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## FORMS AND PREDICATION RECONSIDERED

In *Western Creed, Western Identity*, Professor Dougherty notes the seminal influence of Greek philosophy on the western identity. While both Plato and Aristotle contributed to western culture and identity, the present paper concentrates on the contribution of Plato, with specific reference to the forms and the importance of predication in philosophical discourse.

Plato's account of the existence and nature of forms has been variously interpreted—and criticized. In the first section of the dialogue, *Parmenides*, Parmenides and Zeno raise objections that may be, or perhaps had been, pressed against the theory, or rather against certain ways in which the account of the forms had been, or might be, stated. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Metaphysics*, and perhaps, in the fragmented *Peri Ideon*,<sup>1</sup> also treated some criticism of the forms.

In Anglo-American academic circles, the approach to Plato's account of forms has been predominately analytic. The analytic approach is not monolithic, but generally those who work in this tradition, even if they recognize the systematic nature of Plato's work, tend towards a genetic-historical interpretation of the theory of forms. They assume, for example, that the "separable" forms are not present in the dialogues they consider to be early dialogues, and that the theory of forms in the middle dialogues is quite distinct from the "later" theory, somewhat on the model that one speaks of an "earlier" and "later" Wittgenstein. This assumption is sometimes coupled with the claim that Plato abandoned earlier versions of the theory because he came to recognize they were logically flawed. The so-

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<sup>1</sup> See Gail Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) for an extended treatment of the fragments of Aristotle's essay, *Peri Ideon*.

called flaws<sup>2</sup> usually mentioned are those against which the criticisms in the first part of the *Parmenides* are directed. The inherent danger of the analytic approach is that the very narrowing of the focus that gives sharpness and clarity to the arguments may blur the connections between the individual arguments and the wider context of Plato's thought. Yet, it is this wider context, containing myth, irony, and indirection, that provides the resonance needed for understanding the individual argument.

The central questions addressed in this paper are: (1) how are forms related to predication? And (2) what role do forms and predication play in the discovery and articulation of truth? In the first section of the paper, I provide—in broad strokes—a synopsis of Plato's account of the Forms. In the second section, I consider predication in relation to forms and conclude that the existence and nature of forms is a necessary condition for predication and that Plato's account of predication is consistent with, in fact, *anticipates*, Aristotle's treatment of reality in the *Categories*. A further conclusion is that forms and predication are central to philosophical hermeneutics, to the discovery and articulation of truth.

The approach I take in interpreting the dialogues is roughly based on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his major work on hermeneutics, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer, following Heidegger, says that the interpretation of a text must attend to and be guided by the object being interpreted and avoid imposing a pre-determined *method* or *procedure* on the work. The Socratic dialogue, while it is *addressed* to interlocutors, is concerned primarily with the opinions they *express*, with the logic of the subject matter that is unfolded in the dialogue. From the dialogue what emerges is the truth of the *logos*, "which is neither mine nor yours."<sup>3</sup> There is an expectation that the work being interpreted has an immanent unity of meaning, that it is intelligible. While Gadamer's treatment of hermeneutics does not offer a *method* of interpretation, it does provide a *criterion* of an adequate interpretation: "The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of some of the more prominent criticisms, see my *Plato's Theory of Forms: A Critical Analysis* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed., translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1975), 361.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, 291.

### Synopsis of the Theory of Forms

If the term ‘system’ is not taken too narrowly, it is evident that Plato has a systematic philosophy of which the theory or account of forms is the lynchpin. The central theses that unify the dialogues are: (1) that intelligible objects are ontologically and epistemologically distinct from sensible objects; (2) that knowledge is distinct from belief; (3) that the soul is improved by knowledge and destroyed by ignorance; (4) that intellect guides and directs all; (5) that good intelligence directs well, and bad intelligence does so poorly; and (6) that the human intellect is both cognitive and conative, from which arises the necessity for both dialectic and rhetoric.

