

# 16 The Virtue of Power

*Jens Kristian Larsen*<sup>1</sup>

University of Copenhagen  
jenskl@hum.ku.dk

The “battle” between corporealists and idealists described in Plato’s *Sophist* 245e6–249d5 is of significance for understanding the philosophical function of the dramatic exchange between the Eleatic guest and Theaetetus, the dialogue’s main interlocutors. Various features of this exchange indicate that the Eleatic guest introduces and discusses the dispute between corporealists and idealists in order to educate Theaetetus in ontological matters. By reading the discussion between Theaetetus and the Eleatic guest in the light of these features, one comes to see that the primary audience for the proposal advanced by the Eleatic guest in this passage, namely that being is power, is not any of the participants in the “battle,” as has been commonly assumed, but Theaetetus himself—a fact to bear in mind in any viable interpretation of the passage. **Keywords:** Plato’s *Sophist*; Platonic ontology; dialectic; education; being and power.

This paper offers a detailed interpretation of the passage in Plato’s *Sophist* running from 245e6–249d5.<sup>2</sup> In this passage, a dispute about the nature of being is discussed, which the Eleatic guest—or stranger, as he is often called—claims resembles the mythical battle between the gods and giants. I shall refer to this philosophical dispute as the Gigantomachy and to the passage in which it is discussed as the Gigantomachy-passage. In discussing this dispute with his interlocutor Theaetetus, the guest suggests that *dynamis*, which I shall translate as power, could be regarded as a distinguishing mark, or a definition, of the things that are.

The aim of the present paper is to address the question of how we are to regard the *dynamis*-proposal by looking at its significance for the dialogue between the Eleatic guest and Theaetetus. The paper will thus sidestep the question how we are to regard the proposal in relation to Plato’s own understanding of being in order to focus on the role the proposal plays in what we may call the educative dimension of the guest’s dialogue with Theaetetus.<sup>3</sup> Its thesis will be that it is Theaetetus, rather than the participants in the Gigantomachy—the philosophical “giants” and “gods”—who is the primary audience for the guest’s proposal.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the guest’s teaching about being should not be regarded as a general ontological or metaphysical claim about being as such, but rather as a teaching addressed to Theaetetus, meant to show him how being and our understanding of being, how *ousia* and *psychê* aiming at understanding *ousia*, must be understood as interrelated.

## The Dialogical Context of the Gigantomachy

To understand the educative element of the Gigantomachy-passage it is important to understand the specific way the dialectical exchange it contains unfolds, the specific way

the guest and Theaetetus pursue this part of their conversation. The best way to understand this aspect of the Gigantomachy-passage is to compare and contrast it with the way the dialogue between Theaetetus and the guest unfolds in the immediately preceding passage.

The Gigantomachy-passage falls within the middle (often referred to as the ontological) part of the *Sophist*, where the notions of being and non-being take center stage in the discussion. In the first section of this part, after having discussed why utter non-being (*to mêdamôs on*, 237b7–8) is, as Parmenides had claimed, impossible to know, and indeed even to utter, the guest and Theaetetus turn to discussing what a number of previous thinkers have said about being or the things that are, about *to on* or *ta onta*, in particular Parmenides' view of being. This discussion unfolds by way of what Hegel might call an immanent criticism. By taking at their word these previous thinkers, who have all made claims about being, the guest shows Theaetetus that their teachings are self-contradictory. This criticism is developed dramatically, or “enacted,” via an imagined conversation with them during which the guest questions them and both he and Theaetetus answer on their behalf. The result of this conversation is that those who claim that the things that are, *ta onta*, are a plurality, are led to posit a single thing, namely being, *to on*, which is common to, or can be stated equally about, the things they claim truly are (243c10–244a3), whereas Parmenides, who claims that the one, *to hen*, alone is (244b9–10), is led to posit a plurality rather than a unity, in consequence of the fact that the one, according to Parmenides, is identical with being, *to on* (244b12–c2), which furthermore is claimed to be a whole, *holon* (244d14–15). Parmenides thus implicitly posits a plurality, first of all, of names—“one,” “being,” “whole”—and, if the names are to point something out, rather than be mere names of nothing, also a plurality of “things,” of beings. Whether this criticism reflects a fair interpretation of these thinkers is unimportant here; to be noted is that it is based on claims advanced by these thinkers, rather than on assumptions about being made by the guest or Theaetetus. The guest's procedure reminds us of a Socratic *elenchus* carried out in discussion with imagined interlocutors rather than with real dialogue partners.

In one sense the dialogue found in the passage 245e6–249d5 continues this kind of imagined conversation with philosophers not actually present. But the conversation we find in it differs in at least two important ways from the previous conversation. First of all, the way the notion of being is discussed by the participants in the Gigantomachy is slightly different from the way it is discussed both by those who posit a plurality of beings and by Parmenides. Secondly, the way the participants are interrogated by the guest also differs from the way the pluralists and Parmenides were interrogated. Let us begin by looking at the participants in the Gigantomachy and their notions of being.

