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The Way We Divide Forms 'in Our Soul': Conceived Parthood at Plato's *Sophist* 250b8

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Abstract

What does Plato mean when he declares at *Soph.* 250b8 that Theaetetus is positing Being *in his soul* (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τιθείς) as a third something encompassing Change and Rest? Is he merely clarifying that the act of positing is a mental act? Or is he making a further point? This paper argues that the locution 'in the soul' plays a significant role in the passage in alerting to a contrast between the way Being and its relation to Change and Rest are intelligible to Theaetetus and the way Being really is and relates to those two other kinds. This interpretation is set against another interpretation, defended by Leigh, according to which the phrase should be understood as drawing a contrast between what is done by the agency of the soul and what is done by the agency of the body. The paper then explores the consequences of the proposed interpretation for our understanding of the broader context of the passage. In particular, it argues that the claim that Being is a third something encompassing Change and Rest is more problematic than critics have usually assumed. To account for Theaetetus' depiction, it develops the notion of 'conceived parthood', which are part-whole relations posited by the mind for the needs of a philosophical enquiry.

Keywords

Plato's *Sophist* – part-whole relations – forms – Plato's realism – Plato on Being

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Introduction¹

At 250b8–c2 in the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger, who is in charge of the enquiry, asks Theaetetus, his respondent in the dialogue, the following question:²

{EE.} Τρίτον ἄρα τι παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ ὄν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τιθεῖς,
ὡς ὑπ' ἐκείνου τὴν τε στάσιν καὶ τὴν κίνησιν περιεχομένην
συλλαβῶν³ καὶ ἀπιδῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὴν τῆς οὐσίας κοινο-
νίαν, οὕτως εἶναι προσεῖπας ἀμφοτέρα;

VISITOR: Is it as some third thing over and above Change and Rest, then, that you are positing Being in your soul, after having grasped Change and Rest together as if they were encompassed by Being; and after having looked from a distance at the community they have with Being, you thus call them both 'being' – right?⁴

The passage is found after the Gigantomachia passage in the *Sophist* and is about the relation between the three prominent Forms or kinds that have emerged from this passage, namely Being, Change and Rest. For the record, the Gigantomachia is this passage in the *Sophist* where Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger examine the view of the Giants and the Friends of the Forms about Being. At the end of this passage, they come to the conclusion that Being, or the totality, is all together all that which is changing and changeless (249d3–4). After they have reached this conclusion, further examination takes place in order to clarify whether what this means is that Being is the same as Change,

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- 1 This paper has been presented at an online conference at the KU Leuven. I would like to thank my respondent at the conference, C. Poetsch, for his detailed and helpful comments on the first version of this paper. I have then particularly benefited from long discussions with V. Harte and G. Rudebusch. It is difficult to pinpoint where exactly I am indebted to them, as many of the points discussed in this paper are the product, in one way or another, of discussions I had with them. I have nevertheless tried to do so as accurately as possible in the footnotes. Finally, I would like to thank S. Delcomminette and J. Vlasits for comments and help with the final version of this paper.
- 2 Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine and ~~the Greek texts is that of the latest OCT.~~
- 3 Removing the comma before συλλαβῶν, unlike in the OCT. I shall motivate this choice in the first section of the paper.
- 4 The translation is mine and I shall justify it in what follows. This passage raises several challenges for the translator, and I shall restrict myself to those that are relevant to the overall point of this paper. Compare with Rowe's translation (2015): 'In that case in your mind you're assuming that Being is a third thing over and above these, on the basis that both rest and change are embraced by it; you have taken the two of them together and noted the way they both share in being, and that's why you also say they both are – right?.'

or Rest, or Change and Rest taken together, or something different. Following a brief discussion, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger conclude that Being is not identical with either Change or Rest (taken individually or together) but is some ‘third thing’ (*triton ti*). This is the passage I have just quoted.

The question I would like to raise is the following: What role, if any, does the locution ‘in the soul’ play in the passage? On the whole, scholars have paid little attention to this phrase. They have either left it untranslated, or have translated it as stating that the positing is a mental act. Leigh, however, is a remarkable exception.⁵ In her 2012 address to the Aristotelian Society, she calls attention to the phrase and argues that it points to a contrast between what is done by the agency of the soul, and what is done by the agency of the body. The Eleatic Stranger’s point here, she claims, is to make clear the intelligible nature of the kinds Being, Change and Rest.

Against Leigh’s reading, I shall argue that ‘in the soul’ points to a contrast not between thinking and perceiving, or between the intelligible and the sensible, but between the way Theaetetus conceives of Being and its relation to Change and Rest, and the way it really is. My argument relies on close textual analysis of the passage, where I shall show that the locution ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ is to be understood in contrast with ὡς ἀληθῶς at 250c1.

The rest of the paper will be dedicated to examining two consequences of this reading. A first consequence is that it sheds a different light on the aporia about Being that follows our passage. More precisely, I shall argue that it shows that the claim that Being is some third thing – a *triton ti* – is more problematic than critics have usually assumed. A second consequence concerns Plato’s depictions of the relations among Forms. If this paper is along the right lines, it shows that the way those relations are spelled out is not only responsive to the way these relations are in themselves, but also to the way they are intelligible to us. This, as we shall see, is helpful when it comes to the specific case of the relation among Being, Change and Rest as described in this passage. As we shall see, Being and its relation to Change and Rest is understood by Theaetetus as a whole encompassing its parts. This will bring me to the notion of ‘conceived parthood’, where ‘conceived’ refers not only to the fact that we are dealing here with the product of a mental activity, but emphasises that these parts emerge through the process by which a person engaged in a philosophical enquiry comes to conceive of a particular Form in her mind. This suggestion, as we shall see, can offer an interesting way out of the vexed question of whether Forms can have parts.