To provide a framework for discussion of Plato’s account of predication, a brief reminder of the essential characteristics of the forms will suffice. Plato uses the terms ‘form’ (εἶδος) and ‘idea’ (ἰδέα) interchangeably. In this essay, I use the word ‘form’ for either expression, and also for ‘kind’ or ‘class’ in the *Sophist*. Forms are intelligible, incorporeal, and unchangeable in essence; each form is objective, single, and self-identical. These essential characteristics are mentioned throughout the dialogues. Forms are contrasted with particular things, which are sensible, corporeal, and subject to generation and corruption. Forms are “present in” particulars; particulars “participate” in forms.

Forms are both transcendent and immanent. They function as standards in two ways: first, they provide a basis on which a particular may be classified as a kind or type; second, they are prescriptive standards for the embodiment of a form in particulars. As prescriptive standards, they are essential for the activity of the philosopher-king—or for ordinary mortals who try to bring about justice in a historical state—and for the Demiurgos who *looks to*, but does not *create*, the transcendent forms in order to create the cosmos.

At *Republic* (506), Socrates states the general principle that there is a single form for each set of things called by the same name—with the restriction that the name must indicate a real class and not merely a part. On this basis, the following classification may be made of the forms discussed in the dialogues: (1) forms or kinds of very wide application, such as Sameness, Difference, Existence, Motion, Rest, One, and Many; (2) moral forms such as Courage, Temperance, Justice, Piety, and Friendship; (3) mathematical forms such as Circle, Triangle, Equal, Odd and Even; (4) forms of nonmoral qualities such as Quickness and Tallness;

(5) forms of arts such as Medicine, Rhetoric, and Education; and (6) forms of artifacts and physical things such as shuttle, bed, clay and finger.<sup>5</sup>

Two forms, the Good and the Beautiful, do not fit into this classification. In the *Republic* (508e–09a), Plato says that the form, Good, “exceeds all other forms in beauty and power.” This might lead one to think that the form of the Good is God, an assumption that is understandable but totally inconsistent with the role that the Good plays in Plato’s account of forms. Instead of being a genus of which all other ideas are species, the Idea of the Good is a species under the genus of Idea. It shares with other Ideas the essential characteristics of being—unity, stability, and intelligibility, while at the same time having a distinctive function, associating it closely with the Idea of the Beautiful.

Each form marks some natural division of reality; so too, does the Good, but the Good is also connected with each form as a kind of regulative principle. If we know the good of something, we know its function, nature, or essential structure. Nettleship, in *Lectures on The Republic*, states the point succinctly: “The good or end of any thing is the immanent principle which we have to suppose in it in order to explain it, and which is involved in calling it a whole at all.”<sup>6</sup>

The Idea of the Good is an ontological good that does not necessarily correspond with the moral or personal good for anyone. The ontological good is that which, as formal cause, makes a thing “that which it is and not another thing.” Each idea is good in the sense that each idea is definite, limited, structured, and therefore intelligible. While evil may be considered a privation of good, the *Idea* of Evil partakes of the Good because, as Dante has so clearly shown in the *Commedia*, each kind of evil has its own essential structure—for example, Greed is essentially different from Gluttony. To know the ontological good of anything is simply to know the thing in its tendencies.

The Beautiful has a regulative function similar to that of the Good. In the *Greater, Hippias* (290d–91b), Socrates says that a ladle made of figwood is more beautiful in a pot of soup than one made of gold—because the wooden ladle is more *appropriate* for dipping soup. The clear implica-

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<sup>5</sup> This list differs from that given by Anders Wedberg in *Plato’s Philosophy of Mathematics* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1955), 32–33, in that his list does not include forms of nonmoral qualities or forms of the arts. Also, Wedberg lists the ideas of Good, Just, and Beautiful under a classification titled “Ethical and Esthetical Ideas.”

<sup>6</sup> Richard Lewis Nettleship, *Lectures on the “Republic” of Plato* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 222–223.

tion is that beauty follows function; thus, the Beautiful is necessarily connected with the Good.

Knowledge of the forms may be attained by various methods—definition, hypothetical reasoning, argument by analogy and example, division by genus and species—and underlying all, the double process of collection and division, of which Socrates says in the *Phaedrus* (265d) “I am myself a lover of these divisions and collections, that I may gain the power to speak and to think.”

