

understood as dealing expressly with existence. But it follows the argument of 255a4-b6, in which change and rest (C and R) are distinguished from identity and difference on the ground that, while both C and R can be called either identical or different, C cannot be said to rest nor R to change. Thereafter being is distinguished from identity on the ground that C and R can both alike be said to be, but not said to be identical (*tauton*). Throughout both arguments the complements to 'identical' and 'different' are left unspecified. So in the first argument the ascription of identity to C and R is tacitly understood as meaning that C is identical *with* C, and R *with* R, while in the second it is tacitly understood as meaning that they are the same *as each other*. (The use of the singular *tauton* as a joint predicate in 255c1 helps the shift, but is itself illegitimate: the counterpart predicate from the verb 'to be' would be *on*, which cannot be a joint predicate at all.) What the arguments show, if anything, is that for some subject in whose description 'the same' and 'different' can properly occur (sc. with some undeclared complement), neither expression can be replaced in the description by 'changing' or (in the alternative case) by 'at rest'; and that, for some subjects in whose joint description 'being' can properly occur, that expression cannot be replaced by 'identical' (again with some undeclared complement). Patently the argument loses none of its force if we write: 'for some subject in whose description "being" can properly occur (*with some undeclared complement*)'; the argument systematically discounts complements.

XVIII

BEING IN THE *SOPHIST*:
A SYNTACTICAL ENQUIRY*

LESLEY BROWN

Plato's *Sophist* presents a tantalizing challenge to the modern student of philosophy. In its central section we find a Plato whose interests and methods seem at once close to and yet remote from our own. John Ackrill's seminal papers on the *Sophist*,¹ published in the 1950s, emphasized the closeness, and in optimistic vein credited Plato with several successes in conceptual analysis. These articles combine boldness of argument with exceptional clarity and economy of expression, and though subsequent writers have cast doubt on some of Ackrill's claims for the *Sophist* the articles remain essential reading for all students of the dialogue.

Among the most disputed questions in the interpretation of the *Sophist* is that of whether Plato therein marks off different uses of the verb *einai*, 'to be'. This paper addresses one issue under that heading, that of the distinction between the 'complete' and 'incomplete' uses of 'to be', which has usually been associated with the distinction between the 'is' that means 'exists' and the 'is' of predication, that is, the copula.

I

Those who hold that there is a sharp distinction in ancient Greek between the complete and the incomplete *esti* may take one of the following stances *vis-à-vis* the *Sophist*:

© Lesley Brown 1986. Reprinted with permission from *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 4 (1986), 49-70, and the author.

This is a lightly revised version of an essay which was first published in a volume of *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* dedicated to John Ackrill. The new version expands Sects. V(c) and V(d), and makes some reference to recent publications. New footnotes are cued with an asterisk.

¹ 'ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΕΙΔΩΝ', *Bulletin of The Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London* (1955), 31-5; 'Plato and The Copula: *Sophist* 251-9', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 77 (1957), 1-6; both repr. in J. L. Ackrill, *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1997), 72-9 and 80-92.

- (1) The *Sophist* contains a clear statement of the distinction, which is just what is needed to help solve the philosophical problems raised in the dialogue.
- (2) The *Sophist* needs a statement of the distinction (since it contains at crucial points both complete and incomplete uses), but, alas, it lacks it.
- (3) The *Sophist* lacks a statement of the distinction, but this is no ground for lamentation since it would be irrelevant to the philosophical issues addressed by the dialogue.

(3) represents Owen's position in his 1971 article, which has received widespread acceptance.² His central claims are the following:

- (i) that the *Sophist* is an essay in problems of reference and predication [and *not* of existence] and in the incomplete uses of the verb *to be* associated with these and
- (ii) that the argument neither contains nor compels any isolation of an existential verb.

It is on the first claim that this article will focus, though some discussion of the second will naturally be involved. I argue that the distinction between syntactically complete and incomplete uses of the verb *einai* needs careful examination before dispute about Plato's overall position or about individual passages can be fruitfully pursued.³ I distinguish two different ways of characterizing a complete use, and argue that the one that Owen presupposes, in his *Sophist* article, is the less plausible. In its place I offer an alternative characterization of a complete use, whose effect is that the distinction between the syntactically complete and incomplete uses is less sharp than it has traditionally been conceived to be. With the new understanding of *complete*, many centrally important uses of *esti* in the *Sophist* can be reinstated as complete. Provided that we recognize the continuity between the complete and the incomplete (predicative) uses, there will be no harm in regarding the complete use as weakly existential in force. But it is a consequence of the continuity between the two that distinguishing one from the other is not and could not be part of Plato's

² Ch. XVII of this volume.

³ R. Heinaman, 'Being in the *Sophist*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 65/1 (1983), 1–17, disputes Owen's claim that Plato's discussion in the *Sophist* concerns syntactically incomplete uses of *einai*. Though some of his points against Owen are well taken, he appears to accept the traditional account of the distinction, which I shall dispute, and does not pause to define the crucial terms *complete* and *incomplete*. Some of Heinaman's arguments are discussed in Sect. V below. For a critique of Heinaman, see now J. Malcolm, 'Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the *Sophist*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 67 (1985), 162–5.

answer to the problems he inherited from Parmenides. To this extent, then, I accept Owen's thesis, but I believe that a misconception of the nature of the complete use of *esti* led Owen to the implausible views that the problems of the *Sophist* do not concern existence and that the central uses of *esti* in the dialogue are to be construed as incomplete.

II

In this section I outline those parts of Owen's position which are relevant to my discussion. Those familiar with his paper may proceed direct to Section III.

Owen opens with a rehearsal of some—up to that time—accepted commonplaces (416–18). These include two theses about the Greek language and a third about the *Sophist*. The theses about Greek are

(a) a distinction between two syntactically distinct uses of the verb *to be*: a complete, substantive use in which it determines a one-place predicate, and an incomplete use determining a two-place predicate;

(b) answering to the syntactic distinction, a semantic one: in its substantive, complete, use the verb signifies *exist*; in its incomplete use it is the copula or identity sign.

(c) The commonplace about the *Sophist* is that here Plato marks off the first use of *esti*—complete, existential—from its other, incomplete uses, and similarly for the negative construction represented by *to mē on*; for (the commonplace runs) the problems which dominate the central arguments of the *Sophist* are existence problems, so that disentangling the different functions of the verb *to be* is a proper step to identifying and resolving them.

Owen's paper confines its attack to commonplace (c); he explicitly accepts the first point, the syntactic distinction.⁴ In place of (c), Owen's central theses include the two quoted above in Section I. He accepts that there is a distinction (which he does not define) between a complete and an incomplete *esti*, but argues that Plato's interest in the *Sophist* is exclusively in the incomplete uses.

⁴ 'The general syntactic claim will not come into question: we can accept a distinction between the verb's complete and incomplete uses provided we are wary of confusing the first with elliptical occurrences of the second' (p. 417 above). Thus Owen accepts that *esti* has complete uses, but he argues that putative candidates in *Sph.* are incomplete elliptical. His attitude to the second commonplace, the semantic distinction, is not clear from the article, for he does not make clear what semantic force (whether existential or some other) a 'complete' use of *esti* would have.

Owen's reasoning for the desirability of his interpretation can be reduced to four main steps. (1) It is agreed on all hands that the troublesome concept Not-being or *to mē on*, whose discussion was forbidden by Parmenides' strictures, and which gave rise to a clutch of paradoxes at the beginning of the central section (236–41), is legitimized in the following way. Far from being disallowed as not true of anything (as had at first appeared) *to mē on* is reinstated as true of everything, for everything *is not* countless other things. Not-being is thus equated with difference and shown to be one of the all-pervasive kinds which occupy so much of the central section of the *Sophist*. Everything, then, *is not* countless other things: the vindication of *to mē on* is squarely of its incomplete use—not being is always not being something or other: there is no trace of a legitimization of not-being as a negative existential. (2) That being so, it would be feeble of Plato to raise puzzles about not-being in its other, complete, use, given that his 'solution' ignores such a use. (3) It would be worse still if we should find him explicitly pointing to such a distinction among 'ises', when (as established at step (1)), he forgets or suppresses the distinction as applied to 'is not'. (4) What is more, Plato explicitly tells us that (in Owen's words) 'any light thrown on either being or not-being will equally illuminate the other' (p. 422). This dictum, which he dubbed the Parity Assumption, Owen derived from 250e, and made it a governing assumption of his interpretation. Now it is accepted (step (1)) that the only illumination cast on not-being, on 'is not', is on its incomplete use: by the Parity Assumption, then, we should expect to find only the incomplete use (or uses) of 'is' illustrated. So not only would it be unfortunate if Plato were to allow a use of 'is' while disallowing the corresponding use of 'is not', here he explicitly tells us (if we press the so-called Parity Assumption) that he will not do so.

