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

XVIII

BEING IN THE SOPHIST:
A SYNTACTICAL ENQUIRY*

LESLEY BROWN

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

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

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


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

(1) The **Sophist** contains a clear statement of the distinction, which is just what is needed to help solve the philosophical problems raised in the dialogue.

(2) The **Sophist** needs a statement of the distinction (since it contains at crucial points both complete and incomplete uses), but, alas, it lacks it.

(3) The **Sophist** lacks a statement of the distinction, but this is no ground for lamentation since it would be irrelevant to the philosophical issues addressed by the dialogue.

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

(i) that the **Sophist** is an essay in problems of reference and predication and in the incomplete uses of the verb to be associated with these and

(ii) that the argument neither contains nor compels any isolation of an existential verb.

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

II

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 R. Heinaman, 'Being in the **Sophist**', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 65/1 (1983), 1-17, disputes Owen's claim that Plato's discussion in the **Sophist** concerns syntactically incomplete uses of *einai* though some of his points against Owen are well taken, he appears to accept the traditional account of the distinction, which I shall dispute, and does not pause to define the crucial terms complete and incomplete. Some of Heinaman's arguments are discussed in Sect. V below. For a critique of Heinaman, see now J. Malcolm, Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the **Sophist**, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 67 (1985), 163-5.

2 C. XVII of this volume.

3 The general syntactic claim will not come into question: we can accept a distinction between the verb's complete and incomplete uses provided we are wary of confusing the first with elliptical occurrences of the second (p. 417 above). Thus Owen accepts that *esti* has complete uses, but he argues that putative candidates in *Sph.* are incomplete elliptical. His attitude to the second commonplace, the semantic distinction, is not clear from the article, for he does not make clear what semantic force (whether existential or some other) a 'complete' use of *esti* would have.
Owen's reasoning for the desirability of his interpretation can be reduced to four main steps. (1) It is agreed on all hands that the troublesome concept Not-being or to mē on, whose discussion was forbidden by Parmenides' strictures, and which gave rise to a clutch of paradoxes at the beginning of the central section (236–41), is legitimized in the following way. Far from being disallowed as not true of anything (as had at first appeared) to mē on is reinstated as true of everything, for everything is not countless other things. Not-being is thus equated with difference and shown to be one of the all-pervasive kinds which occupy so much of the central section of the Sophist. Everything, then, is not countless other things: the vindication of to mē on is squarely of its incomplete use—not being is always not being something or other: there is no trace of a legitimization of not-being as a negative existential. (2) That being so, it would be feeble of Plato to raise puzzles about not-being in its other, complete, use, given that his 'solution' ignores such a use. (3) It would be worse still if we should find him explicitly pointing to such a distinction among 'ises', when (as established at step (1)), he forgets or suppresses the distinction as applied to 'is not'. (4) What is more, Plato explicitly tells us that (in Owen's words) 'any light thrown on either being or not-being will equally illuminate the other' (p. 422). This dictum, which he dubbed the Parity Assumption, Owen derived from 250e, and made it a governing assumption of his interpretation. Now it is accepted (step (1)) that the only illumination cast on not-being, on 'is not', is on its incomplete use; by the Parity Assumption, then, we should expect to find only the incomplete use (or uses) of 'is' illustrated. So not only would it be unfortunate if Plato were to allow a use of 'is' while disallowing the corresponding use of 'is not', here he explicitly tells us (if we press the so-called Parity Assumption) that he will not do so.

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

III

First a closer look at the complete–incomplete use distinction. Neither of the pair of terms is explicitly defined by Owen, though he uses the terms one-place and two-place predicate as apparently equivalent to complete and incomplete (see (a) in Section II above). I therefore take as the definition of an incomplete use that in McDowell's commentary on Theaetetus, which seems to state in an admirably clear and precise way what Owen intended by his use of the term: an incomplete use, i.e. a use in which a subject expression and the appropriate form of the verb requires a complement in order to constitute a complete sentence, though in an elliptical sentence the complement may be omitted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(2a) Jane is teaching French.
(2b) Jane is teaching.

