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Degrees of Reality in the *Republic*

Key Terms:

- Metaphysics
- Ontology
- Epistemology
- Existential Use of *Einai*
- Predicative Use of *Einai*
- Degrees of Reality
- Sensibles (particulars)
- Flux

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When Robert Elkins entered UCI, he was a biological sciences major; however, after a year and a half, he changed majors because according to him, "philosophy is the single most important aspect of a good education and of anyone's personal identity." As an undergraduate, Rob was able to enroll in a graduate philosophy course with Professor Santas. By tackling this ambiguous and problematic topic, Robert proved to himself he could produce the high-caliber work necessary for his future doctorate pursuits.

NEXT

Abstract

In the *Republic* Book V (476a-478e), Plato correlates three kinds of objects—that which "is," that which "is not," and that which both "is and is not"—with three states of mind: knowledge, ignorance, and opinion. This paper will attempt to understand the sense of *einai* (the Greek infinitive for "to be" or "to exist") used by Plato in this context by analyzing the existential and predicative interpretations of *Republic* Bk. V (476a-478e). It will be argued that, due to the inherent ambiguity of the passage, and the word *einai* itself, we are not justified in adopting one reading over the other. By taking into account the fact that Plato does not present an explicit notion of change, or flux, we can consistently ascribe both the existential and predicative interpretations to the text.

BACK NEXT

Faculty Mentor

Gerasimos Santas

Degrees of reality by Plato is one of the most difficult interpretive issues in modern Platonic scholarship. Plato's texts on this topic are ambiguous and obscure and the contemporary secondary literature intricate and sophisticated. Undergraduates enrolled in this graduate course never touch this topic. Robert Elkins navigates its muddy waters remarkably without shipwreck.

BACK NEXT

School of Humanities

Robert Elkins - Degrees of Reality in the *Republic* [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]

Back to Journal 1998 Index

Introduction

In the *Republic*, Plato says some curious things by way of various constructions of the word *einai*—"to be." For example: "what participates in being and not-being,"[1] "more real,"[2] "less real,"[3] "the really real,"[4] "completely real,"[5] "purely real."[6] How are we to understand what Plato is trying to say in these instances? Are we justified in interpreting these constructions in strict ontological terms (the existential use of "to be"), or do these passages express qualitative meaning (the predicative use of "to be")? More to the point, what does Plato mean by "real" and "reality" in these contexts?

We will attempt a brief exposition of the existential and predicative readings of *Republic* Bk. V (476a-478e).[7] The questions are these: 1) How is Plato using *einai* in *Republic* Bk. V, and what is meant by "real" within this context? 2) Which of the interpretations—the existential or predicative—is more coherent? 3) Are we justified in accepting either one of these interpretations?

It will be argued that, within the context of the degrees of reality theory presented in *Republic* Bk. V (476a-478e), it is not as easy to discriminate between Plato's "existential," ontological use of "to be" and its predicative use, as some scholars have represented.[8] Moreover, since Plato does not provide an explicit characterization of sensibles and change (also known as flux), we cannot readily discard either reading. That is, both interpretations are consistent with the content and scope of *Republic* Bk. V. Because of this, we are not justified in favoring one reading over the other.

This is a difficult and controversial issue. The literature among noted scholars is considerable. Contradic-tory positions are the norm in this area. The usual approach has been to argue for the philosophically best interpretation of Bk. V that is consistent with the text. The problem is that, because of the ambiguity of the text, many different interpretations can consistently be ascribed to it. This gets us nowhere, as far as determining what Plato actually means. Indeed, the controversy should indicate that establishing Plato's "true" meaning is very likely impossible. Our ambitions here are merely to present an exposition of the problem and to advance the view that the have asserted that this account of the "grades" or "degrees of reality"[12] constitutes a significant development of his theory of Forms.[13] As G. Vlastos points out, Plato never actually uses the terms "grades" or "degrees." This ordering of reality is claimed to be expressed, as Vlastos says, by "the deliberate use in the comparative form of *to be* or *to be real* and their derivatives."[14] The Forms, which are objects of knowledge, are taken to be "completely" and "perfectly" real, while their particular instances in the sensible world are "deficiently" real, "[falling] between the purely real and the wholly unreal,"[15] because the status of their reality is such that "they both are and are not."[16] The Forms are "more" real than objects of sensation, which are, in turn, "more" real than nothing, or that which is not (objects of ignorance). We are presented with a spectrum of reality with varying grades or degrees.[17] According to Ross, this represents a "notable advance on Plato's earlier presentation of the theory of [Forms]."[18]

> Hitherto he had maintained simply a complete opposition between the eternal, unchanging world of Forms and the temporal, changing world of individual things. He now still maintains that opposition, but he recognizes degrees within each of these worlds.[19]

Rather than completely opposed realities, Plato now advances a more complicated world-view recognizing the complexity of the universe.