So much, then, for the broad canvas of Owen's argument, which might be described as tailoring Plato's problem to fit the solution offered. In addition, of course, Owen examines the text passage by passage, hoping to show that in each case where a complete or existential 'is' had been assumed, or argued for, an incomplete 'is' was either mandatory or at least possible. Some of these passages I review in Section V below.

III

First a closer look at the complete-incomplete use distinction. Neither of the pair of terms is explicitly defined by Owen, though he uses the terms *one-place* and *two-place* predicate as apparently equivalent to *complete*

and *incomplete* (see (a) in Section II above).⁵ I therefore take as the definition of an incomplete use that in McDowell's commentary on *Theaetetus*,⁶ which seems to state in an admirably clear and precise way what Owen intended by his use of the term: 'an *incomplete* use, i.e. a use in which a subject expression and the appropriate form of the verb requires a complement in order to constitute a complete sentence, though in an elliptical sentence the complement may be omitted'.

Two crucial points emerge: (1) in an incomplete use a complement is *required*, and (2) an 'is' lacking an explicit complement may yet be an incomplete 'is'. In such a case, presumably, the hearer or reader has not correctly understood the sentence unless he is able to supply the missing complement. A clear example of such a use occurs at *Sophist* 233c6–8 in the course of the attempt to define the sophist as an image-maker who imparts false beliefs to his pupils. Sophists, says the Eleatic Stranger, appear to their disciples to be wise in all things: *panta ara sophoi tois mathētais phainontai*. (*Theaetetus*: Yes, indeed.) *ouk ontes ge*: though they are not [wise]. Here the reader has not understood the phrase *ouk ontes ge* unless he supplies *sophoi*, wise, from two lines before. Let us acknowledge the existence of such uses and dub them IE, for incomplete elliptical. How important and frequent they are in the *Sophist* remains to be seen (Section V).

How should we characterize a *complete* use? I offer two possibilities: a complete use of *esti* is

- (C1) a use which neither has nor allows a complement;
- (C2) a use where there is no complement (explicit or elided) but which allows a complement.

I believe that commentators have, implicitly or explicitly, assumed a C1 characterization of *complete*, but that C2 is preferable.

I illustrate the difference between the two, and in particular the meaning of 'allows a complement', with a comparison with verbs other than the verb *to be*. (Naturally the definitions C1 and C2, with their reference to a complement, cannot be applied directly to other verbs, but I hope the point of the comparison will be obvious.) Consider these pairs of sentences:

- (1a) Jane is growing tomatoes.
- (1b) Jane is growing.

⁵ Owen also employs the contrast between a 'substantive' and a 'connective' use. I believe this terminology is misleading, for the complete use (as I define it) is *potentially* connective, and the incomplete use is often *substantive*, if by this is meant that it can have semantic force over and above its role as a copula (see Sect. IV, p. 465).

⁶ J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), 118.

(2a) Jane is teaching French.

(2b) Jane is teaching.

It is, I hope, uncontroversial to say that in (1a) we have a transitive, in (1b) an intransitive, use of 'is growing'; equally that (1a) contains a two-place or dyadic use, (1b) a one-place or monadic use. Since this latter terminology is standardly used to explicate the incomplete-complete distinction it would be natural to say that (1a) contains an incomplete, (1b) a complete, use of 'is growing', between which there is a sharp syntactic and semantic distinction. Pair (2) is clearly rather different, in the following ways (*inter alia*): (i) while (1a) neither entails nor is entailed by (1b), (2a) does entail (2b); (ii) while (2b) entails 'Jane is teaching something', (1b) does not entail 'Jane is growing something'; (iii) (a corollary of (ii)) one who heard (1b) and asked 'growing what?' would reveal misunderstanding of (1b), while the follow-up question to (2b), 'teaching what?', is perfectly proper. Though (2b), like (1b), contains an intransitive, complete use of its verb (for 'is teaching' in (2b) is certainly not elliptical, though the use no doubt derives from (2a)-type uses), it is far closer semantically to its transitive, incomplete partner than (1b) is to its partner.

Returning to the rival characterizations, C1 and C2, of a complete *esti*, the meaning of 'allows a complement' is, I hope, clear from these analogies: just as 'is teaching' in (2b) is complete but allows an object (it would not be a solecism to ask 'is teaching what?'), so a C2 complete *esti* is one that allows a complement, that is, it is not a solecism to ask 'is what?' An incomplete and a C2 complete *esti* would bear a closeness analogous to that between the uses of 'is teaching' in pair (2). Many other verbs have complete and incomplete uses like those in pair (2): *fight*, *eat*, *breathe*. As Kenny has shown,⁷ verbs, unlike relations, can exhibit variable polyadicity; it is therefore misleading to assimilate verbs to relations and characterize their uses as one-place, two-place, etc. If we compare the Greek verb *to be* with verbs of variable polyadicity, we shall avoid the pitfalls that arise from this practice.⁸ My suggestion, then, is that the complete *esti* should be characterized as C2 rather than C1, that is, as complete but allowing further completion.

That Owen understood C1 as his characterization of 'complete' is shown

⁷ A. Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (London, 1963), ch. vii. I am indebted to Kenny's chapter, and to discussions with Michael Woods, for suggesting an account of *einai* along the lines of Kenny's verbs of variable polyadicity. Kenny correctly insists that sentences such as 'Plato taught' are not elliptical.

⁸ Witness, for instance, M. Matthen, 'Greek Ontology and the "Is" of Truth', *Phronesis*, 28 (1983), 122: 'Let us call a use of "is" *monadic* if it must be completed by exactly one term to form a sentence, *dyadic* if it requires exactly two.' Such regimentation fails to do justice to the nature of verbs in general, and of *einai* in particular.

by his discussion of 259a6–8, one of the passages where Plato uses *esti* without explicit complement, and offers the paraphrase or analysis *dia metechein tou ontos*, 'because it shares in being'. It was the glossing of 'is' by 'shares in being' that earlier commentators (e.g. Ackrill⁹) had taken to be Plato's way of marking off the existential *esti* from other uses of *esti*, which do not receive this paraphrase. In several places in the *Sophist* it is said of one kind or another that it is, because it shares in being, and it was perhaps natural to see this as marking off an existential, complete use. (These passages are discussed in Section V(c) below). At 259a6–8 the Eleatic Stranger sums up his argument about the Different thus: partaking in being, it is by virtue of that partaking—but not the thing of which it partakes but something different:

το μὲν ἕτερον μετασχὼν τοῦ ὄντος ἔστι μὲν διὰ ταύτην τὴν μέθεξιν, οὐ μὴν ἐκεῖνό γε οὐ μετέσχευ ἄλλ' ἕτερον.

'The verb in the last clause' (Owen continues—namely 'but not the thing . . .') 'must be supplied from its predecessor, and the verb supplied is the incomplete "is"' (p. 422).

Owen argues that since a subsequent clause adds a completion, the verb in the clause to which it is added cannot be complete. And this piece of reasoning shows that Owen must understand by a 'complete' use one which (not only does not require but also) *does not allow* further completion. The success of Owen's argument at this point thus depends on understanding 'complete' as C1. If we define it, as I shall argue that we should, as C2, it will not follow from the fact that a completion is added in the second clause that the verb in the first was not complete, so that we could read 259a6's first clause as containing a complete *is* (glossed as *metechei tou ontos*) notwithstanding that the second clause promptly specifies what *heteron* is, or rather, is not. Compare 'My sister is still teaching, but not French these days, only Spanish'.