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

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

That Owen understood C1 as his characterization of 'complete' is shown by his discussion of 259a6–8, one of the passages where Plato uses esti without explicit complement, and offers the paraphrase or analysis dia to metechein ou ontos, 'because it shares in being'. It was the glossing of 'is' by 'shares in being' that earlier commentators (e.g. Ackrill) had taken to be Plato's way of marking off the existential esti from other uses of esti, which do not receive this paraphrase. In several places in the Sophist it is said of one kind or another that it is, because it shares in being, and it was perhaps natural to see this as marking off an existential, complete use. (These passages are discussed in Section V(c) below). At 259a5–6 the Elatic Stranger sums up his argument about the different thus: partaking in being, it is by virtue of that partaking—but not the thing of which it partakes but something different:

τὸ μὲν ἔτερον μεταχείν τοῦ ὄντος ἐστι μὴ διὰ τοῦτον τὴν μέθεξιν, οὐ μὴν ἐκαίνι γε οὐ μετέχειν ἀλλ' ἐτερον.

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

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

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

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

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

9 N. White, Plato: Sophist (Indianapolis, 1993), p. xxii, uses the terms uncompleted v. complemented uses of 'is', where Owen (whom I have followed) uses complete v. incomplete. White (p. xxvii) shares my view that for Plato there is no sharp distinction between the two uses. But I have reservations about his claim that complemented being ('is...') stands to uncompleted being ('is' tout court) as 'heavy, in comparison to K' stands to 'heavy' (tout court), at least in so far as it seems to suggest that the uncompleted use of 'is' is prior in understanding to the complemented use.
article ‘A Metaphysical Paradox’写道的“the difference between the “is” in *Troy is famous* and in *Troy is*, implicit knowledge of which ‘even a Greek child would have had’. (Vlastos’s chief interest is in the question how we should understand Plato’s description of the forms as *ontos on*, ‘really real’, and so forth: he insists that these uses of ‘to be’ are to be sharply distinguished from those in which ‘to be’ means ‘to exist’. His choice of example suggests that he takes as one aspect of the distinction the fact (presumably supposed to be well known to the Greek child) that

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

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

IV

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

\[11\] G. Vlastos, ‘A Metaphysical Paradox’. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 59 (1965-6), 5–19; repr. in *Platonic Studies*, 1st edn. (Princeton, 1973), 47. Vlastos agrees with Owen that the *Sophist* does not contain an explicit statement of the distinction between the ‘is’ of existence and other uses of ‘is’.

\[12\] In Sect. V(d) below I concede that the proof at 255c–d does invoke a distinction between the complete and incomplete uses of *enai*, but, though it cannot be used for that purpose, it did not form a major plank in Plato’s answer to Parmenides.

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

(1) ‘*Yπηκε δέ, ἵππημα, βούλευτε γεινοῖσθαι αὐτῶν σοιών, ὑμαθὴ δὲ μὴ εἶναι.*
(2) Ὄντως δὲ μὴν ἑαυτῷ, βούλευτε γεινοῖσθαι, δέ τινεν, μητρικί εἶναι.
(3) Ἡπικεβολευ̣τε αὐτῶν ὑπεικεν ἑαυτῷ ἑαυτοῖς μητρικί εἶναι, βούλευτε αὐτῶν, ὡς ἐν εὐκραίνη ἀκολούθωσιν.

(1) ‘You want him to become wise, and not to be ignorant;’ he said.
(2) ‘You want him to become what he is not, and to be no longer what he is now.’
(3) ‘Since you want him, who is now, to be no longer, you want to destroy him apparently!’

A standard diagnosis of the fallacy would be to see an equivocation on *est*: in (2), which is *true*, it is the two-place copula; in the *false* protasis of (3), it is the one-place existential. But the correct diagnosis is different; it is that the fallacy depends on a syntactic ambiguity in the clauses *hos esti nun* and *hos nun estin*. In (2) it means *(you want him no longer to be) what he now is*, *where hos is the equivalent of hoi* and the complement of *estin*. But in (3), *(you want him, who now is, no longer to be) hos nun esti* is a relative clause dependent on *auton; hos is the subject of esti* which is left without a complement, as is the infinitive *enai*. Now it is true that the effect of lopping off the complement of *enai* is to make *(you want him no longer to be alive, or ‘... to exist’ a natural translation. But I do not think we are forced to postulate a radically different use of *is’ or ‘be’ here. To show this I suggest the following, parallel, argument. Socrates and his friends try to rescue a child from a smoke-filled room; that is, they want him no longer to breathe what he is now breathing (namely smoke). The wily sophists exclaim *(You want him no longer to be breathing what he’s now breathing)—(Yes)—‘So you want him, who is now breathing, no longer to be breathing’. Once again Socrates and friends want the child to die—they want him no longer to be breathing.