The objects in the sensible world are held to be objects of opinion, since they are changing (in flux), imperfect, and not proper objects of knowledge.[20] Thus, the Forms are "more" real than objects of sensation, since these can only be objects of opinion. Plato sums this up briefly, but cryptically: "what is completely knowable and what is in no way is in every way unknowable."[21] We see that Plato has united metaphysics and epistemology,[22] such that the way in which something is (or is not, or both) is directly related to its being known, not known, or believed (opined).[23] Perhaps we are not making things any clearer. If we proceed with Plato's argument, we will at least be able to

problem is persistent—not try to present a definitive interpretation.

Republic Bk. V (476a-478e)

In the *Republic* Bk. V (476a-478e), Plato associates three classes of objects—that which "is," that which "is not," and that which both "is and is not"—with three corresponding states of mind—knowledge, ignorance (or nescience[9]), and opinion (or belief[10]).[11] Many scholars trace the development of such paradoxical language.

If knowledge is "by its nature set over what is"[24] and knowledge is different than opinion, then opinion must be "set over" neither "what is" (since then it would be knowledge), or "what is not" (since that would be ignorance), but both "what is and what is not." Opinion is then "intermediate"[25] between knowledge and ignorance. The logistics seem simple enough. Knowledge encompasses, or is "set over," what is, opinion (what is and is not), and ignorance (what is not). Since knowl-

BACK NEXT

edge and opinion are different faculties, their respective objects must also be different.[26] The problem is, if there are objects of opinion, then how can they both "be *and* not be?" But by this point Plato has already decided that there *are* objects of opinion. Note: the person who "believes in beautiful things, but doesn't believe in the beautiful itself...opines."[27] He establishes first that the objects of sensation—"sensibles"—are objects of opinion, and then, that opinion is "set over" that which is and is not, and finally, by the first two assumptions that sensibles both are and are not.[28] Plato's hypothetical stance, evidenced by "*if anything is such* as to be and not to be,"[29] "*if something could be shown*, as it were, to be and not to be at the same time,"[30] "*if there is such a thing*...as participates in both being and not being,"[31] is, by the time it occurs in the argument, purely rhetorical, since he has already established one and two (and therefore three) by this time.[32] So it seems we must try to understand what Plato means by the assertion of grades of "semi-reality." Sensible things in the world are "endowed with an ambiguous half-reality."[33] How are we to understand this?

Einai: Existence Versus Prediction

Vlastos enumerates some linguistic points about *einai*.[34] The gist of his analysis is that English must utilize two unrelated etymological groups to express the four forms—verb, participle, noun, and adverb—that *einai* does. This is not a problem in itself, unless we lose sight of the fact that "'real' and 'really' are simply the adjectival and nominal forms of 'to be,' and that 'is' in turn represents the verbal form of 'real' and 'really'."[35] This has practical import for understanding what Plato means by "real" and "reality" in the passages noted. In English we might tend to forget that the adjective "real" and the noun "reality" are merely different forms of "to be." We cannot say "isness" or "beingness," just as we cannot use "real" as a verb. We must use "reality" or "existence" to get an existential noun form. This makes for ambiguous constructs of "to be," wherein what is being said is not entirely clear. The verb "to be," in its various uses, poses formidable problems of interpretation. Aristotle was aware of the difficulties attendant to the "arch-deceiver" *einai* and warned against hasty "oversimplifications."[36] Aristotle observed that *einai* has many different senses and uses. Translations have not made things

What then does one mean by something being "real" or "not real"? We can divide this use of "real" into two general headings: its "existential" use and its "predicative" use.[38] A couple of traditional examples illustrate this.

> 1. *Unicorns are not real*.[39]
> 2. *These flowers are not real*.[40]

In 1, "real" is used existentially to denote "that which exists." In our example, this happens to be negative. *Unicorns are not real* means that nothing exists such that it has the properties of a unicorn. In contrast to the real (those things which exist), they are said to be imaginary or fictitious.