The effect of understanding the complete *esti* as C2 rather than C1 is that the distinction between the incomplete and complete uses is far less striking and clear-cut.^{9*} In suggesting that it should be so understood, I take issue not only with Owen but also with Vlastos, who in his important

⁹ 'Plato and the Copula', 82.

^{9*} N. White, *Plato: Sophist* (Indianapolis, 1993), p. xxiii, uses the terms *uncomplemented v. complemented* uses of 'is', where Owen (whom I have followed) uses *complete v. incomplete*. White (p. xxvii) shares my view that for Plato there is no sharp distinction between the two uses. But I have reservations about his claim that complemented being ('is . . .') stands to uncomplemented being ('is' *tout court*) as 'heavy, in comparison to X' stands to 'heavy' (*tout court*), at least in so far as it seems to suggest that the uncomplemented use of 'is' is prior in understanding to the complemented use.

article 'A Metaphysical Paradox'¹⁰ writes of 'the difference between the "is" in *Troy is famous* and in *Troy is*', implicit knowledge of which 'even a Greek child would have had'. (Vlastos's chief interest is in the question how we should understand Plato's descriptions of the forms as *ontōs on*, 'really real', and so forth; he insists that these uses of 'to be' are to be sharply distinguished from those in which 'to be' means 'to exist'.) His choice of example suggests that he takes as one aspect of the distinction the fact (presumably supposed to be well known to the Greek child) that

- (3a) Troy is famous does not entail
- (3b) Troy is, hence, is consistent with
- (3c) Troy is not (i.e. does not exist).

Vlastos's remarks suggest that he believes there is a sharp syntactic and semantic distinction waiting to be articulated, such that only a paradox-monger could trade on an equivocation between them. I discuss this further in the next section, but remark here on a difficulty which must strike all readers of the *Sophist*: if so sharp a distinction existed (as sharp as that between the use of 'is growing' in (1a) and (1b)) and if, as Vlastos insists, Plato faithfully *observed* it, then the *Sophist* of all places was the dialogue where the distinction ought to have been explicitly stated. But not only does Plato *not*, according to present consensus, explicitly mark the distinction, he does *not even observe* it to the extent of allowing that a sentence of form (3a) can be true while one of form (3b) is false. He nowhere allows that *X is F* does not entail *X is* but is consistent with *X is not*. Indeed he allows no role to the complete *is not*, and this is what prompted Owen to deny that Plato's problem concerned existence (i.e. the complete *esti*) at all, for if it had done, Plato could not have failed to delineate both the 'is' of existence and the 'is not' of non-existence. But if, as I shall suggest, the syntactic distinction (at least) is not as sharp and clear-cut as Vlastos assumes, then Plato's failure to exploit it is more explicable.¹¹

IV

But it may be claimed that we *do* find paradox-mongers exploiting precisely this equivocation on the two distinct *estis*. I now consider the little

¹⁰ G. Vlastos, 'A Metaphysical Paradox', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 39 (1965-6), 5-19; repr. in *Platonic Studies*, 1st edn. (Princeton, 1973), 47. Vlastos agrees with Owen that the *Sophist* does not contain an explicit statement of the distinction between the 'is' of existence and other uses of 'is'.

¹¹ In Sect. V(d) below I concede that the proof at 255c-d does invoke a distinction between the complete and incomplete uses of *einai*, but, though it can be used for that purpose, it did not form a major plank in Plato's answer to Parmenides.

sophism at *Euthydemus* 283c-d. Socrates and his friends want young Kleinias to get an education, that is, they want him to become wise, which he now is not. So, they are told,

- (1) 'Ἦμεῖς δέ, ἔφη, βούλεσθε γενέσθαι αὐτὸν σοφόν, ἀμαθὴ δὲ μὴ εἶναι.
- (2) Οὐκοῦν ὃς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, βούλεσθε αὐτὸν γενέσθαι, ὃς δ' ἔστι νῦν, μηκέτ' εἶναι.
- (3) Ἐπεὶ βούλεσθε αὐτὸν ὃς νῦν ἔστιν μηκέτι εἶναι, βούλεσθε αὐτόν, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἀπολωλέναι.
- (1) 'You want him to become wise, and not to be ignorant,' he said.
- (2) 'You want him to become what he is not, and to be no longer what he is now.'
- (3) 'Since you want him, who is now, to be no longer, you want to destroy him apparently!'

A standard diagnosis of the fallacy would be to see an *equivocation on esti*: in (2), which is *true*, it is the two-place copula; in the *false* protasis of (3), it is the one-place existential. But the correct diagnosis is different; it is that the fallacy depends on a *syntactic ambiguity* in the clauses *hos esti nun* and *hos nun estin*. In (2) it means '(you want him no longer to be) *what he now is*', where *hos* is the equivalent of *hoios* and the complement of *estin*. But in (3), 'you want him, *who now is*, no longer to be' *hos nun esti* is a relative clause dependent on *auton*; *hos* is the subject of *esti* which is left without a complement, as is the infinitive *einai*. Now it is true that the effect of lopping off the complement of *einai* is to make 'you want him no longer to be alive', or '... to exist' a natural translation. But I do not think we are forced to postulate a radically different use of 'is' or 'be' here.

To show this I suggest the following, parallel, argument. Socrates and his friends try to rescue a child from a smoke-filled room; that is, they want him no longer to breathe what he is now breathing (namely smoke). The wily sophists exclaim 'You want him no longer to be breathing what he's now breathing'—(Yes)—'So you want him, who is now breathing, no longer to be breathing'. Once again Socrates and friends want the child to die—they want him no longer to be breathing.

Now no one, I think, would try to argue that the fallacy involved a shift in uses of the verb 'breathe', simply because in one clause an object is specified and in another it is not. Whenever 'X is breathing' is true, it will also be true that X is breathing something—oxygen normally. Conversely 'X is not breathing' will normally mean the same as 'X is not breathing anything'. But for all that, we should not say either that 'X is breathing' is elliptical, or that the use of the verb where it has an object is significantly different from the use where it has no object. Of course, that in itself is a difference, but not involving an important shift in the verb's sense. And exactly the same may be said of the original argument with the verb *to be*:

lopping off the complement produces a falsehood but need not be seen as yielding a sharply different ('one-place, existential') use of *esti*. Rather, 'They want him not to be' will be equivalent to 'They want him not to be anything at all', just as 'They want him not to breathe' will be equivalent to 'They want him not to breathe anything at all'. Contrast the lopping off of the object in 'You want her to stop growing tomatoes', which yields 'You want her to stop growing': here the effect of lopping off the object is to produce a sharply different use of the verb.

The sophism in the *Euthydemus*, then, need not be understood as relying on an illicit shift between two uses of the verb *to be* which are syntactically and semantically distinct. The inference from *X is not F* to *X is not* (the move which results from the change in role of the subordinate clause in the sophist's argument) is illicit whether the complete *is* is understood as C1 or as C2, that is, whether or not a 'new' use results. It is only in connection with an inference from *X is F* to *X is* that the two characterizations give divergent answers: with a C2 use, the inference is as straightforward as that from (2a) to (2b), while a more complex story has to be told if a C1 use is envisaged. So the *Euthydemus* passage cannot be used as evidence for a sharp syntactic-semantic distinction known implicitly to all Greek speakers and exploitable by paradox-mongers. For all that that little argument shows, the continuity between the complete and the incomplete *esti* is as strong as that between complete and incomplete uses of the variably polyadic verbs listed above (p. 460).

It is, I believe, this continuity between the apparently complete and the incomplete use of *esti*, *on*, etc. in the *Sophist* that has led Owen and others to claim that (contrary to appearances) only incomplete uses play any important role in the dialogue, and to interpret those uses without explicit complements (which I read as C2 complete) as incomplete but elliptical. They may urge that this IE use has been found in a very important role elsewhere in Plato, in his discussion of the Form *F* and the many *F*s, where claims about the being of the Form and the being-cum-not-being of the many *F*s require us to supply a complement: the Form *F* is perfectly, unqualifiedly [*F*], the many *F*s are and are not [*F*].¹² If the IE use is well attested and important elsewhere in Plato, why should I balk at Owen's detection of it in the *Sophist*?

