Elements of being: Reading Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* as a critique of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

**Thesis**

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Elements of being:
Reading Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* as a critique of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein suggests that the logical atoms of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* are similar to the primary elements of Socrates’ Dream in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (*P.I.* §46). I explore the texts in detail and argue that there are two key similarities between the *Tractatus* and the Dream: they both propose the existence of a single type of logical ‘atom’ and they both reject the object-property distinction. I suggest that Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* are effectively two parts of one larger dialogue which can be read as a critique of *Tractatus*-type theories – theories that have object-only ontologies. I argue that Plato demonstrates that any theory lacking the object-property distinction will be unable to explain how strings of words are transformed into meaningful propositions about the world. Such theories relegate all propositions and mathematics to the class of nonsense. Wittgenstein acknowledges that, strictly speaking, the propositions of the *Tractatus* are nonsense (*TLP* 6.54); I show that the inexpressibility problem that Wittgenstein references is the same problem that Plato shows is faced by Heraclitus in the *Theaetetus* (183b). At the time of writing the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein did not realise that all propositions, not just those of philosophy, like those in the *Tractatus*, were reduced to nonsense by his theory. Plato, on the other hand, foresaw the issues that any *Tractatus*-type theory would inevitably face, and resolved them in the *Sophist* with the introduction of a second type of logical atom with a different (metaphorical) shape. Different shapes account for how logical atoms combine to create propositions with unity. I argue that the version of logical atomism that Plato presents in the *Sophist* looks more Fregean than Tractarian. I discuss Wittgenstein’s criticism of Frege, rejection of the idea of a second type of atom representing properties, and preference for necessarily featureless atoms. I conclude that this preference comes at too high a price.
Analytical table of contents

Chapter 1. The *Theaetetus* as a critique of empiricism

In chapter 1, I argue that the *Theaetetus* is a critique of empiricism written by a Platonist Plato, despite some commentators’ views to the contrary and their suggestions that Plato is abandoning his theory of Forms or showing genuine confusion about how false belief occurs.

a. Introducing the *Theaetetus*

I start by introducing the themes of the *Theaetetus* and proposing a set of criteria that any successful interpretation of the dialogue must meet.

b. ‘Reading A’ and ‘Reading B’

I then set out possible alternative interpretations of the dialogue and show that these tend to fall into one of two broad categories, as originally presented by Burnyeat: ‘Reading A’ (or ‘Unitarian’) and ‘Reading B’ (or ‘Revisionist’). I outline the key features of these and points of contention.

c. The puzzle of false belief in support of Reading A

I discuss the ‘puzzles of false belief’ and argue that this passage is used by Plato to highlight the flaws of non-Platonist theories and does not express genuine confusion on Plato’s part. I conclude that ‘Reading A’ is the most plausible interpretation of the dialogue.

d. Plato was a Platonist

In further support of my chosen interpretation, I argue that there is significant continuity between the *Theaetetus* and Plato’s other dialogues, including those that show support for the Forms. I suggest that when Plato wrote the *Theaetetus* he was already aware of and confident in the Platonist solution that he would eventually present in the *Sophist*.

e. A central digression

The *Theaetetus* exhibits a feature shared by several Platonic dialogues: the passage of text that is *literally* at the centre of the dialogue also turns out to be *figuratively* central, and is a point about ethics and piety. This is difficult for a proponent of ‘Reading B’ to explain and therefore supports my overall interpretation.
Chapter 2. Logical atomism in Socrates’ Dream

Reading Plato’s *Theaetetus* as a critique of empiricism leads to an interpretation of ‘Socrates’ Dream’ (201d9–202c8) as introducing the core principles of logical atomism, where the primary elements function like Wittgenstein’s Objects or Russell’s sense-data. Contrary to most of the secondary literature, I argue that Plato does not refute this proposal but, rather, accepts some of the principles and leaves the theory open for further development in the *Sophist*.

a. Introducing Socrates’ Dream

I start by introducing Theaetetus’ third and final definition of knowledge and the interlocutors’ development and critique of it (i.e., Socrates’ Dream), highlighting where the discussion foreshadows, but falls short of, the *Sophist*’s solution.

b. Principles of logical atomism in Socrates’ Dream

I then discuss points of similarity between the Dream Theory and the logical atomism of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and argue that Socrates’ primary elements and Wittgenstein’s Objects function in the same way. I also argue that the interweaving and concatenation metaphors are too underdeveloped in the *Theaetetus* and *Tractatus* to be considered as equivalent processes, as some have claimed.

c. Plato’s verdict

I argue that, throughout the discussion of the Dream Theory, Plato appears to be highlighting to the reader that there are many options for developing the basic Dream Theory into a more complex and successful theory, but that these are unavailable to the interlocutors of the *Theaetetus* because of their empiricist assumptions. Plato hints that when these restrictions are lifted, in the *Sophist*, the theory could succeed.
Chapter 3. Logical atomism developed in the Sophist

In chapter 3, I argue that the Theaetetus and Sophist are effectively two halves of one larger work: the Theaetetus presents us with a non-Platonist theory and demonstrates that it is missing a key ingredient and therefore fails; Plato then uses the Sophist to reveal the Platonist solution. I therefore spend time refuting claims made in the secondary literature that Plato made rudimentary errors of logic in the Sophist and was puzzled by the different uses of the word ‘is’ (for making existence, predication, and identity claims).

a. The Sophist as a continuation of the Theaetetus

I start by introducing the Sophist and drawing out connections between the Sophist and Theaetetus.

b. ‘Is’ in the Sophist

I argue that Plato was not confused by the different uses of ‘is’, and that the Sophist was not ‘one grand logical mistake’, as some have claimed. I suggest that the Sophist shows Plato expertly navigating the topics under discussion.

c. The Sophist’s solution

I argue that the Sophist moves us away from empiricism and towards Platonist metaphysics, and that this key move allows the interlocutors to finally resolve the difficulties raised in the Theaetetus.
Chapter 4. Differently shaped logical atoms

In chapter 4, I argue that the significant development that Plato makes to the Dream Theory in the *Sophist* is the introduction of two different types of logical atom, whose inherent features, their (metaphorical) shape, account for the way that they combine. I argue that this version of logical atomism starts to look more Fregean than Tractarian.

a. Ditton Genos, Democritus and the *Timaeus*

I start by arguing that, in the *Sophist*, Plato builds on the Dream Theory of the *Theaetetus* by introducing the concept of differently shaped logical atoms. The different shapes mean that some atoms fit together and some do not, thereby explaining how ‘Theaetetus sits’ is meaningful and ‘Theaetetus Socrates’ is not. I suggest a comparison with Democritus’ physical atomism and also discuss similarities with Plato’s *Timaeus*.

b. The puzzles of analytic philosophy

I then discuss the development of logical atomism that arose in analytic philosophy from the late 19th century into the early part of the 20th century and set out how Frege landed on his preferred theory. I suggest that Frege’s theory is similar to the *Sophist* because it involves introducing a distinction where the shape of the fundamental building blocks of our language determines which linguistic combinations are possible and which are not, and the shape is what gives propositions unity above and beyond their component parts.

c. Wittgenstein’s rejection of Fregean distinctions

I set out Wittgenstein’s criticism of Frege: that he failed to properly distinguish names and descriptions. I explain that there were fundamental differences between Wittgenstein’s and Frege’s theories of the nature of logical atoms.
Chapter 5. Verdict on the object-property distinction

In chapter 5, I argue that the Dream Theory of the *Theaetetus* and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* both lack the object-property distinction. Both set out an ontology with only one type of logical atom: objects. There is no place for a second type of logical atom representing properties. Plato uses the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* to show the necessity of the object-property distinction in forming meaningful propositions. The identity relation plays a particularly important role but is banished by Wittgenstein, with significant negative consequences.

a. Objects and properties: different types of logical atoms

I start by suggesting that objects correspond to one type of logical atom and properties to another, and that a logical atomist can propose an object-only ontology, a property-only ontology, an object-property ontology, or something else (if they introduce alternative logical atoms). I claim that the Dream Theory is an object-only ontology and that the *Sophist* introduces a second type of atom, acknowledging the importance of the object-property distinction. I argue that this suggests that the *Tractatus* lacked the object-property distinction.

b. Wittgenstein’s object-only ontology

I argue that a close examination of the *Tractatus* reveals that Wittgenstein rejected the object-property distinction and built an object-only ontology. I start by discussing the nature of Wittgenstein’s Objects, noting that they are different to everyday objects. I argue that Ramsey appears to have understood Wittgenstein’s intent better than Anscombe.

c. No properties, no sense

I set out Wittgenstein’s definition of ‘sense’ and ‘nonsense’ and show that, by rejecting properties as a second type of logical atom, and thereby rejecting notions like identity, Wittgenstein’s theory relegates all propositions and all of mathematics to nonsense.
Chapter 1. The *Theaetetus* as a critique of empiricism

In this chapter, I will argue that the *Theaetetus* is a critique of empiricism written by a Platonist Plato, despite some commentators’ views to the contrary and their suggestions that Plato is abandoning his theory of Forms or showing genuine confusion about how false belief occurs. This is an important first step in establishing, as I will do in subsequent chapters, that the *Theaetetus* presents a version of logical atomism which Plato then builds on in the *Sophist*.

a. Introducing the *Theaetetus*

I will start by introducing the *Theaetetus* and proposing a set of criteria that any successful interpretation of the dialogue must meet. I will then outline possible alternative interpretations and justify my own preference using the specified criteria.

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato presents Socrates in discussion with Theaetetus and Theodorus, a mathematics student and his teacher, on the topic ‘What is knowledge?’.

We might think that we have knowledge, and we might say that we ‘know’ something during a conversation, but we lack the philosophical understanding of what knowledge really is. The interlocutors are searching for a thorough understanding of what it is and why it is so valuable.

The examples in the dialogue cover knowledge of numbers, people, moral virtues, facts about what is happening or has happened, medium-sized-dry-goods like tables and chairs, stories,

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1 The question is posed at 146c: τί σοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἐπιστήμη. The usual translation is: ‘what do you think knowledge is?’, i.e., the Greek *epistêmê* is the key word that is translated as ‘knowledge’. Just a few lines earlier, Socrates and Theaetetus discuss whether the wise (*sophoi*) are wise as a result of wisdom (145d11), agreeing that this is the case; whether wisdom (*sophia*) differs from knowledge (*epistêmê*) (145e1), agreeing that it does not; and whether wisdom and knowledge are therefore the same thing (145e5), agreeing that they must be so. Plato then goes on to use the word ‘tekhnê’, shortly after asking Theaetetus to define knowledge, at 146d1, to refer to ‘know-how’ or techniques such as a cobblerly. Another word used within the *Theaetetus* and translated as ‘knowledge’ is *oida* (or *gignôskô*). E.g., at 191b Theaetetus describes the case of seeing a person in the distance and thinking it is Socrates, who he *knows* but it is actually someone he doesn’t *know*. At 209a it is used in the context of the third proposal of what *logos* is: a differentiating sign of recognition. Both cases show that it means ‘know’ in the sense of ‘recognize’. In Greek ‘I know Socrates’ (knowledge of a person or thing) is formed: *oida ton Sôkratên*; and ‘I know that Socrates is wise’ (knowledge that a fact): *oida ton Sôkratên sophon*. I.e., there is not such a clear distinction between objectual and propositional knowledge baked into the grammar of the Greek as there is in English. This proves to be an important point when interpreting the *Theaetetus* (and *Sophist*) and I return to it in more detail in chapter 3 in conjunction with a discussion of *esti*. 

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the alphabet, skills like cobbling, and whether a suspect is guilty of a crime. Plato wants to find a single answer encompassing what is common to all of these apparently distinct types of knowledge. As the examples just listed show, Plato is seeking a definition that covers ‘knowing that...’ (i.e., propositional knowledge, such as knowledge of mathematical propositions (148a1-b1)), ‘knowing how to...’ (i.e., knowledge of a skill, such as the art of carpentry (146e1)), ‘knowing someone or something’ (i.e., knowledge by acquaintance, such as knowledge of clay (147a3)). The interlocutors also discuss errors – when one fails to have knowledge – including ascribing a property to something that does not have that property (but has a different property instead), ascribing a property to something that does not exist, identifying one thing as some other thing instead, and miscalculating a mathematical sum. Again, the examples of failing to know show the same breadth of range as knowing. It is clear that our inquiry is aimed at finding out what is the shared essence of these apparently disparate examples.

A geometrical definition that Theaetetus provides at the start of the dialogue (147d2-148b1) is the epitome of Platonic definition: completely abstract, providing absolute certainty, and...
demonstrating a thorough understanding of the principles behind why it is true. But Theaetetus’ various attempts to define knowledge fail to reach this standard.

Theaetetus’ preliminary attempt to define knowledge (146c7-146d1) is rejected immediately for being a mere list of examples of knowledge rather than a definition. Thereafter, he provides definitions that meet Socrates’ expectation of what a definition should be, but his proposals repeatedly fail when tested. The first adequately framed definition that Theaetetus proposes is that knowledge is perception (151e1-4). This particular definition of knowledge is familiar to modern-day philosophers who will be aware of the debate between rationalism and empiricism. After Hume (1748), Locke (1690) and Descartes (1641), we clearly recognize this as the most basic version of empiricism, where knowledge of the world comes directly from our perceptions of it and with no additional a priori ingredients, and we notice that it contrasts starkly with a rationalist, Platonist account of knowledge involving innate ideas. The interlocutors discuss the definition in conjunction with Protagoras’ theory of relativism (introduced at 151e5-152c8) and Heraclitus’ theory that everything is always in flux (152c8-

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8 Theaetetus says that knowledge is αἰσθησις, which is usually translated as ‘perception’ in this context but which can also be translated as ‘awareness’, ‘sensation’, or ‘impression’ (LSJ). The translation of αἰσθησις as ‘perception’ is, therefore, not meant to suggest anything more ‘loaded’ than passive awareness (despite the fact that a modern English speaker might assume that there is a cognitive difference between ‘perception’ and ‘awareness’).

9 In short, empiricists argue that knowledge of the world comes from our experience of it via the senses, whereas rationalists argue that knowledge comes from reflection and the operation of our consciousness rather than from external inputs such as perception. See Markie and Folescu (2021).

10 Protagoras was a sophist who is most famous for proclaiming that ‘man is the measure of all things’ (fr. 80B1 DK) which is generally taken to be a statement of epistemic relativism. This is one of the few authentic Protagorean fragments to be preserved and available to us – works such as Truth are missing – so we do not know the context or detail of Protagoras’ claim and Plato’s Theaetetus is one of the main sources used to understand Protagoras’ philosophy. See Long (1999).

11 ‘Flux’ in this context means perpetual change. Colvin (2007) makes an interesting point about the historical Heraclitus compared with the Heraclitus that Plato presents to readers of the Theaetetus. Colvin thinks that Plato is deliberately choosing a radical and ‘epistemically upsetting’ version of flux rather than being true to the historical Heraclitus’ theory (2007, p. 769). Plato handles Heracliteanism with ‘comic and hyperbolic imagery’ (ibid.). There are two main images that we typically associate with Heraclitus: the river that we experience differently each time we cross (fr. B12 DK) and the taste of the barley cocktail (fr. B125 DK). Colvin argues that these fragments show that Heraclitus was not teaching a radical or total flux. ‘Heraclitus’ language is carefully chosen to point out the paradoxical union of stability and flux: ‘Upon those who step into the same rivers, still different waters flow’ and ‘The cocktail disintegrates unless it is moved’. The flux in question is not motion simply, but motion productive of stability.’ (2007, pp. 759-760). Colvin says that ‘Flux in Heraclitus is always presented along with stability in the service of the unity of opposites; it is not an ultimate principle to which everything else must be reduced; it does not go ‘all the way down’; and it does not pose a threat to our knowledge of things or to their identity; indeed, in the case of the river and the cocktail, Heraclitus’ point is that
152e1) – similarly non-Platonist theories. There is a lengthy discussion about the implications of these types of theories before the original definition is rejected for being unable to account for notions like ‘existence’ and ‘sameness’, and with the interlocutors acknowledging the distinction between perceiving and believing. Whether Heraclitus’ theory of flux is refuted as robustly as Protagoras’ relativism and Theaetetus’ definition of knowledge is an important point of contention that I will return to shortly.

One of the key passages in the discussion of the basic empiricist definition is the account of perception given at 156a-157c – because if knowledge is perception then we need to understand what perception is. We are told that when we look at something, for example the blue sky, there is both an occurrence of blueness and a glimpse of that blueness. The occurrence and the glimpse of the occurrence are termed the ‘twin products’ or ‘twin offspring’ by Socrates (156b1); these are always created together and cannot easily be separated. The glimpse makes the perceiver see the sky as blue, and the blueness makes that sky blue for me. So the impression that I have of the sky’s colour is one thing, and the fact about the world that makes that impression true for me is another thing entirely. This tells us that a belief, e.g., that the sky is blue, is true for me in virtue of, not only my having that belief, but also of there being something in the world that makes that belief true. In other words, Protagoras’ ‘man is the measure’ theory is presented as a realist one. ‘When I look at a white wall… the glimpse could not occur without the whiteness; nor could the whiteness occur without the glimpse… [But] the impression that I have of the wall’s colour is the one thing, while the fact which makes that impression true for me is quite another.’ (Denyer, 1991, p. 85). This is important because otherwise it would be an empty doctrine. As Denyer explains, simply identifying what is true with what is perceived is not inconsistent, but it is hard to see

flux constitutes these objects, gives them their respective character’ (ibid.). Colvin suggests that Plato is writing a ‘caricature’ of Heraclitus’ theory of flux, and that Plato uses the total flux thesis ‘in order to serve as one half of a dialectical opposition with the thesis of total stability ascribed to Parmenides’ (2007, p. 766). The same hyperbole is employed in the Cratylus’ references to Heraclitus too: Plato’s Socrates claims that ‘most of our wise men nowadays get so dizzy going around and around in their search for the nature of things that are, that the things themselves appear to them to be turning around and moving every which way’ (411b-c, Cooper (1997)), and the references that immediately follow (e.g., ‘nothing is stable or steadfast’; ‘things are full of every kind of motion and constantly coming to be’, ibid.) are similar to those found at Theaetetus 181e. Plato is deliberately choosing an extreme version that does not reflect the subtleties of the original Heracliteanism, hence we cannot take him to be critiquing Heraclitus’ actual theory but using it to represent a wider school of thought.
why Plato would care enough about this theory to discuss it; it is important that there is a credible theory being presented, not one where the best that can be said for it is that it is not inconsistent. The ‘man is the measure’ theory must tell us more than just that there are neither unbelieved truths nor untrue beliefs; it also needs to provide everyday standards for deciding who believes what and whether they are correct or not. It must tell us how to deal with cases that appear to be errors of judgement.

Having agreed that knowledge involves actively applying concepts that come from the mind (to perception or something else), rather than passively letting in perceptions, we move on to the second definition that Theaetetus proposes: knowledge is true belief (187b4), and this is followed by a lengthy discussion of how false belief can be possible (188-200). If false belief is not possible then all belief is true belief and therefore knowledge is nothing special or valuable, so it is important for the interlocutors to understand how false belief can occur. There are a series of puzzles which appear to show that false belief is not possible (187e-190e) and a discussion of two models (the Wax Tablet, 190e-196c, and the Aviary, 196c-200d) which try to show how the mind must operate if we are to be able to distinguish true belief from false belief and thereby explain errors. None of the attempts succeed and I will argue later that this is because the interlocutors still implicitly assume an empiricist-type model of knowledge.

At 201 Theaetetus’ second definition is refuted: a jury might have true belief about the perpetrator of a crime, however they do not have knowledge since they were not there themselves to witness the events and, instead, have gained their beliefs through the arguments and persuasiveness of the prosecution and defence.13 Jurors are said to lack

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12 Theaetetus suggests that knowledge is ἀλήθής δόξα, usually translated as ‘true belief’ or ‘true judgement’. LSJ suggests several alternative translations for δόξα including: expectation, opinion, supposition; and for ἀλήθής: unconcealed, honest, real, as opposed to false.

13 Rowett rejects the idea that there is no refutation of the second definition until the jury passage. She argues that this is the second part of a two-part refutation that had already begun, with the puzzles of false belief forming the first part: ‘If we accept, with Theaetetus and pretty well everyone else, that Socrates is right to say that the jury have reached true doxa while lacking some knowledge, of whatever kind, then Socrates has completed the second half of the demonstration that knowledge and true doxa do not neatly coincide. There are things that are truly discerned in the absence of knowledge, just as earlier we saw that there were things that were falsely discerned in the presence of knowledge’ (Rowett, 2012, p. 165). Despite this point of disagreement, as far as I am aware, all commentators agree that the juror passage marks the end of the first section of the dialogue with a definitive rejection of the first definition.
knowledge about the event because they did not perceive it. This follows a critique of an empiricist, perception-based theory of knowledge and might therefore seem unexpected or contradictory, but, as Nawar has recently noted, there is nothing inconsistent about the claim that perception is necessary for knowledge in some domains and the claim that knowledge is not identical to perception (hence Nawar rejects Bostock’s interpretation of this passage as Plato showing genuine confusion). Perception might be a necessary condition of knowledge for certain restricted domains such as the physical, perceptible world, but we have already demonstrated that perception is not a sufficient condition for knowledge (Nawar, 2013, p. 1056).

Theaetetus’ second suggestion is at least worth building on. It acknowledges that truth is a concept that applies to things of a certain type, and the type of thing capable of being a true belief also seems to be the type of thing capable of being knowledge – ‘Tree’ can be neither, ‘The tree is tall’ can be both. This tells us that there must be some internal complexity within the linguistic item for it to be capable of having a truth-value.

Theaetetus offers a third and final definition of knowledge as true belief with an account (201c8-d3),14 which is familiar to us from the Meno 98a2, Phaedo 76b5–6, Symposium 202a5-9, Republic 534b3-7, and Timaeus 51e5. During the discussion of this definition, Socrates recalls a dream that he had (201d8-202c5) in which this definition of knowledge was discussed and in which there were indivisible elements out of which complexes were built, both in the world and in the language that mirrors the world. The interlocutors discuss how this could work but cannot quite manage to find an answer, always discovering difficulties, and so the dialogue ends without reaching an accepted answer to the original question ‘What is knowledge?’.

The last line of the Theaetetus references the interlocutors’ plans to meet the following day, in the Sophist, to continue the discussion – ‘In the morning, Theodorus, let us meet here again’ (210d3, Fowler (1987)). The Sophist opens ‘According to our yesterday’s agreement...’ (216a, ibid.) and, I will argue later on, the interlocutors are able to resolve the difficulties they faced

14 Theaetetus suggests that knowledge is μετά λόγου ἀληθῆ δόξαν. I discuss the third definition in detail in chapter 2, arguing that the critique of this definition involves Plato setting out the principles of logical atomism.
by combining the Dream Theory with a Platonist metaphysics which is unavailable in the empiricist-focused *Theaetetus* but which is introduced by the Eleatic Visitor in the *Sophist*.

Throughout the *Theaetetus*, the constant presence of Theodorus the mathematician reminds us of the problem of mathematical knowledge, mathematical objects and concepts like ‘sameness’. Theodorus is drawn into the discussion at certain strategic points to underline the importance of this. For example, whilst Socrates is presenting possible defences of Protagoras that rely on being able to predict beneficial or harmful outcomes in politics and health, we have a reminder, in the form of Theodorus, that there are other kinds of knowledge that are left completely unexplained (178b1-179b8). And it is Theodorus who partners Socrates in the discussion of the self-refuting nature of Heraclitean flux where they highlight that Heracliteans cannot coherently state their own doctrine (179c1-183c2 – note that I will return to this passage in chapter 5 in relation to the similar difficulty faced in the *Tractatus*).

In this particular passage, Theodorus’ presence inevitably prompts the reader to question whether numbers are ‘in motion in space’ and undergoing ‘alteration’ in the same way as physical objects are said to be, and whether it is even coherent to think such a thing. It is also Theodorus who Socrates addresses the final line of the *Theaetetus* to and Theodorus who opens the *Sophist*, so his importance should not be underestimated.

The fact that Theaetetus is a student of mathematics is also relevant. Thaler makes the excellent point that ‘Theaetetus himself is a budding mathematician at the dramatic date of

15 It is also in this particular passage of text that we find use of the words *logos* (180a5, 180c5), *eidos* (181c3, 181c9), and *smikrōn* (180a2) – words that are fairly innocuous in the context of empiricist definitions of knowledge (meaning: argument; sort or kind; and small or tiny thing, respectively) but whose presence nevertheless reminds us of how Platonist metaphysics could transform the discussion and provide the answers that the interlocutors are seeking. *Logos* and *eidos* prove to be important later in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Sophist*, where they become more metaphysically loaded terms that provide explanatory power and structure to thought. And the concept of a smallest or tiniest thing (also translated as ‘smallest particle’ by Chappell (2005) and ‘slightest particle’ by Fowler (1987)) appears to hint at the idea of primary elements – the *ultimate* smallest thing. It is the same Greek word that Plato uses in the *Timaeus* in contexts such as ‘first will come [to exist] that form which is primary and has the *smallest* components, and the element thereof is that triangle which...’ (54d, Bury (1929)), i.e., in the context of describing primary elements, and in the *Republic*: “And is it not in some such experience as this that the question first occurs to us, what in the world, then, is the great and the *small*?” “By all means.” “And this is the origin of the designation “intelligible” for the one, and “visible” for the other” (524c, Shorey (1969)), and “...each unity equal to every other without the *slightest* difference and admitting no division into parts?” “What do you think would be their answer?” “This, I think – that they are speaking of units which can only be conceived by thought?” (526a, ibid.). ‘Smallest’ (as opposed to ‘small’) inevitably prompts the reader to think of ‘element’ and ‘indivisible’.
the conversation, a fact which makes him an unlikely candidate for entertaining the suggestion that knowledge is simply perception. So one question which should immediately strike any reader of the dialogue is what philosophical benefits Plato thinks are to be gained from a serious examination of this clearly false suggestion.’ (Thaler, 2016, p. 161).16 Rowett also highlights that ‘Theaetetus is a teenager. The point is not that his idea is naïve or childish, but that it reflects a certain stage of education (that is, training in geometry) at which attention to particulars is the normal route to knowledge.’ (Rowett, 2012, p. 152) – this appears to be a reference to the stages of education outlined in the Republic (509d-511e) and to the fact that we can reasonably assume that Theaetetus is used to working with particular drawings of circles and triangles, not the real things (for obvious reasons), and is still practicing the level of abstract thinking required by philosophy (as opposed to geometry).17

Right at the centre of the Theaetetus is an important but often overlooked passage known as the digression, which I discuss separately in section e of this chapter.

In summary, the Theaetetus takes us from (a) a definition of knowledge that is straightforwardly empiricist, to (b) a second definition where the refutation seems not to depend on any of the intervening discussion (about false belief), and then on to (c) a familiar Platonic definition of knowledge but which, this time, is not fleshed out with the familiar Platonic metaphysics, and finally to (d) where the discussion ends in aporia.18

The presentation and complexity of the subject matter means that there are different ways to interpret the apparent failure of the dialogue to answer the original question posed. Broadly speaking, interpretations differ because commentators have different views about the following:

- The end result of (a)

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16 It may be that Theaetetus has heard this sort of theory of knowledge from the likes of Democritus or Empedocles or their followers, and so it is these ideas that spring to his mind when questioned by Socrates – in the Sophist, at 246b4-5, Theaetetus states that he has ‘met with many of them’, where ‘them’ is a reference to the ‘giants’ who ‘drag down everything from heaven... actually grasping rocks and trees in their hands; for they lay their hands on all such things and maintain stoutly that that alone exists which can be touched and handled; for they define existence and body, or matter, as identical’ (246a5-9, Fowler (1987)), i.e., the materialist, empiricist theorists.

17 Rowett later says that the puzzles of false belief passage ‘is intended to refute a simple-minded idea put forward by a geometry student’ (2012, p. 152).

18 I.e., impasse, or state of continued puzzlement.
• How (b) and (c) are linked to (a)
• The move from (c) to (d)

I will discuss the details of these variations shortly, but in order to adjudicate between competing interpretations of the *Theaetetus* it is necessary to consider the context of the *Theaetetus* within Plato’s other works and the works of his contemporaries.

I accept the following chronology of Plato’s dialogues, which is agreed upon by most modern commentators: early dialogues (e.g., *Apology, Crito*) are used to showcase the historical Socrates’ skill at revealing how little his interlocutors know about ethical topics, through the method of dialectic; slightly later dialogues involve the character Socrates increasingly becoming a mouthpiece for Plato’s own views, including on metaphysical topics like the theory of Forms, culminating in the likes of the *Republic* and *Symposium*; then there is the group which includes the *Theaetetus*, where I take the chronological order to be: *Parmenides*, then *Theaetetus*, then *Sophist, Statesman, and Philebus*, which involve exploration of logical problems and include critical examination of typically ‘Platonist’ theories; finally, we have the late dialogues (e.g., *Timaeus, Laws*) where we return very firmly to these Platonist theories.¹⁹

So the *Theaetetus* was most likely written after the *Republic, Phaedo, and Phaedrus*, i.e., after Plato has explored the theory of Forms and the immortality of the soul in great depth, and after the *Protagoras, Cratylus* and *Parmenides*, i.e., after Plato has demonstrated a thorough understanding of how his ideas compare to those of his contemporaries’ – the real-life

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¹⁹ The origins of this widely accepted chronology are discussed by several commentators in the secondary literature including expertly by Sedley (2004, opening chapter). Some commentators have previously suggested that the *Timaeus* is a much earlier dialogue, sitting alongside the *Republic*, e.g., Owen (1965 and 1999) and Bostock (1984 and 1988) (see chapter 3). However, this appears to be motivated by a desire to create a timeline that supports the view that Plato changed his mind and rejected the theory of Forms later in his career, rather than by a desire to accurately date the dialogues using more objective techniques, e.g., stylistic commonalities, as is more usual and as is found in Sedley’s work. The redating of the *Timaeus* as a ‘middle’ dialogue would create difficulties in the dating of other dialogues that have traditionally been classified as ‘late’ and which clearly show support for the theory of Forms, e.g., the *Laws*. Chappell discusses this in chapter 5 of her *Reading Plato’s Theaetetus* (2005, esp. p. 19). See also Zeyl (2000), Kahn (2003) and Section 11 of Kraut (2022) for a fuller discussion of the topic of chronology. The matter of chronology is not critical to my overall conclusion, since my view is that Plato can be shown to be fairly consistent in his support for the theory of Forms throughout his works (the subject of chapter 1 of this thesis). Timeline matters more to Owen and Bostock because they want to show that Plato went from theory A to theory B over time. However, there is reason to believe that the *Timaeus* is a late dialogue, which counts against Owen and Bostock, and my view is in line with the majority of commentators including Sedley (2004), Denyer (1991), and Chappell (2005).
Protagoras, Cratylus and, Parmenides. The Theaetetus is the work of a philosopher who has just written these and is on his way to writing the elaborate and impressive Timaeus, building on the theory of Forms and setting out a theory of the creation of an ordered, purposeful, and rational universe.

Throughout Plato’s dialogues, he demonstrates an awareness of the possible alternative approaches to tackling the ethical and metaphysical questions that he is concerned with. Plato regularly references Parmenides and monism,20 Anaxagorean science,21 Heraclitean flux,22 Prodicus’ brand of sophism,23 and Protagoras’ relativism. He was also aware of Democritus, Leucippus, and Aristippus, or at least of the broad grouping to which these philosophers belong (i.e. materialist, atomist, non-teleological theorists).24

Any interpretation of the Theaetetus should make sense of the context within which the dialogue was written. For example, we would expect that the philosopher behind the theory of Forms would take issue with any theory that tried to ground knowledge in something as fleeting, unstable, and imperfect as perceptions – unless he had had a fundamental change of heart. In many dialogues, written both before and after the Theaetetus, the Forms are

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20 E.g., in the dialogue named after him, Parmenides. Also in the Theaetetus (e.g., at 180d7-e4, where Parmenideanism is said to be ‘opposite’ to Heracliteanism), the Sophist (there are eight explicit references to Parmenides including an accusation, at 242c8, that he treats us as children by telling us myths like the poets do; but also ever-present in the form of the Eleatic visitor) and the Symposium (‘those old stories Hesiod and Parmenides tell about the gods’, 195c4-6, Cooper (1997)). A particularly insightful discussion of Parmenidean monism is provided in Sedley 1999(a) (pp. 113-133).

21 E.g., Socrates says that his hopes are raised when he hears what Anaxagoras’ theory of Mind promises to provide, but these hopes are dashed when he reads the theory and it is non-sensical (Phaedo, 97c1-99d1); also during Socrates’ speech in the Apology he accuses Meletus of being contemptuous of the men of Athens for assuming them to be ignorant of Anaxagoras’ book, in which Anaxagoras states that the sun is a stone – Socrates points out that copies of the text can be purchased cheaply and easily in the agora and therefore Athenians will be familiar with Anaxagoras’ theories and aware that Socrates is not responsible for these theories (Apology, 26d2-e4). C.f. Curd (2019, especially section 3.3).

22 E.g., in the Cratylus, at 401d3-402c3, there is a reference to Heraclitus and his theory that ‘all things flow’ and ‘nothing stands fast’ and the dialogue ends with Socrates contrasting his own views to those of Heraclitus and Cratylus and suggesting that the interlocutors need a further discussion on this complex topic (440b9 onwards). See also Symposium 187a3-b5.

23 E.g., the sarcastic reference in the opening lines of the Cratylus (384b2-c1) and the grouping of Prodicus with fellow sophists Gorgias of Leontini and Hippias of Elis in the Apology (19e). More substantially, the many references in the Protagoras (‘or the Sophists’) to Prodicus and Hippias together, as though they come as a pair, (314c1-2, 317d1-4, 336d9-e1, 358a2, 359a2) and, more generally, to Prodicus’ presence in the mid and latter parts of that dialogue (there are forty references to him in just over fifty Stephanus pages of text).

24 E.g., in the Sophist, in the battle between the gods and giants. See footnote 16, above.
brought in to play an explanatory role and to structure our interaction with the world. They are said to be fundamental to our ability to form judgements and know truths.\(^{25}\) Plato frequently acknowledges that there is a role for perception in us coming to have knowledge,\(^{26}\) but highlights that perception *alone* cannot underpin knowledge or be all there is to knowledge. This should be kept in mind when deciding on how to interpret the *Theaetetus.*

I think that the most plausible interpretation of the dialogue is one that achieves the following:

1. Presents Plato as competent and sure-footed around the chosen topics, not careless, or guilty of making simple errors, or of presenting easily refutable arguments as his own – this is a point which counts against some of the interpretations put forward in the secondary literature. Interpretation choice must be made whilst remembering that the author of the *Theaetetus* is the very same Plato who has already written the *Republic, Symposium, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Parmenides,* etc. and will go on to write the *Sophist, Timaeus, Laws,* etc. – an extremely intelligent and capable philosopher. Hence, I will reject Bostock’s and Owen’s interpretations,\(^{27}\) and some aspects of Burnyeat’s and Annas’ interpretations for suggesting that Plato is confused and floundering.

2. Makes sense of the position of the dialogue within the standardly accepted chronology, including as sitting between the *Republic* and *Timaeus,* both of which set out, very firmly, very Platonist theories (of Forms and immortal souls in an eternal, unchanging, purposeful, perfect, good realm separate from the non-teleological world of fleeting and chaotic perceptibles), and as the dialogue that is immediately followed by the *Sophist,* which purports to be a continuation of the discussion of the *Theaetetus* and introduces the Greatest Kinds to resolve the problems of the *Theaetetus.* I.e., remembering that Plato is a Platonist or explaining how it is that he has temporarily abandoned or forgotten his Platonist theories – only to change his mind back again in time to write the *Timaeus* and *Laws.* Some accounts in the secondary literature do not explain this sufficiently well and this counts against them.

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\(^{25}\) E.g., in the *Republic,* 508e, the Form of Good is responsible for the existence of knowable objects. The Form of Good gives the power of knowledge to the knower.

\(^{26}\) E.g., the allegories in the *Republic* – of the sun (507b–509c), of the line (509d–511e) and of the cave (514a–520a) – show Plato exploring the link between the perceptible world and the world of Forms.

\(^{27}\) See Bostock (1984 and 1988) and Owen (1999). In chapter 3 section b I discuss their interpretations in detail.
3. Makes sense of the fact that Plato is known to use his dialogues to discuss and criticise schools of thought different to his own, for example Parmenides’ and Zeno’s monism or Protagoras’ relativism, and often uses irony and sarcasm to do so.  

4. Clearly distinguishes the author Plato from the characters in the dialogue (Socrates, Theaetetus, and Theodorus), and sets out how Plato makes use of this form of writing to engage the reader in the dialectic process. I will reject any interpretations that claim straightforwardly that ‘Plato says x’. He did not. He shows us how characters with different assumptions and preferences might engage in a discussion, and he sometimes demonstrates his own preferences through his (un)flattering presentation of those characters and their views.

5. Ties in the midwife motif (148e6-151d7), that Plato uses to set the scene, and the so-called ‘digression’ (172c1-177b8) with the rest of the dialogue. Socrates begins by making a comparison between his work and that of a midwife, noting that his role is to help identify, deliver, and test knowledge. He compares himself to Artemis (149c1), the god representing the profession of midwifery, and says that he makes the comparison because he, like Artemis, has never given birth – he knows nothing except that he knows nothing. But, in making this comparison, Plato is presenting Socrates as, to some extent, godlike. This sets the stage for the rest of the dialogue to begin. The digression is a literally, and I think figuratively, central passage of the dialogue (see chapter 1 section e for a full discussion of this). Here the interlocutors discuss ‘becoming like god’ (176a9-b3). Some interpretations in the secondary

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28 E.g., in the Parmenides, between 127e and 128c Plato has Socrates point out that Zeno is offering up a multitude of arguments in support of his theory of monism. Then, at 128d8, Zeno complains that someone made an unauthorised copy of his book – he says that the duplicate is a poor imitation of the original. Plato appears to be mocking the monists for undermining their own theory by assuming the existence of plurality in their speech and actions, regardless of what they claim to believe. The main focus of Socratic irony tends to be the sophists, e.g., Plato’s presentation of Glauccon (the unwise owl-eyed) and Thrasymachus (the tamed beast) in the Republic. Plato’s character Socrates is often sarcastic when ‘praising’ those he considers unjustifiably boastful, e.g., Euthyphro 4e4-5b1. Plato presumably does not really believe what he has Socrates say in the Protagoras: that the prospect of having Protagoras teach him about virtue is irresistible because Protagoras is not only a good person but, unlike others who are noble and respectable, Protagoras is able to make others good too – so much so that he is able to charge a fee for the service (348e1-349a6). See Rowe (1987) and Long (2007).

29 E.g., in the first half of the Protagoras, Protagoras will not engage in dialectic. Socrates goes on to mock Protagoras’ claims to be able to teach virtue (see footnote 28, above).

30 This reminds the reader of other references to immortality and leaving the earthly realm within Plato’s works, e.g., Symposium 207d-208e (where the reference is immediately followed by the midwife and pregnancy motif at 209a-b – ‘while others are pregnant in soul [with] wisdom and the rest of virtue’ (Cooper (1997)) – reminding
literature seem to overlook the role of the introductory and central passages of text, and the underlying references to godlikeness as a moral virtue inherently connected with knowledge, which I think counts against them.

6. Adequately explains the relevance of each part of the dialogue to the dialogue as a whole, not resorting (too often) to suggesting that sections of the dialogue are wholly irrelevant to the main topic, ‘What is knowledge?’ Shortly, I will highlight some suggestions in the secondary literature that the entire discussion of false belief is irrelevant to the question ‘What is knowledge?’, despite the discussion of false belief being a large and central section of the Theaetetus, and I suggest that this is simply implausible. The relevance of the aporetic ending, and Socrates’ reference to meeting the following day to continue the discussion, should also be acknowledged and explained.\(^{31}\)

Having introduced the dialogue and set out the criteria that a successful interpretation must meet, I will now explore different possible interpretations of the Theaetetus.

b. ‘Reading A’ and ‘Reading B’

The overall conclusion of this thesis relies on a particular interpretation of the Theaetetus, known as ‘Reading A’ or the ‘Unitarian’ interpretation, in contrast with ‘Reading B’ or the ‘Revisionist’ interpretation.\(^{32}\) I will now set out the key features of these and the points of contention.

I said above that the Theaetetus takes us from (a) an empiricist definition of knowledge, to (b) a second definition where the refutation seems not to depend on any of the intervening discussion (about false belief), and then on to (c) a familiar Platonic definition of knowledge but which, this time, is not fleshed out with the familiar Platonic metaphysics, and then to (d) the discussion ending in aporia. I said that interpretations of the Theaetetus differ because of commentators’ views on:

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\(^{31}\) Despite the aporetic ending, an interpretation of the dialogue that leaves us closer to an answer to ‘What is knowledge?’ is arguably preferable to one which suggests that we have not learned anything about the nature of knowledge upon reaching the end of the dialogue.

\(^{32}\) A distinction originally set out by Burnyeat (1990, pp. 8-9 and pp. 52-53).
• The end result of (a)
• How (b) and (c) are linked to (a)
• The move from (c) to (d)

Reading A proposes that the end result of (a) is a rejection of Theaetetus’ definition and of Protagorean relativism but not of Heraclitean flux, because the perceptible world is indeed in flux according to Plato (which is why the Forms are needed in other dialogues); (b) and (c) are a continuation of the critique of empiricism; and the standard Platonist definition of knowledge at (c) fails on this occasion, despite succeeding in other dialogues, because of the lack of Platonist metaphysics, such as the Forms, in the empiricist picture. On this reading, sections (b) and (c) are presenting a series of difficulties that Plato himself does not face. Plato is showing the limitations of his contemporaries’ theories, not of his own. In the first part of the dialogue we see a challenge to the claim that knowledge is built out of perception, i.e. the simplest version of empiricism. The dialogue moves on to assess a more nuanced version of the theory where knowledge is built from collections of perceptions, formed into beliefs, but the interlocutors struggle to explain how these collections are formed. Structuring into collections appears to require more metaphysical resources than the interlocutors have available to them. The final part of the dialogue is a further attempt to understand how structuring could take place, this time by presenting rather more complex theories where semantic structures arise out of perceptions and knowledge stems from an understanding of the link between language and the world.³³ I.e., in the Theaetetus, Plato comfortably and expertly guides us around the main faults with empiricist theories, thereby demonstrating the superiority of his own Platonist theories.

This interpretation suggests some degree of unity across Plato’s dialogues: we see Plato advocating Forms in the Republic, then the Theaetetus shows us what happens without the Forms (aporia), then the Timaeus gives us more details about the Forms to show their contribution to structuring the world and providing stability. Burnyeat notes that Reading A is therefore taken to show that the argument in the first part of the Theaetetus ‘supports the view set forth at length in earlier dialogues like the Phaedo and Republic, the celebrated Platonic doctrine’ (1990, p. 8) and comments that it is ‘the reading most commonly found in

the scholarly literature on Plato’ (ibid.), outlined in detail by Cornford (1935). Chappell highlights that this reading of the *Theaetetus*, as being consistent with other Platonic dialogues, is commonplace among ancient and mediaeval commentators, as well prominent in 19th and 20th century philosophy.

What is left unclear is how the *Parmenides* fits into this unitarian picture. Reading A suggests that Plato wrote an extended critique of the theory of Forms in the *Parmenides* and then, instead of addressing these concerns, continued to write dialogues in support of his theory of Forms with no further acknowledgement of the arguments of the *Parmenides*. Reading B arises from the view that, following the critique of the theory of Forms set out in the *Parmenides*, Plato was moving away from the theory of Forms at the time of writing the *Theaetetus* and can be seen as trying out alternative theories:

Reading B suggests that the end result of (a) is a refutation of Theaetetus’ definition, relativism, and flux, and therefore by the end of section (a) we are completely finished with the discussion of empiricism. As such, sections (b) and (c) of the dialogue do not continue the critique of empiricism, rather, they show Plato exploring and struggling with the topics under discussion. The aporia that we find at stage (d) is what Plato himself genuinely experiences as a result of his mistakes about language and logic in the preceding passages. Plato tries to construct a theory of knowledge without the Forms, but, according to Reading B advocates, Plato fails to distinguish the ‘is’ of identity statements (‘the morning star is the evening star’) from the ‘is’ of predication (‘Socrates is wise’), or sometimes he is said to have failed to distinguish knowledge of (a thing) from knowledge that (a fact). The dialogue shows some confusion on Plato’s part and an attempt by Plato to work through the theories available to him following his realization that there are fundamental flaws with the theory of Forms, as outlined in the *Parmenides*. Burnyeat suggests that, when reading the dialogue, ‘perhaps you will come to suspect, as not a few scholars have done, that it is not just Theaetetus, but Plato himself, through his spokesman Socrates, who is in the grip of a mistaken conception of knowledge’ (1990, p. 75).