But this existential sense of "real" is clearly not the use of "real" in 2. Here the *existence* of the "flowers" is not at issue. Rather, "not real" signifies that these particular "flowers" are *not genuine*, which is to say that they do not have those necessary properties that things must have in order to be *real*, *genuine* flowers. These "flowers" may have *some* of the properties of a flower, but not its *essential* ones. "Real" then describes a thing's correspondence with its definition, i.e. "real" means that a thing

> [H]as those attributes in virtue of which sentences applying [certain] predicates to [it] are true and would be found to be true if put to the test.[41]

The word, or name "flowers," denotes a set of objects with certain essential qualities definitive of that set. Thus, to call something "real" in this context is to say that those essential qualities that are true of a set of objects denoted by a name X, are also true of the particular object in question, in this case the "flowers." This usage is common and not likely to be misconstrued in everyday contexts. As Vlastos indicates, this "non-existential use" of real "has always been in common use and is recognized as such in the Oxford English Dictionary":

> [T]hat which is actually and truly such as its name implies; possessing the essential qualities denoted by its name; hence *genuine*.[42]

easier in this area. Aristotle sometimes substitutes the infinitive *einai* in the "to be" formula with "to on," which in the singular is translated "being," in the plural "things that are" or "existing things."[37] Keeping in mind Aristotle's disclaimer, perhaps we can better understand Plato's meaning of "real" and "reality."

We can now return to the degrees of reality model. What does Plato mean by such things as "more real," "that which is and is not," "less real," "really real"? For the moment, let us approach this na&#65533;vely. On the face of it, these expressions seem obviously strange. How can something be more or less real? Are we not faced with a true dilemma when it comes to something being real? Does not common sense dictate that something either is *or* is not real? It seems there is no room for

BACK NEXT

intermediate existence or some kind of "half" reality. Also, to speak of something being "really real" seems completely redundant. If something is real, it seems as though that is the end of the matter—doubling the predicate would be pointless.

It seems as though one of two things is happening. Either we are completely confused about what Plato could be saying in these instances, and must seek another explanation for the apparent inconsistency of Plato's language, or Plato's thinking is incoherent and misguided in *Republic* Bk. V, 476a-478e. If we tend towards the former, which we will do, we must then try to see how the apparent incoherence of the degrees of reality theory can be explained away.

Given our brief analysis of the existential and predicative use of "to be," one answer should suggest itself immediately. Our initial naïve reactions[43] to Plato's degrees of reality theory were not based on the use of *einai* that Plato was in fact intending.[44] That is, an existential interpretation of *einai* in this context is not appropriate to Plato's expression. So when Plato says something is "more" real than something else, we would be wrong in thinking that he means it *exists* more. This recalls our previous discussion of the Greek and English constructions of "to be." Where Greek can form all necessary constructions from the one root *einai*, English may also use "exists," since the predicate "real" has multiple meanings—it can denote existence *or* express the correspondence of a particular to a definition or set. Thus, "real" can be used in an ontological sense *or* a qualitative sense. Given the paradoxical and seemingly contradictory way in which Plato uses "is" in *Republic* Bk. V, it seems more likely that Plato is using "is" in the predicative, qualitative sense. Take, for example, "that which is and is not." Do we really take Plato to mean that something may exist and not exist at the same time? Certainly the language might indicate this possibility, since that is indeed what Plato says: "is and is not." But surely there is no more perfect example of a logical contradiction than this. Is it likely that this slipped Plato's mind? Or, is Plato advancing a radical ontology that permits such a state of contradictory being? The issue is simple actually: Is Plato's use of "is real" synonymous with "exists"? Some commentators say yes; some say no. Vlastos, for his part, says that there is no good reason for assuming that Plato's use of "is real" and "exists" are synonymous. Just because Plato did not make a formal

Unfortunately, things are not this simple. There are philosophical arguments against the predicative position as well. Vlastos, by means of a couple of clear examples, shows that Plato, in certain instances, observed the distinction between "is real" and "exists,"[46] and that, therefore, we are not justified in assuming that "is real" and "exists" are synonymous. But it is not necessary to agree with Vlastos when he says that this is the "only question"[47] with regards to this issue. Showing that Plato sometimes observed the distinction between the existential and predicative use of "to be" does not, even given our considerations against the existential interpretation, conclusively demonstrate that the predicative meaning of *einai* is being used in the degrees of reality theory. Two basic problems can be generated: a linguistic and an ontological one.

First the linguistic difficulties. Here is Vlastos' concise thesis regarding the degrees of reality:

> The thesis that sensibles "are and are not"—which, on first hearing, sounds ominously as though it meant "exist and do not exist"—turns out, the moment Plato starts arguing for it, to be an ellipsis for "are and are not *F*..."[48]

Vlastos argues that Plato is using *einai* in the predicative sense. We have already considered the reasons why he thinks this.