My answer is this: that if we take the notion of an ellipse seriously,

¹² This way of understanding claims about the being of the forms derives from Vlastos's influential articles 'A Metaphysical Paradox' and 'Degrees of Reality in Plato'; repr. in *Platonic Studies*. Though I have reservations about aspects of Vlastos's position (see p. 462 above and Sect. V(b) below), accepting it will not affect my argument that the *Sph.* passages discussed in Sect. V(c) below are *not* elliptical.

we may detect an ellipse in the assertion that *X is* only where the context supplies the elided complement. In English these uses are extremely common: 'Is he tall? Yes, he is', 'Who is coming? Jane is'. But such 'everyday' ellipses are far from commonplace in ancient Greek.¹³ Only in a narrow range of contexts do we find a true ellipse of the complement after 'is', and these are the well-known contrasts, between being and becoming (*F*); between being and merely seeming (*F*); or the comparison between a thing's *being* so and so, and what it is *said* by some speaker or *logos* to be. In all of these cases the verb *to be* is more than the mere copula, but gets a meaning of its own by contrast with its partner: *becoming*, *appearing*, etc. We should be chary of detecting an ellipse unless the context supplies it or gives us reason to look for one. And though this is sometimes the case in key passages in the *Sophist*, there are very many other central passages which both Owen and Frede¹⁴ have read as incomplete uses where no elided complement can be supplied from the context. These are, I submit, best understood as what I have called C2 complete uses.¹⁵

V

I now turn to the *Sophist* and examine selected parts of the central section (236–64) in the light of the foregoing discussion.

(a) *The Paradoxes of Not-Being* (to *mē on*): 236–41

Though the topic gets introduced by the description of the sophist as a pedlar in illusions and falsehood—both of which seem to call for description involving *to mē on*—the scrutiny of the phrase that follows does not

¹³ It appears that in Plato, at least, the interlocutor's reply *esti* never echoes the *mere* copula; the plain *esti*, as opposed to the very frequent *esti tauta* ('that's so'), may mean 'it is possible' (*Cratylus* 430c1; *Sph.* 225a7). An interesting case, where what we have is the *is* of definition and not the plain copula, is Theaetetus 152b12: ΣΩ. Τὸ δέ γε "φαίνεται" αἰσθάνεσθαι ἔστιν; ΘΕΑΙ. Ἔστιν γάρ.

¹⁴ M. Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage*, *Hypomnemata* 18 (1967), 1–99.

¹⁵ C. H. Kahn, *The Verb 'Be' in Ancient Greek* (Dordrecht, 1973), 240, draws the syntactic distinction between an absolute and a predicative construction of the verb *be*. (His well-known thesis is that the absolute construction of *einai* by no means always bears an existential meaning; indeed he suggests the Greeks did not have our notion of existence.) The absolute construction is defined as one where 'there is no nominal or locative predicate and no other complement such as the possessive dative, nor even an adverb of manner. An absolute construction may however admit adverbs of time'. In a later article ('Some Philosophical Uses of "To Be" in Plato', *Phronesis*, 26 (1981), 131 n. 20) he emends the above to allow expressions such as *to pantelōs on* to count as absolute, adding 'perhaps the notion of an absolute construction has a clear sense only by contrast with the nominal and locative copula, and does not admit of more precise definition'.

confine itself to a scrutiny of its role in the description of images and falsehood. Rather the phrase *to mē on* itself comes under scrutiny in the opening section of the paradoxes, 237b–239c: what can we apply it to? and what can be applied to it?—with the paradoxical result that it has no application, nor can anything that is—number, for example—be applied to it. So it is unsayable, unthinkable, etc.—but in so saying we contradict ourselves—we apply being and number to it.

Confining my attention to this opening paradox (237b–239c, labelled stages i–iii by Owen (p. 431)), I argue for understanding *to mē on* as a C2 complete use, and proceed by examining Owen's position and Heinaman's arguments against Owen. In brief, Owen claims that *to mē on*, here equated with *to mēdamōs on* (237b7; cf. c2) cannot mean the non-existent, and cannot be a complete use, but means 'that which isn't anything at all', that is, that which for no *F* is *F* (see below). Heinaman counters that it cannot mean the latter but must mean 'the non-existent', and must be a complete use. I argue that their shared assumption, that we must choose between the two interpretations, depends on a faulty understanding of the contrast, and that no such choice is necessary if *to mē on* represents the negation of a C2 complete use, for as such it will be equivalent to 'that which isn't anything at all' without being elliptical or incomplete. If we take *to mē on* to be the negation of a C2 complete *esti*, we can understand it as *both* 'that which isn't anything at all' and 'the non-existent' and we are not forced to treat these as rival interpretations.

First, Owen's position: the paradoxes, he writes, arise from the assumption that *to mē on* is the *contrary* of *to on* (n. 18); that is, they treat the phrase *to mē on* as one that attempts to pick out a subject 'which for every predicate *F* is not *F*'. Following Heinaman, let us call this 'that which is predicatively nothing'.¹⁶ We may agree with Owen that the paradox, as sketched two paragraphs above, proceeds by stipulating that nothing that is may be applied to what is not (*to mē on*), nor may the latter expression apply to anything that is (238a7–8, 237c7–8), which amounts to treating *to mē on* as that which isn't anything at all, that of which no statement of the

form 'It is . . .' is true.¹⁷ But we can accept this point and still read *to mē on* as a C2 complete use, for, as I have argued in Section IV, the negation of the C2 complete *esti* is equivalent to 'is not anything at all'. And there are good reasons for doing this, and for saying that *pro tanto* the paradox is about *to mē on* in the sense of the non-existent. For (i) when a puzzle is raised about the applicability of the term *to mē on*, about whether *to mē on* can be thought about, etc., it is natural to take this as an early member of that long-lived and far-flung family of puzzles about how one can think of, speak of, or refer to the non-existent. Not the earliest, of course: and in recalling Parmenides we have another reason to expect a puzzle about non-existence. (ii) When in the course of the argument it is said that nothing that is, no *on*, can be applied to *to mē on*, with the result that number, which is *in primis* an *on*, cannot be applied to it (238a7–b1), what is here said about number is surely that it is a thing that is, i.e. exists, not that it is [some unspecified complement], which is how the incomplete reading would have to take it if it is to treat *on* and *mē on* in the same way.

Heinaman attacks this interpretation of *to mē on* as what is predicatively nothing, correctly pointing out that it does not fit 240e.¹⁸ His argument does indeed show that Owen's interpretation of *to mē on* and *to mēdamōs on* as *that which is predicatively nothing* does not fit the 240 passage, but Heinaman concludes that Owen's reading must be wrong *passim* and that the only alternative is to read *to mē on* as the non-existent.¹⁹

But while Heinaman does show that Owen cannot claim support for his interpretation of *to mē on* at 237 from the 240 passage, he, like Owen, is assuming that the phrase has the same role in the two passages, which need not and indeed cannot be so.²⁰ In fact Heinaman's own candidate, 'the

¹⁷ See McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus*, 200, for this formulation.

¹⁸ I here abbreviate Heinaman's argument ('Being in the *Sophist*', 4–6): at 240e false judgement is described as (a) one which judges *pōs einai ta mē onta* (or, the line before, *ta mēdamōs onta*), (b) one which judges *mēdamōs einai ta pantōs onta* (describing positive and negative false judgements respectively). If *ta mē onta* (= *ta mēdamōs onta*) = that which is predicatively nothing, then by parity of reasoning *ta pantōs onta* would have to be things which are predicatively everything, an absurdity.

¹⁹ Heinaman ('Being in the *Sophist*', 20) dismisses another possibility, the veridical *esti*. I agree that *to mē on* and *to mēdamōs on* in 237–9 cannot consistently be read as veridical, in spite of the introduction of the topic of not-being at 236e via the mention of falsehood, and the allusion at 237a3–4 to the characterization of false speaking as *legein to mē on*; cf. 260c3–4.

²⁰ Malcolm, 'Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the *Sophist*', 164 n. 3, concedes that he was wrong to invoke the 240e passage in support of his interpretation of *to mēdamōs on* as absolute (predicative) non-being. He continues to defend the latter as an interpretation of 237–9; my only disagreement with him is over his insistence that this is to be distinguished from an interpretation in terms of non-existence.