⁵ Leigh (2012), esp. 250–253.

2 Ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ versus ὡς ἀληθῶς: the Textual Argument

Let us start by taking a look at Leigh's reading of her passage and the textual basis for it.⁶ Here is her translation:⁷

Str.: So you set Being before your soul as a third thing beside these, and Rest and Change are encompassed by it, and by grasping and seeing them in relation to their communion with Being, you say that both of them are?

Although Leigh translates the locution as a locative dative, the meaning she attributes to it is instrumental.⁸ In other words, what she takes the Eleatic Stranger to mean that it is by the agency of the soul, as opposed to the agency of the body through sense-perception, that we come to have access to Being, Change and Rest. This move establishes the intelligible nature of the three kinds.⁹ This is not a mere truism for, as she argues, Change and Rest, in so far as they are properties, apply to the sensible realm only, hence the confusion. The Eleatic Stranger's point is that although Change and Rest are properties that apply to sensible things, it remains that, in so far as they are Forms, their nature is purely intelligible and can accordingly only be grasped by the soul. Consequently, whoever wants to know about Change and Rest should not, or so Leigh, summon sense-perception but enquire about this question by the agency of the soul alone.¹⁰

On Leigh's reading, thus, the contrast brought in by the locution 'in the soul' is that between what is accessible to the mind and what is perceptible by the senses, between what has an intelligible nature and what is physical. Now, while her claim is to be read against her overall thesis that in the *Sophist*, Change and Rest do not apply to Forms at all but only to sensible things, a thesis whose merits I cannot discuss here, the worry is that there is no reference, in the immediate context of this passage, to such a contrast. This is however very different from another, earlier passage in the *Sophist*, that Leigh does not mention in her analysis of 'in the soul', but that seems to be exactly drawing

6 In this first section, I shall concentrate on the textual arguments and leave the reconstruction of the argument for the next section.

7 Leigh (2012: 250).

8 See for instance Leigh (2012: 250–1): 'At 250a8, the Stranger emphasizes that Theaetetus is able to access the state of affairs, in which Change and Rest share in Being, with his soul [...] Theaetetus is invited to say, by "looking" with his soul ... '.


9 Leigh (2012: 250).

10 Leigh (2012: 251).

on the contrast that she is looking for. The passage is at *Soph.* 248a10–13 and it stages the Eleatic Stranger addressing the Friends of the Forms:

{EE.} Καὶ σῶματι μὲν ἡμᾶς γενέσει δι' αἰσθήσεως κοι-

νωνεῖν, διὰ λογισμοῦ δὲ ψυχῇ πρὸς τὴν ὄντως οὐσίαν (...)

 Visitor: And, on the one hand, you say that it is by means of the body, through perception, that we have communion with becoming while it is by means of the soul, through reasoning, that we have communion with real being (...)

In this passage, the instrumental dative is clear, and so is the contrast between what is done by the agency of the soul, and what is done by the agency of the body. By contrast, in the *Soph.* 250a8–11 passage, there is no such reference to sense-perception and the particle ἐν suggests that the dative is locative.¹¹

Now, granting the locative reading of the dative, one may nonetheless be willing to retain the gist of Leigh's interpretation and argue that the phrase 'in the soul' marks the move from an enquiry done in the sensible realities to an enquiry done in the intelligible realities. 'In the soul' would thus here signal that the enquiry has left the region of the body to concentrate on that of the soul and of entities known by intelligence.¹² On this reading, 'in the soul' thus primarily acts as a complement of the verb τιθεῖς. It specifies that the action of positing is here a mental one and that consequently, the object posited is of mental nature. This is not redundant, for the action of 'positing something' can be either a mental or a physical activity. However, although non-redundant, it is not necessary either, for the verb is often found in Plato without specification. In our passage, it is clear from the context that τιθημι is not a physical action here. Accordingly, on this reading, 'in the soul' does not add any information that is not already available from the immediate context. While this alone may not tell conclusively against this reading, it makes it less appealing.

But if the point is not about drawing attention to a contrast between an action performed by the soul, and an action performed by the body, or between

¹¹ A similar observation can be made about the passage at *Theaet.* 185e3–186a5 which Leigh mentions in support for her claim (2012: 251). In this passage, Socrates asks Theaetetus whether Being (τὴν οὐσίαν) belongs to the group of things that the soul investigates (ἐπισκοπεῖν) by itself (δι' αὐτῆς) or through the capacities of the body (διὰ τῶν τοῦ σώματος δυνάμεων). The passage is reminiscent of our *Soph.* 250b8–c2 passage, especially because the question is about 'positing Being' (Ποτέρων ... τιθῆς τὴν οὐσίαν). However, unlike in our *Soph.* 250b8–c2 passage but similarly to the earlier *Soph.* 248a10–13, the contrast with the body is made explicit, and so is the instrumental dimension thanks to διὰ.