The battle referred to by the guest as a kind of *gigantomachia* (the philosophical version of the mythical battle between the gods and the giants) is a struggle about the nature of being, fought between two opposing parties. In contrast to the previously interrogated thinkers, the participants have what looks like a more refined position in regard to being. Rather than asking how many beings there are, they focus on the being or essence of the things there are, on their *ousia*, asking what it means to be a being.<sup>5</sup> One party in the discussion thus claims that only what is subject to our embrace or touch (*prosbolê kai epaphê*, 246a11) is, and defines being as body (*sôma*). These are the corporealists. The other party claims that true being is identical with “certain thought-things [*noêta*] and incorporeal *eidê*”<sup>6</sup> (246b7–8) with which we connect through reasoning or calculation (*logismos*, 248a11). The guest at one point refers to them as “friends of *eidê*” (248a4–5). So, rather than asking which beings there are, or how many there are, the corporealists

and the friends of *eidê* ask what characterizes these beings *as* beings, deciding this question on the basis of their understanding of the way beings are accessible to humans. According to the corporealists, beings are accessible through touch, whereas the friends claim they are accessible through reason.

Who the participants are is a question we will turn to when we look at the way the discussion with them proceeds. Before we do that, however, we need to say something about the specific way the guest and Theaetetus enter into discussion with them. In the previous discussion with the pluralists and with Parmenides, the guest and Theaetetus answered jointly on behalf of their imagined interlocutors. Now the guest assigns different roles to himself and to Theaetetus: while the guest is to carry out the questioning, Theaetetus is directed to interpret what the philosophical antagonists tell him when questioned by the guest (246e3, 248a5). We confront a more complex dialogical situation, in which the guest poses questions to interlocutors who are not actually present, and whose answers are not simply to be reported by Theaetetus, but rather to be interpreted or translated by him for the sake of his and the guest's dialogue together.<sup>7</sup> This complex situation, which in itself may seem a bit strange, becomes all the more so in consequence of the fact that one side in the struggle, the corporealists, are never allowed to enter the dialectical encounter.<sup>8</sup> Before they can get a hearing, they are reformed into something else. When we now turn to the first half of the Gigantomachy-passage, where the notion that being is body is discussed, we shall have to consider who these reformed corporealists are and what their reform tells us about the ontological investigation carried out in the passage.

### Interrogating the Corporealists

In a short passage (246a4–246d9) that precedes the imagined interrogation of the parties to the Gigantomachy, the guest introduces these parties. A number of points about his presentation should be noted. First, when the guest describes the *corporealists*, Theaetetus exclaims that these are dreadful men (246b4–5). This echoes what he said on the previous day while engaged in discussion with Socrates, as related in the *Theaetetus*: there Socrates described certain men who only believe that what they can grasp with their hands really is, denying the reality of actions, coming-into-being (*genesis*), and all that cannot be seen. In the *Theaetetus*, as in the *Sophist*, Theaetetus expresses his distaste for such men (*Theat.* 155e4–156a1). Clearly, the young mathematician is unsympathetic to a corporealist outlook. In the *Sophist*, the guest suggests that the friends of *eidê* have a similar dislike. It is because (cf. *toigaroun* 246b6) the corporealists are so dreadful that the friends of *eidê* force (*biazesthai*) certain bodiless and intelligible *eidê*, forms, ideas or looks, to be true being (*tên alêthinên ousian*), while they declare that bodies are not at all being, but rather a kind of swept-along becoming (246b6–c2). We may thus suspect that there is a kind of spiritual affinity between Theaetetus and the friends of *eidê*.

The next thing to note is that the guest goes on to suggest that the corporealists, before Theaetetus will be able to interpret what they say about being, will have to be made better. Ideally, they should be made better in deed (*ergon*) but, if this is impossible, they should at least be made better in speech (*logos*), which means that he and Theaetetus should assume that the corporealists will answer in a more law-abiding manner than they are initially inclined to do (246d4–7). This is surprising. Why are the corporealists not to be questioned on their own terms, just as the pluralists and Parmenides were earlier? Stanley Rosen states that what the guest is really suggesting is that we need, in order to

question a philosophical doctrine, to “formulate” it “in the best or strongest way”<sup>9</sup> and, as the corporealists are really philosophically rather crude, we need to improve them in order to get a coherent position out of them. This may be a true description of the way we should proceed if we are interested in discussing a philosophical doctrine on its own merits. But this can hardly be what the guest has in mind. For rather than suggesting that they should reformulate the corporealists’ position for their sake, he proceeds to explain that what is agreed upon by better men has more authority than what is agreed upon by worse and, as he and Theaetetus are searching for the truth, they do not care about the corporealists (246d7–9). Indeed, at a later point, he explicitly points out that what Theaetetus agrees to on behalf of the corporealists is something the corporealists would themselves never concede (247c3–7).