¹⁶ Cf. J. Malcolm, 'Plato's Analysis of τὸ ὄν and τὸ μὴ ὄν in the *Sophist*', *Phronesis*, 7 (1967), 137: '[to mē on, here = to mēdamōs on] may be read, literally, as "that which "is not" in all possible respects' or 'that which in no way at all may be said to be. . . . On this reading to mēdamōs on is stronger than "non-existence".' I take it that what Malcolm means is this: Plato refuses to allow anything the description *to mēdamōs on*, while he would have had to allow that, for example, Pegasus qualifies for the description 'non-existent'. But this shows only that *to mēdamōs on* is 'stronger than' our notion 'non-existent'. It remains possible, and indeed likely, that Plato's failure to make the 'Pegasus point' is due not to a lack of interest in 'existence problems' (as Owen would have it), but to the fact that he cannot distinguish non-existence from not being anything at all.

non-existent', fits 240e no better than Owen's, while in the original paradox (Owen's i-iii) we do not need to choose between them. We can say both (A) that a complete (C2) use figures in that paradox and (B) that the heart of the paradox is an understanding of *to mē on* as that which isn't anything at all. This yields a reading which is more satisfying both than Owen's which denies (A) and Heinaman's which denies (B). And if it be objected that on this reading we can draw no distinction, on Plato's behalf, between the non-existent and that which isn't anything at all, I reply that this is merely to be faithful to Plato. Had the possibility of the distinction been implicit in his knowledge of Greek, his failure to avail himself of it (by saying that 'does not exist' has a legitimate application, while 'isn't anything at all' has none) would be inexplicable. However we should understand his 'solution' to the paradox concerning Not-being,²¹ it is clear that it dismisses as a wholly absurd notion that Not-being which is the simple *negation* of the complete *X is*,²² allowing only *X is different from being* and *X is not F*, [G, etc.] as acceptable.²³ As noted above (in Section II), it was because Plato's *solution* does not countenance the negation of the complete *esti* that Owen reconstructed the original *problem* to exclude it. But, as I have argued, we can preserve Owen's insight that the original paradox gets its force by treating *to mē on* as 'that which isn't anything at all' within a framework of seeing it as a (C2) complete use; and, as I am about to argue, the complete use is prominent also in the sequel to the paradoxes.²⁴

²¹ A question too complex to be considered here. For some recent discussions, see D. Keyt, 'Plato on Falsity', in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and R. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument*, (Phronesis, suppl. vol. 1) (Assen, 1973), 285-305; F. A. Lewis, 'Plato on Not', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 9 (1976), 89-115; J. McDowell, 'Falsehood and Not-Being', in M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (eds.), *Language and Logos* (Cambridge, 1982); D. Bostock, 'Plato on "Is Not"', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 2 (1984), 89-119; Job van Eck, 'Falsity without Negative Predication: On *Sophistes* 255e-263d', *Phronesis*, 40 (1995), 20-47.

²² 258e7-259a1.

²³ For the former, *X is different from being*, see 256d5-8, d11-e2; for the latter, *X is not F*, G, etc.: this may be either a negative identity-statement or a negative predication. Whether and how Plato distinguishes these is a vexed question, since he appears to have but one analysis, '*X is different from F*'. For *denials of identity*, see 257a3-5, but 256e6 may mean to include *negative predications* as well as negative identities in the 'countless not being with respect to each form', i.e. the countless truths of the form '*K is not ...*'.

²⁴ The puzzle that immediately follows, 239d-240c, where an image is defined as that which *οὐκ ὂν ὄντως ἐστὶν ὄντως ἢν λέγομεν εἰκόνα* ('something which is not really but really is what we call an image'), does seem to contain (elliptical) incomplete uses of *esti* and cognates. That this is so is shown by the context: the contrast between the genuine, *alēthinos* (e.g. horse), and the thing that is like, *εἰκός*, but isn't really (a horse). The difficulty with this little puzzle is to see how it could be thought to engender paradox once the missing complements are supplied.

*

(b) *The Theories about Being (to on)*, 242-50

I shall discuss this section briefly and dogmatically, extracting some points important to my thesis.²⁵ (1) Plato discusses philosophers who had something to say about being (*to on*, or *ousia*; used interchangeably, e.g. compare 248c2 with 247d6). The assertions he ascribes to them (that hot and cold are, that only one thing is, that only that which offers resistance to touch is, etc.) must for the most part be construed as containing syntactically complete uses of *esti*. (2) Most of the theories discussed are about *what there is*, and most of the relevant uses of *einai* look exceedingly like existentials, and call for the translation *exists* (see e.g. 246a10, 247b1, e3). (3) However, while the theories of the dualists, monists, and materialists are naturally described as theories about what exists, about what there (really) is, in that each can be seen as offering a reductive account of all existents to their favoured candidate(s), the Idealist theory, ascribed to 'Friends of the Forms' is *rather different*. In allowing *ousia* only to forms, and relegating perceptible, changeable objects to the status of *genesis*, it is *not* reducing all things to forms, but rather according forms a special status among things that exist. Thus Plato does not hesitate to include among theories of *to on both* theories about what exists *and* the 'Friends of the Forms' theory about what is real. This casts further doubt on Vlastos's claim (referred to above, p. 462) that Plato observed a sharp distinction between the two senses of *esti*. (4) In places (e.g. 246e-247b) the argument uses the absolute *einai* interchangeably with *einai ti*, to be something, which is just what is to be expected if the former is a C2 complete use (as illustrated in Section III). (5) Though the discussion makes heavy use of the complete *esti*, (1), which is by and large to be understood as existential, (2), one of Plato's chief interests in this whole section is in scrutinizing the role of a predicate expression, preparatory to his discussion of the late-learners' difficulty. (The late-learners refuse to admit statements which predicate one thing of another (an *other*)—they won't allow you to say that a man is good or to apply anything except 'man' to man. And this position, the refusal to take seriously the role of a predicate expression, lies behind the fallacious refutation of the dualists at 243d-244a; cf. 250a-e.) The predicate expression chosen for scrutiny, *esti*, is to that extent representative of all predicates, and Plato need not be interested in pursuing the complete *esti* for its own sake, but in order to draw some morals about the correct understanding of an ascription of one thing to another. Once again

²⁵ The whole section on theories of being is virtually ignored by Owen. Malcolm, 'Plato's Analysis of *τὸ ὂν* and *τὸ μὴ ὂν* in the *Sophist*', holds that in this section *to on*, *einai*, etc. may but need not be taken as complete and therefore existential.

† Ne Vlastos nè Lesley vedono che Pl. qui è in R.p. e parla proprio di (grandi di) esistenza.

we can accept this without having to accept that the complete *esti* has no role in this section. It is important for what follows that we have in this section just what we seem to have: theories about what is, where that 'is' is a complete use.^{25*}

(c) *The Communion of Kinds* (252–9)

We have finally arrived at the heart of the *Sophist*, the section in which five *megista genē*, greatest kinds, are identified and proved to be distinct from one another, and their interrelations plotted. Our path lies through a minefield of difficulties, which cannot be here discussed. I shall concentrate my attention on those passages where Plato asserts of some form or other that it *esti dia to metechain tou ontos*, that it is because (or, in that) it shares in being, and argue for a traditional understanding of them as containing complete uses.

Before turning to these, I sketch briefly the aims and achievements of the important section 255e–256e, a section in which Ackrill claimed that Plato distinguishes the 'is' of identity from the 'is' of predication (as well as the 'is' of existence, which I discuss below). Like Owen, I believe that Ackrill was right to hold that this stretch of argument aims to distinguish predications from identity-statements, but wrong to say that Plato's way of doing this is to distinguish two uses or meanings of 'is'; I argue for this in the next paragraph. The section contains four groups of statements about change, tracing the connections between change and the four other kinds, rest (*stasis*), the same, different, and being. I return shortly below to the first group, which discusses change and rest, and which contains the claim that change is, because it shares in being.

