ON PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF CHANGE [*]

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1. Introduction

Time and again, reading Plato's dialogues, we encounter the view that the world around us, the world of sensible particulars, is subject to a continuous process of change. In the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus* this sort of view is ascribed to some other thinkers, who are said to believe something that we could formulate thus: *everything is always changing*—where of course 'everything' is meant to range over the sensible world. In these dialogues, the view is presented in an unfavourable light and is shown to entail unpalatable or absurd consequences. More precisely, Plato assumes (in the *Cratylus*), or argues (in the *Theaetetus*), that adherents of the view that everything is always changing are actually, for some reason, committed to the extreme view that everything is always changing *in every respect*: nothing has any stable feature whatsoever for any stretch of time. And Plato shows that this implausibly extreme view entails implausible consequences which have to do, in the first place, with the impossibility of making any true statement about an object which is undergoing this sort of flux.

As just mentioned, the view under discussion is, in point of fact, about the continuous change *of sensible objects*; and at least in the *Theaetetus* (181 C–183 C) it is clearly with regard to sensible objects that Plato shows it to entail absurd consequences. That is to say, Plato shows that absurd consequences follow if you hold that any sensible particular is always changing in every respect. Therefore he must believe that sensible particulars enjoy at least some degree of stability—which of course is only reasonable. But then in other dialogues, like the *Phaedo* or the *Timaeus*, it is Plato himself who endorses the view that sensible particulars are always

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changing and are radically unstable, though perhaps not exactly in the version which he criticizes elsewhere.

In this paper I shall try to make some progress towards a better understanding of Plato's view that sensible particulars are always subject to change and of the reasons why he regards it as importantly different from the views he criticizes. The paper has the following structure. In Section 2 I set the stage by examining a couple of passages from the *Phaedo* and the *Philebus* in which Socrates claims that sensible particulars are unstable and always changing. Then in Sections 3–6 I inspect other passages from the *Symposium*, the *Theaetetus*, and again the *Phaedo*, and argue that Plato, at least in certain contexts, regards sensible particulars as subject to physical change which is (i) continuous and pervasive, (ii) compatible with some sort of qualitative stability, (iii) incompatible with sensible particulars being strictly identical through time. Along the way I draw a comparison with some partly similar claims made by several modern and contemporary philosophers. Section 7 places the views just ascribed to Plato in the broader context of Greek conceptions of change and advances a conjecture about the significance of certain Aristotelian claims. In Section 8 I proceed to suggest that all this might have something to do with Plato's contention that sensible particulars lack being and are confined to coming to be. Section 9 examines evidence from the *Timaeus* and argues that my interpretation might help to explain some aspects of that dialogue as well. Then in Section 10 I discuss a possible connection between these views and the view, often ascribed to Plato, that sensible particulars lack essences. Finally, Section 11 shows that my interpretation was current in antiquity. Section 12 summarizes and wraps up the overall argument.

2. Changing particulars

We start with a famous passage: *Phaedo* 78 D 1–E 4, which stands at the beginning of the so-called 'Affinity Argument' for the immortality of the soul (*Phaedo* 78 B–84 B). There we find the following sharp contrast between the changeless forms of beautiful and equal, on the one hand, and the changing 'many beautifuls' and 'many equals', on the other:

> αὐτὴ ἡ οὐσία ἧς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἀποκρινόμενοι, πότερον ὡσαύτως ἀεὶ ἔχει κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἢ ἄλλοτ᾽ ἄλλως; αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον, αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν, τὸ ὄν, μή ποτε μεταβολὴν καὶ ἡντινοῦν ἐνδέχεται; ἢ ἀεὶ αὐτῶν ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν, μονοειδὲς ὂν αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὑτό, ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἔχει καὶ οὐδέποτε οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἀλλοίωσιν οὐδεμίαν ἐνδέχεται; […]
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> Τί δὲ τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν, οἷον ἀνθρώπων ἢ ἵππων ἢ ἱματίων ἢ ἄλλων ὡντινωνοῦν τοιούτων, ἢ ἴσων ἢ πάντων τῶν ἐκείνοις ὁμωνύμων; ἆρα κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἔχει, ἢ πᾶν

τοὐναντίον ἐκείνοις οὔτε αὐτὰ αὑτοῖς οὔτε ἀλλήλοις οὐδέποτε ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν οὐδαμῶς κατὰ ταὐτά;

(SO.) What about the Being itself whose being we give an account of in asking and in answering questions? Is it always constant and in the same state or is it in different states at different times? Does the equal itself, the beautiful itself, each 'what is' itself, that which is, ever admit of any change whatsoever? Or is each 'what is' of them, being uniform itself by itself, always constant and in the same state, never admitting of any alteration in any way at all?

… And what about the many beautiful things, like human beings or horses or cloaks or any other things of that sort, or the many equals, or all the things which bear the same name as those items? Are they in the same state or, in complete contrast to those items, they are, *so to speak, never in any way in the same state* as themselves or each other?[1]

Here forms are contrasted with a disjoint set of items, which 'bear the same name as' forms, but whose characteristics are 'in complete contrast to' those of forms. Socrates goes on to specify that 'these items' can be seen, touched and perceived with the other senses, whereas forms are purely intelligible (79 A). Other claims he has already made (78 C) and will make later on in the course of the argument (80 B) imply that these other items are 'composite' and 'dissoluble', whereas forms are 'incomposite' and 'indissoluble'.

The way in which Socrates draws the contrast shows, I take it, that he is contrasting forms, which are completely changeless, with sensible particulars, which are constantly changing. This is, at any rate, what I shall assume henceforth. I shall also make another assumption, which is very natural and is strongly encouraged by the way in which Socrates expresses himself here, namely that the change in question, from which forms are always free and which sensible particulars are always undergoing, is change in the literal, straightforward sense of something's physical change through time.[2] The question that now arises is why Socrates apparently takes

[1] In this and the following *Phaedo* passages I quote the Greek text from E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B. Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan [Duke et al.] (eds), *Platonis Opera*, vol. I (Oxford, 1995). As for the translation, I have modified that of D. Gallop, *Plato:* Phaedo [*Phaedo*] (Oxford, 1975).

[2] According to an alternative, fairly widespread interpretation (see especially T. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracleiteanism' ['Heracleiteanism'], *Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1977), 1–13 at 10, and G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* [*On Ideas*] (Oxford, 1993), 56–7), the change which Socrates is ascribing to the items contrasted with forms is not physical change through time. Rather, Socrates is speaking of change in a sense we could describe as metaphorical, which is a matter of something's simultaneously having opposite features in different respects or comparisons. Indeed, according to one specific version of this alternative interpretation, the items subject to this sort of 'change' and contrasted with forms are not sensible particulars, but rather certain kinds of sensible particulars. An exhaustive discussion would take me too far afield; I believe, however, that these ways of reading the passage are very unnatural and that the alleged parallels with other Platonic texts which have been advanced to support them are questionable. The sequel of this paper will provide further indirect evidence: to the extent that we can (as I shall try to do) make sense of the *Phaedo* passage on the most obvious way of reading it, i.e. as concerned with the physical change of sensible particulars, and indeed we can

so pessimistic a view of sensible particulars—a view that seems to run counter to our pretheoretical, commonsensical world-picture. Surely sensible particulars like your body or your house, far from being 'so to speak, never in any way in the same state either as themselves or as each other' (78 E 3–4), are pretty stable in a number of respects?

In fact it has often been pointed out, by Gregory Vlastos[3] and others, that Socrates seems to recognize, by means of the expression 'so to speak' (ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν), that his picture of the sensible world is somewhat hyperbolic. It is less often pointed out that we can pinpoint *what* exactly the hyperbole consists in. For within the same argument there are three other occasions on which, a few lines apart, Socrates refers to the sensible realm by describing it as the realm of the things that are 'never in the same state' (οὐδέποτε / μηδέποτε κατὰ ταὐτά): 78 C 6–8, 79 A 9–10, C 6–7. None of these passages contains the qualifying expression 'so to speak', which suggests that Plato regards them as free from the exaggeration that affects our passage; and none adds to the words 'never in the same state' the adverb 'in any way' (οὐδαμῶς, literally 'in no way'), which occurs only at 78 E 4.[4] This suggests that the exaggeration lies precisely in this adverb and that Plato might mean something like this: sensible particulars are never in the same state *in many though not all respects*.[5] Which is, upon reflection, a perfectly sensible thing to say. Think again of your own body: its macroscopic features (size, shape, weight, etc.) change very slowly or never at all; but its position in space is changing from one instant to another, and its tissues and organs are constantly undergoing complex physiological processes which make for great and continuous instability beneath a surface of substantial stability. Therefore both your body's '*total state*' (as we might call it), i.e. the collection of all of its features, and many of its specific parameters, are constantly changing. As Vlastos put it,

> no sensible thing is ever the same in *all* of its properties and relations during any stretch of time, no matter how small. This will allow sensible things to change in some ways while remaining constant in others—innumerable changes, subliminally minute, proceeding within every object of our perceptual experience while its gross perceptible properties remain recognizably the same.[6]

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show that the passage's claims, so understood, are part of a consistent set of views which occur elsewhere in Plato, the alternative, more *recherché* construals turn out to lack motivation.

[3] G. Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* [*Socrates*] (Cambridge, 1991), 70–1.

[4] Notice that the first of these passages actually *precedes* the occurrence of our 'so to speak'.

[5] C. H. Kahn, 'Flux and Forms in the *Timaeus*', in M. Canto-Sperber and P. Pellegrin, *Le style de la pensée: Recueil de textes en hommage à J. Brunschwig* (Paris, 2002), 113–31 at 115–6 n. 5, comes to the same conclusion by remarking that οὐδαμῶς is omitted at *Phlb.* 59b (on which see below).

[6] Vlastos, 71.

In our daily life this constant instability tends to pass unnoticed; but it is something that you might instead want to stress, and regard as deeply problematic, if you had been deeply influenced by Eleatic philosophy (see e.g. Melissus 30 B7, B8 DK), as Plato certainly was. Indeed, other dialogues provide positive evidence that he was alive to this issue. One such dialogue is in the *Symposium*, which I discuss in Section 3. Another is the *Philebus*, at 42 C–43 C. There Socrates refers to the possibility that something's nature may be either destroyed or restored 'through combinations and separations, processes of filling and emptying, as well as certain kinds of growth and decay',[7] and remarks that 'necessarily, we are always experiencing one or the other' of these processes, as the wise men say: 'For everything is always in flux, upwards and downwards' (ἀεὶ γὰρ ἅπαντα ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω ῥεῖ). A few lines below he asks Protarchus whether 'a living being always perceives everything it experiences, and it does not escape our own notice either that we grow or that we experience any of such things, or it is rather quite the opposite'. It is the opposite, answers Protarchus: 'almost all such processes escape our notice' (ὀλίγου ... τά γε τοιαῦτα λέληθε πανθ' ἡμᾶς).

Thus in the *Philebus* the claim that everything is always in flux is taken to be made true by the existence of 'innumerable changes, subliminally minute' like those mentioned by Vlastos. This in turn helps us to understand a later passage from the same dialogue, 59 A–B, where Socrates refers to sensible particulars as the things 'none of which has ever been or will be or is at present in the same state' (ὧν μήτε ἔσχε μηδὲν πώποτε κατὰ ταὐτὰ μηθ' ἕξει μήτε εἰς τὸ νῦν παρὸν ἔχει). This expression is obviously reminiscent of *Phaedo* 78 D–E, with two telling differences: both the adverb 'in any way' (οὐδαμῶς) and the qualification 'so to speak' (ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν) are missing in the *Philebus*.[8] Therefore all Socrates need mean in *Phlb.* 59 A–B, and all that is licensed by *Phlb.* 42 C–43 C, is this: no sensible particular is ever in the same *total* state as at any previous time; no sensible particular is ever *completely* stable. So, when in the following lines Socrates goes on to refer to the same things as 'the things that don't possess any stability whatsoever' (τὰ μὴ κεκτημένα βεβαιότητα μηδ' ἡντινοῦν, 59 B 4), we can either understand this as an innocuous exaggeration or suppose that by 'any stability whatsoever' Socrates means '*total* stability *for any stretch of time*'. On the latter construal sensible particulars are characterized, not as things which are never stable in *any* respect, but rather as things which are never stable in *all* respects.

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[7] My quotations from the *Philebus* are drawn—with some modifications—from D. Frede, *Plato:* Philebus (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1993).

[8] See n. 5.

3. Non-identity through time: *Symposium*

There is another text which lends some confirmation to what I have been arguing so far and, indeed, shows that Plato can conceive of the change through time of sensible particulars in a way that is even more radical, yet philosophically understandable and far from the extreme theories he rejects. It is *Symposium* 207 D–208 B, which has only sporadically and marginally come under the spotlight of students of Platonic metaphysics.[9]

Let me first supply some context. The passage occurs just after Socrates recalls how Diotima told him that love is (also) desire for immortality, hence for generation, because 'generation is something everlasting and immortal to the extent that this is possible for a human being' (206 E 7–8), and drew his attention to the way in which animals protect and care for their offspring at all costs. Why do they do so? Because, Diotima explained,

> ἐνταῦθα … τὸν αὐτὸν ἐκείνῳ λόγον ἡ θνητὴ φύσις ζητεῖ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀεί τε εἶναι καὶ ἀθάνατος. δύναται δὲ ταύτῃ μόνον, τῇ γενέσει, ὅτι ἀεὶ καταλείπει ἕτερον νέον ἀντὶ τοῦ παλαιοῦ.[10]
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> in this case [*sc.* that of animals], in the same way as in that case [*sc.* that of human beings], the mortal nature seeks so far as it can to exist forever and to be immortal. And it can achieve it only in this way, by the process of coming-into-being, because *it always leaves behind something else new in place of the old.* (207 C 9–D 3)

Thus generation provides mortal creatures with ersatz immortality. Then, in order to drive her point home, Diotima has recourse to a comparison with what happens within one single mortal life:

[9] The only thorough analysis I am familiar with is the one by A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* [*Love*] (Oxford, 1989), 21–5, which seems to have been less influential in this debate than it should have been; I myself realized its importance only when this paper was almost finished, and was encouraged on finding out how much we agreed about. See also the brief recommendation that the passage be taken seriously in A. Code, 'Reply to Michael Frede's "Being and Becoming in Plato"' ['Reply'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol., 1988, 53–60 at 54; I discuss an aspect of Code's interpretation in Section 10 below. Other pertinent, but shorter or less explicit, references to the passage in I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* [*Examination*], 2 vols (London and New York, 1963), II. 323–4; R. Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antededents, and his Legacy* (Oxford, 2000), 185; W. Leszl, 'Ragioni per postulare idee' ['Ragioni'], in F. Fronterotta and W. Leszl (eds), *Eidos - Idea: Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica* (Sankt Augustin, 2005), 37–74 at 41–2; R. Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* [*Self*] (Oxford, 2006), 57; D. Sedley, 'Three Kinds of Platonic Immortality' ['Immortality'], in D. Frede and B. Reis (eds), *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy* (Berlin and New York, 2009), 145–61 at 158.