Reading B advocates, or revisionist, include Robinson (1950), Runciman (1962), McDowell (1976), Bostock (1988) and Burnyeat (1990). They are committed to a collection of views including that: the arguments that Plato presents in the *Parmenides* are robust enough to
show that Plato is persuaded to move away from his previous metaphysics on the basis of them; the theory of Kinds set out in the *Sophist* (254b-258e, see also chapters 3 and 4) are not part of the theory of Forms that Plato had developed in earlier dialogues (or would go on to develop in later dialogues); the *Timaeus* and *Laws* were either written before the *Parmenides* or Plato changed his mind again, reverting to his original beliefs post-*Theaetetus*.

In relation to the *Theaetetus*, Reading B advocates hold that Plato shows that Theaetetus’ definition relies on, to the point of coinciding with, both Protagoras’ and Heraclitus’ theories, and that the resulting impossibility of language is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the original definition. Burnyeat cites 160d-e as the key passage (1990, p. 9). Plato has the character Socrates sum up the discussion to Theaetetus as follows: “Therefore you were quite right in saying that knowledge is nothing else than perception,” and there is complete identity between the doctrine of Homer and Heraclitus and all their followers — that all things are in motion, like streams — the doctrine of the great philosopher Protagoras that man is the measure of all things — and the doctrine of Theaetetus that, since these things are true, perception is knowledge. Eh, Theaetetus? Shall we say that this is, so to speak, your new-born child and the result of my midwifery? Or what shall we say?” (160d4-e3, Fowler (1987)). Burnyeat appears to take this series of questions posed by Socrates to mean that Plato himself would answer ‘yes’ and take these statements to be true. The fact that, logically speaking, the theories of Theaetetus, Heraclitus and Protagoras are not equivalent and do not entail one another counts against Reading B.

On the Reading B account, we have to conclude either that the *Theaetetus* is an early dialogue (which no-one in the secondary literature has suggested as a credible possibility) or that Plato temporarily abandons his theory of Forms (but returns to it in the *Timaeus* and *Laws*) and is genuinely confused about how false belief can be possible throughout the *Theaetetus*, despite capably navigating this topic in previous dialogues (e.g., *Euthydemus*, which is agreed

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34 Note that this is a statement which no Reading A or Reading B advocate claims Plato ever seriously held, i.e., the answer to this particular question is ‘no’.

35 This is most unlikely because of the complexity of the topic and how Plato deals with it, and because of the fact that the primary topics under discussion are knowledge and the possibility of falsehood rather than ethics or the virtues. Furthermore, the interlocutors are not mere sophists but are philosophers with theories that present a robust challenge to Plato’s metaphysics.
to be an earlier dialogue, see chapter 1 section d for further discussion of the *Euthydemus*). 36 There are variations on Readings A and B within the secondary literature, but most interpretations of the *Theaetetus* fall broadly into one of these two categories. The difference in interpretation stems at least in part from the obscure presentation, via dialogue, of complex ideas. As Stein says, ‘part of the richness and difficulty of Plato’s discussion derives from the fact that some of it lies beneath a double layer of obscurity: the principles driving certain parts of the discussion are at times unclear, but so also, at times, is the dialectical status of the position being examined. Plato has Socrates develop positions which Socrates does not endorse in the dialogue, but we do not know how much of their content Plato would in fact reject, nor is it always clear when the bracketed positions are no longer in play’ (Stein, 2016, p. 260).

These differences in interpretation, as outlined above, also stem from the fact that the *Theaetetus* is stylistically tricky to place in the chronology of Plato’s works, making it difficult to say whether and when Plato changed his mind. Sedley points out that the *Theaetetus* is particularly problematic to fit into a chronology of Plato’s works because, although it is clearly not an early dialogue, it does possess certain features of early dialogues which no other middle or late dialogues possess, namely, ‘a confessedly ignorant Socrates asks for a definition of a problematic item, dialectically examines a series of candidate answers, and at the end admits failure’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 1).

Sedley asks why Plato would revert to this aporetic style. By this stage in his career, Plato has developed the theory of Forms and other ontological tools relevant to the topic of knowledge, but the Socrates that we find in the *Theaetetus* proposes no such theories. While this could suggest that Plato has rejected his previous theories, as a Reading B advocate might suggest,

36 The ‘Unitarian’ vs. ‘Revisionist’ debate is separate from another major distinction in the interpretation of Plato’s works: ‘one-world’ vs. ‘two-world’ Platonism. ‘One-world’ Platonism says that the Platonic metaphysics of transcendental Forms allows us to talk meaningfully and truthfully about things in this physical, sensible, changing world – the Forms in the eternal realm structure the objects in this realm; ‘two-world’ Platonism is the view that truth is found only in the eternal realm of Forms and all we find in this sensible realm is incoherence – the worlds are entirely distinct and disjointed. It may be that the distinction is not as clear-cut as it has sometimes been presented in the secondary literature; the apparent variation in the presentation of Forms and sensibles across the different Platonic dialogues could be in part because of the variety of topics and scopes (e.g., the rather heady transcendentalism in the *Phaedrus* vs. the more sober logic of the *Sophist* is bound to reveal different aspects of the structuring elements). I do not think that either one-world or two-world Platonism is incompatible with either the Unitarian or Revisionist interpretations of the *Theaetetus*. 
Sedley says that it is ‘worth seeking some explanation for this, and preferably one which falls short of the scarcely credible hypothesis that Plato has abandoned his entire metaphysics of transcendence and thrown everything back into the melting pot’, highlighting the difficulty of the *Theaetetus*’ position between the ‘flanking works’, the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, which are heavily committed to the theory of Forms (Sedley, 2004, p. 7). I.e. Reading B advocates face a particularly difficult task trying to convincingly explain why Plato would reject but then return to his original theory.

Sedley’s own theory is a variation on Reading A. His view is that the dialogue is showcasing Socrates’ contribution to Plato’s eventual solution: Socrates’ methods, including dialectic and focus on the priority of definition, are the first stage in Plato developing his detailed metaphysical theory. So ‘the author is a Plato who has by this date developed a major metaphysical doctrine of obvious relevance to some of the dialogue’s central concerns; yet his speaker, Socrates, is to all appearances almost entirely innocent of that Platonic metaphysics’ (2004, p. 7). Sedley suggests a reading of the dialogue whereby Socrates was the intellectual midwife of Platonism, and the *Theaetetus* demonstrates that Socratic dialectic leads naturally on to Platonism.

On this view, Plato gradually transforms the character of Socrates from critical inquirer to mouthpiece for Plato’s own theories, but even in these later works Plato still emphasises Socrates’ method of questioning and dialectic. This method, where Socrates makes people realise how little they actually know, and how difficult they find it to answer ‘What is x?’, is the first stage of developing the right answer to the question ‘What is x?’ – since, if you do not realise that you lack knowledge about x then you will never begin to inquire what x really is. Plato’s answers and theories, then, are to be viewed as the natural continuation of Socrates’ questioning. Socrates ‘repeatedly voices nascent ideas and propounds arguments which cry out for Platonist interpretations but cannot himself articulate them in a Platonist mode’ (2004, p. 12).

This might be true, but it surely cannot be the main purpose of the dialogue. It seems likely that readers of Plato’s work will notice the transition from Socrates asking questions to Plato starting to try to answer those questions and finally to Plato setting out, in great detail, those answers (using characters other than Socrates). It seems implausible to suggest that the purpose of the *Theaetetus*, or the primary purpose anyway, should be as an illustration of this
point; and it does not explain the subject choice and some of the specific arguments that Plato sets out. We still have to ask, ‘why did Plato begin the dialogue with Theaetetus as a mouthpiece for empiricist theories?’ for example.\footnote{Reading B supporters can answer this straightforwardly: Plato is genuinely exploring the topic ‘What is knowledge?’ without knowing the correct answer.} Sedley goes on to clarify: ‘I am not for one moment suggesting that this semi-autobiographical theme exhausts the dialogue’s philosophical content. Far from it. Rather, it provides a frame within which Plato can conduct his own exploration of a range of epistemological issues...’ (ibid.). It certainly does seem more plausible that the ‘Socrates-as-midwife-to-Plato’ motif is an added bonus rather than the main purpose of the dialogue.

Sedley’s interpretation has the advantage of explaining why there is a lengthy discussion of Protagorean views despite these being refuted very quickly and easily at 184b3-187a3. Reading B advocates would struggle to explain why Plato includes the preceding text if he able to so swiftly refute the definition – it is not consistent with the view that Plato is confused and exploring options. On Sedley’s interpretation, Socrates is demonstrating his method of questioning but does not seem to have the metaphysical resources to solve the difficulties he raises; only Plato can do this (by supplying the Forms). Sedley says that this same reasoning also explains why we get a discussion of false belief which ‘turns out to contribute nothing to the definitional question at issue’ (ibid.).

However, on this latter point I strongly disagree because it seems preferable to read the dialogue in a way that does not reduce nearly half the text to an irrelevant diversion.\footnote{If text within a Platonic dialogue appears to be irrelevant or out of place, then it may be because this is actually the case; we cannot always assume that Plato’s writing is all flawless and wise. However, where we are uncertain about how to interpret some particular passage of text within a Platonic dialogue, an attempt to make good sense of it, and to consider whether a charitable interpretation is possible, seems better than dismissing it as irrelevant. Where we find that we have a choice between one interpretation that makes good sense of the text and another interpretation that reduces the text to an insignificant diversion, I suggest that the former option is generally preferable, particularly when the passage in question is so large and so central as Part II of the Theaetetus.} I think Sedley’s statement should count against his interpretation of the dialogue on these grounds. It seems unlikely that Part II of the dialogue does not contribute anything at all to the question that the dialogue is supposedly addressing, ‘What is knowledge?’ Part II is a section of the dialogue about false belief, which is a topic that is resurrected the following day in the Sophist.
and finally solved with the addition of the Platonist metaphysics that Sedley refers to, and I will argue in chapter 3 that there is a close connection between the \textit{Theaetetus} and \textit{Sophist}.

Cornford takes an entirely different interpretation of the dialogue but makes a similar point to Sedley: the falsity puzzles passage is branded as a ‘diversion from the task of defining knowledge’ (Cornford, 1935, pp. 110-111). I do not think that this is a plausible reading of the dialogue. I suggest that a closer look at the discussion of the puzzles of false belief shows us that they play an important role in the dialogue and provide strong support for the ‘Reading A’ interpretation.

Given that my eventual conclusion will rely on establishing that the puzzles of false belief are important, and given that not all commentators are convinced that this is the case, I will now explore the puzzles in more detail and justify my interpretation.

c. The puzzles of false belief in support of Reading A

Interpreting the puzzles of false belief\footnote{Here I refer to the full discussion, all the way from the first puzzle at 187e-188c through to the discussion of the Aviary model at 196c-200d.} as Plato systematically exploring and rejecting non-Platonist theories leads me to conclude that, whilst writing the \textit{Theaetetus}, Plato is a Platonist and therefore ‘Reading A’ is the most plausible interpretation of the dialogue. This in turn will lead me to further conclusions about logical atomism within the \textit{Theaetetus} and \textit{Sophist} (chapters 2 and 3). The first step is to establish who is puzzled by the puzzles of false belief.

Rowett notes that some people ‘have supposed not only that the character Socrates is confused about falsity, but that the author Plato is also genuinely puzzled about it, and that he has not yet worked out how to deal with it. They sometimes suppose that Plato makes progress in later dialogues, for instance in the \textit{Sophist}. So they think that this passage about falsity and error in the \textit{Theaetetus}, which struggles to explain how errors can occur in thought, is as it is, and fails as it fails, because Plato was ignorant of some points in the philosophy of language or lacked some of the distinctions that he needed, distinctions between names and descriptions or between sense and reference, and other tools introduced by Russell, Frege and so on’ (Rowett, 2012, p. 152). Rowett cites Ackrill (1966), Runciman (1962), McDowell (1973) and Bostock (1988) among those who suggest that Plato is demonstrating confusion,
in line with Reading B, as outlined above. She contrasts this view with Fine (1979), Gosling (1973) and Barton (1999).

Rowett argues that Plato and Socrates are not trying to defend the attempt to define knowledge as true belief, ‘except in so far as you have to test a theory and give it the best you can, to see if it is any good, in accordance with the midwife approach’ (ibid.). Rowett puts forward an interpretation of Socrates’ treatment of the second definition as an attempt to defend it ‘using only its own resources’ (2012, p. 153) – i.e., without recourse to ‘conceptual or intensional knowledge of ideas or types or descriptions (as opposed to perception of extensional things)’ in the three initial puzzles and then by adding in only limited ‘intensional ideas of a sort’ when the Wax Tablet and Aviary are discussed (ibid.). The project to explain how false belief would work within these constraints fails ‘as indeed it should, because (as the discussion shows) one can only see x as x (and not as y), whether rightly or wrongly, if there is a logical distinction between the first x (the subject to be identified) and the second x (the description under which it is identified). That requires that the second x, being conceptual and semantic, is drawn from a mental resource, a store of conceptual knowledge or descriptors, which are available to deploy as correct or incorrect descriptions of x, the subject.’ (ibid.). The passage shows the reader that there is an important distinction between concepts and objects that Theaetetus’ definition is unable to cope with, and ‘shifts the place of ‘knowledge’ away from the particular discernment towards the conceptual knowledge that is deployed’ (2012, p. 166).

The limitations of the definition include that it makes ‘inadequate provision for various distinctions such as the distinction between type and token, or role and occupant, and also (more importantly) what I shall call the difference between intensional and extensional objects, or between things and ideas, or referents and descriptions’ – and it is clear that these are issues with trying to adopt the definition under discussion and ‘not problems that Plato himself lacks the resources to address: after all, the problem is very largely the lack of any knowledge of Forms or types, such as the ones that the slave boy was well-equipped to call upon in the Meno, or the ones that people naturally use all the time in judging whether things are equal in the Phaedo’ (2012, p. 152). Rowett suggests seeing Meno 82b-c, Phaedo 75b, and Phaedrus 249b as evidence for the idea that ‘all humans have the capacity to think of things under classes or descriptions due to knowledge of the Forms’ (ibid.).
Rowett sensibly notes that ‘we can hardly imagine that the idea of Forms or types is beyond the reach of Plato at this point’\(^{40}\) and we can therefore confidently assert that ‘these are not difficulties to which Plato is prone; nor would any other ordinary thinkers, who naturally distinguish (informally) between proper names and descriptions, and between extensional objects and the identity ascribed to them, be prone to such problems. *It is not that people needed to have read Frege before they could coherently ask whether the morning star is the planet Venus, or whether the morning star and the evening star are the same planet. Knowing ‘what something is’, and distinguishing the referent from the description, does not normally cause confusion.* The problems arise only because (in the dialogue) we are attempting a specific reductionist approach, which denies that the description is something separate from the object whose identity is described, or that one can know the one without the other. *Plato is diagnosing why that reductionist project runs into difficulties, not running into them himself.*’ (Rowett, 2012, pp. 152-153, my italics).

Rowett concludes that the discussion of false belief should be read as revealing that false belief is only possible in cases where there is ‘a certain stock of abstract knowledge, conceptual knowledge, that is not awareness of the particular individual that is being described. The individual must be identified *under some description, or seen as something of a certain kind*. Error can only occur if the description applied misdescribes the situation, but then if it is to be applied falsely it must first have been known from somewhere else. So knowledge cannot be reduced to the application of description to particulars, but is to be found in the prior possession of abstract descriptions that can be deployed in identifying particular individuals on the ground.’ (Rowett, 2012, p. 151, my italics). Chappell reaches similar conclusions in *Reading Plato’s *Theaetetus* when assessing the first of the falsity puzzles.

I take the first puzzle to be something like the following: (1) either you have knowledge of a thing or you do not have knowledge of it; (2a) if you do have knowledge of a thing, then you

\(^{40}\) However it should be noted that Reading B advocates are unlikely to be suggesting this and may instead be suggesting that, following the criticism of the theory of Forms presented in the *Parmenides*, Plato no longer thinks that he has the Forms or types within easy reach. Until the criticisms of the *Parmenides* are addressed, Forms cannot be called upon. Reading A advocates have to argue that Plato is continuing in spite of the content of the *Parmenides*, for example by claiming that the *Parmenides* reveals new details about the Forms rather than refutes the theory of Forms.
will not mistake that thing, i.e., knowledge prevents error; alternatively, (2b) if you do not have knowledge of a thing, then you cannot believe that thing, i.e., ignorance prevents belief; therefore, (3) you cannot make mistaken beliefs.

Chappell says that the natural next step for the reader is to question why this is being raised by Plato as a puzzle at all:

Why should anyone think this is a genuine puzzle? [It seems possible to have false belief, and] One example is actually given in the dialogue itself, at 191b. It is perfectly possible for someone who knows Socrates to see someone else in the distance, and wrongly think that that person is Socrates. The First Puzzle does not even get off the ground, unless we can see why our knowledge of X and Y should guarantee us against mistakes about X and Y. So let us ask a different question: Who is the puzzle of 188a-c supposed to be a puzzle for?

(Chappell, 2005, p. 159)

McDowell says that ‘the argument’s fundamental flaw can be traced back to the assumption of equivalence between ‘knowledge of x’ and ‘knowledge of what is x’... That assumption leads Plato to regard the knowledge which is required for a thing to figure in one’s judgement as an all-or-nothing matter.’ (1990, p. 197). I.e., McDowell (a Reading B advocate) thinks that the puzzle is faced by Plato himself and we are on a journey in the Theaetetus to find the answer. To develop this line of thought further (for now):

In modern philosophy we clearly distinguish knowledge of objects, e.g., I know Socrates, from knowledge of facts about those objects, e.g., I know that Socrates is wise. McDowell’s suggestion is that the first puzzle gets an air of plausibility because it does not use this distinction consistently. Sedley notes that those who think Plato is genuinely floundering often accuse him of the simple mistake of ‘an assimilation of all knowledge to direct acquaintance – a usage of ‘knowledge’ and ‘know’ which has no exact English equivalent but is well represented in French by ‘connaître’, typically to ‘know’ a person or thing, as distinct from ‘savoir’, typically to ‘know that...’’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 120). Sedley references Runciman (1962) and Bostock (1988) as well as McDowell (1973, pp. 194–198) here, i.e., once again grouping Reading B proponents.
If the argument is concerned with objects throughout (or ‘knowledge by acquaintance’) then proposition (2b) (from the argument above) does not make sense – because we cannot believe falsehoods since no object is a falsehood. If, instead, the argument is concerned with propositions throughout (or ‘knowledge by description’, which I might come by without acquaintance with the object(s) concerned) then (2b) is simply implausible because it says that you cannot believe anything unless you know that it is the case, e.g., you cannot believe that Socrates is wise without knowing it – which is what was discussed in the first part of the Theaetetus. But if we mix up the types of knowledge (propositional and of objects), then we might read (2b) as this instead: ‘If you do not know an object, then you cannot believe propositions about that object’. This sounds much more plausible, since if I do not know an object, e.g., the item in a closed box, then I cannot know propositions about it, e.g., that the item in the box is green. But on this reading of the words ‘know’, proposition (2a) becomes something like this: ‘If you know an object then you will not believe false propositions about that object’ which is not at all plausible, since I could believe someone who told me that the object in the box was green if, e.g., that person was generally trustworthy (even if on this occasion they happened to be wrong).

Of the various types of ‘know’, each statement requires different ones in order to be plausible: for example, (2b) could be interpreted along the lines mentioned above, and (2a) could be ‘If you know every fact about an object then you cannot have a false belief about that object’ – which is obviously true (but this interpretation could not stretch to (2b), because that would then read as follows: ‘You have to know all the facts about an object if you are to have any belief at all about that object’). Statement (1), in order to make the argument valid, would need to be read as something like: ‘Either you know every fact about an object, or you do not know any facts about it’ – which is not the instance of the law of excluded middle that it initially seems to be, but something completely false (note that an obviously false belief is therefore being used to argue that false belief is impossible).

One way to get around this problem is to forget the distinction between different types of knowledge and uses of the word ‘know’, and instead to imagine that sentences are just long names for things. For instance, when I know that ‘Socrates is wise’ I actually know an object that is the wisdom of Socrates, or wise-Socrates, or wisdom-Socraticised. Then there is no difference between knowing objects and knowing propositions, because propositions are
objects, so the jumbled-up interpretations of ‘know’ being to look acceptable. If a proposition is just a complex name for an (unusual) object like the wisdom of Socrates, then propositions and names function in the same way.41

However, Plato shows signs that he is aware of the distinction between names and statements (containing names) elsewhere.42 Any interpretation that leads us to conclude that Plato himself has confused knowledge of a thing with omniscience about it cannot be right – see my list of criteria in section (a) of this chapter. I will discuss the view that Plato is genuinely mistaken in more detail in chapter 3 because it is a surprisingly prevalent view in the secondary literature.

What seems more plausible, given that the discussion leading up to this section of the dialogue has involved Theaetetus putting forward empiricist accounts of knowledge, is that Plato is here showing puzzles and arguments that demonstrate how these accounts struggle to cope with the concept of false belief.

Chappell suggests that Plato is revealing a certain problem about how empiricists are unable to explain our capacity to formulate beliefs about perceptions. On the empiricist picture we can acquire a perception of Socrates and also a perception of Theaetetus and this leaves us with what Chappell calls ‘a perceptual ‘echo’’ which is something like the idea that we retain following our initial perception. When we make a judgement of the sort ‘Socrates is Theaetetus’ (like at 188b8), we are somehow linking these two mental images, or echos, in our mind. But how? After all, Chappell says, if I had photographs of Socrates and Theaetetus I could place the photograph of Socrates to the left of the photograph of Theaetetus, or to the right, or in the same drawer, or exactly 10 meters apart, or in any other configuration, none of which transforms the combination of two photographs into a unity about the parties

41 Trope-theorists reject the existence of universals or Plato’s Forms and, therefore, just as it is unlikely that Plato would genuinely consider empiricist definitions of knowledge (such as that put forwards in Part I of the Theaetetus), it is also unlikely that Plato would accept a trope theory of reality or the existence of anything like wisdom-Socratized – and, as far as I am aware, no-one in the secondary literature has suggested that Plato was a trope-theorist. Trope theory may go back as far as Aristotle, c.f. Ackrill (1963) and, more recently, Cohen (2013).

42 E.g., Sophist 262a-263d5.
concerned, i.e. no mere placing of images next to one another ‘constitutes my meaning anything about those two photographs’ (2005, p. 161).

Sedley agrees that Plato does not show confusion and is also of the view that McDowell is wrong to think that Plato is muddling up two different senses of ‘know’. He notes that we have already established that ‘knowledge is a capacity for attaining truths, which are propositional in structure’ in Part I of the dialogue (the discussion of the definition of knowledge as perception), and ‘this does not fit the acquaintance model at all comfortably’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 121). Sedley points out that both identifications and predications are of the form ‘X is Y’ so it is not obvious that there is a sharp distinction between them, and definitely not obvious that Plato would have seen a sharp distinction (Sedley, 2004, p.124).

The second puzzle of false belief is the argument for ‘being and not being’. Something like this argument is also found in the Euthydemus 283e7-284c8, Cratylus 385a-386e, 429d1-6 and Republic 476e-478d. The argument is that believing a falsehood means believing something that is not the case, which means having dealings with ‘what is not’, but that is impossible: we can no more think something when there is no such thing as we can see unicorns.43 Even Reading B advocate, Burnyeat, acknowledges that this text from Part II of the dialogue (after the refutation of the basic version of empiricism) is part of an extended critique of the sorts of theories that base knowledge on perception: ‘A model on which judgements relate to the world in the same sort of unstructured way as perceiving or (we may add) naming, will tie anyone in knots when it comes to the question ‘What is a false judgement the judgement/name of?’ The only available answer, when the judgement is taken as an unstructured whole, appears to be: Nothing.’ (1990, p. 78).

Sedley notes that in this form the puzzle looks very similar to the one that is raised in the Sophist at 237a-264b and which is then resolved. The Sophist’s solution relies on two aspects: (a) propositional complexity, and (b) reading ‘what is not’ as equivalent to ‘what is other’.

In relation to (a), Sedley says that in the Sophist the solution requires that ‘a statement consists of, minimally, a subject expression and a predicate expression; one may speak falsely

43 In chapter 4 section b I discuss Russell’s difficulty addressing the question ‘If the object of a true belief is a state of affairs in the world, then what is the object of false belief?’ and will note his objections to Meinong’s theory of non-existent objects and the impact that this had on his version of logical atomism.
by attaching to some subject a predicate which ‘is not’ merely to the extent of not being one of that subject’s actual predicates. Socrates actually seems to anticipate this solution from the outset. For he introduces the not-being solution as follows: ‘Perhaps it’s simply that one who believes things-which-are-not about anything cannot fail to have false beliefs, no matter what further state of mind he is in’ (188d3-5).’ (2004, p. 126). The emphasized words acknowledge the subject-predicate structure. The objection (‘who in the world is going to judge what-is-not, whether about one of the things that are or by itself?’ (188d9-10; cf. 189b1-2)), Sedley says is provided because we also need part (b), the ‘demystify[ing] of ‘what is not’ as merely equivalent to ‘what is other’… being other than X does not preclude being Y or Z, and positively entails being other’ (ibid.). Sedley wants to emphasise the role that Socrates plays in helping Plato to solve the puzzle. He notes that Socrates ‘takes great care to stress that knowing and not knowing are mutually exclusive, but when he moves on to discuss being and not being he makes no such observation’, i.e., allowing that ‘is’ and ‘is not’ can apply to everything (Sedley, 2004, p. 127).

The phrasing of Socrates’ point at 189b4-6 is also significant – he refers to holding false beliefs as being something other than believing things which are not, and the ‘other judging’ discussion ensues. Sedley argues that this is Plato acknowledging that, although the solution to the puzzle of false belief is not found and fleshed out until the Sophist’s in-depth discussion of otherness, Socrates has already identified the link between ‘what is not’ and ‘what is other’ at this early stage.

In the Theaetetus, the ‘other judging’ discussion is an attempt by the interlocutors to replace ‘not’ with ‘other than’. False belief then involves interchanging one thing (a thing that ‘is’) with some other thing (that also ‘is’, but is a different ‘is’) – e.g., beautiful with ugly, or cow with horse.

There are two ways that one could read the sentence ‘He thinks that a horse is a cow’. One is: ‘He is thinking about a horse and what he is thinking about it is that ‘It is a cow’, so ‘horse’ is our comment, not his (i.e., de re); and the other is: ‘His thought is ‘Every horse is a cow’ or ‘Some horse is a cow’ or something like that’, whereby ‘horse’ is part of his thought rather

44 Other commentators in the secondary literature object to the idea that the puzzles of false belief can only be solved by the more sophisticated analytical tools made available in the Sophist, for example Robinson (1950).
than being our comment on what he is thinking (i.e., de dicto). The first is plausible whereas
the second makes the mistake of thinking that ‘horse’ and ‘cow’ are not only both in the man’s
mind at the same time but, importantly, that the two are also identical with one another
when, by definition, they are not.

Notice that the mistake does not require anyone to interact with (e.g., by acquaintance) the
non-existent, like shaking hands with the King of France, as the problem of being-and-not-
being implied; and, in fact, the mistake could only have been made precisely because cows
do exist. We are therefore some way towards explaining false belief. We have at least
understood by now that false belief does not mean that there exists a plethora of non-existent
things which we interact with. When a false belief is made such as ‘X exists’ when X does not
in fact exist, it is not the case that we are successfully acquainted with and referring to an
object X that somehow both does and does not exist.

The example also demonstrates the propositional nature of knowledge: in order for the
thought about the cow to be a false one, there has to be the context of the rest of the
proposition. However, this highlights the difficulty that believing that a horse is a cow seems
to require bringing both things before the mind simultaneously – but clearly if this is done
then the person would notice that it is not the case that a horse is a cow, so the necessary
condition for someone to believe that a horse is a cow is also the sufficient condition for them
to not form this belief.

Cornford (1935) and Bostock (1988) suggest that the third puzzle (at 189b10-190e4) collapses
back into the first. Chappell (2005) suggests that the link is close but that in the third puzzle
the key difference is inadvertency – an attempt to tweak the first puzzle left open the
possibility that the belief of one thing as another was deliberate whereas here we are
explicitly told it is accidental, but the interlocutors still have no explanation of how this can
occur. All commentators agree that the first and third puzzles are very similar.

Bostock claims that the third puzzle does not correctly distinguish between ‘believing that a
beautiful thing is ugly’ and ‘believing: A beautiful thing is ugly’. He argues that this shows that
Plato is making a fundamental error by ignoring the fact that ‘the same object may figure in
my thoughts under various different aspects and it will generally make a difference under
which aspect I am thinking of it.’ (Bostock, 1988, pp. 170-171, my italics). On a ‘Reading B’
interpretation of the dialogue, Plato is using the puzzles to work through his own confusion, but it seems unlikely that someone as intelligent as Plato has made such a fundamental error. The point highlighted by Bostock is such a basic fact about language that it seems implausible that Plato missed it and yet was capable of writing the *Sophist*, *Euthydemus*, *Cratylus*, and other dialogues which highlight so many intricate features of language. I return to this point in detail in chapter 3.

On a ‘Reading A’ interpretation, Plato is highlighting that the mental images that the empiricist started out with cannot be thought of *under different aspects* and this is an inherent flaw in their theory. Being able to consider something under different aspects requires complexity and structure that the empiricist does not have access to – it would be a move towards a Platonist ontology. ‘A theory of knowledge that entails that misidentifications of known objects are impossible is likely to be one that denies that there is more than one ‘epistemic route’ to any known object’ (Chappell, 2001, p. 100). On an empiricist account, ‘The epistemic route to any such object of thought O will be, simply, grasping O... this sort of theory construes knowing a thing on the model of holding a pebble... for any pebble, either you are holding it (in your hand) or you are not.’ (ibid.). The wider range of epistemic routes, or aspects, is what is missing from the empiricist’s theory. Elsewhere Chappell also reminds us that ‘the Greek for ‘aspect’ is *eidos*, which is also the Greek for ‘Form’’ (Chappell, 2005, p. 171). Structure, whether via Forms or Greatest Kinds or something else, is the key component that is missing from the empiricist account and is what restricts the interlocutors to the ‘pebble’-type, all-or-nothing, account.

Fine also notes the link between finding false belief problematic and a ‘pebble’-type theory.

It is often supposed that Plato regards knowledge as some kind of acquaintance, so that knowing consists in some sort of grasping or hitting, the only alternative to which is not hitting, or missing. Knowing is an all or nothing, hit or miss affair. It is also often assumed that this model of knowledge underlies or explains Plato’s supposed inability to accommodate false belief in dialogues prior to the *Sophist*. Either one ‘hits’ what one is talking about, and so has knowledge, not false belief; or else one fails to grasp, and so has said nothing, and hence again does not have false belief.

(Fine, 1979(a), p. 70)
Fine comments that at the end of the discussion of false belief Socrates rejects both Theaetetus’ suggested definition and also the acquaintance model that gave the suggestion its hint of plausibility. This both frees Plato from a commitment to the acquaintance model and also reveals the connection between the model and the discussion of false belief, showing that that the latter is not at a tangent to the main discussion as some have supposed (e.g. Sedley, 2004, p. 12) but is an ‘integral part of Plato’s attack on that definition’ (Fine, 1979(a), p. 70).

The kind of theory that struggles with the problem of false belief is the kind of theory that has a ‘pebble theory’ underlying it. Over the course of the discussion on false belief, the target becomes clear. Fine notes that, on the acquaintance model, ‘...any grasp of a thing amounts to knowledge, and so true belief, since it involves a grasp of a thing, is knowledge.’ (1979(a), p. 77).

On Chappell’s account, the first puzzle shows that the empiricist faces a problem explaining how simple mental images can be confused or conjoined or otherwise structured. The second puzzle builds on this, showing that the empiricist is susceptible to sophistical arguments identifying believing ‘with having a mental image, and then identifies believing what is with having a mental image too – and so ‘process’ the impossibility of false belief’. The third puzzle is a variation on the first puzzle and emphasises that for particular cases the empiricist is yet to show how certain confusions arise when the objects are so simple and lacking structure that they are ‘either grasped or not grasped’. ‘What the empiricist needs to do to show the possibility of such a confusion is to explain how, on his own principles, either speech or thought can fail to be fully explicit and fully ‘in touch’ with its objects, if it is ‘in touch’ with them at all.’ (Chappell, 2005, p. 168).

Once we get to the fourth and fifth puzzles, we get more detail about the empiricist account to help provide answers to just these questions and we discover why it is that Plato thinks that the empiricist cannot adequately explain thought processes. The empiricist theory of thought as the concatenation of bare perceptions has been shown not to work. We start to see the need for something else to explain thought and mistakes in thought. On the theory of Forms, mistakes in thought are mistakes either about the interrelations that hold between Forms or about the applicability of the selected Forms to particular perceptions, and this is
what is drawn out in the Aviary and Wax Tablet examples where we explore what the mind does to process the objects that it perceives in relation to sorting inputs and selecting recall, for example. Chappell highlights this involvement of the Forms in mistake-formation in 2005 pp. 168-169.

Sedley’s interpretation also looks to Plato’s metaphysics, but focusing on the Greatest Kinds, brought in to resolve the difficulties of the *Theaetetus* in the *Sophist*.\(^45\) He claims that ‘this failed explanation of false belief as other-judging contains virtually all the ingredients of the successful explanation in the *Sophist*: that belief is internal discourse; that this discourse, like all discourse, takes the form of linguistically linking one item to another item, both items being ‘things which are’; and that the falsehood lies in the fact that the item attached is other than the things which belong to the subject in question.’ (Sedley, 2004, pp. 131-132). It fails where the *Sophist* succeeds, Sedley argues, because whereas the *Theaetetus* starts with a discussion of false belief and analyses it in terms of the underlying sentence, the *Sophist* starts with metaphysical discussion examining the Greatest Kinds including Otherness and ‘how [Otherness] is distributed ontologically in relation to kindred genera’. It turns out that it mirrors things-which-are. ‘For example, the ontological class of that which is large is mirrored by the ontological class of that which is not (or ‘is other than’) large’ (ibid.).

‘Theaetetus flies’ is false because flying is but is other than Theaetetus’ actual things-which-are. So the function of ‘being’ is different in the *Theaetetus*. In this case:

> ...a false statement or judgement was one that attaches to a subject something which ‘is’, e.g. ugly, in the sense that there is such a thing even if it happens not to be instantiated here. This had the consequence that the only way Socrates could find to lay bare the error was to say that the false-judger mistook one of the things-that-are for some ‘other’ of the things-that-are... The *Sophist* account, by contrast, does not depend on any such interchange between two coordinate ‘things-which-are’. It would not matter if the attribute attached to Theaetetus by the false statement were not

\(^{45}\)Chappell’s suggestion that Forms play this fundamental role for all linguistic meaning relies on the view that there are sufficient Forms to accomplish this – i.e., that there are Forms for everything that we want to speak about. There are conflicting views in the secondary literature about which Forms do and do not exist, based on different interpretations of the *Republic* esp. 523d (about comparing smaller and larger fingers and the purpose of positing Forms) and *Parmenides* 130a-e. C.f. Gill (1996).
among the things there are, e.g. ‘drawing a square circle’... the diagnosis locates the falsity in the attribution to Theaetetus of a predicate which is-not (i.e. is other) in the sense of not-being (or being other than) *his*, but which is not thereby a total non-being because it also is, namely *is other*. This account avoids the *Theaetetus*’ interchange between two coordinate things—which-are, and therefore does not invite the fatal rewording which there derailed the entire Other-judging solution... [the rewording being:] ‘A judges that what is un-F is F’ or ‘There is something un-F which A judges to be F’ which was reworded as ‘A makes the judgement: ‘What is un-F is F’.

(Sedley, 2004, p. 133)

Sedley says that Socrates supplies various ingredients for the *Sophist*’s final solution: the ‘not’/‘other than’ equivalence, the analysis of a sentence (*logos*) into a name and verb (also in the *Apology*, 17b9-c2), and ‘the appreciation of how beliefs embody assertoric sentences has a specifically Socratic pedigree’. However, what is beyond Socrates’ ability is ‘to construct the kind of map of reality which charts and explains the distribution of being-other in the world. That metaphysical enterprise lies at the heart of the *Sophist*, where it is recognized as a necessary preliminary to the solution of the falsity puzzle.’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 134).

Whilst Chappell suggests the Forms are important in providing the structure to the empiricist’ ‘simples’ and Sedley focuses on the role of the Greatest Kinds, both agree that the missing ingredient at this point in the *Theaetetus* is the metaphysical entities that play a structuring role. This supports a ‘Reading A’ interpretation and is a plausible and interesting way of reading Part II of the dialogue that fulfils the criteria set out in section (a) of this chapter.

Burnyeat raises a valid point that Plato appears to be making the refutation of Theaetetus’ second definition rather ‘tortuous’ (1990, p. 119) and it is worth considering why Plato includes such a lengthy discussion of false belief when all he requires to defeat the definition is a ‘quick argument and persuasive counterexample’ (1990, p. 120). Throughout his book Burnyeat pursues the idea that Plato is engaging the reader in the philosophical process and exploring the topics to gain greater understanding, for example, in the case of false beliefs, ‘spot the false judgement which makes it appear that false judgement is impossible’ (1990, p. 66). This is not incompatible with the view proposed by Sedley, that Plato his showcasing a series of mistakes, ready to correct these in the *Sophist*.  

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I agree that the puzzles of false belief should be read as a continuation of the critique of empiricism in much the same way described by Chappell (2001, p. 97): the first puzzle suggests that I cannot mistake X for Y unless I know both X and Y (because if I do not know X or Y then I cannot formulate thoughts about X or Y) but knowing both X and Y means that I cannot be mistaken about them (since I know them) so error is impossible; and this leaves the reader wondering what sort of theory of knowledge is unable to explain such a simple case of misidentification. The subsequent discussion shows that it is empiricist theories. Part II of the Theaetetus can therefore be said to take the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* of these basic forms of empiricism.

As well as playing the role of *reductio ad absurdum*, the Wax Tablet (190c-196c) and Aviary (196c-200d) models reveal a close link between the Theaetetus and Sophist. For example, Sedley points out that the Aviary model ‘emphasizes taxonomy as vital to the assimilation and proper use of knowledge’ – most birds are organized into flocks, some large and others small, whilst some fly singly in amongst the others (2004, p. 143). This is a pointer ‘to Plato’s method of Collection and Division as itself a Socratic legacy’ (ibid.).

The Aviary rightly tries to explain false belief by complicating our picture of belief. But it complicates in the wrong way and the wrong place. It is no help to complicate the story by throwing in further objects of the *same sort* as the object that created the difficulty about false belief in the first place… Like the Wax Tablet, the Aviary founders on its own inability to accommodate the point that thought cannot consist merely in the presentation of a series of inert ‘objects of thought’. Whether these objects of thought are mental images drawn from perception or something else, the thinking is not so much in the object of thought as in what is done with those objects (cp. 186d2-4, and Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* I, 454).

(Chappell, 2005, p. 189, my italics)

Some aspects of the Aviary passage do pre-empt the eventual solution in the Sophist of having two *different sorts* of ‘object’. The birds that fly singly and weave in and out of all the flocks (197d9-10) ‘sound as if they correspond to the group of topic-neutral concepts already picked out at the end of Part I (185a8-186b6), exemplified by being, otherness, sameness, oppositeness, and similarity’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 144). If this is the case, then they are the
forerunners of the Greatest Kinds which ‘underlie Plato’s eventual solution to the falsity puzzle in the Sophist’. Change and Rest do not appear. Sedley says that is not surprising because they ‘belong, as a pair, primarily to metaphysical inquiry, and for this reason do not play any significant part in the Socratic dialogues’ (ibid.). This does not seem to be correct. On the contrary, change and rest seem more relevant to the physical world of perceptibles than Sameness and Being. However, this does not affect the fact that the categorisation appears to pre-empt and lead into the Sophist solution.

Sedley takes it that the Aviary model involves ‘the capacity to inquire about a priori entities in their own right; taxonomy as basic to the proper use of knowledge; and the special importance of the topic-neutral items that will play such a huge part in the metaphysics of the Sophist. And all of it displays a Socratic pedigree. Just one insight is missing, and Plato is careful to make us notice its absence there is no innate knowledge (197e2-3) … Socrates has failed to provide the appropriate mechanism for cognitive access to Forms. Most of the necessary cognitive psychology is in place, but not the discarnate soul’s direct cognition of being.’ (Sedley, 2004, pp. 144-145).

Whilst this is different to Chappell’s interpretation, the following argument appears to be shared: ‘I have chosen to concentrate on a pattern which I feel has been missed, thanks to the almost universal assumption that it is Plato himself who is shown working out his ideas.’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 151, referring to Reading B advocates including, for example, Burnyeat (1990, p. 75), as quoted above). Socrates’ ‘inattention to metaphysics’ is why he is left unable to answer the questions posed, whereas Plato himself is more than able to effectively navigate the problems that are being raised in the dialogue. Plato, in other dialogues ‘investigate[s] the ontology of the entities which the mind interrelates when forming a false judgement.’ In the Sophist that falls to a character other than Socrates (Sedley, 2004, p. 152).

More recently, Stein has argued that neither of the interpretations of the falsity puzzles outlined above (‘Reading A’ or ‘Reading B’) do justice to them:

The puzzle clearly rests on some unstated principles or assumptions, and it is difficult to see what those are in such a way that they could either be plausibly Platonic principles or, alternatively, principles accepted by other thinkers or by people in general that Plato is keen to highlight and reject. Some have argued that Plato is
himself in the grip of certain assumptions about knowledge, judgement or identity statements, such that he recognises a problem for himself which he is here unable to solve decisively [i.e., McDowell, Bostock, Burnyeat]. Others have argued that the puzzle only arises for those who accept principles Plato himself rejects, and that it is in fact an indirect refutation of the second definition of knowledge, followed up by a more direct refutation by counterexample [i.e., Chappell, Cornford, Fine, Sedley]. Neither set of attempts has, I think, resulted in a satisfying interpretation.

(Stein, 2016, p. 261)

Stein’s own suggestion is that Part II of the dialogue (i.e., 187b-201c) is already hinting at what is to come in Part III (i.e., 201d-210a) regarding the ability to distinguish one thing from another. In fact, Stein appears to focus on the link between Parts II and III of the dialogue at the expense of recognising the link between Parts I (i.e., 151e-187a) and II, and of seeing Part I as a critique of empiricism. Stein thinks that the difficulty that the interlocutors face when trying to explain false belief arises ‘because Theaetetus accepts both that ‘successful’ intentionality is a requirement for judgement (and hence for knowledge, on the proposed definitions), and that in some vague sense the conditions for successful intentionality are themselves cognitive in nature. These assumptions in turn sit badly with his further temptation... to think that knowledge is or involves or entails an ability to distinguish something from everything else.’ (2016, p. 273). Stein’s conclusion relies on the idea that the so-called ‘Mark Criterion’ ‘is allowed to stand at the end of the dialogue’ (2016, p. 275):

At the end of the dialogue... Theaetetus has shown that his proposed gloss of having a logos as being ‘able to state some mark [sēmeion] by which the thing being asked about differs from everything’ (208c7-8), which was supposed to be sufficient with true judgement to constitute knowledge, is in fact a necessary condition for having a judgement be about a given individual at all. Here he is compelled to recognize that, in order to make a judgement about X, one must already grasp a mark (or have a record of something) by which X differs from everything else. We may call this the Mark Criterion of judgement. Without possessing such a mark, it turns out that one’s judgement is not about the individual as such, any more than it is about any of the
other individuals who have the same common properties that are pertinent to or constitutive of one’s prior conception of the individual...

There are thus two patterns of thought at the source of the [falsity] problem: one involving cognitive conditions on judgement, the other involving a connection between knowledge and the ability to distinguish the object of knowledge from everything else. While it is unclear whether Plato himself shares Theaetetus’ confusion, it is clear that he finds both patterns of thought worth taking seriously.

(Stein, 2016, p.273 and p.278)

This is not a plausible reading of the dialogue. Firstly, because it suggests that Plato is himself unaware of where he has gone wrong – but this cannot be the case since Plato is able to correct the mistake in the Sophist at 260-264 (see chapter 3). Secondly, because, far from being ‘allowed to stand’, at the end of the dialogue, the Mark Criterion is a part of one of the three attempts at defining logos which fail to yield a satisfactory account of logos and which leads to the dialogue ending in aporia (see chapter 2 for a full discussion of the interlocutors’ exploration of logos).

Stein presents three results of his interpretation in his concluding remarks, all of which should count against his interpretation. The first is that his interpretation means that the Theaetetus should be read as comprising two parts rather than three, because he argues that Parts II and III are so closely related that they should be read as a single part and distinct from Part I. This does not seem right given that the dialogue proposes and discusses three (not two) definitions of knowledge – hence why all other commentators have discussed the dialogue as a three-part text. The second is a view about ‘grasping’ objects in thought, which I think reveals that Stein has himself made the ‘pebble’ mistake highlighted by Chappell (2001).  

The third is that it is ‘of philosophical interest that the problems of intentionality and de re

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46 Stein says that the puzzle of false belief would arise for ‘any’ definition of knowledge that tries to base knowledge on belief (irrespective of whether that is belief alone, or true belief, or true belief with an account, or belief with some other element or qualifier) because belief inherently ‘presupposes’ some sort of, what Stein calls, ‘cognitive grasp’ or ‘prior knowledge’ (p. 282). By this, Stein seems to mean that belief always, necessarily involves ‘grasping’ the items that we form beliefs (or knowledge) about. He dedicates just over four lines to this statement without considering that this need not necessarily be true, and that, in fact, he has made a mistake highlighted by Theaetetus-commentators (Chappell (2005) and Fine (1979(a))) several years prior to the publication of his paper.
thought arise via [a] different route than they do for contemporary philosophers’ – which should be obvious on any interpretation.