The remaining three groups all follow the same pattern. Starting with change and the same, it is argued (1) change is different from the same, so (2) change is not the same but (3) change is the same, because (4) change shares in the same. The apparent contradiction in the conjunction of (2) and (3) is mirrored in what follows with 'change is different and is not different' (256c8), and finally 'change is being and is not being' (256d8–9). Plato makes the Stranger explain away the apparent contradiction in (2) and (3) by saying (256a11–12) that 'when we said [it is] the same and

not the same, we were not talking in the same way', i.e. by pointing to an ambiguity. Now many scholars read Plato here as distinguishing an 'is' of identity in (2) *change is not the same*—i.e. change is not the kind *sameness* (as proved earlier at 255a–b), from the 'is' of predication, the copula, in (3) *change is the same*.²⁶ But a grave difficulty for this interpretation is that in the vital lines explaining the ambiguity (256a10–b4), Plato does not even use the verb to be, let alone draw attention to it (though it has to be supplied in the sentence, as my translation indicates). However, as Owen noted (n. 47), we may and should credit Plato with distinguishing predications from statements of identity in this section, even though the text does not allow us to credit him with a distinction between an alleged 'is' of identity and one of predication.^{26*} Distinguishing predications from statements of identity is just what is needed to defuse the late-learners' difficulty of 251a–c, for they, we are told, did not allow one to say that a man is good, but only that the good is good and the man is a man. They did not understand how a thing can be what it also is not, but in discussing the communion of kinds Plato shows how even a kind can be (predicatively) what it is not (i.e. what it is not the same as, what it is different from). Solving this difficulty does not require distinguishing an 'is' of identity from an 'is' of predication; it is sufficient for Plato to do what he here does, viz. draw the distinction between a predication and a statement of identity without 'pinning the blame' on the verb to be.

After that excursus into passages where the incomplete 'is' is found, I now turn to the locution *esti dia to metechain tou ontos* (it is, because it shares in being). I shall argue that it does offer an analysis of a complete *esti*. I fully accept, however, two important points. The first is that a major aim of this section (as just described) is the distinction of predications from identity-statements, each of which contains an *incomplete* 'is'. The second is that, though the phrase *dia to metechain tou ontos* (because of sharing in being) analyses a complete 'is', this use is not seen as importantly distinct from incomplete uses of 'is'. Indeed, this is part of my thesis about

²⁶ Ackrill, 'Plato and the Copula', 82–4, followed by Vlastos, 'An Ambiguity in the *Sophist*', in *Platonic Studies*, 288 n. 34. Doubters include Owen, Ch. XVII, n. 46; pp. 445–6; F. A. Lewis, 'Did Plato Discover the *Estin* of Identity?', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 8 (1975), 113–43; Bostock, 'Plato on "Is Not"'.
^{26*} Where does Plato locate the ambiguity, if not in the 'is'? Two answers suggest themselves: (i) he notes that the term following the 'is' is an adjective in (3), i.e. used predicatively, but an abstract noun in (2) or (ii) he notes that the sentence form 'A is (not) B' allows interpretation both as a predication and as an identity-sentence, without pinning the ambiguity on any one element of the sentence. Each of these explanations is as satisfying an account of the ambiguity as one invoking the alleged ambiguity between an 'is' of predication and one of identity.

^{25*} I have discussed the section on theories of what is in Lesley Brown, 'Innovation and Continuity: The Battle of Gods and Giants, *Sophist* 245–249', in Jyl Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 1998). In exploring the *gigantomachia* there, I examine the 'dunamis proposal'—the suggestion that to be is to be capable of affecting or being affected (*dunamis tou poiein kai paschein*). Whatever the correct interpretation of the *dunamis* proposal, and whether or not Plato endorses it—both highly debated issues—it is manifest that it offers an account of what it is to be, where 'to be' is understood in a complete use.

the complete, C2, use. Nevertheless, it is important to argue, against Owen and Frede,²⁷ that the locution *esti dia to metechlein tou ontos* offers an analysis of a complete use of *esti*.

There are three main passages to be considered:

- (i) 256a1
- (ii) 256d8–e6
- (iii) 259a4–b1.

Owen considers these passages in reverse order, arguing that since neither (iii) nor (ii) can be construed as containing a complete use of *esti*, (i), despite appearances, cannot either (pp. 442–4). I shall take them in their natural order.

(i) forms part of a series of propositions about the sample kind *kinēsis*; it comes in the pair *Kinēsis is not stasis* but *Kinēsis is, because it shares in being*.²⁸ How should we understand the claim that *Kinēsis is, because it shares in being*? One would have to have very good reason for rejecting the view that this is a syntactically complete, existential 'is', given what has led up to this. *Kinēsis* is one of five distinct kinds. It was one of the first to be postulated. In the course of the proof of the non-identity of the kind *being* with either *kinēsis* or *stasis* (254d10) we have the premiss *to de ge on meikton amphoin*, being mixes with (i.e. is predicable of, as it transpires) both—*eston gar amphō pou*—for both, presumably, are. Again, one would have to have good grounds for denying that this is a complete, existential use. And this is reinforced by going back again to 250a–b where it is agreed that *kinēsis* and *stasis* both are (250a11). Now 250a–b is the culmination of the discussion of theories of being, discussed above (Section V(b)). I insisted that these are theories of what there is, while conceding that ontological questions were not, for all that, Plato's chief target.

A connection can be traced between the three passages 250a11, 254d10, and 256a1, which all make the same assertion but with increasing technicality of expression: at 250a11 we have simply, *kinēsis* and *stasis* are; at 254d10 the same assertion, accompanied by the claim that being mixes with both (*to de ge on meikton amphoin*); finally at 256a1 the fully technical version: *kinēsis esti, dia to metechlein tou ontos*. This, then, is the argument for taking 256a1 as analysing a complete use of *esti* and *pro tanto* making

²⁷ Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage*, argues that all three passages to be discussed contain incomplete uses.

²⁸ This pair of statements has a different form from the next three (*K* is and is not *tauton*, is and is not *heteron*, is and is not *on*), because *stasis* is not even predicable of *kinēsis*.

an existence claim: it is naturally connected with the two earlier passages, each of which contains a complete use.²⁹

(ii) 256d8–e6. This much-discussed passage has often been cited to show that *esti, dia to metechlein tou ontos* cannot analyse a complete use.³⁰ I argue that if we take a complete use to be C2, the argument has no force.

The passage is the culmination of the discussion of the interrelations of *kinēsis* with the other kinds. It is here said that *kinēsis* is not being (since it is different from being) but *kinēsis* is being, since it shares in being (*epeiper tou ontos metechlei*). The result is then generalized for all the kinds, and the following conclusion drawn:

Περὶ ἑκάστων ἄρα τῶν εἰδῶν πολὺ μὲν ἐστὶ τὸ ὄν, ἄπειρον δὲ πλήθει τὸ μὴ ὄν.

In the case of each of the forms, then, there is much that it is and indefinitely much that it is not.³¹

There is thus an inference from

- (1) Each kind shares in being (256e3) to
- (2) There is much that each kind is (e5).

And this, in Owen's view, shows that 'the use of the verb [*to be*] on which the Eleatic Stranger rests his conclusion is the connective use, distributed between identity and predication. . . . So to extract any express recognition of a substantive or existential use of *is* from this passage would not square with the argument' (p. 443). With the second sentence we may agree, if by 'a substantive or existential use' is intended a use seen as discrete from the incomplete use. The passage does indeed show that Plato saw an intimate connection between (1) and (2), but this is quite consistent with taking (1) to contain a complete, C2, use. Compare the inference from *Jane is teaching* to *Jane is teaching something*. Once again, we can preserve an important insight, in this case into Plato's perception of the relation between

²⁹ Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage*, 56, claims that 256a1 is contained in 255e11: *Kinēsis is altogether different from stasis* (1). (1), he argues, contains both subsequent assertions; both (2) (*Kinēsis* is not *stasis* (a14) and (3) *Kinēsis is, because it shares in being*. If this means that (3) is an ellipse of (1), this cannot be right. That would be to treat it like the exchange 'Courage is different from foolhardiness'—'It is indeed'. Here we have true incomplete elliptical use, but such a use would, I submit, not be permissible in Greek. If it means that (3) is an inference from (1), then we need not hold that because *is* in (1) is incomplete, so must *is* in (3) be. We need not, because we have an alternative account, in terms of a C2 use (in (3)), and an analogy with the inference from 'Caesar is fighting the Gauls' to 'Caesar is fighting'.