[10] Both here and in the sequel, the Greek text is that of J. Burnet (ed.), *Platonis Opera*, 5 vols [Burnet] (Oxford, 1900–1907). I have borrowed and slightly modified the translation of C. J. Rowe, *Plato:* Symposium (Warminster, 1998).

> ἐπεὶ καὶ ἐν ᾧ ἓν ἕκαστον τῶν ζῴων ζῆν καλεῖται καὶ εἶναι τὸ αὐτό–οἷον ἐκ παιδαρίου ὁ αὐτὸς λέγεται ἕως ἂν πρεσβύτης γένηται· οὗτος μέντοι οὐδέποτε τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχων ἐν αὑτῷ ὅμως ὁ αὐτὸς καλεῖται, ἀλλὰ νέος ἀεὶ γιγνόμενος, τὰ δὲ ἀπολλύς, καὶ κατὰ τὰς τρίχας καὶ σάρκα καὶ ὀστᾶ καὶ αἷμα καὶ σύμπαν τὸ σῶμα.
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> For even during the time in which each living being *is said to be alive and to be the same*—as for example someone *is said to be the same person* from when he is a child until he comes to be an old man, and yet, *if he's called the same, that's despite the fact that he is never made up of the same things*, but *always comes to be new and loses what he had before*—hair, flesh, bones, blood and the whole body. (207 D 4–E 1)

In the next lines Diotima proceeds to extend the scope of her comparison to the soul's inner life:

> καὶ μὴ ὅτι κατὰ τὸ σῶμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν οἱ τρόποι, τὰ ἤθη, δόξαι, ἐπιθυμίαι, ἡδοναί, λῦπαι, φόβοι, τούτων ἕκαστα οὐδέποτε τὰ αὐτὰ πάρεστιν ἑκάστῳ, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν γίγνεται, τὰ δὲ ἀπόλλυται. πολὺ δὲ τούτων ἀτοπώτερον ἔτι, ὅτι καὶ αἱ ἐπιστῆμαι μὴ ὅτι αἱ μὲν γίγνονται, αἱ δὲ ἀπόλλυνται ἡμῖν, καὶ οὐδέποτε οἱ αὐτοί ἐσμεν οὐδὲ κατὰ τὰς ἐπιστήμας, ἀλλὰ καὶ μία ἑκάστη τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ταὐτὸν πάσχει. ὃ γὰρ καλεῖται μελετᾶν, ὡς ἐξιούσης ἐστὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης· λήθη γὰρ ἐπιστήμης ἔξοδος, μελέτη δὲ πάλιν καινὴν ἐμποιοῦσα ἀντὶ τῆς ἀπιούσης μνήμην σῴζει τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ὥστε τὴν αὐτὴν δοκεῖν εἶναι.
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> And that doesn't hold only of the body: in the case of the soul, too, its traits, habits, beliefs, desires, pleasures, pains, fears—none of these is ever the same in any individual, but some come to be while others pass away. It's much stranger even than this with the pieces of knowledge we have: not only do some of them come to be while others pass away, so that *we are never the same even in respect of our pieces of knowledge*, but in fact each individual piece of knowledge is subject to the same process. For what is called 'going over' something presupposes that knowledge goes out of us; for forgetting is departure of knowledge, and going over something, by creating in us again another memory in place of the one that is departing, preserves our knowledge in such a way that it *seems to be the same*. (207 E 1–208 A 7)

And finally she winds up with some general statements:

> τούτῳ γὰρ τῷ τρόπῳ πᾶν τὸ θνητὸν σῴζεται, οὐ τῷ παντάπασιν τὸ αὐτὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι ὥσπερ τὸ θεῖον, ἀλλὰ τῷ τὸ ἀπιὸν καὶ παλαιούμενον ἕτερον νέον ἐγκαταλείπειν οἷον αὐτὸ ἦν. ταύτῃ τῇ μηχανῇ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἔφη, θνητὸν ἀθανασίας μετέχει, καὶ σῶμα καὶ τἆλλα πάντα· ἀθάνατον δὲ ἄλλῃ.
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> For in this way everything mortal is preserved, *not by always being absolutely the same, as the divine is, but in virtue of the fact that what is departing and growing old leaves behind in its place something else new such as itself was* . It is by this means, Socrates,' she said, 'that what is mortal, both body and everything else, partakes of immortality; what is immortal partakes of it in a different way. (208 A 7–B 4)

After this statement she picks up the point she was originally trying to make, i.e. the love and care of every animal for its own offspring, and reminds us of the function of her digression: ‘So don’t be surprised if everything by nature values its own offspring: it is for the sake of immortality that this eagerness, this love, affects every creature’ (208 B 4–6).

Now let us turn back to the digression and to Diotima’s views about change and identity through time, which are very interesting and deserve careful scrutiny. She tells us that throughout its lifetime an individual living being undergoes a continuous series of changes, affecting both its material constitution and its psychology, through which it ‘is called the same’ (207 D 4–7) but is not ‘always absolutely the same’ (208 A 8). What does she exactly mean? I shall set forth and discuss two alternative interpretations, focusing on what Diotima says about the body and setting aside as much as possible until Section 5 her remarks on the soul’s inner life, which are more difficult to understand.

On a first possible way of reading the passage, which I dub the ‘Identity Interpretation’, Diotima says that a body, or an individual living being in respect of its body,[11] *remains identical through time and all sorts of change*.[12] On the rival reading, which I call the ‘Non-Identity Interpretation’, Diotima’s main point is rather that the persistence of the same body through time *actually consists in a succession of distinct but similar bodies*. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as one and the same body enduring through time and change; there is rather a succession of distinct but similar bodies—or *body-stages*, as it were—which come into being and pass away every time each of them undergoes a small change, thus presumably staying in existence only for an instant.

Two details in the text must be read very differently by each of these interpretations.

(i) When Diotima repeatedly says that an individual body, or a living being in respect of its body, ‘*is called the same*’ throughout its lifetime (207 D 4–7), the Identity Interpretation must take ‘is called the same’ to mean ‘is the same’; on the Non-Identity Interpretation, instead, this means that the individual is *merely* called the same, but is not really the same.

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[11] ‘An individual living being in respect of its body’ is my attempt at capturing the import of the masculine expressions used by Diotima at D 5–8 (e.g. ὁ αὑτὸς λέγεται, ὁ αὑτὸς καλεῖται) to make a point which is actually about the body. Cf. 208 A 1–2 οὐδέποτε οἱ αὑτοί ἐσμεν οὐδὲ κατὰ τὰς ἐπιστήμας.

[12] Cf. Irwin, ‘Heracleiteanism’ 6, who claims that Diotima ‘shows how someone remains the same man throughout his lifetime’; C. H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), 167–8; and D. Bostock, *Plato’s* Theaetetus [*Theaetetus*] (Oxford, 1988), 74 and n. 19. The ensuing development of this interpretation, however, is mine. So is also my presentation and defence of the rival interpretation, although its essentials can be ascribed to most of the authors mentioned in n. 9, most explicitly to Price, *Love* 21–5. My account of both interpretations has been influenced by discussion with Rachel Barney, Willie Costello, Brad Inwood, and Jennifer Whiting in Toronto.

(ii) When Diotima, in her final summary, claims that everything mortal is preserved '*not by always being absolutely the same*' (οὐ τῷ παντάπασιν τὸ αὐτὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι, 208 A 7–8), on the Identity Interpretation 'absolutely the same' is equivalent to 'the same in *all* respects': she is maintaining that everything mortal continues to be the same individual, remains numerically the same, while undergoing a number of changes and hence not being the same in all respects. The Non-Identity Interpretation, by contrast, takes 'absolutely the same' in this context to mean '*really* the same', with reference to numerical identity, and construes Diotima as claiming that everything mortal is preserved not by being really the same individual through time, but rather in virtue of a succession of related individuals.

These divergences, taken by themselves, do not allow us to settle the dispute; but a couple of elements tell in favour of the Non-Identity Interpretation.

First, in the course of her remarks about our psychic life Diotima claims that exercise or 'going over' something preserves our knowledge in such a way that it 'seems to be the same' (τὴν αὐτὴν δοκεῖν εἶναι, 208 A 6–7), while in fact this appearance is misleading and what there really is is a succession of lost and newly acquired memories or pieces of knowledge. Now, as I said above, for the moment I prefer to postpone discussion of this part of the digression until later (Section 5); clearly, however, Diotima's remarks about the soul are intended as at least partly parallel to those about the body. So her use of 'seems to be the same' strongly suggests that, when she says that a body—or someone in respect of his body—'is called the same' through time and change, 'is called the same' is not equivalent to 'is (actually) the same' but rather to 'is *merely* called the same but is not really the same'. Thus the Non-Identity Interpretation seems to be right with regard to (i) above.

Secondly, recall why Diotima opened this digression. It was in order to bolster her initial claim, at 207 D 2–3, that generation is a surrogate for immortality—that, in other words, an individual who is *not really immortal* can achieve ersatz immortality through the coming to be of another, distinct individual appropriately related to him, 'something else new in place of the old' (ἕτερον νέον ἀντὶ τοῦ παλαιοῦ). In order to support that claim, at 207 D 4 she introduced an analogy with the continuity of one single life. But the purpose of constructing such an analogy would be poorly served by the thesis that within one single lifetime an individual can be *literally identical* through time. That purpose is instead served perfectly by the thesis that within one single lifetime an individual who is *not really identical* through time can achieve ersatz identity through time thanks to the coming to be of another, distinct individual appropriately related to him—indeed, a succession of such individuals. Therefore we should

ascribe to Diotima the latter thesis, not the former, and the Non-Identity Interpretation has the edge.

This receives further confirmation if we consider again in more detail Diotima's conclusion at 208 A 7–B 4. It consists more precisely of two sentences: 'For in this way … such as itself was' (τούτῳ γὰρ τῷ τρόπῳ ... οἷον αὐτὸ ἦν, A 7–B 2); 'It is by these means … in a different way' (ταύτῃ τῇ μηχανῇ ... ἄλλῃ, B 2–4). Let us focus on the former. As already the initial 'for' (γάρ) suggests, this is a recapitulation of Diotima's immediately preceding considerations about identity through a single lifetime, to which she refers by the verb 'is preserved' (σῴζεται, A 8: cf. 'preserves', σῴζει, in A 6). So it is still with regard to identity through a *single* lifetime that Diotima here claims that everything mortal 'is preserved in this way', namely 'in virtue of the fact that what is departing and growing old [τὸ ἀπιὸν καὶ παλαιούμενον] leaves behind in its place [ἐγκαταλείπειν] something else new [ἕτερον νέον] such as itself was'. Thereby she is picking up her formulation at 207 D 2–3 in order to emphasize the analogy between the initial claim about survival from one life to another and the present evidence about survival within a single life: *in both cases an old item is replaced by another new and distinct one*. She achieves this by repeating almost literally the earlier formulation, with a couple of small variations. One of these variations is significant: while the initial claim was that mortal nature 'leaves behind' (καταλείπει, 207 D 3) another new item in place of the old, now she speaks of the old item 'leaving behind in its place' (ἐγκαταλείπειν, 208 B 2, literally 'leaving *in* behind') another new one. The addition of the preverb ἐν-, 'in', points to a difference between the two kinds of survival: in this case the replacement is stricter, because there is, we might say, perfect spatiotemporal continuity between the old item and the new. This final detail confirms that the whole first sentence of Diotima's conclusion (τούτῳ γὰρ τῷ τρόπῳ ... οἷον αὐτὸ ἦν, A 7–B 2) is a recapitulation of her previous considerations about identity through a single lifetime.[13] Then and only then, in the next and final sentence (ταύτῃ τῇ μηχανῇ ... ἄλλῃ, B 2–4), can she return to her initial claim about survival between one life and another and restate it as having now been established by the analogy with survival within a single life.

From Diotima's claims about the body, as the Non-identity Interpretation understands them, we can extrapolate a conception of the change of sensible particulars in general. The

[13] For my present purposes it would make no difference if the first sentence of Diotima's conclusion were instead meant as a *generalization* from the preceding considerations, covering *both* kinds of survival. What is really important is that the first sentence holds (only or also) of the case of survival within one single life, and therefore makes it clear that identity through time actually consists in replacement between similar items. Anyway, my construal of the first sentence seems to agree with that of Rowe, 187.

extrapolation is worth trying and seems fairly safe, because it is hard to imagine that other kinds of sensible particulars (non-biological ones such as stones and statues) could be subject to different and more tolerant identity conditions. As we shall see in due course, other texts will confirm that we are licensed to take this step.