But there are still difficulties when it comes to determining whether or not Plato actually means *einai* in the predicative sense since, and this is critical, he does not actually *use* a predicate here. Plato does not say that something is or is not *F;* he simply says "what is and what is not."[49] The predicate form "X is *F,*" is not observed here—there is no *F* to speak of.[50] R.E. Allen makes this same observation: "We have a theory of predication without predicates."[51] How can we readily suppose that in Bk. V Plato intends a predicative usage when he does not explicitly use it? We might assume that, given the context of the argument and Plato's previous use of the predicates *beautiful*, *just*, and *pious*, this is what Plato *really* means. We can then interject any predicate *F* and derive the thesis that Plato's degrees are ones of quality, such that expressions like "more real" and other

distinction between the two[45] does not in turn imply that he did not *distinguish* them and that we can then replace "is real" with "exists" in any context. So, if we can specifically identify places in which Plato does distinguish between "is real" and "exists"—and Vlastos claims that we can—we should buy Vlastos' argument that we would not be justified in universally substituting "exists" for "is real."

related comparatives serve to *categorize* and *qualify* a thing's existence, not to assert its greater or lesser existence. But it seems we cannot do this without taking liberties with the text as it reads, since the text itself is ambiguous—the existential and predicative readings are *interpretations*. Vlastos maintains that existence is not the issue for Plato, but, rather, the categorization of those things

BACK NEXT

that exist. He points out that Plato asserts that the Forms *and* sensibles exist. Plato never says anything to indicate that sensibles (those which both are and are not) do not exist. Vlastos claims that, while Plato held that the Forms were of greater reality than sensibles, both grades of reality *exist* nonetheless.[52] We have Vlastos' summation:

> When the sensible instance is said to be less real than its Form, this is not said to ambiguate its existence, but on the contrary to disambiguate the sort of existence it has. By the same token the Form is said to be "really real" not to assert, but to categorize, its existence—to tell us what kind of existence *it* has.[53]

This leads us directly into some potential ontological difficulties. As Vlastos has it then, existentially speaking, Forms and sensibles (particulars) are of the same type, in the sense that they are both existing objects. If Vlastos held the contrary view, and maintained that Forms and particulars were of categorically differing types, then "to be and not to be" would have to be taken literally as indicative of these opposed categories—being versus non-being. Vlastos' point seems to be that Forms and particulars are radically different with respect to their qualitative degree, that is, the degree to which they reflect or correspond to a Form or definition. Particulars are said to be deficiently real or less real in the sense that they are approximate "images" or reflections of qualities, which in Forms find "complete" or "perfect" expression. However, it seems that to speak of degrees of reality, and make use of such comparatives as greater or lesser, is to necessarily assimilate particulars and Forms *categorically* for purposes of qualification and comparison. Things of fundamentally different types, or categories, cannot be compared by degree, since they are not in the same set to begin with—a qualitative spectrum would be meaningless in such a context. It can be argued that predication can only make sense if it supervenes on a fundamental ontology.

> Forms clearly function, in the early and middle dialogues, as standards and paradigms. Plato's theory of predication admirably supplements a fundamental thesis of his ontology.[54]

one of quality, rather than type. Some quality *F* is had perfectly by Forms—which *is* the quality itself—and to a lesser, deficient degree by particulars. Allen argues that particulars are deficient in the sense that they are of a fundamentally different type than the perfect Forms, of which they are mere "imitations."

> The deficiency in question is that of one type of thing with respect to something of another type: 'deficiency' is here a category distinction, not a distinction within categories.

It could be argued, against Vlastos, and along with Allen, that this assimilation of Forms and particulars seems to be exactly what Plato is *not* doing in *Republic* Bk. V. How can we "disambiguate the sort of existence" or "kind" of existence of graded elements of the same existential type? In referring to "what participates in both being and not being" is not Plato distinguishing two different ontological categories? Plato does not merely say that sensibles are less real and leave it at that. Sensibles participate in being and not being[57]; they are qualified by opposites, not merely by a deficient correspondence to perfect Forms, since then Forms would only be perfect particulars. They are not just deficient qualitatively, but categorically.

> Particulars are deficient not because they have the characters they have but because they are the kind of things they *are*...[58]

We have seen that both the existential and predicative positions have their strengths and weaknesses. It is possible to generate arguments for and against either position. We will now turn from philosophical arguments to direct applications of the existential and predicative models to Bk. V in order to determine the conditions for accepting one interpretation over the other. I intend to show that Bk. V, taken together with Plato's conception of change, or flux, does not adequately furnish the conditions for making a decisive judgement.

The Existential and Predicative Models in the *Republic* Bk. V (476a-478e)

We have briefly considered the existential and predicative positions. However, in

A particular is deficient with respect to a Form insofar as it possesses in "merely approximate or comparative degree"[55] a property that the Form, which *is* the character, has "perfectly" or "completely."[56] But this model of comparison by degree, as Allen points out, "assimilates the Form categorically to the class of things it defines." The degrees of reality theory implies that the deficiency of particulars is

order to come to some conclusion on the matter, we must apply these two models to our analysis of *Republic* Bk. V (476a-478e). By considering these formulations explicitly and evaluating their consistency with the text, we can then either decide which interpretation is more accurate given the relevant difficulties or conclude that a decisive judgement is unwarranted.