Stein’s proposal therefore has less merit than the alternatives and is inconsistent with many interesting and insightful interpretative points raised by others in the secondary literature, e.g., it would discount much of Sedley’s robust analysis.

I think I have shown that the most plausible reading of the false belief discussion in the *Theaetetus* is as Plato exploring the flaws of non-Platonist theories. This provides strong support for a ‘Reading A’ interpretation of the *Theaetetus* as a whole.

**d. Plato was a Platonist**

I want to emphasise the point that ‘Plato is a Platonist’\(^{47}\) because, although it sounds trivially true, I am in fact making a strong claim here which will prove to be important when I discuss the link between the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* later on: I want to show that when Plato wrote the *Theaetetus* he was already aware of, and confident in, the Platonist solution that he goes

\(^{47}\) When I use the terms ‘Platonist’ and ‘Platonism’, I refer to the core principles generally acknowledged to be part of Plato’s metaphysical and ethical theories, such as the existence of the Forms including The Good, the immortality of the soul, and the goal of human life being to emulate god as far as is possible in mortal life (see section e of this chapter). The term is imprecise because there is no agreement on the exact details of Plato’s own thoughts and theories – the fact that Plato wrote dialogues rather than treatise does not help with this. Those familiar with modern philosophy might associate the term ‘Platonism’ with a belief in abstract objects, but in this thesis I want it to mean more than this and to convey something of what the historical Plato is likely to have believed (making reasonable assumptions about his own beliefs on the basis of how he presents various questions and theories in his dialogues). In the modern sense of the word, Frege and Russell are both said to be Platonists but this does not mean that their views do not differ, rather significantly, from what is generally taken to be Plato’s own position on key topics. Others have suggested that ‘Platonism’ refers to the set of beliefs held by those who call themselves followers of Plato, e.g., Gerson (2005). Gerson’s paper ‘What is Platonism?’ correctly highlights the difficulty of bridging the gap between, for example, references to the Forms in Plato’s dialogue and anything that we could reasonably call a ‘Theory of Forms’. However, I am not convinced by his approach to resolving this difficulty. Section 2 of his paper, ‘The Fundamental Features of Platonism’, begins: ‘I propose to sketch what I take to be the contours of the common ground shared both by all who self-identified explicitly as Platonists and all those self-identified as proponents of the philosophical position of which Plato was held to be the greatest exponent. I am not exactly sure what it would mean to provide direct evidence for the accuracy of this sketch short of providing expositions of the basic philosophical positions of the above mentioned philosophers.’ (p. 259), whereas, in the context of this thesis, and more generally, I take Platonism to be the common ground across Plato’s own work and therefore direct evidence can be sourced from the Platonic dialogues. Gerson proceeds to list six features of Platonism but provides no textual evidence in support of them and I take issue with all six claims. (The remainder of Gerson’s paper does contain interesting discussion of features of Platonism with direct references to various dialogues including the *Sophist* and with reference to alternative schools of thought, notably materialists, esp. pp. 266-268.)
on to present in the *Sophist*, and therefore Plato was not himself confused about false belief and the other difficulties that the *Theaetetus*-interlocutors face.

The *Theaetetus* shares certain ideas and approaches with various Platonic dialogues. The fact that the *Theaetetus* does not itself contain any references to the theory of Forms or to recollection does not necessarily mean that Plato has abandoned Platonism in this dialogue. We can spot many examples of shared features that indicate a consistency across dialogues including the *Theaetetus*.

For example, the *Euthydemus* follows a very similar line to the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* and foreshadows some of the key points raised in the later dialogues. We start with a list of examples of knowledge that looks very familiar from the *Theaetetus*: flute playing (279e, also in *Meno* 90e, *Protagoras* 323a-b), reading, writing, piloting a vessel, leading an army, carpentry, money-making, medicine, making and playing the lyre, shoe-making, the number of stars and the sands, how many teeth Euthydemus has, etc. This is followed by a discussion of the possibility of telling untruths (283e6-284c9), which is essentially the puzzle from being and not-being in the *Theaetetus*; and Plato shows that he is aware of Ctesippus’ answer to the problem – evidence that Plato is not confused in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. There is a passage about the difference between naming and describing (285e1-286c4) and something very similar to Protagoras’ self-refutation in the *Theaetetus* (*Euthydemus* 286c4-287a10). There is a passage that sounds very familiar to readers of the Aviary passage of the *Theaetetus*: ‘we kept thinking we were about to catch each one of the knowledges, but they always got away’ (*Euthydemus* 291b3, Cooper (1997)). The Aviary’s distinction between active and passive knowing is also raised (294e5-9), and the *Euthydemus* acknowledges that one can have partial understanding (295c1). Plato demonstrates that he is already aware of the flaw in the argument from ‘knowing and not knowing’, e.g., at *Euthydemus* 293d4-9 and 294a4-c10. There is a discussion about the difference between ‘not’ and ‘different’, which appears to pre-empt the *Sophist* solution (297e1-298e6). Similarly, ‘the same is the same and the different is different’ (301a-c, ibid.) looks very much like Plato is already thinking along the lines of the *Sophist* at the time that he wrote the *Euthydemus*. In fact, the question at 303a7-9 of the *Euthydemus* foreshadows the Late Learners discussion (*Sophist* 251b-c), when Dionysodorus says ‘Is Heracles a bravo or is a bravo Heracles?’. The tone at 303b1-c6 is
mocking and sarcastic and indicates that we are not meant to read the *Theaetetus* or *Sophist* at face value.

A large part of the *Theaetetus* is spent discussing Protagoras’ theory. If we compare this with the dialogue *Protagoras* then we notice certain points of interest. For example, both discuss things appearing to be different to how they actually are when viewed at a distance (*Protagoras* 356d). And both complain that Protagoras uses eloquence to hide inconsistency in his arguments and fails to adhere to Socrates’ standards for debate (a turning point in *Protagoras*: Socrates threatens to leave the discussion at 335c8 but then Protagoras agrees to engage in the dialectic process). The *Protagoras* shares features with the *Sophist* too: the discussion at 331 about resemblances between piety and justice resemble the discussion in the *Sophist* about being and sameness, and the discussion of being opposite versus being different at 332-333 looks very similar to the discussion in the *Sophist*.

In a similar way to the *Euthydemus*, the *Protagoras* also shows us that Plato is not confused about ‘is’ in the *Theaetetus* or suffering like the Late Learners of the *Sophist* (251b-c). For example, at 350d Protagoras says that, although he agreed that the confident are courageous, he does not agree that the courageous are necessarily confident and he objects to confidence being equated with courageousness. It is important that Plato was already aware of this sort of argument before the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, therefore any confusion shown in either of these dialogues cannot be genuine on Plato’s part without supposing that Plato somehow forgot the solution that he has already shown awareness of. The author of the *Protagoras* 351 (discussing how strength and power are derived from different things and are therefore fundamentally different despite the fact that the powerful are also strong) is not himself a Late Learner.

There is certainly consistency across the dialogues in respect of the Wax Tablet, and also an indication that Plato is exploring different aspects to this model. As Sedley explains,

> Where the Other-judging model resulted in impossible internal utterances like ‘A cow is a horse’, the Wax Tablet will substitute the benign alternative ‘The object that I am

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48 From the initial statement of the theory at 151e5-152c8, followed by objections at 160e2-163a, the self-refutation argument at 168c2-171e7, the discussion of justice at 171c7-172b9, and of expertise predicting the future at 177b8-179b9.
perceiving in the distance is a horse’. In fact, once we appreciate this, it becomes clear that Plato, in the later Philebus (38b12-e4), offers a fully articulated illustration of true and false judgement which is entirely consonant with the Wax Tablet and makes it explicit how we should assume the wording of a false judgement to run. Judgement, Socrates remarks there, arises from the combination of memory and perception.

(Sedley, 2004, p. 137)

According to Sedley, the model is saved from the self-contradiction that the other-judging model generated because the judgements are referred to by perceptual descriptions only, supporting my interpretation above. When read in this way, the similarities between the two passages is striking.

It is clear that the Theaetetus and Philebus discussions are not mere repetition of the same theory, though. In the Philebus, there is an internal scribe and internal illustrator and a matching up process, much like the Wax Tablet, but Plato goes on to investigate beliefs about the future, so is exploring a different angle of the same theory. Burnyeat agrees that the Wax Tablet is not rejected but just will not suffice as a definition of false belief within the framework of the discussion in the Theaetetus (Burnyeat, 1990, p. 102). Sedley goes on to argue that the Wax Tablet is vindicated to a significant degree and that something like the Wax Tablet is a component in a Platonic ontological scheme in the Republic and Timaeus. Sedley discusses the ancient Platonist interpretation of the Wax Tablet as representing the empirical half of Plato's dual epistemology.

Sedley’s ‘midwife of Platonism’ interpretation of the Theaetetus argues that we must ‘take the Socrates of the Theaetetus to represent, not Plato’s present philosophical persona, but a reversion to the historical or semi-historical Socrates’. So the dialogue contains a Platonic message ‘but that message is not articulated by the speaker Socrates. Socrates fails to see the Platonic implications, and instead it is we, as seasoned readers of Plato, who are expected to recognize and exploit them’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 8). On this account ‘midwifery’ is the concept used to ‘legitimize such a division of roles between Plato and Socrates’. Sedley’s interpretation is one where Socrates (the ‘historical or semi-historical’) was the midwife of Platonism, and Plato is using the Theaetetus to illustrate the continuity between Socrates’
contributions and the Platonist truth that develops out of it. In support of this interpretation, Sedley points out that this approach is not unique to the *Theaetetus*.

In various dialogues, ‘Plato gradually transforms his speaker Socrates from an open-minded critic and inquirer into a mouthpiece for his own Platonic doctrines and a committed proponent of the underlying arguments’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 9), e.g., in the *Meno* we ‘start out with a virtuoso performance by what is palpably the old elenctic Socrates, but one which leads seamlessly into his replacement by the new doctrinal Socrates... Generalizing the lesson... the historical Socrates had the initial task of pressing the right questions, and of so puzzling us as to persuade us of our own ignorance, before Plato could come along and get us to see the truth. That amounts to a reassurance that the early Socratic phase was a necessary preliminary to the mature Platonic phase. The smooth continuity, within the dialogue, between the primarily aporetic Socrates and the primarily doctrinal one demonstrates the profound historical continuity between the work of Socrates and that of Plato’ (ibid.). We see the same approach in the *Republic*, where we transition from the aporetic Socrates of book one into the system-building metaphysician of subsequent books. Book one contains hints at what is to come in the later books in the same way that the *Theaetetus* hints at what is to come in the *Sophist*. Sedley argues that the *Euthydemus* contains a similar mix. It ‘reads as an authentically Socratic dialogue punctuated by a sudden influx of middle-period wisdom from the young Clinias (290b7–d8), so extraordinary that neither Socrates nor Crito can entirely believe that he said it (290e1–291a7). Whatever the precise purpose of this device, it undoubtedly serves to link the Socratic inquiry and impasse to the mature philosophy of the *Republic.*’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 10).

Against this unitarian view, it might be argued that there is an obvious difference between Plato’s analysis of knowledge in the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus* which would indicate a change of approach on his part, i.e., count as evidence in favour of Reading B: in the *Republic*, knowledge is entirely different from belief, and you cannot ‘upgrade’ or ‘transform’ a belief to knowledge, whereas in the *Theaetetus* knowledge is a special type of belief. In the *Republic*, therefore, belief seems to be a relatively bad thing, whereas belief is morally neutral, or even good, in the *Theaetetus*.

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49 Republic 477a-478e.
It may be that Plato recognized that the *Republic* account of knowledge can be improved upon and that the Aviary example is meant to highlight an issue with the *Republic* schema, and that, in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, Plato is acknowledging that the *Republic* account is too Parmenidean and should be adapted; but this does not mean that Plato is totally rejecting the account or moving away from the Forms. A Reading A advocate would counter that a comparison with the *Meno* shows that the *Theaetetus* is consistent with earlier dialogues and shows that belief can fulfill both roles: *mere* belief being bad and misleading (and covered in the *Republic*) but, when tied down, as per the *Meno*, something which is transformed into knowledge and is good.⁵⁰

Although there are apparent inconsistencies between early dialogues like the *Meno*, middle dialogues like the *Republic*, and later dialogues like the *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*, and although it is possible to apply a Revisionist interpretation, it is possible, and I think preferable, to interpret these inconsistencies as Plato continuing to explore the same issues that he deals with throughout his career and developing lines of thought in different directions. Otherwise, we have difficulty explaining how Plato’s treatment of belief in later dialogues is more akin to his approach in early dialogues than middle ones. Revisionists suggest that Plato sets out his views, x, at one time, and proceeds to reject x in favour of y at a later point in time, and then perhaps reject y in favour of z; however, the *Theaetetus* seems to return us to x. Furthermore, Plato is not necessarily, and certainly not clearly, advocating x, y or z at any point in time – he is discussing and exploring these theories using dialogue form.

A Reading B advocate might also argue that the *Theaetetus* explicitly denies the theory of recollection, because we are said to be born with empty mental aviaries (197e2-3).⁵¹ Some unitarians have found it tempting to think that midwifery is somehow a method of assisting recollection, but this is not mentioned anywhere in the dialogue and in fact there is evidence to the contrary. However, Sedley suggests that ‘it by no means follows that the postulated correspondence between midwifery and recollection is superficial or illusory… Socrates is innocent of any heavy-duty metaphysical or epistemological theory… he is still struggling to make sense of the concept of knowledge at the simplest possible level… more reminiscent of

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⁵⁰ *Meno* 97e-98a.

⁵¹ Although, to reiterate my argument from above, it is the empiricist who believes that we have empty aviaries and are born *tabula rasa* (c.f. Locke (1690)), not the Platonist.
the *Apology* than of the *Phaedo*... [and he] certainly has no theory that all learning is recollection, let alone recollection of transcendent Forms. But it seems to be equally clear that, from a Platonic perspective, we are meant to recognize that this primitive Socrates is practising a method by which he extracts, from the interlocutor’s inner resources, beliefs which are already present there, if only in embryo, and some of which will when tested turn out to be true’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 29). So even if *Socrates* does not indicate the theory of recollection, *Plato* might. And in the Aviary passage Sedley thinks he is doing exactly that.

Sedley quotes *Theaetetus* 198d4-8: ‘In this way, the things of which he long ago had pieces of knowledge because he had learnt them – things which he used to know – these same things he can learn again, by recovering the knowledge (*analambanonta tēn ἐπιστήμην*) of each thing and taking hold of it, knowledge which he long ago possessed but did not have at the forefront of his mind.’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 30). Even though Socrates goes on to deny that ‘learn’ is the right word to use here, he has used this in the above passage right next to talk of ‘recovering knowledge’ – the same expression as in the *Meno* (85d3-8). Sedley says that ‘Once this is noticed, it becomes hard not to recognize here a deliberate allusion to the thesis defended in the *Meno* that all ‘learning’ is in fact recollection. Not, that is, an allusion by the speaker Socrates, whose casual remarks have emphatically ruled out innate knowledge, but an authorial ploy to indicate how short a step it is from Socrates the midwife’s diagnosis of learning as the realization of latent understanding to the Platonic theory of recollection’ (ibid.).

In fact, we have a hint at the model of learning that Plato sets out in the *Republic*, right at the start of the *Theaetetus*: ‘Theaetetus recounts how he and his fellow student the younger Socrates were set by Theodorus the task of generalizing over the infinitely many square areas with integer areas but irrational sides. They discharged it by first distinguishing two classes of numbers, then mapping the same distinction onto two kinds of geometrical figure (square and oblong), then doing the equivalent job for cubic numbers. The question which concerns Socrates is whether, in the dialectical discussion to follow, Theaetetus can find an equally successful way of generalizing over all cases of knowledge... [Notice that] progress from arithmetic, via plane geometry, to solid geometry, and then on to dialectic prefigures the educational programme of *Republic* VII’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 27). The two remaining disciplines (astronomy and harmonics), Theaetetus says he wants to study with Theodorus.
I have argued that there are various hints within the *Theaetetus* at ideas that are fully explored in other dialogues, and showed that it is no criticism of a ‘Reading A’ interpretation to merely point out that there are no references to Forms or recollection in the *Theaetetus*. On the interpretation that I have outlined above, and taking into account Sedley’s distinction between the semi-historical Socrates and Plato himself, we would expect to find some aspects of typically Platonic theory missing from the *Theaetetus*. This would include explicit reference to the Forms (because Socrates does not have access to Plato’s fully-fledged metaphysics, and anyway is currently in the business of highlighting issues with empirical theories that deny the Forms); to immortality and recollection (because, again, Socrates does not have this Platonic metaphysics, or any fully worked out theories); and to the complexity of the soul, comprising irrational and rational components (again this is not a Socratic theory but a Platonic one).

I have demonstrated that there are strong arguments in favour of taking Plato to be a Platonist and wanting to critique, not adopt, empiricism at the time of writing the *Theaetetus*. There are strong suggestions that Plato was already aware of the solution that he would eventually present in the *Sophist* (see chapters 2 and 3).

**e. A central digression**

Before ending the opening chapter of this thesis, I want to highlight one more interesting and under-appreciated point which further supports my claim that Plato was a Platonist when writing the *Theaetetus*. The *Theaetetus* exhibits a feature shared by several Platonic dialogues: the passage of text that is literally at the centre of the dialogue also turns out to be figuratively central. I will show that this is difficult for a proponent of ‘Reading B’ to explain.

The *Theaetetus* runs from Stephanus pages 142a to 210d, about 68.5 pages. The central line of the dialogue, about 34.25 Stephanus pages in, is therefore found a quarter of the way through page 176, at 176b1-2. At this exact point we find the following claim about what we ought to aim for in life: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὁσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι – ‘to become like god by being pious and wise’. As far as I am aware, only Polansky and Sedley

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52 Each Stephanus page is divided into five sections, labelled ‘a’ to ‘e’, which are in turn divided into ~10 lines. I.e., there are ~50 lines per Stephanus page. The *Theaetetus* begins at 142a and runs to 201d, meaning that it covers a full 68 Stephanus pages plus about half of a 69th page.

53 My translation.
have noticed that the so-called ‘digression’, and specifically the reference to ‘becoming like god’, is literally central to the *Theaetetus*, and no other commentators have suggested that the literal centrality is philosophically or interpretatively significant. Furthermore, no commentator that I am aware of has checked to see what text is literally central in other dialogues to assess the significance of these central passages more generally.

I will now correct this oversight and explain its significance to my conclusion. I should note here that I do not take this insight to be conclusive proof that my interpretation of the dialogue is correct, however I do find that it is in keeping with my interpretation and I think that it is very difficult for a proponent of ‘Reading B’ to explain away this interesting feature.

I will start by introducing the digression and its context –

The exploration of flux and relativism starts off unhurried, meandering between some serious criticism and some less serious, rather more jokey, criticism. Then we find the digression where Socrates’ talks about the goal of life being to become like god as far as possible. The discussion starts off with a description of a philosopher who is baffled by what others find important and valuable in life (173d), noting that only the philosopher’s body resides in the city, not his mind (173e), such that he is mocked (174c) and he, in turn, finds the mockers ridiculous (174e). He lacks knowledge of material, worldly things because he spends his time asking more general questions – instead of ‘is the king happy?’ he asks ‘what is happiness?’ (175c). His thought reaches dizzying heights that others ‘have no perception of’ (175d, Fowler

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54 Sedley (2004, p. 80, footnote 43) credits Polansky (1992) with the insight. Sedley notes that the ancient scribes were paid by the line so they recorded line numbers in their work for these purposes. This had the useful side-effect of making it easy to spot the literal centre of the works that they recorded. Sedley also references the potential existence of an authentic alternative proem to the *Theaetetus*, which purportedly shares the same line-count as the surviving one, preserving the dialogue’s length (and, therefore, literal centre).

55 This is surprising given the insight shared by Sedley (2004) that I reference in footnote 49. As far as I can tell, the only analysis in the secondary literature that draws conclusions about Plato’s intentions from counting either words, lines or pages is Burnyeat’s ‘Dramatic Aspects of Plato’s *Protagoras*’: ‘In the course of its 53 Stephanus pages Plato’s *Protagoras* uses the verb διαλέγεσθαι 32 times: a frequency considerably greater than that of any other dialogue. The next largest total is 21 occurrences in the *Theaetetus* (68 Stephanus pages). In the vast bulk of the *Republic* διαλέγεσθαι occurs just 20 times over 294 Stephanus pages. The ratios are striking. In the *Protagoras* the verb turns up once every 1.65 Stephanus pages; in the *Theaetetus* once every 3.25 pages; in the *Republic* only once every 14.7. The statistics reflect a fact evident to any reader of the *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*, that the first of these dialogues is Plato’s most sustained treatment of the comparative merits of the many different forms of διαλέγεσθαι, the second his most ambitious exhibition of the type of dialectic (as he has taught us to call it) with which Socrates there wins his contest against Protagoras.’ (2013, p. 419).
(1987) – hinting that perception is not relevant to questions like ‘what is happiness?’). Theodorus highlights that there would be fewer evils and more peace – both the virtue itself and also the worldly benefit produced by it – if Socrates could persuade others of the truth of what he has just described (176a – note how this follows on from the criticism of Protagoras). But Socrates says that there must always be something opposed to good, i.e., evil, because they come as a pair of opposites. This is why we must escape the world and become like god by being pious and wise (176b). Being pious and wise also go together as a pair, but not because they are opposites, rather, Socrates equates wisdom with virtue and ignorance with folly and wickedness (176c). Continuing this theme, Socrates says that two ‘paradeigmata’ (patterns or structures) are set up in the world: the divine and most blessed, contrasted with the godless and most wretched. Men do not always see this because they are blind (176e – imagery very familiar from the Republic, e.g., the analogy of the sun at 507b-509c). They pay a penalty for this lack of sight, which is to live a life that conforms to the pattern they resemble (177a). Socrates says that we should turn away from this earthly problem of men focusing on earthly things (177b) and once we have ‘turned’ we can and should proceed with the philosophical discussion (177c, Fowler (1987) – again this reminds us of the allegory of the cave in the Republic at 514a-520a).

Immediately following the digression is the serious and final rejection of Theaetetus’ first definition. The final refutation of Heraclitus does not refer to everyday objects like tables and chairs, but to the ‘twin-offspring’, which is something like Russell’s sense-data, and the refutation depends on the notions of sameness and existence, which cannot be accounted for by sense-data. So the digression marks the end of fairly light-hearted exploration of non-Platonist theories and the beginning of more purposeful refutation of a fundamental aspect of the empiricist doctrine – a refutation that makes the first reference to concepts that are

56 Chappell uses the following pertinent analogy: imagine that Conan Doyle wrote a brand new book and mentioned the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’, it would be natural to assume that he meant to allude to the Sherlock Holmes of his other works. Likewise, ‘if Plato uses such phrases in a passage which is admitted on all sides to allude to the themes of the Republic, it strains credulity to imagine that Plato is not intentionally referring to the Forms.’ (2005, p. 127). Sedley agrees that Plato is signalling that he is still a Platonist at this point in the dialogue but for slightly different reasons. Sedley notes that Plato uses the word paradeigmata which is ‘in some contexts a Platonic buzzword for Forms’, e.g., in the Parmenides at 132d2 (Sedley, 1999(b), p. 312). Sedley argues that, in the context of the digression, the word is actually meant to refer to god not to the Forms (ibid.), but this does not mean that Plato is abandoning the theory of Forms because we can see that Plato equates godliness and goodness (i.e., the Form of Good) across the Platonic corpus, e.g., in the Timaeus at 29e (1999(b), pp. 313-316).
then developed into the Greatest Kinds in the dialogue set the next day (see chapter 3 for more on this).

The reference to ‘becoming like god’ and the reverential language used either side of the reference, particularly in relation to the hierarchy of realms, is reminiscent of Platonist dialogues that discuss the Forms. In other dialogues, Plato’s god is a paradigm to emulate, and the cause and benefactor of the world. There is a strong presumption of god’s inherent goodness and perfection, e.g., in the Republic at 379. This goodness is what is referred to here, in the Theaetetus, too, because we are told there would be ‘more peace and fewer evils’ (176a, Fowler (1987)) if Socrates were believed.

Elsewhere Plato explores a number of different ways of becoming like god. For example, he talks about immortality. In the Symposium (207d) biological reproduction is a way to overcome mortality – and notice the giving birth motif and the contrast between being pregnant with a child or with a thought that is presented in both the Symposium and Theaetetus – and in the Symposium and Timaeus (90a) Plato explores the idea of identifying yourself with your immortal soul in order to become like god. Plato also talks about godlikeness in the context of morality, e.g., in the Republic (613a-b) in relation to divine protection, and Phaedrus (252-3) where individual gods provide alternative paradigms. Intellectually, the Timaeus talks about becoming like god by aligning the rotations of your thoughts to those of the divine world soul by practising astronomy. Sedley argues that the goal of becoming like god is ‘a pivotal feature of Plato’s thought’ (1999(b), p. 309).^57

The reference to ‘becoming like god’ features in between an exploration of Protagorean theories and their refutation, so should be read alongside Laws 716c4-6: ‘It will be god who, par excellence, is the measure of all things for us, rather than man as some people claim^58 – clearly a damning reference to Protagoras (and his ‘man is the measure’ slogan), who, in the

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^57 Sedley highlights the ‘extraordinarily illuminating’ (1999(b), pp. 326-327) suggestion made by one early Platonist scholar: the Timaeus provides an account of physics and cosmology which explains ‘how the very structure of the heavens permits and encourages man to emulate god’ and other dialogues raise the goal of godlikeness from other ‘angles’ ‘according to the tripartition of philosophy into physics, ethics, and logic. That is, [the goal of godlikeness] is said ‘physically’ (phasiskos) in the Timaeus, ‘ethically’ in the Republic, and ‘logically’ (i.e., epistemologically) in the Theaetetus.’ (ibid.). Throughout Plato’s work he raises the same discussion points from different angles, e.g., the physics of falsity at 43e-44a of the Timaeus (ibid.), and godlikeness is a significant example.

^58 Translation from Sedley (2004, p. 81).
Theaetetus, we are still concerned to refute. It also reminds us of Euthyphro 6d-7c where there is a discussion about using god as a moral measure within a dialogue that clearly both advocates the Forms and shares parallels with the Theaetetus (see chapter 1 section d).

There is widespread agreement in the secondary literature that the digression contains language that reminds us of the Forms, but there is no general agreement on the role of the digression in the overall dialogue. That is because, although the language clearly evokes the Forms, the Forms are not explicitly mentioned and it is unclear how this language helps any particular interpretation of the dialogue. For example, although highlighting apparent allusions to the Forms initially seems to help ‘Reading A’ advocates, it is difficult to see how it really helps given that Plato makes no further use of the Forms in the rest of the dialogue. Perhaps a ‘Reading A’ advocate could suggest that Plato was hinting at a possible solution to the question of knowledge by referencing the Forms and then showing us what happens when the interlocutors do not take up that hint (i.e., aporia) – but this is just speculation rather than clearly evidenced and, anyway, showing that without the Forms we experience aporia is something that Plato could have achieved without referencing the Forms at all, so it does not explain the presence of the digression.

Burnyeat suggests that the digression builds on the preceding discussion: ‘If questions of advantage have objective answers but what is just or unjust depends on and is relative to the fluctuating judgements of community or individual, then it becomes impossible to say that justice is in one’s best interests.’ (Burnyeat, 1990, p. 33). Chappell (2005) has also suggested that the passage is a continuation of the discussion immediately preceding it and is showing the reader what it would be like to function within Protagoras’ relativism. Socrates shows his dislike of Protagoras’ approach of separating out of the notion of justice itself from the benefits that justice brings. I agree that there is definitely evidence to support this reading, particularly the remark at 176a about fewer evils and more peace. However, this interpretation of the digression does not explain the entirety of the passage, only limited aspects of it, nor does it explain the sudden change in tone and language.

Some commentators have gone so far as to say that the digression is ‘philosophically quite pointless’ (Ryle, 1966, p. 158), and many have been not far from this, suggesting only a very minor role (Cornford (1935) and McDowell (1976)). It is certainly in the interests of a ‘Reading B’ advocate to find minimal content in the digression and to shrug off anything Platonist-
sounding and dismiss it as philosophically irrelevant. A ‘Reading B’ advocate, who is trying to argue that Plato was seriously questioning and troubled by his theory of Forms, would struggle to explain any evidence that suggested that Plato still held Platonist views in high regard, or any evidence that Plato’s thought showed signs of consistency across the Theaetetus and the traditionally Platonist dialogues. But this is exactly what we do find in the digression.

I think that the primary role of the digression is evidence that Plato still holds typically Platonist views about the links between knowledge and ethics. The position of the digression shows that Plato gives it greater weight than has previously been appreciated: at the exact and literal centre of the Theaetetus is a discussion about how we should try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods in order to remove ourselves from the Bad and be nearer the Good. This is totally out of keeping with the rest of the dialogue and with empiricism. I think that it demonstrates that Plato’s central concern when discussing knowledge is not of mistaking people or horses, but is ethics.

It is not unreasonable to think that the author of the Timaeus, a celebration of mathematical perfection, may have considered the centre of his works to be significant and the appropriate place for figuratively central text to be placed.\(^{59}\) It is certainly interesting to see what else can be found at the centre of Plato’s works:

In the Protagoras, ‘I’ll be leaving now’ (335c8 – exactly half-way into the 53 Stephanus pages, 309 to 362) – a turning point where there is a power-shift and a concession on the part of Protagoras to engage in the dialectic process. In the Republic, ‘I think we need to define for them who the philosophers are that we dare to say must rule’ (474b3 – exactly half-way through the 295 Stephanus pages, 327 to (nearly) 622) – prompting the definition of the Philosopher King. In the Timaeus, ‘let us next discuss the form that each has come to have and the various numbers that have combined to make them. Leading the way will be the primary form, the smallest structure’ (54d5-8 – exactly half-way through the 75.5 Stephanus pages, 17 to 92.5) – introducing the most fundamental building block of reality. In the Sophist, ‘how shall we begin this dangerous discussion?’ (242b5 – exactly half-way through the 52.5

\(^{59}\) Certainly the constant presence of Theodorus the mathematician and of Theaetetus the pupil of mathematics should remind us that elsewhere Plato treats mathematics as a window to the world beyond and to the realm of perfect Forms.
Stephanus pages 216 to 268.5). In the *Phaedrus*, ‘we did not go into details of the goodness of the good horse or the badness of the bad. Let us do that now.’ (253d3-4 – exactly half-way through the 52.5 Stephanus pages, 227 to 279.5).60

On the basis of the above, I argue that the digression is not a digression at all, but is confirmation that Plato believes that knowledge and ethics are inherently connected. Plato wants to deliberately place god and ethics, not Protagorean relativism or Heraclitean flux, at the centre of his empiricism-rejecting dialogue on knowledge.

At the end of this chapter 1, I hope to have argued convincingly that the *Theaetetus* is a critique of empiricism written by a Platonist Plato, despite some commentators’ views to the contrary. This is an important first step in establishing, as I will do in subsequent chapters, that the *Theaetetus* presents a version of logical atomism which Plato takes forward and builds on in the *Sophist*.

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60 All translations in this paragraph are from Cooper (1997).
Chapter 2. Logical atomism in Socrates’ Dream

Reading Plato’s *Theaetetus* as a critique of empiricism leads to an interpretation of ‘Socrates’ Dream’ (201d9–202c8) as introducing the core principles of logical atomism, where Socrates’ primary elements function in a similar way to Wittgenstein’s Objects or Russell’s sense-data, as Wittgenstein himself recognized in his *Philosophical Investigations* (§46). Although most of the secondary literature states or implies that Plato rejects the Dream Theory, I will argue that aspects of logical atomism survive the critique. Although it is true that Plato has the character Socrates highlight a series of issues with certain aspects of the Dream Theory, and although Plato demonstrates the absurdity of simultaneously believing that (i) knowledge must be based on knowledge, and (ii) objects are unknowable, and (iii) our knowledge is built from objects (and nothing else), Theaetetus’ third definition is very clearly still ‘in play’ following this, as are some of the core principles of logical atomism. I will argue that Plato accepts some of the principles and leaves the theory open for further development. His rejection is of a particular version of logical atomism – one which only has room for one kind of atom. In chapters 3 and 4, I will go on to show that this further development takes place in the *Sophist*, where Plato builds a more complex version of logical atomism that resolves the difficulties of the *Theaetetus* by introducing Platonist metaphysics.

a. Introducing Socrates’ Dream

I will start by introducing the third definition of knowledge that Theaetetus proposes and the interlocutors’ development and critique of it. I will highlight where the discussion foreshadows, but falls short of, the *Sophist*’s solution because this will be the focus of later chapters.

Theaetetus proposes that knowledge is true belief with a *logos*, usually translated as ‘account’ (201c8–201d9).\(^61\) The interlocutors have already ruled out equating knowledge with true

\(^61\) *Logos* can be translated in various ways depending on context. LSJ suggests numerous possible definitions including ‘account’, ‘explanation’, ‘argument’, ‘principle’, ‘definition’, ‘formula’, and ‘reason’; and *logos* is where we get our words ‘logic’ and ‘dialogue’ from. Plato uses it to mean simply ‘discourse’ or ‘speech’ in the *Laws* (625b), *Republic* (328d), *Symposium* (172b), and *Phaedrus* (227b); but also uses *logos* in a weightier sense elsewhere, meaning something more like ‘explanation of the cause’ in *Meno* (98a2) and *Phaedo* (97d-99d2), ‘understanding’ in *Phaedo* (76b5-6) or, similarly, ‘ability to explain’ in *Symposium* (202a5-9). In the *Republic*, there is a passage that helps us see the connection between these different uses, where Plato suggests that the
belief, but consider that the addition of an account might transform mere belief into knowledge. The discussion of this definition takes place across Stephanus pages 201d to 210a – just nine of the 68 that comprise the dialogue. Following Theaetetus’ initial idea, Socrates says that he is reminded of a dream that he had which shows us what things would be like were the definition true (201d9-202c8). This Dream Theory is discussed and critiqued (202d5-206c2) and, although the interlocutors find fault with the specifics of the theory, they go on to make three attempts\(^{62}\) to understand what a logos might be on this theory (206c5-210a9). Each of the three options is problematic and dismissed, but there are aspects of the underlying theory that the interlocutors seem to accept – or at least do not reject outright. We are left with a theory that has not been conclusively rejected. In fact, we seem to be only just starting to explore this final definition: we very quickly progressed from Theaetetus’ basic definition to a more fleshed-out version, then four pages of initial critique is followed by just four more pages of exploration of the concept of logos, and then the dialogue closes with a reference to the interlocutors plans to continue the discussion the following day. Compare this with the first definition of knowledge as perception, which takes a full 31 Stephanus pages to fully explore and definitively refute. The suggestion is that the idea is deserving of further discussion, in the Sophist.

Theaetetus’ third definition is very familiar from Platonic dialogues advocating the theory of Forms, for example, we find it in the *Meno* 98a2, *Phaedo* 76b5–6, *Symposium* 202a5-9, *Republic* 534b3-7, and *Timaeus* 51e5. Therefore we can reasonably assume that Plato is familiar, comfortable, and sure-footed with this topic and this particular answer to the question ‘What is knowledge?’. On Sedley’s interpretation of the dialogues (see chapter 1), we are exploring how far Socrates gets us towards Plato’s eventual solution, i.e., how far we can get towards the right answer without the metaphysics of the Forms, and with only the purely Socratic tools available to us (like the method of the dialectic). On this view, we can

dialectician is the one who can grasp the concept, and therefore explain it in words, whereas someone who lacks understanding of a thing cannot explain it to someone else (534b). In the *Theaetetus*, logos is usually translated as ‘account’, but exactly what logos means is unclear and, indeed, is the subject of the discussion from Stephanus page 201 onwards (and this chapter). I will follow the convention of using the translation ‘account’, however, it is important to acknowledge that this is not the only possible translation.

\(^{62}\) The list of three variations is not said by Plato to be an exhaustive list; Socrates says that the solution must be one of three variations, but the reader should keep in mind that Socrates does not have Platonist metaphysics at his disposal and that Plato, on the other hand, has more than three options available to him – including the versions discussed in Platonist dialogues like the *Meno* (98a).
expect to see a discussion of some versions of the definition that do not involve commitment to the Forms; we can expect to see these fail; but we can also expect to see that the underlying principle of the definition survives – it just needs the additional metaphysical heft that Plato brings in at the next stage in order to work properly. I will try to show that this is exactly what we do see.

The first part of the Dream Theory passage involves Socrates recounting a dream he had:

I in turn used to imagine that I heard certain persons say that the primary elements of which we and all else are composed admit of no rational explanation; for each alone by itself can only be named, and no qualification can be added neither that it is nor that it is not, for that would at once be adding to it existence or non-existence, whereas we must add nothing to it, if we are to speak of that itself alone. Indeed, not even ‘itself’ or ‘that’ or ‘each’ or ‘alone’ or ‘this’ or anything else of the sort, of which there are many, must be added; for these are prevalent terms which are added to all things indiscriminately and are different from the things to which they are added; but if it were possible to explain an element, and it admitted of a rational explanation of its own, it would have to be explained apart from everything else. But in fact none of the primal elements can be expressed by reason; they can only be named, for they have only a name; but the things composed of these are themselves complex, and so their names are complex and form a rational explanation; for the combination of names is the essence of reasoning. Thus the elements are not objects of reason or of knowledge, but only of perception, whereas the combinations of them are objects of knowledge and expression and true opinion.

(Theaetetus 201d9-202b7, Fowler, 1987)

I read from this the following principles, which I will discuss in detail over the course of this chapter:

1. There exist primary elements
2. It is of these primary elements that we and everything else are composed
3. The primary elements have no account (logos)
4. The primary elements can only be named
5. It is not possible to say anything about the primary elements. It is not even possible to say that they are or are not. We cannot ‘attach’ anything to them.

6. The things composed of the primary elements are composed by a method of ‘weaving together’ of the names. When woven together, the names create an account – an account being, essentially, a complex of names.

7. The primary elements are unknowable

8. The primary elements are perceivable

I take these principles to be the basis of the Dream Theory. It is not yet a fully formed theory but the subsequent discussion makes use of the above list to explain knowledge with reference to primary elements.

Theaetetus’ definition is criticised in the same way that his previous attempts are criticised: it attempts to explain knowledge with reference to non-knowable perceptibles – several commentators have highlighted this ‘knowledge must be based on knowledge’ principle, e.g., Fine (1979(b)). Sedley comments that Socrates’ ‘...insight that reductionist analysis of the physical world cannot yield knowledge defined the end of the Presocratic era, and paved the way for Platonism.’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 161). The point that he appears to be making is that if you start from what is unknown then you will never build up to something knowable. Socrates saw what was wrong with Presocratic materialism as a basis for understanding the world, but, since he was not a metaphysician, he had to leave the development of a positive solution to Plato. In the Theaetetus, Sedley suggests, we are still waiting for Plato’s own solution and are focused on demonstrating where empiricism has gone wrong. The critique of the Dream Theory begins immediately after the above list, from 202d5 onwards.

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63 The key word in the original Greek is συμπλοκή. It is found at 202b5 of the Theaetetus, where it is translated as either ‘combination’ or ‘interweaving’ by most; 240c2 of the Sophist, where it is translated as ‘entangled’ by Fowler (1987); and, most famously, at 259e6: ‘For our power of discourse is derived from the interweaving of the classes or ideas with one another’ (ibid.). LSJ suggests ‘intertwining’ as an alternative translation. In the Statesman, Plato uses συμπλοκή at 306a (‘...in which it combines the threads, and the kind of web it produces...’), then again at 308e, (‘...prepare the materials for its web, directing each person to do the tasks which it thinks are requisite for its fabric...’ (Fowler and Lamb (1925))) and 309e (‘...such interweaving and binding together of the bad with the good...uniting such persons...’ (ibid.)). Plato also uses it in other contexts, e.g., Laws VIII 833a: ‘...in tangling with the enemy...’ (Bury (1926)). Note that all uses of συμπλοκή are found in Plato’s later works (according to the standard chronology, see chapter 1).

64 I established in chapter 1 that I will proceed, from this chapter 2 onwards, on the basis that Reading A is the most plausible interpretation of the dialogue, however it is worth noting here that Reading B advocates would
Socrates begins by highlighting that elements are unknowable and complexes knowable. This is immediately followed by the introduction of the analogy with language being made up of letters (elements) and syllables (collections of elements), at 202d8. The first stage in exploring this analogy is to say that ‘SO’ is the first syllable of ‘Socrates’, and that this syllable is made up of the letters ‘S’ and ‘O’. We can give an account of ‘SO’ by showing its constituent parts ‘S’ and ‘O’; we cannot give an account of ‘S’ or ‘O’ because they have no constituent parts. We reach this conclusion at 203c1.

What goes unmentioned by the interlocutors (but not unnoticed by the reader) is the fact that ‘S’ is a consonant and ‘O’ a vowel: there are two types of element here and they make a syllable because we have taken one from each category and combined them. If we combine ‘H’ and ‘J’ then we do not make a pronounceable syllable because we have taken two elements of the same type and tried to combine them. This is the first time that the Dream discussion foreshadows the eventual solution that we arrive at in the Sophist – that there are two different types of logical atom, not just one type. Plato is showing us that his interlocutors have already missed an opportunity to develop the theory in a particular direction that we will find, in the end, works well.65

Socrates then presents a criticism of the theory: if someone knows how to make the sound ‘SO’ then they must know how to make ‘S’ and ‘O’ too (203d5). So we appear to have shifted the problem rather than solved it, because we now have to explain how ‘S’ and ‘O’ are knowable, whereas we initially stipulated that these are unknowable (and therefore not in need of explanation themselves). But Socrates says that we must keep going and adapt our analogy because perhaps a slight tweak to the set-up will prove successful.

At 204a, we try a variation, where the complex is a single form arising out of the combination of elements, i.e., where the complex has no parts. At 205b we hit upon the issue that if the syllable is just the letters then it must be equally (un)knowable as the letters (and therefore the theory does not help us get knowledge out of unknowables), but if it is not just the letters argue that the Dream discussion shows us Plato testing out alternative ways of understanding how thoughts about perceptions of the world are structured, and Plato himself is not aware of the correct answer.

65 We miss out because the eventual solution involves a second type of primary element, or atom, which would not be accepted by an empiricist – the Greatest Kinds, which structure the perceptible elements. In the Theaetetus, Plato shows us how someone without access to Platonist metaphysics would explore this topic; in the Sophist we gain access to the Platonist ontology that we are denied in the Theaetetus.
then it is unclear what the (additional) parts are that make up ‘SO’ (and therefore the theory has not revealed the underlying nature of ‘SO’). Neither option helps us.

The next strand of criticism is that the letters are actually better candidates than syllables to be the known item than the syllable, whereas up until now we have said that the elements are unknowable and complexes knowable. At 206b, Socrates introduces the idea that, when we learn language, we learn the letters first then build syllables from these known letters, and therefore anyone who suggests that the elements are unknowable and the compounds are knowable must be joking. But Socrates immediately reminds us (206c1) that we must not forget or lose sight of the fact that the letters and syllables analogy is just that, an analogy, and we should return to the main question.

We therefore move on to discuss three possible versions of what logos might be. It is important to note that we do not have a decisive or damning criticism or a rejection of the Dream Theory yet. We are not moving onto the next topic because we have shown the Dream Theory to be conclusively wrong and unworthy of further discussion. All we have shown is that one particular analogy – which is acknowledged by the interlocutors to be imperfect – does not play out well. We therefore decide to stop using that analogy and, instead, consider what form the logos might take considering the matter of knowledge directly rather than through an analogy with language.

When we move on to discuss three possible options for what logos is, it is interesting to note that none of the options is the original version that we heard at the beginning: that knowledge is true belief with an account of why that true belief is true. So although the ensuing discussion appears to rule out each of the three options presented, we should remember that it is made very clear to us upfront that these three options are not an exhaustive list – since we already know of a fourth.\(^{66}\)

\(^{66}\) C.f. Cornford, who notes that ‘No one of the senses [of logos] is the sense which [it] bears in the *Meno* and *Timaeus*’ (1935, p. 142); and Ryle who agrees that ‘Socrates himself suggests three different interpretations of meta logou, none of which has anything to do with the possession of provision of... reasons’ (1990, p. 29); and Chappell who points out that ‘If what Plato wants to tell us in *Theaetetus* 201-210 is that he no longer thinks that any version of [the third definition] is true, not even his own earlier version, then it is truly extraordinary that he does not even mention his own version, and concentrates instead on refuting... other versions... which are so different from Plato’s [own] version [i.e. that of the *Meno* and *Timaeus*]’ (2005, p. 201).
The first attempt is to say that *logos* involves vocal expression of the belief ‘by means of verbs and nouns’ (206d2-3, Fowler (1987)). This is ruled out very quickly because it does not seem to distinguish or explain knowledge. But Socrates says that we must not condemn the author of this suggestion too harshly because ‘perhaps that is not what he meant’ (206e5-9, ibid.), and we move swiftly on to the second attempt.