This conception has familiar modern parallels, for example in Berkeley (*Siris* 347), Hume (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 1. 4. 6),[14] and Thomas Reid (*Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, III. 4). The following passage from Reid is especially relevant:

> the identity of objects of sense is never perfect. All bodies, as they consist of innumerable parts that may be disjoined from them by a great variety of causes, are subject to continual changes of their substance, increasing, diminishing, changing insensibly. When such alterations are gradual, because language could not afford a different name for every different state of such a changeable being, it retains the same name, and is considered as the same thing. Thus we say of an old regiment, that it did such a thing a century ago, though there now is not a man alive who then belonged to it. We say a tree is the same in the seed-bed and in the forest. A ship of war, which has successively changed her anchors, her tackle, her sails, her masts, her planks, and her timbers, while she keeps the same name, is the same.
>
> The identity, therefore, which we ascribe to bodies, whether natural or artificial, is not perfect identity; it is rather something which, for the conveniency of speech, we call identity. It admits of a great change of the subject, providing the changes be gradual; sometimes, even of total change. And the changes which in common language are made consistent with identity differ from those that are thought to destroy it, not in kind, but in number and degree. It has no fixed nature when applied to bodies; and questions about the identity of a body are very often questions about words.[15]

In more recent times, Reid's view has been endorsed by Roderick Chisholm,[16] who holds that most ordinary physical objects[17] are identical through time 'only in a loose and popular sense' but not 'in a strict and philosophical sense':

> whenever there is a change of parts, however insignificant the parts may be, then some old thing ceases to be and some new thing comes into being… such things as the Ship of Theseus

[14] There are issues of Humean interpretation which I cannot go into here. See J. L. McIntyre, 'Hume and the Problem of Personal Identity', in D. F. Norton and J. Taylor (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2009), 177–208. For parallel passages and comparison with other authors see the notes in D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton, 2 vols (Oxford, 2007): 2. 809–15. This is also the edition from which I shall quote Hume later on.

[15] T. Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. by D. R. Brookes, annot. by D. R. Brookes and K. Haakonssen, intr. by K. Haakonssen (Edinburgh, 1991).

[16] See R. Chisholm, *Person and Object* (La Salle, 1976), 89–104.

[17] In fact, all those physical objects that are not *persons*. See Chisholm, *Person and Object* 104–13.

> and indeed most familiar physical things are really 'fictions', or as we would say today, 'logical constructions'. They are logical constructions upon things which *cannot* survive the loss of their parts.[18]

Chisholm refers to such logical constructions by means of the scholastic term '*entia successiva*'[19] and goes on to offer a rigorous account of the relation between an *ens successivum* and the impermanent stages or successors which constitute it, showing how truths about the former can be analysed into truths about the latter.[20]

In the *Symposium* too Diotima makes a brief reference to a relation that binds together the various bodies and enables her to account for the apparent stability of sensible particulars.[21] This is the relation of *resemblance* or being 'like' (οἷον, 208 B 2). To see—with a modicum of speculation—how this could be supposed to work, let us use 'Body' as an abbreviation for 'Callias' body', and consider an event we would ordinarily describe as Body's undergoing a

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[18] Chisholm, *Person and Object* 96–8. Cf. Price, *Love* 22, on the *Symposium*: 'Bodily survival is a matter not of strict identity over time, but of a sequence of successors. If we want to talk strictly of identity, we need a new concept, say that of a "superbody" which survives as long as the sequence continues. Such an entity would be a logical construction, arriving on the scene only on the coat-tails of a set of suitably related bodies, with its identity tied to that of the first member of the set (not to the whole set, if it can be envisaged that the superbody might have enjoyed a different history)'.

NB: In the quoted passage Chisholm is not directly setting forth his own views but rather interpreting Reid's ones, with which he declares himself in agreement. The contrast between a 'loose and popular' and a 'strict and philosophical' sense in which something may be said to be identical through time he draws from Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed*, Dissert. I. The reference to the 'Ship of Theseus' is obviously to the famous puzzle mentioned by Plutarch, *Thes.* 23.1, and revived by Hobbes, *De corpore* 11.7; Leibniz, *New Essays* 2.27.4; etc.

[19] On *entia successiva* in scholastic thought see R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671* (Oxford, 2011), 374–98.

[20] Chisholm, *Person and Object* 97–104. Unlike Chisholm, at various points in this paper I have taken the liberty of referring to the impermanent successors which constitute the 'logically constructed' object as its '*stages*'. I find this terminology convenient, but it is important to beware of a possible confusion: strictly speaking, talk of X_1 and X_2 as 'stages' of X rather suggests that X is a *four-dimensional* object, a 'spacetime worm' which has not only spatial parts (e.g. the table's legs), but also temporal parts or slices (e.g. the table today, as distinct from the table yesterday and the table tomorrow). Such parts can be appropriately termed 'stages' of the whole four-dimensional object. For this kind of view see e.g. D. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford, 1986), 202–4, and T. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford and New York, 2001), 180–208. The two pictures are actually very different (cf. Price, *Love* 22). Chisholm's impermanent items can be regarded only in a 'loose and popular sense' as constituting a three-dimensional enduring object which is in fact a mere 'logical construction'; by contrast, Lewis's and Sider's impermanent items are *parts* of a four-dimensional whole which exists as firmly as anything. This latter sort of view was not a theoretically available option in ancient philosophy (though see n. 74 below).

[21] Thereby I do not mean that her account is philosophically complete and satisfactory as it stands (or that she regards it as such): resemblance is not sufficient to bind together all and only the stages of the relevant individual to the exclusion of other extraneous items. A fuller account should take into account an appropriate causal relation and/or spatiotemporal continuity between the stages. With regard to *biological* sensible particulars—those with which Diotima is explicitly concerning herself—a role might, in theory, also be played by the presence in them of a *soul* which is strictly self-identical. Diotima, however, makes no such claim. On the role of the soul in her account see Section 5 below; on the its much more prominent role in the *Phaedo* see Section 6.

quantitative change—say, the growth of a bone or the loss of some hair.[22] On Diotima's view, this should more accurately be construed as the destruction of one thing, $Body_1$, and the simultaneous generation of another thing, $Body_2$, which is similar to $Body_1$ in almost all respects but that it contains more bone or less hair. There is, however, a sense (a 'loose and popular sense' in Chisholm's words) in which $Body_1$ and $Body_2$ can be regarded as two stages of one individual, Body (an *ens successivum* in Chisholm's words), which remains the same through time and change and is stable in several basic qualitative respects.

This is why I said above that the conception expressed in this passage is importantly different from the extreme flux theories that Plato rejects. The upholders of those theories, as Plato understands them, are committed to holding that sensible particulars are *totally* unstable, not only numerically, i.e. with respect to their identity, but also qualitatively, i.e. with respect to their features. As he puts it in the *Cratylus*, it follows from their theory that, if something is always in flux, then you cannot say of it correctly 'first that it is *that*, and then that it is *such*' (πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι ἐκεῖνό ἐστιν, ἔπειτα ὅτι τοιοῦτον, 439 D 9). And in the *Theaetetus* what condemns the theory is precisely the fact that it somehow involves total *qualitative* instability, so that 'every answer, whatever it is about, is equally correct, both to say that things are so and to say that they are not so' (183 A 5–7).[23] As against those theories, Diotima can recognize the presence of qualitative stability in the sensible world: there is real qualitative stability between each impermanent stage or successor and the similar one that replaces it; and this grounds the seeming qualitative stability of the seemingly enduring *ens successivum* that we construct upon the sequence of stages.

Indeed, we could speculate further that this relation of resemblance between stages is grounded in their having the same features,[24] namely (from Plato's point of view) *participating in the same forms*; and that thereby, by structuring a world of physical stages, the forms lend it whatever degree of stability it enjoys. It is often said that Platonic forms have the function of guaranteeing the stability of the physical world;[25] my suggestion is a way of making this claim more precise.

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[22] Other kinds of change would presumably work in the same way. If Diotima concentrates on quantitative change, this is because it is the kind of change which (i) can paradigmatically occur unnoticed, (ii) is closely connected with reproduction.

[23] On *why* Plato takes flux theorists to be so committed, both in the *Cratylus* and in the *Theaetetus*, see F. Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato: A Commentary* (Cambridge, 2011), 468–73.

[24] For resemblance as qualitative identity or sharing the same features see Pl. *Parm.* 132 D–E (according to one possible construal), 147 E–148 A, *Theaet.* 159 A; Arist. *Metaph.* Δ15, 1021ᵃ11–12.

[25] See e.g. H. Cherniss, 'The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas', *Americal Journal of Philology*, 57 (1936), 445–56 at 452–6, repr. in H. Cherniss, *Selected Papers*, ed. by L. Tarán (Leiden, 1977), 121–32 at 128–32; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. V: *The Later Plato and the Academy* (Cambridge, 1978), 80; Leszl, 'Ragioni' 42–3.

4. Non-identity through time: *Theaetetus*

Resemblance makes all the difference between the *Symposium* passage and one contained in the so-called Secret Doctrine of the *Theaetetus* (152 D–160 E) .[26] The Doctrine aims to provide a metaphysical underpinning for Protagorean perceptual relativism. It does so by depicting a world consisting of perceiving subjects and perceived objects emitting streams of perception and of perceptible quality which encounter between them and account for the equal reliability of the conflicting perceptual appearances of different subjects. But then the Doctrine is confronted with the challenge posed by the case of dreaming, ill, or hallucinating subjects: aren't the perceptions of such subjects obviously false (157 E–158 A)? In order to guarantee that even the perceptions of an ill subject will be incorrigible, as relativism requires, the Doctrine advocates an extreme thesis of Non-identity through time for perceiving subjects and perceived objects (158 E–160 A). The point of the argument is apparently to show that an ill subject is not just a defective, unreliable version of a healthy subject, but an altogether different individual, to which the Secret Doctrine applies with full force. In order to do so, however, Socrates implausibly argues that no perceiving subject or perceived object will be the same, *not just numerically but also qualitatively*, from one perceptual encounter to another. Thus subject and object are dissolved into a series of stages which are supposed to be *completely different* from each other. I shall not dwell on the argument itself, but here is its conclusion (159 E 7–160 A 4):

> ΣΩ. Οὔκουν ἐγώ τε οὐδὲν ἄλλο ποτὲ γενήσομαι οὕτως αἰσθανόμενος· τοῦ γὰρ ἄλλου ἄλλη αἴσθησις, καὶ ἀλλοῖον καὶ ἄλλον ποιεῖ τὸν αἰσθανόμενον· οὔτ᾽ ἐκεῖνο τὸ ποιοῦν ἐμὲ μήποτ᾽ ἄλλῳ συνελθὸν ταὐτὸν γεννῆσαν τοιοῦτον γένηται· ἀπὸ γὰρ ἄλλου ἄλλο γεννῆσαν ἀλλοῖον γενήσεται.[27]
>
> SO. So, on the one hand, I'll never come to be perceiving any other thing in just that way; for *a perception of another thing is another perception, and it makes the perceiver otherwise qualified and another perceiver*. On the other hand, that thing which acts on me will never, by coming into contact with another perceiver, generate the same product and come to be qualified in just that way; for *by generating another product from another perceiver it will come to be otherwise qualified*.

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[26] On the general purport and the details of the Secret Doctrine see especially M.-K. Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus* (Oxford, 2005), 77–117.

[27] The text is that of Duke et al.; I have borrowed the translation of J. McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus [*Theaetetus*] (Oxford, 1973), with some modifications.

Here there is a complete conflation between *being another thing* and *being otherwise qualified*.[28] This is not required by the argument's purpose, for which the former notion would seem to be enough. Nothing hinges on the idea that the partners in different perceptual encounters have to be *completely* different from each other—not just numerically but also qualitatively different. Yet this is precisely what Socrates emphatically argues. Indeed, the Secret Doctrine had already, from the very beginning, described every perceptual encounter as unrepeatable (154 A). But why does this have to be so? This question has always puzzled commentators. I suggest that we consider the following interesting possibility: perhaps Plato believes that the Doctrine's upholders lack the proper conceptual resources to distinguish between numerical and qualitative identity. They are unable to take theoretical account of the resemblance between the various stages into which they dissolve both subject and object, because they do not recognize the existence of general features, i.e. (from Plato's point of view) of the forms. That they do not recognize the existence of general features is clear from the whole Doctrine;[29] indeed, I take it to be even asserted at 157 B–C, immediately before the objection about ill perceivers is advanced.[30]

[28] See e.g. J. McDowell, *Theaetetus* 153–4, who detects in the argument 'a confusion between what it is to distinguish *quality-instances* and what it is to distinguish *varieties of a quality* (e.g. shades of a colour)'.

[29] Cf. T. Chappell, *Reading Plato's* Theaetetus (Sankt Augustin, 2004), 77, who points out 'the uncompromisingly nominalist and particularist tone of the *Theaetetus*' account: see, e.g., 156 D 4–5 … on that theory, each perceptual experience is not just another instance of a general kind that we already understand, but a unique event with a unique content … The *Theaetetus*' flux theory of perception is not backed up, like the *Timaeus*' flux theory, by Plato's own wider belief in universals and in general kinds under which the ever-changing data of the senses are to be subsumed and ordered.' For a small, earlier hint in the same direction see already R. M. Dancy, 'Theaetetus' First Baby: *Theaetetus* 151e–160e' ['First Baby'], *Philosophical Topics* 15 (1987), 61–108 at 91.