### Forms in Relation to Predication

Predication is a central topic throughout the dialogues. In the following account, I will use the term ‘predication’ to refer to any combination of predicate and subject that makes a statement. It encompasses what in the contemporary literature is referred to as the ‘is’ of predication and the ‘is’ involved in real definition, but not the ‘is’ of identity; it also includes what Plato refers to as ‘participation’ and what he describes in the *Sophist* as the “communion” or “weaving together” of kinds. Participation is a kind of predication. Plato uses several expressions for the relationship identified as ‘participation.’ In some dialogues, he speaks of particulars “having” certain qualities, or of qualities being “present in” particular things. In the *Symposium* (211b), the multitude of beautiful things are said to “partake” of absolute Beauty. In the *Phaedo* (74d), a particular equal is said to be an inferior copy of the form, Equality. Plato argues there are good reasons for distinguishing common natures from particulars, yet even in the dialogues in which he is said to have “separated” the forms from particulars, he consistently maintains that there is a strong connection between common natures and particulars that have the same name. Plato holds that the exact description of this relation is less important than the realization that it is because of the forms that particular things are what they are (*Phaedo*, 100c–101c). This “because” is the cause we have been taught by Aristotle to call ‘the formal cause.’

In the *Sophist* (251c), the Eleatic Stranger makes fun of those “late learners” who deny that one particular thing can be many, and “delight in forbidding us to speak of a man as ‘good;’ and say we must only speak of a good as good, and of the man as man.” The short response to the late learners is that predication does not imply *identity* of subject and predicate, but only that

when we speak of a man we give him many additional names; we attribute to him colors and shapes and sizes and defects and good qualities; and in all these and countless other statements we say he is not merely a “man” but also “good” and any number of other things. And so with everything else, we take any given thing as one and yet speak of it as many and by many names (*Sophist*, 251b).

Although Plato does not give a complete classification of the different ways a man can be—or linguistically, all the different things that can be said of one, his statement shows he is aware of the distinctions that underlie Aristotle’s categories, or possible predicates.

A passage in the *Lysis* (217e) shows that Plato also distinguishes different kinds of predicates. In this passage, Socrates discusses how whiteness could be said to be “present in” the now golden locks of Lysis. He mentions two possibilities. Lysis’s hair could be dyed with white lead, or it could grow white with age. The color of the dyed hair would not differ *in color* from the naturally white hair, yet the *manner* in which the color is present in the hair, or the cause of its presence, is not the same in the two cases. The distinction is easier to make in Aristotelian terminology: natural whiteness is a *property* of the hair when one grows old, but an *accident* of the hair if the color is set there by dye.

Definition is a type of predication. In a real definition, the subject term is a form and the predicate is a combination of forms. Throughout the dialogues, Socrates seeks such definitions. In fact, since the dramatic setting of the *Parmenides* shows a young Socrates already accepting that there are forms and being brought along by Parmenides and Zeno, it is reasonable to conclude that Socrates, early in his search for definitions, presupposed the existence of forms. Moreover, given the “knowing look” of approval that passes between Parmenides and Zeno<sup>7</sup> and the comments of Parmenides as Socrates is struggling to give an adequate account of forms, it is reasonable to assume that Plato is both endorsing *some* account of the forms and giving credit to “father” Parmenides for the importance of forms in philosophical reasoning.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> At *Parmenides*, 130a, 5–9, “While Socrates was speaking, Pythodorus said he was expecting every moment that Parmenides and Zeno would be annoyed, but they listened very attentively and kept on exchanging glances and smiles in admiration of Socrates.”

<sup>8</sup> In a passage often overlooked when the “criticisms” of the forms are being considered, Parmenides remarks, “. . . if, in view of all these difficulties and others like them, a man refuses to admit that forms of things exist or to distinguish a definite form in every case, he

Plato assumes that it is possible to give a real definition of *any* form. However, as he notes in the *Phaedrus* (263a), definitions are called for only when sense impressions arouse reflection. When someone utters the word ‘iron’ or ‘silver,’ we all have the same object before our minds and no definition is called for, but of such things as justice, goodness, and love, of which we have no simple sensible image, it is difficult, yet important, to give a definition, or a formal account of these objects.