¹² I thank the anonymous reviewer for this objection.

an enquiry done in the intelligible and an enquiry done in the sensible, what is it, then? I shall now argue that the contrast at issue is that between the way Theaetetus conceives of Being in relation to Change and Rest, and the way it really stands in relation to them.

On the previous reading, 'in the soul' works as a placeholder indicating the intelligible realm. In other words, the Eleatic Stranger asks whether Theaetetus posits the three Forms or kinds 'in his soul' because he wants to make their intelligible nature clear. The point is thus primarily of metaphysical significance and concerns the three Forms mentioned. On the reading I am now going to defend, by contrast, the point is primarily of dialectical significance. The locution 'in the soul' is there to indicate that the account of the relation between three Forms that we are given here corresponds to how Theaetetus understands it at this stage of the enquiry. For this reason, it is more accurately rendered using the possessive form 'in your soul'.¹³ To be clear, the point is not about Theaetetus' soul as opposed to all other souls, but about its role as the Eleatic Stranger's interlocutor in the enquiry about Being. In fact, since 250a5, Theaetetus is being questioned directly (ἔρωτων σέ). This is the first time, since the enquiry about Being started at 242c, that he finds himself in this position. Previously, his role was either to question the views of his predecessors about Being together with the Eleatic Stranger, or to act as their spokesman.¹⁴ Accordingly, our passage, and the lines that precedes it, are written in the second person singular. Now, not only is our passage ~~directly~~ directed at Theaetetus, but also, it contains mostly verbs that describe the mental or mental related activities performed by Theaetetus, like 'positing' (τιθείς), 'grasping together' (συλλαβών), 'looking from a distance' (ἀπιδών) and 'naming' (προσείπας). In other words, we are given the mental steps that caused Theaetetus to see Being and its relation to Change and Rest the way he does. Again, the point is not that those mental steps are peculiar to Theaetetus alone; they aren't, and they can be replicated by the reader. The point, however, is that Plato is interested here in explaining how Theaetetus came to the view that Being and its relation to Change and Rest in this way.¹⁵ In a way, it is almost as if we, readers, were given a picture of Theaetetus' soul at that moment, just

13 See also Schleiermacher (2016): 'Also setzest du doch das Seiende in deiner Seele', and also Cambiano (1981): 'nella tua anima'. Note that Leigh's translation also has 'in your soul'.

14 *Soph.* 243d6–8 and *Soph.* 246e3.

15 Note that from the moment the Eleatic Stranger's questioning starts at *Soph.* 250a8, all steps in the reasoning are introduced by verbs like λέγεις, φῆς, συγχωρῆς. ~~Compare if~~ the Eleatic Stranger was simply asking whether Change and Rest are most opposed to one another; or whether both and each of them 'are', without ~~such~~ verbs. See n. 23 on this point.

like when talking to a friend, we can sometimes have the feeling of knowing exactly what is going on in her mind at that precise moment.¹⁶

That the passage is seen through Theaetetus' mind has not escaped translators. Accordingly, some of them have rendered *τιθείς* not by the neutral 'setting' or 'positing', but by verbs indicating that the view about Being, Change and Rest that is described here has a different epistemic status. Campbell and Cornford, for instance, chooses to translate *τιθείς* as 'conceive', thereby emphasising that this is how Theaetetus forms Being in his mind. White follows Cornford, and in a similar move, Cambiano has 'intendendo porre', which also highlights that Being and its relation to Change and Rest are seen from Theaetetus' perspective. As for Rowe, he chooses 'assuming' for *τιθείς*, thereby indicating that the statement about Being does not stand on firm ground.

A further piece of evidence in favor of this reading can be found in the *ὡς* on line 250b9. To begin with, note that *ὡς* is not required by *τιθείς*. For this reason, it is generally taken in conjunction with the participle 'encompassed' (*περιεχομένην*). Now, *ὡς* followed by a participle, but without *ὄν*, can take difference nuances, but it often highlights that what comes after the *ὡς* is seen from the point of view of the speaker and may, as such, depart from the way things really are. In this way, *ὡς* can be equivalent to *ὡσπερ* and participle, that is, it can be equivalent to 'as if'.¹⁷ Thus understood, *ὡς* indicates that what is asserted primarily reflects the judgment of the speaker, but may be different from the way things really are.¹⁸ This is even more apparent if we change the place of the comma and place it after *συλλαβῶν*, as Campbell suggested, and not before it.¹⁹ The alternative that Campbell sees is between reading *συλλαβῶν* together with *ἀπιδῶν* – this is the classical construal, with the comma before *συλλαβῶν* – or taking it with what precedes, that is, as governing the two nouns in the accusative, namely Change and Rest on line 250b8.²⁰ Though not necessary for it, the advantage of removing the comma before *συλλαβῶν* for my reading is that it draws a connection between the depiction of Change and

16 The strikingly visual and suggestive vocabulary used by Plato in these lines has not escaped critics. Leigh (2012: p. 252) is one of them, although her point is primarily to say that the spatial vocabulary should not be understood literally but as pointing to a 'conceptual space'.

17 See for instance Crivelli (2012: 97): 'as if stability and change were contained by it'.

18 This nuance is rendered by several translators, for instance Diès (1925), who adds 'pour ainsi dire'; Cambiano (1981), '*convinto che* la quiete e il movimento siano abbracciati da esso' (my emphasis); Cordero (1993), 'comme si'; Cornford (1935), 'you are taking both movement and rest as embraced by reality' (my emphasis).