[30] There Socrates claims that the Secret Doctrine prescribes not to use either the verb 'to be' or such expressions as 'something', 'this' or 'that', 'or any other name that brings things to a standstill', and rather to speak of things as coming to be and undergoing production, destruction and alteration; 'and we should speak so both in particular cases [κατὰ μέρος] and about many collected together [περὶ πολλῶν ἀθροισθέντων]—to which collection they give the names 'human', 'stone', and those of each animal and kind [ᾧ δὴ ἀθροίσματι ἄνθρωπόν τε τίθενται καὶ λίθον καὶ ἕκαστον ζῷόν τε καὶ εἶδος]'. A linguistic parallel with 182 A strongly suggests the following interpretation: the Doctrine's linguistic prescriptions concern not only how we should speak of particular objects, but also of their 'collections', which are referred to by general terms like 'human', 'stone' etc. By implication, general terms do not refer to universals—let alone Platonic forms. See L. Campbell, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1883), 62; L. Brown, 'Understanding the *Theaetetus*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 11 (1993), 199–224 at 207–8. Most commentators adopt a different and much less straightforward interpretation: see e.g. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1935), 48 n. 1; Dancy, 'First Baby' 86–8; Bostock, *Theaetetus* 66–7. Both interpretations are discussed at length by McDowell, *Theaetetus* 143–5.

5. Impermanent souls?

In Section 3 I set aside a problematic aspect of the *Symposium* passage, i.e. Diotima's claim (207 E 1–5) that her account 'does not hold only of the body':

> καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν οἱ τρόποι, τὰ ἤθη, δόξαι, ἐπιθυμίαι, ἡδοναί, λῦπαι, φόβοι, τούτων ἕκαστα οὐδέποτε τὰ αὐτὰ πάρεστιν ἑκάστῳ, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν γίγνεται, τὰ δὲ ἀπόλλυται
>
> in the case of the soul, too, its traits, habits, beliefs, desires, pleasures, pains, fears—none of these is ever the same in any individual, but some come to be while others pass away.

Diotima immediately went on to add that the account also holds of pieces of knowledge (207 E–208 A). Her treatment of this last case suggests that she wants to make the following general points. First, if at time t_1 you have certain beliefs, desires, fears and pieces of knowledge, then at time t_2 you have *different* beliefs, desires, fears and pieces of knowledge—which means, at the very least, that the set of your beliefs, desires, etc. at t_1 (your 'total cognitive, intellectual and emotional state at any given point'[31]) is different from the set of your beliefs, desires, etc. at t_2. Secondly, even when you seem to have uninterruptedly one and the same individual belief, desire, etc. for a stretch of time, the apparent continuity of this state actually consists of a succession of numerically distinct but similar states. You seem to know uninterruptedly that *P* for a stretch of time; but in fact this continuity consists of a succession of events of your losing and recovering knowledge that *P*, i.e. of your forgetting and being reminded that *P*. This looks like a very questionable and strained view; for there would seem to be plenty of cases in which you do uninterruptedly believe, desire, fear, or know that *P* for some time. It seems, nevertheless, to be exactly what Diotima is claiming here.

This second part of Diotima's account has, like the previous one, a Humean parallel:

> Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions. Our thought is still more variable than our sight; and all our other senses and faculties contribute to this change; nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment. (*Treatise* 1. 4. 6, § 4)

Now, Hume deploys this as an argument against the identity through time of the self or mind and in favour of the thesis that we are 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement'. Likewise Diotima's point may seem to threaten the soul's identity through time. Is she holding that, just as your body actually consists of a succession of impermanent

[31] K. Dover, *Plato:* Symposium [*Symposium*] (Cambridge, 1980), 149.

body-stages, in the same way your soul actually consists of a succession of impermanent soul-stages?[32] If this were so, then her account would seem to run counter to Plato's fundamental conviction that your soul (*this* very soul, not just a sequence of similar ones) will survive your body, will be punished or rewarded for what you have done in your earthly life, and will subsequently reincarnate in another body. As is well known, this conviction is not aired in the *Symposium*;[33] but Diotima had better not say anything flatly inconsistent with it. For if she did, that might be a reason for doubting that any of what she says is endorsed by Plato.

Fortunately, however (and fortunately from *any* point of view, not just from that of the present interpretation), there is no need to construe Diotima's words as committing her to a Humean dissolution of the soul. Here against Hume we may pit Reid, *Essays* III. 4, who essentially follows Hume (and hence Diotima as well) as far as the identity of the body and of the mind's states are concerned, but parts company with him when it comes to that of the soul or mind itself. On the one hand, Reid grants,

> identity cannot, in its proper sense, be applied to our pains, our pleasures, our thoughts, or any operation of our minds. The pain felt this day is not the same individual pain which I felt yesterday, though they may be *similar* in kind and degree, and have the same cause. The same may be said of every feeling, and of every operation of mind. They are all successive in their nature …

On the other hand, Reid goes on to argue against Hume,

> My personal identity … implies the continued existence of that indivisible thing which I call myself. Whatever this self may be, it is something which thinks, and deliberates, and resolves, and acts, and suffers. I am not thought, I am not action, I am not feeling; I am something that thinks, and acts, and suffers. My thoughts, and actions, and feelings, change every moment: they have no continued, but a successive existence; but that *self* or *I*, to which they belong, is permanent, and has the same relation to all the succeeding thoughts, actions, and feelings which I call mine.

Likewise Diotima's claims are actually consistent with the possibility that a *permanent* soul is the subject of the impermanent mental states she describes.[34] This would, indeed, harmonize

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[32] This was the view of Crombie, *Examination* II. 23 (cf. II. 323, 362): here Plato 'is prepared to treat human minds as consisting of nothing but the sum of what would ordinarily be called their acts and experiences, where men are nothing but a stream of transient thoughts, feelings and sensations'.

[33] For an explanation of this silence see C. H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* [*Socratic Dialogue*] (Cambridge, 1996), 344–5: 'It is left for the more intimate and more philosophical setting of the *Phaedo* to bring together the transcendental metaphysics revealed in the *Symposium* with the otherworldly psychology outlined in the *Meno*.'

[34] This is also the interpretation of Price, *Love* 21–5. He even believes that there is positive evidence for it: 'Plato seems to be assuming that at least the cognitive elements of the mental sequence are subject to the control

with a couple of textual details. First, it would be odd if the words ‘what is mortal, both body and everything else’ (208 B 3–4) were meant to apply to the soul as well; for then Diotima would be not merely stating, but even *taking for granted* that the soul is mortal—which would be hardly plausible. Secondly, Diotima’s ensuing, vague reference to ‘what is immortal’, which partakes of immortality ‘in a different way’ (B 4), may well be meant to include the soul within its scope.[35]

So it is possible—or even plausible—that while in this context the soul’s states are conceived of as analogous to the body, the soul itself is not. This is, after all, an unsurprising conclusion. The soul is obviously a particular entity, but it is not sensible; and in the *Phaedo* the Affinity Argument (78 B–84 B: the very argument with which we started out in Section 2) emphasizes that its nature is much more similar to that of the changeless forms than to that of the changing sensible particulars. So it may well be that one aspect of this similarity is that the soul, though it is subject to change, unlike the forms which are exempt from it, is also capable of enduring through it, unlike sensible particulars, and thus is always identical to itself, as the forms are eternally.

6. Non-identity through time: *Phaedo*

The *Phaedo* actually contains another interesting passage which provides a parallel *both* to Diotima’s explicit views about the body *and* to the views I have hypothetically ascribed to her about the soul.

We are in the context of Cebes’ objection to Socrates (86 E–88 B). The main thrust of that objection is that proving that the soul lasts longer than the body, as Socrates has just done with the Affinity Argument, is not sufficient to prove that the soul is immortal. Cebes introduces a famous simile between the soul and a weaver. The life of a weaver is longer than that of each of the successive cloaks he wears out; nevertheless, at some point the weaver dies while he is wearing a cloak which thus turns out to be his last and which survives him (87 C–D). Likewise,

of an agent … the active term ‘rehearsal’ (208a5) [μελετᾶν or μελέτη, ‘going over’ in the translation of Section 4] intimates that such mental continuities as there may be are subject to the activity of a soul whose own identity rides free’ (24–5). This inference, however, strikes me as over-confident; for in principle it is not impossible that our talk of ‘rehearsal’ might be just an imprecise manner of speaking (see 208 A 3–4 ‘what *is called* “going over” something’, ὃ ... καλεῖται μελετᾶν).

[35] See Dover, *Symposium* 149; Price, *Love* 30; Kahn, *Socratic Dialogue* 345 n. 20; Sedley, ‘Immortality’ 159–60. This solution would not be available if one accepted Creuzer’s disruptive conjecture ἀδύνατον in place of ἀθάνατον, as e.g. did R. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato*, 2nd edn [*Symposium*] (Cambridge, 1932).

a soul stays in existence for longer than a body does (87 D); but even if a soul were able to undergo a number of successive incarnations into different bodies, this would leave open the possibility that it could be destroyed at some point (88 A–B).

Now, this idea of successive incarnations is not introduced immediately. Here is what Cebes says after describing the case of the weaver (87 D 3–E 5):

> τὴν αὐτὴν δὲ ταύτην οἶμαι εἰκόνα δέξαιτ᾽ ἂν ψυχὴ πρὸς σῶμα, καί τις λέγων αὐτὰ ταῦτα περὶ αὐτῶν μέτρι᾽ ἄν μοι φαίνοιτο λέγειν, ὡς ἡ μὲν ψυχὴ πολυχρόνιόν ἐστι, τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἀσθενέστερον καὶ ὀλιγοχρονιώτερον· ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἂν φαίη ἑκάστην τῶν ψυχῶν πολλὰ σώματα κατατρίβειν, ἄλλως τε κἂν πολλὰ ἔτη βιῷ—εἰ γὰρ ῥέοι τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἀπολλύοιτο ἔτι ζῶντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλ᾽ ἡ ψυχὴ ἀεὶ τὸ κατατριβόμενον ἀνυφαίνοι—ἀναγκαῖον μεντἂν εἴη, ὁπότε ἀπολλύοιτο ἡ ψυχή, τὸ τελευταῖον ὕφασμα τυχεῖν αὐτὴν ἔχουσαν καὶ τούτου μόνου προτέραν ἀπόλλυσθαι, ἀπολομένης δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς τότ᾽ ἤδη τὴν φύσιν τῆς ἀσθενείας ἐπιδεικνύοι τὸ σῶμα καὶ ταχὺ σαπὲν διοίχοιτο.
>
> The relation of soul to body would, I think, admit of the same comparison. Anyone making these very points about them, that the soul is long-lived, while the body is weaker and shorter-lived, would in my view argue reasonably. But this would be irrelevant, for the following reason. He might say that *every soul wears out many bodies, especially in a life of many years—for if the body is in flux and perishes while the human being is still alive, nonetheless the soul is always weaving afresh that which is being worn out*—but necessarily, when the soul does perish, it happens to be wearing its last garment and perishes before that alone. And once the soul has perished, then at last the body will reveal its natural weakness, moulder away quickly, and be gone.

It is important to reflect on why Cebes chooses to compare the soul, not just to someone who wears successive clothes throughout his life, but specifically to a weaver, who *makes* the successive clothes he wears. This comparison aims to capture something which, as a first approximation, we could spell out in the following terms: the soul is not merely contained or hosted in the body, but plays an *active* role in preserving it, repairing the damages it receives and governing its physiological processes of nourishment and growth. But there is more than this to the comparison. Cebes does not compare the soul to a weaver who keeps repairing and enlarging *one and the same* garment; he rather finds it natural to compare the soul to a weaver who makes *different and successive* garments throughout his life. Likewise the soul is here very clearly described not as inhabiting and taking care of one and the same body, but rather as *going through a succession of distinct bodies throughout a single lifetime*. It is via this idea that in the following lines Cebes, as a further step, gets at the idea of successive incarnations (88 A 1 ff.)

Now, this notion of a succession of distinct bodies—or distinct stages of a single body—during a single lifetime is exactly what we encountered in the *Symposium* passage. Cebes seems to take it for granted as though it were perfectly unproblematic; indeed, this is apparently the

view of Socrates himself. When he recapitulates Cebes' objection at 91 D 2–7, he reformulates it as follows:

> Κέβης δέ μοι ἔδοξε τοῦτο μὲν ἐμοὶ συγχωρεῖν, πολυχρονιώτερόν γε εἶναι ψυχὴν σώματος, ἀλλὰ τόδε ἄδηλον παντί, μὴ πολλὰ δὴ σώματα καὶ πολλάκις κατατρίψασα ἡ ψυχὴ τὸ τελευταῖον σῶμα καταλιποῦσα νῦν αὐτὴ ἀπολλύηται, καὶ ᾖ αὐτὸ τοῦτο θάνατος, ψυχῆς ὄλεθρος, ἐπεὶ σῶμά γε ἀεὶ ἀπολλύμενον οὐδὲν παύεται.
>
> Cebes, I thought, agreed with me in this much, that soul is longer-lived than body; but he held that no one could be sure whether the soul, after wearing out many bodies time and again, might not then perish itself, leaving its last body behind, and whether death might not be just this, the perishing of soul—since *body, of course, is perishing incessantly and never stops*.

So he is perfectly alive to the presence of this notion in Cebes' objection. But he will not say anything about it, let alone do anything to reject it, in his ensuing reply to Cebes' objection. David Gallop, with whose remarks on the passage I agree, notes the parallel with the *Symposium* and claims that 'Socrates … never disputes the theory as a model for understanding the relation between body and soul. Perhaps, therefore, it expresses his own view of the soul's animating function (cf. 105c9–d5), though it is incompatible with the notion of soul as a "prisoner" in the body'.[36] My only disagreement is with Gallop's last clause: there is no real incompatibility between the two views. The soul is no less of a prisoner if it turns out on close philosophical analysis that its bodily prison is actually, strictly speaking, a sequence of numerically distinct but similar prisons.

7. A broader picture (and an Aristotelian conjecture)

The agreement between Diotima, Cebes and Socrates encourages us to suppose that Plato himself at least occasionally sympathizes with the conception of change we are considering. The possibility that he may go so far as to question the identity through time of sensible particulars should, after all, not come as a surprise. For it accords with an assumption that seems to be common in Greek philosophy, and which was presumably facilitated by the syntax of the

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[36] Gallop, *Phaedo* 151; cf. R. Hackforth, *Plato's* Phaedo (Cambridge, 1955), 103–4. The parallel with the *Symposium* is noted also by Price, *Love* 23, who even uses it as an argument for thinking that there Diotima does not really intend to treat the soul in the same way as the body (see Section 5 above).

