Parts of Difference in Plato's *Sophist*, with Help from *Republic* V

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In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger develops an account of non-being according to which it is understood as a part of Different. Yet the precise language he uses to characterize the form Non-Being and other negative forms has two variations. In the first, a negative form is characterized as a part of the nature of Different contraposed to the nature of the form negated. Thus, Non-Beautiful is described as 'something different among beings that is marked-off from some one kind and in turn contraposed with something among beings' (257e2-4), and Non-Being is identified as 'the part of the nature of Different contraposed with the being of each thing' (258e2). In the second variation, however, a negative form is characterized as the contraposing (*antithesis*) of the nature of a part of Different relative to the nature of the form negated. Hence, Non-Beautiful 'turns out to be a contraposing of being in relation to being' (257e6-7) and Non-Being is 'the contraposing of the nature of a part of Different and of the nature of Being' (258a11-b1). In this essay, I develop an account of the parts of Different that explains the two variants in the Stranger's characterization of negative forms, focusing on the Stranger's description of the Non-Beautiful as a part of Different. Since the Stranger's account of the parts of Different is based on an analogy with parts of knowledge, I begin by examining what it means to be a part of knowledge, drawing on Socrates' account of knowledge in *Republic* V.
Plato, *Sophist*, *Republic*, Non-Being, Metaphysics

In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger develops an account of non-being according to which the form (εἶδος) Non-Being is understood in terms of the part (μόριον) of the nature (φύσις) of Different contraposed with the nature of Being. Yet the precise language he uses to characterize Non-Being, as well as other negative forms, has two variations. In the first, a negative form is characterized as a part of the nature of Different contraposed to the nature of the form negated. Thus, Non-Beautiful is described as 'something different among beings [that is] marked-off from some one kind and in turn contraposed with something among beings' (257e2-4; ἄλλο τι τῶν ὄντων τινὸς ἑνὸς γένους ἀφορισθὲν καὶ πρός τι τῶν ὄντων αὖ πάλιν ἀντιτεθὲν οὕτω συμβέβηκεν εἶναι τὸ μὴ καλόν;).[1] Likewise, Non-Being is identified as 'the part of the nature [of Different] contraposed with the being of each thing'

1 All translations are my own, in consultation with Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem (1996); Crivelli (2012); Rowe (2015[1]).

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(258e2; τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὂν ἑκάστου μόριον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον).[2] In the second variation, however, a negative form is characterized as the contraposing (ἀντίθεσις)[3] of the nature of a part of Different relative to the nature of the form negated. Hence, Non-Beautiful 'turns out to be a contraposing of being in relation to being' (257e6-7; ὄντος δὴ πρὸς ὂν ἀντίθεσις, ὡς ἔοικ', εἶναί τις συμβαίνει τὸ μὴ καλόν), and Non-Being is 'the contraposing of the nature of a part of Different and of the nature of Being, which have been contraposed in relation to one another' (258a11-b1; ἡ τῆς θατέρου μορίου φύσεως καὶ τῆς τοῦ ὄντος πρὸς ἄλληλα ἀντικειμένων ἀντίθεσις).[4] Although commentators, when they venture to note this variation at all, take the two formulations to be saying the same thing (e.g., Lee 1972, 277–84; Van Eck 2002, 78, 81; Crivelli 2012, 212), we should find that unsatisfying. A contraposing is not the same thing as something contraposed. A contraposing is presumably an act (ποίημα); whereas something contraposed is presumably the recipient of that act. In this essay, I develop an account of the parts of Different that explains the two variants in the Stranger's characterization of negative forms, focusing on the Stranger's description of Non-Beautiful as a part of Different. Since the Stranger's account of the parts of Different is based on an analogy with arts (τέχναι) and sciences (ἐπιστῆμαι) as parts of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), I will begin by examining what it means to be a part of knowledge, drawing on Socrates' account of knowledge in *Republic* V.