At the beginning of the *Sophist* the guest claims that, in order to make something apparent in speech, in order to disclose the truth about it, those who seek the truth about it should reach a shared agreement about that matter through *logoi*, or accounts (218b8–c5). In this regard, at least, the guest shares Socrates’ conviction that truth about something is reached through a shared search where it is essential that an agreement about the “what it is” (*ti estin*), the being, of that which is sought is established. At the same time, at least according to what the guest says at the beginning of the Gigantomachy-passage, such agreement is not merely a matter of being able to follow an argument. Better people, we may suppose, will agree on things that worse people will not concede, and just such agreement, the Eleatic guest leads us to understand, is more authoritative. The reason the guest claims that the corporealists must be reformed seems to be that he holds that only what appears to be the truth to people who are good—a truth reached through discourse and agreement—is in fact true. He thus might seem to have in mind something analogous to what Aristotle means when he states that what is really good only appears as good to those who are themselves good (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1113a17–26). If this is so, it means that what we disclose as true not only depends on our capacity for reasoning, but also on our goodness or virtue as men. And since the investigation about to commence concerns being, it seems that the guest holds this to be so not simply in our discussion of such matters as the good or the virtues, but also when we are discussing ontological matters. In fact, as we shall see shortly, he seems to be of the opinion that a consideration of the nature of being cannot be complete if isolated from a discussion of such matters as “justice and thoughtfulness and the rest of virtue” (247b1–2).

With these initial considerations in view, we may now turn to the hypothetical discussion with the reformed corporealists, the structure of which may be summarized as follows. The guest seeks to obtain from the corporealists the concession that a number of things which should be regarded as things that are, as *onta*, are not bodies. For if the corporealists accept that there are such things, and that they are not bodies, their account of all beings, *qua* beings, as bodily must be wrong, which should lead them to look for a new account that can account for all the types of things that they now concede are.

The things the guest specifically cites as being, for the sake of this conclusion, are soul and the virtues. More precisely, he calls attention to a difference between just and unjust, and thoughtful and thoughtless souls (246e9–247a3), a difference that the corporealists, according to Theaetetus, acknowledge. The guest suggests that this difference should be explained by the presence or absence of justice and thoughtfulness (*dikaiosynê* and *sôphrosynê*)<sup>10</sup> in souls and suggests further that what has the power to be present or absent in something else, that is the virtues, must be something that is (247a5–10). Again Theaetetus accepts all this on behalf of the corporealists. Both souls and virtues are things that are.

But now the question arises whether the virtues or the soul can be said to be visible and bodily. We should note that a thoroughgoing corporealists might, like Democritus, accept that souls exist, but still claim that they, as composed of a certain kind of atoms, are bodies, and furthermore accept that virtues are in some sense, while claiming that they only are by convention. Alternatively, like the proponents of the “harmony” theory of soul in the *Phaedo*, he might hold that they should be regarded as being simply an epiphenomenal organization of the body’s components.<sup>11</sup> But these alternatives do not occur to Theaetetus, who claims rather that the corporealists will answer that the soul *possesses* (*kektesthai*, 247b9; literally “to have acquired”) some body, which implies that it itself is not identical with its body.<sup>12</sup> He states further that they are ashamed to claim either that the virtues do not belong to the things that are or that they are bodily. In reply to this answer the guest says that the corporealists have indeed become better.

This means that what turns the corporealists into reformed corporealists is not simply that they acknowledge that soul and virtues are among the things that are. It is rather the narrower claim that the soul *has*, rather than *is*, a body, and the further claim that the virtues are bodiless, which suggest that the corporealists have been transformed into something else. It is important to bear this in mind in order to understand the full significance of the *dynamis*-proposal that the guest is about to advance, a proposal that offers a new account of *ousia*, purportedly in order to help the corporealists out of their dilemma. For the guest readily admits that true corporealists would not make the concession Theaetetus has just made (247c4–7) and further suggests that it will be enough if the corporealists should accept that something, no matter how small, is bodiless (247c9–d2), in order to drive home his point, which is that *ousia* cannot be identical with body. However, he offers no grounds at all why they should accept that some of the things are bodiless. It therefore seems likely that what the proposal is primarily intended to explain is what being, what *ousia*, is, provided we accept that not only what we can grasp exists, but that souls and virtues—which are bodiless—also are. In short, the proposal need not be offered to the real corporealists at all, but only to someone who, like Theaetetus, readily accepts that bodiless souls and virtues exist.