Although we move on from the first attempt very quickly, it is worth pausing to note that the first attempt, and Socrates’ ‘rejection’ of it, already foreshadows the discussion that Plato presents to us in the *Sophist*. The eventual solution to the problems of the *Theaetetus* relies on making the distinction between verbs and names, and, at 206d2-3, Plato makes it clear here that he is already aware of the relevance of the verb and name distinction to the problem the interlocutors are facing, but shows us that this line of thought cannot progress with the tools available to his interlocutors in the *Theaetetus* – i.e., without Platonist metaphysics. Furthermore, this first attempt is far from rejected by the interlocutors: Socrates says that it does not appear to him to resolve the problem at hand but acknowledges that a proponent of this solution may have meant something slightly different or more in depth than Socrates realises – and indeed this does prove to be the case when the noun and verb distinction is revisited in the *Sophist* the next day (262a). Therefore, we could read this passage of the *Theaetetus* as a reference to the fact that Plato, with his metaphysics of Forms, does indeed mean something different. This would support Sedley’s interpretation of the *Theaetetus* because it shows us that Socrates’ suggestion is picked up by Plato and developed. It also counts against Reading B because it looks as though Plato has already identified the eventual solution that he will set out in the *Sophist*.

The second attempt, the enumeration of the elements, also involves a discussion of ‘grammar’ and ‘grammarians’ (207b2-3). Here we are tantalizingly close to the eventual solution – that the structure of language is a clue to the solution because language is isomorphic with the structure of the world (and, from the previous attempt, that there are two different categories of element). But this attempt fails when we think that the only elements that exist are bare perceptibles and when we cannot yet see exactly where the ‘grammar’ (in this analogy) comes into play. In the *Sophist*, grammar is the rules of combination that apply to language and the world; the fact that we have to combine one type of element with an element of a different type (e.g., ‘Theaetetus sits’ rather than ‘Theaetetus
Socrates’). But in the *Theaetetus*, this attempt is rejected because, with the empiricist assumptions at work, we can only achieve mere concatenation of semantically inert elements, not structured sentences that are capable of being knowledge. If I list out all of the elements in Socrates’ name then I can choose between ‘Socrates’ and ‘ocSteras’, and I need some rules that provides structure to prevent errors of this kind occurring. This is hinting at the solution to come in the *Sophist* – that elements only fit together in a particular way and that one has knowledge when one understands how elements are structured. The discussion of the second attempt closes with ‘perhaps the definition adopted is not this’ (208b9, Fowler (1987)) – hardly a conclusive or certain rejection (even by the interlocutors, let alone by Plato) as some in the secondary literature have claimed.

The third and final attempt to understand logos is to take it as the ability to distinguish the thing you know from other things, or to have found the uniqueness of meaning that makes mistakes impossible (208c8-9). It reminds us of the Wax Tablet discussion (191-196) – a model that the interlocutors said was imperfect or limited but did not reject outright – where the interlocutors discuss how the mind recognizes something as the same thing it has seen before and allows us to distinguish one thing from another. It also reminds us again of the strong link between the main question of the dialogue (‘What is knowledge?’) and the lengthy ‘other-judging’ discussion in Part II – a very strong foreshadowing of the eventual solution in the *Sophist* (where ‘not-being’ is explained and demystified using the concept of ‘otherness’). The explanation of this third model involves the image of the sun (208d1) and the heavens (208d3). Theaetetus says that it seems quite right to call this third model a rational explanation or definition. Socrates then uses a description that will be familiar to readers of the *Republic*: now that we have expressed the third model in more detail, Socrates says that it is like looking at a σκιαγραφήματος (208e8) – a ‘shadow-painting’ (LSJ) – despite being so close to the eventual answer in the *Sophist*, without the Forms we are falling short of revealing the true nature of knowledge, we are still in the cave.

Reviewing the critique as a whole, we see that each of the three attempts gives us an aspect of the final solution that we find in the *Sophist*: (i) the two categories of primary element, or atom; (ii) the isomorphism, or mirroring relation, between language and the world; and (iii)

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67 The allegory of the cave at 514a-520a.
the role of ‘otherness’ instead of ‘not being’. But because the subject of the conversation was not the Forms or Greatest Kinds, we are unable to see the sunlight directly.

In all three attempts, aspects are said by the interlocutors to be ‘silly’ or a ‘joke’ – not at all the same tone of dismissal that the first two definitions of knowledge (as perception and as true belief) warranted.

The final lines of the dialogue once again reference god – a reminder of the digression (see chapter 1 section e) – and indicate that the discussion is not over: ‘let us meet here again in the morning’ (Fowler (1987)). The Sophist begins ‘according to our yesterday’s agreement, we have come... and we bring also this man... a stranger from Elea, one of the followers of Parmenides and Zeno, and a real philosopher’ (216a, ibid.).

The Theaetetus and Sophist are presented by Plato as two halves of a whole: the first half (the Theaetetus) shows the limitations of a non-Platonist metaphysics and ends in aporia; but, when a ‘real philosopher’ frees the interlocutors from the constraints of empiricism (in the Sophist), the discussion continues where it left off but, this time, ends successfully. The two should be read together in order to reveal what Plato was seeking in his solution, and reading the two together shows why the discussion about wholes and parts (204a–205c) is so significant. Sedley distinguishes two different ways that we can characterise the relation between the parts, or elements, and the wholes, or compounds, which they comprise, providing the following example: imagine that you start out with the ingredients for a cake (butter, flour, sugar, eggs) and mix them and bake them. You end up with a cake which you can slice into multiple pieces. You could say either that the parts of the cake are the ingredients or that the parts of the cake are the slices. If you are looking for the most basic parts of the cake, slices of cake do not help you, because parts of a cake are still just cake (Sedley, 2004, pp. 164-165). Not all parts are relevant to the Dream Theory. The Dream Theory wants parts to be ‘epistemically independent of the complex’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 165). It is the epistemic independence that is the difficulty in the Theaetetus and that leads us to the Platonic model in the Sophist. The Dream Theory is trying to understand what parts make a whole without Platonic metaphysics.
b. Principles of logical atomism in Socrates’ Dream

I have argued that the discussion leading up to the Dream Theory is a critique of empiricist foundations for knowledge (chapter 1). Having set out what I take Socrates’ Dream to be (above), I will now go on to discuss the similarity between the Dream and the logical atomism found in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein highlighted the similarity in his *Philosophical Investigations* some years after writing the *Tractatus* but gave no details about the nature of the link between the Dream and the *Tractatus*. I will explore what this similarity amounts to, concluding that the Dream Theory sets out several of the core principles of logical atomism and that the primary elements of the Dream function in the same way as Wittgenstein’s Objects. In later chapters, I will argue that Plato’s amended version, presented in the *Sophist*, resolves some of the difficulties faced by Wittgenstein’s version.

A successful interpretation of the Dream Theory must be able to tie together the points that the interlocutors have been discussing up until now, i.e., whether it is possible to find the foundations of knowledge in our perceptual experience of the world around us. A credible interpretation of the Dream Theory is that it sets out to explain how bare, unprocessed perception (the simple, or primary, elements) can be the building blocks of something meaningful, about the world, and capable of being true or false and of being knowledge, like a judgement or belief (a complex).

As Chappell says, there is a problem for empiricists about how to bridge the gap between sensation and content (Chappell, 2005, pp. 204-205). Platonist Plato can say that sense-data from experience becomes contentful when ordered within the structure provided by the Forms, but the empiricist cannot do this and therefore struggles to link together the external world with the mind and our language in a way that explains how we progress from experiencing the world to expressing our thoughts about it. In the Dream Theory we are presented with an empiricist suggestion that the content is provided by taking groupings or sets of sense experience – e.g., we see patches of colour produced by the ‘twin-offspring’ (151b1) which we join together in order to be able to say that we can see a table or chair and to ascribe features to the objects that we see. The empiricist recognizes the problem that bare perceptions do not have ‘aboutness’ and tries to solve the difficulty by suggesting that
the proper structuring of the primary elements is what transforms them into knowable complexes.

Wittgenstein suggested that the primary elements of Socrates’ Dream played a similar role as Objects in his theory:

What lies behind the idea that names really signify simples? – Socrates says in the *Theaetetus*: “If I am not mistaken, I have heard some people say this: there is no explanation of the primary elements [στοιχεία] – so to speak – out of which we and everything else are composed; for everything that exists in and of itself can be signified only by names; no other determination is possible, either that it is or that it is not. …what is composed of the primary elements is itself an interwoven structure, so the correspondingly interwoven names become explanatory language; for the essence of the latter is the interweaving68 of names.” [Tht. 201e] Both Russell’s ‘individuals’ and my ‘objects’ (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) were likewise such primary elements.

(Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §46)

But Wittgenstein did not elaborate on what the similarity amounted to or how Plato’s treatment of it concluded. I would now like to set out in detail what the link is and show that the comparison is interesting and insightful when we consider Plato’s verdict and next steps.

I will begin by setting out the most basic principles of logical atomism69 and where they are found in Socrates’ Dream:

1. *The business of language is to assert or deny facts about the world. This is achieved owing to linguistic items being correlated with things in the world*

A fundamental principle of logical atomism is that language allows us to describe the world by stating what is (or is not) the case. These descriptive sentences will be capable of being true (or false) and of being knowledge. Any other use of language will result in nonsensical

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68 Note that Wittgenstein translates συμπλοκή as ‘interweaving’ here. See footnote 63, above, for more about the translations of this word across Plato’s works and for alternative translations.
69 This term was first used by Russell in 1911 when presenting to the French Philosophical Society (Monk, 1996, p. 200). He advertised his ‘Philosophy of Logical Atomism’ lectures (from 1918) as being based on ideas that he had learned from Wittgenstein (Monk, 1996, p. 200), and Wittgenstein’s own version (the *Tractatus*) was then published in 1921. Both are logical atomist theories in that logical analysis identifies things devoid of complexity, but the term is somewhat vague and allows for variation in theory details.
statements; as Wittgenstein writes in his preface to the Tractatus, his book ‘will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather – not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts... The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language’.

For Wittgenstein, ‘A proposition presents the existence and non-existence of atomic facts’ (4.1), where an atomic fact is a combination of objects (2.01). ‘The totality of propositions is language’ (4.001) and any other combination of words is nonsensical. ‘A proposition is a picture of reality’ (4.01). ‘The picture consists in the fact that its elements are combined with one another in a definite way’ (2.14), and ‘That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another’ (2.15). ‘In order to be a picture a fact must have something in common with what it pictures’ (2.16).70

In other words, the picture is meant to accurately describe reality, and certain restrictions stop us from using language in areas where it is inappropriate to do so and where the structure of the proposition prevents us from being able to assert something capable of being true or false. Wittgenstein likened the picturing relation to the way toy cars are used in the Parisian law courts. The spatial picture of a car accident will have the same spatial structure if recreated using toy cars, so the Parisian law courts used toy cars to get people to demonstrate what happened in the car crash. Although people could still lie about how the crash happened (by representing a false scenario), they could not represent something impossible like ‘the car hit me on the right and the left simultaneously’. This is because the

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70 Translations all from Ogden and Ramsey. The Tractatus was published in German in 1921. Its translation into English, published in 1922, was arranged by Ogden, who studied Classics at Cambridge but was neither a philosopher nor academic, having a role as editor for publishers Kegan Paul. Ramsey, a family friend, was a 19 year old undergraduate studying mathematics at Cambridge at the time. He had learnt some German language skills the previous year by borrowing a book written in German from Ogden, alongside reading works of Russell and Moore (c.f. MacBride et al. (2020)). A further translation into English was made by Pears and McGuinness in 1961; both are renowned for their philosophical work, primarily related to Wittgenstein’s own work, at Oxford. While both translations are used by commentators in the secondary literature, sometimes together, there appears to be a general preference for the original (i.e., Ogden/Ramsey) translation. I make use of both translations throughout this thesis, but primarily Ramsey’s (indicating on each occurrence when I have used Pears and McGuinness’ instead). One important point to note when working across both versions is that Ramsey translates ‘Sachverhalt’ as ‘atomic fact’, whereas Pears and McGuinness call this ‘state of affairs’, and Ramsey translates ‘Sachlage’ as ‘state of affairs’, whereas Pears and McGuinness call this ‘situation’. (Both translations have ‘Tatsache’ as ‘fact’).
spatial structure of toy cars is the same as that of the real cars. Similarly, ‘the picture has the logical form of representation in common with what it pictures’ (2.2).

This view contrasts with the views expressed in Wittgenstein’s later works, for example, by the time he wrote the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein thought of language not as just words and sentences in an abstract and isolated way, but as utterances and actions within life where they fulfil certain useful functions.\textsuperscript{71} By the time of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein saw language as a form of behaviour that can be used for far more than just to describe items in the world by finding the correlated name. The idea that linguistic meaning is nothing more than correlations between linguistic and non-linguistic items to be discovered by logicians is replaced by a picture of speakers using sounds and marks as part of their lives.

In the Dream Theory, and throughout the *Theaetetus*, we appear to have a simplistic view of language as describing the world, truly or falsely, and nothing else. That is the assumption that plays a role in refuting Protagoras’ and Heraclitus’ theories (their theories prevent us from describing the world in a way that is capable of being true or false, so we reject those theories) and in underlying the discussion of how false belief is possible (our ability to explain how false belief is possible matters only to the extent that language is supposed to be able to truly describe the world).

In the *Cratylus*, the interlocutors discuss whether names rely on convention to signify things or whether a name is a sort of vocal portrait of a thing, sharing a resemblance with that thing.

\textsuperscript{71} See *Philosophical Investigations* §11: ‘Think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. – The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects.’ Wittgenstein goes on to suggest that, just because words look similar does not mean that we should try to force a similarity and think that we have discovered some interesting feature of the words themselves, e.g., ‘Suppose someone said, “All tools serve to modify something. So, a hammer modifies the position of a nail, a saw the shape of a board, and so on.” – And what is modified by a rule, a glue-pot and nails – “Our knowledge of a thing’s length, the temperature of the glue, and the solidity of a box.” – Would anything be gained by this assimilation of expressions? –’ (P.I., §14). He immediately goes on to criticise the idea that names ‘signify things’ and that things have names attached to them (§15), and to criticise Frege (§22) for having too simplistic and restrictive an idea of the function of language. Other language-games include making up a story, guessing riddles, thanking, and praying (§23). §26 and §27 explicitly attack the view that language consists in naming objects as a preliminary activity for using names. Late-Wittgenstein mocks those who suggest that we learn a name for an object first, in order that we can then go on to use that name to refer to that object in future, as though the former act has some power to produce the latter.
in order to secure its status as that thing’s name.\(^{72}\) They discuss the extent to which that resemblance can provide us with knowledge about a thing. We hear that names have evolved over time into a state where they can mislead us about the nature of the thing they represent, but that if we analyse language then we can see that names were originally descriptions of things. Two different names can be linked to the same object in two different ways (394b-c), e.g., Hesperus and Phosphorus. A complex name can be analysed into simpler names and eventually primary names must be reached, which cannot be analysed into further simpler names but only into sounds or letters. Socrates uses the comparison of portraits whose components (nose, ears, clothes) will eventually be analysable only into colours rather than more component ‘parts’. Falsehood has to do with degrees of resemblance when the portrait is compared to the sitter. (431e4-433a2). ‘A false statement comes to mean what it does because it is a likeness of the facts, but is false nevertheless because it does not resemble them to a sufficiently high degree’ (Denyer, 1991, p. 81). If you take the following statements, ‘Victoria married Albert’ and ‘Victoria never married Albert’, you will note that they are a likeness of exactly the same thing, the marriage of Victoria to Albert, but the first resembles that thing enough to be a true statement of it and the second not quite enough to be true of it but enough to be a statement of it. ‘When we put the little word ‘never’ into the first statement to form the second, that is like drawing a moustache on a picture of the Princess of Wales: the moustache does not stop the picture being a picture of Her Royal Highness; still less, does it make the picture a picture of no one, or of some non-existent person; it just makes the picture less accurate’ (ibid.).

The *Sophist* can be read as a continuation of the *Cratylus* to some extent - the difference, or refinement, being that in the *Sophist* we apply truth and falsehood to statements that contain both a name and verb rather than applying truth and falsehood at the level of names (see Sedley’s *Cratylus* chapter 7, ‘A Platonic Outcome’). If the *Cratylus* is a continuation of, not inconsistent with, the *Sophist*, and if the *Sophist* is a development of the Dream Theory (see chapters 3 and 4), then the *Cratylus* is also of great relevance to interpreting the Dream

\(^{72}\)Hermogenes states that names are assigned arbitrarily and by convention (384d-385a) but Socrates suggests that a certain line of reasoning would suggest that only some names succeed in naming, due to the nature of the thing being named and the name (387d).
It is interesting to note that it appears to be a precursor to Wittgenstein’s picture theory and that Denyer’s example of comparing portraits with their sitters is exactly what Wittgenstein is suggesting applies to all language. The Cratylus’ suggestion that there is a process of analysis of a picture which stops when we reach the level of patches of colour (as opposed to noses and eyes) is very Tractarian.

Different versions of logical atomism involve different types of correlation, but what is fundamental to all of them is that language is directly relevant to an understanding of the nature of reality because of the correlation between these two. In the picture theory, names go proxy for things in the world and the structure of a fact will be shared with the structure of the state of affairs that the fact represents because of the correlation between name and object. ‘The sense [or meaning] of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with the possibilities of the existence and non-existence of the atomic facts’ (4.2).

This is what happens in the Dream Theory too, because ‘an account is essentially a complex of names woven together and [this] presupposes a matching complexity in what is it an account of’ (Burnyeat, 1990, p. 135). I.e., linguistic items pick out things in the world and we weave them together with the aim of saying something about the named objects.

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73 The Cratylus also provides us with a discussion of an alternative to the correlation-theory of meaning, whereby words have meaning by functioning in a particular way, like a tool. This is something more like later-Wittgenstein’s ‘meaning as use’ theory. So we can assume that Plato was familiar with and comfortable exploring a variety of alternatives and chose a correlation-type theory for the Dream Theory passage in the Theaetetus deliberately. Plato is keen to spend time and pages exploring correlation theories because he thinks of language as describing and mirroring the world. ‘One central conclusion of the Cratylus is, I would take it, that names are indeed concealed descriptions, and that the more accurately a name describes its nominatum the better a name it is, although inevitably the description will always be less than perfect (esp. 433a, 435c). This seems to me to be broadly true. Or rather, it is true as regards manufactured names. In our age names are constantly being created, and with very few exceptions they function as names by being descriptive of their nominata. Most carry their meaning on the surface: ‘washing-machine’, ‘passport’, ‘potato-peeler’, ‘birdbath’, ‘chewing-gum’, ‘hatstand’... Others require some decoding, such as the acronym ‘AIDS’, the contracted ‘modem’ (= ‘modulator-demodulator’), and foreign-derived words like ‘biopsy’ and ‘spaghetti’. But virtually all, one way or another, are descriptive. And Plato is right that a language is which ‘potato-peeler’ means something used for peeling potatoes is, to that extent, a better language than one in which it designates a bookshop, a daydream or a species of tulip.’ (Sedley, 2003, p. 147). This is further evidence that the Cratylus and Sophist are consistent and Plato is a Platonist throughout.

74 But Plato is already ahead of Wittgenstein and more Fregean in acknowledging that two names can be linked to the same object in two different ways (see chapter 4).
2. Linguistic and non-linguistic complexes can be analysed into, and built from, component parts, the primary elements

Wittgenstein stated that ‘Every statement about complexes can be analysed into a statement about their constituent parts, and into those propositions which completely describe the complexes’ (2.0201).

According to logical atomism, we can conduct a top-down analysis of language to reveal the smallest component parts and we can then conduct bottom-up construction of complexes out of these smallest component parts. Analysis is the process of deconstructing the whole to see what it is made up of and how it is put together. Once you know what the parts are and the ‘recipe’ for putting them together, you can recreate the whole, which has some sort of unity despite being a collection of parts.

Wittgenstein commented on this process of analysis some years after writing the Tractatus:

> Formerly, I myself spoke of a ‘complete analysis,’ and I used to believe that philosophy had to give a definitive dissection of propositions so as to set out clearly all their connections and remove all possibilities of misunderstanding. I spoke as if there was a calculus in which such a dissection would be possible. I vaguely had in mind something like the definition that Russell had given for the definite article.

(Wittgenstein, Philosophical Grammar, p. 211)

Analysis into component parts as a means to uncover the hidden nature of everything is fundamental to logical atomism. Kanterian describes it as follows:

> Wittgenstein’s early work was a paradigmatic example of system-building philosophy – his atomistic account of the essence of the proposition was the foundation upon which he built his theory of logic, language, ontology, mind and ethics. Everything was meant to hang together through one key assumption, namely that the essence of every elementary proposition is to describe a possible fact and to be independent of any other elementary proposition... Things are not as they seem to be; their hidden real essence is revealed to us when we step below the realm of appearances and analyse, that is, decompose the statement or a fact that we are interested in into its actual constituents... The aim, or rather the dream, of revealing the essence of things
was as old as philosophy itself. It was the dream of establishing philosophy as... a super-science discovering the most fundamental features of the world by means of the most rigorous method.

(Kanterian, 2007, p. 172, my italics)

The Dream Theory is trying to achieve the same end result: the recipe for revealing a hidden truth and for building complexes from simples. The interlocutors have already stressed the importance of dialectic in being able to logically and methodically tackle problems and reveal the true nature of things. In other words, they are trying to conduct a systematic analysis akin to that of the logical atomist. They continue the next day, in the Sophist, with the method of collection and division. They discuss the nature of wholes and parts and are looking for an explanation of logos that makes sense given the nature of wholes and parts. They have difficulty explaining how the whole has unity as well as parts, but they do not question or reject the concept that the whole is indeed formed from its parts, or that proper deconstruction will reveal the answers that they are looking for.

How the parts are said to form the whole varies from one version of logical atomism to another, for example, Frege’s component parts were very different to Russell’s. For Wittgenstein, we do not even know what the component parts, the Tractarian ‘Objects’, really are (see chapter 5), just that they must exist: ‘It is obvious that in the analysis of propositions we must come to elementary propositions, which consist of names in immediate combination’ (4.221). For Wittgenstein, it was necessary that the analysis must stop at a certain point and, where the analysis stops, there we find the most fundamental building blocks of complexes. The Dream Theory shares this assumption, there is no suggestion from the interlocutors that the theory should be rejected because there is no end point to the analysis and no foundation. Quite the opposite.

3. By definition, logical atoms or primary elements can have no properties

For the logical atomist, the purpose of analysis is to discover the nature of the smallest, indivisible part, i.e., the part which, by definition, has no further facets, aspects, or properties to discover. It is bare and can be subject to no further analysis or deconstruction, necessarily. For Wittgenstein, it makes no sense to say even that the logical atoms exist or do not exist, because you cannot ascribe any properties to them, including being or not being. They simply
provide a structure or framework for the existence or non-existence of complexes. Their configuration is what we can make existence claims about and be correct or incorrect about (see outline of the picture theory above). In his Philosophical Remarks, Wittgenstein says that Tractarian objects are ‘that for which there is neither existence nor non-existence’ (section 36, p. 72), they are the framework that contains the combinatorial possibilities.

In the Theaetetus we are told, similarly, that the primary elements ‘each alone by itself can only be named, and no qualification can be added, neither that it is nor that it is not, for that would at once be adding to it existence or non-existence, whereas we must add nothing to it, if we are to speak of that itself alone’ (202a1-4, Fowler (1987)).

4. Elementary propositions are logically independent

The Tractatus states that elementary propositions are logically independent from one another (2.061). Various combinations of the logical atoms are possible and none can be ruled out a priori (2.225). Objects can combine and recombine to create a variety of different states of affairs, and there is no suggestion that one state of affairs is privileged above others, or primary, or better. The theory of combination is entirely content-neutral and non-teleological (6.37, 6.371, 6.372). Causation is replaced by randomness and probability (6.3, 6.32) – like the world according to Heraclitus or the empiricists who have no Forms or higher-power beyond mere physical objects in flux.

If my interpretation in chapter 1 is correct, then Plato’s discussion of the Dream Theory, and the other two definitions of knowledge, is an illustration of the way the world would be if it were merely a collection of bare perceptibles randomly bumping into one another and sometimes (through no causal rules, just by accident) linking together and sometimes not. In other words, an important part of the picture that Plato is painting is the logical independence of the elementary propositions that the Dream Theory describes. If primary elements are all there is in the world, i.e., if we have no Forms and no higher reason why things are the way they are and why this is good, then we have mere Anaxagorean science,75 Heraclitean flux and Protagorean relativism – just atoms moving in a void, chaotic and unstructured. That is exactly what the Theaetetus is exploring (see chapter 1).

75 See Curd (2019).
Contrast this with the ontology and metaphysics of the *Timaeus*, which tells us not just how things are but why things are, and why things should be as they are, why that is good and best. In the dialogue named after him, Timaeus tells us that there is a higher purpose guiding things and that the demiurge imprints its will through the Forms. We transform belief into knowledge by fitting it into a wider picture showing how it is good for things to be that way. Plato appears to have huge ambitions of his ontology and in the *Theaetetus* is demonstrating to us what happens when you remove access to that ontology. So it is fundamentally important to Socrates’ Dream that the elementary propositions are logically independent, just as it is for the logical atomists.

This is one of the aspects of logical atomism that Plato will firmly reject in the *Sophist* and other Platonic dialogues, but it is important to note that it is a feature of logical atomism that is present in Socrates’ Dream and also in the other definition attempts throughout the *Theaetetus*.

5. Primary elements form the substance of the world

In the *Tractatus*, ‘Objects form the substance of the world’ (2.021). They subsist or persist through space and time, and do not themselves undergo change but account for all the changes that occur in the world by having a form that contains all combinatorial possibilities (2.0123). This underlying substance is what makes the theory meaningful: we want to explain how it is that language can be used to say true or false things about the world.

In the Dream Theory, we are told that the primary elements are that ‘of which we are all else are composed’, i.e., the primary elements are the substance out of which all the things in the world are built.

*Apparent Differences*

As well as the above similarities, it is worth highlighting where there are apparent differences. These could be used to argue that there is a somewhat weaker link between the *Tractatus* and Dream Theory than I have so far suggested. However, when these differences are explored, I will argue that they turn out to be differences in the detail of particular versions of logical atomism rather than deviations from the fundamental principles of logical atomism.
• According to the *Tractatus*, in a fully analysed language, each object has one and only one name, so that names differentiate between objects in the world (3.203). This is a point that is fundamental to Wittgenstein’s logical atomism and yet is not made explicit in the Dream Theory. In the Dream we are told that the primary elements can only be named, not described (as per *Tractatus* 3.26), but it is not clear whether this is, by necessity, a one-off process, or whether multiple names can apply to the same element. There is no indication that the elements are renamed, but the one-to-one correlation is not explicit in the theory. Even if the elements can be renamed, or multiple names given to the same object, this does not mean that the Dream Theory diverges from all versions of logical atomism. Consider Russell’s belief that the only real proper names are ‘this’ and ‘that’ when used to pick out sense-data at different times and places. On either interpretation of the Dream Theory, this is not a departure from the principles of logical atomism or evidence that the Dream Theory is something other than a version of logical atomism.

• For Wittgenstein, ‘Only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning’ (3.3). Meaning has to do with presenting a picture of a state of affairs that we can hold up next to the world to check the truth of, like holding up a portrait next to its sitter (or another person). A tautology lacks meaning because it does not contrast two alternative states of affairs (4.461, see chapter 5 section c). A name also lacks meaning, in this strict sense, because it is not possible for a name to be true or false. This approach is not explicitly present in the Dream Theory. However, it is not inconsistent with the Dream Theory either. The Dream Theory does not explicitly state that the primary elements have meaning in the same way that complexes (sentences) have meaning. The primary elements of the Dream Theory are a totally different type of thing to the complexes they build – this is necessarily the case because they need to explain knowledge without being knowable themselves (and therefore in need of explanation themselves). Complexes carry meaning. Elements are perceptible and the entire dialogue has been an exploration of the difficulties faced by an empiricist trying to show how bare unprocessed perceptibles (exactly like the elements) can be about

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76 In ‘On Denoting’ (1905) Russell suggested that denoting phrases contained both definite descriptions and proper names. Logically proper names are words such as ‘this’ or ‘that’ which refer to sensations of which one is immediately aware (sense data).
something and be meaningful. Arguably once we reach this stage in the dialogue we have reached the stage of accepting that the perceptibles do not themselves have meaning but are the things which comprise meaningful sentences. We certainly cannot say that the perceptibles are ‘bearers of meaning’ or say how they might themselves have meaning, because this would be to ascribe to them a feature or attach something to them – which Socrates says that we are necessarily not able to do.

- For Wittgenstein, the world is the totality of facts not things (1.1). There is no evidence to support the view that Plato or the Theaetetus interlocutors are discussing or promoting this view. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary, because this is a dialogue exploring the definition of knowledge according to empiricists. In this regard, the Dream Theory looks more like Russell’s version of logical atomism than Wittgenstein’s. This is not evidence that the Dream Theory steps away from logical atomism, just evidence that there are different versions of logical atomism and the Dream Theory may deviate from the Tractatus in this regard. This is a point of detail rather than evidence that undermines my interpretation.

- For Wittgenstein, the logical form of propositions (the framework for object-combinations) cannot be set out clearly, only shown. This is because ‘The picture... cannot represent its form of representation’ (2.172), ‘Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it - the logical form. To be able to represent the logical form, we should have to be able to put ourselves with the propositions outside logic, that is outside the world’ (4.12). There is no equivalent problem raised in Socrates’ Dream. The Dream Theory can be set out and discussed in words and at no point do the interlocutors question whether they are able to talk about it properly. In this regard, again, the Dream Theory is more like Russell’s version of logical atomism than Wittgenstein’s. Russell was quite comfortable with the concept of using a meta-language to talk about features of a primary language and so are Plato’s interlocutors. This is not a departure from logical atomism, just a variation.
Wittgenstein’s concatenation and Plato’s interweaving

In the commentary that I have set out above, I have limited my discussion to the nature of Wittgenstein’s Objects and the primary elements of Socrates’ Dream, the logical atoms themselves. Some commentators have instead focused on the way that the logical atoms combine into propositions and knowables, likening Wittgenstein’s concept of concatenation (4.22) to Plato’s interweaving metaphor (202b5) or, the opposing view, suggesting that a lack of similarity between concatenation and interweaving means that the link between the Tractatus and Theaetetus is merely superficial. I will now discuss the merit of comparing these two methods of atomic-combination and will argue that it is separate from the discussion of the atoms themselves and does not undermine my analysis of logical atomism in Socrates’ Dream, as set out above.

In Gaskin’s ‘When Logical Atomism Met the Theaetetus: Ryle on Naming and Saying’, he notes that ‘McDowell follows Ryle in offering a propositional interpretation of the dream, one that aims to bring it into line with some of the main tenets of Russellian and Wittgensteinian logical atomism’ (2013, p. 853). On this interpretation, what Socrates refers to as ‘interweaving’ is equivalent to what Wittgenstein refers to as the propositional structure of a statement – the ‘links of a chain’ (2.03). Gaskin says that this reading suggests that ‘what the dream theorist is trying to achieve, on this view, is the drawing of a distinction between saying, which requires propositional complexity, and mere mentioning, which does not: names merely mention their referents, whereas statements – logoi, the word standardly translated as ‘accounts’ – say something. (See, e.g., Russell 1956, pp. 187-8; Wittgenstein 1922, § 3.14-3.142, 3.144, 3.221.)’ (ibid.). Gaskin says that McDowell (1973, 1982, 1998) and Ryle (1971, 1990) came to this conclusion because they were ‘influenced by a verbal similarity between the dream theory’s treatment of the logos as an interweaving of names and the way the same metaphor is deployed in a passage occurring towards the end of the Sophist (262d3-6)... in which [logos] clearly has to mean something like ‘sentence’’ (ibid.) And, taking the Sophist to be about propositional structure, they worked backwards to assume this was under discussion in the Theaetetus too.

McDowell’s and Ryle’s views, both stemming from a Reading B interpretation of the dialogue as a whole, differ to my interpretation (set out above) because they focus on a particular
aspect of the Dream Theory and *Tractatus*, namely, how primary elements combine, in order to suggest a high or low degree of similarity between the two texts.

I have so far limited my list of points of similarity to those about the primary elements themselves (their nature and how we ‘reach’ them), rather than how they then combine into complexes, because the *Tractatus* has very little to say about the concatenation of names, which Wittgenstein simply says ‘hang one in another’ like ‘links of a chain’ (2.03). Similarly, the *Theaetetus* does not say much about interweaving – we have to wait for the *Sophist* to hear more about this. I will return to this point, about how the elements combine, in later chapters because I will argue that it is an interesting difference between the *Tractatus* and *Sophist*. For now, I will return to exploring Gaskin’s critique of Ryle and McDowell because it illustrates that the similarity or difference between concatenation and interweaving is entirely separate from the question of whether the Dream Theory is a version of logical atomism and whether its primary elements are the same as those in the *Tractatus*.

Gaskin suggests that ‘despite the superficial similarity between the language of the dream and the theory of discourse put forward at the end of the *Sophist*, it is clear on closer examination that the metaphor of interweaving is in fact deployed quite differently by the two dialogues, and that Ryle’s and McDowell’s propositional reading of the dream is, purely as a matter of exegesis, misguided.’ (2013, p. 854). He argues that ‘The dream theorist aims to tell us what knowledge, not meaningful discourse in general, is, and he does so in terms of the formula ‘knowledge is true judgement together with a *logos*. But if *logos* here meant ‘sentence’, that would imply that a true judgement as such was not yet in propositional form, which is absurd, and is in any case explicitly rejected by Socrates in his subsequent discussion of the dream (206d-e).’ (ibid.). Gaskin argues that the ‘account’ that is being added in the Dream Theory cannot be mere propositional form but must be something else, like analysis or definition of the object, and here Gaskin cites Bostock (1988, pp. 207-208) – but notes ‘Oddly, though Bostock rejects the propositional interpretation of the dream, his overall reading of the *Theaetetus* imposes on it the task of addressing the problem of the unity of the proposition (his own solution to which involves following Frege and Russell in according special status to predicates/verbs: pp. 274-279). So in Bostock’s story Ryle is trounced at the tactical level only to return strategically triumphant.’ (Gaskin, 2013, p. 854, footnote 3).
The above paragraph highlights the difficulty of interpreting a particular passage within a particular dialogue within the wider Platonic corpus. I will spend time discussing the link between the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* in chapter 3 because being clear and consistent about the issue of propositional knowledge and the difference between *savoir* and *connaître* is important. It also highlights the fact that the debate about the link between the Dream Theory and *Tractatus* has at times ignored the most fundamental aspect: the primary elements. When the focus shifts to how those elements combine then we lose sight of the similarities between the elements themselves.

Gaskin praises McDowell for highlighting an apparent difficulty with drawing parallels between the Dream Theory and the *Tractatus*:

Now the dream theory, on the [propositional reading] shows awareness of the point that mentioning an individual thing does not constitute saying anything: cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §49. But its author seems to regard the difference between an account and a name as lying fundamentally in the fact that an account consists of several names. Hence we can object as follows. If mentioning an individual thing does not constitute saying anything, mentioning several things, successively, does not constitute saying anything either. That performance might, perhaps, amount to mentioning a single complex thing; but saying something is not the same as mentioning a single complex thing.

(McDowell, 1973, pp. 232-233)

McDowell claims that Plato in the *Theaetetus* fails to distinguish between naming and saying, but claims that the *Tractatus* does achieve this. McDowell thinks that the ‘concatenation’ that Wittgenstein refers to is not just a mere list of names. As Gaskin highlights, McDowell suggests that ‘the fact that the names are concatenated in the way that they are *says that* the corresponding objects are configured in a particular way’ (McDowell, 1973, pp. 233-234). McDowell says that interweaving does not achieve the same result and therefore that ‘the resemblances between the dream theory and the *Tractatus*, though superficially quite striking, are not, ultimately, very important’ (McDowell, 1973, p. 234). In other words, McDowell focuses on a comparison between how the Dream Theory and *Tractatus* form compounds from elements and ignores the similarities between the elements themselves.
McDowell thinks that Plato corrects the mistake in the \textit{Sophist}, whereas Ryle, when he makes the comparison between the Dream Theory and the \textit{Tractatus}, seems to think that Plato has already implicitly introduced the distinction (between mentioning several things and saying something) in the \textit{Theaetetus} (see Ryle (1990, pp. 25-28). Burnyeat (1990, p. 155) makes the following interesting remark: ‘Plato’s terminology in the \textit{Sophist} (261d-262a) distinguishes \textit{onoma} (name or noun) from \textit{rhema} (predicate or verb)... The definition of account at \textit{Theaetetus} 202b uses \textit{onoma}, but Ryle is entitled to take the word in its generic sense, which covers any kind of term’, justifying Ryle’s claim. No justification is provided for this and it seems that a close examination of the original text counts against this interpretation. Furthermore, neither McDowell nor Ryle seem to question whether the distinction is particularly well explained in the \textit{Tractatus}. It is not. Gaskin rightly points out that McDowell and Ryle both get rather carried away in their comparison of the two theories given that ‘Wittgenstein says no more about the relation of concatenation than the dream theorist says about his weaving image... Both accounts remain at an essentially metaphorical level’ (2013, p. 856).

The progress made in the \textit{Sophist} discussion of interweaving is to recognize that all words do not have the same grammatical function, whereas in both the Dream and the \textit{Tractatus} words are presumed to have the same basic grammatical function: naming. Neither the Dream nor the \textit{Tractatus} provide us with any detail about how these names connect up beyond being a mere list. It is simply missing.

McDowell is therefore too quick to conclude that the resemblance between the Dream Theory and \textit{Tractatus} is unimportant. In subsequent chapters of this thesis I hope to show how the similarity is very important – because Plato accepts and develops an interesting version of logical atomism in the \textit{Sophist} which solves some of the problems of the \textit{Theaetetus} and we can explore why Wittgenstein rejected such developments.

I have shown that there are a number of striking parallels between the Dream Theory and \textit{Tractatus}, and argued that this is because they both set out fundamental principles of logical atomism. My argument does not rely on drawing a comparison between concatenation and interweaving; my argument focuses solely on the nature of the Objects and primary elements themselves, rather than how they combine, which I have shown to be a secondary issue.
I will now move on to discuss Plato’s treatment of the principles of logical atomism within the Dream and show that he appears to accept some of the principles of logical atomism and hints at how they will be developed further in the *Sophist*.

**c. Plato’s verdict**

As a reminder, from part (a) of this chapter, here are the set of principles which I consider make up the Dream Theory (from 201d9-202b7) and which are used to flesh-out Theaetetus’ third definition of knowledge immediately following its presentation:

1. There exist primary elements
2. It is of these primary elements that we and everything else are composed
3. The primary elements have no account (*logos*)
4. The primary elements can only be named
5. It is not possible to say anything about the primary elements. It is not even possible to say that they are or are not. We cannot ‘attach’ anything to them.
6. The things composed of the primary elements are composed by a method of weaving together
7. The primary elements are unknowable
8. The primary elements are perceivable

Contrary to the views expressed in much of the secondary literature, I will argue that Plato does not reject the Dream Theory in its entirety. Some aspects of the theory (as outlined above) are accepted, and we can see them discussed again and developed in the *Sophist*, the dialogue set the following day. Once we accept the addition of structuring elements, which are introduced in the *Sophist*, alongside the elements of the original Dream (that were lacking structure), the problems of false belief that are discussed in the *Theaetetus* are revealed as mistakes about either the logical interrelations of the Greatest Kinds, or about the links between these and our perceptions of objects (see also Chappell (2005, pp. 168-169)).

Theaetetus’ third definition, and Socrates’ development of it, is criticised in the same way as the others are: it attempts to explain knowledge with reference to non-knowable perceptibles – several commentators have highlighted and discussed the consequences of the ‘knowledge must be based on knowledge’ principle, e.g., Fine (1979(b)). Plato demonstrates to the reader
that it is absurd to simultaneously hold the following beliefs: (i) knowledge must be based on knowledge, and (ii) objects are unknowable, and (iii) our knowledge is built from objects (and nothing else). As a result, some accounts imply or state that Plato rejects the theory being discussed, e.g., Burnyeat’s ‘The Material and Sources of Plato’s Dream’ ends by commenting that ‘the consequence [is] that he is committed to the unknowability of any indefinable that remain over after his defining is done. The Dream accepts the commitment, and is refuted.’ (Burnyeat, 1970, p. 122, my italics). Bostock concludes his explanation of the Dream Theory passage as follows: ‘Two separate arguments are offered in refutation of the theory... to confirm his result Socrates adds another... Finally he claims that yet other disproofs of the theory would be available’ (Bostock, 1988, p. 211, my italics). However, the demonstration of the ‘knowledge must be based on knowledge’ principles does not mean that we can conclude that Plato rejected Theaetetus’ third definition or that Plato rejected all aspects of the Dream Theory or logical atomism.

Although the definition is criticised, several positive points come out of the discussion and it is left far from refuted.

First, Socrates never rejects the possibility that knowledge is true belief plus logos, he just rejects a few of the many possible accounts of logos. It is clear from the outset that the three possible accounts of logos that are discussed in detail are not meant to be an exhaustive list – not least because a fourth option has already been mentioned before the Dream was originally discussed (at 201c9). Notably, the dialogue does not address the definition that is familiar to us from other Platonic dialogues; we cannot conclude that the rejection of three possible variations is equivalent to rejection of all possible variations since that would imply that Plato has forgotten about the Meno, Republic and other dialogues discussing this version – before remembering again in subsequent dialogues.

Second, Plato does not reject the concept of explaining wholes (compounds) with reference to their parts (elements). There is a brief discussion by the interlocutors about what the relationship is between wholes and parts, but no rejection by Plato of the basic concept that one can divide complex things into simpler elements, or that we then structure our interaction with the world by building back up to complexes. The idea of analysing through dividing into smaller parts is similar to the method of collection and division that we see in action in the first part of the Sophist – we have a large categories of things that we gradually
break down into smaller subsets until we reach the final analysis, where we cannot divide any longer, and so we discover the essence of what we were seeking. This reinforces the view that analysis into smaller parts is the way to understand a thing.

There is also no rejection of the concept that ‘we and everything else’ are composed of the same sort of parts. The critique does not proceed along the lines of: ‘this theory cannot possibly be true because it suggests that the elements that make up me and you are the same sort of elements that make up that tree and that chair, whereas I am made of fundamentally different stuff from a tree’. The generalised, universal nature of the elements appears to be accepted.

The interlocutors do not question that the way that elements form compounds is through interweaving. Interweaving, originally mentioned in the Theaetetus at 202b5 (see earlier footnote), is described in more detail in the Sophist (240c2) when the topic is discussed again. The Theaetetus cannot give any details about interweaving because the primary elements of the Dream Theory are so simple that it is difficult to see how they combine, whereas in the Sophist we have two different types of primary elements that are differently shaped and they combine by fitting together (see chapter 4). That development requires Platonist metaphysics alongside the Dream Theory and a rejection of empiricism. But, far from showing that Plato rejected the Dream Theory, it is further evidence that he accepted some of the principles contained within it. The Sophist solution does not replace the Dream Theory, it adds to it.

Throughout the Dream Theory discussion, the interlocutors also maintain the underlying assumption that the role of language is to describe the world and that there is some relationship between our words and the things that they purport to designate which is the reason why our statements are either true or false. This, again, is taken forwards and clarified in the Sophist. It is in the Sophist that we are finally able to explain how it is that false statements are false. In the Theaetetus we were testing out how falsehood could occur with simplistic empiricist assumptions, and then in the Sophist we introduce the subject-predicate distinction and rules of combination (‘at least one subject with at least one predicate’) and we see that falsehood is simply attaching to a subject some predicate which it does not actually have (see chapter 4). Although there is an acknowledgement that not all words function in the same way (i.e., as names), there is no suggestion that not all language is
descriptive.\textsuperscript{77} We maintain the idea, shared with Wittgenstein, that language allows us to accurately say things about the world.

The interlocutors are also making significant progress when trying out alternative ways of developing the theory, and in ways that presuppose the acceptance of the idea that there are smallest parts (elements or atoms) that combine in certain ways to create things capable of being knowledge, for example, as I indicated in section (a) of this chapter:

- We already have the idea of a compound syllable ‘SO’ comprised of elementary letters ‘S’ and ‘O’ (203c8). Note that one of these letters is a vowel and the other is a consonant – i.e., two \textit{different types of atom}. This turns out to be an important step towards the correct solution in the \textit{Sophist} (see chapter 4 for further discussion).

- We already have the distinction between verbs and names (206d2-3) which looks like a step towards the eventual solution in the \textit{Sophist} (262a). The interlocutors do not have the metaphysical tools at their disposal to do much with this distinction at this stage, or to see how this distinction helps them, however this is the second time that we see the interlocutors attempt to find a solution by introducing a \textit{distinction of types} to explain how it is that some element-combinations work while other element-combinations do not.