19 Campbell (1867: n. 1 p. 134). Note that Cornford follows Campbell (1935: n. 1 p. 250).

20 On the second construal, the Greek reads: *συλλαβῶν τήν τε στάσιν καὶ τὴν κίνησιν ὡς περιεχομένην ὑπ' ἐκείνου [=τὸ ὄν]*.

Rest as encompassed by Being and the mental act that leads to it – that of ‘grasping together’ (συλλαβών) Change and Rest – more clear.²¹

But the main textual argument in support of the view that ‘in the soul’ refers to the way Theaetetus conceives of Being in relation to Change and Rest, as opposed to the way this relation really works, is to be found in Theaetetus’ reply to the Eleatic Stranger’s question at 250c1–2. There, he reformulates what the Eleatic Stranger has just been stating, with an interesting difference:

{ΘΕΑΙ.} Κινδυνεύομεν ὡς ἀληθῶς τρίτον ἀπομαντεύεσθαι
τι τὸ ὄν, ὅταν κίνησιν καὶ στάσιν εἶναι λέγωμεν.

VISITOR: We run the risk of divining Being as really some third thing, when we say of Change and Rest that they are.

The crux here is the ὡς ἀληθῶς. This locution is very common in Plato and means something like ‘truly’, ‘really’. It is often used to state emphatically that something is the case or is truly so.²² In this passage, translators have been divided as to whether ὡς ἀληθῶς is to be read together with τρίτον τι τὸ ὄν, or whether it is to be read with κινδυνεύομεν ἀπομαντεύεσθαι.²³ Not much relies on this decision, however, and the meaning is similar irrespective whether one puts the emphasis on the verb or its object. More important for my purpose is that the mention ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ is dropped and replaced with ὡς ἀληθῶς. This difference precisely captures the contrast I am after between the way Theaetetus conceives of Being in relation to Change and Rest and the way Being really is, the former I take to be captured by the phrase ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, and the latter by ὡς ἀληθῶς. On my reading, this difference is significant and corresponds to the move from the Eleatic Stranger asking Theaetetus about how he conceives of Being in relation to Change and Rest, to Theaetetus replying about Being being ‘really’ (ὡς ἀληθῶς) some third thing. The difference is that unlike before, there no longer is the distinction, in Theaetetus’ reply, between how one conceives of something and how this thing is: if they ‘really’ take Being to be a *triton ti*, or if they take Being to be ‘really’ a *triton ti*, then it means that Being *is* so for them. That we are leaving the discussion about how Theaetetus conceives of Being and moving to the field of how Being is, is supported by two further changes

21 Of course, τιθείς is also a mental act in this passage, but unlike συλλαβών, it does not contain the idea of something encompassing something else and hence does not draw a connection with περιεχομένην.

22 See for instance the ‘true’ or ‘real philosophers’ at *Phd.* 64e2.

23 In favour of reading it with τρίτον τι, see for instance Centrone (2008) and Mouze (2019); for reading it together with the verb, see for instance Cornford (1935); Fronterotta (2007); Rowe (2015); Schleiermacher (2016).

in the rest of the text: first, the move to the first person plural (*κινδυνεύομεν*); second, the fact that the next two consequences about Being, namely that Being is different (*ἕτερον*) from Change and Rest (250c3–4) and that it neither changes nor rests by its own nature (250c6–7), are formulated without a verb indicating a mental activity, unlike before.²⁴

3 The Meaning and Significance of the Locution ‘in the Soul’: for Argument, the *Sophist* Passage

In the first section of this paper, I have given textual reasons for understanding the locution *ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ* as introducing a contrast between the way Theaetetus conceives of Being and its relation to Change and Rest, and the way it really is. This contrast, I have argued, is to be found in the opposition between *ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ* and *ὡς ἀληθῶς*. My reading is different from Leigh’s one, who thinks that the contrast is between what is done by the agency of the soul and what is done by the agency of the body, through sense-perception. It is also different from taking the locution *ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ* as specifying that the act of positing, introduced by *τίθημι*, is a mental one. But what role does this distinction play in the argument? This is the question that now needs to be answered. I shall argue that this distinction prepares the ground for the upcoming task, that is, working out the relation between Being, Change and Rest.

Let us remind ourselves of the situation at the end of the Gigantomachia: after having spent some time examining and challenging the views of the Giants and the Friends of the Forms, the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus come to the conclusion that Being is all things changing and changeless (249d3–4). This is an improvement over the views that were previously examined, but it requires clarifying the relation between Being, Change and Rest. Hence the reference to the Hot and Cold passage: since we have three terms, we need to clarify how they stand in relation to one another, hopping not to get into the same kind of trouble as before. But this is where difficulties arise, as it turns out that the agreement reached at the end of the Gigantomachia ultimately leads to an *aporia* (250e1–2).

Commentators have had difficulties understanding how it happens exactly that Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger end up in *aporia*. Often, they take the issue to be either with the claim that Being, by its own nature, neither changes nor rests at 250c6–7, or with the claim that Being is ‘outside’ (*ektos*)

²⁴ See n. 14 of this paper.