S. Menn, 'On Socrates' First Objections to the Physicists (*Phaedo* 95 E 8–97 B 7)' ['First Objections'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 38 (2010), 37–68, does not consider the *Phaedo* passage, or for that matter the *Symposium* one; both, however, tell against his claim that at *Phaedo* 96 C–97 B Socrates wants to criticize the physicists for being unable to preserve the identity through time of sensible particulars. I agree, instead, with Menn's emphasis ('First Objections', 53–5) on the importance of the soul as the bearer of personal identity: see especially *Phaedo* 115 C–D, and cf. *Leg.* 12. 959 A–C.

verb γίγνεσθαι,[37] according to which any change involves some sort of generation and destruction. We can see the assumption at work in the arguments advanced by Parmenides (28 B 8. 26–30 DK, cf. 38–41) and Melissus (30 B 7 DK) to show that Being or What Is is unchangeable on the grounds that generation and destruction are impossible.[38] And in a way it is still operating in Aristotle himself, who in his analysis of change in *Physics* 1 has no qualms about claiming that in any change there is something which comes to be (τὸ γιγνόμενον, 1. 7, 190ᵇ11–13), or that when something changes from white to black the white 'is destroyed' or 'perishes' (φθείρεται, 1. 5, 188ᵇ3–6).[39] Of course the Aristotelian version of the assumption is much more innocuous than the Eleatic one. For Aristotle believes that such a change can be also described—indeed more fundamentally—as the change of a persisting underlying subject from one attribute to another.

Now, in many cases the underlying subject which persists through the change is a substance (οὐσία) which undergoes a change in one of its non-essential attributes (*Phys*. 1. 7, 190ᵃ31–ᵇ1). And already in the *Categories* Aristotle claims that 'it seems to be most proper to substance that it is something which, while being numerically one and the same, is capable of receiving contraries' (5, 4ᵃ10–11). In other words, primary substances—which include sensible particulars—are identical through time and change from one contrary attribute to another. In the light of the evidence we have been examining it becomes possible to surmise that this is put forward not as a commonsensical claim, but rather as a controversial philosophical contention—more precisely, as an anti-Platonic contention.[40] The fact that it is not announced as such is no objection; for the *Categories* never voices agreement or disagreement with other philosophers. A case in point is Aristotle's view that primary substances, the fundamental entities (πρῶται οὐσίαι), are particular objects—including sensible ones—and that 'if the

[37] The verb can be used both without a complement ('*X* γίγνεται' = '*X* comes to be, *X* is generated') and with a complement ('*X* γίγνεται *F*' = '*X* comes to be *F*'). The two uses cannot be sharply separated from each other and indeed are as continuous as the complete and the incomplete use of εἶναι, 'to be'. For a discussion of this grammatical fact and its implications see M. F. Burnyeat, '*Apology* 30 B 2–4: Socrates, Money, and the Grammar of γίγνεσθαι' ['Money'], *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 123 (2003), 1–25.

[38] See J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edn (London, 1982): 215–6, 220–1.

[39] Cf. T. Clarke, 'Aristotle and the Ancient Puzzle about Coming to Be', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 49 (2015), 129–50 at 131–2 and n. 10.

[40] Aristotle is certainly familiar with the *Symposium* passage. He agrees with what Diotima says there about animals achieving an immortality of sorts by reproducing themselves and leaving behind them another individual similar to them; and he voices his agreement by almost verbatim (though unacknowledged) quotations at *De anima* 2. 4, 415ᵃ26–ᵇ7 and *Politics* 1. 1, 1252ᵃ29–30. He also agrees, at *GA* 735ᵃ13–21, that there is a close connection between reproduction, thus conceived, and the process of nutrition and growth of a single individual. See Bury, *Symposium* 117; F. Sheffield, 'Aristotle and Plato's *Symposium*', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 54 (2011), 123–41 at 124; Sorabji, *Self* 64 and n. 33. Sorabji counts as echoes of the *Symposium* also *GC* 2. 11, 338ᵇ11–19, and *Meteor.* 2. 3, 357ᵇ26–358ᵃ3. In this last passage Aristotle argues that elemental masses (air, fire, the water of a river, or the sea) persist as the same objects not numerically but specifically, through replacement of their parts.

primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist' (5, 2^b5–6^c): that goes flatly against Plato's view that the fundamental entities are universal forms, not sensible particulars, and that forms would exist even if sensible particulars did not exist (as can be seen most clearly from the *Timaeus*).[41]

8. Being and coming to be

Let us leave Aristotle aside and get back to Plato. The view we are considering, if and to the extent that it can be legitimately ascribed to him, might play some role, or constitute one strand, in the basic contrast that he sometimes formulates as a contrast between 'coming to be' and 'being' (γένεσις and οὐσία: e.g. *Rep.* 7, 525 B, C, 526 E, 534 A), sometimes as a contrast between 'what comes to be' and 'what is' (τὸ γιγνόμενον and τὸ ὄν: e.g. *Rep.* 6, 518 C, 521 D), and sometimes as a contrast between 'what comes to be and passes away' and 'what always is' or just 'what is' (τὸ γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον and τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν or just τὸ ὄν: e.g. *Rep.* 6, 508 D; 7, 521 E, 527 B).[42] If, and to the extent that, you believe that strictly speaking there is no single thing that is Callias' body and stays in existence as numerically the same object through any appreciable stretch of time, it makes sense to say that Callias' body strictly speaking is not something that *is*, or does not have *being*, and is instead confined to coming to be—the successive coming to be of the various successive bodies or body-stages which lends the body a shaky existence of sorts as a 'logical construction'. At least in the *Symposium*, when four pages later (210 E–211 B) Diotima finally introduces the form of beautiful and contrasts it with the beautiful particulars on the grounds that it 'always is' and is perfectly unchangeable whereas they come to be and pass away (211 A 1, B 3–5), it is natural to think not just of ordinary coming to be and passing away, but also of the special way in which she talked about the particulars' coming to be and passing away at 207 D–208 B.

We shall see in Section 11 that this interpretation of Plato's views on change and being is well attested in antiquity. Here I rather wish to consider a potential objection to it: admittedly, not

[41] S. Menn, 'Metaphysics, Dialectic and the *Categories*', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 3 (1995), 311–37, esp. 323–5, argues that the *Categories* is actually a work of dialectic and therefore cannot contain any anti-Platonic metaphysical claims. Whatever the general purpose of the *Categories* may be, however, in the particular case of 5, 2^b5–6^c the contrast with Plato seems to me to be too evident and too fundamental to be explained away. And on the basis of this case it is possible to conjecture that there are other cases as well, such as 4^a10–11.

[42] On the contrast as it occurs in *Tim.* 27 D–28 A see Section 8.

everyone agrees that one of the two realms contrasted by Plato in the passages at issue should be characterized primarily in terms of coming to be and passing away. In particular, doubts have been raised in connection with the passage where the contrast is first introduced in the *Republic*, 6, 485 A–B. In order to discuss that passage I have to supply a modicum of context.

At *Republic* 5, 479 A–D Socrates draws a famous distinction between the philosopher and the 'lover of sights and sounds', the kind of person who delights 'in beautiful tones and colours and shapes' and 'believes in beautiful things, but neither believes in beauty itself nor is able to follow when someone tries to guide him to the knowledge of it' (476 C 1–3).[43] He imagines the following exchange with the lover of sights and sounds, whose answers are given by Glaucon (479 A 5–D 4):

> "Τούτων ... δή, ὦ ἄριστε, φήσομεν, τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν μῶν τι ἔστιν ὃ οὐκ αἰσχρὸν φανήσεται; καὶ τῶν δικαίων, ὃ οὐκ ἄδικον; καὶ τῶν ὁσίων, ὃ οὐκ ἀνόσιον;"
>
> Οὔκ, ἀλλ᾽ ἀνάγκη, ἔφη, καὶ καλά πως αὐτὰ καὶ αἰσχρὰ φανῆναι, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐρωτᾷς.
>
> Τί δὲ τὰ πολλὰ διπλάσια; ἧττόν τι ἡμίσεα ἢ διπλάσια φαίνεται;
>
> Οὐδέν.
>
> Καὶ μεγάλα δὴ καὶ σμικρὰ καὶ κοῦφα καὶ βαρέα μή τι μᾶλλον ἃ ἂν φήσωμεν, ταῦτα προσρηθήσεται ἢ τἀναντία;
>
> Οὔκ, ἀλλ᾽ ἀεί, ἔφη, ἕκαστον ἀμφοτέρων ἕξεται.
>
> Πότερον οὖν ἔστι μᾶλλον ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν τοῦτο ὃ ἄν τις φῇ αὐτὸ εἶναι;
>
> …
>
> Ηὑρήκαμεν ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὅτι τὰ τῶν πολλῶν πολλὰ νόμιμα καλοῦ τε πέρι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μεταξύ που κυλινδεῖται τοῦ τε μὴ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ὄντος εἰλικρινῶς.

> ' "My good fellow, is there any one of these many beautiful things that will not appear ugly? And of the just things, that will not appear unjust? And of the pious things, that will not appear impious?" '
>
> 'No, it is inevitable,' he said, 'that they would appear both beautiful in a way and ugly, and so with all the other things you are asking about.'
>
> 'And again, do the many double things appear any the less halves than doubles?'
>
> 'None the less.'
>
> 'And likewise with things great and small, and light and heavy—will they admit those predicates that we apply to them any more than the opposite ones?'
>
> 'No,' he said, 'each of them will always be possessed of both.'
>
> 'Then *is* each of these many rather than it *is not* that which one affirms it to be?'
>
> …

[43] Here and in the following passages from the *Republic* I have modified the translation of P. Shorey, *Plato:* Republic (2 vols.) (Cambridge MA and London, 1930–5). The Greek text I shall quote is that of S. R. Slings (ed.), *Platonis Rempublicam* (Oxford, 2003).

> ‘Therefore we have found that the many conventions of the many about the beautiful and the other things *are tumbled about in the mid-region between what is not and what is purely*.’

The unstable condition of the ‘many *F* things’ described in this passage seems to cover a twofold kind of variability, both diachronic and synchronic: on the one hand, they change through time from being *F* to not being *F*; on the other, they are *F* in one respect or comparison but are not *F* in another respect or comparison. Socrates refers to this condition as their being ‘tumbled about’ between not-being and pure being (κυλινδεῖται, 479 D 3–4); a few lines below he will also describe the sensible world as ‘that which wanders between’ the two realms (τὸ μεταξὺ πλανητόν, D 7–8).

Right at the beginning of Book 6, 484 B 4–7, Socrates recalls the distinction of Book 5 between the philosophers and the lovers of sights and sounds, asking:

> ἐπειδὴ φιλόσοφοι μὲν οἱ <u>τοῦ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντος</u> δυνάμενοι ἐφάπτεσθαι, οἱ δὲ μὴ ἀλλ’ <u>ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ παντοίως ἴσχουσιν</u> πλανώμενοι οὐ φιλόσοφοι, ποτέρους δὴ δεῖ πόλεως ἡγεμόνας εἶναι;
>
> Since philosophers are those who are able to grasp *that which is always constant and in the same state*, whereas those who are unable and wander *among things that are many and are in all sorts of ways* are not philosophers, which of these two groups ought to be leaders of the city?

Then Socrates starts arguing that the philosophers, not the lovers of sights and sounds, should rule the city. And while he is doing so, at 485 A 10–B 3 he says this:

> Τοῦτο μὲν δὴ τῶν φιλοσόφων φύσεων πέρι ὡμολογήσθω ἡμῖν ὅτι μαθήματός γε ἀεὶ ἐρῶσιν ὃ ἂν αὐτοῖς δηλοῖ <u>ἐκείνης τῆς οὐσίας τῆς ἀεὶ οὔσης καὶ μὴ πλανωμένης ὑπὸ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς</u>.
>
> Let us agree about this point concerning the nature of philosophers, that they are always enamoured of any study which reveals to them something *of that being which always is and is not made to wander by coming to be and passing away.*

As I said above, this is apparently the first occurrence in the *Republic* of the contrast between the realm of being and that of coming to be and passing away. Now, those commentators who oppose this construal advance the following argument: here at the opening of Book 6 we should not take Socrates to be saying more than the immediately preceding Book 5 entitles him to say;[44] but in Book 5 he only described sensible things as appearing both beautiful and ugly,

[44] In addition to the textual proximity between the end of Book 5 and the beginning of Book 6, notice also that ‘not made to wander’ (μὴ πλανωμένης) at 6, 485 B 2 seems to hark back to ‘that which wanders between’ (τὸ μεταξὺ πλανητόν) at 5, 479 D 8–9. This, however, is perfectly compatible with the possibility that the two passages may emphasize partly different ways in which sensible particulars can be described as ‘wandering’.

both great and small, etc., and did not mention their coming to be and passing away at all; therefore we should construe accordingly his claims in Book 6, both at 484 B and at 485 A–B.[45]

Sticking so close to Book 5, however, is neither necessary nor feasible. (i) Not necessary, because Book 6 may well be building on the argument of Book 5, or looking at the same subject from a partly different angle, rather than just summarizing it; and the new development, i.e. the introduction of coming to be and passing away, is unlikely to perplex any reader—let alone readers already familiar with the *Symposium*. (ii) Not feasible, because at 485 B 2–3 Socrates speaks of γένεσις and φθορά, 'coming to be' and 'passing away'. True, the term γένεσις could, in theory, be construed as referring to predicative change (i.e. as 'coming to be' not in the sense of coming into existence but rather in the sense of coming to be so-and-so), and hence perhaps even, figuratively, to synchronic variability, namely the compresence of opposite features in the same subject. But there is no escaping the fact that φθορά can only mean 'passing away' or 'destruction'.[46]

9. Evidence from the *Timaeus*

So far we have examined texts from the *Symposium* (Sections 3 and 5), the *Theaetetus* (Section 4), and the *Phaedo* (Section 6), and we have subsequently used them as a basis for a conjecture about the contrast between being and coming to be, especially with reference to the *Republic* (Section 8). We can now proceed to consider two passages from the *Timaeus*.