- We have a reference to grammar and the need for a set of structuring rules or framework (207b2-3), which, again, foreshadows the solution in the \textit{Sophist}, where we do not reject the logical atomist picture at all, rather, we adapt it with the introduction of transcendental structuring elements (the Greatest Kinds) – which we are able to do because we are freed from empiricist assumptions and are guided by the visitor from Elea (see chapter 3).

- The final attempt at explaining \textit{logos} references \textit{otherness} and \textit{distinguishing things}, which hints at an appreciation of the need for uniqueness of reference (so that I can distinguish one thing from another) and is a step closer towards the solution in the \textit{Sophist}, where ‘not-being’ is demystified and said to just be difference or otherness.

\textsuperscript{77} See footnote 71 regarding the \textit{Philosophical Investigations} – although the \textit{Sophist} suggests that words function in different ways, not just naming but also describing, the interlocutors do not reject the concept that the function of language is to describe the world in the same way that later Wittgenstein does.
If we now return to assess the original list of eight principles that comprise the Dream Theory, we can see that, although the theory as a whole does not work, some of the eight do appear to survive the critique. This allows us to locate the issue with the theory in one of the principles that does not survive, i.e., in the following:

4. the primary elements can only be named
5. it is not possible to say anything about the elements i.e. it is not possible to attach any features to them (like ‘being’ or shape)
7. the primary elements are, of necessity, all unknowable
8. the primary elements are, of necessity, all perceivable

It is precisely these principles that we see amended in the Sophist.

The version of logical atomism presented in the Dream Theory passage of the Theaetetus is one where we gain knowledge of complexes by perceiving the elements that make up those complexes. The interlocutors’ critique shows that this is absurd and unhelpful. That does not mean that Plato rejects any and all versions of logical atomism or that we are done with the Dream Theory at the end of the Theaetetus. Rather, we are shown the absurd consequences of maintaining statements 4, 5, 7 and 8 in their original, unamended form – and invited to revise them the following day.

I have demonstrated that, throughout the discussion of the Dream Theory, Plato appears to be highlighting to the reader that there are many options for developing the basic Dream Theory into a more nuanced and successful theory, but that these are unavailable to the interlocutors because of the underlying empiricist principles that they have adopted within the context of this particular dialogue.

The final line of the dialogue – ‘let us meet here again in the morning’ is Plato sign-posting that some of the aspects of the theory just discussed are worthy of being explored again. The dialogue where the discussion is continued, the Sophist, begins ‘According to our yesterday’s agreement...’ and the interlocutors pick up where they left off but with a new metaphysics at their disposal – the presence of the visitor from Elea marks the end of the empiricist restrictions.
In chapter 2, I have established that Plato’s Dream Theory contains a version of logical atomism that is similar to Wittgenstein’s Tractarian logical atomism, and I have shown that Plato accepted some aspects of the theory and that the dialogue ends without the theory being rejected by Plato, as some in the secondary literature have claimed. I have also suggested that in the *Theaetetus* Plato is already hinting at the solution that is contained in the dialogue set the following day – the *Sophist*. In chapter 3 I will discuss this interpretation of the link between the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. 
Chapter 3. Logical atomism developed in the *Sophist*

The *Theaetetus* ends with hints that some aspects of logical atomism have unexplored potential and might be developed in a future discussion. Plato’s interlocutors are unable to make the theory work with the empiricist grounding that Theaetetus and Theodorus bring to the discussion. The next day, however, the discussion resumes with the addition of a new interlocutor, who is decidedly not empiricist and who is therefore able to take the theory in a different direction. It is developed into a more complex theory that I will argue helps to resolve the difficulties that the interlocutors were not able to resolve in the *Theaetetus*.

My interpretation relies on establishing a strong link between the two dialogues: that the one is a continuation of the other, almost two parts of the same dialogue, such that my interpretation of the one will inevitably be tied to my interpretation of the other – and suggests that Plato already had the *Sophist* solution in mind when writing the *Theaetetus*.

It also presupposes that the Plato who wrote these two dialogues was a competent philosopher who was confident about a positive proposal – and was a Platonist.

Some of the secondary literature denies these claims, suggesting a weaker link between the two or suggesting that Plato was confused and therefore exploring alternatives to Forms in one or both of the dialogues. In fact, some have accused Plato of making very rudimentary errors of logic in the *Sophist* (e.g., Owen (1999) and Bostock (1988)). These interpretations of the *Sophist* preclude my interpretation of both dialogues, so I will address this now and establish that the *Sophist* expertly develops a complex version of logical atomism by stepping away from the empiricist foundations of the *Theaetetus*.

In subsequent chapters I will go on to show that the *Sophist* takes us away from the Tractarian version of logical atomism and towards a more Fregean-version.

**a. The *Sophist* as a continuation of the *Theaetetus***

I will start by introducing the *Sophist* and drawing out some connections between the *Sophist* and *Theaetetus*.

The dialogue is set the day after the *Theaetetus*. The characters of the *Theaetetus* bring a visitor from Elea – Parmenides’ home town – to join them and continue the discussion of the
previous day. The method of collection and division is used to define a sophist as someone who makes false statements look like true ones, which the visitor says is problematic because Parmenides taught that you cannot have false statements (237a-b). Statements are about something; if true then they are about something that is, and if false then about something that is not; clearly ‘not being’ cannot exist, else it would be ‘being’ (237c-d, 238e9-239a1). A discussion about non-being follows, starting with the assumption that ‘not’ is the polar-opposite of the item being negated, and that ‘not-being’ is therefore full of contradiction and difficulty (240c1-5).

The interlocutors agree that sophists would use contradictions to argue against the proposed definition. Remembering that Parmenides originally formulated contradictions and used them to argue for all sorts of strange conclusions, we can see that perhaps Plato is prompting the reader to question whether Parmenides himself is a sophist.

The Eleatic visitor comments that ‘all those who teach that things combine at one time and separate at another, whether infinite elements combine in unity and are derived from unity or finite elements separate and then unite, regardless of whether they say that these changes take place successively or without interruption, would be talking nonsense in all these doctrines, if there is no intermingling’ (252b, Fowler (1987)). I.e., all those who believe that there are primary elements which combine and recombine need to be able to explain how the combinations, or structuring, occur. This is precisely the difficulty with the original Dream Theory of the Theaetetus.

The visitor says that either all things mingle with all other things, or none mingle with any others, or some mingle with some others but not all. The first two options are obviously false, therefore the third option should be explored (252e1-3). The third option is not possible on

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78 This definition is reached only after identifying six other ways of applying divisions, 221c-231b. Vlastis (2021) highlights parallels with other dialogues where interlocutors struggle with the method of division (including the Phaedrus, Statesman, and Philebus) and presents the Sophist as being consistent with these but offering a more ‘subtle’ variation on the types of mistakes that can occur with the method of division (2021, p. 26). Vlastis concludes that the dialogue may show that Plato is trying to convey that ‘not all divisions get at relations of essential predication [but] this was what we wanted from division’ (2021, p. 28) so we must rule out problematic divisions (as is done in the Statesman – ‘while the Sophist investigates division generally... the Statesman starts to articulate norms for scientific divisions’ (ibid.)).

79 Plato also has the Eleatic visitor say that it is ‘rather ridiculous to assert that two names exist when you assert that nothing exists but unity’ (244c7-8, Fowler (1987)).
the Dream Theory account, because, on that account, the elements were said to be
categoryless and therefore indistinguishable, so it is impossible that some should be able to
combine but not others — they must all behave in the same way by definition. This same
reasoning applies to the Objects of the *Tractatus* (see chapter 5 section b).

The interlocutors leap straight into the discussion using the same analogy as the Dream
Theory discussion: letters making syllables. However, this time, they immediately spot that
only certain *types* of letters can combine with other types and that the rules that constrain
combination possibilities is called ‘grammar’ (253a3-b1). The same applies to music, and the
fact that there are certain classes or genera that comingle (or not) according to some rules
reveals that there are higher-level structures (that structure the structures) (253b5-9) — and
investigating these is said to be the role of the philosopher (253c5-d3). The philosopher is
contrasted with the sophist, and Plato also appears to reference the empiricist here to
contrast with the philosopher: ‘The sophist runs away into the darkness of not-bring, *feeling*
his way in it by practice’ (254a4-5, Fowler (1987)).

And so, the Eleatic visitor introduces the ‘Greatest Kinds’, which are the transcendental
structuring elements that provide the power to link particulars and Forms together (253d4-
e3). The five Greatest Kinds are Being, Sameness (or identity), Difference, Rest and Change.

With the application of these concepts, we can make sense of non-being. Plato’s strategy is
to make ‘not being’ something other than the opposite of ‘being’, so that the Parmenidean
contradictions are shown to be only *apparent* contradictions. By introducing Difference, or
Otherness, Plato finds a way around the contradictions.

Change and Rest are distinguished from one another and from Being (255a-b): Change and
Rest, being opposites, do not mix with each other, but both *are*, i.e., both exist. So they must
both partake in Being. Being must be distinct from them because, whilst both of them have
Being, if Being were the same as either of them, then, when Being is applied to the other, that
other would partake in its opposite, which is not possible (255c). The visitor then goes through
similar arguments to show that Sameness and Difference are distinct from each other and
from Change and Rest. He also shows that Being is distinct from Sameness by arguing that, if
they were identical to one another, then when we say that, e.g., Change and Rest both *are*,
i.e., both exist, we would be able to swap in ‘the same’ for ‘are’ and then two opposites would
be classed as the same as one another — but this is not possible.
Difference is distinguished from Being at 255d-e: here we learn that Difference is a distinct thing from Being because things are said to be different in relation to other things whereas Being is both itself by itself and relative to other things. At 256d we see that, given that all the forms (except Being, if it is a Form) differ from Being itself, it will be true of all Forms that they are not-being just as much, if not more, than they are Being – i.e., the form of beauty is in the sense that it exists and is unqualifiedly beautiful, but that means it is not ugly or just or pious or any other form, so it is not a lot of things.

Not-being is equated to Difference, and ‘we shall not agree then, when the negation of something is said to signify its opposite. We shall agree only that when words for ‘not’ are applied they mean something different than the terms that follow them; or rather, that they mean something different than the things for which the terms uttered after the negation are terms.’ (257b9-c3). I.e., when we say ‘not black’ we do not mean ‘white’, we might mean ‘green’ or ‘blue’ instead. In the same way, Change is both the same (i.e., as itself) and not the same (since it is a distinct thing from Sameness). This seems like a contradiction, but it is only an apparent contradiction (256d5).

We can distinguish different uses of ‘is’ across these few Stephanus pages: the existential ‘is’ (as in ‘Change is’ meaning ‘Change exists’); the ‘is’ of predication (‘Change is different’); and the ‘is’ of identity (‘Change is Change, and is not Sameness’). The ambiguity could be the source of the apparent contradiction. However, Denyer (1991, pp. 130-137) argues that Plato’s own reason for the fact that there is no real contradiction is this: when we call something ‘the same’, we say this because of its participation in Sameness with respect to itself, and when we call it ‘not the same’, this is because of its combination with Difference. The ambiguity is not located in the different uses of ‘is’, but in the role played by Sameness and Difference. The Sophist solution is that it is the very nature of the Same and the Different that allows for falsehood.

Denyer argues that, although modern philosophers would distinguish the ‘is’ of identity (‘Cicero is Tully’) and ‘is’ of predication (‘Cicero is an orator’), Plato would have seen this as a distinction between a general term and a specific term to the right of ‘is’: ‘‘Is’ is not rendered ambiguous for the same reason ‘chased’ is not in ‘Sally chased Amy’ and ‘Sally chased a cat’.’ (1991, p. 135). When, at 256a10-11, we hear that ‘we did not speak unambiguously when we
called it ‘the same’ and ‘not the same’; there is a plausible explanation without having to make the distinction between the different uses of ‘is’. We can identify the ambiguity as being inherently present in the term to the right of ‘is’.

If this is the case, then not-being is explained in the following way: when we negate a sentence, for instance ‘Socrates is Cicero’, we have a new term to the right of the ‘is’: ‘not Cicero’. This could be construed as a specific term (an entity not-Cicero), or could be taken, more generally, to mean ‘someone different from Cicero’. In this case, it is obvious that we require the latter; however, in the case of ‘change is not the same’, which the Eleatic visitor considered earlier, there was an ambiguity over whether ‘the same’ referred to one of the five Greatest Kinds in a singular way or as a general term for the group of things that happened to all be the same as one another. ‘Change is not the same’ will be true when taken as the former, as referring to one of the Greatest Kinds.

On this interpretation, the emphasis is back on not-being defined as Difference rather than the opposite of Being.

Once the metaphysics of non-being is understood, the discussion moves on to how false statements are constructed. During an earlier part of the Sophist there is a passage about the Late Learners, who think that the good can be called ‘good’ and man can be called ‘man’ but that we cannot say that a man is good because man is man, only, and good is good, only (251b-c). When we come to the end of the discussion on false statements, we are told that these Late Learners were confused because they thought that all speaking was naming, hence the one-to-one correlation of names with objects, but there is actually description as well. Given their assumption, it is not possible to talk about non-being, but it is also not possible to talk about anything else. The puzzles of non-being and Greatest Kinds are discussed and then we return to the question of how statements are put together, pausing in between to summarise the progress made in refuting Parmenides (258c9-260b2).

The interlocutors discover that a statement is, at a minimum, a name combined with a descriptive word, e.g., ‘Theaetetus sits’, and an understanding of this structure, or the set of rules of combination, is the logos that the interlocutors had been seeking the previous day. A statement cannot be a string of names or a string of descriptive words; rather there are verbs which say what actions are taking place and names which tell us who or what is acting (261-
To be about something is only a necessary condition of making a statement, not sufficient, i.e., there must be a name which refers to something and, in addition, the name must be combined with a verb. The interlocutors have finally solved the problems of false belief that were covered in the *Theaetetus* (187-201) and worked through further in the *Sophist* (240-260) by introducing structure and differently-functioning primary elements.

True *logoi* weave names and verbs in a manner that is with reference to the subject – so ‘Theaetetus sits’ will be true when it says how Theaetetus actually is. False *logoi* are *logoi* still, but they do not say how the thing actually is, so ‘Theaetetus flies’ is false either because the name fails to pick out the subject or because the statement asserts a predicate ascribing something that is different to what is actually the case in the world.

There is an element of *identity* in the theory, since we use words to go proxy for the things we are talking about (so there must be a suitable relation between the word we are using and the item we are trying to pick out); and an element of *correspondence*, since, once we have a picture of how the things are arranged, we compare that picture with the real world to see whether we have said something true or not. The *logos* is true if and only if the linguistic items are woven together in the same way as the items in the world that those linguistic items are representing are woven together.

Although Plato introduces a distinction between names and verbs, both are said to ‘designate’ (261e5). The difference between them is a difference in the type of thing that they designate (262a4-7). In other words, Plato has taken forwards the idea of logical atoms or elements, which play the role of designating things in the world, from the *Theaetetus*, but has now introduced a second type of designating item. One type of element is the type of thing that I pick out when I use a name (as originally proposed in the *Theaetetus*), and the other type of element is the thing that I pick out when I ascribe a property. We know that they are both the same in respect of both still being *primary elements*:

Plato speaks of both names and verbs as ‘designating’ items of reality. Thus the word *deloma* is used for them both at 261e5. Likewise a name is called a *sêmeion* at 262a6, and at 262b6 verbs are said to *sêmainein*. Both names and verbs have the same semantic task, that of designating. They differ only in what they designate: while verbs
designate actions, names designate objects that do actions (262a4-7). This is incorrect. The difference between names and verbs is far greater than any that Plato allows.

(Denyer, 1991, p. 164)

Denyer suggests that the difference between names and verbs is much more significant: if an object that is named does not exist then the name has no function or contribution to meaning, whereas if a verb is not true of an object then it is still valid to say that it is false of that object. The ‘difference’ account of negation only seems to work for verbs, not names, because of this underlying structural difference (Denyer, 1991, p. 176).

Denyer illustrates his point with what he calls a ‘Replaceability test’. If we take the sentence ‘Fido purrs’, we can say ‘The object designated by the name ‘Fido’ purrs’ but we cannot say ‘Fido the action designated by the verb ‘purrs’’. In order to make the latter work, we would have to insert a verb like ‘performs’, but then ‘performs’ cannot be said to designate an action (performance) or we would have to slot in another verb.

Denyer suggests names designate and verbs are true (or false) of objects, i.e., they function in totally different ways.

Frege wished to maintain that just as a proper name refers to an object, a predicate also refers to something. He realised that predicates do not refer to objects, and so suggested they refer to concepts instead. He was thus led to investigate the concept to which the predicate ‘is a horse’ refers. What was this concept? The concept horse? 

No. For ‘the concept horse’ is not a predicate, but a proper name; and so what it stands for is not a concept after all, but an object. ‘The concept horse’, Frege found himself forced to say ‘is not a concept.’ Frege’s difficulty is also Plato’s. Once we try to specify the actions that verbs designate, we find ourselves using such phrases as ‘the action designated by the verb ‘purrs’’. But that is a complex noun phrase not a verb.

(Denyer, 1991, p. 167)\(^8\)

\(^8\) Denyer highlights that various attempts to resolve this difficulty have failed, e.g., Dummett’s attempt does not succeed because it changes the thesis that it is supposed to defend (Denyer points us to Dummett’s *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (1973, pp. 211-219)). See also Geach (1980(a), pp. 49-52).
I will explore the parallel with Frege in more detail later in this thesis, because I agree that the developments presented in the *Sophist* transforms the Tractarian-like Dream of the *Theaetetus* into a more Fregean theory. For now, it is sufficient to note that Plato and Frege are both testing out ways of introducing different types of logical atom rather than keeping a simplistic model where all words function in exactly the same way, as per Socrates’ Dream and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Plato is satisfied with some aspects of the original, basic version of logical atomism but is adapting it into a new theory by introducing distinctions among the primary elements.

I have shown that the *Sophist* can be read as developing the ideas that were first presented in the Dream Theory of the *Theaetetus*, resolving the difficulties that the interlocutors faced when trying to explain false belief. But it is important to emphasise that the continuation between the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* goes beyond the continuation of Socrates’ Dream and the latter part of the *Sophist* (on names and verbs, from 261 onwards). It also continues lines of argument found earlier in the *Theaetetus*, e.g., relating the puzzles of false belief.

Sedley argues that ‘in part II of the dialogue [Plato] will show us what are the Socratic insights that bear on the question, and hint at how they foreshadow his own definitive solution in the *Sophist.*’ (2004, p. 119). Sedley argues the puzzles of false belief bring us ‘close to Plato’s definitive solution in the *Sophist* but fail for lack of an adequate grounding in metaphysics’ (2004, p. 118). Even in part I of the *Theaetetus*, the problem that ‘it is impossible to believe what-is-not’ (from part II) ‘has already been put verbatim into Protagoras’ mouth [in part I of the dialogue (167a7-8)]. This fact gives part II of the dialogue a much closer continuity with part I than is generally recognized by modern scholarship’ (2004, p. 119). I.e., there is continuity all the way from the very beginning of the *Theaetetus*, through to the Socrates’ Dream passage and into the *Sophist*.

For example, consider the puzzle of being and not being, at 188c10-189b9 of the *Theaetetus*. The eventual solution within the *Sophist* involves two main developments:

1. The introduction of the subject-predicate distinction: I can speak falsely by attaching, or trying to attach, a predicate to a subject that does not actually have that predicate among its predicates (see chapter 4).
2. What Sedley calls ‘demystifying’ what-is-not by making it equivalent to what-is-other (Sedley, 2004, p. 127). I.e. being other than x does not preclude being y or z (and therefore existing) instead.

Sedley points out that, with respect to the second of these developments, Plato is already hinting, within the *Theaetetus*, at the eventual solution that is reached in the *Sophist* because in the *Theaetetus* ‘Socrates takes great care to stress that knowing and not knowing are mutually exclusive, but when he moves on to discuss being and not being he makes no such observation – a possible nod to the fact that it is possible to apply both ‘is’ and ‘is not’ to everything’ (2004, p. 127), and Socrates’ response to the being-and-not-being puzzle ‘turns precisely on the reinterpretation of not-being as some kind of otherness’ (ibid.).

‘Socrates’ new idea for a solution – ‘other judging’ (189b10-191a5) – seems to be prompted by a casual-sounding but highly significant phraseology which he has just used in finally rejecting the not-being account of false belief (189b4-6): ‘Then holding false beliefs is something other than believing things which are not’ (ibid., my italics).

Sedley points out that ‘other-judging’ ends up containing almost all of the ingredients of the successful solution in the *Sophist*, for example:

- belief as internal discourse
- this discourse involving linking one linguistic item to another
- both of these items being ‘that which is’
- falsehood being the linking or attaching to things which are other than what belongs to the subject in question

Part II of the *Theaetetus* fails where the *Sophist* succeeds and the key difference between the two is the metaphysical discussion of Greatest Kinds and the ontology that Plato builds that is unavailable to the interlocutors in the *Theaetetus* because of the empiricist assumptions at play (see chapter 1). The key move is to see that, when we link linguistic items, we must take one from the first type or category of things (names) and another from the second category (verbs). These types of vocal indication represent different types of primary element in the world. Plato has at his disposal a complex ontology of particulars and, importantly, Kinds or Forms.
‘Theaetetus flies’ ends up being a false belief because words mirror the world and there are
different categories, or types, of thing in the world so there must be different types of word
too. The Sophist solution takes aspects of the Theaetetus solution and builds on it.

Sedley also argues that the Aviary discussion hints at what is to come in the Sophist. The Aviary
‘emphasizes taxonomy as vital to the assimilation and proper use of knowledge’, for example,
some birds are organised into flocks, some large and others small, and some fly singly in
amongst the others (2004, p. 143). This is a precursor to the method of collection and division
in the beginning of the Sophist.

Sedley notes that the birds that fly singly and weave in and out of all the flocks (197d9-10)
‘sound as if they correspond to the group of topic-neutral concepts already picked out at the
end of part I (185a8-186b6), exemplified by being, otherness, sameness, oppositeness, and
similarity.’ (ibid.). These are the forerunners of the Greatest Kinds, which form the basis of
the solution to the puzzles in the Sophist. There was no way for Socrates, Theodorus and
Theaetetus to make use of these kinds or categories in the Theaetetus without stepping away
from their empiricist assumptions and introducing Platonist metaphysics, as per the Sophist.

Sedley’s interpretation of the Theaetetus acknowledges the complexity and multi-layered
quality of the dialogue. Whilst one can interpret the Theaetetus as Plato playing out his own
confusions with the topics at hand, and interpret the Sophist as Plato setting out solutions
that he was unaware of or that were underdeveloped in the Theaetetus, it is more credible
to suppose that Plato is contrasting the difficulties and solutions available to us on the basis
of an empiricist, atomist, materialist account without Platonic metaphysics, with the
difficulties and solutions available to us once we develop the Platonic metaphysics. It is
credible to think that Plato is hinting at possible solutions in the Theaetetus and showing that
they cannot be developed to their full potential without the underpinning metaphysics of the
Sophist.

On this interpretation, Plato is sure-footed throughout the Theaetetus and Sophist, and is
exploring different angles of the falsity problem, empiricism, atomism, being and non-being,
and other topics. He is already aware of the solution in the Sophist at the time of writing the
Theaetetus. This contrasts with an interpretation that is fairly commonplace in the secondary
literature: that Plato is expressing genuine confusion in the Theaetetus. For example, that the
‘knowing and not knowing’ puzzle (188a1-c9) – that you cannot judge falsely that A is B, whether you know A, B, both or neither – demonstrates that Plato is accidentally, or in the style of a sophist, equating knowledge of a thing with omniscience about it. It is fairly commonly supposed that Plato is conflating knowledge by acquaintance with propositional knowledge, perhaps because he is misled by the Greek formulation, ‘I know x, what it is’, which lacks a sharp distinction between these two. However, this does not seem to ring true once we start to notice the various areas in which the Theaetetus foreshadows the Sophist solution, and when we consider Denyer’s comment about placing ambiguity in the term to the right-hand-side of ‘is’ rather than in ‘is’ itself. Sedley argues that a strong case can be made for extending the first puzzle of false belief to (mis)predications as well (mis)identifications (2004, pp. 123-124). He starts by running the argument in its original form, noting that Plato would have us believe that you cannot believe that Anaxagoras is Protagoras because for each to feature in your thoughts you must know who he is (so you know Anaxagoras is Anaxagoras not Protagoras). Sedley then suggests rerunning the argument after replacing the name ‘Protagoras’ with a suitable description such as ‘the author whose book began ‘Man is the measure…’’ and points out, following the same logic as before, you cannot believe that Anaxagoras is the author whose book began ‘Man is the measure…’ because that would involve either a failure to distinguish the two people involved or a failure to distinguish the author whose book began ‘Man is the measure…’ from the author whose book began ‘All things were together…’, i.e. the same type of mistake can occur in two ways – but it is fundamentally the same type of mistake. The argument works for predication statements for the same underlying reason that it works for identification statements.

Both identifications and predications take the form ‘x is y’ and there is minimal evidence that early-mid Plato made a sharp distinction between the different senses of ‘is’. We can either conclude that Plato mistook the one for the other (within the very passage of dialogue where other-thinking is shown to be ridiculous – more than a hint of irony here) or we can conclude that Plato judged that false identifications and false predications to be of roughly the same type of sentence.

Since Plato presents the puzzle as being about false belief in general, we can suppose that either ‘(1) Plato failed to notice that false predications are invulnerable to it, or (2) Plato had reason to think that they are not invulnerable to it’ (ibid.). When we come to other-judging
and the Wax Tablet, we see that Socrates has considered false predication (because of the examples that he uses – e.g., ugly vs beautiful), so the second option simply must be the case.

Sedley suggests that we consider that ‘Theodorus cannot (at 143e8) have believed that Theaetetus was ugly, because, given that Theaetetus was actually beautiful (185e3-5: true beauty belongs to the soul, not the body), Theodorus was failing to distinguish ugly from beautiful; in which case, it follows that he did not know what ugly is, so was not thinking of ugly at all.’ (2004, p. 124). This picks out ‘ugly’ and ‘beautiful’ as though they were ‘things of which it can be said to be either true or false that someone knows that they are’ (2004, p. 125). In Greek this is done by the phrasing, ‘the ugly’ and ‘the good’. So we can consider the puzzle and potential solutions as applying equally well to predicative or identificatory cases.

Sedley emphasises this because ‘That predicative as well as identificatory judgements have turned out to be included, both in the puzzle and in the candidate solutions, is of great importance... [since] one leading aim of part II is to exhibit the extent of Socrates’ contribution to the eventual successful resolution of the falsity problem,’ i.e., in the Sophist where we explain all kinds of falsity, including predicative – by the introduction of the subject-predicate distinction.

I agree with Sedley that the Sophist follows on from the Theaetetus as a whole, not just from the Dream Theory. This interpretation of the Sophist helps us to make sense of parts I and II of the Theaetetus, and shows that the two dialogues go hand-in-hand.

Some commentators disagree with this interpretation and insist that Plato has simply failed to notice the distinction between different types of ‘is’ – in both the Theaetetus and Sophist. If this were the case then it would undermine my overall conclusion, so I will now discuss this alternative interpretation.

b. ‘Is’ in the Sophist

Whether Plato was confused by the different uses of ‘is’ is important because it impacts how one interprets the Sophist and therefore has the potential to undermine my interpretation of the Theaetetus. For example, Owen and Bostock argue strongly that Plato is confused when writing the Sophist and that the dialogue is full of rudimentary logical errors stemming from Plato’s lack of understanding of the different uses of ‘is’ (existence, identity, and predication).
If they are correct, then it suggests that my interpretation of both the *Sophist* and, therefore also the *Theaetetus*, is wrong. I will address this concern here by refuting their claims and discussing an alternative suggestion from Brown. I aim to show that, far from being confused, Plato is expertly navigating the topics under discussion.

**Owen’s ‘Plato on Not-Being’**

Owen begins his paper by introducing the notion of ‘to be’:

> The verb in its first use signifies ‘to exist’ (for which Greek in Plato’s day had no separate word) or else in Greek but only in translators’ English ‘to be real’ or ‘to be the case’ or ‘to be true’, these senses being all reducible to the notion of the existence of some object or state of affairs; while in its second use it is demoted to a subject-predicate copula (under which we can here include the verbal auxiliary) or to an identity sign. Plato’s major explorations of being and not-being are exercises in the complete or ‘existential’ use of the verb. And, lest his arguments should seem liable to confusion by this versatile word, in the *Sophist* he marks off the first use from the verb’s other use or uses...

(Owen, 1999, pp. 416-417)

All of Owen’s subsequent argument rests on the fact that there is a clear-cut distinction between different uses of ‘is’. The implication from the above quotation is that these uses are as different to one another as river ‘bank’ is from financial ‘bank’, there is no acknowledgement that the uses are closely related, in fact he wants to deny this. I will go on to argue that this not necessarily the case, and will discuss an alternative view, but will for now will continue to explore Owen’s views.

Owen says that this matters ‘For the problems which dominate the central argument of the *Sophist* are existence problems, so disentangling the different functions of the verb ‘to be’ is a proper step to identifying and resolving them.’ (Owen, 1999, p. 417). I.e., Owen thinks that the problems of the *Sophist* can be at least partially addressed through proper analysis of language, and that this is what Plato should be aiming to do.

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'The Sophist will turn out to be primarily an essay in problems of reference and predication and in the incomplete uses of the verb associated with these. The argument neither contains nor compels any isolation of an existential verb. Yet the problems about falsehood and unreality which it takes over from earlier dialogues do seem to be rooted in what we should call existence puzzles, so it will need to be explained why they present themselves here in such a way as to lead to a study of ‘...is...’ and ‘...is not...’.’ (Owen, 1999, pp. 417-418).

That latter point is important: Plato raises problems of non-existence so it will be difficult for a commentator to argue that, when Plato subsequently uses the word ‘is’, this has nothing to do with existence claims. It seems, initially at least, implausible, and I will conclude that Owen is not successful in arguing for his position.

‘Let us begin, as Plato begins his own discussion of not-being, with Parmenides. That philosopher had written (B2 7-8): ‘You could not distinguish, nor could you express, what is not’. Which of its roles is the verb ‘to be’ playing here? Given the conventional choice it was natural to plump for the existential role... [as] Parmenides goes on to equate ‘what is not’ with ‘nothing’... when Plato takes over Parmenides’ topic he adopts this equation, so here too the question has seemed, by default to be settled.’ (Owen, 1999, p. 418)

Here Owen adds a footnote referring to the Theaetetus (188e-189a) and says ‘the move from ‘what is not’ to ‘nothing’ is argued not assumed’ – seemingly forgetting that the Theaetetus is in dialogue form, and the fact that an interlocutor is made to assume something instead of arguing for it does not necessarily mean that Plato thinks that it can be assumed rather than argued. In fact, as I have outlined above, Plato is showing that the empiricist makes this assumption and struggles to explain how it is not the case. Owen makes a similar sort of claim later, on page 418:

So it seems that in these contexts he [Plato] is expressly concerned with the possibility of speaking and thinking about what does not exist... [and] he contends, in the Theaetetus (189a10-12) and the Sophist (237e1-6), that thinking or speaking of what is not is simply not speaking or thinking at all... What can this mean but that he now denies sense to any attempt to speak of what does not exist?

82 Acknowledging the link between the Theaetetus and Sophist.
But it does not seem to me that Plato himself contends these things. The dialogue form should be taken into account by commentators. The speaker at 189a10-12 of the Theaetetus is Socrates, who says ‘Well then, he who holds an opinion of nothing, holds no opinion at all’ (Fowler, 1987), and at 237e1-6 of the Sophist is the Eleatic visitor, who says ‘And he who says not something, must quite necessarily say absolutely nothing... Then we cannot even concede that such a person speaks, but says nothing? We must even declare that he who undertakes to say ‘not-being’ does not speak at all?’ (ibid.) – followed immediately by ‘Boast not too soon! For there still remains, my friend, the first and greatest of perplexities...’, suggesting that we do not yet have the final and definitive answer. Furthermore, Owen’s question is asked as though there is one obvious answer, when it is actually not as straightforward as this. A similar type of statement is found on page 424: ‘I have represented Plato as concerned with affixing negatives to parts of sentences and not, as later logic accustoms us to expect, to whole sentences. This is clear from the text and needs no argument...’ – but, on the contrary, it does need argument. It is not a given at all.

Owen continues: ‘...a defender of the established view would probably say that the Theaetetus is content to leave the problem of falsehood in its traditional form... in the Sophist, if not before, Plato expressly discounts negations of existence as unintelligible’ (Owen, 1999, p. 420). I am not sure what it means to say that a dialogue ‘is content’ and it seems unlikely that Owen would be able to substantiate his claim that ‘Plato expressly’ did or said anything (given the dialogue form).

The same sort of reasoning is used here: ‘Plato does not say that his problems about not-being come from understanding ‘being’ in a certain way; he says that they come from understanding ‘not’ in a certain way.’ (Owen, 1999, p. 418). I cannot see a point in the Theaetetus or Sophist where ‘Plato says’ anything of the sort. These remarks therefore count against Owen’s interpretation of the dialogues.

Owen introduces the ‘Parity Assumption’ (PA) on page 421. The PA is the statement that being and not being are such that one of them cannot be illuminated without the other also being illuminated. Owen thinks that the Eleatic Stranger proposes (something like) the PA. Owen refers to this during subsequent discussion and it plays an important part in his argument and in Brown’s criticism of his argument (which I discuss later in this chapter).
On the puzzles of falsehood and concept ‘is not’, Owen says that Plato distinguishes speaking of something from saying something, and likens speaking to seeing or touching, ‘as though the words had content to the extent that they made contact with the actual situation (189a3-10)’ (Owen, 1999, p. 434). Owen diagnoses this as Plato making ‘primitive assumptions about language’ (ibid.) and says that, rather, words are ‘given their purchase on the world’ by being used as names and going proxy for the things that they are meant to designate. Owen says that in the Sophist, ‘I take them to be modified at an essential point’ (1999, p. 435) however that modification does not make use of an existential ‘to be’, but we needed this to address the puzzles of the Theaetetus. In the Theaetetus we have puzzles that require a distinction between the case where there is nothing being talked about and the case where there is something being talked about but that is nothing; but Plato ‘miscasts’ Nothing as a subject rather than as subject-excluder and Owen says that this results in paradoxes ‘flagged by Plato and after him by Frege and Quine’ (1999, p. 436). Owen, referring to 189a3-10 concludes that ‘in fact the paradox has no independent importance in Plato’s argument’ (ibid.).

I have argued in chapter 1 that the ‘primitive assumptions’ are those of the empiricists, and that they cannot be Plato’s own assumptions because Plato shows himself better able to deal with these topics in other (sometimes earlier) dialogues. The particular passage that Owen references here (189a3-10) supports my view further, because it is a discussion that focuses on perception and treating belief and knowledge formation as functioning in the same way as perception: ‘Then he who sees any one thing, sees something that is... he who hears anything, hears some one thing and therefore hears what is... he who touches anything, touches some one thing, which is... So, then, does he who holds an opinion hold an opinion of some one thing?...[And] he who holds an opinion of what is not holds an opinion of nothing?’ (Fowler, 1987).

Owen’s comment that ‘I take [the assumptions] to be modified at an essential point in the Sophist’ shows why his position is so important in the context of this thesis. Owen’s interpretation of the word ‘is’ is inherently tied up with his reading of the Sophist and Theaetetus as a whole and, on Owen’s account, the Sophist is a criticism of a type of logical atomism – which starkly contrasts with my view that the Sophist account is a logical atomist account. On Owen’s view, the Sophist fails to properly address the problems raised in the Theaetetus because it continues to suggest that the subject of falsehood is some thing called
Nothing, which means that paradoxes and contradictions persist. I have shown earlier in this chapter that there is a plausible interpretation of the *Sophist* which says that this is the difficulty faced by empiricists in the *Theaetetus* and which Plato goes on to clarify in the *Sophist*. On Owen’s alternative view, he has to locate the source of the continued errors in the *Sophist* and selects Plato’s treatment of ‘is’.

Owen therefore proceeds to say that the idea put forward by Plato that ‘to be is to be something’ is unintelligible and that this results in the phrase ‘not to be’ making no sense. Owen says that Plato ‘argues with all possible emphasis’ that the negation of ‘to be’ cannot be legitimate on these grounds, but Owen says that this means that we ‘saddle Plato with an argument which first sets puzzles about non-existence, then offers to refute the assumptions on which the puzzles depend, and finally backs down and recommends that direct negation be prudently reserved for other uses of the verb ‘to be’.’ (Owen, 1999, p. 453).

It is not clear to me that ‘he argues with all possible emphasis’ is a phrase that should be applied to any of Plato’s works, given the dialogue form.

Furthermore, Owen here admits that his preferred reading of the *Sophist* is one that ‘saddles’ us with an interpretation of the dialogue that renders it unremarkable and lacking any intelligent and insightful conclusions (i.e., not what we expect from Plato). Furthermore, Owen fails to question the assumptions on which his interpretation rests, namely: that there is a clear distinction between different uses of ‘is’. I will come back to this point shortly, when I discuss Lesley Brown’s alternative view, but first I will discuss Bostock’s paper, largely in support of Owen’s view, which suggests that the *Sophist* is ‘one grand logical mistake’ on Plato’s part (Bostock, 1984, p. 90).

**Bostock’s *Plato on ‘is not’***

Bostock states that Plato failed to notice that ‘...the incomplete uses of ‘is’ may be divided into two. In one sense the verb functions as an identity sign, and means the same as ‘is the same as’, while in the other it functions merely as a sign of predication, coupling subject to predicate...’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 89). Bostock argues ‘not only that Plato failed to see [this] distinction, but also that his failure, together with another ambiguity that he fails to see, wholly vitiates his account of the word ‘not’. The central section of the *Sophist* is therefore one grand logical mistake.’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 90). I.e., along with Owen, Bostock would
disagree with my interpretation of the Sophist as solving the problems raised in the Theaetetus.

However, Bostock’s words raise red flags – he is claiming that the best available interpretation of Plato’s text is that Plato was in a muddle. It seems unlikely that this is the best interpretation available to us, especially when there are alternatives that make good sense of the dialogue as offering intelligent discussion of the topics at hand. I will argue here that Bostock does not manage to successfully defend his reading of the dialogue. His view is implausible because it relies on a thinking that Plato made rudimentary mistakes and, importantly, it also relies on the re-glossing of key words in the text rather than taking a more natural, face-value translation.

Bostock begins his argument with a statement that ‘No doubt ‘Socrates is human’ is a clear example of the ‘is’ of predication, and ‘Socrates is Socrates’ is a clear example of the ‘is’ of identity, but what shall we say of the ‘is’ in ‘Socrates is a man’?’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 90). It is unclear why there is a confusion here, since this is straightforwardly a case of predication, which Bostock himself must acknowledge if he follows his own suggestion on the following page on how to distinguish these two uses of ‘is’: ‘The ‘is’ of identity, it may be said, can always be paraphrased by ‘is the same as’, or ‘is identical to’, or (as Frege has it) ‘is not other than’...’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 91).

Bostock goes on to say that Plato does not offer a paraphrasing and, worse still, the dialogue suggests that Plato did not see the possibility of paraphrasing “‘is’ in terms of sameness” (1984, p. 91). Bostock says that if Plato had seen the possibility then he would have expressed it ‘in his own preferred terminology’ (ibid.), meaning that Plato would have said something like ‘there are two kinds of being, and one of them is the same as sameness’ (ibid.). Bostock says that Plato fails to do this but, furthermore, the dialogue makes it clear that Plato does not think that this paraphrasing is possible, referencing 255b8-c3 and claiming that Plato is here showing that sameness and being are not identical to one another.

255b8-c3 of the Sophist runs as follows: ‘STR: “But one should conceive of ‘being’ and ‘the same’ as one?” THT: “Perhaps” STR: “But if ‘being’ and ‘the same’ have no difference of meaning, then when we go on and say that both rest and motion are, we shall be saying that they are both the same, since they are” THT: “But surely that is impossible” STR: “Then it is
impossible for being and the same to be one.’’ In other words, Bostock is correct that the interlocutors in the dialogue appear to rule out the possibility of equating ‘is’ or ‘being’ with ‘sameness’.

And it is true to say that it is not clear that sameness *is* ‘one variety of being’ in the way that Bostock suggests. When we say that two things are the same as one another in some respect, that use of the word ‘same’ achieves something different than if we had substituted the word ‘being’ in place of ‘sameness’. To say ‘x exists’ is to say a complete sentence, whereas to say ‘x is the same’ is just nonsense. The grammatical form is different so they cannot be identical to one another.

Bostock says that one might argue that Plato has grasped a different distinction and that he is at least on the right lines even if his explanation is wrong (as Owen contends) – Bostock refers to 255c8-e8, which aims to show that being and otherness are not identical.

This claims that things that are other are always so-called in relation to something other than them [whereas things that are are so-called just by themselves]... Despite its surface grammar, this sentence presumably does not really mean to distinguish the items which are in one of these ways from the items which are in the other way, for exactly the same items are in both ways (namely, all items).

(Bostock, 1984, pp. 92-93, my italics)

It is not clear why Bostock believes he is justified in ignoring the structure of what Plato is saying in this way; I would have thought that it is more likely that Plato does really mean to distinguish the items that he appears to be distinguishing. Bostock goes on to claim that the point must be to distinguish two senses of ‘to be’, but only one of which refers to something else, whereas Owen thinks that two incomplete uses of the verb distinguished here (i.e., both importing reference to something else) (1984, p. 93).

Bostock disagrees with Owen on the basis of the Greek text but then immediately adds: ‘It is true that on either way of construing the argument Plato has not said quite what he ought to have said’ (ibid., my italics), which I think rather undermines Bostock’s argument. We should look to the textual evidence rather than re-gloss phrases that are inconvenient or inconsistent with our preferred interpretation.
On the following page, Bostock says that ‘it is natural to suppose that the reason why Plato failed to notice this...’ and ‘this is no doubt why...’ without sufficient substantiation of his views.

Bostock concludes that Plato intended to draw a distinction between two different uses of the verb ‘to be’, specifically, a complete use from incomplete uses, not two different incomplete uses. Commentators have mistakenly supposed that Plato is distinguishing two different incomplete uses, predication and identity, by reading this into the passage about the Greatest Kinds (Plato highlights that the ‘is’ of sameness can be predicated of change but ‘is’ is not identical with change). However Bostock thinks that this reading does not work on close examination of the text because Plato’s own explanation of why we should not worry about the apparent contradiction ‘evidently has nothing to do with the word ‘is’” (1984, p. 95).

Bostock quotes 256a10-b4, where the Eleatic Stranger says ‘When we call it the same, we do so because it partakes of the same in relation to itself, and when we call it not the same, we do so on account of its participation in the other, by which it is separated from the same and becomes not that but other, so that it is correctly spoken of in turn as not the same’ (Fowler, 1987), then says that ‘It is true that the explanation contains two verbally different technical paraphrases for the implied ‘is’... but Plato surely cannot have meant these two paraphrases to reveal different senses.’ (Bostock, 1984, pp. 95-96). However, if Plato uses two different phrases then one can reasonably infer that the purpose of this is to distinguish the two and to reveal differences between them. Bostock appears to be playing down the importance of textual evidence where it does not fit with the position that he is arguing for.

It is theoretically possible that Plato did mean the same thing by the two different phrases, as Bostock claims, however Bostock does little to justify his re-glossing and merely states that ‘...they are evidently intended synonymously, and each represents a predicative ‘is’’. In effect, the two words ‘is the-same’ are glossed as ‘participates-in sameness’ (and we understand ‘to itself’), and the three words ‘is not the-same’ are glossed as ‘participates-in otherness-than sameness’.’ (Bostock, 1984, pp. 95-96, my italics). Bostock says that this demonstrates no ambiguity at all, but he is not necessarily justified in changing the original text to fit the position he is arguing for – at least, it is not as self-evident as Bostock seems to suppose.
Bostock proceeds to question whether the ambiguity is located in ‘not’ instead (pp. 96-98). Elsewhere ‘not’ is used to negate, so perhaps here it ‘imports a reference to otherness’? But no, says Bostock, it cannot be that that is the case, because Plato ‘apparently supposes that the word ‘not’ is always used to import a reference to otherness’. So Bostock considers whether the ambiguity is located in ‘the same’. He says that arguably there is ambiguity in ‘the same’, ‘but in this wholly irrelevant way: in its first occurrence the word is to be filled out as the same as itself, but no such filling is needed in the second occurrence… Since this ambiguity is so irrelevant, one would rather not suppose that it is what Plato wishes to draw to our attention… perhaps he does not really mean to suggest that the lack of contradiction is due to the ambiguous usage of any word…’ and, anyway, the ambiguity is not with ‘is’ or ‘the same’ and ‘if he has not seen the ambiguities here, where they play a crucial role in his argument, it must be very unlikely that he has seen them at all.’ (ibid.).