BACK NEXT

Recalling our earlier discussions of the problems for the existential position, and given the explicit formulation of each of the interpretations, we should be able to better deal with them, discern where the problems lie, and propose some solutions or qualifications. Our na&#65533;ve criticisms have already informed us that the difficulties lie in 2a and, perhaps less obviously, 2b&#65533;the formulations for sensibles, the objects of opinion. The apparent problem is this: How can something both exist and not exist, or be both *F* and not *F*? While the notion of something both existing and not existing seems more absurd, it is not any more problematic, logically speaking, than something having the qualities *F* and not *F*. But why are these formulations problematic in the first place?

Table 1
Summary of existential and predicate models.

a: Existential model	*b: Predicative model*
1a. X exists.	1b. X is F.
2a. Y exists and does not exist.	2b. Y is F and not F.
3a. Z does not exist	3b. Z is not F.

Note:
By substituing "exists" for "is" in Plato's object model, we get the existential interpretation. With X, Y, and Z standing for the objects of knowledge, opinion, and ignorance respectively.

The answer seems to be, as many commentators have suggested, that they are not really problematic so long as we qualify them temporally, spatially, or relatively. That is, the formulations are only absurd if they are considered apart from time, space, or perspective&#65533;in a vacuum so to speak. Given a more complex account, the formulations can be rendered entirely coherent. For instance, something can exist at time *t1* and not exist at time *t2*. The same applies for the predicative formula. Something can be *F* at one time and not *F* at another. If temporality is included as part of the contexts of the formulae, they are entirely consistent. But it seems 2a cannot easily be rendered coherent by appeal to perspective, while 2b can.[59] I would argue that this does not furnish grounds for eliminating the existential interpretation, since Plato does not even bother to qualify his expression at all. We cannot readily reject 2a because we cannot reconcile it with relative perspective. Plato does not take care to explain the conditions for qualifying the objects of knowledge, opinion, and ignorance, so we cannot justifiably throw out the existential interpretation because of its failure to

Those objects which undergo constant change, or embody opposite properties, cannot furnish grounds for knowledge, since whatever propositions one constructs in reference to them are always false, or, rather, become false due to change. Some X may be *F* at time *t1* and not *F* at time *t2*; X may be *F* from one person's point of view and not *F* from another's; X may be *F* in one respect and not *F* in another.[60] In short, it seems that sensibles&#65533;objects which undergo some type of change&#65533;can never be proper objects of knowledge if we can never give an accurate, indubitable description of them. From this reasoning we get 2a and 2b as possibilities. In *Republic* Bk. V, rather than giving us an exposition of change, or flux, Plato gives us "that which is and is not." By looking further into types of flux, and making some distinctions between two types of change, we should see how this affects our evaluation of 2a and 2b

T.H. Irwin, in "Plato's Heracleiteanism," outlines two types of flux: *self-change* (*s*-change) and *aspect-change* (*a*-change). *S*-change amounts to constant "qualitative alteration." Some X is *F* at one time, not *F* at another:

> X *s*-changes iff at time *t1* X is *F* and at time *t2* X is not-*F*, and X itself is not in the same condition at *t2* as it was at *t1*.[61]

This does not exhaust the kinds of change attributed to Heracleitus, whose "unity of opposites" also includes things with "compresent opposite properties." This is *a*-change.

> X *a*-changes iff X is *F* in one aspect, not-*F* in another, and X is in the same condition when it is *F* and when it is not-*F*.

What is the difference between the two types of change? As Irwin suggests, *s*-change is change through time, while in *a*-change, time is static. Both involve the "presence of opposite properties in different situations," but in *a*-change these opposite properties are not derived by comparing the object with itself at some previous time. According to Irwin, we can safely infer that Plato recognized the differences between *s*-change and *a*-change, and that he clearly refers to both types. However, Plato does not clearly

measure up to conditions that Plato does not himself bother to specify.

Types of Change—2a and 2b

For evaluative purposes, we must further discuss the issue of change and its relation to the two formulae for sensibles. Earlier, we briefly discussed Plato's classification of the objects of knowledge, opinion, and ignorance. Plato's basic epistemological idea is that only perfect, unchanging Forms can be the proper objects of knowledge.

distinguish them.[62] This is critical for our understanding of Bk. V and for evaluating the existential and predicative formulae in 2a and 2b.