2 I follow Owen (1971, 239n33), Van Eck (2002, 75–76), and Crivelli (2012, 219) in reading ἑκάστου here, instead of emending the text to ἕκαστον. In this I break with Campbell (1867, 163) and the Oxford editions of both Burnet (1900) and Duke et al. (1995). Cf. Robinson (1999, 158).

3 The term ἀντίθεσις in the *Sophist* is difficult to translate. 'Opposition' (used by Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem 1996, 69) is problematic because the Stranger is arguing that Non-Being is not the opposite (ἐναντίον) of Being (257b9-c3, 258b3). 'Contrast' or 'contrasting' are better (used by Cornford 1935, 292; Crivelli 2012, 205, 212, 215–16), but 'con-' suggests a symmetrical relationship. White (1993, 52) uses 'setting against', which captures ἀντίθεσις well, but as a two-word phrase can be a bit unwieldy. Rowe (2015[1], 161) uses 'contraposition', which in its construction nicely parallels ἀντίθεσις, 'contra-' matching ἀντί- and 'position' paralleling θέσις. Mitchell Miller suggested to me that 'contraposing' might be better, since the '-ing' suffix captures the -σις ending. A weakness of 'contraposition' and 'contraposing' is that those terms have a meaning in logic that has nothing to do with ἀντίθεσις in the *Sophist*.

4 For debate on how to construe this passage, see Van Eck (2002, 77–78); Crivelli (2012, 216n122).

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I. Parts of Knowledge

The Stranger explains that knowledge, although one, has been marked-off (ἀφορισθέν) into various parts corresponding with its various subject matters (257c10-d2). What the Stranger has in mind is that arithmetic, for example, is the part of knowledge set over (ἐπί) the combination and division of numbers, while cobblery is the part set over crafting shoes. Each part is presumably marked-off in the following way: knowledge, in knowing some determinate subject matter, *x*, marks-off a part of itself and sets that part over *x*. Knowledge, in other words, in knowing its various subject matters, produces parts of itself relative to those subject matters.

In order to get more precise on how the production and marking-off of a part of knowledge works, we can begin with Socrates' account of knowledge at the end of *Republic* V and note how the Stranger's account is more advanced.[5] Socrates proposes that knowledge, like opinion, is a kind of power (δύναμις) (477b ff.). Further, he argues that one power is differentiated from another on the basis of two criteria: that which it is set over (ἐφ᾽ ᾧ ἔστι) and that which it produces (ὃ ἀπεργάζεται) (477d1).

While these two criteria can be used to differentiate one power from another (477c6-d5), they cannot explain the relationship between a whole power and its parts.[6] After all, a part is in one way the same and in another way different from the whole of which it is a part. Knowledge, on Socrates' account, is one power in that it is set over (ἐπί) one subject matter—being (τῷ ὄντι)—and produces one act—understanding (τὸ γιγνώσκειν) (see 477b10, 478a6). Yet, as the Stranger's ontology highlights, there are many beings, each different from the others. Hence, given that the subject matter of knowledge is being, and being is many, knowledge will be set over many subject matters. Furthermore, in relation to each subject matter, knowledge produces a distinct understanding. In relation to crafting shoes, for example, knowledge produces an understanding of how to craft shoes, while in relation to combining and dividing numbers, knowledge produces an understanding of how to combine and divide numbers. Therefore, the power we call knowledge is both set over many distinct subject matters and produces as many distinct understandings as there are subject matters. According

5 Socrates' account in *Republic* V is corrected and developed in various ways in the *Sophist*. In *Republic* V, for example, Socrates posits non-being as the unknowable object of ignorance, whereas the Stranger's shows that non-being both is and is knowable.

6 Although Socrates in *Republic* IV.438e explains how knowledge as such can become knowledge of a certain sort (ποιοῦ τινος)—e.g., medical knowledge—he does not characterize knowledge of a certain sort as a part of knowledge.

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to Socrates' criteria, however, powers set over different things and that produce different things are different powers. Consequently, it appears that knowledge is not one power but many different powers. In order to avoid the contradiction that threatens here—that the power we call knowledge is both one and many—we will need something beyond Socrates' criteria that can explain why knowledge, which in one line of inquiry appears as one and the same power, and in another line of inquiry appears as many different powers, is in fact one whole power composed of many parts.