³⁰ e.g. by Owen, pp. 442–3 above; Malcolm, 'Plato's Analysis of τὸ ὄν and τὸ μὴ ὄν in the *Sophist*', 143; cf. Malcolm, 'Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the *Sophist*', 165.

³¹ I prefer this to the alternative translation proposed, for his own reasons, by McDowell: 'in the case of each of the forms, what is (it) is multiple and what is not (it) is indefinite in number' ('Falsehood and Not-Being', 125).

(1) and (2), while rejecting the implausible view that (1) is an incomplete (i.e. elliptical) use.³²

(iii) 259a4–b1. This passage has already been discussed, in Section III (p. 461). Owen's argument against this passage containing a complete use was there shown to depend on understanding a complete use as one which *does not allow* a completion. If we understand a complete use as one which allows but does not require a completion, the sentence presents no difficulty for the view that *esti, dia to metechlein tou ontos* (and the variant here found: *metaschon tou ontos*; 259a6) represent a complete use.

To sum up my discussion of the passages containing the key phrase *esti, dia to metechlein tou ontos*: there is every reason to take passage (i) as containing a complete use. Since passages (ii) and (iii) repeat the phrase, this gives us good grounds for interpreting them in the same way. But passages (ii) and (iii) suggest a C2 understanding of complete, rather than C1; that is, a use connected to the incomplete use in the manner explained in Section III. This being so, we can agree with those who deny that distinguishing the complete from the incomplete use was an important part of Plato's strategy, while insisting that the phrase in question does analyse a complete (C2) use. Plato has no idea of solving the problem of not-being by allowing that *X is F* need not entail *X is*, no wish to allow that only a subclass of things that are *F* are things that are (i.e. exist). But though it is not part of his overall strategy to draw a distinction between the complete and the incomplete use, he does, I believe, employ it as an occasional tactic, to wit, in his proof of the non-identity of the kinds *being* and *different*.

(d) 255c–d: The Proof of the Non-Identity of Being and the Different

This proof proceeds by invoking a distinction, said to be familiar to Theaetetus (255c12), in the way things that are are said to be:

Ἄλλ' οἶμαι σε συγχωρεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά, τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄλλα αἰεὶ λέγεσθαι.

But I think you agree that some of the things that are are said to be 'themselves by themselves', while some are said to be in relation to other things.

In contrast, that which is different is always said to be different in relation to something different (*to de ge heteron aei pros heteron*).

What is the distinction alluded to? One line of interpretation, A, takes

³² Heinaman, 'Being in the *Sophist*', 7–8, suggests that in this passage Plato either 'slides from' *Each form is (i.e. exists) to each form is (predicatively) many things*, or infers the latter from the former. My view is the second; the inference is a straightforward one if a C2 use is involved in (1). Malcolm, 'Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the *Sophist*', 165, resists this interpretation on the grounds that such an inference would be 'flagrantly fallacious'.

it to be between uses of *esti*: according to A, the proof points out that *esti* has both a *pros allo* use and an *auto kath' hauto* use, while *heteron* has only the former. The other line, B, denies this.³³ Those who favour A differ over whether the distinction is, A(i), between the complete (*auto kath' hauto*) and the incomplete (*pros allo*) uses,³⁴ or A(ii), between distinct incomplete uses which these labels pick out.³⁵ Like many others, I believe A(i) is correct, since it makes a clear and correct point, using fairly familiar terminology. The clear and correct point is this: that 'is' can be said of something on its own (as when one says, for instance: *change is*), and also in relation to something else, as when one says, for instance, *change is the opposite of rest* or *Socrates is wise*. But any use of *X is different* must be completed, with a reference to what *X* is different from. In Plato's usage elsewhere something said 'itself by itself' (*auto kath' hauto*) is typically something said with no qualification, not in relation to anything. So when the first way things can be said to be is labelled 'themselves by themselves' it is natural to understand this to mean uses of 'is' which stand on their own, i.e. complete uses. Which kind of complete use is meant I discuss below. The second way things can be said to be is characterized as 'in relation to something else' (*pros allo*, then *pros heteron*); this is understood as those uses of 'is' which have some completion, i.e. where 'is' is followed by another term. On this interpretation, then, Plato uses a familiar contrast (between non-relative and relative) to designate complete and incomplete uses of 'is' respectively.

But critics of A(i) disagree, using an argument from the choice of the expressions *pros allo* and *pros heteron*, where the more usual term is *pros ti* ('in relation to something') for the second term of the familiar contrast described above. They argue that Plato cannot have intended to include all incomplete uses of 'is' with the designation 'things said to be *pros allo*', since in some incomplete uses the completion picks out the *same* thing as the subject term (as in *Change is change*, or *The beautiful is beautiful*), not something different. So, they argue, we should not discern here the familiar contrast between non-relative (i.e. complete uses of 'is') and relative (i.e. incomplete uses), but should look for a different one, one which does justice to the choice of the expression 'in relation to something different'. Here Owen and Frede offer different alternatives, though both argue

³³ Heinaman, 'Being in the *Sophist*', 14: 'the passage is standardly interpreted as drawing a distinction between non-relative or complete predicates such as *man* and relative or incomplete predicates such as *equal*'. See e.g. A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Sophist and the Statesman* (London, 1961), 161, for this view.

³⁴ e.g. J. M. E. Moravcsik, 'Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 14 (1962), 48.

³⁵ Owen, pp. 444–6 above; Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage*, 12–29.

against interpreting *auta kath' hauta* uses as complete, and both interpret the first use as well as the second as an incomplete use. Owen suggests that the contrast involved is that between the 'is' of identity ('is *auto kath' hauta*') and the 'is' of predication. Frede, followed by Meinwald,^{35*} holds that the use of 'is' labelled *auto kath' hauta* is one in which we say what something is *of itself* or *by itself*. Examples would include 'White is a colour', 'Not-being is not-being', and 'The beautiful is beautiful'. The second use, on Frede's reading, picks out ordinary predications. In sum, those who believe that interpretation A(i) does not do justice to Plato's choice of terminology at 255d-e agree in denying that the first use of 'is' should be read as a complete 'is', but disagree in what alternative contrast Plato is signalling. Owen holds that the contrast is between the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of predication, while Frede holds that it is that between 'of itself' predication and ordinary predication, as explained above.

How serious is their objection from Plato's choice of the expression 'in relation to something else', in place of the more familiar 'in relation to something'? It can easily be answered, I believe. First, elsewhere Plato uses the two expressions interchangeably.³⁶ Second, given that he apparently regards them as interchangeable, the choice of the less usual *pros heteron* is easily explained by the contrast the Stranger is drawing between 'is' and 'different', since the natural way to say that different only has relational uses (what is different is always different *from something*) is to say that the different is always so-called in relation to something different.

So the objections to A(i) are easily answered. The rival interpretations of Owen and Frede, however, each suffer from the drawback of invoking a quite unfamiliar interpretation of the label *auta kath' hauta*.^{36*}

^{35*} Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage*, and, for a more recent and much briefer treatment, M. Frede, 'The *Sophist* on False Statements', in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, 1992); C. Meinwald, *Plato's Parmenides* (Oxford, 1991) and (a briefer discussion) 'Goodbye to the Third Man', also in Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*.

³⁶ At *Philebus* 51 Plato draws the contrast between non-relative and relative, when discussing the beauty of shapes, pictures, and sounds. He uses both phrases, 'in relation to something' (*pros ti*)—at 51c6—and 'in relation to something different'—at 51d7—evidently to make one and the same contrast, between things beautiful relative to something, and things which are beautiful *auta kath' hauta*, just in themselves. See Bostock, 'Plato on "Is Not"', 92-4, for further arguments against Owen's view and in favour of the view I have labelled A(i).