Change and Rest at 250d2.²⁵ However, Theaetetus' reply to the Eleatic Stranger at 250c1 shows that already, the claim that Being is a *triton ti* is problematic, as I shall now argue. As we have seen, Theaetetus' reply focuses on Being being *really*, or *truly* some third thing, which Theaetetus introduces as something they 'run the risk' (κινδυνεύομεν) of 'divining' (ἀπομαντεύεσθαι). The two verbs raise some questions about how to translate and interpret them. Κινδυνεύω can either signal a danger or the sheer possibility that something is the case.²⁶ As for ἀπομαντεύεσθαι, the verb is linked to the vocabulary of oracles and is found a few times in Plato.²⁷ Taken together, they convey the idea that the claim that Being is some third thing is a bad omen, or so I want to claim. It is an omen, in the sense that it is a claim whose consequences Theaetetus does not fully grasp yet but needs to work out.²⁸ In the same way an oracle is not immediately intelligible to ordinary people, but needs to be interpreted, and properly interpreted, Theaetetus needs the help of the Eleatic Stranger before he can fully realise how problematic this claim is.²⁹ At this point, it is interesting to draw attention to a similar passage at 248e7–249a3. In this passage, the Eleatic Stranger discusses the views of the Friends of the Forms, and in particular, their view that Change has no place in Being. In challenging their claim about the complete unchangeability of Being, the Eleatic Stranger also makes use of a religious vocabulary, just like in our passage.³⁰ Now, at 248e7–249a3, there is no doubt that those consequences would be appalling, and that the view

25 See Crivelli (2012: p. 97 ff.) for an overview of the discussion, and for the view that Plato's argument contains a fallacy.

26 Danger is the first sense listed in the Bailly entry of the verb κινδυνεύω, though it can also simply indicate something possible or likely, without the idea of danger. For a similar translation, see Diès (1925); Cambiano (1981) and Mouze (2019).

27 E.g. *Lysis* 216d3; *Rep.* 505e1 and 516d2.

28 I do not mean, however, that it is an omen in the sense that it is a claim reached without argument, like it can be said of oracles that their message is not the outcome of a rational process they have been through, but of some connection with the gods. I thank the anonymous reviewer for helping me clarify this point. For a different interpretation of ἀπομαντεύεσθαι, see Rosen (1983: 241), together with a note from Fronterotta (2007: n. 204 pp. 389–390). Both agree that ἀπομαντεύεσθαι suggests a sense in which the claim that Being is a *triton ti* is not argued for, though they draw opposite conclusions from it. For Rosen, it means that it is a sort of immediate knowledge, whereas Fronterotta, replying to Rosen, rejects this view.

29 *Soph.* 250c3 onwards. Theaetetus' final reaction at 250d4 is quite telling: 'This is most impossible!'

30 The similarity between the two passages is even more striking that they contain the only two occurrences of ὡς ἀληθῶς in the whole dialogue. Compare *Soph.* 248e6–249a3: {ΞΕ.} Τί δὲ πρὸς Διός; ὡς ἀληθῶς κίνησιν καὶ ζῶην καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν ἢ ῥαδίως πεισθησόμεθα τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι μὴ παρῆναι, μηδὲ ζῆν αὐτὸ μηδὲ φρονεῖν, ἀλλὰ σεμνὸν καὶ ἄγιον, νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον, ἀκίνητον ἑστὸς εἶναι; {ΘΕΑΙ.} Δεινὸν μὲν τᾶν, ὦ ξένη, λόγον συγχωροῖμεν.

should not be accepted. In the same way, in our passage, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger find themselves in a state of aporia (*Soph.* 250e1), a situation that is correlated to the view that Being is a *triton ti*. All this indicates that the claim that Being is a *triton ti* is not only an omen, but a bad omen, because of the problematic consequences it entails. Accordingly, κινδυνεύομεν is better rendered as ‘we run the risk’, as opposed to expressing a mere possibility.

But why is this claim problematic? Critics have been reluctant to see the claim that Being is a *triton ti* as being part of the set of misleading conclusions that lead to the aporia, for, as they argue, it is correct, and actually one of the main achievements of this passage, that Being is a different from Change and Rest, and that it accordingly is a ‘third’ Form or kind.³¹ And they are right about this: that Being is not the same as either Change or Rest is a conclusion that has been arrived at through a long argument which started with the Gigantomachia at *Soph.* 245e. This conclusion has put an end to the confusion of the Friends of the Forms and the Giants, and even of some of their predecessors, who have all proved guilty of confusing Being with something else. More to the point, this is a claim that is not going to be questioned or revised in the rest of the dialogue, as later passages testify.³²

However, those critics have perhaps been hasty in reducing the claim that Being is a *triton ti* to the claim that Being is a *triton* or *heteron genos*. In a recently published paper, Gonzalez has argued that the phrase *triton ti* in Plato does not merely refer to a third thing beside two others. As he demonstrates, *triton* does not merely mean ‘third’, but is always ‘a third’ between two opposites.³³ Gonzalez’ claim relies on the reading of the phrase *to triton* at *Parm.* 155e4. His claim is that *to triton* in this context does not refer to a third, additional deduction but to a ‘third way’ out of two opposed conclusions. Precisely because the two conclusions are opposed, whatever the third way proposes cannot be just a synthesis; it must be ‘a transcendence’, by which he means that the third way cannot be reduced to the synthesis of the two previous conclusions, since these conclusions are, precisely, incompatible. Rather, it emerges from them but is not reducible to them. The structure of the *Parmenides* passage Gonzalez is referring to is strikingly similar to our *Soph.* 250b8–11 passage. At 250a8, Change and Rest are clearly identified as opposites, and Being is established as a *triton ti* after the Eleatic Stranger has ruled out first, that Being is identical Change, and second, that it is identical with Rest.³⁴ Following Gonzalez, thus,