The first passage can be regarded, generally speaking, as another occurrence of the general contrast between being and coming to be, but presents special difficulties and requires careful and patient discussion. It is placed at the very beginning of Timaeus' speech, where Timaeus

[45] See Irwin, 11; Fine, 57; and Burnyeat, 22–3. Between these scholarly accounts there are some differences, which however are not relevant for our present purposes. Irwin and Fine take Book 5 to be about *synchronic* variability and hence suppose that this is also the point at issue in Book 6; Burnyeat rather speaks of 'predicative changeability', which he seems to understand *diachronically*. As I said above, in fact both kinds of variability are likely to be in play in Book 5.

[46] See n. 37 on the verb γίγνεσθαι, to which the noun γένεσις corresponds. But the verb φθείρεσθαι, which has the same relation to the noun φθορά, can only be used without a complement, to mean 'to pass away, perish, be destroyed': in *ordinary* Greek you do not say '*X* φθείρεται *F*' to mean '*X* ceases to be *F*'. Admittedly, the notion that something can be φθαρτόν not only 'absolutely' or 'in respect of substance', but also 'in respect of place or in respect of quantity or quality', occurs in Aristotle, *Metaph.* Θ10, 1050^{b}13–16. Cf. *Phys.* 5. 1, 225^{a}17–20: φθορά can be either 'absolute' (ἁπλῶς) or 'qualified' (τις). But those are highly technical contexts, very different from the *Republic*, and Aristotle is deliberately straining the language in order to assimilate φθορά and φθείρεσθαι to γένεσις and γίγνεσθαι.

famously lays down a basic ontological dichotomy. In the standard editions[47] this reads as follows (27 D 6–28 A 1):

> τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε;
> What is that which always is and has no coming to be, and what is that which always comes to be and never is?

This question clearly contrasts two classes of items: forms and sensible particulars. But the way in which the question is formulated is problematic. In particular, at first glance it is difficult to see in what sense a sensible particular could be said to be something which 'always comes to be', or 'is always coming to be', and 'never is', given that we are plainly expected to assume that it 'is always coming to be' *in every respect*, without ever *being* in any respect at all. Socrates' body is continuously changing in all sorts of ways and is never exactly in the same state, all right; but it would seem to *be a body*, and to possess many other features, as long as it exists, or at least for a very long time.[48]

Now, to solve the difficulty I would in principle be ready, developing a brief suggestion of Alan Code,[49] to construe the passage in the light of what I have been arguing so far and take Timaeus to be saying that an ordinary sensible particular 'is always coming to be' and 'never is' in the sense that it is actually a succession of impermanent items which come into existence and immediately cease to exist. If we read it in this way, we could let the *Timaeus* passage fall into line with the *Republic* ones discussed in Section 8, in which 'what comes to be' is contrasted with 'what is'.

There is, however, a problem that precludes a complete assimilation of the *Timaeus* passage to the *Republic* ones and reduces (though it does not eliminate) the extent to which this passage can support my interpretation. All I have been saying so far hinges on the assumption that the second member of Timaeus' dichotomy is τὸ γιγνόμενον ... ἀεί, 'that which *always* comes to be'. Yet, as some (but not all) commentators on this passage have pointed out, here ἀεί,

[47] See Burnet and A. Rivaud, *Platon:* Oeuvres Complètes*, tome X:* Timée - Critias (Paris, 1925). I follow both of these in the ensuing *Timaeus* quotations.

[48] See M. Frede, 'Being and Becoming in Plato' ['Being and Becoming'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol., 1988, 37–52 at 38–41.

[49] Code, 'Reply' 54. Code mentions the *Symposium* passage as a possible parallel: see n. 9 and Section 10.

‘always’, is in fact poorly attested.[50] What is more, there is strong internal evidence that it should not be in the text. To see what this evidence is we have to read on.[51]

In the following lines (28 A 1–4) Timaeus proceeds to expand on his initial distinction:

> τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, <u>ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν</u>, τὸ δ᾽ αὖ δόξῃ μετ᾽ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, <u>γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν</u>.
>
> The former can be grasped by intellection together with a reasoned account; *it is always in the same state*. By contrast, the latter is the object of belief together with unreasoned perception, which *comes to be and passes away but never really is*.

Here the phrase ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν (‘which never really is’, A 3–4) is clearly a gloss on the initial ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε (‘which never is’, A 1). Likewise, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον (‘which comes to be and passes away’, A 3) is apparently intended to pick up and expand on the initial γιγνόμενον (‘which always comes to be’, D 6); and this confirms that that participle meant ‘what comes into existence’ rather than ‘what comes to be something or other’. Then, some lines below, Timaeus starts to consider ‘the whole universe’ and says that we must first ask about it ‘a question which has to be asked about anything at the beginning of an inquiry’, namely

> πότερον ἦν ἀεί, γενέσεως ἀρχὴν ἔχων οὐδεμίαν, ἢ γέγονεν, ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς τινος ἀρξάμενος
>
> whether it always was, having no beginning of coming to be, or it has come to be, beginning from some beginning. (28 B 6–7)

Thereby he is considering a particular case, i.e. that special object which is the whole universe, and asking where it fits in the initial distinction: does it belong to the first or the second class of items? But the fit between that distinction and its current application is tricky. According to the text of the current editions, the general distinction was between (a) τὸ ὂν ἀεί, ‘that which always is’, and (b) τὸ γιγνόμενον ... ἀεί, ‘that which always comes to be’; what we are asking now is whether the universe ἦν ἀεί, ‘always was’—which corresponds to (a)—or γέγονεν, ‘has

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[50] ἀεί is present only in the text of one MS (A = *Parisinus gr.* 1807), where however it is cancelled by dots; as a marginal correction in another MS (*Vaticanus gr.* 226); and in a small part of the indirect tradition. It is instead completely absent in all other MSS and in the greater part of the indirect tradition, including the translations of Cicero and Calcidius. See J. Whittaker, ‘*Timaeus* 27d5 ff.’, *Phoenix*, 23 (1969), 181–5, and ‘Textual Comments on *Timaeus* 27c–d’, *Phoenix*, 27 (1973), 387–91; J. Dillon, ‘Tampering with the *Timaeus*: Ideological Emendations in Plato, with Special Reference to the *Timaeus*’, *American Journal of Philology*, 110 (1989), 50–72 at 60–3. Therefore ἀεί is wisely omitted by several scholars: D. J. Zeyl, *Plato: Timaeus* [*Timaeus*] (Indianapolis, 2000); D. Sedley, *Creationism and its Critics in Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2007), 103 n. 20; S. Broadie, *Nature and Divinity in Plato’s* Timaeus [*Nature and Divinity*] (Cambridge, 2012), 36.

[51] The following analysis of the structure of Timaeus’ argument, and of its implications on the issue of ἀεί, agrees with T. M. Robinson, ‘Understanding the *Timaeus*’, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 2 (1986), 103–19, repr. in his *Cosmos as Art Object: Studies in Plato’s* Timaeus *and Other Dialogues* (Binghamton, 2004), 7–22.

come to be'—which should correspond to (b). Now, this γέγονεν refers to a case of complete coming to be, = 'coming into existence', as is proved by the reference to a 'beginning' and by the whole course subsequently taken by the argument; so it is again confirmed that this was the use of the verb already in (b). However, *if* in (b) τὸ γιγνόμενον was followed by ἀεί, as in the current editions, then it referred to a coming to be that occurs *continuously or repeatedly*. And this does not correspond to the particular case of the universe as it is presented here, where γέγονεν rather refers to an *initial*, one-off coming to be. So the distinction drawn at the outset rather ought to have been between (a) that which always is and (b') that which comes to be *full stop*—without 'always'. And that is just how the distinction went according to most witnesses, which do not read ἀεί. That omission is thus proved to be correct also on internal grounds.

Thus philological and philosophical reasons alike recommend that we read the initial distinction as follows:

> τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μέν {ἀεί}, ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε;
> What is that which always is and has no coming to be, and what is that which comes to be and never is?

The intrusion of ἀεί into the text can be easily explained in several ways: it could have been added to τὸ γιγνόμενον by someone who was influenced by the previous reference to τὸ ὂν ἀεί, or by the superficial resemblance between our passage and *Theaet.* 152 E ἔστι μὲν ... οὐδεποτ' οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ γίγνεται ('Nothing ever is, but [everything] always comes to be', a main tenet of the Secret Doctrine), or also by the assumption—widespread in antiquity—that the initial argument of the *Timaeus* is not really about the generation of the universe.

Once the problematic 'always' disappears, several interpretations of this passage are ruled out of court.[52] Actually, even my own interpretation loses the main piece of evidence in its favour, because the second horn of the distinction is now characterized simply as comprising *generated* items as opposed to everlasting ones. Nevertheless, the fact that these items are said to be generated or come into existence tells us nothing about whether, in what sense, and under

[52] E.g. the interpretation of Frede, 'Being and Becoming', is predicated upon the unquestioned assumption that ἀεί is in the text. Apart from this, I find his interpretation very difficult to accept also for an entirely different set of reasons. Frede construes γίγνεσθαι *F* in the *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus* as 'to behave like an *F*, to display or take on the outward characteristics of an *F*' and as distinct from 'being really *F*'—a distinction allegedly present in some non-philosophical texts (e.g. Thuc. 1. 86. 1–2, 2. 87. 9, 3. 54. 3) and in Plato's *Protagoras*, 339 A–345 C. Code, 'Reply', however, while sharing the assumption about ἀεί, has shown that (i) it is dubious whether the parallels adduced by Frede are actually pertinent, (ii) Frede's construal of the contrast between γενέσθαι and εἶναι in the *Protagoras* is hard to reconcile with the textual evidence. Code's brief remarks could be expanded on: e.g. it is apparently impossible for Frede to make sense of the use of γενέσθαι at *Prot.* 345 B 7–8. Frede's interpretation is defended—to my mind unsuccessfully—and developed by W.-R. Mann, *The Discovery of Things: Aristotle's* Categories *and their Context* [*Discovery*] (Princeton, 2000), 84–107.

what conditions they will continue to exist. Therefore my interpretation remains at least consistent with the text. Moreover, it retains the advantage that it provides an interesting way of making sense of Timaeus' claim that what comes to be 'never is'.

The second *Timaeus* passage I wish to examine is comparatively plainer. We are at 52 A 1–B 2, where Timaeus sets out the fully-fledged version of his distinction between three metaphysical principles:

> ἓν μὲν εἶναι τὸ κατὰ ταὐτὰ εἶδος ἔχον, ἀγέννητον καὶ ἀνώλεθρον, οὔτε εἰς ἑαυτὸ εἰσδεχόμενον ἄλλο ἄλλοθεν οὔτε αὐτὸ εἰς ἄλλο ποι ἰόν, ἀόρατον δὲ καὶ ἄλλως ἀναίσθητον, τοῦτο ὃ δὴ νόησις εἴληχεν ἐπισκοπεῖν· τὸ δὲ ὁμώνυμον ὅμοιόν τε ἐκείνῳ δεύτερον, αἰσθητόν, γεννητόν, πεφορημένον ἀεί, γιγνόμενόν τε ἔν τινι τόπῳ καὶ πάλιν ἐκεῖθεν ἀπολλύμενον, δόξῃ μετ᾽ αἰσθήσεως περιληπτόν· τρίτον δὲ αὖ γένος ὂν τὸ τῆς χώρας ἀεί, φθορὰν οὐ προσδεχόμενον, ἕδραν δὲ παρέχον ὅσα ἔχει γένεσιν πᾶσιν, αὐτὸ δὲ μετ᾽ ἀναισθησίας ἁπτὸν λογισμῷ τινι νόθῳ, μόγις πιστόν.
>
> (1) One thing is that which possesses its own form in the same way, ungenerated and imperishable, which neither receives into itself anything else from anywhere else nor goes itself into anything else anywhere; this is invisible and impossible to perceive in any other way, and it is the role of thought to inquire into it. (2) Second comes that which bears the same name as the former and is similar to it, perceptible, generated, *always in a state of having changed place, coming into being in a given place and then passing away from it*; this is apprehended by belief with the aid of sense-perception. (3) Next, as a third kind comes that of space, which always is and does not admit of destruction, which provides a fixed site for all things that have coming to be; this is itself apprehended without sense-perception by some sort of bastard reasoning and is hardly even an object of conviction.[53]

What is interesting about this passage is this: in the words I have emphasized (52 A 6–7) Timaeus speaks of spatial movement in terms of coming into being and passing away, generation and destruction. It looks as if what we would ordinarily describe as a single object's moving from place A to place B should instead be described as *one object's passing away from A and another (presumably similar) object's coming into being in B*. In short, sensible particulars do not remain identical through spatial change—which they are constantly undergoing.[54]

This striking consequence actually harmonizes with a plausible way of understanding the metaphysics of the *Timaeus*. For if sensible particulars are conceived of as temporary

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[53] Translation after Zeyl, *Timaeus*.