What kinds of change are consistent with the existential and predicative models? It should be clear that

BACK NEXT

both 2a and 2b are consistent with *s*-change, but that 2a is not consistent with *a*-change since existence is not a predicate. That is, we can consistently substitute "exists" into the *s*-change formula:

> X *s*-changes iff at time *t1* X *exists* and at time *t*2 X *does not exist*, and X itself is not in the same condition at *t*2 as it was at *t*1.

Since Irwin's formulations are already in the predicate form, it is easy to see that 2b is consistent with both *s*-change and *a*-change. However, there is the concern that *a*-change is not genuine change at all, since it apparently views relative change as intrinsic change. That is, the object is seen as changing merely because its situation can be perceived to change or because opposite properties can be attributed to it due to differing perspectives. The object itself is mistakenly taken as cause for these apparent contradictions, when in actuality, we have no grounds for inferring this. In any event, it seems Plato counts *a*-change as genuine.[63] This is what is important for interpreting Bk. V and evaluating the existential and predicative positions.

Conclusion

What can we conclude from this discussion of change and the existential and predicative formulae? I argue that, since Plato does not clearly distinguish between *s*- and *a*-change, since he does not supply any qualifying descriptions of the change of sensibles in Bk. V, and because both the existential and predicative interpretations are both consistent with *at least one* of the possible conceptions of change accepted by Plato, we cannot readily exclude either the existential or predicative positions from being equally possible and legitimate readings of Bk. V.

We have discussed the inherent ambiguity of *einai*. The application of the existential or predicative form to the given language is a difficult business, since, while we can distinguish between the meanings of the existential and predicative uses, Plato, and the language he has used to express the correlation of faculties and their respective objects in Bk. V, does not make distinctions between these different meanings for us. We can propose models and formulae that Plato might have been intending and argue about which reading is better philosophically; but, I argue it is difficult to project specific, detailed interpretations onto a systematically

> to find a single hypothesis which would at once solve the problems of these several spheres and also create a rationally unified cosmos by establishing the connection among the separate phases of experience.[64]

An apparent side effect of this universal project is (in its appeal to complete generality) vague, ambiguous expressions that are difficult to interpret. I tend to think, and our discussion of Bk. V should illustrate this, that perhaps we are not entirely justified in attributing specifics to Plato that he himself does not explicitly indicate. We run the risk of reading details into a philosophical system that must often appeal to the most general expression in order to deal with the universal scope it has set for itself.

Vlastos submits that Plato would have been better off with a "kinds-of-reality" theory rather than a degrees of reality theory. It is hoped that we have shown the possibility that Plato might have intended a kinds-of-reality theory and that this ontology serves as the basis for predicative expression. Thus analysis should indicate the possibility that perhaps both the existential and predicative models were operating together in his mind, resulting in the ambiguity and paradoxical language we find in the *Republic*. At the least, we have shown that both the existential and predicative accounts of the objects of the faculties of knowledge, opinion, and ignorance can be consistently ascribed to the text. I fail to see why we could not read the text either way, or even conclude that both models are working together, at the same time. Stranger things have been attributed to Plato.

End Notes

[1]*R*. 478e.

[2]*R*. 515d.

[3]*R*. 515d, 585b-e.

[4]*R*. 597d.

[5]*R*. 477a.

[6]*R*. 477a, 478d, 479d. Cf. also "the really

ambiguous text.

H.F. Cherniss has argued that the universal scope of Plato's philosophical system is an attempt to respond comprehensively and coherently to various ethical, epistemological, and ontological problems.

> The phenomena for which Plato had to account were of three kinds, ethical, epistemological, and ontological. [...] The dialogues of Plato, I believe, will furnish evidence to show that he considered it necessary

real reality." Phaadrus 247c.

[7]This by no means exhausts the possible readings. The veridical reading is another possible reading. This is the interpretation advanced by Gail Fine in "Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*." *Archiv f*r *Geschichte der Philosophie 60* (1978): 121-39. Fine argues that "if we can find a better argument consistent with the text, we should prefer it" and asserts that the veridical interpretation, which does

BACK NEXT

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not necessitate a "two worlds" hypothesis, is this "better" argument. I will not follow Fine's methodology of simply ascertaining the "best" argument. I want to understand the conditions for making a conclusive judgement on this issue, if this is possible. I intend to argue that both the existential and predicative readings are consistent with the text, given the ambiguity of einai and the content of Plato's description of the objects of opinion: sensibles; and also that, given this ambiguity, we are not justified in advancing any consistent reading over another.

[8]This paper follows Vlastos' "A Metaphysical Paradox" *Proceedings* 39 (1966): 5-19. Rpt in Vlastos, G. *Platonic Studies.* New York: Princeton University Press, 1973: 43-57; and "Degrees of Reality in Plato." *New Essays in Plato and Aristotle.* Ed. R. Bambrough. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) 1-19.