That forms can be in a subject-predicate relation in definitions is presupposed in every attempt to construct adequate accounts of such terms as ‘knowledge,’ ‘justice,’ ‘wisdom,’ ‘courage,’ ‘temperance,’ etc. The formal account of Justice in the *Republic* can be taken as an extended exemplification of how forms are related in definition. Other examples of such predication are plentiful in the dialogues, for example, the theoretical account in the *Lysis* of friendship, in the *Phaedrus* of rhetoric, and in the *Philebus* of what constitutes a good human life.

The *Parmenides* is a rich source for Plato’s views on predication, but the ironic play in the first part presupposes considerable skill in logic and dialectic. It is precisely because Plato knows the area so well that he is able to argue from within different positions in order to show their shortcomings and indirectly suggest distinctions that need to be made. The *Parmenides* ends in an apparently inconclusive manner, but the conclusion is ironic since within the dialogue various ways are suggested in which something can be—or, linguistically, the possible kinds of predicates that can be attributed to a subject; the dialogue, at the same time, illustrates the dialectical method by means of which truth is attained.<sup>9</sup>

The technique illustrated by Parmenides is not quite the same as that of Zeno. Zeno constructed paradoxes against the critics of Parmenides, that is, on one side of the question only. The technique illustrated in the second half of *Parmenides*—tracing out the consequences of what can be said on *both* sides of the question<sup>10</sup> is a technique more suited to the discovery of truth than to mere refutation. The two techniques also differ in purpose. In the second part of the *Parmenides*, Parmenides does not try to reduce the hypotheses to absurdity, but only indicates, indirectly, that predicates

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will have nothing on which to fix his thought, so long as he will not allow that each thing has a character which is always the same, and in so doing he will completely destroy the significance of all discourse.”

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer remarks that Aristotle’s account of dialectic in the *Topics* “corresponds exactly to what we find . . . in Plato’s *Parmenides*.” See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 358.

<sup>10</sup> For an insightful comment on this procedure, see Aristotle, *Topics*, I, 2, 101a34–36.

which appear contradictory are really compatible—if careful distinctions are made between various aspects of being, unity, sameness, difference, motion, and rest.<sup>11</sup>

There are eight hypotheses in the second half of the *Parmenides*. For the first hypothesis, which assumes that nothing is real except the One, Parmenides considers whether this One could have limit, extension, shape, place, motion, rest, sameness, and difference (like-unlike, and equal-unequal), and whether it is temporal. He concludes that if nothing is real except the One, there are no available predicates so knowledge of this One is not possible and nothing can be said about it. Indirectly, Hypothesis 1 shows that although a form may be described as “just by itself,” this does not imply that a form is completely and in every way isolated from all other forms; if it were, one could not have knowledge of it, or make any statement about it. Moreover, Hypothesis 1 shows that nothing can be an object of knowledge unless the contraries, the One and the Many, are in some sense predicable of it.<sup>12</sup> Even a form is one in essence, but is many in that several names may be predicated of it, for example, ‘being,’ ‘unity,’ ‘incorporeal,’ and so on.

For the second hypothesis—if extension in space and time are assumed—in addition to the predicates of unity, being, and plurality, the One will also have shape, position, and the contrary predicates of being both at rest and in motion. The One will have various *relations* to itself and to others, including the relations of sameness/difference, likeness/unlikeness, in contact/not in contact, and equal/unequal. A spatially extended thing will have the predicate of quantity, and will stand to other extended ones in a quantitative relation of being smaller than, greater than, or equal to itself (*Parmenides*, 149d–51b); it will also stand in certain temporal relations to itself and others (*Parmenides*, 151e–55c).