Bostock then moves on to ‘disarm the reasons that commentators have advanced for supposing that it must be Plato’s purpose, in the central section of the Sophist, to open our eyes to exactly this distinction between the ‘is’ of identity and the ‘is’ of predication’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 98). The arguments commentators have advanced are that: ‘Plato introduces his whole discussion of the ‘combination of kinds’ with a statement of a confusion prevalent among the young and the ‘late learners’, which appears just to be a confusion of these two senses of ‘is’ (251a5-c2). Since his discussion professes to answer them, he must presumably be aiming to expose this confusion for what it is.’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 98). ‘The problems which introduce Plato’s positive doctrine, first concerning not being and then concerning being, end at 250c3-d4 with a blatant example of a fallacy based on the confusion of the two senses of ‘is’. Plato would surely not have offered us so gross an example of the fallacy, at precisely this point in the dialogue, unless he had clearly seen it for what it was, and was going on to expose it.’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 99). Despite Bostock’s complaint, the commentators’ arguments seem reasonable and Bostock fails to present a strong argument against their view, merely stating that it is unconvincing.

Bostock considers the Late learners passage (251a5-c2) in more detail – ‘…late learners deny the possibility of ordinary predications, but what is not clear is their reason for doing this.’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 99). It is possible that they think of all uses of ‘is’ as introducing identity statements, but it could be that ‘...their mistake is first to suppose that all speaking is naming,
and then to fasten on the point that ‘good’ names good, and not man… On this view the late learners are silenced for the time being by pointing out that since their view allows no statements at all, it cannot itself be stated without self-refutation… they are finally shown the error of their ways by the discussion at 261d1-262e1, where it is made clear that naming and predicating are different… None of this requires any special focus on the copula… [so] no need to suppose that the late learners’ mistake is a mistake about the word ‘is’…” (Bostock, 1984, p. 100). This does not seem to be a very plausible reading of this passage.

Bostock says that ‘It is perfectly true that Plato here uses a word in a certain sense [but] it obviously cannot be inferred that he has noticed that it has that sense.’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 100). I am not convinced by this. It seems reasonable to think that the purpose of the Late Learners passage is to display the confusion that others face (not Plato himself) because we use the same language (‘is’ in modern English) to convey different points (existence, predication and identity). It is implausible to think that Plato wrote the Late Learner passage whilst himself being under the spell, or misapprehension, that he suggests that the Late Learners are under.

Bostock then discusses the argument with Parmenides (244d14-245b6) and says that he is not denying that Plato distinguishes predication from sameness but does not think that Plato notices that ‘sameness is itself one kind of being’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 100). However, the reason for this could be that Plato does not think that sameness is one kind of being. In Bostock’s summary he appears to argue that sameness is a kind on being on the basis that ‘is’ can be substituted by ‘is the same as’ sometimes, but this is too simplistic an analysis:

Since in fact the ambiguity of ‘is’ does have an important role in this sentence, the fact that Plato does not draw attention to it makes it overwhelmingly probable that he has not seen it. A little earlier (at 255b12-13) he does seem to be adverting to distinct uses of ‘is’, but it is much better to suppose that what he there has in mind is the distinction between complete and incomplete uses of that word… Anyway, even if he has seen that there is an ambiguity in the incomplete use of ‘is’, he has certainly not seen that in one of its senses ‘is’ means the same as ‘is the same as’. One who has not seen this has a pretty inadequate grasp of the distinction…

(Bostock, 1984, p. 103)
Bostock then examines the word ‘not’, which leads him to consider the Forms and generalizing words too. He suggests that some commentators are incorrect for supposing that the words following ‘not’ stand for forms, given that the *Sophist* is written after the *Parmenides*. Bostock grants that Plato may once have held that ‘not large’ involves a Form, largeness, and references the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, but suggests that this cannot be assumed post-*Parmenides*. This means that when we say $x$ is large or $x$ is not large, we are not restricted to assuming that ‘is’ links $x$ with a Form, rather, if we say that a thing is not large we are saying that it is one of the things other than the things in the collection of large things (1984, pp. 115 – 116).

Bostock’s argument depends on a particular interpretation of the *Parmenides* and the order the dialogues were written. Arguably Plato does not reject core elements of the theory of Forms in the *Parmenides*, rather, he clarifies the nature of Forms and how they interact with sensibles. And it is clear from reading the later dialogues, such as the *Timaeus* and *Laws*, that Plato continues to be a Platonist after writing the *Sophist* too (see chapter 1). Therefore Bostock’s argument is not convincing and does not present a strong challenge to my overall interpretation of the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* as being written by a Platonist Plato.

Bostock continues: ‘...and of course he certainly is not here saying that the form of non-being is not a being. But there is an interesting double use in the final clause, which claims in one breath that what is not is not and is one form (258c2-3)’ (Bostock, 1984, p. 116). Bostock thinks that the former is a generalization and latter a name, but on the following page says, once again, that ‘There is no reason to suppose that he [Plato] has noticed that he is using the same words now in one way and now in another.’ As I have already said, I do not think that we should speculate about whether Plato failed to notice that he had used the same word in two different ways and use this to justify a particular reading of the text. It does not seem to be a particularly strong argument in support of Bostock’s view. However, Bostock relies on the validity of this argument in the following passage:

> To sum up, at the start of this central section of the *Sophist* Plato’s abstract nouns are used to generalize, until we come to 255b3 which is crucially ambiguous. From then on they are used to name, until at 257b1 attention switches to what is actually a use of ‘is not’ where the ‘is’ is an ‘is’ of predication. To make sense of what Plato says of
this we must then revert to the generalizing interpretation, which continues to predominate to the end of the section, but not quite consistently...

...Plato does in effect give two different accounts of ‘is not’, the first being suitable where the ‘is’ is an ‘is’ of identity, and the second where the ‘is’ is an ‘is’ of predication. But this is not because he has seen that the word ‘is’ is functioning differently in each case. On the contrary, what actually makes the difference between his two accounts is that the words following the ‘is not’ are first taken in their naming role and second in their generalizing role. But Plato is not aware of this either. His terms slip from one role to the other quite without warning, and it is impossible to believe that he was any more alive to this ambiguity than he was alive to the relevant ambiguity of ‘is’. Consequently he thinks he has given a uniform account of ‘not’, as meaning otherness... [but] actually the function of the word ‘not’ is to negate, and about that Plato has said nothing at all.

(Bostock, 1984, pp. 117-118, my italics)

In summary, both Owen’s and Bostock’s arguments suggest that Plato made the mistakes of Parmenides and the Late Learners, without realising that how he was using ‘is’ varied from one part of the dialogue to another, but this does not ring true. The reason that Plato’s main interlocutor is the Eleatic stranger, and that the Sophist begins with a discussion of Parmenides’ puzzles about not-being, and the reason for highlighting the errors of the Late Learners, seems to be precisely because Plato did see the mistakes of Parmenides and wants to suggest a different way of approaching the puzzles.

If their interpretations of the Sophist were convincing, then it would be a challenge to the conclusions that I drew in chapters 1 and 2 and would undermine my contention that Plato was developing a complex and nuanced version of logical atomism in the Sophist. However, both sets of arguments have fundamental flaws, either in relation to unjustified re-glossing of the original Greek or in relation to presenting Plato as being subject to the confusion that he accuses the Late Learners of being subject to (which seems unlikely).

I will now outline an alternative and more plausible view from Lesley Brown. This view is consistent with, and to a great extent supports, my interpretation of both the Theaetetus and
Sophist. I will aim to show that it is more credible than the alternative presented by Owen and Bostock.

Brown’s ‘Being in the Sophist: a syntactical enquiry’

Brown begins by acknowledging that ‘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’. ’ (Brown, 1999, p. 455) and sets the scene as follows:

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

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

(Brown, 1999, pp. 455-456)

Brown focuses on (i), which is indeed the statement that stands out from the others in the list above because the Theaetetus and Sophist appear to contain several explicit references to, and detailed discussions of, existence (and non-existence) claims. It seems implausible that

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83 E.g., the second puzzle of false belief (188c8-189b9) and the middle section of the Sophist following the Eleatic visitor’s statement that false belief ‘involves the bold assumption that not-being exists’ (237a3-6, Fowler (1987)).
Plato was not concerned with the ‘is’ of existence in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, and Brown agrees and sets out a summary of her alternative line of argument:

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.

(Brown, 1999, pp. 456-457)

Brown breaks down Owen’s position into the following set of statements (Brown, 1999, p. 458):

1. Not being is legitimized as being true of everything, for everything *is not* countless things
2. It ‘would be feeble of Plato to raise puzzles about non-being in its other, complete, use, given that his ‘solution’ ignores such use’
3. It is worse still for Plato if we say that he does distinguish different types of ‘is’ and either ignores or suppresses it
4. Plato says that ‘(in Owen’s words) ‘any light thrown on either being or not-being will equally illuminate the other’ (p. 422)’, i.e., Owen’s ‘Parity Assumption’

If we take 1 and 4 together then we see that, if the only illumination of non-being is the incomplete use, then we should only find incomplete uses of ‘is’ being explained.
‘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.’ (Brown, 1999, p. 458). Brown then refers to McDowell’s definition of complete and incomplete uses of ‘is’, found in McDowell, 1973, p. 118: ‘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 by omitted.’

Brown states that complete uses are either of the following:

(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.

(Brown, 1999, p. 459)

The examples Brown gives to illustrate the difference are as follows:

1a: Jane is growing tomatoes
1b: Jane is growing

2a: Jane is teaching French
2b: Jane is teaching

This is fundamental to the conclusion reached later on in the article –

…as Owen noted (n. 47), we may and should credit Plato with distinguishing predications from statements of identity in this section… [because it] 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… 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.

(Brown, 1999, p. 471)

It is important that Brown here acknowledges that the presence of the Late Learners’ difficulty is precisely because *Plato is aware* of the difference between predication and statements of identity. This is in stark contrast to Owen and Bostock’s approach and makes much better sense of the *Sophist*.

A similar example is given on page 463, where Brown refers to *Euthydemus* 283c-d. Here, she notes that the ‘standard diagnosis of the fallacy would be to see equivocation on esti’, but Brown gives an example using ‘breathes’ as the verb: you want someone to stop breathing smoke (but not to stop breathing altogether). You can see that ‘...no one, I think, would try to argue that the fallacy involved a shift in uses of the very ‘breathe’, simply because in one clause an object is specified and in another it is not.’

This can be directly applied to ‘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... 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.’ (Brown, 1999, p. 464). This is an extremely useful analogy that allows us to interpret the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* as dialogues written by someone who is not himself subject to the confusions ascribed to the Late Learners.

This culminates in Brown’s crucial insight: ‘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’...’ (Brown, 1999, p. 470).

Brown notes that ‘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’ (Brown, 1999, p. 461), and Bostock does it at 259a6-8. There is no need to do this once you realise that the complement functions in the way that Brown outlines above.
Brown also criticises Vlastos’s ‘A Metaphysical Paradox’ for suggesting that there is a sharp distinction between different uses of ‘is’, such as between ‘is growing’ in 1b and 1b, above. She notes that Vlastos claims that Plato observed the difference but did not articulate it, instead, simply making of it to draw out paradoxes and cause confusion. However Brown argues that Plato does not consistently observe it in the way that Vlastos claims, suggesting that Plato did not see such a clear-cut distinction (Brown, 1999, p. 462).

Brown discusses the paradoxes of not-being (236-41) and, in particular, the uses of ‘to mē on’, noting that initially the Sophist asks ‘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.’ (Brown, 1999, p. 466).

Brown argues that we should read to mē on as ‘that which isn’t anything at all’ or ‘that which for no F is F’ (as per Owen) and ‘the non-existent’ (as per Heinanen). Brown applies the insight above and concludes that ‘we are not forced to treat these as rival interpretations’ (Brown, 1999, p. 466).

If we take (C2) instead of (C1) as our definition of the complete use of ‘is’ then ‘...the complete and incomplete uses are related as follows: X is (complete use) entails X is something and X is F entails X is. X is not (complete use) is equivalent to X is not anything at all. Understanding the complete esti thus allows us to 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 a discovery of a fundamental distinction between existence and the copula... [this] yields a satisfying reading of the Sophist.’ (Brown, 1999, p. 477). This seems to be a plausible reading of the text.

Throughout the article, Brown says things like ‘Plato makes the Stranger explain away the apparent contradiction by saying x’ in stark contrast with Bostock’s and Owen’s approach (‘Plato expressly says x’). This is truer to the text and helps the reader understand why certain arguments are raised and whether the confusion is Plato’s own or one of Plato’s characters.

This is in line with my original criteria for a successful interpretation of the *Theaetetus*, outlined in chapter 1, that any interpretation of the *Theaetetus* must distinguish the character Socrates from the author Plato. It is not necessarily the case that the difficulties or conclusions presented in a Platonic dialogue are difficulties faced by Plato or conclusions that Plato himself supports. Brown finds an interpretation of the *Sophist* that acknowledges the distinction between the interlocutors and the author and, importantly, does not present Plato as making rudimentary errors (the same errors that he mocks others for making, e.g., at 251b-c).

Instead of following Owen and Bostock in assuming that the various uses of ‘is’ are radically different from one another, we can view them as closely related, and this changes our interpretation of the *Sophist*. Plato is no longer considered to have misunderstood the nature of ‘is’ by not clearly distinguishing the different uses of the word.

If we return to Bostock’s claim that some uses of ‘is’ in the *Sophist* are clearly the ‘is’ of identity and some are clearly the ‘is’ of predication (and some he is not sure about (e.g., ‘Socrates is a man’)), we can now apply Brown’s analysis as follows:

- ‘*Socrates is Socrates*’ ← Socrates fits into a very small class of one thing (identity)
- ‘*Socrates is a citizen of Athens*’ ← Socrates fits into a larger class of things (predication)
- ‘*Socrates is a human*’ ← Socrates fits into an even larger class of things (still predication)
- ‘*Socrates is*’ ← Socrates fits into a very large class, the class of all things that *are* (existence)

On this reading, the ‘is’ of identity is a limiting case rather than totally separate from the ‘is’ of existence or predication, and this undermines the argument put forward by Owen and Bostock.

Owen’s and Bostock’s views were inconsistent with my interpretation of the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, but I have now shown that this should not count against my interpretation because there is a more plausible reading of the *Sophist* available which is consistent with my interpretation and which has notable benefits over Owen’s and Bostock’s.
c. The *Sophist*’s solution

It is important for my overall conclusion that the *Sophist* can be interpreted as a dialogue that picks up where we left off in the *Theaetetus*, resolving the earlier difficulties using Platonist metaphysics. A critic might argue that my interpretation of the *Sophist* as solving the problems of the *Theaetetus* fails because the *Sophist* does not actually manage to solve those problems.

My claim is that, in the *Sophist* we retain certain core elements of the logical atomist theory presented in the *Theaetetus* but, because there is a distinction between different categories of element and a fleshed out metaphysical theory, we are able to solve the problems of the *Theaetetus*. In the *Sophist*, Plato is not confused or unaware of the different uses of ‘is’, he is actually constructing an impressive metaphysical theory that demonstrates a significant continuity of thought with his other dialogues, and which is already (strongly) hinted at in the *Theaetetus*.

The idea is that, once we accept the *Sophist* account, we gain an understanding of how interweaving takes place and why it is that some words connect up in meaningful ways and others do not (252e1-3). Words do not all function in the same way (262a1), so we move away from the view that thought is a concatenation of semantically inert simple images that we were presented with in the Dream Theory (as explained at 262b8-c8 of the *Sophist*). Accepting additional structuring elements, alongside perceptions, reveals the problems of false belief in the *Theaetetus* to be mistakes about either the logical interrelations of the Forms or about the links between Forms and our perceptions (see also Chappell (2005, pp. 168-169)). So logical atomism as developed in the *Sophist* is key to solving the problems of false belief in the *Theaetetus*, the bold move being to introduce a second type of atom.

We can read the *Theaetetus* in two possible ways: (1) a rejection of the definition of knowledge as perception because Plato thinks that the theory of flux is true of the world of perception but not of knowledge (see also *Timaeus* 27d5-28a4), or (2) a rejection of the theory of flux outright, even in the realm of perceptibles. Either way, the *Sophist* brings in an eternal realm to solve the problems associated with thinking about the perceptible world.
It might be argued that this is jumping the gun and that it is not at all clear that the problems of the *Theaetetus* have been fully resolved. The *Sophist* addresses the nature of predication and talks about participation in the Greatest Kinds but it is not clear how helpful this metaphor is. If I analyse ‘x is not F’ as ‘x is other than participating in F’, have I provided a thorough account of ‘is not’? Arguably the ‘otherness’ discourse does not avoid the problems of the ‘is not’ discourse, but rather replaces one difficulty with another. It may not provide a full solution unless it is clear why the former phraseology gets priority over the latter as the most primitive and foundational.

Furthermore, to what extent does the interweaving of the Forms help us make sense of ‘is not’, and how do the interweaving and otherness explanations work alongside one another? Are we presented with two compatible solutions (in which case why are both necessary?) or two incompatible alternatives?

Regardless of my answer to these questions, the following point is clear: both of the alternative or compatible theories offered involve using non-perceptibles in a higher-realm, and one not available to the empiricist, in order to structure perceptibles into meaningful thought and language. We are clearly moving away from empiricism and into an ontology of non-empiricist-entities – entities whose existence is divined through contemplation and without reference to our senses and perceptions. The key move in the *Sophist* is towards a Platonist metaphysics. So the *Sophist* can still be seen as a continuation of the *Theaetetus* and a move closer towards the answer, even if it falls short of absolute clarity.

I will argue in chapter 4 that we do get clarity because Plato uses the notion of differently shaped atoms to explain how interweaving works.

In chapter 2 I established that the *Theaetetus* presents a version of logical atomism and that some aspects of this are accepted. In this chapter 3, I have now also established that the *Sophist* can be read as a continuation of the *Theaetetus*: the *Theaetetus* presents us with a non-Platonist theory and demonstrates that it is missing a key ingredient and therefore fails, Plato then uses the *Sophist* to develop the Platonist solution. In chapter 4 I will go on to argue
that the *Sophist* develops Tractarian logical atomism into something that looks more Fregean by introducing differently shaped logical atoms.
Chapter 4. Differently shaped logical atoms

In chapter 1 I argued that the *Theaetetus* can be read as a critique of empiricism. Given this interpretation of the *Theaetetus*, in chapter 2 I argued that the Dream Theory can be read as introducing principles of logical atomism, similar to those found in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. I argued that some of these principles were not rejected by Plato, as some have claimed, but were taken forwards into the discussion in the *Sophist* and developed. I suggested that the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* should be read together, almost as if they were two halves of one larger dialogue, and that Plato used the *Sophist* to present a Platonist solution to the problems that the empiricists struggled with in the *Theaetetus*. In other words, the *Theaetetus* presents us with a Tractarian theory and demonstrates that this theory is missing a key ingredient and therefore fails, and Plato subsequently uses the *Sophist* to reveal the (Platonist) solution to the difficulties that the Dream Theory, and *Tractatus*, face.

I ended the last chapter by acknowledging that some might question to what extent Plato really does resolve the problems of the *Theaetetus* in the *Sophist*. Therefore I will now set out my interpretation of the *Sophist’s* solution and argue that it succeeds in locating and solving the difficulty faced by the *Tractatus* and the Dream Theory (that of how logical atoms combine into meaningful propositions (or fail to)) by introducing different types of logical atom with different shapes allowing for, and placing limits on, combinatorial possibilities.

At the end of the *Theaetetus* we are left unable to explain how the component parts of knowledge, the primary elements or logical atoms, join together, and what rules of combination apply. The *Sophist* addresses both of these points by positing different types of logical atoms whose inherent features, their metaphorical ‘shape’, account for the way that they combine (or do not combine) with other atoms.

The theory looks familiar to readers of Frege: we can build propositions by slotting names into argument places, but cannot slot argument places into names because they are the wrong ‘shape’ to do so. I will explore this apparent similarity and, in the next chapter, I will argue that this helps us to understand Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and the nature of Tractarian Objects.
a. Ditton Genos, Democritus and the *Timaeus*

I will start by arguing that, in the *Sophist*, Plato builds on the Dream Theory of the *Theaetetus* by introducing the concept of differently shaped logical atoms. The different shapes account for why ‘Theaetetus sits’ is meaningful but ‘Theaetetus Socrates’ is not. I will suggest a comparison with Democritus’ physical atomism and also discuss similarities with Plato’s *Timaeus*.

In the Dream of the *Theaetetus* (201d-210a), all words are names which stand for objects, i.e., the discussion proceeds on the basis that there is just this one type of primary element. Necessarily, the elements are propertyless and indistinguishable. We are told that they combine in ways that create states of affairs and statements about them, but there is no explanation of how this occurs (i.e., what transforms a list of names into a statement about the world) and no explanation provided for why some elements combine with one another but others do not (e.g., ‘Theaetetus flies’ vs. ‘Theaetetus Socrates’). To resolve this combination issue, in the *Sophist*, the Eleatic visitor introduces an important distinction between two different types of vocal expression: names and verbs (262a), thereby introducing two different types of primary element: the things that names stand for (i.e., objects) and the things that verbs stand for (i.e., ‘Kinds’, which apply to objects). Speaking or writing two names does not create a statement capable of being true or false because the linguistic items are not properly combined, they are just sat side-by-side – this is revealed to be the fundamental mistake of the Dream Theory.

Instead, a name must be combined with a verb in order to create something meaningful (e.g., ‘Theaetetus flies’ or ‘Theaetetus sits’). Here we depart from the simpler version of logical atomism, where we have only one type of logical atom (names standing for objects, which we combine by placing next to one another to form a sort of list) and we move instead to a new picture where there are two fundamentally different types of logical atom whose inherent nature restricts which combinations are possible: names for objects and verbs for saying what those objects do. I will argue that the relevant feature is the metaphorical ‘shape’ of these atoms.

The new theory retains many of the original features of logical atomism including, crucially, that the world and the words that we use to describe it can be broken down into component
parts until we reach the most fundamental, atomic level, and that we can build complexes out of these component parts. The interlocutors do not reject the principles of logical atomism, but acknowledge that one key aspect must be rejected: elements cannot be propertyless, but must have some property or properties that allow certain combinations to take place (‘Theaetetus sits’) and do not allow others (‘Theaetetus Socrates’).

We can see that the introduction of the second type of atom is a proposal targeted at the Dream Theorist, and others who believe that all speaking is naming, because of what immediately precedes it: during the middle part of the *Sophist* there is a passage about the so-called ‘Late Learners’, who think that good is good and man is man and we cannot say that man is good because man is man, only, and good is good, only (251b-c). In other words, because good equates to good and man equates to man, they think that good cannot predicate man. The Late Learners appear to be confused about the ‘is’ of identity and the ‘is’ of predication. In fact, the Late Learners are working on the assumption that all speaking is naming, hence the one-to-one correlation of names with objects – i.e., simplistic, naïve, Wittgensteinian atomism.

On the alternative model, presented by the Eleatic visitor, a statement is a name combined with a descriptive word, e.g., ‘Theaetetus sits’. This has unity and aboutness, as opposed to being a string of names like ‘Theaetetus Socrates’, because the elements are correctly combined. An element of one type ‘fits together’ with an element of another, different type in a way that two names (or two verbs) would not. Theaetetus asks, ‘What do we need to understand about names?’ (261d5-6, Fowler (1987)) to which the Eleatic visitor replies,

...we have two kinds (*ditton genos*) of vocal indications of being... One called nouns (*onomata*), the other verbs (*rhemata*)... The indication which relates to action we may call a verb... And the vocal sign applied to those who perform the actions in question we call a noun... Hence discourse is never composed of nouns alone spoken in succession, nor of verbs spoken without nouns... ‘walks,’ ‘runs,’ ‘sleeps’ and the other verbs which denote actions, even if you utter all there are of them in succession, do not make discourse for all that... [And] when ‘lion,’ ‘stag,’ ‘horse,’ and all other names of those who perform these actions are uttered, such a succession of words does not yet make discourse; for in neither case do the words uttered indicate action or inaction or existence... *until the verbs are mingled with the nouns;* then the words *fit*... *For when*
he says that, he makes a statement about that which is or is becoming or has become or is to be; he does not merely give names, but he reaches a conclusion verbs with nouns... So, then, just as of things some fit each other and some do not, so too some vocal signs do not fit, but some of them do fit and form discourse (logos).

(Sophist 261e5-262e1, Fowler (1987))

To form a logos, one must pick out some thing in the world and then ascribe a feature to it. I.e., take one primary element from the category of ‘nouns’ or ‘names’ (representing objects) and one primary element from the category ‘verbs’ (representing repeatables that can apply to objects) and then fit them together.

The ‘fitting together’ is a physical analogy that implies that the shape of the elements is what gives them the power to combine in particular ways, i.e., they are not glued together (because then we would have yet another type of element) or merely mixed together, but rather they are shaped such that some combinations allow for an interlocking to occur whilst other combinations do not (consider how a jam jar lid ‘fits’ on a jam jar but does not ‘fit’ on a second jam jar lid). They are not all shaped alike and connected like ‘links of a chain’, as per the Tractatus (2.03), because this uniformity would not explain why some combinations are possible and others not (i.e., why ‘Theaetetus sits’ is inherently different to ‘Theaetetus Socrates’). The combinatorial possibilities are contained within the elements by virtue of their different shapes. (One type of atom is shaped like a jam jar and the other type is shaped like a jam jar lid.)

Two important words are ἁρμόζω and συναρμόζω. The former is found repeatedly in the Sophist, at 253a, 262c, d and e, but is not found anywhere in the Theaetetus. It means ‘fit together’, ‘join’, or ‘put together’ (LSJ), indicating that it is by slotting in place or interlocking that the elements combine. The latter does appear in Theaetetus, at 204a2, in the context of syllables being in some sense unitary,85 again implying that it is by ‘fitting’ together that two elements are transformed into a single complex. It is also found in the Sophist, along with various other spatial words, for example:

85 See chapter 2 section C where I note that there are indications that the Theaetetus foreshadows the eventual solution in the Sophist.
Now since we have agreed that the classes or genera also *commingle with one another*, or do not commingle, in the same way, must not he possess some science and proceed by the processes of reason who is to show correctly which of the classes harmonize with which, and which reject one another, and also if he is to show whether there are some elements *extending through all* and *holding them together* so that they *can mingle*, and again, when they *separate*, whether there are other universal *causes of separation*?

(Sophist 253b-c, Fowler (1987))

Spatial words also appear in the *Timaeus*, where Plato develops a *physical* theory and is using the terms in a literal sense:

...have come to be as a *two dimensional plane*, a single middle term would have sufficed to *bind together* its conjoining terms with itself... however, the universe was to be a *solid*, and *solids are never joined together* (συναρμόττουσιν, 32b3) by just one middle term but always by two...

(Timaeus 32a-b, Cooper (1997))

The key word here, συναρμόττουσιν, means ‘in a physical sense, to fit together’ ‘to put together, so as to make a whole’, ‘to combine in act or thought’ (so not exclusively physical, but metaphorical too), ‘to fit together, agree’ (LSJ).

Ryle says that a point ‘which is brought out clearly in the *Sophist*, [and] is only hinted at in the *Theaetetus*, [is that] at least two of the pieces in a truth or falsehood are (a) out of different baskets from one another and (b) coupled or glued together in a certain definite way... A list [of names] states nothing, true or false. It only lists several things; it does not tell *one* truth or falsehood...the two are not merely side by side but in some important way *married*’ (Ryle, 1990, p. 25). I agree that the key move is to introduce two different baskets of primary elements and put in place structuring rules (grammar) restricting how things from those baskets combine. However, I think that Ryle’s is not the only, or best, reading available of the *Sophist*.

I take issue with the following aspects of Ryle’s analysis:
1. If the elements come out of different baskets then we should make it clear that this is because the baskets hold elements of fundamentally different types of things. It is no accident or coincidence that the theory requires two baskets not one. Only something from basket A will connect with something from basket B, because of the underlying nature of the things stored in those baskets (not because of the baskets themselves). We have objects of two types, A and B; type A objects are stored in the type A basket; type B objects are stored in the type B basket. This is not made sufficiently clear by Ryle.

2. Ryle’s use of the phrase ‘glued together’ is unfortunate. We are explicitly told that no glue or additional element is required, and that instead the elements just ‘fit together’. Otherwise, the Sophist solution would be subject to something like Bradley’s Regress, which Russell faced. The theory presented here is more like Frege’s theory, which managed to avoid this difficulty – see later sections of this chapter.

3. The elements that fit together are characterised by Ryle as being ‘married’. Although συναρμόττουσιν can be translated as ‘married’ as well as the other translations I have given above, it does not appear to be the most appropriate translation to use in this case. ‘Married’ is ambiguous because it could be taken to mean they have an external, contingent property, reliant on a third party, and that something that has been done to two elements by a third element (‘they were married by the priest’) and is reversible; but Plato is concerned to discover the inherent nature of the building blocks of reality. For full clarity, ‘married’ should perhaps be replaced by something more like ‘activated their inherent capacity for blending’, or clarified in some other way which removes connotations carried by the word ‘married’.

The idea that the shape of logical atoms explains how interweaving takes place is similar to the idea that the shape of physical atoms explains how complexes are formed in Democritean atomism. Exploring the parallels between logical atomism and physical atomism helps to understand the Sophist theory.

86 See Perovic (2017).
87 For original sources and discussion see KRS (1957, pp. 413-429).
Democritean physical atoms are indivisible, with no internal complexity and only minimal properties. They combine to form different compounds, which are the things that we interact with in the world – the atoms themselves are so small that they are invisible but they come together to create much larger perceptible things. There is no teleology or purpose to these combinations, just collisions as atoms drift and bump into one another. Democritus suggested that there are innumerable worlds with completely different characteristics, some large, some small, some with life and others without life.

Ancient atomism appears to have been motivated by a desire to explain how there can be plurality in the world. Parmenides and Zeno presented a number of difficulties with thinking that plurality is a real feature of the world and the atomists sought to overcome these. For example, Parmenides thought that the notions of ‘coming into being’ and ‘going out of being’ were full of contradiction; so the atomists proposed the idea of unchanging atoms which are not created or destroyed but which reconfigure and make it look as though there are things being created or destroyed – explaining away the contradictions.

In order for the atoms to move about there has to be a part of the universe not filled with atoms, the void – i.e., the atomists responded to Parmenides’ claim that ‘what is not cannot exist’ by stating that, actually, it can and does (see KRS, §555 and §556, p. 414). ‘Not being’ (void) becomes as fundamental a part of the atomists’ ontology as the atoms themselves, because it is what facilitates the reconfiguration of atoms and therefore explains change.

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88 See KRS, p. 415.
89 See KRS, §565, p. 418.
90 Contrast this with Plato, where the only suggestion that I can find to the existence of more than one world is found in the Laws book 10 among the discussion of the cosmic soul: the Athenian states that we must agree that soul is the cause of things both good and bad (all the opposites, in fact) and that the cosmic soul controls all things (896d-e); the Athenian then asks ‘one soul, is it, or several? I will answer you – ‘several’. Anyhow, let us assume not less than two – the beneficent soul and that which is capable of effecting results of the opposite kind’ (896e4-8, Bury (1926)), which could be taken to suggest that there is a good cosmic soul controlling everything within one world and a bad cosmic controlling everything within another. The interlocutors go on to agree that when one looks up at the heavens then one is looking at the good world, and when one looks down at earthly things then one is looking at the bad world, and therefore the concept of two worlds is presumably meant to be something like the metaphor of the Cave (inside vs. outside) in the Republic (514a-520a), rather than a literal reference to a plurality of worlds including an evil world that is distinct from our good one. This is consistent with their comment that there might be multiple souls controlling this one world at 898c1-9.
91 Hasper (2006) has suggested that atomism developed in response to Zeno’s paradoxes; Sedley (2008) argues that it was more likely in direct response to Parmenides’ arguments.
To explain the appearance of change, creation and destruction in the world, in a way that answers Parmenides’ challenge, the atomists needed to be able to explain how atoms combine with one another and then recombine in different ways. The difficulty is very similar to that faced by the Dream Theorist. This difficulty appears to be a key motivation for Democritus’ suggestion that the atoms varied in shape and size. On Democritus’ account, some atoms are round, others angular, some rough, sharp, bent, and some even have hooks or barbs. This allows them to fit together when they move near to one another or directly collide. When they strike they will either bounce off each other (if they are not the right shape to link up) or will form a compound – note that in this latter case they do not stick together as a result of some additional adhesive like glue, rather, they slot together or interlock due to their different shapes.

The reason [Democritus] gives for atoms staying together for a while is the intertwining and mutual hold of the primary bodies [i.e., atoms]; for some of them are angular, some hooked, some concave, some convex, and indeed with countless other differences; so he thinks they cling to each other...

(Aristotle On Democritus ap. Simplicium de caelo 295, 11; KRS, §583, p. 426)

So Democritus used the idea of differently shaped physical atoms to explain how some combinations are possible and others are not: if two round objects collide they will merely bounce apart again, whereas if a hooked object collides with an irregular object they will become a compound.

There is an important difference between this and the Sophist’s account: the Sophist is not proposing a plethora of irregular different shapes, just two types. Only two are justified by the particular context; the Eleatic visitor has no reason to posit vast numbers of totally different shaped atoms. Whereas Democritus’ is a non-teleological and chaotic theory, the Eleatic visitor is constructing an ontology with a view to adding structure and reducing chaos within the simpler version of the logical atomist’s theory. The Eleatic visitor is therefore

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92 Various atomists (Democritus, Leucippus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras) apparently held that the atoms can be different weights from one another (KRS, §573, p. 421), different densities (KRS, §574, p. 421), different sizes and shapes (KRS, §574 and §575, p. 421); c.f. commentary in KRS, p. 422.
selective about introducing new shapes and does so only to the extent that the different shapes are needed to explain how atoms combine.

Sedley points out that a physical equivalent of the logical atomist’s theory is present in the *Timaeus* and we can use this to help understand what Plato might have envisioned for the logical atoms in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*; it is a more constrained version of physical atomism than that found in Democritus.\(^93\) Sedley suggests that the second of the three attempts to define *logos* in the *Theaetetus* already hints that the elements are not completely unknowable and that they have some describable shape or geometry which accounts for how they might combine. They are ‘functional parts with a definable formal aspect’ (Sedley, 2004, p. 171). Sedley suggests here that we can know elements by stating their function within the whole. He argues this on the grounds that the criticism of the Dream Theory was the criticism of the cognitive asymmetry of complexes and elements – the fact that we can know complexes but not the underlying elements – and that a sensible adaptation to make would be to soften the requirement for elements to be completely unknowable.

Given this, in the *Sophist* we get something more like a ‘structural element theory,’ says Sedley (ibid.), where complexes can be analysed into elements that have some sort of describable shape or geometry which accounts for the way they combine to create complexes. Sedley says this is close in spirit to the *Timaeus* metaphysical account and Democritean atomism. The difference between the *Timaeus* and Democritean accounts of physical atoms is primarily the teleology that is so apparent in the former – Plato is setting out an atomist theory to explain the ultimate cause of everything and why that is the best and only way that the world could be. The number of and type of atoms is limited and their

\(^93\) In the *Timaeus*, the main interlocutor, Timaeus, tells us that some underlying substance, or molding stuff, must exist which itself lacks characteristics but which accounts for characteristics in other things (50d-e); this is followed by the familiar definition of knowledge as true belief (51d) and a reference to god and higher purpose (50e8); and then an account of the world as containing Forms, the subject of knowledge, and particulars, the subject of belief, (52a) along with void for particulars and Forms to be present in. Void is said to be the source of ‘dreamlike illusions’ (which is surely a deliberate reference to the Dream Theory of the *Theaetetus*) because it makes us think that all existent things must exist within some patch of space (52a-c) – i.e., to think like the Giants (*Sophist* 245e-249e) or empiricists by overlooking abstract existents like numbers. Timaeus then goes on to talk about the four elements or kinds, and highlights their different shapes (the famous Platonic solids comprised of two different types of triangle) and discusses how these shapes are the underlying cause of the nature and combinations of the elements (52d-68d9), e.g., when earth encounters fire it is broken up by the angularity of the element (56d) and liquid water has particles that are uneven and are therefore easily moved (58d5-9) compared with solid water.
geometry is not haphazard and random, as in the case of Democritus’ atoms, but extremely precise.

The difference between the *Timaeus* and *Sophist* accounts is that the *Sophist* account is both a metaphysical one and a semantic one, and that the elements are two-typed: names standing for objects and predicates for relations and properties. The adjustment that Plato makes to the original Dream Theory is therefore to acknowledge the object-property distinction and to explain it using the analogy of ‘fitting together’ and ‘interweaving’ of two types of atoms.

I will discuss the link between the object-property distinction and different types of logical atom fully in chapter 5 section a. But I will now argue that the introduction of differently shaped atoms means that the *Sophist*’s updated version of logical atomism looks less Tractarian and more Fregean.

b. The puzzles of analytic philosophy

I have argued that the Dream Theory sets out some of the core principles of logical atomism and alluded to the fact that the details of Wittgenstein’s theory were subtly different to the details of Russell’s and Frege’s theories. The implication is that the nature of logical atoms, including how they combine, was a live topic millennia after Plato’s discussion of it in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. This is indeed the case, and I will now discuss how logical atomism arose in analytic philosophy from the late 19th century into the early part of the 20th century.

I will set out how Frege reached his preferred theory and suggest that his theory is similar to the *Sophist* because it involves introducing an ontological distinction whereby the shape of the fundamental building blocks of our language determines which linguistic combinations are possible and which are not, and the shape is what gives propositions unity.

I will start by discussing the development of Russell’s ideas and Wittgenstein’s exposure to them, since Wittgenstein’s introduction to philosophy was via Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics* and he subsequently went to Cambridge to study under Russell. I will show that

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94 Objects and properties have been contrasted in various ways in the secondary literature, e.g., objects are subjects, properties are predicates; objects are in space and time, properties are not; objects are singly-located, properties may be multiply located; objects are ‘concrete’, properties ‘abstract’ (cf. Rettler and Bailey (2017)). In general, properties are attributed to objects and can be called ‘qualities’, ‘features’, ‘characteristics’ or ‘types’; whereas objects like apples cannot be predicated of anything else.
Russell specific motivations – namely, logicism and refuting idealism – were not shared by Wittgenstein and this caused a divergence in their views. I will then go on to discuss how Frege’s closely-related work developed out of puzzles which demonstrated peculiar features of language (much like the puzzles of falsehood), and will set out Frege’s preferred solution. I will then highlight points of similarity between Frege’s solution and the Sophist’s.

Wittgenstein’s interest in the philosophy of mathematics is difficult to trace but we know that one of the first texts that Wittgenstein engaged with was Russell’s The Principles of Mathematics:

Wittgenstein himself told me that while he was working in the Engineering Laboratory, he and two others doing research there began to meet for one evening each week to discuss questions about mathematics, or ‘the foundations of mathematics’... At one of those meetings Wittgenstein said he wishes there were a book devoted to these questions, and one of the others said, ‘Oh there is, a book called The Principles of Mathematics, by Russell: it came out a few years ago.’ Wittgenstein told me that this was the first he had heard of Russell: and that this was what led him to write to Russell and to ask if he might come and see him. I believe it was from The Principles of Mathematics that Wittgenstein learned of Frege.

(Rhees, 1984, pp. 213-214)

Principles was based on a philosophical position that arose from Russell’s discussions with Moore at the turn of the 20th century: the rejection of the neo-Hegelian idealism of Bradley that was popular in British philosophy at the time, and of Berkeley’s view that esse est percipi, and of Kant’s idea that certain relations that hold between objects are sourced from within one’s mind. Russell preferred the realist position set out in Moore’s ‘The refutation of idealism’, where propositions are classified as objective complex entities independent of any mind.96

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95 See discussion in McGuinness (1990), especially chapters 3 and 4.
96 Moore had earlier stated that ‘Once it is definitely recognized that the proposition is to denote not a belief (in the psychological sense), it seems plain that it differs in no respect from the reality to which it is supposed merely to correspond, i.e. the truth that I exist differs in no respect from the corresponding reality my existence.’ (‘Truth’, 1901). And that truth ‘does not depend upon any relation between ideas and reality, nor even between concepts and reality, but is an inherent property of the whole formed by certain concepts... The ultimate
Russell’s preface to Principles, written in 1902, states that:

On fundamental questions of philosophy, my position, in all its chief features, is derived from Mr G. E. Moore. I have accepted from him the non-existential nature of propositions (except such as happen to assert existence) and their independence of any knowing mind; also the pluralism which regards the world, both that of existents and that of entities, as composed of an infinite number of mutually independent entities, with relations which are ultimate, and not reducible to adjectives of their terms or of the whole which these compose. Before learning these views from him, I found myself completely unable to construct any philosophy of arithmetic, whereas their acceptance brought about an immediate liberation from a large number of difficulties which I believe to be otherwise insuperable. The doctrines just mentioned are, in my opinion, quite indispensable to any even tolerably satisfactory philosophy of mathematics, as I hope the following pages will show. But I must leave it to my readers to judge how far the reasoning assumes these doctrines, and how far it supports them. Formally, my premises are simply assumed; but the fact that they allow mathematics to be true, which most current philosophies do not, is surely a powerful argument in their favour.

He continues in the next paragraph:

In Mathematics, my chief obligations, as is indeed evident, are to Georg Cantor and Professor Peano. If I had become acquainted sooner with the work of Professor Frege, I should have owed a great deal to him, but as it is I arrived independently at many results which he had already established.

There are two particular aspects of Moore’s philosophy that Russell adopted that appear to have strongly influenced Wittgenstein. The first is that propositions must contain the part of the world that they purport to be about,97 and the second is that there are no internal elements of everything that is are concepts’ (letter from Moore to Russell, 11 September 1898 in Griffin 1991, p. 300). His 1903 paper ‘The refutation of idealism’ built on these principles.

97 Contrast with Frege’s approach - introducing ‘sense’, as well as reference, when defining meaning, in order to allow that propositions containing the name ‘Mont Blanc’ do not contain something that corresponds to the entire mountain. On Russell’s account, the entire mountain must correspond to its name, which seems difficult to achieve. Wittgenstein did not follow Russell in suggesting that the proposition contains the part of the world
relations between concepts (the component parts of propositions). The *Tractatus* presents to us a picture where names refer directly to their objects without anything like Fregean ‘sense’ to mediate, and have no internal relations, such that Wittgenstein asserts the logical independence of elementary propositions.

The claim that there are no internal relations between concepts presents an immediate difficulty to anyone trying to found mathematics in logic: for ‘a = a’ to be meaningful, it must express something about the object mentioned (i.e., about the thing that a names) and the only candidate seems to be an internal relation (since no external thing is mentioned that would indicate a relevant external relation exists). The difficulty in explaining the identity relation presents a challenge to those who wish to explain how ‘the morning star is the evening star’ is meaningful, or to explain statements of the form ‘7 + 5 = 12’.

Russell’s *Principles* made an attempt to explain how meaningful identity statements can exist by introducing a ‘denoting concept’. Russell would go on to use the term for a range of purposes:

> The concept all numbers, though not itself infinitely complex, yet denotes an infinitely complex object. This is the inmost secret of our power to deal with infinity. An infinitely complex concept, though there may be such, can certainly not be manipulated by the human intelligence; but infinite collections, owing to the notion of denoting, can be manipulated without introducing any concept of infinite complexity.

(Principles, §72)

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98 On Moore’s account, a proposition is true when the concepts that it is composed of are externally related to one another in a certain way (contrast Bradley’s claim that all relations are internal and that knowledge is a relation between the knower and known). Hence Russell’s statement that ‘all relations are external’ (Russell *Collected Papers*, II, 143).

99 The *Tractatus* uses ‘object’ as a technical term, not to mean tables and chairs. See chapter 5 section b.

100 See *Principles*, §56.
Russell’s desire to understand denoting concepts led him to dedicate a paper to the idea and to its application to denoting concepts that do not actually denote anything (‘the present King of France’).

As Russell alludes to in the earlier quotation above, Peano provided him with the other key breakthrough in the *Principles*: the re-expression of mathematical propositions in terms of *classes* which are, in turn, grounded in certain rules of logic. Such a theory had already been developed by Frege in *Begriffsschrift* and subsequently in *Grundgesetze*. Russell’s critique of Frege’s theory and identification of ‘Russell’s paradox’ followed after Russell had already written the *Principles*, so is included as an appendix.

The totality of all logical objects, or of all propositions, involves, it would seem, a fundamental logical difficulty. What the complete solution of the difficulty may be, I have not succeeded in discovering; but as it affects the very foundations of reasoning, I earnestly commend the study of it to the attention of all students of logic.

(Principles, §500)

A mutual friend of Russell’s and Wittgenstein’s noted that Wittgenstein was working on the paradox around April 1909. Russell continued to work on understanding the denoting concept but his ‘Grey’s Elegy argument’ led him to reject the idea that the theory of

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101 ‘On Denoting’ (1905).
102 Appendix A to the *Principles*, entitled ‘The logical and arithmetical doctrines of Frege’ sets out the ‘contradiction’ in Frege’s work and states that it leads him to re-examine the whole doctrine of classes. Russell had wanted to reduce mathematics to logic using classes (or sets) as objects and allow higher-order set creation (sets of sets). He began by defining the null set as the set of things not identical to themselves; now he has one object (the null set) so can define the number 1; then he has two objects (the null set and the number 1) so can define the number 2, etc. The paradox arises in all such naïve set theories because self-reference is permitted. Hence the famous ‘set of all sets that do not contain themselves’. Appendix B of the *Principles*, entitled ‘The Doctrine of Types’ tries to resolve the paradox by restricting what one can properly say (self-reference is said to be nonsense). Frege’s theory required that we be able to speak of the domain of all objects, which was ruled out by Russell’s analysis.
103 See Linsky (2004).
104 See Jourdain’s correspondence from 20 April 1909 quoted in Grattan-Guinness (1977, §114).
105 In short, the paradox appeared to show that ‘the class of all classes that do not belong to themselves’ was a denoting concept. In the *Principles*, Russell said that a proposition containing a denoting concept is not about that denoting concept but is about a term connected with the concept in a ‘peculiar way’ (§53). When Russell tried to explain how the concept is connected with the correlated term he struggled. If there is a relationship between the denoting concept and the thing that it denotes, then there must be a true statement that we can make about the nature of that relationship, and this statement will make reference to the denoting concept
denoting from the *Principles* could ever adequately explain the connection between language and the things that language is about or help him resolve the paradox that he had discovered.