Now no one, I think, would try to argue that the fallacy involved a shift in uses of the verb ‘breathe’, simply because in one clause an object is specified and in another it is not. Whenever *(X is breathing)* is true, it will also be true that *(X is breathing something—oxygen normally. Conversely *(X is not breathing)* will normally mean the same as *(X is not breathing anything). But for all that, we should not say either that *(X is breathing)* is elliptical, or that the use of the verb where it has an object is significantly different from the use where it has no object. Of course, that in itself is a difference, but not involving an important shift in the verb’s sense. And exactly the same may be said of the original argument with the verb to be:
lopping off the complement produces a falsehood but need not be seen as yielding a sharply different ('one-place, existential') use of *esti*. Rather, 'They want him not to be' will be equivalent to 'They want him not to be anything at all', just as 'They want him not to breathe' will be equivalent to 'They want him not to breathe anything at all'. Contrast the lopping off of the object in 'You want her to stop growing tomatoes', which yields 'You want her to stop growing'; here the effect of lopping off the object is to produce a sharply different use of the verb.

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

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

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

V

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

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

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

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

13 It appears that in Plato, at least, the interlocutor's reply *esti* never echoes the mere copula; the plain *esti*, as opposed to the very frequent *esti iatia* ("that's so"), may mean 'it is possible' (*Cratylos* 430c1; *Phaedrus* 223a7). An interesting case, where what we have is the *is* of definition and not the plain copula, is *Theaetetus* 152b12–22b. To be *ya-"palaiyov* or *tivn xerousias* is *GEAL* "utterly young*


15 C. H. Kahn, *The Verb 'Be' in Ancient Greek* (Dordrecht, 1973), 240, draws the syntactic distinction between an absolute and a predicative construction of the verb *be*. (His well-known thesis is that the absolute construction of *einai* by no means always bears an existential meaning: indeed he suggests the Greeks did not have our notion of existence.) The absolute construction is defined as one where 'there is no nominal or locative predicate and no other complement such as the possessive dative, nor even an adverb of manner. An absolute construction may however admit adverbs of time'. In a later article ('Some Philosophical Uses of "To Be" in Plato', *Phronesis*, 25 (1981), 131 n. 20) he extends the above to allow expressions such as *penuiô* on to count as absolute, adding 'perhaps the notion of an absolute construction has a clear sense only by contrast with the nominal and locative copula, and does not admit of more precise definition'.
confine itself to a scrutiny of its role in the description of images and falsehood. Rather the phrase to mē on itself comes under scrutiny in the opening section of the paradoxes, 237b–239c: what can we apply it to? and what can be applied to it?—with the paradoxical result that it has no application, nor can anything that is—number, for example—be applied to it. So it is unsayable, unthinkable, etc.—but in so saying we contradict ourselves—we apply being and number to it.

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

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

16 Cf. J. Malcolm, ‘Plato’s Analysis of to őv and to mē on in the Sophist’, Phronesis, 7 (1967), 137: [to mē on, here = to mēdamōs on] may be read, literally, as ‘that which “is not” in all possible respects’ or that which is so way at all may be said to be. . . . On this reading to mēdamōs on is stronger than “non-existence”. I take it that what Malcolm means is this: Plato refuses to allow anything the description to mēdamōs on, while he would have had to allow that, for example, Pegasus qualifies for the description ‘non-existent’. But this shows only that to mēdamōs on is ‘stronger than our notion non-existent’. It remains possible, and indeed likely, that Plato’s failure to make the Pegasus point is due not to a lack of interest in ‘existence problems’ (as Owen would have it), but to the fact that he cannot distinguish non-existence from not being anything at all.

form ‘It is . . . is true’17 But we can accept this point and still read to mē on as a C2 complete use, for, as I have argued in Section IV, the negation of the C2 complete esti is equivalent to ‘is not anything at all’. And there are good reasons for doing this, and for saying that pro tante the paradox is about to mē on in the sense of the non-existent. For (i) when a puzzle is raised about the applicability of the term to mē on, about whether to mē on can be thought about, etc., it is natural to take this as an early member of that long-lived and far-flung family of puzzles about how one can think of, speak of, or refer to the non-existent. Not the earliest, of course: and in recalling Parmenides we have another reason to expect a puzzle about non-existence. (ii) When in the course of the argument it is said that nothing that is, no on, can be applied to to mē on, with the result that number, which is in primis on, cannot be applied to it (238a7–8), what is here said about number is surely that it is a thing that is, i.e. exists, not that it is [some unspecified complement], which is how the incomplete reading would have to take it if it is to treat on and mē on in the same way.