In the remaining six hypotheses, which need not here be treated in detail, Parmenides uses the same list of predicates to consider each different ‘One.’ Whether and in what manner these possible predicates are applicable serves to distinguish various ways of being. The list is comprised of the same predicates Aristotle identifies in the *Categories*, and may be taken

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<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of the similarities and differences between the technique of Zeno and that of Parmenides, see Francis M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 105–115.

<sup>12</sup>For further treatment of this passage, see *id.*, 134.

as evidence that Plato had already distinguished various senses of being that Aristotle later systematized in the *Categories*.

In the first part of the *Parmenides*, Zeno suggests that a form cannot have contrary predicates, and Socrates agreed that he would be “surprised” to find that it could. However, in the second half of the *Parmenides*, it is demonstrated that any One that has being *must* have contrary attributes. This does not lead to a contradiction so long as the aspects in which the terms are predicated are carefully distinguished.

One way to avoid ambiguity is to specify what the predicates mean, or under what conditions they may be applied. At *Parmenides* (161e), being is said to be predicable of anything of which a true statement may be made. At 139e–40b, the terms ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ are defined with reference to predication. Two things are said to be ‘like’ when the same statement can be truly made about both, and ‘unlike’ when a statement true of one is not true of the other. At 146d, Parmenides says about difference “Now, all things which are ‘not One’ must be different from the One, and the One also must be different from them.” This passage anticipates the demonstration in the *Sophist* (257b) that ‘is not’ can mean merely ‘is different from.’

Hypothesis 2 shows that if anything has being, it must necessarily have both Unity and Plurality, since “One and its being are different from each other” (*Parmenides*, 143b). At 144b, the parts of being are said to be “not more numerous than those into which unity is distributed, but equal in number; for nothing that *is* lacks unity, and nothing that is *one* lacks being.” This is essentially the same claim found in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle (1003b) that there are as many species of being as there are of unity.<sup>13</sup> The forms are not mentioned in this hypothesis, but the attributes of being, unity, and plurality are predicable of anything that has being, and *a fortiori* are applicable to forms.

The hypothesis bearing most directly on what can be said of the forms is Hypothesis 5 (*Parmenides*, 161e–62b) in which Parmenides shows that a “nonexistent” entity may yet have being and can be distinguished from other nonexistent entities. A nonexistent entity has being since if anyone makes two statements such as “smallness does not exist” and “largeness does not exist,” it is plain that he is speaking of two different things and can distinguish them from each other. Paradoxically, this argument opposes the view attributed to the historical Parmenides that

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<sup>13</sup> See *id.*, 142.

what *is not* is unknowable and cannot be thought, spoken of, or named, but its importance goes beyond this. The argument shows that statements about what does not “exist” can nonetheless be meaningful; that something which does not exist in one way can have being in another way, for example, as the subject of a sentence; that such “nonexistent” entities can be known and distinguished from each other; and that “nonexistent entities” may have various other predicates. A conclusion drawn is that this “non-existent” One has the characters of being “that” and “something,” and of being related “to this” or “to these,” and all other such characters.

One of the most surprising and important points developed in Hypothesis 5 is that a nonexistent one can have the contrary predicates of being both at rest and in motion. This is surprising because one does not ordinarily think of nonphysical or “nonexistent” things as moving, probably because locomotion and the double process of generation and corruption are the most familiar sorts of motion. However, at *Parmenides* (162b–c), after having argued that a nonexistent one has the *being* of nonexistence and the *nonbeing* of existence, Parmenides makes the statement: “Now a thing which is in a certain condition can not-be in that condition only by passing out of it. So anything that both is, and is not, in such and such a condition implies transition; and transition is motion.” On this basis, he then argues that “the non-existent One has been shown to be a thing that moves since it admits transition from being to not-being.”<sup>14</sup> Immediately following this passage, other kinds of motion—locomotion, alteration, or internal change of character—are all ruled out as possible kinds of motion for nonexistent entities, so the only kind of motion of which a nonexistent entity is capable is the transition from some condition to another condition. But what kind of transition could this be and what kind of condition? How could a non-existent “round square” *move* from non-existence to existence, or vice-versa? Parmenides comments do not rule out this sort of transition. To avoid the absurdity of asserting that a round square could exist in a space-time continuum, the implicit suggestion is that one must distinguish various kinds of being—for example, being as the object of knowledge and subject of a sentence from being as existent in a time-space continuum.