[54] The verb γίγνεσθαι admits of an innocuous locative use with a preposition: see LSJ II.3.c, and cf. for example *Prot.* 314 C ἐπειδὴ ... ἐν τῷ προθύρῳ ἐγενόμεθα, 'when we got in the doorway'. But ἀπόλλυσθαι does not seem to have any parallel use. Cf. the end of Section 8 and n. 46.

qualifications of parts of a *spatial* substratum, the 'Receptacle' (50 C–51 B), then it is difficult to see what could provide them with identity through *spatial* change. And when I say 'sensible particulars', I am thinking primarily of *ordinary* sensible particulars like our bodies. But it is not clear to me how the point could—at least in principle—fail to apply also to the elementary triangles whose joining and separating ultimately accounts for all processes of change.[55]

These considerations are mostly in agreement with the insightful analysis of the relation between the Receptacle and its contents advanced by Donald Zeyl.[56] We should, he says, view the Receptacle as 'a neutral three-dimensional material medium or field within which spatio-temporal particulars, as images of Forms, come into and pass out of being. These images are the products of the Forms' "projecting" their various natures into the field. Space as the material medium "receives" these projections'.[57] And Zeyl compares the motion of particulars in the Receptacle, thus conceived, to that of *waves* in water:

> What is it that makes a particular wave, which at t_1 is 100 yards away from the shore and at t_2 50 yards away, *the same* wave? It is not that the wave at t_2 is constituted by the same bit of water that constituted it at t_1, for clearly the wave, as it traveled, did not take any water "along" with it as it approached the shore. At t_2, the water that made up our wave at t_1 makes up a different wave (or no wave at all). On this model what preserves the identity of a spatio-temporal particular is not the bit of matter that constitutes it, but the continuity of a configuration in the succession of filled places within the field that the particular occupies.[58]

The difference between this account and my proposal is essentially this. Zeyl assumes that Timaeus' spatiotemporal particulars are *strictly* identical through time and advances an explanation of what makes them so. In the light of the parallels with other dialogues and of the textual evidence from the *Timaeus* itself, I rather incline towards the alternative hypothesis that in fact the factors Zeyl identifies provide spatiotemporal particulars with identity through time

[55] T. K. Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the* Timaeus-Critias (Cambridge, 2004), understands 52 A correctly but holds that the point applies only to ordinary sensible particulars, *not* also to the elementary triangles of which they are composed: 'There is no coming-into-being or destruction of [*sc.* elementary] triangles, only movement from place to place' (126). Both my claim and Johansen's are, however, apparently inconsistent with 81 B–D, where Timaeus speaks of triangles as coming into being, remaining identical through spatial change, and eventually being destroyed.

[56] D. Zeyl, 'Visualizing Platonic Space' ['Platonic Space'], in R. D. Mohr, B. Sattler (eds), *One Book, the Whole Universe: Plato's* Timaeus *Today* (Las Vegas, Zurich, and Athens, 2010), 117–30.

[57] 'Platonic Space', 124. On the Receptacle in general see also Zeyl, *Timaeus* liv–lxiv, and the profound enquiry by Broadie, *Nature and Divinity* 186–242. F. Fronterotta, ' "Do the Gods Play Dice?" Sensible Sequentialism and Fuzzy Logic in Plato's *Timaeus*', *Discipline Filosofiche* 28.1 (2018), 13–32, appeared too late for me to be able to take it into account. An interpretation purportedly able to preserve the persistence of sensible particulars is proposed by A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence: A Study of Plato's Metaphysics* [*Dialectic*] (Princeton and Oxford, 2002), 281–2; I cannot discuss it here.

[58] Zeyl, 'Platonic Space', 122.

only 'in a loose and popular sense'. To stick to his comparison, strictly speaking all that exists are the impermanent phases of which the wave consists, whereas the wave itself, as an enduring object which remains self-identical as it progresses towards the shore, is only a 'logical construction' upon them.

10. Essenceless particulars?

Alan Code, who is one of the few scholars who have construed—albeit somewhat incidentally—the *Symposium* passage as I have argued we should do, also briefly suggested that there might be a deep-seated theoretical rationale behind Plato's denial that sensible particulars are identical through time. After claiming that for Plato 'the inhabitants of the realm of becoming are not endowed with essences, or essential natures, whereas the inhabitants of the realm of being are so endowed … The many sensible things that we *call F* are not really *F*, and are called *F* not because that is their nature, but rather because they stand in some appropriate relation (participation, or whatever) to the real *F*', Code went on to argue that 'if Plato intends to deny that ordinary objects of experience have essences or natures, he will not himself be able to draw a distinction between (i) generation *simpliciter*, and (ii) coming to be something or other'.[59]

This interesting suggestion should, I think, be handled with caution. The thesis that sensible particulars lack essential natures (let us call it 'anti-essentialism' for brevity) may be one to which Plato has been committed since the so-called 'middle' dialogues. The main reason for which one might take Plato to be thus committed is the one stated by Code: Plato seems to believe that if any sensible particular *X* is *F*, for any *F*, this is because *X* bears a certain *relation* to a form, *F*-ness or the *F* itself. This may be taken to imply, strictly speaking, that being *F* cannot be part of what *X* is in itself or essentially, and hence that sensible particulars lack essential natures.[60]

[59] Code, 'Reply' 43–4. On the claim that Plato takes sensible particulars to lack essential natures cf. A. Code, 'Aristotle: Essence and Accident', in R. E. Grandy, R. Warner (eds), *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality* (Oxford, 1986), 411–39. Cf. also Frede, 'Being and Becoming' 37, and Mann, *Discovery* 117–33 (esp. 124–5), 183. Mann claims that in the so-called 'middle dialogues' Plato conceives of a sensible particular as being *nothing more than a bundle of forms*, none of which is essential to it, so that any change which affects the bundle counts as its being replaced by a new bundle (cf. Silverman, *Dialectic* 281). This is a very speculative interpretation without any firm textual basis.

[60] For a discussion of the philosophical issues involved in this line of argument see for example M. J. Loux and T. M. Crisp, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 4th edn (New York and Abingdon, 2017), 82–117; T. Sider, ' "Bare Particulars" ', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 20 (2006), 387–97.

Nevertheless, even if 'middle' dialogues (including *Symposium* and *Phaedo*) are committed to anti-essentialism, it is open to doubt whether in those dialogues this commitment is ever explicit, or whether Plato is alive to it. Perhaps anti-essentialism will become explicit only in the *Timaeus*, where Plato posits the Receptacle as the bare, propertiless substratum of change, the underlying subject which the forms qualify, and the ultimate referent of our use of deictic pronouns in sentences of the form 'This is *F*' (48 E–51 B). Then facts about ordinary sensible particulars will have to be analysed into facts about portions of the Receptacle; and it will become true that, for any *F*, any sensible particular *X* (i.e., strictly speaking, any portion of the Receptacle) is *F* only temporarily and accidentally.

Furthermore, it does not seem to be the case that anti-essentialism by itself (as opposed to some *particular* version of anti-essentialism, such as the one found in the *Timaeus*) immediately entails Non-identity through time. One might hold that sensible particulars lack essential natures but still ascribe to them identity through time grounded in some other factor, for example spatiotemporal continuity.

So I am sceptical about the alleged connection between the two theses as far as the 'middle' dialogues such as the *Symposium* and *Phaedo* are concerned. It is safer to think that Plato's denial of identity through time to sensible particulars derives directly from his reflections on change.

11. Ancient interpretations

The view that sensible particulars lack identity through time was ascribed to Plato by several ancient sources.

According to Diogenes Laertius, 3. 9–17, a fourth-century BC author called Alcimus[61] claimed that Plato had borrowed many of his philosophical ideas from the Sicilian playwright Epicharmus. Diogenes reports Alcimus' actual words, including his quotations of the allegedly Epicharmean fragments he regarded as having been plagiarized by Plato. Today these fragments are often rejected as spurious because of their style and contents. But however this may be,

[61] This is probably the same as the Alcimus who wrote on Sicilian history (*FGrHist* 560F1–5); he might also be identical with the Alcimus whom Diogenes elsewhere (2. 114) mentions as a famous rhetorician and a pupil of the Megarian philosopher Stilpo. On Alcimus, Diogenes' report, and the Epicharmean fragments see R. Kerkhof, *Dorische Posse: Epicharm und Attische Komödie* (Munich, 2001), 65–78; see in particular 59–65 for a general introduction to the so-called *Pseudepicharmeia*. The fragments are collected in R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci* vol. I (Berlin, 2000), as 275–9.

Diogenes' report constitutes an interesting testimony of how Plato could be read shortly after his death. In particular, at 3. 9–10 Alcimus claims that

> ὁ Πλάτων φησὶν αἰσθητὸν μὲν εἶναι τὸ μηδέποτε ἐν τῷ ποιῷ μηδὲ ποσῷ διαμένον ἀλλ' ἀεὶ ῥέον καὶ μεταβάλλον, ὡς ἐξ ὧν ἄν τις ἀνέλῃ τὸν ἀριθμόν, τούτων οὔτε ἴσων οὔτε τινῶν οὔτε ποσῶν οὔτε ποιῶν ὄντων. ταῦτα δ' ἐστὶν ὧν ἀεὶ γένεσις, οὐσία δὲ μηδέποτε πέφυκε.
>
> Plato asserts that the object of sense-perception is that which never persists in quality or quantity but is always flowing and changing, on the grounds that the things from which one takes away the number are neither equal nor something nor endowed with quantity or quality. These are the things of a nature to have always coming to be and never being.[62]

The words 'on the grounds … or quality' are unclear and possibly garbled. The meaning might include one—or perhaps both—of the following claims: (a) if you deprived *X* of *all* numerical properties, then *X* would be left without *any* essential, qualitative or quantitative properties; (b) if you change *any* of the *specific* numerical properties *X* has, then it will not be the case that *X* has the *same* essence or identity, or the same qualitative and quantitative properties, as before.

Then (3. 11) Alcimus reports, as the Epicharmean source for his claims, a famous fragment (fr. 276 Kassel–Austin) in which someone argues that human beings are comparable to things, like numbers and measures of length, that do not survive the addition or subtraction of parts: 'one grows, another shrinks, and all are engaged in change all the time [ἐν μεταλλαγᾷ δὲ πάντες ἐντὶ πάντα τὸν χρόνον]', and therefore they are *never numerically the same* (κοὔποχ' ωὑτοί). In other words, human beings do not remain identical through change in their material parts![63]

This is one of the texts that sparked off the so-called Growing Argument (αὐξανόμενος λόγος), which turned precisely on the idea that growth and deminution are in fact generation

[62] Greek text from T. Dorandi (ed.), *Diogenes Laertius:* Lives of Eminent Philosophers (Cambridge, 2013). The translation is mine.

[63] Menn, 'First Objections' 67, advances the following argument for the authenticity of fr. 276 Kassel–Austin: 'the text is far too good for Alcimus' purposes. He uses it only to show that for Epicharmus, as for Plato, sensible things are in continual qualitative and quantitative change, missing the much more important point that under some conditions growth or diminution … would imply substantial non-persistence.' If Menn were right, then Alcimus would not be an ancient follower of the kind of interpretation of Plato I have been advocating; rather, the real Epicharmus would be a forerunner of Plato in this respect, and Alcimus would fail to realize this. However, whether or not the fragment is authentic, and whatever the real Epicharmus may have written, it is far from clear that Alcimus fails to notice this aspect of the text. (i) His claim that sensible particulars never persist 'in quality or quantity' (ἐν τῷ ποιῷ μηδὲ ποσῷ) might be meant merely as the *premiss* from which Non-identity through time is inferred, and his ensuing quotation of fr. 276 might have the function of drawing the inference and thus completing his account of the views of both Epicharmus and Plato. (ii) Alcimus' claim might instead be meant to *cover* the case of substantial change, if 'quality' had a broad scope, including essence: cf. Arist. *Metaph.* Γ5, 1010^{a}23–5. (iii) As we have just seen, Alcimus might actually refer to substantial non-persistence when he says that 'the things from which one takes away the number are neither equal *nor something* nor endowed with quantity or quality'. For these reasons, all things considered, I am not convinced by Menn's argument and believe that we are entitled to trace my interpretation back to Alcimus.

and destruction.[64] This argument is usually taken to have been devised by the Academy in the third century BC, when Arcesilaus was head of the school. But it was probably presented as grounded in Plato's own texts and thus is, again, evidence of the views that were ascribed to Plato. The Anonymous Commentary on the *Theaetetus*, 70. 5–11 = 28B Long/Sedley, remarks that

> τὸν δὲ | [περ]ὶ τοῦ αὐξομένου | [λ]ọ́γ̣ον ἐκίνησεν | [μ]ὲν πρῶτος Πυθα-| [γό]ρ̣ας, ἐκίνησεν | [δὲ] καὶ Πλάτων, ὡ̣ς ἐν | [το]ῖ̣ς εἰ̣ς τὸ Συμπόσιον | [ὑ]π̣ε̣μνήσαμεν.
>
> The argument about what grows was first propounded by Pythagoras, and was propounded by Plato too, as we noted in our commentary on the *Symposium*.[65]

This obviously suggests that *Symposium* 207 D–208 B was connected with the origins of the Growing Argument. But it is a fair guess that *Philebus* 42 C–43 C was originally involved as well. For there, as we saw in Section 2, we encounter the claim that bodies are always in flux due to the microscopic processes of combination and separation, filling and emptying, growth and decay. And when Socrates asks whether we are aware of such processes, *growth* is the only one he singles out by way of example: 'Is it the case that it does not escape our own notice either *that we grow* [αὐξανόμενοι] or that we experience any of such things?' (43 B).

In the first century BC Plato seems to have been understood in the same way by Antiochus of Ascalon, whose account of early Academic philosophy reported by Cicero, *Acad.* 1. 31, includes the claim that sensible things are

> *ita mobiles et concitatae ut nihil umquam unum esset <et> constans, ne idem quidem, quia continenter laberentur et fluerent omnia*
>
> changing so rapidly that nothing was one and constant, or even self-identical, because everything was continually slipping and flowing away.[66]

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[64] On the Growing Argument see Anon. *in Pl. Theaet.* coll. 70–1 (see text below) = 28B Long/Sedley, Plut. *De sera num. vind.* 559 A–B, *Comm. not.* 1083 A = 28A Long/Sedley, and D. Sedley, 'The Stoic Criterion of Identity' ['Identity'], *Phronesis*, 27 (1982), 255–75. The pseudo-Epicharmean fragment, authentic or not, is surely meant to have something to do with a genuine comedy in which Epicharmus represented a debtor refusing to pay his debt on the grounds that he is not the same man as the one who contracted it, and hence being slapped by the creditor, who then denies to be the same man as the one who gave the slap. The above texts, which refer to the comedy, are collected among Epicharmus' fragments as fr. 136 Kassel–Austin.