31 See for instance Crivelli (2012: 98).

32 E.g. *Soph.* 254d12, where Being, Change and Rest are counted again and explicitly said to be three kinds.

33 Gonzalez (2022: 74–75).

34 *Soph.* 250b2–7.

the claim that Being is a *triton ti* contains already more than the view that it is a third Form or kind in addition to Change and Rest, and already points to a transcendence of Being over and above the opposites Change and Rest. But this, precisely, is problematic, because of the precise nature of Being, Change and Rest. Recall the conclusion of the Gigantomachia at 249d3–4, according to which Being is all things both changing and changeless. In this context, to say of Being that it is beyond Change and Rest is to suggest that it is not itself a further thing that is, since all things are changing and changeless. This reading finds support in the fact that the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus do not describe Being as a third Form (*eidos*) or kind (*genos*) at 250b8 and 250c1, but as some third 'thing' (*ti*), and even as a *heteron ti* (250c4).³⁵ In so far as Being is neither changing nor at rest, it is a 'thing', but we don't know what, since it is not a further thing that is.

This is helpful for understanding why the claim that Being is a *triton ti* raises some issues. The difficulty with this claim lies in the tension between the necessity to distinguish and separate Being from Change and Rest on the one hand, and the impossibility to do so on the other. That it is necessary to distinguish and separate Being from Change and Rest has been established in the discussion with the Friends of the Forms, and even before, if we go back to the discussion with the Dualists about the Hot and the Cold. At the same time however, it is impossible to do so, as the Eleatic Stranger's examination of the consequences of the claim that Being is a *triton ti* has revealed, for it leads to an aporia similar to that about non-being. Indeed, if all things are changing and changeless, as they have agreed at the end of the Gigantomachia, but Being is not, then Being is not itself a further thing that is, which is 'most impossible!', as Theaetetus ultimately comes to realise (250d4).

Now, Being is not only described as a *triton ti* in relation to Change and Rest, but also as encompassing them. It is the *ὡς περιεχομένην* mentioned earlier. In many ways, the claim that Being encompasses Change and Rest prepares for the claim that Being is a *triton ti*.³⁶ First and foremost, whatever encompasses something is different from what it encompasses. This may be clear intuitively, but most importantly, it is explicitly stated and thematised in the *Parmenides*, where *to periechon* and *to periechomenon* are distinguished from one another.³⁷ This is confirmed if we take a look at the other occurrences of the verb in the *Sophist*. In the *Sophist*, the verb is used two other times: before our passage, at

35 Being is also identified as a *genos*, but later in the text, for instance at 254d4.

36 This can also be shown grammatically, if one gives the participle *περιεχομένην* a temporal or a causal value.

37 See for instance *Parm.* 138b2–3: Οὐκοῦν ἕτερον μὲν ἂν τι εἴη αὐτὸ τὸ περιέχον, ἕτερον δὲ τὸ περιεχόμενον.

220c2, and after our passage, at 253c8, in the notoriously difficult passage about dialectic. At *Soph.* 220c2, the verb is used in the active voice and describes the function of an enclosure (τό ἔρκος), which is to encompass. The examples that are given include baskets, nets, meshes, fish-traps. In all these cases, there is no doubt that whatever does the encompassing is not to be confused with what it encompasses. For this reason, it is correct that Being, in so far as it encompasses Change and Rest, is different from them, and hence that there are three things altogether, not just two.

Second, the claim that Being encompasses Change and Rest prepares for the claim that Being is a *triton ti* because of the sort of connection the *periechon* has with the *periechomenon*, and which is comparable to the sort of connection Being has with Change and Rest. Another look at the uses of the verb περιέχω/περιέχομαι in the corpus shows that it is used in a variety of contexts.³⁸ It can be used to describe how something physically encompasses or surrounds another – e.g. mountains encompassing a plain (*Crit.* 118a4–5), the earth encompassing the sea (*Tim.* 25a4). – but it can also be used in a more abstract way – at *Men.* 87d7, it is used about science (*epistêmê*), or even about the way the universe or the totality encompasses everything in it in the *Timaeus* (e.g. 31a4, 92c7). In a similar vein, it is one of the verbs most frequently used by Plato to describe the way a whole encompasses its parts (*Parm.* 144e8–145a1). What these examples have in common is that for each of them, the *periechon* and the *periechomenon* are different, but they are connected. In some of these examples, there does not seem to be more than a spatial connection between the *periechon* and the *periechomenon*, such as in the case of the plain and the mountains which just happen to be contiguous. In others, by contrast, the *periechon* and the *periechomenon* are intrinsically connected, just like in the example of the universe encompassing everything, or as in the part-whole relation. Here, it is not only that there is a link between the *periechon* and the *periechomenon*, it is also that they always go together: where the *periechon* is, there is also the *periechomenon*, just as where the whole is, there are also its parts, and conversely. These things are always intertwined. If this is correct, positing Being as a *triton ti* is somewhat artificial, for in so far as Being is the *periechon*, it is always intertwined with Change and Rest.