The sort of transition to which Parmenides is referring would apply to *every* nonexistent entity. In fact, if *knowledge* of things that do not exist is possible, this transition would *have* to apply to every nonexistent entity, so long as the nonexistent entity is the subject of a statement. Any nonexis-

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<sup>14</sup> See *id.*, 226–28, for a discussion of the difficulties in translating 162b–163b.

tent entity may move from not being the subject of a statement to being a subject, from not being distinguished from other nonexistent and existent entities to being distinguished from these, from not being known about to being known about. All these movements are transitions from one kind of nonbeing to a corresponding kind of being, and so fit the description for transition from one condition to another. They are not movements in space; we may think of them as logical movements.

In the *Sophist*, many of the distinctions developed in the *Parmenides* are presupposed, used, and sometimes explicitly mentioned; for instance, the distinction between the One and the Many, developed in Hypothesis 5, is used extensively. The predicates (time, place, quantity, etc.) discussed in the second part of the *Parmenides* are also used in the *Sophist*. These predicates perform essentially the same function as the categories of Aristotle, marking ways in which something can be, or kinds of being.

The really new point about predication introduced in the *Sophist* (254d–55c) is that there are certain Forms, namely, Existence, Sameness, and Difference that do not mark divisions *within* being, but are predicable of each and every being, including themselves. Delineating the connections and distinctions among the forms directs attention to the logic and ontology of the forms.

That some of the topics treated in the *Sophist* are less controversial now than in fifth and early-fourth-century B.C. Greece is partly a result of Plato's treatment of predication in the *Sophist*. At *Sophist* (241d), the Eleatic Stranger urges that "what is not, in some respect has being, and conversely, that what is, in a way is not." The demonstration of this claim concludes at 257b in the Eleatic Stranger's statement: "when we speak of that which is not, it seems that we do not mean something contrary to what exists but only something that is different." The general point is that any statement of the type "x is not y" *may* mean only "x is different from y." This statement, together with the corresponding discussion from the *Parmenides*, helps resolve the quandary of how statements about nonexistent entities can yet be meaningful. Other metaphysical questions discussed in the *Sophist* are of continuing interest, among which may be mentioned the following: Of what may the term 'real' be appropriately predicated? Which forms are predicable of which others? What is the philosophical importance of predication?

The first question is discussed in the context of a battle between the giants who think only physical things are real and the gods who think only forms are real. At *Sophist* (247e), the Eleatic Stranger proposes, as a suffi-

cient mark of real things, “the presence in a thing of the power of being acted upon or of acting in relation to [another thing].” The giants (materialists) might go so far as to admit that the soul is real, but when it comes to wisdom or other such things they are not willing to say either that these are not real or that they are all bodies. The gods (“friends of the Forms”) would have to deny the possibility of knowledge since being acted upon would change what is known and they hold that a form must be changeless. The philosopher, on the other hand, realizing that the knowing mind and the object known both change in the act of knowing, although they are (in some way) still the same, will accept neither the doctrine that all reality is changing or the doctrine that all reality is changeless, but “Like a child begging for ‘both,’ he must declare that reality or the sum of things is both at once—all that is unchangeable and all that is in change.”<sup>15</sup>

Discussion of the second question, “which forms are predicable of which?” begins at *Sophist* (251d) with the consideration of whether Existence, Motion, and Rest can combine with any other Form. Three possibilities are considered: (1) no Form combines with any other; (2) every Form combines with every other; (3) some pairs of Forms will combine while other pairs will not. The first alternative is ruled out since it is self-refuting and would make all predication and knowledge impossible. The second alternative is rejected by Theaetetus<sup>16</sup> on the ground that some forms such as Rest and Motion could not combine, presumably because the combination would result in a statement that is self-contradictory. The philosopher must accept the third alternative.