[9]W. D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* 37.

[10]F. M. Cornford, *The REPUBLIC of Plato*, Cf. 181.

[11]Some scholars would object to this characterization of Bk. V. Gail Fine refers to the view that Plato "distinguishes knowledge and belief by reference to their objects" as the two worlds theory (TW). She claims that "the best arguments consistent with the text...fail to support TW." But she also admits that the text can be read as supporting TW. Fine's position on TW follows from her argument for the veridical interpretation of *Republic V*, which, she argues, is "better." Whether it is or not is controversial. Suffice it to say that I disagree with Fine's methodology of equating the "best possible argument" with the "best reading." Given this, we will maintain the TW theory for purposes of a discussion and exposition of the problem of the interpretation of Bk. V. As Fine indicates, the literature favors the TW interpretation. Our discussion will then center on questions of interpretation given the assumption of TW.

[12]Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* 6. The phrase "degrees of reality" can be found in many scholarly interpretations. Vlastos' "A Metaphysical Paradox" and "Degrees of Reality in Plato." Cornford describes this as "a distinct order of realities."

[13]Cf. Ross 37.

[14]Vlastos, "A Metaphysical Paradox" 43-57.

[22]N. P. White, "Plato's Metaphysical Epistemology," *The Cambridge Companion.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 227-310: "[Plato's] views about what there is are largely controlled by ideas about how knowledge can be accounted for, and his thinking about what knowledge is takes its character from convictions about what there is that is knowable," 9.

[23]Cf. H. F. Cherniss 1-12. "The essential characteristic of knowledge cannot be explained by any theory which takes phenomena to be the objects of intellection." Then later: "the theory of Ideas is a necessary hypothesis for the solution of the problems of epistemology," 7.

[24]R. 477b.

[25]R. 478d.

[26]Cherniss 6: "In the *Republic* the proof that knowledge and opinion are different faculties is conclusive evidence for the fact that the objects with which they are concerned must be different."

[27]R. 476c-e.

[28]This is obviously not an attempt at formality. It merely shows the general progression of the argument.

[29]R. 477a. Italics are my own.

[30]R. 478d. Italics are my own.

[31]R. 478e. Italics are my own.

[32]Cf. Ross 38: "The sights and sounds which have already been identified with the objects of opinion are therefore consigned to the status of semi-reality." Plato explicitly states this conclusion at R. 479d.

[33]Cornford, "Platos Theory of Knowledge" 7.

[34]I do not read Greek, so this analysis must follow Vlastos' "Degrees of Reality."

[35]Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality" 1.

[36]Owen 69.

[15]R. 477a.

[16]R. 477a-478d.

[17]Cf. Bk. X for another expression of the degrees of reality theory. We will be limiting ourselves to a discussion of R. Bk. V.

[18]Ross 79. Ross actually uses "Ideas" instead of "Forms," which we will use for the sake of consistency.

[19]Ross 80.

[20]R. 479e: Knowledge is set over "the things themselves that are always the same in every respect." Grube's Translation. Plato notoriously claims that knowledge is only possible of fixed, 'perfect' objects, i.e. Forms. The difficulties associated with this claim will not be treated.

[21]R. 477a. Grube's Translation.

[37]Following Owen's analysis: "Aristotle on the Snares of Ontology," 69.

[38]This does not exhaust the usage. "Is" may be used as an identity sign, or may preface a locative. Later we will see how these complications bear on the current analysis.

[39]Used by Vlastos, "A Metaphysical Paradox," Ryle, "Systematically Misleading Expressions," and Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology."

[40]Used by Vlastos, "A Metaphysical Paradox."

[41]Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality in Plato" 3.

[42]Vlastos, "A Metaphysical Paradox" 45.

[43]The viewpoint elaborated in the previous paragraph.

BACK NEXT

Page 8

Robert Elkins - Degrees of Reality in the *Republic* [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]

Back to Journal 1998 Index

[44]The issue of Plato's meaning and intent with this language is the problem at hand. Grube, in a footnote in his translation of the *Republic*, writes: "Because of the ambiguity of the verb einai ('to be'), Socrates could be asking any or all of the following questions: (1) 'Something that exists or something that does not exist?' (existential 'is'); (2) 'Something that is beautiful (say) or something that is not beautiful?' (predicative 'is'); (3) 'Something that is true or something that is not true?' (veridical 'is'). This ambiguity is the source of our difficulties."

