a greatest kind. My argument in this paper suggests a similar logical role for change as a greatest kind. Without difference, none of the many forms discussed by the Visitor and Theaetetus would be capable of being distinguished from one another. But without change, none of the associations that these forms enter into in being distinguishable—that is, none of the is-and-is-not relations that make them the distinctive beings they are—would be possible. The status of change as a greatest kind is, for this reason, crucial to the account of the sophist as he ‘really is’ by the end of the dialogue. The forms experience change both in the case of what can be predicated of them invariantly across contexts and in the case of what can be predicated of them in varied contexts. The set of is-and-is-not relations between them are stable, but they entail that the forms—in being perfectly interrelated—are also perfectly changed.

5. Conclusion

I have offered a reading of some central sections of the *Sophist* in this paper. The advantage of this reading is that it integrates Plato's rejection of the friends of the forms in the dialogue with his subsequent arguments for the interrelatedness of the forms and his understanding of change as a greatest kind. This reading shows the connection between the two objections that the Visitor develops against the friends' position at 248a–249b and it explains the solution that he presents to the battle of gods and giants by fulfilling the children's wish at 249d3–4. Plato holds on to the friends' view of the forms as exemplars of unchanging being, while also insisting that the forms experience change. On this view, it is the interrelated nature of the forms that leads Plato to argue that they experience change. They are changed due to the conjunction of is-and-is-not relations that they bear in associating with one another as beings in possession of a rational order, but they remain unchanging insofar as these relations are fixed.

Key to this reading is the notion of perfect change I have proposed, which explains how the forms, in both being and not-being, are changed. Plato draws a well-known analogy here in asserting that the forms are like letters of the alphabet, which combine in discernible ways to produce words: by functioning as kinds, the forms are affected (πεπονθότα, 253a1) just as letters are affected.⁷⁹ When different letters are properly woven together, they possess sense; likewise, when different forms are properly woven together, they possess *nous*. And just as a certain group of letters, the vowels, links letters together with the result that their association makes sense, so too a

⁷⁹ Again, this assumes a pluralistic view of being, with a world populated by many forms. See n. 62 above.

certain group of forms, the greatest kinds, links forms together with the result that their association exhibits *nous*.

But the letters analogy is not entirely exact. For Plato holds that every form must be assumed to be *already* woven together with other forms: to have the distinctive being it does, every form must be associated timelessly with some forms but not others.⁸⁰ Understood in this way, the forms are always in possession of *nous*. It is because every form possesses its own rational order in its association with other forms that we can engage in discourse about the world using speech and argument (259e5–6), and by dividing by kinds and producing a rational account of the world, we ourselves come to possess *nous* (227a10–b1). Among other things, this requires that every form have its own timeless set of distinctive properties. I have argued that in possessing these properties, every form is changed perfectly according to Plato. If that is the case, it is due primarily to the perfect changes that a form experiences that it is the distinctive being it is.

I have argued further that in exploring the network of is-and-is-not relations that the forms bear to one another in the *Sophist*, Plato identifies relations of definitional dependence that hold among the forms. When a form *F* is changed perfectly in virtue of its association with a distinctive property *G*, the forms *F* and *G* stand in an asymmetric relationship, such that the nature of *F qua F* is definitionally dependent

⁸⁰ See Lentz, 'Problem of Motion', 102 for other limitations of the letters analogy.

on the nature of *G*. The nature of *F* is thus determined in part by the nature of *G*. To understand the nature of *F*, we must first understand the nature of *G*.

To see this principle applied, let us recall again how the ability of the forms to associate with one another is critical to Plato's efforts to construct a definition of sophistry in the *Sophist*. In seeking to determine the nature of the sophist *qua* sophist—the sophist as he 'really is' (ὄντως εἶναι, 231c2)—following their sixth account of sophistry, the Visitor and Theaetetus come to an impasse about how to move forward in the seventh account. To define the sophist as a copy-maker in speech, they must explain how it is possible to speak falsely, which depends in turn on explaining the nature of not-being. Yet once the form of not-being is identified as the form of difference in the middle stretches of the *Sophist* and, further, is found to associate with human language in discourse, the sophist can be distinguished by the end of the dialogue as a producer of false appearances in speech: in speaking falsely, the sophist speaks about what is not in the sense of saying something *different* from what is (see 257b3–4). The nature of sophistry thus turns out to depend definitionally on the nature of not-being. To understand the nature of sophistry, the Visitor and Theaetetus must first understand the nature of not-being. This tracks the development of their discussion in the dialogue exactly.