We may now turn to the proposal itself. It is meant to explain what characterizes bodily and bodiless beings alike, insofar as they *are*, and the guest clearly advances it in his own voice.<sup>13</sup> It reads as follows:

I say, then, that what possesses any sort of power [*dynamis*]—whether for making anything at all, of whatever nature, other than it is or for being affected even the least bit by the meagerest thing, even if only once—I say that all this really is [*ontôs einai*]. For I set down as a boundary [*horos*] marking off [*horizein*] the things that *are*, that their being is nothing else but *power*.

(247d8–e4)<sup>14</sup>

In response to this proposal Theaetetus states that, since the corporealists themselves have nothing better to suggest, they accept it. The guest exclaims that they do well (*kalôs*; literally “beautifully” or “nobly”) to concede this and, although he says that it may later appear differently to them all, he suggests that for now their agreement should be left as it is. It is this mutually agreed-upon *dynamis*-proposal that the guest will now advance against the other party in the Gigantomachy, the friends of *eidê*.

But before we turn to these, a few final considerations about the status of the *dynamis*-proposal are in order. As should be clear by now, the agreement that being is power is an

agreement reached between the guest and the corporealists as interpreted by Theaetetus. This *dynamis*-proposal is motivated by the fact that the corporealists, who have been transformed into better men, now accept an ontology that clearly distinguishes between bodily beings, on the one hand, and bodiless and invisible virtues, on the other, which also seems to operate with the soul as some kind of intermediary being—connected with, or possessing, a body—that *may* connect with the bodiless virtues, but does not necessarily do so. It is possible that Theaetetus, by interpreting the corporealists, finds this ontology attractive because of what he learned when considering what knowledge is with Socrates in the *Theaetetus*. There he learned that Protagoras' teaching, that man is the measure of all things, a teaching he initially found attractive (*Theat.* 152b1–13), is false (183b7–c3). He also witnessed his teacher Theodorus accept an alternative view to the effect that there is a godly pattern independent of humans, to which we should try to assimilate as far as possible in order to become virtuous—a view to be preferred to the position of Theodorus' old friend, Protagoras (cf. 176a5–177c5). Furthermore, he himself came to the conclusion that one should distinguish between the activity of the soul when it perceives via the body, and its activity when it reaches for being (*ousia*), the beautiful, and the good (185a4–e2, 186a2–b1). Although no reference to virtues as independent beings is made in these passages, they do imply that the soul becomes virtuous when it directs itself toward a divine pattern that transcends human convention. They suggest further that the soul is able to understand this pattern only when it reasons about being, rather than when it perceives through the body. This seems to point in the direction of an ontology resembling the one implied by the position of the reformed corporealists. If the rudimentary ontology of the reformed corporealists may then be said to represent Theaetetus' own understanding, it seems likely that the guest is in fact offering his account of being to Theaetetus as something that may provide an ontological foundation for the insights he gained during his discussion with Socrates the day before.

We may finally note that Theodorus, when he introduced Theaetetus to Socrates on the previous day, mentioned that Theaetetus' wealth had been squandered by some trustees (*Theat.* 144d1–2). Now, the word for wealth used in this statement (*ousia*) is the same word used to mean being. Given Plato's way with words, it is perhaps not reading too much into Theodorus' initial remark to suggest that Plato is here playfully pointing out to the attentive reader that Theaetetus' intellectual trustees, Theodorus and especially Theodorus' friend and teacher Protagoras (cf. 161b9–10, 162a4–5, 164e2–165a3, 171c8–9, 179a10), whom Theaetetus has studied closely (152a5), have in fact impoverished Theaetetus' understanding of being.<sup>15</sup> If this suggestion is not entirely off the mark,<sup>16</sup> one might further suggest that the guest is offering to restore Theaetetus' "wealth," his understanding of being, in a fatherly manner. This seems to be in harmony with the way the guest, at an earlier point in the dialogue, claimed that he, like all those present at the conversation, is attempting to bring Theaetetus closer to the truth about the things that are; that is, that he is trying to educate him (*Sophist* 234e5–7; see also 242b1–2). On this reading, the Gigantomachy-passage is a high point in a philosophical education that is pursued throughout the *Sophist*. With these considerations in mind, we may turn to the discussion of the friends of *eidê*, in order to see how the *dynamis*-proposal fares with them.

### Power and *Eidê*

As was the case with the corporealists, Theaetetus is to interpret the answers given by the friends of *eidê* to the questions posed by the guest. A question arises whether their notion

of being is compatible with the *dynamis*-proposal advanced by the guest. Let us take a closer look at it.