[45]This itself is a controversial matter. Vlastos thinks, along with G.E.L. Owen and against John Ackrill and others, that "the method of analysis by paraphrase in the Sophist which isolated perfectly the 'is' of identity from its other uses was not pushed far enough to sort out in the same way the 'is' of existence from that of predication." (Vlastos "Metaphysical Paradox," 47.) Unfortunately, the space required for a sufficient treatment of this controversy, and the implications following from it, would far exceed the scope of this paper. Bringing in a discussion of the Sophist, and its treatment of the Forms of "being" and "non-being," while certainly relevant to *Republic* Bk. V, would basically involve a comprehensive assessment of Plato's ontology, which, needless to say, is far to ambitious for the current exposition.

[46]Vlastos puts forth Politicus 293e as showing this.

[47]Vlastos, "Metaphysical Paradox" 47.

[48]Vlastos, "Metaphysical Paradox" 48. This is the exact same conclusion reached by Owen in "Aristotle on the Snares of Ontology," 71: "he treats 'to be' and 'not to be' alike as incomplete or elliptical expressions which always call for some completion: to be is just to be something or other." The problem is, as we will see, that Plato does not 'complete' this expression in 478e. We can hardly infer the premise of predication only by appeal to his non-use of a predicate.

[49]R. 477a, 478c, 478d, 478e. Grube's translation.

[50]Vlastos justifies this expansion by referring to 479c 3-4 in conjunction with 479b 9-10. These further complications will not be dealt with here, except to say that we can still generate ontological problems. Cf. 478e: "what participates in both being and not being." It would be difficult to see in what general issues of being are addressed, not instances of particular existence like the examples Vlastos gives us.

The Sophist is particularly relevant to these speculative questions, since it is there that Plato explicitly considers the Forms of "being" and "not-being," which, it may be argued, is directly applicable to the three formulations Plato offers us in *Republic* V: "is," "is and is not," and "is not." If Plato accepts Forms of "being" and "non-being," as is indicated in the Sophist, then this poses difficulties for the predicative position, since then the hypothesis that these formulations are merely ellipses for predicative expression would not seem to be as accurate as saying that Plato is setting up a serial gradation of distinct ontological categories. Again, Plato often uses the expression "participate" to refer to the relation of sensibles and Forms-or, in Aristotle's words, the relation of particulars and universals.

Given this, and taken together with R. 478e ("what participates in being and not-being"), it can be argued, contra the predicative position, that Plato is setting two distinct ontological classes (in short, two different Forms) in opposition, and not merely alluding to a hypothetical predicate F. In short, the existential interpretation, for all its apparent inconsistency, in the end, seems to be most in keeping with Plato's radical union of metaphysics and epistemology, wherein the degree to which something may be known, is directly related to its measure of "reality," and, vice-versa, the degree of reality of an object necessarily dictates the extent to which someone may have knowledge of that object, and ultimately defines the state of mind one adopts with respect to it (knowledge, opinion, or ignorance).

[51]R.E. Allen 46.

[52]He cites Timeas 52a. The citation, and Vlastos' use of it, is not contradicted here.

[53]Vlastos, "Metaphysical Paradox" 49.

[54]Allen 52.

[55]Allen 51.

[56]Allen 52

[57]R. 478e

way this could be rendered with a predicate that avoids ontological difficulty, since the noun 'being' can hardly be said to have the multiplicity of use that 'real' has. Vlastos also indicates that when Plato is using "to be" in an existential sense he supplements it with locatives like somewhere, or nowhere. Since he does not do this in the degrees of reality theory, Vlastos might argue that this further indicates the predicative use of "to be." There are complications however. One could argue that locatives would be pointless in this context, since

[58]Allen 52

[59]The same might be said of a thing's spatial location. It would be difficult to claim that a thing's spatial location has determinative bearing on its existence, while it is far easier to claim that time has bearing on a thing's existence. But the spatial dimension can be incorporated if it is merely for descriptive purposes, just as time, one could argue, may be mere description. In any event, temporality will be the focus of the analysis.

BACK NEXT

[60]Vlastos refers us to Symp. 211a. Substituting *F* for Beauty, we obtain 1) *F* in one respect, not *F* in another, 2) *F* at one time, but not *F* at another, 3) *F* in relation to some things, not *F* in relation to others, and 4) *F* here, not *F* elsewhere, *F* for some, not *F* for others.

[61]T. H. Irwin 4.

[62]Cf. Irwin 5. I will not go into Irwin's arguments except to say that his demonstrations of Plato's reference to *s*-change and a-change are fairly uncontroversial.

[63]The Phaedo and its discussion of 'equality' clearly indicate this.

[64]Cherniss 1-2.

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BACK

Page 10

Robert Elkins - Degrees of Reality in the *Republic* [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]

Back to Journal 1998 Index