It is natural to ask whether this reading of the *Sophist* suggests an innovation in Plato's metaphysical views and a departure from ideas he advances in other works

that contain canonical statements of his theory of forms.⁸¹ A thorough treatment of this issue lies beyond the purview of this paper, yet it is worth considering how far our findings might extend. Plato's principal aim in the *Sophist* is to explore the full implications of the *koinōnia* of the forms, and on the assumption that states of *koinōnia* imply states of *kinēsis*, he is also led to explore the way in which the forms experience change. So the question we have to consider is whether he accepts the *koinōnia* of the forms in other dialogues. And here we do, in fact, find continuity in the corpus. When Socrates introduces the forms for the first time in the *Republic* near the end of Book 5, he takes for granted their interrelated nature: 'Each of them is itself one, but because they manifest themselves everywhere in association (κοινωνία) with actions, bodies, and one another (ἀλλήλων), each of them appears

⁸¹ As argued by A. Nehamas, 'Participation and Predication in Plato's Later Thought' ['Participation and Predication'], *The Review of Metaphysics*, 36 (1982), 343–74, who claims that the *Sophist* indicates 'a development in Plato's thought that the Forms are capable of participating in one another, a new feature which distinguishes his later views from the metaphysics of the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*' (343); cf. also most recently A. Nehamas, 'The Academy at Work: The Target of Dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides*' ['Target of Dialectic'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 57 (2019), 121–52, esp. 131, 147–50: 'in his middle works Plato, like all the philosophers who had preceded him, could not explain how it is possible for *one* thing to be *many*, or for one thing to have many "names". What he didn't understand was, precisely, predication' (149; his emphasis). Gill, *Philosophos*, likewise argues that revision occurs in Plato's theory of forms in the *Sophist*, though in an Aristotelian direction, where the forms now come to represent 'the stable natures of things, immanent in them' (9); and Hestir, *Meaning and Truth*, distinguishes the 'strong Platonism' of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, which he claims deny the interrelatedness of forms, from the 'restricted Platonism' of the *Sophist*, where interrelatedness is a condition for the being of every form (see esp. ch. 2). For a view closer to my own, see C. Meinwald, 'Goodbye to the Third Man', in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, 1992), 365–96, who holds that the metaphysical passages in dialogues typically assigned to Plato's middle period state the 'motivations and outlines of views that it is not their purpose fully to develop' (391).

to be many' (476a5–7).⁸² Plato interprets the *koinōnein* relation broadly in this passage so that it covers the associations that occur between the forms and the world of becoming, which fits with his wide-ranging construal of the principle in the *Sophist* at 248b5–6. It also fits with his line of argument in Book 5 of the *Republic*, since Socrates' point in introducing the forms at this stage of the work is to highlight their epistemological role in sense experience. But what is noteworthy for our purposes is that Socrates acknowledges in addition that the *koinōnein* relation covers the metaphysical relations that hold among the forms in their association with one another (τῆ...ἀλλήλων κοινωνία, 476a6–7).⁸³ The idea in this passage that forms associate with each other must be how Plato regards the essential relationships that exist among the forms. Since he clearly assumes here the *koinōnia* of the forms, we have reason to suppose that he accepts that the forms experience change even in works written prior to the *Sophist*.

The thesis that the forms associate with each other in a determinate manner is one that Plato believes requires argument in the *Sophist*. Not all of those who speculate about being evidently accept the thesis. In arguing for the *koinōnia* of the forms following the battle of gods and giants, the Visitor refers at one point to a group of

⁸² αὐτὸ μὲν ἕν ἕκαστον εἶναι, τῆ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἕκαστον. My thanks to Vanessa de Harven for directing me to this important passage and for discussion.

⁸³ Nehamas in 'Participation and Predication' and 'Target of Dialectic' does not pay sufficient attention to this passage in my view. See J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, vol. i (Cambridge, 1902) at 362–4, who devotes an appendix to 476a and its interpretation in his commentary on Book 5. Adam suggests 'the beautiful is good' and other essential predications as examples of the relations between the forms that Socrates has in mind here, and also makes the connection with Plato's views in the *Sophist*.

‘old late-learners’ (τῶν γερόντων τοῖς ὀψιμαθέσι, 251b5–6) who deny that anything can be called another thing by means of its association with the property of another thing (κοινωνία παθήματος ἑτέρου, 252b9–10). The Visitor calls this view manifestly absurd (καταγελαστότατα, 252b8) since it makes impossible the subject-predicate statements that are required for the late-learners to set forth their own position. Now, the friends of the forms and the late-learners address the nature of being differently, of course, but we have seen how the friends’ denial that the forms experience change leads them to a position very like that of the late-learners. For by denying that the forms experience any kind of change, they deny that the forms are affected, and by denying that the forms are affected, they deny that the forms are associated. This makes clear why Plato moves from his arguments against the friends of the forms to arguing for the *koinōnia* of the forms in the *Sophist*. He believes that a view of being as entirely changeless prevents the forms from entering into the subject-predicate relations that make them the distinctive beings they are. In pressing the friends to abandon their view, we can presume, he expects us to affirm the *kinēsis* of the forms too, lest we be led to similar absurdities.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Many of the ideas in this paper are drawn from material in my Ph.D. dissertation submitted to Northwestern University in 2008 and I’ve accumulated a string of debts in refining my views since then. I would like to thank Tad Brennan and Richard Kraut for discussion and feedback at that stage, as well as participants at the University of Chicago’s Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop in April 2006, where I presented the earliest version of this paper. Much of the current version would not have been written were it not for a workshop on ancient philosophy I attended at Dartmouth College in June 2017. My thanks to all the participants at that workshop and especially the two organizers, Dhananjay Jagannathan and Christie Thomas, who provided comments on the paper. I am indebted also to Mary Louise Gill for her invitation to participate in a conference on Plato’s *Sophist* at Brown University in May 2019, where I benefited from discussing

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