This brings me back to the meaning and significance of the locution ‘in the soul’ in the passage. For just like there is a sense in which a whole can be separated from its parts, namely in so far as it is analysed by the mind, there is a sense in which Being can be separated from Change and Rest, by a similar act of the mind. When we are thinking about a whole, we can, in our mind, separate

38 See Gill (2012: 207 ff.).

and isolate the whole from its parts. But by doing so, we are mentally dividing that which otherwise belongs together. This, it seems to me, is the meaning and significance of the phrase ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ here, and its opposition to ὡς ἀληθῶς. It is the power of dialectic, and the power of the soul, to draw distinctions between things that are normally always intertwined and mixed together. The action of position Being as a *triton ti* is an act of division performed by the mind as part of an enquiry about Being.³⁹ Outside of this context of philosophical enquiry, however, Being is always intertwined with Change and Rest, and the mistake of the Giants and the Friends of the Forms, who have respectively confused Being with Change and Rest, testifies of how tight this intertwining is. At 250b8–11, we are thus confronted with a mental representation of the relations among Being, Change and Rest, an image that corresponds to the stage of the enquiry they are at. Because Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger have come to the conclusion, against the Giants and the Friends of the Forms, that Being should not be confused with Change or Rest, they have come to posit Being as separated from them. In doing so, they have actually separated in thought what otherwise belongs together. But they quickly realise that Being must always mingle with Change and Rest, for it is impossible that it is totally 'outside' (*ektos*, 250d2) of them. To overcome the threat that Being is really a *triton ti*, with the difficulties that we saw associated to it, the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus need to properly work out the relations among the three kinds. This will be the focus of the next passages, where the communion of kinds is established, as well as the role of Sameness and Otherness in these relations.

4 'Conceived Parthood' in Plato

If the argument of this paper is along the right lines, I believe it has one final important result. The long examination of the passage at *Soph.* 250b8–11 has shown that the phrase 'in the soul' plays a significant role in alerting to a contrast between the way Being and its relation to Change and Rest appear to Theaetetus, and the way they really work. In particular, we have seen that in describing how Being relates to Change and Rest, the Eleatic Stranger makes use of the vocabulary of parts and wholes. As such, this does not come as a surprise, for the part-whole relation is key to Plato's divisions, as Moravcsik has already shown.⁴⁰ In the context of our passage however, the point is that

39 Whether this corresponds to an act of division as part of Plato's so-called 'method of division and collection' is a topic I shall not address here.

40 Moravcsik (1973: 332).

this vocabulary is linked to the way Theaetetus conceives of Being and its relations to Change and Rest. In other words, it is Theaetetus who comes to represent Being in his soul as being related to Change and Rest in a way that is comparable to a whole and its parts.

This brings me to the notion of ‘conceived parthood’. Scholars have long suspected that Plato’s terminology for the relations among Forms is not, in some contexts, to be understood literally but only metaphorically.⁴¹ Now, as we have seen, Theaetetus’ depiction of Being can be explained by the state of the enquiry they are at – the communion of kinds has not been established yet, although the term *koinônia* has just been introduced at 250b10–11 – and also by the inherent difficulty in working out the relations among Being, Change and Rest – one the one hand, Being has to be different from Change and Rest, but on the other hand, all there is is either changing or at rest. This suggests that the depiction of the relation among Forms is not only dependent on the true nature of these relations, but that in the process of an enquiry, it is also, if not primarily, dependent on how these relations are comprehensible *to us*, the enquirers. In other words, it means that Plato’s account of the relation among Forms is not only responsive to reality but also to our understanding of it. On this reading, Plato, in the first place, does not compare the relation Being has with Change and Rest to a part-whole relation *because* the three are related as parts and wholes, but *because* those relations among Forms are intelligible *to Theaetetus* as parts-whole structures. Hence the notion of ‘conceived parthood’. ‘Conceived’ stands here both for the fact that those divisions are operated by the mind and for the fact that they also reflect the way those relations are intelligible *to us*. ‘Part’ accounts for Plato’s favourite part-whole terminology to talk about those relations.⁴² Note that the term ‘part’ is understood here in a broad way and is meant to include anything along the line of ‘elements’, ‘ingredients’ or ‘constituents’. The important point is that there is some idea of inclusion – captured here by the term ‘encompassing’ – and of combination – here, the fact that both Change and Rest partake of Being and hence ‘are’.

41 See for instance Moravcsik (1979: 98): ‘Plato’s talk in this context of something “generating” something else can be misunderstood. The references are as metaphorical as similar references would be to mathematical methods that can “generate” certain kinds of numbers.’

42 What I am here calling *conceived parts* or *conceived parthood* may not be far from Epicurus’ theoretical minima. Certainly, they have in common to be parts that are distinguished by the mind, as opposed to physical parts. Theoretical minima are however parts of physical entities (atoms), whereas Forms are intelligible entities. Besides, it is not clear that theoretical minima are responsive to the way we understand things; rather, they are in the things themselves.

This is something to bear in mind when it comes to the vexed question whether or not Forms can have parts.⁴³ The worry is that attributing part-whole structures to Forms is not compatible with the view, expressed by Plato on several occasions, that Forms are unitary and non-composite. This feature of Forms plays an important role in the theory of Forms. First, it is connected to other features of Forms. In the *Phaedo* for instance, it is because Forms, unlike sensible things, are unitary and non-composite that they are eternal. Second, it is one of the features that distinguishes Forms from sensible things. At *Tim.* 35a2, it is said of the intelligible realm as a whole that it is indivisible (*ameristos*), whereas the sensible world is divisible (*meristos*). Third, the claim that Forms cannot have parts is central to the dilemma of participation at *Parm.* 130e4–131e7. In this passage, it is the view that a part of a Form may be present in each of its participants that prompts Socrates' denial that a Form can be so divided (*merizesthai*) and nevertheless remain one (*hen*).