The ontology of the friends is characterized by a basic distinction between being and becoming (248a7–8), which in turn corresponds to a distinction between two ways in which we align ourselves relative to these ontological regions. According to the friends, we commune (*koinônein*) with becoming (*genesis*) by means of our body through sense (*aisthêsis*), whereas we commune with true being (*ontôs ousia*) by means of our soul through reasoning (*logismos*) (248a10–11). In the subsequent discussion of this basic distinction, to which Theaetetus seems to subscribe, the guest is primarily interested in gaining a clearer understanding of the notion of communion, in order to evaluate the friends' notion of being.

It has been a matter of controversy who these friends are. Most scholars have regarded them as representing Plato's hypothetically earlier position as expressed in, for instance, the *Phaedo*.<sup>17</sup> I cannot go into a full discussion of this matter here, but suffice it to say that it is only possible to identify the friends as representing Plato's earlier position if one disregards the dramatic dimension of the dialogue. The guest clearly states that Theaetetus is probably not too familiar with the friends' position, wherefore he may not be able to explain what they claim about our communion with being and becoming, but that he himself is familiar with it, because he has had habitual dealings with the friends (248b7–8). As a character in a Platonic dialogue the guest can hardly be familiar with views expressed earlier by Plato.<sup>18</sup> For this reason it seems more plausible to regard the friends as people somehow connected with the circle around Parmenides and Zeno of whom the guest is himself a part (cf. 216a3–4).

This suggestion gains further likelihood from the following consideration. At 246c2–4 the stranger states that the dispute about being is a boundless battle (*apletos machê*), taking place in the middle (*en mesōi*) between the two parties, a battle that is forever (*aei*) joined. Just as Theaetetus' reaction to the stranger's description of the corporealists echoes his reaction to Socrates' description of a similar group of people in the *Theaetetus* (see page 308 above), the stranger's description of the battle echoes Socrates' description of a similar battle in the *Theaetetus* (179d3–181b5). Here Socrates described the doctrine that everything is really *kinêsis* as a teaching about "being that's carried along" or in change (*pheromenê ousia*), a teaching that had instigated a battle (*machê*) among a great many people (179d3–5). He there described the party opposing the Heraclitean supporters of the moving being as people like Melissus and Parmenides (180e3). Socrates explained that he, Theodorus, and Theaetetus had fallen into the middle (*eis to meson*) between the two parties. If these parallel expressions are not coincidental, as seems doubtful, it is reasonable to think that the stranger's description of the two parties in the Gigantomachy are not meant to recall any specific philosophical schools, but should be seen as sketches of philosophical attitudes towards being, associated loosely with the names of Heraclitus and Parmenides.

If this is correct, these passages from the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* can be read as a continued dialogue with the ontological tradition preceding Plato. In the *Theaetetus*, Heraclitus and his followers are discussed at length and their understanding of being is eventually dismissed (183a2–c3)—but when Socrates is asked to discuss the opposing party, the followers of Parmenides who claim that being is one and stands still, he refrains from doing so out of reverence for Parmenides (cf. 183c8–184b1). In the *Sophist*, by contrast, the Eleatic guest begins the entire ontological investigation of the middle section of the dialogue by questioning the Eleatic tradition, in particular Parmenides

(cf. 237a4–b2, 241d3–e7), and the investigation ends when Parmenides’ notion of being has finally been dismissed or at least modified into a richer understanding of being, which allows for non-being *somehow* to be (258c7–e5). On the reading suggested here, the passage 245e6–249d5 should be seen as a part of the Eleatic guest’s overall discussion of his own Eleatic heritage, rather than as a dialogue Plato is carrying out with his own previous position.<sup>19</sup>

To the above considerations may be added that what the guest is about to state about the friends’ understanding of our communion with being has a rather “unplatonic” ring to it, by the usual standards. So let us look more closely at what they say.<sup>20</sup> At 248b2–6 the guest suggests that this communion could in fact be the same as a being affected or an affecting, a *pathêma* or a *poiêma* that arises (*ek ... gignomenon*) out of some power (*dynamis*) from a mutual coming together of different things (*pros allêla syniônton*). In other words, our communion with being as well as with becoming, as the guest suggests, may be viewed as an affecting or a being affected, arising out of a power from, on the one hand, the body and the sensibles coming together through sensing, and, on the other, from the soul and the intelligible coming together through reasoning.<sup>21</sup> As soon as he has made this suggestion, however, the guest assumes responsibility for interpreting what the friends say, asserting that they will reject this suggestion. The reason for this, he says, is that they will not accept the suggestion that being and power are the same (248c1–5), since they deny that true being takes part in any power to affect or to be affected (248c7–9).

To Theaetetus’ mind, the friends may be on to something in claiming this. In what follows, however, the guest defends the *dynamis*-proposal against the friends,<sup>22</sup> and insofar as Theaetetus here seems to identify himself with these friends, we may say that he defends it against Theaetetus as well. The guest’s primary intention thus seems to be to get Theaetetus to agree with him that being is power; that is, to make Theaetetus come to share the understanding of being he has put forward.