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

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

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

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

19 Heinaman (‘Being in the Sophist’, 20) dismisses another possibility, the veridical esti. I agree that to mē on and to mēdamōs on in 237–9 cannot consistently be read as veridical, in spite of the introduction of the topic of not-being at 256d via the mention of falsehood, and the allusion at 237a3–4 to the characterization of false speaking as legein to mē on; cf. 268c3–4.

20 Malcolm, ‘Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the Sophist’, 164 n. 3, conceded that he was wrong to invoke the 240c passage in support of his interpretation of mē on as absolute (predicative) non-being. He continues to defend the latter as an interpretation of 237–9; my only disagreement with him is over his insistence that this is to be distinguished from an interpretation in terms of non-existence.
we can accept this without having to accept that the complete esti has no role in this section. It is important for what follows that we have in this section just what we seem to have: theories about what is, where that ‘is’ is a complete use.25

(c) The Communion of Kinds (252–9)

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

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

The remaining three groups all follow the same pattern. Starting with change and the same, it is argued (1) change is different from the same, so (2) change is not the same but (3) change is the same, because (4) change shares in the same. The apparent contradiction in the conjunction of (2) and (3) is mirrored in what follows with ‘change is different and is not different’ (256e8), and finally ‘change is being and is not being’ (256d8–9). Plato makes the Stranger explain away the apparent contradiction in (2) and (3) by saying (256a11–12) that ‘when we said [it is] the same and

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

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

After that excursus into passages where the incomplete ‘is’ is found, I now turn to the locution esti dia to metechein tou ontos (it is, because it shares in being). I shall argue that it does offer an analysis of a complete esti. I fully accept, however, two important points. The first is that a major aim of this section (as just described) is the distinction of predications from identity-statements, each of which contains an incomplete ‘is’. The second is that, though the phrase dia to metechein tou ontos (because of sharing in being) analyses a complete ‘is’, this use is not seen as importantly distinct from incomplete uses of ‘is’. Indeed, this is part of my thesis about
the complete, C2, use. Nevertheless, it is important to argue, against Owen
and Frede,\footnote{Frede, Prädikation und Existenzaussage, 56, claims that 256a1 is contained in 255e11: Kinesis is altogether different from stasis (1), (1), he argues, contains both subsequent assertions; both (2) (Kinesis) is not stasis (a14) and (3) Kinesis is, because it shares in being. If this means that (3) is an inference from (1), then we need not hold that because it is in (1) is incomplete, so must it in (3) be. We need not, because we have an alternative account, in terms of a C2 use (in (3)), and an analogy with the inference from ‘Caesar is fighting the Gauls’ to ‘Caesar is fighting’.}
that the locution esti dia to metechein tou ontos offers an analysis of a complete use of esti.

There are three main passages to be considered:

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

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

(i) forms part of a series of propositions about the sample kind kinesis; it comes in the pair Kinēsis is not stasis but Kinesis is, because it shares in being.\footnote{Frede, Prädikation und Existenzaussage, argues that all three passages to be discussed contain incomplete uses.}\footnote{This pair of statements has a different form from the next three (K is and is not stasis, is and is not heteron, is and is not on), because stasis is not even predicative of kinesis.} How should we understand the claim that Kinesis is, because it shares in being? What would one have to have very good reason for rejecting the view that this is a syntactically complete, existential ‘is’, given what has led up to this. Kinesis is one of five distinct kinds. It was the first of these to be postulated. In the course of the proof of the non-identity of the kind being with either kinesis or stasis (254d10) we have the premiss to de ge on meikon amphon, being mixes with (i.e. is predicative of, as it transpires) both—eston gar amphiō pou—for both, presumably, are. Again, one would have to have good grounds for denying that this is a complete, existential use. And this is reinforced by going back again to 250a–b where it is agreed that kinesis and stasis both are (250a11). Now 250a–b is the culmination of the discussion of theories of being, discussed above (Section V(b)). I insisted that these are theories of what is, while conceding that ontological questions were not, for all that, Plato's chief target.