As the Stranger pointed out during his criticism of the monists earlier in the *Sophist*, in order to explain the unity of a whole, appeal must be made to a partless (ἀμερές) 'one itself' (τὸ ἓν αὐτό) (245a1-b5). Presumably something similar is needed in the case of knowledge. To explain why knowledge is one whole composed of many parts, we will need a kind of knowledge that is only one and not many, in reference to which the many parts of knowledge can be unified into one whole. Without such a partless one, the many arts and sciences will not be unified as parts of knowledge. Instead they will simply be many distinct powers that we happen to homonymously call 'knowledge'. Fortunately, such a partless knowledge is already implied in the account of knowledge as a power. Knowledge is one and not many insofar as it is one power causally prior to and responsible for the production of the many determinate acts of understanding relative to the many determinate subject matters. Yet, insofar as the power we call knowledge is engaged in producing acts of understanding relative to determinate subject matters, it is one whole composed of many parts, such that each part is marked-off in reference to the act of understanding each subject matter. That a part of knowledge is the power we call knowledge insofar as it is operative relative to a determinate subject matter is implied by the Stranger's wording when he says that 'each part [of knowledge], coming to be set over something (τὸ δ' ἐπί τῳ γιγνόμενον), is marked-off and has a certain title unique to it' (257c10-d1). It is only insofar as the power we call knowledge comes to be set over some determinate subject matter that a part of that power is marked-off. Prior to being set over a determinate subject matter, the power we call knowledge is a partless one.

To sum up, then, the power we call knowledge, prior to being set over a determinate subject matter, is a partless one. Yet the power we call knowledge produces determinate understandings relative to determinate subject matters. Insofar as it produces an understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, it is marked-off from the rest of knowledge as the part of knowledge relative to that subject matter. The marking-off, since it depends on the production of a determinate understanding, is causally posterior to

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the production of that determinate understanding, whereas the power producing that determinate understanding is causally prior to that determinate understanding. The marking-off of cobblery from the rest of knowledge, for example, is causally posterior to the production of the understanding of how to craft shoes, while knowledge as such, which produces the understanding of how to craft shoes, is causally prior to that understanding.

One important consequence of the analysis so far is that a given art or science can be considered both as a power and as the act of understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, while knowledge as such is only a power. A given art or science can be considered as a power because it is the power we call knowledge in the act of producing understanding relative to a determinate subject matter. Yet, a given art or science can also be considered as the act of understanding a determinate subject matter, since only in reference to the act of understanding a determinate subject matter can the part of the power we call knowledge that produces that understanding be marked-off from the rest of knowledge. If we take cobblery again, on the one hand it can be considered the power we call knowledge insofar as that power has been marked-off as producing the act of understanding how to craft shoes. On the other hand, however, it can be considered the understanding of how to craft shoes in reference to which the part of knowledge set over crafting shoes is marked-off. Having identified the way in which the marking-off of a given part of knowledge is dependent upon the act of understanding a given subject matter, we are now in the position to turn to the Stranger's account of the parts of Different.

II. Parts of Different

The Stranger claims that although the nature of Different is one, its parts have been affected in the same way as the parts of knowledge (257d4-5). In order to give an account of the nature of Different that parallels the account of knowledge just developed, my first task will be to identify what kind of thing the nature of Different is. Let us assume, for the sake of argument at least, that the nature of Different is, like knowledge, a kind of power (δύναμις). After all, earlier in the digression the Stranger proposed that whatever possesses some power to affect or to be affected is a being, and that beings are nothing other than power (247d8-e4; see Leigh 2010). Given that the nature of Different is a being (see esp. 258a7-10), if we assume that it is also a power, the next question is 'what sort of power?' We can formulate a more sophisticated way of asking this question by employing Socrates'

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criteria for distinguishing powers: What is the power we call the nature of Different set over and what does it produce? The Stranger claims that the nature of Different is set over each thing (255e3-6, 256d12-e2, 258d7-e2, 259a5-6). Likewise, he says that it produces each thing as different from being (256d12-e2). The 'being' here, however, is not only the form Being, for otherwise Being itself could not be a non-being relative to everything different from it (257a1-6, 259b1-5). Instead, the nature of Different produces differences relative to 'the being of each thing' (258e2). For example, it not only produces Motion as different from the form Being, but also as different from being-rest, being-same, being-different, being-beautiful, being-large, being-just, etc. (see Van Eck 2002).