If Theaetetus finds attractive the suggestion that being can neither affect us nor be affected by us, it is hardly surprising that the guest now demands to know how the friends will explain the fact that the soul may come to recognize (*gignôskein*) being, and being may come to be recognized. For some such relation between the soul and being is essential if the ontological distinction between being and becoming is not to deteriorate into a sterile two-world theory where the real beings are left without a function for the soul that strives to understand them. If the friends cannot explain this relation, their ontology threatens to become devoid of meaning. However, the passage in which the guest defends his suggested notion of being against the friends is one of the more complex passages in the dialogue, which, since we are talking about the *Sophist*, is saying quite a bit.

In this passage Theaetetus takes over the role of interpreter for the friends whom the guest, at 248d4–7, proceeds to present with three alternative interpretations of the soul’s and the forms’ relation to each other.<sup>23</sup> The alternatives are set out as follows:

1. recognition and being recognized are likewise an affecting or an affection or both,

or

2. one is an affecting, while the other is an affection,

or, finally,



3. neither has a share in either affecting or affection.

The first alternative itself yields three possibilities, namely (a) that both recognizing and being recognized should be regarded as affecting, (b) that both should be regarded as being affected, and finally (c) that both should be regarded as affecting and being affected at the same time. As Lesley Brown puts it, the two first possibilities are “non-starters,” since we need both affecting and affection in order to explain the relation between souls and forms—which makes it understandable why the guest and Theaetetus do not pursue them.<sup>24</sup> The third is theoretically a possible explanation of this relation, but it, likewise, is not discussed.

The second alternative offers us two possibilities: either (a) recognizing is an affecting and being recognized is an affection or (b) recognizing is an affection and being recognized is an affecting. Apparently it is only the first that is discussed. For when Theaetetus claims that the friends will have to choose the third alternative, namely that neither recognizing nor being recognized is an affecting or an affection, the guest states that he understands Theaetetus’ reason for choosing this alternative. Otherwise, he suggests, the friends, in accepting that recognizing is identical with affecting, would have to admit that the beings that are recognized, since they would then be affected, would thereby also be moved. And this the friends will surely not admit (cf. 248a12–13). But what about the second interpretation, according to which recognizing the *eidê* would consist in being affected by them, whereas the fact that the *eidê* are recognized would amount to their affecting the one who recognizes them? If we look at what Plato has Socrates state about the relation between *eidê* and the soul in the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, for instance, this would seem a rather attractive interpretation. In both dialogues, the soul is said to undergo a change as a result of recognizing or grasping *eidê* or true beings, which for their part are said to remain self-identical and unchanging, while they at the same time are depicted as powers or causes that may affect virtue in the soul that grasps them.<sup>25</sup> It is never stated explicitly in the *Sophist* that this would be the correct way to understand how the soul and the *eidê* relate to each other, but it is reasonable to read the final part of the Gigantomachy-passages as pointing in this direction.

A problem for this interpretation is the fact that the guest, when he and Theaetetus have concluded that the friends of *eidê* will have to maintain that the *eidê* cannot be affected by our recognizing them, seems at first to argue against the friends’ understanding of the *eidê* as motionless, that is, to argue in favor of the first possibility within the second alternative. At 248e7–249a2 he suggests that the view expressed by the friends implies that motion, life, soul, and thoughtfulness, that is, *phronêsis*, are not present to that which completely, or perfectly, is (*to pantelôs on*), a conclusion that both he and Theaetetus find disconcerting. However, before we look at the way this claim advanced against the friends unfolds, we should note that the expression “that which completely is,” *to pantelôs on*—from which life and motion seems to be excluded as a consequence of the friends’ account of being—could be understood in two different ways. It could be seen as referring to the *eidê*, which the friends earlier described as truly, *ontôs*, or the true, *alêthinê*, being (246b8, 248a11). If we read it this way, the guest does indeed seem to argue that the *eidê* are moving or changing. On the other hand, it could simply refer to complete being, *whatever that may be*, in which case he might only be arguing that some things that move or change have to be regarded as belonging to the beings that completely are, an interpretation that has been defended by, for instance, W. D. Ross.<sup>26</sup> In short, he could in this case be arguing only that soul and mind should be elevated to the

position of being, and not that the *eidê* are alive and moving. With this in mind, we now turn to the final part of the Gigantomachy-passage.