A connection can be traced between the three passages 250a11, 254d10, and 256a1, which all make the same assertion but with increasing technicality of expression: at 250a11 we have simply, kinesis and stasis are; at 254d10 the same assertion, accompanied by the claim that being mixes with both (to de ge on meikon amphon); finally at 256a1 the fully technical version: kinesis esti, dia to metechein tou ontos. This, then, is the argument for taking 256a1 as analysing a complete use of esti and pro tanto making an existence claim: it is naturally connected with the two earlier passages, each of which contains a complete use.\footnote{E.g. by Owen, pp. 442–3 above; Malcolm, Plato's Analysis of τὸ ἄχος and τὸ μὴ ἄχος in the Sophist', 143, cf. Malcolm, Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the Sophist', 165.}

(ii) 256d8–e6. This much-discussed passage has often been cited to show that esti, dia to metechein tou ontos cannot analyse a complete use.\footnote{I prefer this to the alternative translation proposed, for his own reasons, by McDowell: ‘in the case of each of the forms, what is (ii) is multiple and what is not (ii) is indefinite in number’ ('Falsehood and Not-Being', 125).} I argue that if we take a complete use to be C2, the argument has no force.

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

Ποι ἑκατον ἄρα τῶν εἰδών πλούς μὲν ἡ ἐπί τὸ ὅν, ἑσπερον δὲ πόθεν τῷ μὴ ὅν.

In the case of each of the forms, then, there is much that it is and indefinitely much that it is not.\footnote{This pair of statements has a different form from the next three (K is and is not stasis, is and is not heteron, is and is not on), because stasis is not even predicative of kinesis.}

There is thus an inference from

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

And this, in Owen's view, shows that 'the use of the verb [to be] on which the Eleatic Stranger rests his conclusion is the connective use, distributed between identity and predication... So to extract any express recognition of a substantive or existential use of is from this passage would not square with the argument' (p. 443). With the second sentence we may agree, if by 'a substantive or existential use' is intended a use seen as discrete from the incomplete use. The passage does indeed show that Plato saw an intimate connection between (1) and (2), but this is quite consistent with taking (1) to contain a complete, C2, use. Compare the inference from Jane is teaching to Jane is teaching something. Once again, we can preserve an important insight, in this case into Plato's perception of the relation between
(d) 255c–d: The Proof of the Non-Identity of Being and the Different

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

\[
\text{All} \ \lambda\epsilon\nu\eta\mu\alpha\nu\text{ with } \delta\gamma\nu\rho\omicron\nu \text{ in } \delta\nu\omicron\nu \text{ and } \nu \text{ is } \eta\iota\nu\nu\iota\nu \text{ with } \nu \text{ is, } \text{or the latter from the former. My view is the second; the inference is straightforward one if a C2 use is involved in (1). Malcolm, 'Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the Sophist', 165, resists this interpretation on the grounds that such an inference would be 'flagrantly fallacious'.}
\]

\[\text{Heineman, 'Being in the Sophist', 7-8, suggests that in this passage Plato rather 'slides from' Each form is (i.e. exists) to each form is (predicatively) many things, or infer the latter from the former. My view is the second; the inference is a straightforward one if a C2 use is involved in (1). Malcolm, 'Remarks on an Incomplete Rendering of Being in the Sophist', 165, resists this interpretation on the grounds that such an inference would be 'flagrantly fallacious'.}\]

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

But critics of A(i) disagree, using an argument from the choice of the expressions \textit{pros allo} and \textit{pros heteron}, where the more usual term is \textit{pros tis} ('in relation to something') for the second term of the familiar contrast described above. They argue that Plato cannot have intended to include all incomplete uses of 'is' with the designation 'things said to be \textit{pros allo}', since in some incomplete uses the completion picks out the same thing as the subject term (as in \textit{Change is change}, or \textit{The beautiful is beautiful}), not something different. So, they argue, we should not discern here the familiar contrast between non-relative (i.e., complete uses of 'is') and relative (i.e., incomplete uses), but should look for a different one, one which does justice to the choice of the expression 'in relation to something different'. Here Owen and Frede offer different alternatives, though both argue
against interpreting *auto kath' hauta* uses as complete, and both interpret the first use as well as the second as an incomplete use. Owen suggests that the contrast involved is that between the *is* of identity (*is auto kath' hauta*) and the *is* of predication. Frede, followed by Meinwald, holds that the use of *is* labelled *auto kath' hauta* is one in which we say what something is of itself or by itself. Examples would include 'White is a colour', 'Not-being is not-being', and 'The beautiful is beautiful'. The second use, on Frede's reading, picks out ordinary predicates. In sum, those who believe that interpretation A(i) does not do justice to Plato's choice of terminology at 255d–e agree in denying that the first use of *is* should be read as a complete *is*, but disagree in what alternative contrast Plato is signalling. Owen holds that the contrast is between the *is* of identity and the *is* of predication, while Frede holds that it is between of 'itself' predication and ordinary predication, as explained above.