[65] Text as in G. Bastianini and D. N. Sedley (eds), 'Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetum*', in *Corpus dei Papiri Filosofici,* III (Florence, 1995), 227–562; translation by Long/Sedley, who add a reference to *Symp.* 207 D. On Arcesilaus' attitude to Plato see D. L. 4. 32, Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1121 F–1122 A = 68E, H Long/Sedley.

[66] Text as in O. Plasberg (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis scripta quae manserunt omnia*, fasc. 42: *Academicorum reliquiae cum Lucullo* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1922); translation after C. Brittain, *Cicero:* On Academic Scepticism (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 2006). In the phrase *Ne idem quidem* ('not even self-identical') *ne idem* is Manutius's plausible and generally accepted correction of the MSS *eidem*.

The same interpretation is then emphatically put forward by Seneca, *Letters* 58. 22:

> *Quaecumque videmus aut tangimus Plato in illis non numerat quae esse proprie putat: fluunt enim et in adsidua deminutione atque adiectione sunt. Nemo nostrum idem est in senectute qui fuit iuvenis; nemo nostrum est idem mane qui fuit pridie. Corpora nostra rapiuntur fluminum more. Quidquid vides currit cum tempore; nihil ex his quae videmus manet: ego ipse, dum loquor mutari ista, mutatus sum. Hoc est quod ait Heraclitus: 'in idem flumen bis descendimus et non descendimus'. Manet enim idem fluminis nomen, aqua transmissa est.*
>
> Plato does not count the things we see or touch among those that he thinks 'are' in the strict sense. For they are in flux and constantly engaged in shrinkage and increase. None of us is the same in old age as he was in youth; none of us is the same the next day as he was the day before. Our bodies are swept along like rivers. Whatever you see runs with time; none of what we see is stable. I myself, while saying that those things are changing, have changed. This is what Heraclitus says: 'we do and do not enter the same river twice'. The name of the river stays the same, the water has passed on.[67]

I have two remarks on this passage. First, on the face of it Seneca seems to be speaking as though not just our bodies, but our *selves* were nonidentical.[68] This would go beyond anything Platonic or Stoic: both schools posit something which accounts for the personal identity of a human being, respectively the soul and a mysterious 'peculiar quality', ἰδία ποιότης (whether or not this coincides with the soul, as has been supposed).[69] In fact, however, Seneca may just be expressing himself misleadingly. Throughout the passage he repeatedly presents his claim as being about sensible objects, 'the things we see or touch'; so when he says 'none of us' and 'I myself' he may actually mean 'none of our bodies' and 'my own body'. The *Symposium* passage—which is in any case likely to be prominent in Seneca's mind—would encourage him in this direction. For there, as we saw in Section 3, Diotima's remarks about the Non-identity of the body were formulated as remarks about the Non-identity of the whole living being in respect of its body: see 207 D 5 '*he* is said to be the same' (ὁ αὐτὸς λέγεται), D 7 '*he* is called the same' (ὁ αὐτὸς καλεῖται), etc.

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[67] Text as in L. D. Reynolds (ed.), *L. Annaei Senecae ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1965); translation after B. Inwood, *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters* [*Letters*] (Oxford, 2007). Inwood, 129, mentions the *Symposium* passage, thanking Gur Zak for suggesting its relevance.

[68] See Inwood, *Letters* 128–9: 'he includes our whole selves in the impermanence of things … there is no sign here that Seneca believes in souls that are our true selves in that they outlast the body'. Cf. Sorabji, *Self* 247–8.

[69] On the soul as the bearer of personal identity in Plato see n. 36 above. On the Stoic 'peculiar quality' see Sedley, 'Identity'; E. Lewis, 'The Stoics on Identity and Individuation', *Phronesis*, 40 (1995), 89–108, who gives plausible reasons for identifying the peculiar quality with the soul as far as human beings and animals are concerned; and T. Nawar, 'The Stoics on Identity, Identification, and Peculiar Qualities', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 32 (2017), 113–59, who provides a reassessment of the evidence and a discussion of Lewis.

Secondly, note that here the ‘for’ (*enim*) at the beginning of the second sentence suggests that Seneca sees a connection between sensible particulars’ lack of being proper and their lack of identity through time. This is precisely the connection I suggested as a possibility in Section 8.

The same connection is explicit in Plutarch, *De E apud Delphos* 392 A–393 A, a passage which has several points of contact with Seneca’s one.[70] There Ammonius is made to claim that

> Ἡμῖν μὲν γὰρ ὄντως τοῦ εἶναι μέτεστιν οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσα θνητὴ φύσις ἐν μέσῳ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς γενομένη φάσμα παρέχει καὶ δόκησιν ἀμυδρὰν καὶ ἀβέβαιον αὑτῆς.[71]
>
> We really have no share in being, but every mortal nature, finding itself between coming to be and passing away, provides only a dim and unstable semblance and appearance of itself. (392 A)

This, Ammonius goes on to explain, is because reason, confused by the coming to be and passing away of a changing thing, ‘is unable to apprehend anything that persists [μένοντος] or really is [ὄντως ὄντος]’ (392 B). He quotes Heraclitus’ dictum that ‘It is not possible to step twice into the same river’ (22 B91 DK),[72] and explains that the career of a ‘mortal substance’, such as a human being, is actually a continuous sequence of generations and destructions in which we ‘have died and are still dying so many deaths’ (392 C) and ‘no one persists or is one, but we come to be many’ (μένει δ’ οὐδεὶς οὐδ’ ἔστιν εἷς, ἀλλὰ γιγνόμεθα πολλοί, 392 D).

> οὔτε γὰρ ἄνευ μεταβολῆς ἕτερα πάσχειν εἰκός, οὔτε μεταβάλλων[73] ὁ αὐτός ἐστιν· εἰ δ’ ὁ αὐτὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐδ’ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ μεταβάλλει γιγνόμενος ἕτερος ἐξ ἑτέρου
>
> For neither is it reasonable that without change someone should have different experiences, *nor is anyone the same as he changes; and if he is not the same, he is not at all*, but he changes precisely in this respect when he comes into being as a different individual from a different one. (392 E)

[70] See J. Whittaker, ‘Ammonius on the Delphic E’, *Classical Quarterly*, 19 (1969), 185–92 at 190 (who also cites the Cicero passage mentioned above).

[71] Text by C. Moreschini, *Plutarco*: L’*E* di Delfi [Moreschini] (Naples, 1997).

[72] This is the form in which the dictum is already reported by Plato (*Crat.* 401 E–402 A) and Aristotle (*Metaph.* Γ 5, 1010^{a}10–15). It is also the form according to which Heraclitus claims that *the river does not remain the same through time*. Seneca’s version, which we saw above (the river is the same, in so far as the *name* is the same, and is not the same, in so far as the *waters* are different; cf. Heraclit. *Allegoriae* 24. 5 = 22 B49a DK), though superficially different, is substantially equivalent. There is also a third version, according to which the river is (unqualifiedly) the same, while the waters are different (Eus. *PE* XV 20. 2–3 = 22 B12 DK). For some discussion see L. Tarán, ‘Heraclitus: the River-Fragments and Their Implications’, *Elenchos*, 20 (1999), 9–52, repr. in L. Tarán, *Collected Papers (1962–1999)* (Leiden, Boston, and Köln, 2001), 126–67.

[73] Here at 392 E 3 Moreschini prints μεταβάλλων <οὐδεὶς>, accepting a supplement by Sieveking which I consider unnecessary. Cf. F. C. Babbitt, *Plutarch:* Moralia, *vol. V* (Cambridge MA and London, 1936).

More passages could probably be marshalled as evidence of this ancient line of interpretation; but I shall leave this task to others.[74] Those which I have collected are, I believe, enough to prove that the facets of Plato's conception of change which I have been investigating were not lost on his ancient readers.

12. Conclusion

I am reluctant to generalize my conclusions as though they constituted a reconstruction of a theory which Plato espoused single-mindedly: as far as this issue is concerned there might well be no such single thing as 'Plato's theory'. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that a certain picture has been gradually emerging. It may be useful now to focus on its main lines, abstracting from many minor details and boldly filling in some blanks.

Generally speaking Plato regards ordinary sensible particulars as different from (and inferior to) forms essentially because they, unlike forms, are whatever they are only in a qualified way or relative to something. In other words, ordinary sensible particulars exhibit various kinds of variability. On the one hand, there is *synchronic* variability, namely the fact that something which is *F* is *F* only in some respect or comparison but not in others, at least for many values of *F*. This feature of sensible particulars is important for Plato, but has not been the subject of this paper except marginally.[75] On the other hand there is *diachronic* variability, namely change through time: the fact that (as we might express it provisionally) something which is *F* is *F* only at some time but not at another. This latter is the kind of variability we have been concerned with.

In doing so we have seen that Plato seems to take a complex attitude towards this issue and the many thinkers (in his view) who have treated it before him.[76] Those thinkers, he believes, are right to stress this aspect of the sensible world: sensible particulars are, indeed, constantly changing in all sorts of ways—their material parts, their place, their properties.[77] But those

[74] Among other things, one might want to take into account Plotinus' conception of sensible particulars, as it seems to emerge from such passages as 3.7.3.12–23, 3.7.4.19–28, 3.7.11.45–59, 4.3.8.22–30. Although Plotinus does not explicitly mention Plato in this connection, he presumably assumes that he is following Plato. It may, however, be not completely clear whether his view is closer to the one I have been reconstructing or rather to a form of four-dimensionalism *avant la lettre*, as has been supposed by P. Remes, *Plotinus on Self* (Cambridge, 2007), 33–59. I am unable to discuss the matter here.

[75] See A. Nehamas, 'Plato on the Imperfection of the Sensible World', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 12 (1975), 105–117, and F. Ademollo, 'Plato's Conception of the Forms: Some Remarks', in R. Chiaradonna, G. Galluzzo (eds), *Universals in Ancient Philosophy* (Pisa, 2013), 41–85. Here see Section 8 on *Rep*. 5, 479 A–D.

[76] On Plato's view of his predecessors in this respect see *Crat.* 411 B–C, 439 B–D; *Theaet.* 152 D–E.

[77] See Section 2 on *Phaedo* 78 D–E, *Phlb.* 42 C– 43 C, 59 A–B.

thinkers do not limit themselves to this generic view. They also claim—or mean, or should claim, if they were consistent—that there is no stability whatsoever in this change: neither the things themselves nor any of their characteristics are preserved through it. The world they believe in—or they ought to believe in on the basis of their assumptions—is chaos, undescribable and unintelligible.[78] Plato rejects this outcome and therefore has to propose something different. His proposal is that there is, indeed, continuous change in the sensible world, but there is also some stability, and there are patterns and regularities in the change. He thinks that he is in a position to recognize these elements of stability because he, unlike his opponents, admits in his ontology the universal properties of the changing things, namely the forms, by participating in which the changing things are whatever they are. That is to say, forms are a necessary—though not sufficient—condition for qualitative stability in the sensible world.[79]

Now, you might expect part of Plato's disagreement with his opponents to be that he, unlike them, recognizes that sensible objects are able to preserve their identity through time and change—that, in other words, it is possible for one and the same thing to have some characteristics at one time and some other characteristics at another time. Surely stability in the sensible world has to consist first of all in the identity through time of the changing things? But some passages in the dialogues[80] suggest something different, which was actually recognized by many ancient interpreters.[81] Plato admits that, strictly speaking, an object that changes does not preserve its identity and is instead destroyed and replaced by another object. Thereby he is probably influenced by assumptions deeply embedded in the Greek way of thinking.[82] Plato, however, also holds that the new object, while numerically distinct from its predecessor, is nevertheless similar to it: it has the same characteristics except for those that were involved in the change. So where we seem to detect identity and persistence there is in fact similarity and succession. This connection between the numerically distinct objects which make up the succession, though weaker than strict identity, can be regarded as equivalent to identity in many respects, especially practical ones. If I am right, Plato takes this to be a significant difference from the views of his opponents—and also one that is at least partly grounded in the assumption of the existence of the forms.[83] Another difference between Plato and at least some of his

[78] See Section 3 on *Crat.* 439 D, *Theaet.* 181 C– 183 C.
[79] See the end of Section 3.
[80] *Symp.* 207 D–208 B (Section 3); *Phaedo* 87 D–E, 91 D (Section 6); and *Tim.* 52 A (Section 9).
[81] See Section 11.
[82] See Section 7.
[83] See again the end of Section 3, and Section 4 on *Theaet.* 158 E–160 A.

opponents is that Plato recognizes the existence of immaterial souls which unlike sensible particulars are strictly identical through time (so much so, indeed, that they are able to survive through multiple incarnations).[84] As far as those sensible particulars which are bodies of living beings are concerned, the soul may contribute to accounting for their quasi-identity through time.

Despite these mitigating considerations, however, the fact remains that according to this picture sensible particulars as we ordinarily conceive of them—i.e. as continuants endowed with a temporal career which has a beginning, a duration, and an end—strictly speaking do not exist. This, I have also supposed, might be at least part of what Plato has in mind when he repeatedly describes the contrast between forms and sensible particulars in terms of a contrast between being and coming to be.[85] It might also be something against which Aristotle intends to react when he promotes sensible particulars to the rank of (primary) *ousia*, which Plato had conferred on the forms, and declares it a distinctive mark of *ousia* that it remains numerically identical through time and change.[86]

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[84] See Section 5, on *Symp.* 207 D–208 B, and Section 6, on *Phaedo* 87 D–E, 91 D.

[85] In many passages of the *Republic* (see Section 8) and in *Tim.* 27 D–28 A (see Section 9).

[86] See Section 7 on *Categories* 5 and *Physics* 1. 7.

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