Russell’s next attempt was to ‘translate’ apparent denoting phrases (such as ‘the present King of France’) into something else in a way that removes the difficulty associated with the denoting phrase. In this way ‘the present King of France’ becomes ‘there is some $x$ such that $x$ is currently King of France; and, for any $y$, $y$ is currently King of France only if $y$ is the same thing as $x$; and that thing $x$ is bald’, or $(\exists x)(Kx \& \forall y(Ky \supset x = y) \& Bx)$. This transformed the possibilities open to those aiming to solve the paradox: the face-value grammatical form of a sentence may differ from the fully-analysed logical form of the proposition that the sentence expresses.

Wittgenstein followed Russell in this approach – to some extent. In the postscript to a letter from Wittgenstein to Russell dated late 1913 (Cambridge Letters, §23), Wittgenstein writes ‘your ‘Theory of Definite Descriptions’ is quite CERTAINLY correct, even though the individual primitive signs in it are not at all the ones you thought.’ – the first few paragraphs of the letter are taken up with criticism of Russell’s views on the identity relation and the proper scope of logic:

All the propositions of logic are generalisations of tautologies and all generalisations of tautologies are propositions of logic. There are no other logical propositions. (I regard this as definitive.) A proposition such as ‘$\exists x(x = x)$’, for example, is really a proposition of physics... The same holds for the axiom of infinity: whether there exist $N_0$ things is a matter for experience to determine (and one which experience cannot decide)... But the propositions of logic – and only they – have the property that

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106 Translation: ‘There exists some thing $x$, such that $x$ is identical with itself’

107 This is a reference to the axiom set out by Russell in the *Principles* which ensured that there were a sufficient number of sets available for Russell to use to ground mathematics in logic. Wittgenstein criticises it in the *Tractatus* at 5.535 by suggesting that what Russell means by the axiom of infinity can be expressed in language simply by the fact that there is an infinite number of names with different meanings.
their truth or falsity, as the case may be, finds its expression in the very sign for the proposition. I have not yet succeeded in finding a notation for identity that satisfies this condition; but I have NO doubt that it must be possible to find such a notation.\footnote{This confidence is lost by the time that Wittgenstein wrote the \textit{Tractatus}, and he declares that there is no adequate notation for identity because identity is not a relation between objects and it must therefore be rejected (5.53, 5.5301, summing up with 5.533).} For compound propositions (‘elementary propositions’) the ab-notation\footnote{I.e., $a$ is a name that stands for an object and $b$ in another, different one. Nothing else is required – see chapter 5 section b.} sufficient. It distresses me that you did not understand the rule dealing with signs in my last letter because it bores me BEYOND WORDS to explain it. If you thought about it for a bit you could discover it for yourself!

(\textit{ibid.})

Wittgenstein’s complaint was a fundamental one. Wittgenstein did not sympathise with Russell’s logicist project or with Russell’s (and Moore’s) realist, empiricist project to construct matter from sense-data.\footnote{See Russell’s ‘On Matter’ (1912(b)) and the discussion in chapter 3 of Potter (2008).} For Wittgenstein, logic ‘does not have a subject matter – a contention standing in stark contrast to the beliefs of Frege and Russell that logic describes the relations between ‘logical objects’ in a Platonistic ‘Third Realm’ (Frege) or the most general features of the universe (Russell)’ (Kantarian, 2007, p. 26). Wittgenstein continued building his theory on the basis that Russell’s theory of descriptions was correct, but Wittgenstein’s approach started to diverge from Russell’s in important ways. While Russell continued his original project, with Moore, of rejecting the idealist, and proceeded to build ontological features into his theory in order to achieve that over-arching aim, Wittgenstein did not have the same motivation. Wittgenstein proceeded on the basis of what \textit{must} be the case and a somewhat sparser ontology (see chapter 5 section b).

In order to salvage his over-arching project, Russell developed a solution of ‘types’ – suggesting a hierarchy of objects with individual objects at the first level and properties that apply to those on a higher level (and so on). In this way variables range over objects of a certain type and the paradox does not get going. However, from Wittgenstein’s perspective, these structures were not proposed on the basis of logical necessity and certainty; they were an \textit{ad hoc} addition to Russell’s theory in order to achieve a particular pre-determined
outcome. And, furthermore, it is not possible to formulate rules describing how the hierarchies interact in a way that determines rather than describes the allowed combinations and is still considered a matter of logic.\textsuperscript{111} Russell continued to add further amendments to his theory\textsuperscript{112} as he discovered that he could not achieve his original goal. One of these additions was the axiom of reducibility, which Wittgenstein later criticised (6.1232, 6.1233) for being an empirical statement about the world not a statement of logic.\textsuperscript{113}

Frege had already published his complete theory of logic and language by the time that Russell had identified the paradox that Frege’s theory was subject to, and Frege remarked that ‘hardly anything more undesirable can befall a scientific writer than to have, at the completion of his work, one of the foundation-stones of his edifice shattered.’\textsuperscript{114}

Frege had had similar concerns to Russell in relation to establishing the special status of mathematics and logic and dissatisfaction with idealism:

I understand by ‘laws of logic’ not psychological laws of takings-to-be-true, but laws of truth. If it is true that I am writing this in my chamber on the 13\textsuperscript{th} July 1893, while the wind howls out-of-doors, then it remains true even if all men should subsequently take it to be false. If being true is thus independent of being acknowledged by somebody or other, then the laws of truth are not psychological laws: they are

\textsuperscript{111} Potter (2008) suggests that Wittgenstein’s point here would be that there is no sense in introducing new grammatical categories in advance of having words to put into those new categories. ‘Proper name’ and ‘verb’ ‘are not buckets into which we cast words before they have meanings; they are descriptions of resemblances between the meanings which various existing words possess’ (2008, p. 84), and Russell is creating hierarchies and rules of combination to avoid a paradox but has no content to sort (via the hierarchies). He is working in the wrong order, and supposing that his description then determines the nature of the items that wants to describe.\textsuperscript{112}

It is worth pausing to clarify that Russell’s theory is still a logical atomism theory despite its departure from Wittgenstein’s. Russell still believed that truths are derived from the arrangement of independently existing facts which are complexes of objects standing in relations to one another, discoverable through analysis until one ‘hits upon’ the smallest most fundamental building block, and this accounts for how we can speak meaningfully about the world. Cf. sections 4.2 and 4.3 of Kelment (2020).

\textsuperscript{113} Potter explains: ‘Russell needed reducibility in order to obtain the indiscernibility of identicals in full generality [i.e., to maintain Leibniz’s law]. Without this axiom, he could not rule out the possibility that there are objects which are equal according to the definition (because they share their predicative properties) but differ as to higher-order properties.’ (2008, p. 204). Wittgenstein’s objection is that Russell only introduces the axiom in order to salvage the indiscernibility of identicals. See chapter 5 section c for further discussion of Wittgenstein’s attitude towards the identity relation.

\textsuperscript{114} From Frege’s Afterword to Volume II of Grundgesetze written in October 1902 (p. 253).
boundary stones set in an eternal foundation, which our thought can overflow, but never displace.

(Grundgesetze, I, xvi)

Frege stated that logic was concerned with the predicate ‘true’ and that this predicate functions in a particularly unusual way:

What distinguishes [true] from all other predicates is that predicating it is always included in predicating anything.

(Posthumous Writings, §129)

Potter (2008) highlights the peculiarity here: ‘if logic is about truth and truth is in this sense redundant, it is a short step to conclude that logic is not about anything’ (2008, p. 60). Frege did not take this redundancy to show that the word ‘true’ was meaningless, as Wittgenstein would go on to do. Rather, Frege saw it as a peculiar difficulty to overcome. In ‘On Sense and Reference’, Frege discussed some puzzles that appeared to show strange feature of language relating to the concept of truth and to the identity relation. Consideration of these puzzles led him in a different direction to Russell.

In the first puzzle, he considers statements of the form ‘the morning star is the evening star’ and decides that there is more to meaning than names standing for objects because statements of the form ‘$a = b$’ have a different cognitive significance to statements of the form ‘$a = a$’. In the case of the latter, I can tell the truth of the proposition just by inspecting the signs on the page; but, in the case of the latter, I have to inspect the world. If ‘$a$’ means the same as ‘$b$’ because meaning is reducible to the referent of the term, then I cannot explain this difference between obvious tautologies and meaningful identity statements.

In the second puzzle, Frege considers statements of the form ‘$x$ believes that $p$’, e.g., ‘Alex believes that George Orwell wrote Animal Farm’. George Orwell is the name of Eric Blair, i.e., both names share the same referent, yet we cannot necessarily substitute one name for the other and retain the original truth-value of the proposition. Alex may not know that the two names refer to the same person and may believe that George Orwell wrote Animal Farm but not that Eric Blair did. The truth-value can change even though the object being spoken about is the same, so there must be more to meaning than the reference.
Frege called this the ‘sense’ of the proposition. It is the manner of presentation of the referent, or the way that one conceives of the referent of the name or term. Consider the name ‘1’ and term ‘2/2’; they both have the same reference but they carry a different sense. Likewise, for ‘morning star’ and ‘evening star’, or for ‘George Orwell’ and ‘Eric Blair’.

Frege thought of sense as being just as objective as reference, because the sense of an expression is what is communicated from speaker to hearer, so must be something shared and not private (like an idea). But then there is something of a conceivability, or strangeness, problem with the notion of sense. Frege suggested the following analogy:

The reference of a proper name is the object itself which we designate by its means; the idea, which we have in that case, is wholly subjective; in between lies the sense, which is indeed no longer subjective like the idea, but is yet not the object itself. The following analogy will perhaps clarify these relationships. Somebody observes the Moon through a telescope. I compare the Moon itself to the reference; it is the object of the observation, mediated by the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope, and by the retinal image of the observer. The former I compare to the sense, the latter is like the idea or experience. The optical image in the telescope is indeed one-sided and dependent upon the standpoint of observation; but it is still objective, inasmuch as it can be used by several observers. At any rate it could be arranged for several to use it simultaneously. But each one would have his own retinal image.

(Frege, On Sense and Reference, 1984, pp. 160-161)

However, it is challenging to give a non-metaphorical account of sense. Frege proposed that the sense of a sentence (as opposed to a name) is the ‘thought’. By this he meant, not the subjective performance of thinking, but the objective content, and the truth of a sentence is its reference. Therefore, each sentence is effectively analysed as a long name for The True or The False,\(^{115}\) and the manner of that reference, the thought, is the sense of the sentence.

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\(^{115}\) The most immediately obvious criticism of the idea that sentences are names for truth-values seems to be that, on such a theory, I speak truly when I assert a name for The True, i.e., I have supposedly said something true when I say ‘The True’, but it is entirely unclear what I have asserted and how it is a true statement. As Potter puts it ‘When I assert ‘The True’, it seems that I am performing the incoherent feat of telling the truth without
Truth-value can now remain unchanged when replacing one name by another which has the same reference, but this is not all there is to meaning.

On this theory, ‘Socrates’ and ‘the teacher of Plato’ are both the same kind of symbol – a name with a sense and a reference. Wittgenstein preferred the theory that Russell developed whereby ‘Socrates’, if it was a genuine proper name at all, was a proper name by virtue of having a reference, and where an expression like ‘the teacher of Plato’ is not a proper name – revealed by the fact that it has parts which are symbols in their own right.

In Russell’s ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’ he sets out his view (opposing Frege) as follows:

It is perfectly evident as soon as you think of it, that a proposition is not a name for a fact, from the mere circumstance that there are two propositions corresponding to each fact. Suppose it is a fact that Socrates is dead. You have two propositions: ‘Socrates is dead’ and ‘Socrates is not dead’. And those two propositions corresponding to the same fact, there is one fact in the world which makes one true and one false. That is not accidental, and illustrates how the relation of proposition to fact is a totally different one from the relation of name to the thing named. For each fact there are two propositions, one true and one false, and there is nothing in the nature of the symbol to show us which is the true one and which is the false one. If there were, you could ascertain the truth about the world by examining propositions without looking round you.

(Philosophy of Logical Atomism, 1918(b), pp. 167-168)

This argument stems from two ideas held by Wittgenstein and adopted by Russell: (1) the same feature of the world that makes a proposition true also makes its negation false;\(^{116}\) (2) there being any particular truth that I am telling’ (2008, p. 92). Hence Wittgenstein’s insistence that propositions are always complex.

\(^{116}\) This removes the need for Meinongian-style non-existent objects. While some philosophers have been troubled by the question ‘what do I refer to when I speak of Zeus or Pegasus?’, Meinong simply posited a realm of non-existent objects to answer the question. The idea stemmed from the fact that when I speak I seem to intend to refer to an object and to be speaking about something, so perhaps this is what occurs. Russell discussed the idea in a 1904 paper published in *Mind*, ‘Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions’ (see Russell 1973, pp. 21-76) and grappled with the existence of so-called ‘negative facts’ at the time of writing *Principia*. Wittgenstein’s alternative (the ‘picture theory’) was that what makes a proposition true (if it is actually true) is
we can understand the meaning of a proposition without knowing whether it holds true or not. On this view a feature of the world might make a proposition false, but the proposition is not altered (by switching its referent from ‘The True’ to ‘The False’, for example).

Russell’s theory of definite descriptions had some apparent advantages over Frege’s. Both Russell and Frege were trying to construct a language which:

...would be in some ways a more precise and scientific instrument than ordinary language for purposes of logic and mathematics. Both Frege and Russell regarded it as essential that such a language should contain only expressions which had a definite sense, by which they meant that all sentences in which the expressions could occur should have a truth-value... Frege proposed to avoid such truth-value gap by arbitrarily stipulating a reference for vacuous definite descriptions and empty names – e.g. that ‘the sovereign of x’ shall refer to the number ‘0’. Russell’s analysis, according to which ‘the sovereign of x’ is not a referring expression at all, whether or not x is a monarchy, achieves the definiteness sought by Frege by far less artificial means.

Wittgenstein, when he wrote the *Tractatus*, accepted Frege’s requirement of definiteness of sense (TLP 2.0211, 4.063, 5.4733) and Russell’s method of securing this definiteness for propositions containing definite descriptions. He was interested in particular in applying and modifying Russell’s theory to fit descriptions which described complex objects by enumerating their parts. ‘Every statement about complexes’ he wrote ‘can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complexes completely’ (TLP 2.0201).

(Kenny, 1973, p. 38)

Frege’s approach to sentences meant that he recognized three classes of expression: singular terms, sentences, and predicates (Morris, 2008, p. 69). Singular terms include a wide range of things such as objects, people, numbers, and even mathematical series like ‘the least rapidly converging series’; sentences convey ‘thoughts’ which refer to entities of a special kind that become peculiar types of names that in turn refer to truth-values; and predicates, which are the same as what makes its negation false, ensuring that the world is responsible for the truth or falsity of propositions and that this part of the world was the meaning of the proposition (which was either asserted or denied). Russell adopted this (see quotation above from ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’ (1918(b))).
left over when you remove a singular term from a sentence, and refer to ‘a kind of incomplete entity which [Frege] calls a concept’, or function, which yields a truth-value as the output when a singular term is provided as input (ibid.). As a result of these different categories of entity, the way that linguistic items correlate to non-linguistic items (this correlation being fundamental to logical atomism - see chapter 2 section b) varies depending on the type of linguistic expression being employed.

Russell did not like this approach and his theory of definite descriptions allowed him to avoid being subject to a difficulty that afflicted Frege and led to the requirement to introduce ‘sense’: having predicates which are true of the same thing having to be correlated with the same concept.

Russell criticised Frege’s theory because it required that there be a distinction between a ‘concept as such and a concept used as a term, between, e.g., such pairs as is and being, human and humanity, one in such a proposition as ‘this is one’ and 1 in ‘1 is a number’’ (Russell, 1903, pp.45-46). Russell considered that Frege was wrong to think that there were ‘fundamental differences in logical or grammatical kind between entities which are correlated with the different kinds of words’ (Morris, 2008, p. 92). Frege can show but not state what his theory is meant to result in and was content enough to respond, in On Concept and Object: ‘By a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought; I mention an object, when what I intend is a concept. I fully realise that in such cases I was relying upon a reader who would be ready to meet me half-way – who does not begrudge a pinch of salt’ (Frege, 1951, p. 179).

Russell instead leaned more heavily on a meta-language as a solution – the same approach as with the theory of types, creating hierarchies to avoid self-reference issues.

However, Wittgenstein made a damning criticism of Russell in his Notes on Logic: ‘Every right theory of judgement must make it impossible for me to judge that ‘this table penholders the book’ (Russell’s theory does not satisfy this requirement)’ – this is the same point that he makes in the Tractatus at 5.5422. Wittgenstein was attracted to Russell’s theory of definite descriptions because it meant that he could avoid the distinctions that Frege had drawn, which would have fundamentally altered the nature of his theory, but both Wittgenstein and
Russell recognized that Russell’s theory failed to achieve what Russell required of it: explaining the unity of some collections of words and the lack of unity in others.

Frege used the idea of a mathematical function and applied it to statements. In mathematics we might have a squaring function \((x)^2\) or addition function \((x) + (y)\) which have argument places into which we slot numbers. The bare functions, without numbers plugged in, are incomplete or unsaturated expressions. In contrast, \(2^2\) or \(1 + 2\) are complete or saturated expressions, because we have inserted an object into the argument place of the function. A denoting expression would take the form \(\langle x \rangle = \langle y \rangle\) where the expression as a whole denotes the truth-value True when the objects slotted in are actually identical or False otherwise, e.g. \(2^2 = 4\) denotes True. In predicate calculus, the function might be something like ‘is tall’ or ‘is taller than’. It would be represented in the same way as mathematical functions e.g. ‘\(F(x)\)’ or ‘\(F( ) ( )\)’. We can show where the object would be placed using a variable such as ‘\(F(x)\)’. When we insert an object in place of the variable we get a sentence which denotes either True or False, ‘\(Fa\)’.

A name is something like ‘\(a\)’ rather than ‘\(F( )\)’. It is clear from comparing the shapes of ‘\(a\)’ and ‘\(F( )\)’ that some items are the right shape to combine and others are not. For example, I can slot ‘\(a\)’ into ‘\(F( )\)’ to form the sentence ‘\(a\) is tall’, or ‘\(a\)’ and ‘\(b\)’ into ‘\(G( ) ( )\)’ to form the sentence ‘\(a\) is taller than \(b\)’, but I cannot slot ‘\(F( ) ( )\)’ into ‘\(a\)’ because it is the wrong shape so would create nonsense.\(^{117}\) There is a fundamental difference in the shape of functions and objects which determines their combinatorial possibilities and which explains how they become a single sentence once we combine their component parts.

It might be natural to assume that the components of ‘\(Fa\)’ are \(F\) and \(a\)\(^{118}\) – not \(F(x)\) and \(a\). The use of capital and lower case to represent the component parts would be partial acknowledgement that ‘\(F\)’ and ‘\(a\)’ are fundamentally different types of entities, but it provides no insight about the rules of combination and the essential nature of the different types of components. Frege’s insight was to see that, not only are the two components different, but

\(^{117}\) Notice that this theory copes with non-monadic predicates, i.e., relations like ‘is taller than’ as well as properties like ‘is tall’. I will come back to this point shortly.

\(^{118}\) In contrast to Wittgenstein’s suggestion at 5.47. See chapter 5 for further discussion.
that that difference manifests itself in the shape of the entities and therefore in the combinatorial possibilities.

I have shown that the development of this theory was complex and arose out of consideration of puzzles strikingly similar to those considered in parts I and II of the *Theaetetus*. And I have shown that Frege eventually chose a theory that involved distinguishing two different types of building block with different shapes which allow for, and also restrict, combination into complexes. Just as the Dream Theory and *Tractatus* were alike, I have argued that the *Sophist* and Frege’s theory are alike.

**c. Wittgenstein’s rejection of Fregean distinctions**

I will now set out Wittgenstein’s criticism of Frege: that he failed to properly distinguish names and descriptions. I will explain that this reveals fundamental differences between Wittgenstein’s and Frege’s theories of the nature of names (logical atoms).

Frege's concept-object distinction is not a distinction between nouns and verbs in exactly the same way as in the *Sophist*. However, it is a distinction where the shape of the most fundamental building blocks of our language is what determines which combinations of linguistic items can combine and which cannot, and how that combination takes place in a way that creates unity of the eventual proposition. As I alluded to above, the Fregean solution has the advantage of being able to cope with relations as well as properties, because functions can be ‘multi-placed’, by allowing multiple argument places into which we can slot names in a structured way - a nuance not explicitly mentioned in the *Sophist* although Plato shows awareness of the problem that relations present in the dice passage of the *Theaetetus*;¹¹⁹

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¹¹⁹ At *Theaetetus* 154c2-7, there is a discussion of the fact that 6 is more than 4 but fewer than 12, i.e., that it is possible for something to become more or less, bigger or smaller, or otherwise undergo change, by means other than growing. Immediately preceding this, at 153d6-e1, we hear that accepting flux and relativism means that qualities have no independent existence in time and space and that qualities therefore do not exist except within our perceptions as totally private existents (153e3-154a8). The problem that appears to be being presented is this: if changes are not located in the thing itself, but in the perceiver’s perception of them in relation to other things, then it looks like objects do not have inherent properties belonging to them, i.e., it is a denial of the object-property distinction. The Kinds of the *Sophist* are a way of structuring elements which I will argue is equivalent to the object-property distinction (chapter 5), but there does not appear to be any in principle reason why the Kinds cannot structure multiple objects, i.e., cope with relations as well as properties.
his proposed treatment of properties in the *Sophist* needs only a small change to accommodate relations.

The solution presented to us in the *Sophist* and Frege’s theory both achieve two things: (1) they explain how it is that a combination of two (or more, in the case of Frege’s theory) items become a single complex, with unity, over and above a mere list, and (2) they explain how some combinations are *not* possible. Wittgenstein’s ‘links of a chain’ analogy arguably achieves the first of these two (although we are not given much detail on how this mechanism actually works) but definitely does not achieve the second.

Frege’s approach contrasts with Wittgenstein’s ‘links of a chain’ analogy: ‘In the atomic fact objects hang one in another, like the links of a chain’ (2.03). Wittgenstein’s atoms, the objects and their names, do not vary in shape, they are all links in a chain where each and every one can slots into any other. This might help us explain how ‘F’ and ‘a’ can combine to create a meaningful complex such as ‘Socrates is tall’ or ‘Theaetetus sits’, but it can never explain why it is that the same does not apply to some other combinations, such as ‘is tall sits’ or ‘Theaetetus Socrates’ (this is Wittgenstein’s own criticism of Russell at 5.5422).

Wittgenstein’s theory shares some similarities with Democritus’, for example, objects are said to be ‘...unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable’ (2.0271, 1961). But, having invoked the idea of shaped and therefore linkable elements to avoid Bradley’s Regress, he rejected differently shaped elements in favour of uniformity of type.

Wittgenstein made the following criticism of Frege’s alternative:

> The arguments of functions are readily confused with the affixes of names. For both arguments and affixes enable me to recognize the meaning of the signs containing them.

> For example, when Russell writes ‘+c’, the ‘c’ is an affix which indicates that the sign as a whole is the addition-sign for cardinal numbers. But the use of this sign is the result of arbitrary convention and it would be quite possible to choose a simple sign instead

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120 I have used the Pears and McGuinness translation here because ‘unalterable’ and ‘subsistent’ seem to capture better the point that Wittgenstein is making versus the Ramsey translation of ‘fixed’ and ‘existent’.

121 See Perovic (2017).
of ‘+c’; in ‘~p’, however, ‘p’ is not an affix but an argument: the sense of ‘~p’ cannot be understood unless the sense of ‘p’ has been understood already. (In the name Julius Caesar ‘Julius’ is an affix. An affix is always part of a description of the object to whose name we attach it: e.g. the Caesar of the Julian gens.)

If I am not mistaken, Frege’s theory about the meaning of propositions and functions is based on the confusion between an argument and an affix. Frege regarded the propositions of logic as names, and their arguments as the affixes of those names.

(Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 5.02, 1961,122 my italics)

In other words, Wittgenstein maintained that Frege failed to make the proper distinction between names and descriptions and was incorrect in his characterisation of names (logical atoms). In relation to properly distinguishing names and descriptions, Wittgenstein followed Russell instead. By introducing the theory of definite descriptions, Russell was able to maintain his view that all true propositions of the form ‘x is y’ are tautologous, because identity is a relation between objects – because this only applied for proper names and he reduced the number of words that fell into the category of proper name. Frege continued to maintain that two names with the same reference may diverge in sense, so ‘x is y’ can say something different from ‘x is x’.

Wittgenstein was attracted to Russell’s theory of definite descriptions but took it in a different direction. For Wittgenstein, the theory showed that analysing language can remove the need to introduce the kind of additional, arguably ad hoc, and even slightly strange distinctions that Frege required. However, Russell did not go far enough in his analysis, Wittgenstein wanted to analyse even further to secure uniqueness among names and therefore remove the need for the identity relation altogether. There were fundamental differences between Wittgenstein’s and Frege’s theories of the nature of names and the consequences for the

122 The Pears and McGuinness translation seems to be preferable here because the original German ‘Indices’ is left as ‘indices’ by Ramsey whereas Pears and McGuinness’ choice of ‘affix’ makes the meaning of the text clearer. Additionally, Ramsey fails to include quotation marks around the second instance of ‘Julius’, whereas the original German has quotation marks and this seems to be an important point – that the name is mentioned, i.e., functions as a sign in this instance here. Therefore only Pears and McGuinness capture an important point that Wittgenstein was making in the original text.
concept of identity. For Wittgenstein, the elimination of identity was a fundamental part of what he was trying to do with the *Tractatus*. I will discuss this in detail in chapter 5 section c.

I have suggested in this chapter 4 that the account given of the fundamental building blocks of language in the *Sophist* and in Frege’s works are alike in an important respect: the combinatorial possibilities of logical atoms are determined by their ‘shape’, and they fall into distinct categories only one of which is objects. In other words, the Tractarian logical atomism of the Dream Theory is transformed into a more Fregean-looking theory. We know that Wittgenstein was aware of and criticised Frege’s theory, so in the next chapter I will discuss why Wittgenstein retained only one type of atom and the consequence of rejecting Fregean structures.
Chapter 5. Verdict on the object-property distinction

I have argued that the Tractatus and the Dream Theory share striking similarities including that they discuss an ontology with a single basic building block from which all states of affairs and statements about them are founded, i.e., logical atomism with one type of logical atom. I have argued that the theory developed in the Sophist is more complex and shares more similarities with Frege’s, because new distinctions are introduced in order to explain the structure of atomic combinations. This includes distinguishing two differently-shaped types of logical atom.

I will now argue that the introduction of a second type of atom in the Sophist is equivalent to introducing the object-property distinction, and this equivalence helps to show that the object-property distinction is lacking in the Tractatus.

In arguing that the Tractatus rejects the object-property distinction, and that it sets out an object-only ontology, I am disagreeing with most of the secondary literature. However, I will show that this conclusion must follow from a close examination of the original text and is supported by Wittgenstein’s own notes from 1915 and his reflections on the Tractatus in a letter from c.1930. Wittgenstein’s rejection of Frege’s function-object distinction was on the grounds that, when exploring what must necessarily be the case, objects are the only result.

Plato used the Theaetetus and Sophist to show the necessity of the object-property distinction in forming meaningful propositions. A theory with only one type of fundamental atom, like the Dream Theory or the Tractatus, cannot work because the consequence of any such theory is that we cannot speak meaningfully about many aspects of the world that we would like to speak meaningfully about, and we can only produce lists of names for objects. Wittgenstein agreed that having only one type of logical atom is restrictive, and stated that the Tractatus itself was, strictly speaking, ‘nonsense’ (6.54), but denied that it would prohibit the formation of meaningful propositions until many years after the publication of the Tractatus, when he acknowledged that it inadvertently relegated all of mathematics to nonsense.

a. Objects and properties: different types of logical atom

I will start by suggesting that objects are one type of logical atom and properties are another, and that a logical atomist can propose an object-only ontology, a property-only ontology, an
object-property ontology, or something else (if they introduce alternative logical atoms). I will claim that the Dream Theory is an object-only ontology and that the Sophist introduces us to a second type of logical atom, properties, and acknowledges the importance of the object-property distinction.

In the *Theaetetus* the interlocutors try to build propositions from names which stand for objects (see chapters 1 and 2). They discover that placing a series of names side-by-side does not yield a proposition with unity, but a mere list. On the model that they test out, all words are names which stand for objects, such that the world and language looks like this:

**World of objects:**

```
O1  O2  O3  O4
```

**Names standing for those objects:**

```
N1  N2  N3  N4
```

When we gather together the names, we want them to form a proposition with unity, but the interlocutors struggle to explain how this unity is created over and above a mere list of names. If the world contains only objects, and language can only name objects, then the only candidate for what constitutes a proposition about the world is groups or lists of names, e.g.:

```
‘N1 N2’ or ‘N2 N3 N4’
```

But we know that ‘Theaetetus Socrates’, for example, is not a proposition capable of being true or false.

This is the same difficulty that is faced by the *Tractatus*, which claims that objects are connected like links of a chain (2.03) – it fails to explain why ‘Theaetetus sits’ is fundamentally different from ‘Theaetetus Socrates’, i.e., why some combinations are possible while others are not.

This picture changes in the *Sophist*, where we acknowledge the need for two different types of logical atom, one representing objects and another, of an entirely different nature, representing Kinds (chapters 3 and 4). A concatenation of names will never produce a proposition, but a combination of a name and a verb will, because the things that they stand
for combine in a way that objects alone cannot. The structuring element introduces *aboutness*. On this picture we have the following set-up to replace that outlined above:

*World of existents, i.e., objects and properties:*

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
O_1 & O_2 & P_1 & P_2 \\
\end{array}
\]

*Names and verbs standing for these:*

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
N_1 & N_2 & V_1 & V_2 \\
\end{array}
\]

The names and verbs are of a different metaphorical shape (see chapter 4), such that the component parts of propositions ‘slot’ or ‘fit’ together in certain ways but not others. This explanation was not available to the Dream Theorist, who claimed that all logical atoms were the same shape and had no distinguishing features, or to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, because, again, logical atoms were said to be propertyless and necessarily indistinguishable.

Frege’s mathematical analogy helps us to see why some combinations are possible and others are not: to build a proposition I need to take a name (for an object) and slot it into an argument place (a structuring kind), e.g., plug ‘a’ into function ‘f(x)’ to form the proposition ‘f(a)’. I am not able to plug ‘f(x)’ into ‘a’ – that would be like trying to put an electrical socket into a plug, it is simply the wrong shape.

So now we can say that propositions are of the form:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{‘}V_1(N_2)\text{’} \\
&\text{‘}V_2(N_1, N_2)\text{’}
\end{align*}
\]

Contrasting the two approaches, as I have done above, shows that the key move that Plato makes in the *Sophist* is to acknowledge the object-property distinction by introducing two different types of logical atom: one type representing objects and one type representing properties. The object-property distinction and having two different logical atoms are ‘two sides of the same coin’.
I have already argued that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is strikingly similar to the Dream Theory in that it proposes a version of logical atomism with one type of logical atom. I will now argue that, much like the Dream Theory, the *Tractatus* lacks the object-property distinction, because it sets out an ontology where there is only one type of logical atom: objects.

It is not the case that the introduction of the object-property distinction necessarily involves two different types of atoms in exactly the way that I have set out above. But I will argue that this does happen to be the case in relation to the *Theaetetus, Sophist* and *Tractatus*.

If I introduce the object-property distinction into an ontological theory, then I can build that theory in a number of different ways. For example, one option available to me is to state that objects are the bare substratum onto which properties ‘attach’, in which case there are two different atomic entities – each one is not reducible to the other but fundamentally different (option ‘a’).\(^\text{123}\) Alternatively, my theory might state that objects are just bundles of properties, i.e., objects can be reduced to properties, and properties are the only fundamental atomic entity (option ‘b’).\(^\text{124}\) Or I can argue that objects are the only thing that exist and certain possible combinations of objects are experienced as, or manifest as, properties, in which case there is only one type of atomic entity but this time it is objects rather than properties (option ‘c’).\(^\text{125}\) As it is developed, any theory (a-c) would then be expected to contain details about which entities can and cannot combine, in what manner complexes are created out of atoms, and what role these entities play in the wider theory.

The eventual theories would differ on the following key points: whether I can analyse a complex compound into smaller component parts; whether I am left with one thing or two at the end of that analysis; and what limits there are on the combinatorial possibilities provided for by these one or two types of atom.

If I deny the existence of the object-property distinction, then I am denying that objects and properties are different from one another in some fundamental way. On this theory there is no category of thing called ‘objects’ inherently different from some other category of thing.

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\(^\text{123}\) E.g., as per Locke book two (1690, pp. 104-402).

\(^\text{124}\) E.g., where objects become something like ‘coinstantiated universals’ (c.f. Armstrong (1997), Lewis (1983)). I found the discussion in Loux’s ‘Substance and Attribute’ (1978) very helpful.

\(^\text{125}\) In the next section of this chapter, I will argue that this is what Wittgenstein attempts to do in the *Tractatus*, contrary to the views expressed by most commentators.
called ‘properties’. When building my theory, I no longer have the option of stating that objects are a bare substratum onto which properties attach (i.e., option ‘a’ above is immediately ruled-out). If, for some reason, I particularly wanted to create a theory involving more than one type of atomic entity, and if I specified that these types could not be ‘object’ and ‘property’, then I could introduce other distinctions, e.g., ‘object-thought’ or ‘property-time’. But ‘object’ and ‘property’ are the most common distinctions to draw, if any.

Whatever options I take when building my theory, e.g., whatever additional elements or rules I choose to introduce, it is reasonable to expect that the final written account of that theory would state what those elements and rules are; i.e., it would be strange to build and publish an ontology (and to state that it is the ultimate solution to all philosophical problems) and then only mention a sub-set of the fundamental elements or rules that are contained within that theory and that are necessary for it to work as designed. Therefore, in the next section of this chapter, I will argue that the lack of detail about properties in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, and his repeated insistence that objects are the only fundamental element, shows that Wittgenstein deliberately chooses to exclude properties from his ontology, i.e., deliberately rejects the object-property distinction.

b. Wittgenstein’s object-only ontology

I am going to argue that a close examination of the Tractatus reveals that Wittgenstein builds an ontology entirely from objects, with no properties, in other words that Wittgenstein rejected the object-property distinction. I will start by discussing the nature of Tractarian Objects, explaining how they are different to everyday objects. I will discuss Ramsey’s and Anscombe’s interpretations of Wittgenstein’s theory and argue that Anscombe misunderstood Wittgenstein’s intent.

Statement 1.1 of the Tractatus says that the world, everything that exists, is a collection of facts, not ‘Dinge’ (things). No definition of ‘things’ has been provided and we must take ‘things’ to mean the everyday things that we interact with like tables and chairs. This

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126 As Wittgenstein does in the second to last sentence of the preface to his Tractatus: ‘I am, therefore, of the opinion that the problems have in essentials been finally solved.’
statement is followed by strict definitions of ‘facts’ and ‘atomic facts’ and then immediately by 2.01, which defines Tractarian Objects – here and henceforth capitalised to distinguish it from objects or things like tables and chairs. Here Wittgenstein writes ‘Der Sachverhalt ist eine Verbindung von Gegenständen. (Sachen, Dingen.)’, translated by Ramsey as ‘An atomic fact is a combination of objects (entities, things)’ and by Pears and McGuinness as ‘A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things)’ (my italics). I interpret this to mean two things: (1) that we are meant to take ‘Gegenstände’ ‘Sachen’ and ‘Dingen’ as interchangeable – else they would not be listed next to one another in the manner that they are; and (2) that the choice of word that we use, and that we usually translate as ‘Object’, is in some sense arbitrary and inexact. There is no word already in existence that exactly captures the meaning that Wittgenstein wants to employ, else he would have used it (and only it), but these words are an approximation and the full technical meaning of the word Object will be set out in the proceeding text of the Tractatus. This is a plausible explanation of the fact that Wittgenstein offers up multiple words, why the brackets are necessary after Gegenständen, and why details about the nature of Objects are provided in subsequent statements.

I therefore take statement 2.01 to be Wittgenstein providing a technical definition of Tractarian Object, and indicating that we are not meant to import any connotations that are linked to our everyday use of the words ‘object’ or ‘thing’. He is specifying here that Objects are existents that combine to make up atomic facts, i.e., the fundamental building blocks, simple elements, or logical atoms. We are being told, in effect, that we are going to use some existing word meaning roughly ‘object’ to mean logical atom and that ‘Object’ will not imply tables and chairs.

‘Gegenstände’ is, in fact, used in everyday German to mean ordinary objects like tables and chairs. However, if we set aside connotations that we ordinarily associate with the word then it starts to seem a much more appropriate word-choice again. ‘Gegen-’ just means ‘against’ or ‘contrary to’, and ‘-stand’ means much the same as it does in English (state, level, position part of withstand, standstill, standpoint); so Gegenstände just means a thing that you come

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127 This takes place in the seven statements numbered 1.1 to 2. As I mentioned in footnote 64, Ramsey translates ‘Sachverhalt’ as ‘atomic fact’, whereas Pears and McGuinness call this ‘state of affairs’.
up against or that puts up resistance to you. Although it is normally used to refer to tables and chairs, and although was given specialist meaning by Wittgenstein’s predecessors and contemporaries (e.g., Frege)\(^{128}\) that we might expect Wittgenstein to follow, actually, at its most basic, it just means an obstacle in our path that we can bump into and interact with.

Wittgenstein also uses ‘Gegenstände’ in a non-technical way, and sometimes in close proximity to its technical use. Considering this helps us to better understand the distinction between the two and the nature of Tractarian Objects. For example, at 2.0121 Wittgenstein says that, just as we cannot think of a spatial Object\(_{\text{Everyday}}\) (Gegenstände, used in the sense of tables and chairs) apart from or outside of space, in the same way we cannot think of an Object\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\) (also Gegenstände, but this time in the technical sense defined in 2.01) apart from or separated out from the possible connections that it has to the other Object\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\) in the world that are contained in it inherently. Each Object\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\) contains, as a potentiality, all of the possible connections that it can hold with all of the other Objects\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\) in the world. The spatial analogy requires the everyday use of the word object, but it is clear that we are meant to be contrasting objects and Objects (because we are told that, just as one fact holds true for objects, a different fact holds true of Objects).

In interpreting Wittgenstein’s use of the word ‘Gegenstände’, we must be guided by context. In the example above, we must interpret the first use as meaning Object\(_{\text{Everyday}}\) and the second as Object\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\) in order to make sense of the paragraph. However, an inconsistency issue occurs throughout the *Tractatus* and in some instances it is less than clear how we should translate and interpret the word. For example, at 2.01231 Wittgenstein talks about the ‘external and internal properties’\(^{129}\) of Gegenstand. Given that 2.01231 is meant to be a comment on 2.0123, and ultimately on 2.01, Wittgenstein ‘should’ be using ‘Gegenstand’ to mean Object\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\). However, we know from 2.02 that Objects\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\) are simple and have no properties, which rules out this option.

The lack of external and internal properties is just one way in which Objects\(_{\text{Tractarian}}\) are fundamentally different from Objects\(_{\text{Everyday}}\). The existence of the former is deduced using Wittgenstein’s transcendental method, not via perception and interaction with the world.

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\(^{128}\) Where it is contrasted with ‘concepts’ (Frege (1892)). See chapter 4.

\(^{129}\) Pears and McGuinness translation used here (Ramsey uses ‘qualities’ instead of ‘properties’).
Wittgenstein imagined what must necessarily be the case and concluded that there must be some basic ingredients of reality which take the form of Objects\textsuperscript{Tractarian}. While you can imagine the world in all sorts of different ways, one thing is always given: ‘There must be objects, if the world is to have unalterable form’, (2.026, my italics), and ‘...there would still have to be objects and states of affairs’ (4.2211, my italics),\textsuperscript{130} i.e., the Objects\textsuperscript{Tractarian} are a logical necessity in the world envisioned in the \textit{Tractatus}.

Objects\textsuperscript{Tractarian} (which I will simply refer to as ‘Objects’ from now on) are simple (2.02). Every statement about complexes can be analysed into one about their component parts (2.0201) and this analysis must end somewhere, at the smallest non-compound thing: the Object (2.01 and 2.021). No further analysis is possible because Objects are the ultimate foundation and are conceptually indivisible. ‘The fixed, the existent and the object are one... The configuration [of Objects] is the changing, the variable’ (2.027 and 2.0271), rather than their existence. Their configurations form facts (2.0272), and form the substance and structure of the world (2.021, 2.024). Their nature is what allows for combinations and recombinations (2.0231, 2.033). Objects ‘contain’ the possibility of all states of affairs that they may be found in (2.014). Once the analysis into Objects has been completed, and once ‘all Objects are given, then thereby are all possible atomic facts also given’ (2.0124) – nothing else is required. ‘The possibility of its occurrence in atomic facts is the form of an object’ (2.0141), which is something like its metaphorical shape, because Objects combine like links in a chain (2.03, 2.032).

At 2.011 we learn that it is essential to Objects that they are possible constituents of atomic facts. It is the very essence of these atomic, simple elements that they are the building blocks of atomic facts. If something has the characteristic of being able to be a constituent part of an atomic fact, then, by definition, it is an Object and nothing else. 2.0201 supports this claim by stating that every statement about complexes can be analysed or resolved into a statement about their constituents and this statement (2.0201) sits directly under statement 2.02 which is about Objects as the only constituents of atomic facts.

We can only conclude that the sole fundamental type of entity that exists in the \textit{Tractatus} is the Object. If we find, through our logical analysis, some existent in the world that is simple,

\textsuperscript{130} Both Pears and McGuinness translations. The Ramsey translation (of 2.026 in particular) is not as effective at fully bringing out the point that Wittgenstein is emphasising here.
then it must, by definition, be an Object. The world is the totality of facts; facts are comprised of atomic facts; and atomic facts are themselves made up of combinations of fundamental entities called Objects. Nothing more. We cannot say that there is another category called Properties or Relations which are of a different nature to Objects and which combine with Objects to form propositions.

This is why, once we know all Objects we also know all possible atomic facts (2.0124). It is clear that 2.0124 would be false if, alongside Objects, there was a second category of logical atom, or fundamental existent, that represented properties and that was required for the formation of meaningful propositions about the world. No additional category or type of thing such as Properties is required.

Wittgenstein saw no reason to introduce another category to his ontology because his Objects are explicitly said to already contain within themselves all of the combinatorial possibilities for forming propositions (2.0251, 2.033) such that no further, structuring element is needed. Wittgenstein makes it clear within the sections of the *Tractatus* that I have quoted above that ‘the configuration of the objects forms the atomic fact’ (2.0272, my italics) and this is achieved by the fact that ‘objects hang one in another, like the links of a chain’ (2.03). Throughout *Tractatus* sections 2 to 2.033, which covers the nature of Objects, there are absolutely no references to properties or relations as being fundamental logical atoms, operating alongside Objects (e.g., no use of properties in order to explain how Objects combine, or restricting the combinations of Objects). There is no reference to any type of logical atom distinct from Objects or sitting alongside Objects as equally fundamental to the Tractarian ontology. Wittgenstein sets out his ontology without mention of this additional category of existent because it is an unnecessary addition. The theory that Wittgenstein sets out is one with a single type of logical atom, Objects.

This is the reason why, later in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein outlines certain special rules that apply to Objects, e.g., that the variable name ‘x’ is the proper sign for the ‘pseudo-concept’ Object and the fact that it is nonsense to speak of the total number of all objects (4.1272).

Wittgenstein only accepts features into his theory when he can demonstrate that they are a necessary part of the world and language.\(^{131}\) He is comfortable to be free of concepts like

\(^{131}\) See 5.452.
truth, identity, and existence because he finds that they are not strictly necessary.\textsuperscript{132} His account includes the bare minimum that must be the case.

The \textit{Tractatus} outlines a world consisting of an array of facts made up of Objects. The actual combinations and arrangements are contingent because Wittgenstein rules out any causation or teleology.\textsuperscript{133} Wittgenstein appears to find the actual state of things to be unimportant and uninteresting. He is concerned only with what \textit{must} be the case, not with what might be the case.

If Wittgenstein thought that there must be a second category of fundamental element, of a different nature from Objects, something like Properties or Relations, then he would have stated this, but such a statement is totally absent from the text.