^{36*} Owen (n. 61) appealed to the division in Aristotle between *kath' hauta legomenon* and *to heteron kath' heterou legomenon*. Frede (*Prädikation und Existenzaussage*, 27) appealed to a fragment of Aristotle to defend his interpretation of the expression in terms of what a thing is said to be *of itself*, *by itself*, or *in relation to itself*. Meinwald (*Plato's Parmenides*, and 'Goodbye to the Third Man') accepts Frede's reading of the distinction at *Sph.* 255c-d, and uses it to explicate a problematic contrast in *Parmenides* (an earlier work) between predications said to be *pros heauto* and those *pros ta alla* (in relation to itself versus in relation to the others). Meinwald ('Goodbye to the Third Man', 381) suggests that the starring role accorded to the distinc-

I conclude, therefore, that in this passage Plato makes the Stranger draw a distinction between two uses of 'is', the first of which is the complete or absolute use, the one we have met often already in the *Sophist*, and which gets glossed as 'shares in being' in the passages cited in (c) above. That being so, we may ask: is the complete (*auto kath' hauta*) use to be understood as C1 or as C2?

There seems to be no objection to taking the distinction to be between an incomplete (*pros allo*) use and a use which *does not need* a completion, that is, a C2 use. Plato's point would then be that every use of *heteron* requires a completion while some uses of *esti* do not require a completion. To make his point Plato needs only the C2 understanding of an *auto kath' hauta* use: he does not have to claim that there are some uses of *esti* which additionally do not *allow* a completion (C1). Indeed the traditional explication of the *auto kath' hauta*-*pros ti* distinction is phrased in precisely C2 terms (Diogenes Laertius 3. 108: 'things which are said *kath' heauto* are such as do not need anything additional in their interpretation').

I believe that this proof does invoke a distinction between a C2 complete and an incomplete use of *esti*. But there is no inconsistency in maintaining both of the following: (i) in this passage, 255cd, to achieve a proof of the non-identity of the kinds *being* and *different*, Plato points out that *esti*, unlike *heteron*, has a complete (C2) and an incomplete use; and (ii) the relation between the complete (C2) and the incomplete use is such that the distinction between them cannot form part of his overall strategy in solving the problems of not-being.

CONCLUSION

I have argued for a new understanding of the distinction between the syntactically complete and incomplete use of *esti*, supplanting the traditional understanding in terms of *monadic* and *dyadic*. A consequence of the proposed characterization, which I labelled C2, is that the complete and incomplete uses are related as follows: *X is* (complete use) entails *X is something* and *X is F* entails *X is*. *X is not* (complete use) is equivalent to *X is not anything at all*. Understanding the complete *esti* thus allows us to

tion in the *Parmenides* explains why Plato relied on it at *Sph.* 255c12 without explaining it or even drawing attention to it. But a major difficulty for Meinwald's identification of the two distinctions is the difference in terminology, for while the expression used in the *Parmenides* (*pros heauto*) does mean 'in relation to itself', it is far harder to understand the *Sophist's* expression (*auta kath' hauta*) in that way, especially when it has a more familiar meaning which fits the context well.

* Nel *Phlb.* però il $\tau\iota$ è effettivamente ἑτερον, mentre nel *Sph.*, nel caso dell'identità,

say (*contra* Owen) that the *Sophist's* problems about not being are stated in terms of the complete *esti*, but also to see why Plato found no role for *to mē on* or *to mēdamōs on* where that is the negation of the complete *esti*. We can also agree that at 255c–d Plato draws attention to the distinction between the complete and incomplete uses of 'is', while denying that this amounts to the discovery of a fundamental distinction between existence and the copula.

I hope to have shown that understanding the relation between the complete and incomplete uses of *esti* in the way proposed yields a satisfying reading of the *Sophist*. I believe that this proposal for the *Sophist* can be extended to, and supported by consideration of, other works of Plato and indeed Aristotle.^{36**} Aristotle's well-known insistence (*Analytica Posteriora* 92^b4–8) that it is necessary to know *that* a thing is in order to know *what* it is (in other cases, as with 'goatstag', one can know only what the name signifies) is well explained if we pursue the analogy between *einai* and verbs such as *teach*: compare 'it is necessary to know that *X* is teaching in order to know what *X* is teaching'. And though Aristotle explicitly recognizes that *What is not is thought about* does not entail *what is not is* (the very point which the *Sophist* requires but which Plato fails to make), his discussion of the point does not suggest that he finds a clear semantic and syntactic distinction between the *estis* in that pair of sentences.³⁷

^{36**} See Lesley Brown, 'The Verb "To Be" in Greek Philosophy: Some Remarks', in S. Everson (ed.), *Language, Cambridge Companions to Ancient Thought*, iii (Cambridge, 1994) for a fuller treatment, which discusses Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle.

³⁷ For a defence of this, see *ibid.* Among key texts are: *de Interpretatione* 21^a31–2; *Sophistici Elenchi* 166^b37–167^a4; cf. 180^a32–4. In the second passage the fallacious inference is put under the general heading of fallacies *παρὰ τὸ ἀπλῶς τὸδε ἢ πῇ λέγεσθαι καὶ μὴ κυρίως* and is treated analogously to that from *the Indian is white in the tooth* to *the Indian is white*. Each involves the illicit removal of a qualifier (is white in the tooth, is thought about). Far from showing that Aristotle has here recognized two distinct senses of *esti*, his discussion of the fallacy suggests that he assumed a single sense to be involved, as with *white*. His point would then be that just as being white in the tooth is not really a way of being white, being thought about is not really a way of being (as being an expectant mother is not necessarily being a mother). So that although he points out that 'it is not the same thing to be something and to be *haplōs*', this does not seem to be an express recognition of a clear-cut distinction such as Vlastos believed to be latently known to every speaker of Greek.

Per Arist. εἶναι ἀπλῶς = εἶναι la propria essenza (cf. τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, *Met.* H2, ecc.) =
εἶναι qualcosa κατ'αὐτό. Quindi 'S ε' P' → 'S ε' ne S ε' P κατ'αὐτό: e qui vale
l'analisi di Lesley per cui εἶναι ἀπλῶς è completo c.z. Ma l'inferenza non vale per altri
tipi di predicati: in quei casi non si possono direttamente da 'S ε' P' a 'S ε'', e
comunque ciò non sarà sempre possibile, perché alcuni predicati (ποιητής, δοξαστής)
non implicano esistenza.

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

J. L. ACKRILL was, until his retirement in 1989, Professor of the History of Philosophy in the University of Oxford and Fellow of Brasenose College. He is also Fellow of the British Academy. He is the author of *Aristotle: Categories and de Interpretatione* (translation and notes) (1963), *Aristotle the Philosopher* (1981), and *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (1997), and the editor of *A New Aristotle Reader* (1987).

LESLEY BROWN is Centenary Fellow in Philosophy at Somerville College, Oxford. She is the author of several papers in ancient philosophy, and is working on a Clarendon edition of Plato's *Sophist*.

M. F. BURNYEAT is Senior Research Fellow in Philosophy at All Souls College, Oxford, and Fellow of the British Academy. He has also been Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy in the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *The Theaetetus of Plato* (1990), the editor of *The Skeptical Tradition* (1983), and co-editor of *Doubt and Dogmatism* (1980) and *Science and Speculation* (1982).

S. MARC COHEN is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Washington. He is the author of several papers in ancient philosophy, and co-editor of *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy from Thales to Aristotle* (1995).

JOHN M. COOPER is Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University. He is the author of *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (1975) and of *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (1999), and the editor of *Plato: Complete Works* (1997).

DANIEL DEVEREUX is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia. He is the author of many articles in ancient philosophy.

GAIL FINE is Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University. She is the author of *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* (1993) and co-author of *Aristotle: Selections* (translation and notes) (1995).

MICHAEL FREDE is Professor of the History of Philosophy in the University of Oxford and Fellow of Keble College. He is the author of *Prädikation und Existenzaussage* (1967), *Die stoische Logik* (1974), *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (1987), co-author of *Aristoteles Metaphysik Z* (text, translation, and commentary) (1988), and co-editor of *Rationality in Greek Thought* (1996).

T. H. IRWIN is Susan Linn Sage Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University. His books include *Plato's Moral Theory* (1977), *Plato: Gorgias* (translation and notes) (1979), *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (translation and notes) (1985), *Aristotle's First Principles* (1988), *Classical Thought* (1989), *Plato's Ethics* (1995), and *Classical Philosophy* (1999). He is also co-author of *Aristotle: Selections* (translation and notes) (1995).

JOHN McDOWELL is University Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh. His books include *Plato: Theaetetus* (translation and notes) (1973), *Mind and World* (1994), *Mind, Value, and Reality* (1998), and *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (1998).