Not all kinds are considered in the ensuing demonstration of the dialectical method, but only five of the most important kinds: Existence, Rest, Motion, Sameness, and Difference. Each of the five is shown to be a distinct form, and Existence, Sameness, and Difference are shown to be “all-pervading,” that is, each can be predicated of every form, including each other, thus each one is also self-predicable. In a careful analysis of this passage, Ackrill<sup>17</sup> has argued that Plato not only recognized the ambiguity

<sup>15</sup> The account of the battle between the gods and the giants occurs at *Sophist*, 246a–49d.

<sup>16</sup> That this alternative is rejected by Theaetetus and not the Eleatic Stranger may be significant since there is good reason to think that, in some way, Rest may combine with Motion. Perhaps since Theaetetus is only a mathematician, he has not thought how the two may be combined.

<sup>17</sup> John L. Ackrill, “Plato and the Copula: ‘Sophist’ 251–259,” in *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics* ed. R. E. Allen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 201–218. But see Lam-

of 'is,' but that he clearly distinguishes statements of identity and statements of attribution from the existential 'is.'

In the text, there is some basis for the claim that Plato distinguishes these various senses of 'is,' and that he also distinguishes between predicates that are "relative" and those that are not. At *Sophist* (255e), the Eleatic Stranger says that among things that exist, "some are always spoken of as being what they are just in themselves, others as being what they are with reference to other things." In the context of the *Sophist*, Existence, Sameness, Motion, and Rest, when predicated of anything, retain the same sense, but Difference, when used as a predicate, is a "relative" predicate for whatever is "different" is different only with reference to something else.

It is clear why Plato would consider Existence, Sameness, and Difference as important kinds, but why did he also choose Rest and Motion? A possible answer is that they were the natural choices given the two views of reality being considered, but another possibility suggests itself: Rest and Motion are important because knowledge depends both upon the stability (rest) of the Form and the knower's apprehension of the Form, which act *moves* the Form from the condition of being unknown to being known. The point is developed in Hypothesis 5 of the *Parmenides* that even a nonexistent entity can move from one condition to another, and this point is explicitly related to knowledge in the Eleatic Stranger's statement (*Sophist*, 248e) that "If knowing is to be acting on something, it follows that what is known must be acted upon by it, and so, on this showing, reality when it is being known by the act of knowledge must, in so far as it is known, be changed owing to being so acted upon." The consequence is that every form, including Motion and Rest, both changes and does not change. It does not change in its essence, but it does change in relation to a knower.

This brings us to the third question: What is the philosophical importance of predication? On the most obvious level, as the Eleatic Stranger points out, discourse itself depends upon the possibility of predicating one form of another. A statement (*logos*) refers to things past, present, or future and connects a noun with a verb. Noun and verbs name, or designate, something, but some combinations of these words make sense (yield a *logos*) while others do not (*Sophist*, 262b–d).

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bertus M. de Rijk, *Plato's "Sophist": A Philosophical Commentary* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1986), 114 for criticism of Ackrill's view.

Examples of combinations that do not make sense are: “Walks, runs, sleeps,” and “Lion, stag, horse.” Neither of these strings of words makes a statement because they “do not signify any action performed or not performed or nature of anything that exists or does not exist” (262c). The Eleatic Stranger points out that even a simple statement such as “‘a man understands’ . . . gives information about facts or events in the present or past or future . . . and gets you somewhere [states something] by weaving together verbs with names” (262d).<sup>18</sup>

Concerning predication, the Eleatic Stranger sets out some of the now familiar elements of Aristotelian logic. Certain combinations of verbs and nouns make a true statement, for example, “Theaetetus sits,” while other combinations make a false statement, for example, “Theaetetus flies.” Since any descriptive statement is about something, it must be either true or false—true if it states things that are (or the facts as they are), false if it states things that are not as if they were. Judgment is said to be a conclusion of thinking that asserts or denies one thing of another, that is, it is predicative.

Plato is giving this account of predication to show that the sophist deals in false statements that are deceptive semblances of true ones. At the same time, he is also showing that some combinations of forms make a true statement, while others do not, and that the test of truth in both cases is whether the statement reflects the structure of the reality to which it refers.