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

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

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

There seems to be no objection to taking the distinction to be between an incomplete (*pros allo*) use and a use which does not need a completion, that is, a C2 use. Plato's point would then be that every use of *heteron* requires a completion while some uses of *est* do not require a completion. To make his point Plato needs only the C2 understanding of an *auto kath' hauta* use: he does not have to claim that there are some uses of *est* which additionally do not allow a completion (C1). Indeed the traditional explanation of the *auto kath' hauta–pros allo* distinction is phrased in precisely C2 terms (Diogenes Laërtius 3.108: 'things which are said *kath' heauta* are such as do not need anything additional in their interpretation').

I believe that this proof does invoke a distinction between a C2 complete and an incomplete use of *est*. But there is no inconsistency in maintaining both of the following: (i) in this passage, 255c-2, to achieve a proof of the non-identity of the kinds *being* and *different*, Plato points out that *est*, unlike *heteron*, has a complete (C2) and an incomplete use; and (ii) the relation between the complete (C2) and the incomplete use is such that the distinction between them cannot form part of his overall strategy in solving the problems of not-being.

CONCLUSION

I have argued for a new understanding of the distinction between the syntactically complete and the incomplete use of *est*, supplanting the traditional understanding in terms of *monadic* and *dyadic*. A consequence of the proposed characterization, which I labelled C2, is that the complete and incomplete uses are related as follows: X is (complete use) entails X is something and X is F entails X is X is not (complete use) equivalent to X is not anything at all. Understanding the complete *est* thus allows us to...
say (contra Owen) that the Sophist's problems about not being are stated in terms of the complete esti, but also to see why Plato found no role for to mē on or to mēdamos on where that is the negation of the complete esti. We can also agree that at 255c-d Plato draws attention to the distinction between the complete and incomplete uses of 'is', while denying that this amounts to the discovery of a fundamental distinction between existence and the copula.

I hope to have shown that understanding the relation between the complete and incomplete uses of esti in the way proposed yields a satisfying reading of the Sophist. I believe that this proposal for the Sophist can be extended to, and supported by consideration of, other works of Plato and indeed Aristotle. Aristotle's well-known insistence (Analytica Posteriora 924a-8) that it is necessary to know that a thing is in order to know what it is (in other cases, as with 'goatstag', one can know only what the name signifies) is well explained if we pursue the analogy between einai and verbs such as teach: compare 'it is necessary to know that X is teaching'. And though Aristotle explicitly recognizes that What is not is thought about does not entail what is not is (the very point which the Sophist requires but which Plato fails to make), his discussion of the point does not suggest that he finds a clear semantic and syntactic distinction between the estis in that pair of sentences.59


For a defence of this, see ibid. Among key texts are: de Interpretatione 2131-2; Sophistei Elenchi 166-67; 167-4; 210a-2-4. In the second passage the fallacious inference is put under the general heading of fallacies magi to ehlax sas eλαξης, as in Aelian, and is treated analogously to that from the Indian is white in the tooth to the Indian is white. Each involves the illicit removal of a qualifier (is white in the tooth, is thought about). Far from showing that Aristotle has here recognized two distinct senses of esti, his discussion of the fallacy suggests that he assumed a single sense to be involved, as with white. His point would then be that just as being white in the tooth is not really a way of being white, being thought about is not really a way of being (as being an expectant mother is not necessarily being a mother). So that although he points out that 'it is not the same thing to be something and to be kapatos', this does not seem to be an express recognition of a clear-cut distinction such as Vlastos believed to be latent know in every speaker of Greek.