The notion 'conceived parthood' does not have a magic solution to solve these issues. Indeed, although the notion of 'conceived parthood', by emphasising that this is only the way these relations are intelligible *to us*, puts some distance between the way Plato describes the relation among Forms and the way these relations really work, it nevertheless requires that Forms have some sort of internal complexity which grounds their depiction as parts and wholes. In this respect, it is important to note that conceived parts must have some basis outside of the mind that posits them. If not, this would entail that the way we conceive of them has nothing to do with the way they are, which would pose a serious threat to the possibility of knowing the world. To put it differently, this would be tantamount to attributing to Plato a sort of Kantian view whereby we are stuck with the way we conceive of things, but have no access to the things in themselves. Given that for Plato, Forms are precisely those entities on which the possibility of objective knowledge rests, this would be a very unfortunate, and indeed unacceptable consequence. Taking again the example of Being and its relation to Change and Rest, the point is not to say that Theaetetus is inventing or imagining out of the blue that Being stands in relation to Change and Rest as some third thing encompassing them. Rather, it is that enquiring about Being, he discovers that Being has a complex relation with Change and Rest, and presenting it as some third thing encompassing the other two is how this relation is intelligible to him.

43 For a defence of the view that Forms do have parts, and that they have always had parts even in so-called early dialogues like the *Euthyphro* or the *Laches*, see Hochholzer (2015). Hochholzer's claim relies on assertions like 'Courage is a part of virtue', or 'Piety is a part of justice' (see in particular pp. 20–7).

That said, although it does not solve the issue, the notion of conceived parthood can contribute to easing it. One reason why the claim that Forms have parts seemed to be incompatible with the view that Forms are unitary and non-composite is that the terms Plato uses for referring to parts of Forms are the same terms that he uses for referring to parts of sensible things. The issue is particularly acute in the *Parmenides*, where the models of parthood offered by Parmenides are all physical ones (e.g. the day and the sail analogies) and accordingly lead to all sorts of problems for Forms. In our *Sophist* passage also, ‘encompassing’ is a term that has a physical connotation: it is used in examples involving fences, nets, and by extension, to examples involving abstract entities. Now often, the passages where Plato asserts the incompatibility and indivisibility of Forms are passages where Forms are contrasted with sensible things. For instance, in the *Phaedo*, the claim that Forms are unitary and non-composite is made in the context of an argument for the immortality of the soul. The point is to show that the soul does not undergo dissolution after death because the soul is not a composite, just like Forms and unlike the body. However, note that although it is said in the *Phaedo* that the soul, just like Forms, is incomposite, we know from other passages that Plato admits parts of soul, for instance in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Republic*. In the case of the soul, then, the claim that the soul is incomposite seems compatible with the view that the soul has parts. Accordingly, one may tentatively argue that the claim that Forms are indivisible and incomposite is primarily set against the view that they are divisible and composite in the same way sensible things are. This does not rule out, however, that they are composite or divisible in some other ways. The notion of conceived parthood is compatible with this kind of reading, for it emerges from the observation that Plato distinguishes between the way relations among Forms are intelligible to us as composite relations based on a sensible model – e.g. the encompassing relation – from the way those relations really work.⁴⁴

This brings me to the question of Plato’s realism. This paper has presented Plato in a perhaps unusually anti-realist fashion, as being mostly preoccupied with the way those relations among Forms are intelligible to us, as opposed to being mostly concerned with the way these relations really work. I have already clarified that I do not intend to imply here that there is no relation between the two, nor do I imply that the conceived parts I am referring to

44 Differences between the part-whole structure of Forms and that of sensible things may include, for instance, a greater degree of unity of the part-whole complex in the case of Forms. In the *Sophist* passage, for example, we have seen that positing Being as a *triton ti* amounted to separating in thought what is actually not separated, and perhaps not even separable, outside the mind.

exist only in our thoughts and have no basis in reality. Rather, the point is, I believe, a much simpler one. Plato is often presented as a philosopher whose aim is to 'carve nature at its joints', by which it is meant that Plato thinks that there is a strong connection between mind and world, so that when we divide something properly, we understand how reality really is. In other words, it is the thought that under certain conditions, pertaining for instance to the adequacy of a philosophical enquiry, there is no contrast between the way we conceive of things and the way things really are. This paper does not intend to challenge any of these. All it is meant to stress is that the carving or working out of the relations among Forms, in so far as it is a heuristic device, need not only provide an *accurate* account of those relations, but also a *comprehensible* one. It is one thing to divide something into its parts, it is not always the same thing to divide it into parts that we can grasp and understand. It is to the latter aspect of the task of dividing and mapping the relations among Forms that the passage I have examined draws attention to. Traditionally, the debate over Plato's realism is couched in terms of the relation between knowledge and reality. Here however, it would be more accurate to say that it is not so much about knowledge as such, and more about the way we come to know things, in the process of a philosophical enquiry. In other words, it is not so much about the relation between mind and reality, and more about the relation between enquiry and reality.

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