The Stranger introduces the language of 'contraposing' to describe the production of determinate differences among natures, for example the difference of part of the nature of Different from the nature of Beautiful. Just as the power we call knowledge produces understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, so the nature of Different produces the contraposing of a part of the nature of Different relative to the nature of any form *F*. The act of contraposing, in other words, parallels the act of understanding. There is, however, a disanalogy between contraposing and understanding. The act of understanding takes one object, whereas the act of contraposing takes two. Understanding takes a given thing and transforms it into 'something understood' or a 'subject matter'. Contraposing, however, takes a given nature, on the one hand, and a part of the nature of Different, on the other, and transforms them both into things contraposed relative to one another (see πρὸς ἄλληλα ἀντικειμένων at 258b1). One act of contraposing, for example, takes the nature of Being and part of the nature of Different and renders them contraposed relative to one another, whereas another act of contraposing takes the nature of Beautiful and part of the nature of Different and renders them contraposed relative to one another.

The Stranger begins his account of the parts of Different by asking whether there is 'some part of Different contraposed to the Beautiful' (257d7). Theaetetus agrees that there is and says it is called the Non-Beautiful (257d8-13). The Stranger goes on to characterize the Non-Beautiful in two ways. First he has Theaetetus agree that the Non-Beautiful is 'something different among beings [that is] marked-off from some one kind and in turn contraposed in relation to something among beings' (257e32-4). Then he claims that 'the Non-Beautiful turns out to be a contraposing of being in relation to being' (257e6-7). Here we see the tension with which I began this essay. How can the Non-Beautiful be both a contraposing and something contraposed?

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The account of the parts of knowledge I have offered provides resources to answer this question. According to the account of the parts of knowledge developed above, a given art or science can be considered in two ways. On the one hand, an art or science such as cobblery can be considered as a marked-off part of the power we call knowledge insofar as that power is producing an act of understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, such as crafting shoes. On the other hand, an art or science such as cobblery can be considered as the determinate act of understanding a determinate subject matter, such as crafting shoes, since only in reference to such an act of understanding can a part of the power we call knowledge be marked-off.

The Stranger's characterization of Non-Beautiful as a contraposing of being in relation to being (257e6-7) parallels an art or science considered in the second way, as a determinate act of understanding. The nature of Different produces a determinate contraposing in relation to the nature of Beautiful. Then, the nature of Different insofar as it is producing that contraposing is marked-off as the part of Different whose nature produces a contraposing in relation to the nature of Beautiful. The result is the part of the nature of Different relative to the nature of Beautiful. Next, the contraposing produced by the part of the nature of Different relative to the nature of Beautiful renders the nature of that part of Different something contraposed relative to the nature of Beautiful. Non-Beautiful as this part of Different parallels the first way in which an art or science can be considered. Just as an art or science such as cobblery can be considered both as an act of understanding a determinate subject matter and as the part of the power of knowledge that produces that understanding, so Non-Beautiful can be considered on the one hand as an act of contraposing of the nature of part of Different relative to the nature of Beautiful, and on the other hand as the nature of the part of Different that produces that contraposing and thereby renders both the nature of the Beautiful and that part of the nature of Different things contraposed relative to one another.[7]

7 I would like to thank Mitchell Miller, Eric Sanday, Colin Smith, Peter Moore, Mary Cunningham, Joseph Li Vecchi, Rachel Kitzinger, and audiences at the SAGP, APS, and IPS for helping me think through the account of Non-Being in earlier versions of this essay and in related projects.

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