The friends, as well as the corporealists, are here left entirely out of the conversation. From now on, it is only the guest and Theaetetus who are engaged in discussion. Together they agree that, if complete being is to have mind, *nous*, it must be alive, and furthermore that life and mind must be in a soul. Finally, they agree that all this implies motion or change (249a4–b1). So complete being, if it is to include mind and thoughtfulness, must be characterized by motion, contrary to what the friends hold (249b2–3). But the guest can hardly wish to imply by this that the *eidê* posited by the friends are in motion and alive. For having reached the conclusion that complete being must include motion, the guest immediately goes on to claim that they will exclude *nous* from the things that are if they agree that everything is in motion (249b8–10). Mind, the guest explains, presupposes that there is something that is in the same respect and in a like manner and about the same, and such things cannot be regarded as moving (249b12–c1).<sup>27</sup> Although the full implications of this suggestion are not spelled out by the guest, it is reminiscent of a similar claim made by Parmenides in the Platonic dialogue named after him, where he concludes his criticism of the forms posited by the young Socrates by stating that one has to accept that there are, somehow, unchanging forms, if one is to be able to explain the activity of dialectical reasoning (135b5–c3). Seen in conjunction with this, what the guest is claiming seems likely to be that we have to accept a moving or changing being among the things that are, since movement and change characterize the soul, as well as motionless or unchanging beings to which the soul may be related, if our ontology is to make the fact of insight intelligible. Indeed, if motion is linked with being affected, as the guest claims at 248e3–4, the conclusion of the Gigantomachy-passage seems to be not that the *eidê*, when recognized, are affected and in motion—they cannot be what they are, namely self-identical beings, if in motion—but rather that the soul must be regarded as moving, since being affected by the *eidê* is a way of being moved. So it seems, after all, that the guest ends up defending the second possibility within the second alternative—that recognizing is a being affected and being recognized is an affecting.

One may still wonder what it means to include soul in complete being. Are we here talking about human souls? Or is it perhaps rather a divine soul, analogous to the one the Pythagorean Timaeus talks about in the dialogue named after him? The guest may well have both things in mind, but it lies beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss this in any detail, since this would demand a discussion of the rest of the drama of this dialogue. Instead we shall end by trying to specify what the Gigantomachy-passage teaches Theaetetus about being and the soul. The guest has evidently advanced and defended his *dynamis*-proposal against both parties in the Gigantomachy in order to make Theaetetus accept it as well. The primary purpose of this proposal is to make intelligible the fact that the soul, which is moving, can be related to beings that are unmoved and invisible, so that these somehow become present to the soul. If one does not concede this, as the real corporealists do not, because they deny that there are invisible, self-identical beings, and as the friends of *eidê* cannot, since they deny the *eidê* any power, one not only denies that life, mind, and motion truly are. One denies further that thoughtfulness, *phronêsis*, and knowledge, *epistêmê*, of anything whatever may come about at all, as the stranger points out at 249c6–8. At least from a Socratic point of view, this amounts to denying the possibility of virtue, since true virtue presupposes *phronêsis* or *epistêmê*, which Socrates elsewhere claims come about when the soul draws near to, or has intercourse with, the *eidê* or *ideai* (cf. *Phaedo* 65e7–66a8, 69a6–c3, *Resp.* 490a8–b7, 500b8–d3, *Symp.* 211e4–212a7).

Perhaps it is the same view that is expressed in the guest's final remark in the Gigantomachy-passage. The philosopher, he states, who honors mind, thoughtfulness, and knowledge above everything else, has to object both to the view that everything is in motion and to the view that everything is standing still, and, as the little child, when confronted with the question which hand it will choose, has to beg for both. Perhaps we should regard the insight the philosopher strives for as itself being a child, namely the offspring of the *eros* of the soul and the generating power of the beings for which the soul longs.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Lesley Brown, Vivil Valvik Haraldsen, and Vigdis-Songe Møller who read an earlier version of this paper and made fruitful comments. Special thanks are due to Hayden Ausland, who read the entire manuscript several times and made innumerable corrections and many valuable suggestions. The present work was written as part of a postdoctoral research project financially supported by the Danish Council for Independent Research.