Because there are necessary connections and divisions among concepts, the statement “Existence is different from Sameness” is true, but the statement “Existence is *essentially* the same as Difference” is false; “Justice is a species of virtue” is true, but the statement “Virtue is a species of justice” is false. Every science, including metaphysics, is possible only because there are discernible conceptual connections and divisions in the nature of the subject itself. The scientific intelligence of the philosopher, using due measure, connects the connectible, and predicates the predicable. The *ostensible* purpose of the *Sophist* is to define the sophist. Of equal or more importance is the task of defining the philosopher, a task that is actually completed before the sophist is captured.

The Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus, having concluded that forms do combine, are about to embark on the task of determining which forms

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<sup>18</sup> See Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition* (Amsterdam: North Holland Linguistic Series, 1973), 14–21, for a clear and useful discussion of these passages.

combine. The Eleatic Stranger has been pointing out that only one skilled in grammar will know which letters will blend with which, and that only a musician will know which sounds can blend with which, and then Theaetetus suggests that there must be some special science, “perhaps the most important of all,” needed to determine which forms “blend with” [can be predicated of] which. At this point, in a passage too well marked to be missed, the Eleatic Stranger exclaims, “Good gracious, Theaetetus, have we stumbled unawares upon the free man’s knowledge and, in seeking for the Sophist, chanced to find the philosopher first?” (253c). The evident answer is “Yes” since the Eleatic Stranger immediately gives the description of the dialectician familiar from the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Philebus*:

Dividing according to kinds, not taking the same form for a different one or a different one for the same—is not that the business of the science of dialectic . . . that means knowing how to distinguish, kind by kind, in what ways the several kinds can or cannot combine. . . . And the only person, I imagine, to whom you would allow this mastery of dialectic is the pure and rightful lover of wisdom (*Sophist*, 253d–e).

Plato did not write a dialogue titled *The Philosopher* that he said, perhaps ironically, he intended to write; however, the portrait of the philosopher is drawn in every dialogue, and especially in the *Sophist*. The philosopher is the negation of the sophist. The philosopher is a scientist and a lover of wisdom, dealing not in images, but in realities, a dialectician adept at using the processes of collection and division to discover truth. The philosopher resembles the sophist in the ability to refute others by discovering contradictions, except that the philosopher discovers real, not pseudo, contradictions. The philosopher uses refutation to get rid of false opinions and to purify the soul so it can begin the positive activity of dialectic.

### Conclusion

The not too surprising conclusion is that forms are necessary for knowledge, either of metaphysics or of ethics—or for that matter of any other discipline or state of affairs. This does not, of course, imply that this is *all* that is needed. Experience is necessary, as is openness to what is “there” (being) and the mental capacity to reflect on being. Knowledge

depends upon one's ability to use language, or rather, as Gadamer would say, to recognize that we always already find ourselves in a language game, and have to discover *real* questions.<sup>19</sup> Responding to real questions requires predication, and predication depends upon stability in forms.

We write footnotes to Plato because of the depth and breadth of his understanding. Plato understood, as did Aristotle, that science is of the universal, that order and intelligence is present in the universe and can be apprehended by the human mind, that there is a need for truth and a natural human desire to know, and that the search for truth is both a joy in itself and of use in living a good life.

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### FORMS AND PREDICATION RECONSIDERED

#### SUMMARY

The central questions addressed in this paper are: (1) how are forms related to predication? And (2) what role do forms and predication play in the discovery and articulation of truth? The first section of the paper provides—in broad strokes—a synopsis of Plato's account of forms. The second section considers predication in relation to forms showing that the existence and nature of forms is a necessary condition for predication, and that Plato's account of predication is consistent with, in fact, *anticipates*, Aristotle's treatment of reality in the *Categories*. The conclusion of the paper is that forms and predication are central to philosophical hermeneutics, to the discovery and articulation of truth.

KEYWORDS: forms, predication, truth, Plato, Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics.

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<sup>19</sup> For the hermeneutical importance of asking an *authentic* question, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 356–362.