## Notes

- 1 Jens Kristian Larsen is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), working on the notion of godlikeness in Plato and its role in Plato's conception of philosophy as a way of living. He obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Copenhagen with a dissertation on Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. His recent publications have focused on the notion of *eros* in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, on the question how the sixth definition of the sophist in the *Sophist* should be understood, and on Heidegger's interpretation of the *Sophist*.
- 2 References to the Greek text are to *Platonis Opera*, vol. 1, ed. E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B. Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 3 That the *Sophist* as a whole can be regarded as an education of Theaetetus is strongly emphasized in Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Dialektik ist nicht Sophistik—Theätet lernt das im *Sophistes*," in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 338–69.
- 4 A similar reading is suggested in Fiona Leigh, "Being and Power in Plato's *Sophist*," *Apeiron* 43 (1) (2010), 78 (henceforth cited as "Power"), though the implications of this are not worked out in her paper.
- 5 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophistes*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1992), 464–65; Mary Margaret McCabe, *Plato and his Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81 (henceforth cited as *Predecessors*); Christian Iber, *Platon—Sophistes* (commentary to the translation) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007), 269.
- 6 Translation is from *Plato: Sophist or the Professor of Wisdom*, trans., intro., and glossary Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem (Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library, 1996). The translation has been slightly modified at certain points without notice.
- 7 Noboru Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist: Between the Sophist and the Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 218 (henceforth cited as *Unity*) points to this difference in the dialogical situation, although he draws a conclusion along the lines of Rosen's, mentioned below, and unlike the one drawn in this paper.
- 8 McCabe, *Predecessors*, 76 thus rightly describes the corporealists as "missing persons," as people who never turn up for the dialectical encounter in which they are supposed to take part. See also Kenneth Dorter, *Form and Good in Plato's Eleatic Dialogues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 142.
- 9 Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 214.
- 10 In many Platonic dialogues, virtues such as justice and thoughtfulness are treated as Forms or Ideas, as instances of that which really is (*ta ontôs onta*). As it is a matter of controversy whether the *Sophist* operates with "Platonic Forms" at all, and as the corporalists are in any case not adherents to a "doctrine of Forms," I shall leave talk of Forms aside and refer to the virtues simply as "beings," since this is how they are described in the text.

- 11 See Lesley Brown, "Innovation and Continuity," in *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Jyl Gentzler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 188 (henceforth cited as "Innovation").
- 12 Brown, "Innovation," 188 regards this as equivalent to the claim that the soul *is* a body, in contradistinction to the virtues, which are said not to be bodies (cf. 247c2). In the reading suggested here, Theaetetus answers on behalf of the corporealists that the soul is invisible but *has* a body (while not thereby being identical with body), whereas the virtues and their opposites are both invisible and without a body.
- 13 This is rightly emphasized by Leigh, "Power," 65.
- 14 The passage is notoriously difficult to translate and to interpret. For a more detailed discussion of the formulation of the proposal, see Brown, "Innovation," 190.
- 15 Cf. John McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 113.
- 16 For a similar play on *ousia*, see *Republic* 329e4 and 330d1–3, in comparison with 509b8–10. Note also that both Cephalus' grandfather (330b3–6) and Theaetetus' father (144c7–8) left fortunes, and both Cephalus' father (330b5) and Theaetetus' trustees (144d2) squandered them. I thank Hayden Ausland for pointing out these parallels.
- 17 Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935), 242; William David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 107 (henceforth cited as *Ideas*); Brown, "Innovation," 194; Notomi, *Unity*, 219–20; for other suggested candidates, see Ross, *Ideas*, 105–6.
- 18 Cf. Alfred Edward Taylor, *Plato: the Sophist and the Statesman*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and Elizabeth Anscombe (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961), 44–5.
- 19 A full discussion of Plato's connection with the "presocratic" tradition, in particular with Heraclitus and Parmenides, lies beyond the scope of the present paper. A discussion of this complex and fascinating matter would require that one took the *Parmenides* and the *Cratylus* into consideration as well, and there is a further question to what extent the notion of Forms in the so-called middle-period dialogues can be regarded as "Parmenidean."
- 20 Even their understanding of our communion with becoming by means of our body through sense seems unplatonic. In the *Phaedo*, as in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates advances the view that we commune with sensibles, with becoming, through the *soul's* use of the senses (*Phaedo* 79c2–8; *Theat.* 184c1–9). In other words, the senses are not separate faculties, set over sensible things, but rather instruments through which the soul is related to sensibles. Brown, "Innovation," 195, note 23, acknowledges this difference, but, in contrast to the present reading, believes that this may be regarded as nothing more than the result of Plato's wish to "state the Friends of the Form's theory in a bold and economical way."
- 21 As is emphasized by Brown, "Innovation," 200, this "theory" may remind us of the theory of perception developed by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*. It would be interesting to look more closely into this—in particular into the possibly close relationship existing between perception and knowledge in Plato—but it lies beyond the scope of the present paper to go into this.
- 22 See Rudolf Rehn, *Der Logos der Seele* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1982), 164, note 118.
- 23 The three alternatives have been carefully analyzed by Brown, "Innovation," 196–200, to whom the present interpretation is indebted. Brown's reading has recently been criticized by Leigh, "Power," 69–72, but Brown's suggestion remains the more attractive in respect of its understanding of the outcome of the Gigantomachy.
- 24 Brown, "Innovation," 196.
- 25 Cf. *Phaedo* 65c2–66a8, 69a6–c3, 80a10–b7; *Republic* 500b8–d9.
- 26 Ross, *Ideas*, 107–10. Brown, "Innovation," 203 takes the passage in the same manner.
- 27 For further discussion of this problem, and alternative solutions, see Brown, "Innovation," 190–92 and 197–200.