The idea that there is no object-property distinction is unintuitive, and Wittgenstein eventually came to reject the ontology of the \textit{Tractatus}. Some commentators attribute this rejection, in part, to the peculiar use of the word Object. By the time of the \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, Wittgenstein rejected logical analysis as a means to reveal the hidden nature of language and distinguish Objects\textsubscript{Tractarian} from Objects\textsubscript{Everyday}. In the \textit{Investigations}, linguistic meaning acknowledges the importance of the way that language is actually \textit{used} by competent speakers. On this view, it would be nonsense to say that linguistic meaning is hidden from native speakers and can only be discovered by analysis, and that there is therefore any difference between Objects\textsubscript{Everyday} and Objects\textsubscript{Hidden-then-revealed}. Schroeder notes that the error ‘was partly due to the misuse of the word ‘meaning’ for the objects referred to (\textit{TLP} 3.203; \textit{P.I.} 40). Of course, an object named has some atomic constitution, and if you call the object the ‘meaning’ of its name, then its unknown atomic constitution will be part of that ‘meaning’. But then, the investigation of the name’s ‘meaning’, in this sense, will be a physicist’s task and nothing to be expected from \textit{logical} analysis. The problem in such a case of redefinition of a commonly used word arises if one does not stick consistently to the redefinition, but occasionally slips back into the way the word is commonly used... In this case, the author of the \textit{Tractatus} conflated his artificial stipulation that the meaning of a word is the object denoted with the common notion of meaning as what words convey – with the

\textsuperscript{132} For example, see 5.5301, 5.5351 and 5.5352.

\textsuperscript{133} See 6.32 and comments on 6.32 (i.e., 6.321...) and 6.37.
absurd result that our words seem to convey more than anybody knows.’ (Schroeder, 2012, p.138).

It does indeed sound strange to think that our words have meanings that we are unaware of and that what we speak is nonsense and in error.

I said at the start of this chapter section that I was going to begin by introducing Tractarian Objects and show that this is the only type of logical atom that Wittgenstein envisioned. I have set out my arguments for this view above and noted the strange nature of these Objects. I acknowledge that my claim is unusual, and that most of the secondary literature states or tacitly assumes that Wittgenstein accepted the object-property distinction and the existence of properties as a distinct category of entity from Objects. Considering some possible criticisms of the view that I have outlined will help to clarify the details of my interpretation:

1. One criticism of the view outlined above is that we clearly do need the object-property distinction in order to be able to speak intelligibly about the world. If there are no properties or relations then it is difficult to see how we can say anything about the world, as opposed to list strings of words. We cannot claim that Wittgenstein denies the distinction because that would leave him with the problem of being unable to explain how we can understand simple sentences like ‘The cat is on the mat’. Wittgenstein does not acknowledge that he faces this difficulty or try to solve it via another means, which he surely would have done if he knew that he was holding such a radical view.

However, in response to this, I would argue that Wittgenstein is satisfied to accept that his Tractatus does indeed reduce a lot of speech to nonsense. He never claimed that sentences like ‘The cat is on the mat’ are anything but nonsense. He sets out a framework that will function when we complete the project of analysing our language down to the smallest parts and these, he claims, will correspond with ObjectsTractarian. If we accept that the Tractatus requires a distinction between ObjectsTractarian and ObjectsEveryday then we must also accept the distinction between NameTractarian and NameEveryday, which means that we should never expect to be able to make sense of sentences like ‘The cat is on the mat’ on the assumption that ‘cat’

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134 See chapter 1 discussion of the criticism of Heraclitus’ theory on the grounds that its proponents cannot coherently state their own position or argue for it. Compare with Wittgenstein’s own statement at the end of the Tractatus that he has reduced his own theory to nonsense (see section c of this chapter for a fuller discussion of this parallel and Wittgenstein’s intention).
and ‘mat’ are names – they are not Names\textsuperscript{Tractarian}. This is something that the Wittgenstein highlights as a flaw with the \textit{Tractatus} in his later works, including the \textit{Investigations}, where he stresses that language is a human behaviour, not something that can be abstracted and analysed to the point where the analysis refers to so-called ‘names’ that no person would recognize as a name.\textsuperscript{135}

2. Another criticism that my interpretation faces is that we cannot say that Wittgenstein thinks that properties and relations are objects just because he uses the word ‘Gegenstand’ to describe the fundamental elements of the world. We should instead translate ‘Gegenstand’ as something like ‘anything that exists that is fundamental and necessary’, and accept that it encompasses both objects and properties. Wittgenstein is not necessarily denying that objects are inherently different from relations or properties, he is just grouping the two together into one category, which we then mistakenly call ‘objects’, and talking about how these elements must be and highlighting shared features.

I would concede that Wittgenstein is indeed capturing properties, relations, and objects under the term Objects\textsuperscript{Tractarian}. That is absolutely what he appears to be doing in the \textit{Tractatus}. However, there is no reason to believe that Wittgenstein thought that there was any real difference between these three. Nowhere in the \textit{Tractatus} does Wittgenstein suggest that there is any difference and that his ‘grouping’ is for any reason other than because they are of the same type. The criticism of my interpretation seems to be implying that there is more than one type of fundamental building block or logical atom but that, in the \textit{Tractatus}, Wittgenstein groups them together for convenience under the term ‘Gegenstand’; whereas, actually, I would argue that they are grouped into one category precisely because the \textit{Tractatus} denies that they are different things.

3. Another reaction to my proposed interpretation might be to argue that atomic facts do not have \textit{parts}, as such, only \textit{abstractions}, and one could argue that properties and relations can exist as abstractions instead of as parts, or Objects. I.e., some would challenge my claim that properties and relations are the same as, or included in, the category Objects and maintain that they exist and contribute to the \textit{Tractatus} theory in an entirely different way to Objects.

\textsuperscript{135} E.g., Wittgenstein states that ‘For a large class of cases... the meaning of a word is its use in the language’ (\textit{P.I.} \S 43).
– perhaps in something like the manner of the arrangement of the Objects. Atomic facts are the fundamental building blocks of reality, not Objects_{Tractarian}, and therefore properties and relations do not need to fit into the category of Objects_{Tractarian} in order to be a fundamental part of the Tractatus theory.

In response to this, I would suggest that section 2 of the Tractatus makes it clear that, whether parts or abstractions, Objects_{Tractarian} are the only necessary components of the ontology (as evidenced by 2.0124). There is no place for any additional element, whether in the form of logical atoms or the manner of arrangement of these atoms. Furthermore, there is no reference to properties or to relations being added in any other way within the primary text. The above criticism implies that Objects are like ingredients for a cake and the properties and relations are something like the recipe, or the chef, or the oven, or some other non-ingredient component which would allow the object-property distinction to remain. But this is simply not found in the text and should not be assumed without evidence.

4. One might argue that when Wittgenstein writes about the nature of facts and about how one combines objects to make facts, what he is doing is describing a process of combination that is equivalent to what some would call ‘properties’. I.e., given that it is difficult to see how he could be denying the object-property distinction (because of the intelligibility issue), it would be preferable to read the Tractatus as presenting his method of combination, the picture theory, in a way that allows this theory to play a role equivalent to the role of properties in Russell’s or Frege’s theories.

Although it is perhaps possible to shoe-horn aspects of the Tractatus theory into this form, it is not how the text is actually written. We are more than willing to accept that Parmenides and Zeno held their extremely counterintuitive views despite the strange consequences (e.g., two philosophers arguing jointly that there is a lack of plurality in the world). Wittgenstein asks us to rid our ontologies of all common-sense notions and then build back, from scratch, using only those components that he thinks are fully justified. He introduces concepts only

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136 E.g., 5.452 speaks of the introduction of a concept in logic as being ‘momentous’ (from the Pears and McGuinness translation, which more accurately translates ‘folgenschweres’ than Ramsey) and should not be done ‘innocent’ (both translations agree here) of the gravity of such a decision. This applies to all concepts, across logic and ontology.
when he absolutely needs them. The result: properties and relations are not introduced as distinct and necessary elements of a different type to Objects. The picture theory is never said to be a replacement for, or in some way equivalent to, a theory of properties or relations. A theory of combination of logical atoms (i.e., the picture theory) is the wrong type of thing to suggest as an alternative to a theory of properties or relations. If Wittgenstein did see the picture theory in this strange way, I would have expected him to state this and clarify how this could be the case, which he does not do.

5. One might say that a close look at the *Tractatus* phrasing means that we should take 3.1432 to mean that properties and relations are not nameable, and therefore not Tractarian Objects:

   We must not say, “The complex sign ‘aRb’ says ‘a stands in relation R to b;’” but we must say, “That ‘a’ stands in a certain relation to ‘b’ says that aRb.”

I.e., Wittgenstein’s own preferred phrasing reveals that relation R is not nameable in the same way that a and b are nameable and therefore R is not an Object in the same way that a and b are Objects.

But, on the contrary, if we look at the phrasing that Wittgenstein rejects, the first of the two options, we can see that Wittgenstein is rejecting the imposition of a distinction between Objects and relations. He is rejecting the phrasing that specifies that Object a stands in relation R to b because that makes a distinction between the Objects and relations. This is the only aspects of the first proposal that could be objectionable. The second phrase is preferred because the quote marks are around letters a and b (individually) and we are therefore picking out the name ‘a’ and name ‘b’ rather than object a and object b; and the name ‘a’ standing in a certain relation to the name ‘b’ says that a state of affairs aRb (without quote marks) is the case. Contrast with the first sentence where the sign (i.e., the collection of names) ‘aRb’ is referenced rather than the state of affairs aRb.

3.1432 is the closest statement that we have within the *Tractatus* to conclusive proof of my view that Wittgenstein denies that there is a distinction between Objects and relations.

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137 E.g., 5.453 requests ‘justification’ (both translations agree).
6. Someone might ask what Wittgenstein is referring to when he does speak about properties in other parts of the *Tractatus*. For example, at 2.02331:

Either a thing has properties which no other has, and then one can distinguish it straight away from the others by a description and refer to it; or, on the other hand, there are several things which have the totality of their properties in common, and then it is quite impossible to point to any one of them.

For if a thing is not distinguished by anything, I cannot distinguish it – for otherwise it would be distinguished.

Here I would suggest that Wittgenstein is very clearly using the word ‘properties’ in a non-technical way, just as he uses objects in a non-technical way (see my earlier comments contrasting Object*Tractarian* and Object*Everyday*). Regardless of whether this is the case, there is no reason to think that by mentioning the word ‘properties’ Wittgenstein is introducing a different type of logical atom, distinct but equal in status and importance, to Objects.

That is not to say that what we commonly call ‘properties’ do not play a crucial role in the *Tractatus*’ theory. For example, in relation to identity statements, Wittgenstein thinks that ‘even if as a matter of fact \(a\) and \(b\) are distinguishable, they might not be. We can understand what it means to say of two distinct objects \(a\) and \(b\) that they have all their predicative properties in common’ (Potter, 2008, p. 205). This is a significant consequence of other parts of the Tractarian theory: it ‘follows from the doctrine that all elementary propositions are logically independent of one another, and that doctrine in turn depends on Wittgenstein’s hostility to the Kantian synthetic *a priori*’ (ibid.). And ‘otherwise the fact that they do not have all their properties in common would be a further fact about them not reducible to the atomic facts’ (ibid.). Properties*Everyday* are important, but this does not automatically grant them a status of equivalent importance to logical atoms like Objects*Tractarian*.

The view that I have outlined above is supported by Wittgenstein’s own *Notebooks* entries from 1915 in which he clarifies that the word Objects is meant to capture not just objects (lower case ‘o’) but also properties and relations because they are the same fundamental type of thing, not as distinct as others have thought: ‘Relations and properties etc. are objects [Gegenstände] too’ (NB, 61) immediately followed by ‘But logic as it stands, e.g., in Principia Mathematica can quite well be applied to our ordinary propositions, e.g., ‘All men are mortal’
and ‘Socrates is a man’ there follows according to this logic ‘Socrates is mortal’ which is obviously correct although I equally obviously do not know what structure is possessed by the thing Socrates or the property of mortality. Here they just function as simple objects’ (NB, 69, my emphasis added). And it is supported by Wittgenstein’s letter to Desmond Lee regarding Tractatus proposition 2.01 from 1930-31: ‘Objects’ also include relations; a proposition is not two things connected by a relation. ‘Thing’ and ‘relation’ are on the same level.’ (p. 120, Wittgenstein’s Lectures Cambridge, 1930–32, Desmond Lee (ed.), 1989).

Having considered some hypothetical criticisms of my interpretation above, I will now take a closer look at Anscombe’s interpretation of the Tractatus and her critique of Ramsey’s interpretation of the Tractatus. I will argue that Anscombe’s interpretation of the Tractatus is inconsistent and that she misunderstands Ramsey, who appears to grasp Wittgenstein’s ideas more accurately. Exploring this helps clarify aspects of the Tractatus and confirms my interpretation, as outlined above.

Anscombe says that Ramsey took Wittgenstein to mean that there was no difference between ‘individuals and qualities’, quoting Ramsey’s Universals:

Against Mr. Russell it might be asked how there can be such objects as his universals, which contain the form of a proposition and are incomplete. In a sense, it might be urged, all objects are incomplete; they cannot occur in facts except in conjunction with other objects, and they contain the form of propositions of which they are constituents. In what way do universals do this more than anything else?

(Anscombe, 1959, p. 98)

Anscombe immediately goes on to say that:

Ramsey therefore suggests that it is mere prejudice to distinguish between individuals and qualities; there is no reason why we shouldn’t speak of Socrates’ attaching to φ as well as of φ’s attaching to Socrates in a proposition ‘φ Socrates’. ...he [i.e., Ramsey] observed quite correctly that Wittgenstein holds that both a name, and the remainder of a sentence from which a name has been removed, are represented by ‘propositional variables’; moreover, Wittgenstein does not speak of ‘concepts’ or
‘universals’ as a kind of thing that is to be found in the world: it is quite clear that for him there is nothing but objects in configuration.

( ibid., my italics )

Anscombe thinks that Ramsey is mistaken in his interpretation of Wittgenstein as denying the object-property distinction because Wittgenstein also writes that ‘Names are the simple symbols, I indicate them by single letters (x, y, z). The elementary proposition I write as function of the names, in the form “fx”, “φ(x,y)”, etc. Or I indicate it by the letters p, q, r.’ (4.24), i.e., because Wittgenstein appears to use different notation to indicate objects and functions within propositions. Anscombe says that ‘it must not be supposed from this that Wittgenstein intends ‘φ(x,y)’ to represent an atomic fact consisting of three objects... nothing whatever is indicated about how many names may be covered by the sign of the function...’ (Anscombe, 1959, p. 99), despite the clear statement by Wittgenstein at 3.1432 (see comments above). Anscombe quotes another passage of the Tractatus in support of her view: ‘where there is complexity there is argument and function’ (5.47). However, although this text implies that composites (such as propositions) include an argument or function (as well as Objects), this text immediately follows the statement that ‘Logical operation signs are punctuations...’ and 5.47 also contains: ‘...for all logical operations are already contained in the elementary proposition... For “fa” says the same as “(∃x).fx.x=a”’ such that this passage can be read as Wittgenstein suggesting that ‘property’ f is just the same type of thing as ‘object’ a (hence ‘fa’ is acceptable) and that the logical notation expressing existence and identity claims is misleading because it does not express any fact about the world but is simply punctuation that is unnecessary (because we can just write ‘fa’ instead). This means that the statement that Anscombe quotes from 5.47 does not amount to a claim by Wittgenstein that, in addition to Objects, there are structuring logical atoms like arguments or functions. The complexity amounts to the addition of ‘punctuation’, and functions can be reduced to Objects – i.e., f is the same type of thing as a.

Anscombe highlights Ramsey’s claim that when Wittgenstein writes ‘a-b’ this can be written as ‘f(b)’, i.e., with the name ‘a’ acting as a function. She says that Ramsey misinterprets

138 ‘Complexity’ is Anscombe’s own translation which differs slightly from Ramsey’s (‘composition’) and Pears and McGuinness’ (‘compositeness’). Anscombe’s choice of word perhaps imports slightly different connotations. Pears and McGuinness’ seems closest to the original German text.
Wittgenstein here: ‘to represent a name ‘a’ by ‘(ξ)a’, i.e., by the most general way for that name to occur in a proposition, is not to represent a name as a function but only to stress that the name has reference only in the context of a proposition.’ (Anscombe, 1959, p. 102). Anscombe thinks, contrary to Ramsey, that Wittgenstein is in agreement with Frege that names and functions are two distinct types of thing, and expresses his agreement at 3.318: ‘I conceive the proposition – like Frege and Russell – as a function of the expressions contained in it.’ – but Anscombe apparently fails to notice that 3.318 can be taken to mean exactly what Ramsey described. It is perfectly possible for Wittgenstein to write ‘a-b’ as ‘f(b)’, making use of the function notation like Frege and Russell, but at the same time deny that there is a fundamental difference in nature between the type of thing that ‘a’ is and the type of thing that ‘b’ is. I.e., the important thing is that for Frege and Russell it is incorrect to write ‘f(b)’ as ‘a-b’, whereas for Wittgenstein it is perfectly correct to say that either option is acceptable – because the real structure of the world is found within the Objects themselves rather than in the logical constants and functions that Frege and Russell rely on.

Anscombe notes that Wittgenstein’s own argument against Frege is to be found at 4.431. Her translation runs: ‘Hence Frege was quite right to premise the truth-conditions as defining the signs of his symbolism. Only, the explanation of the concept of truth is wrong: if ‘the true’ and ‘the false’ were really objects, and were the argument in ~p etc., then according to Frege’s own specifications the sense of ~p would by no means be specified’. Anscombe comments that, ‘as a criticism of Frege the point can be summarized by saying: ‘If truth-values are the reference of propositions, then you do not specify a sense by specifying a truth-value.” (1959, p. 107).

She immediately pre-empts the obvious challenge to this claim, that, if ‘Wittgenstein’s views are extremely Fregean[,] what, then, has become of Frege’s ‘concepts’ in Wittgenstein’s theory? They seem to have disappeared entirely’ (1959, p. 108), but she dismisses the criticism instead of addressing it. This point is certainly a great difficulty with her interpretation, as I have outlined in the previous section of this chapter. Anscombe is absolutely right to point out that Fregean concepts are simply missing from the *Tractatus*, whereas you would expect that a theory which relied on Fregean concepts would mention them at some point and perhaps even describe them alongside the (lengthy) discussion of
Objects. It is no accident that this discussion is missing: Wittgenstein does not want to import them into his theory.

If we take the following set of statements, it looks as though Wittgenstein does not envisage the need for a separate category of thing beyond Objects: ‘What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts’ (2), ‘An atomic fact is a combination of objects’ (2.01), ‘In the atomic fact the objects hang one in another, like the links of a chain’ (2.03), ‘If all objects are given, then thereby are all possible atomic facts also given’ (2.0124) – there is no need for one type of entity to slot into the argument place next to another type, as envisaged by Frege, rather, everything is of the same fundamental shape and therefore type. Every component part of an atomic fact is an Object, as Ramsey realised.

Anscombe claims that ‘actually, however, instead of making concepts or universals into a kind of object, as Ramsey wished to, Wittgenstein made the gulf between concepts and objects much greater than Frege ever made it’ (Anscombe, 1959, p. 108). ‘So far as concerns the content of a functional expression, that will consist in the objects covered by it. But in respect of having argument places, concepts go over entirely into logical forms. In the ‘completely analysed proposition’, which is ‘a logical network sprinkled with names’ [expressions she takes from Wittgenstein’s late notebooks], the Fregean ‘concept’, the thing with holes in it, has become simply the logical form.’ (Anscombe, 1959, p. 109).

However, in a footnote at this point Anscombe quotes a pre- *Tractatus* notebook in which Wittgenstein writes clearly ‘Properties and relations are objects too’, dated 16 June 1915 (1959, p. 109, footnote). Her claim here appears to be similar to the criticism of my interpretation that I considered in the list above, numbered 4. It is a stretch to think that this is what Wittgenstein was doing and is at odds with direct quotations from his *Notebooks*, which Anscombe herself quotes. It is unclear how she imagined these claims to be consistent and she does not provide sufficient evidence for her view.

Anscombe appears to acknowledge that the *Notebooks* suggest she is incorrect, because she goes on to say that Wittgenstein must have changed his mind by the time that he wrote the *Tractatus* for two reasons. Firstly, to make sense of the passages she quotes. Secondly, because ‘if Wittgenstein held that objects fell into such radically distinct categories as functions and individuals, it is an incredible omission not to have made this clear’ (ibid.). But
that is precisely the point. If Wittgenstein believed that there were different categories of things (‘functions and individuals’ or some other distinction) then it is absolutely extraordinary that he only clearly stated the existence of Objects and not of the other category or categories, leaving us guessing whether they existed or not, what they might be, and what contribution they make to his theory (given that he states quite clearly that Objects are all that are required). We are given plenty of information about Objects and absolutely no information about any other entity or even what to call it, hence the inconsistent use in this chapter of Anscombe’s book of words like function, concept, property, relation and universal, and their wider interchangeability across the secondary literature. We must conclude that Wittgenstein did not change his mind, and still thought that relations were Objects at the time of writing the *Tractatus*, as he did in 1915.

Wittgenstein would view the distinction between two different types of fundamental entity, Object and Something-Else-As-Yet-Unnamed (see comment above about the multivariate labels used), as a logical device and he would no doubt advise the application of the following principle:

> The introduction of any new device into the symbolism of logic is necessarily a momentous event. In logic a new device should not be introduced in brackets or in a footnote with what one might call a completely innocent air.

(Thus in Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica* there occur definitions and primitive propositions expressed in words. Why this sudden appearance of words? It would require a justification, but none is given, or could be given, since the procedure is in fact illicit.)

But if the introduction of a new device has proved necessary at a certain point we must immediately ask ourselves, ‘At which points is the employment of this device now *unavoidable*?’ and its place in logic must be made clear.

(*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.452)\(^{139}\)

The object-property distinction is clearly such a device and would clearly merit the treatment that Wittgenstein sets out above: avoidance if at all possible.

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\(^{139}\) Pears and McGuinness translation, see also footnote 130.
Anscombe, however, continues her argument against Ramsey. This time she asks us to imagine ‘two propositions expressing (completely) different facts’ – A is red, and B is red – and she says that we must imagine, too, that Ramsey would have ‘supposed that [the facts] would be the same’ and ‘would have pooh-poohed the feeling that in that case these objects would have the character of universals rather than ‘individuals’’ (1959, p. 109). In other words, she appears to think that Ramsey is a Late Learner of the *Sophist* who thinks that ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘red’ are all names and we are precluded from predicating ‘A’ or ‘B’ with ‘red’ which leaves us with only the ‘is’ of identity and a puzzle of how to say that A is red without misidentifying one object with another. So Anscombe thinks that Ramsey must be incorrect in his interpretation of the *Tractatus* because she believes that we do in fact need the object-property distinction and Ramsey’s interpretation of Wittgenstein suggests that the object-property distinction is missing from the *Tractatus*. This is the criticism that I addressed above: although we may find it strange to think that the *Tractatus* does not accept the object-property distinction, we also cannot find evidence of the distinction when we look closely at the text, so in this way Ramsey is correct and Anscombe is missing the point.

It seems unfair of Anscombe to suggest that Ramsey (a) would have simply stated that two different things were the same without realising the fairly obvious difficulty with this and attempting to resolve that difficulty somehow, and (b) that Ramsey was simply ‘pooh-poohing’ the ‘feeling’ that red is a universal, not an individual like A, rather than making an interesting philosophical point about the contents of the *Tractatus*. Anscombe goes on to talk about how we ‘normally tend to assume’ that different occurrences of, say, red differ ‘only in that there are different things that are red’, and talks about Frege’s object and concept distinction in this context. She then immediately goes on to say that ‘In Wittgenstein’s fully analysed proposition, we have nothing but a set of argument-places filled with names of objects; *there remains no kind of expression that could be regarded as standing for a concept*’ (1959, p. 110). This latter statement is quite correct and contrary to her previous lengthy claim that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is Fregean.

I have found no convincing evidence within the primary or secondary literature to support the claim that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* includes the object-property distinction or sets out a theory of properties combining with Objects. I have demonstrated that the main arguments that Anscombe uses for this view are of the form ‘we need the object-property distinction so
it must be contained within the *Tractatus* somewhere’ and ‘maybe the form of the proposition or the picturing analogy performs the function of properties’, rather than providing textual evidence. I hope to have shown that Wittgenstein rejected the object-property distinction in favour of an object-only ontology.

c. No properties, no sense

I will now set out Wittgenstein’s definition of ‘sense’ and ‘nonsense’ and show that, by rejecting properties as a second type of logical atom, and thereby rejecting notions like identity, Wittgenstein’s theory relegates all propositions and all of mathematics to nonsense. I will argue that Plato had already showed us the consequences of ignoring properties when he wrote the *Theaetetut*.

Plato used the *Theaetetut* and *Sophist* to highlight certain difficulties with Tractarian-type theories which propose the existence of a single type of logical atom and which do not acknowledge the object-property distinction. Plato demonstrates that this type of theory is unable to explain how certain combinations of words are transformed from mere lists into meaningful statements about the world and capable of being true or false, i.e., unable to explain the difference between ‘Theaetetus Socrates’, ‘Theaetetus sits’ and ‘Theaetetus flies’ (nonsense, truth, falsehood). To explain meaningful language, and to salvage mathematics, we need to introduce into our ontology certain structuring concepts, like existence and identity:

Tht: “You are talking about the application to perceptions of ideas like existence and non-existence, likeness and unlikeness, identity and difference, and oneness and all the other numbers. Also, you are clearly raising a question about oddness and evenness in numbers, and whatever these ideas entail [i.e., raising a question about mathematical truths].”

(185c8-d5, Chappell (2005))

Our ability to state something true about the world, and the whole of mathematics, depends on having a theory that includes properties which we apply to, or combine with, objects. This is because it is only properties that set restrictions on which combinations of primary element are possible and which are not (*Sophist*, 252e1-3).
At the time of writing the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein did not seem to appreciate the extent of the consequences of his theory.\(^{140}\) Wittgenstein thought that propositions could be formed by connecting his elements like ‘links of a chain’ (see above discussion); however, then there is no restriction on which objects can (or cannot) connect with which others and therefore there are no *a priori* restrictions on which combinations are (or are not) possible. In this way, all possible atomic facts are logically independent of one another (2.061, 5.152). In other words, a core aspect of the *Tractatus* (the logical independence of atomic facts) is driven by the very nature of the Objects, which form the substance of the world and which the facts are about. When Wittgenstein started to turn away from the *Tractatus*’s logical atomism, one of his main concerns was with the independence of elementary propositions, i.e., the lack of restrictions on what combinations of Objects can occur due to the nature of those Objects. Wittgenstein eventually realised that his theory would categorise all of mathematics as nonsense.

I will now set out the definitions of ‘sense’ and ‘nonsense’ in the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein’s justification for the removal of concepts like identity and existence. I will then discuss Wittgenstein’s realisation, at the time of writing ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, that, as a direct result of these views, the *Tractatus* unintentionally relegated all of mathematics to nonsense.

I will conclude that Plato effectively foresaw the difficulties that naïve Tractarian-type theories faced and resolved those difficulties in the *Sophist* using concepts like identity and existence, which Wittgenstein was too quick to reject and to label as ‘nonsense’. The versions of logical atomism presented and contrasted in the Dream of *Theaetetus* and then in the *Sophist* amount to a damning critique of the *Tractatus* by Plato and vindication of Sameness, Being and the other Kinds. Wittgenstein should have noticed that, when Plato mocked the ‘Secret Doctrine’ believers for being unable to coherently state their own theory, this was the same problem that resulted in Wittgenstein’s own declaration that the *Tractatus* was, strictly speaking, nonsense:

\(^{140}\) Wittgenstein labelled the *Tractatus* as the final solution to all philosophical problems (in his preface) – whereas by the 1930s he had realised his fundamental mistake and was starting to back-track (see his ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’ and subsequent works, which I refer to later in this chapter).
My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them [i.e. all the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself] as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

(6.54)

**Sense and nonsense**

In Russell’s introduction to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, he states that logic has two problems to deal with in regard to symbolism:

1. the conditions for sense rather than nonsense in combinations of symbols; (2) the conditions for uniqueness of meaning or reference in symbols or combinations of symbols. A logically perfect language has rules of syntax which prevent nonsense, and has single symbols which always have a definite and unique meaning. Mr Wittgenstein is concerned with the conditions for a logically perfect language... [and] the whole function of language is to have meaning, and it only fulfils this function as it approaches to the ideal language which we postulate. The essential business of language is to assert or deny facts... [One of] the most fundamental thesis of Mr Wittgenstein’s theory [is] that which has to be in common between the sentence and the fact cannot, he contends, be itself in turn said in language. It can, in his phraseology only be *shown*... [therefore] most propositions and questions that have been written about philosophical matters are not false but senseless.

(1922, pp. ix-x)

Russell then quotes paragraph 4.003: ‘Most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language. They are of the same kind as the question whether the Good is more or less identical than the Beautiful’.

In other words, sense is achieved by having a perfect language in which there is a one-to-one correspondence of objects to names, and combinations of those names present ‘pictures’ which we hold up to the world to compare. Any other use of language is nonsense. Therefore, propositions contained within the *Tractatus* do not fulfil the requirement for sense. Russell’s
introduction describes it as follows: ‘Everything, therefore, which is involved in the very idea of the expressiveness of language must remain incapable of being expressed in language, and is, therefore, inexpressible in a perfectly precise sense. This inexpressible contains, according to Mr. Wittgenstein, the whole of logic and philosophy’.

Propositions effectively carve up the possible worlds into those where the proposition is true and those where the proposition is false. When you ‘exhibit’ a picture you contrast two sets of possible worlds. This is the ‘sense’ of the proposition for Wittgenstein. Nonsense is any attempt to express the semantics of language, e.g., when you attempt to say what it is that language has in common with the world. This is because ‘the picture cannot represent its [own] form of presentation’ (2.172). ‘Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – the logical form’ (4.12).

If you draw a picture and ask, ‘what has it got in common with space?’ then the answer is the fact that they both have spatial features. But if you keep asking what the common feature is then you will end up in an infinite regress of explanation continually finding the same structural features in common but one level higher each time, much like Plato’s ‘Third Man’ argument.

There are two special cases: tautologies and contradictions. The conception of a ‘picture’ does not work in these cases. They are not strictly speaking nonsense (4.4611) because they are part of the symbolism of logic; but they are also not pictures of reality so they ‘say nothing’ and are ‘without sense’ (4.461). Wittgenstein therefore distinguishes being ‘without sense’ and ‘nonsense’.

This is inherently tied to Wittgenstein’s claim that logical constants do not themselves represent and that logical facts cannot therefore be represented (4.0312). This thought is expressed by Wittgenstein in a letter to Russell as follows:

Logic is still in the melting pot but one thing gets more and more obvious to me: The propositions of logic contain ONLY apparent variables and whatever may turn out to be the proper explanation of apparent variables, its consequences must be that there

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141 Termed ‘lacking sense’ by Pears and McGuinness.
are NO logical constants. Logic must turn out to be a totally different kind than any other science

(Wittgenstein to Russell, dated 22 June 1912, in 1974(b))

Wittgenstein says that the variable name ‘x’ is the ‘proper sign of the pseudo-concept object’ (4.1272). He continues, ‘wherever the word ‘object’ (‘thing’, ‘entity’, etc.) is rightly used, it is expressed in logical symbolism by the variable name... The same holds of the words ‘complex’, ‘fact’, ‘function’, ‘number’, etc. They all signify formal concepts and are presented in logical symbolism by variables, not by functions or classes (as Frege and Russell believed). Expressions like ‘1 is a number’, ‘there is only one number nought’, and all like them are senseless’. 142

Any statement that tries to speak of the whole world or encompass the totality of things contained in the world is nonsense,143 because that would imply that we could ‘step outside’ the boundaries of the world and pronounce some fact that applies to the whole of that bounded thing – but we cannot step outside of the world-boundary. The boundaries of the world are the boundaries of logic and the limits of what we can properly speak about (5.6, 5.61, 5.62).

This also applies to ideas like identity: it is ‘obvious’ (Ramsey) or ‘self-evident’ (Pears and McGuinness) that identity is not a relation between objects, because the identity sign does not add anything beyond what is already contained in the name once we have a world in which each object has one and only one name (5.5301). No picture is presented for contrast.

142 Here ‘senseless’ seems to mean ‘nonsense’ not ‘without sense’ or ‘lacking sense’. Ramsey’s translation could be clearer here and, at least in relation to this final word, the Pears and McGuinness translation is preferable. 143 Thus what Russell’s axiom of infinity ‘is meant to say would be expressed in language by the fact that there is an infinite number of names with different meanings’ (if it were true) (5.535), but we cannot properly state something like ‘infinitely many things exist’ regardless of how many things there are in the world (i.e., even if there are in fact an infinite number of things, we cannot properly state this but only show it). What Wittgenstein does seem to want for is statements made about sub-sets of the totality of things. He says that ‘We cannot say in logic “The world has thing in it, and this, but not that”’ (5.61, from Pears and McGuiness (the clearer translation here), with my italics). We cannot specify up front which statements about things in the world are the case and which are not as though that were a matter of logic (i.e., he maintains the logical independence of facts), but we are allowed to make those statements after inspecting the world. Very few examples are provided within the Tractatus to guide us on exactly where the limit lies between what can and cannot properly be said, and the rationale behind Wittgenstein’s view is stated as though it would be obvious to the reader, with no argument or discussion provided (for example, see the diagram of the eye at 5.6331).
Russell expressed some disquiet at the idea that all philosophy is nonsense and suggested a way around what he saw as a fundamental difficulty with Wittgenstein’s theory: ‘What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit. The whole subject of ethics, for example, is placed by Mr. Wittgenstein in the mystical, inexpressible region. Nevertheless he is capable of conveying his ethical opinions. His defence would be that what he calls the mystical can be shown, although it cannot be said. It may be that this defence is adequate, but, for my part, I confess that it leaves me with a certain sense of intellectual discomfort’ (Russell’s introduction to the *Tractatus*).

But Russell rather misses the point here by suggesting a hierarchy or meta-language. The difficulty that Wittgenstein suggests is not that we happen to be missing the words needed to speak of philosophy and logic (in the way that Henry VIII is missing words like ‘laptop’ or ‘software’); this trivialises the problem, whereas, for Wittgenstein, there is a fundamental problem with being able to step outside of the boundaries of logic to speak about it as though one were not oneself contained within those boundaries while speaking.

In Wittgenstein’s own preface to the *Tractatus* he states clearly that ‘The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense’.

Wittgenstein did not attempt to reduce mathematics to tautologies like Russell or Frege – in fact he criticised Russell’s brand of logicism (3.31-3.32, 6.1232, etc.) and Frege’s (6.031, 4.1272, etc.). However, Wittgenstein granted mathematics special attention and suggested that, although mathematical propositions were not themselves tautologous or nonsense, ‘mathematics is a method of logic’ (6.234, both translations agree), and ‘the logic of the world which the propositions of logic show in tautologies, mathematics shows in equations’ (6.22). Wittgenstein implies that mathematics is sometimes not used correctly: ‘Indeed in real life a mathematical proposition is never what we want. Rather, we make use of mathematical propositions only in inferences from propositions that do not belong to mathematics to others that likewise do not belong to mathematics. (In philosophy the question, ‘What do we actually use this word or this proposition for?’ repeatedly leads to valuable insights.’)’ (6.211, from Pears and McGuinness’s slightly clearer translation). Wittgenstein was, therefore, intending
to set limits on what is considered properly mathematical but had not appreciated how strict those limits would end up being.

Elimination of identity

For Wittgenstein, meaningful identity statements are totally impossible in a fully analysed perfect language. If \( a = b \) is an ordinary language identity statement then the statement is either (a) a disguised definite description, or (b) we might have 2 signs used to refer to the same thing. If (a) then the identity can be analysed away, and if (b) then we have information about language only, not about the world – i.e. it is not a genuine identity statement. ‘Identity of object I express by identity of the sign and not by means of a sign of identity. Difference of objects by difference of the signs.’ (5.53). Where I use signs ‘\( a \)’ and ‘\( b \)’ to refer to the same thing, e.g., ‘the morning star’ and ‘the evening star’, Wittgenstein says that I then put the ‘\( = \)’ sign between the two signs to show that the meaning of both signs is the same (4.241).

Expressions of this form (‘the morning star is the evening star’) are therefore ‘only expedients in presentation’ (Ramsey) or ‘mere representational devices’ (Pears and McGuinness), and therefore says something about the symbols used not about the signs (4.242).

Wittgenstein says that ‘the word ‘is’ appears as the copula, as the sign of equality, and as the expression of existence; ‘to exist’ as an intransitive verb like ‘to go’; ‘identical’ as an adjective; we speak of something but also of the fact of something happening. (In the proposition ‘Green is green’ – where the first word is a proper name as the last an adjective – these words have not merely different meanings but they are different symbols.)’ (3.323), and ‘thus there easily arise the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full.’ (3.324). So we must clean up language and be strict about not using the same sign for different symbols (3.325).

In this way, Wittgenstein says that ‘The identity sign is therefore not an essential constituent of logical notation’ (5.533), and this is because ‘The identity of the meaning of two expressions cannot be asserted. For in order to be able to assert anything about their meaning, I must know their meaning, and if I know their meaning, I know whether they mean the same or something different’ (6.2322). Wittgenstein asserts that ‘Roughly speaking, to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing.’ (5.5303). Wittgenstein strongly objected to Russell’s self-identity claim.
(‘(Ex)(x = x)’) as a theorem of logic. Logic, he thought, should not appeal to the world or make existence claims, it should stand alone.

Russell summarises the effects of ‘banishing’ the identity relation in his introduction to the *Tractatus*:

The conception of identity is subjected by Wittgenstein to a destructive criticism from which there seems no escape. The definition of identity by means of the identity of indiscernibles is rejected, because the identity of indiscernibles appears to be not a logically necessary principle. According to this principle x is identical with y if every property of x is a property of y, but it would, after all be logically possible for two things to have exactly the same properties. If this does not in fact happen that is an accidental characteristic of the world, not a logically necessary characteristic, and accidental characteristics of the world must, of course, not be admitted into the structure of logic. Mr. Wittgenstein accordingly banishes identity and adopts the convention that different letters are to mean different things. In practice, identity is needed as between a name and a description or between two descriptions. It is needed for such propositions as ‘Socrates is the philosopher who drank the hemlock’, or ‘The even prime is the next number after 1.’ For such uses of identity it is easy to provide on Wittgenstein’s system. The rejection of identity removes one method of speaking of the totality of things, and it will be found that any other method that may be suggested is equally fallacious: so, at least, Wittgenstein contends and, I think, rightly. This amounts to saying that ‘object’ is a pseudoconcept. To say ‘x is an object’ is to say nothing. It follows from this that we cannot make such statements as ‘there are more than three objects in the world’, or ‘there are an infinite number of objects in the world’.

Wittgenstein’s disagreement with Ramsey reveals how fundamental this issue was to Wittgenstein. Ramsey’s ‘The Foundations of Mathematics’ was delivered to the London Mathematical Society in November 1925 and ‘marked the beginning of Ramsey’s campaign to use the work of Wittgenstein on logic to restore the credibility of Frege and Russell’s logicist approach to the foundations of mathematics’ (Monk, 1991, p. 245). In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein distinguishes logical and mathematical propositions, the latter being equations (TLP 6.22) and ‘Ramsey’s aim was to show that equations are tautologies [contrary to
Wittgenstein’s view]. At the centre of this attempt was a Definition of Identity which, using a specially defined logical function $Q(x, y)$ as a substitute for the expression $x = y$, tries, in effect, to assert that $x = y$ is either a tautology (and $x$ and $y$ have the same value) or a contradiction (if $x$ and $y$ have different values). Upon this definition was built a Theory of Functions which Ramsey hoped to use to demonstrate the tautologous nature of mathematics.’ (ibid.).

Wittgenstein corresponded with Ramsey on this, and other, points, criticising Ramsey for not understanding the *philosophical* motivation for the removal of identity from the system. Ramsey was concerned to find a workable, functioning solution, and did not appreciate, thought Wittgenstein, the philosophical consequences of reintroducing ‘$=$’ into logical notation.

Ramsey agreed with Wittgenstein in rejecting the identity of indiscernibles (5.5302) on the basis that this is not a tautology and therefore not a part of logic (Ramsey, *Foundations*, p. 371). However, excluding identity left him unable to achieve results that he wanted in mathematics – he complains that without identity he would be limited to only predicate functions for the specification of classes, and that

> ...mathematics then becomes hopeless because we cannot be sure [for example] that there is any class defined by a predicate function whose number is two; for things may all fall into triads which agree in every respect, in which case there would be in our system no unit classes and no two-member classes.

(Ramsey, 1925, p. 375)

Fogelin (1987, p. 144) quotes Ramsey’s statement of strong commitment to extensionality in mathematics:

> I do not use the word ‘class’ to imply a principle of classification .... but by a ‘class’ I mean any set of things of the same logical type. Such a set, it seems to me, may not be definable either by enumeration or as the extension of a predicate. If it is not definable we cannot mention it by itself, but only deal with it by implication in propositions about all classes or some classes. The same is true of relations in extension, by which I do not merely mean the extensions of actual relations, but any set of ordered couples. That this is the notion occurring in mathematics seems to me
absolutely clear from... Cantor’s definition of similarity, where obviously there is no need for the one-one relation in extension to be either finite or the extension of an actual relation. Mathematics is therefore essentially extensional, and may be called a calculus to extensions, since its propositions assert relations between extensions.

(Ramsey, 1925, p. 349)

I.e., Ramsey agreed with Wittgenstein that identity is not needed to give the cardinality of a class defined by a predicate function (you can say ‘there are two books’ without accepting the identity relation). But Ramsey thought that mathematics was not, or should not be, ‘restricted to only those classes that can be defined by enumeration or by a predicative function’ (Fogelin, 1987, p. 145).

For logic to deal with all classes, Ramsey thought we needed the identity sign or something that functioned in an equivalent manner. But by rejecting Leibniz’s notion of identity he was forced to ‘mimic Leibniz’s definition of identity without committing himself to the identity of indiscernibles… [introducing] what he called a ‘propositional function in extension’” (ibid.). This definition is given in Foundations immediately following Ramsey’s justification above. Under his definition all true identity statements are tautologies and all false identity statements contradictions. Wittgenstein wants to say that tautologies and contradictions are meaningless because they do not present us with an arrangement of logical atoms (state of affairs) that is logically independent of any other arrangements of logical atoms – Wittgenstein’s definition of meaningfulness.

In his Foundations, Ramsey makes it clear that he accepts Wittgenstein’s claim that the identity sign could be eliminated from predicate logic. Of Wittgenstein’s convention, he says: ‘it provides effective proof that identity can be replaced by a symbolic convention, and is therefore no genuine propositional function, but merely a logical device’ (1925, p. 361). Ramsey’s own solution is also just a logical device. It did not reinstate the identity sign, it just allowed him a commitment to the extensionality of mathematics. However, the Tractatus indicates an anti-extensionalist view, e.g., ‘The theory of classes is altogether superfluous in mathematics. This is connected with the fact that the generality which we need in mathematics is not the accidental one.’ (6.031).
And in *Philosophical Grammar* Wittgenstein ‘explicitly attack[s] the idea of specifying a function via an arbitrarily assigned extension. Again, Wittgenstein misrepresents Ramsey’s position by attributing to him the view that any statement formed by flanking an identity sign with different letters must be self-contradictory. Beyond this, he suggests that Ramsey’s definition is simply an arbitrary correlation between signs.’ (Fogelin, 1987, p. 149):

Ramsey’s theory of identity makes the mistake that would be made by someone who said that you could use a painting as a mirror as well, even if only for a single posture. If we say this we overlook that what is essential to a mirror is precisely that you can infer from it the posture of a body in front of it, whereas in the case of the painting you have to know that the postures tally before you can construe the picture as a mirror image.

(Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, p. 315)

Fogelin explains that the mirror is a metaphor for the relationship between a function and its values for various different arguments, and ‘for Wittgenstein, it is essential to a mathematical function that its values are the results of its application. Thus it is a mistake, or rather a conceptual confusion, to identify a function with its extensional counterpart.’ (1987, p. 150). This is vitally important when considering why Wittgenstein rejected Frege’s theory in 5.02, as quoted above.

It is not the case that Ramsey misunderstood Wittgenstein’s point, as Wittgenstein claims, he just does not appreciate the real motivation behind Wittgenstein’s objection. Ramsey’s ‘wildly nonconstructive definition of an extensional counterpart for identity, and, indeed, the very motivation for the production of such a definition exemplifies a commitment to an unordered generality that Wittgenstein rejected in the *Tractatus* and never ceased to reject’ (ibid.).

Fogelin goes on to point out that, whilst Wittgenstein’s views change across his career, he remains opposed to identity statements and self-identity, and quotes:

“A thing is identical with itself.” – There is no finer example of a useless proposition.

(Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §216)
The quotation is from a passage in the *Investigations* about rule-following, and whether a rule generates a series that is always the same each time. Fogelin notes that, despite this,

...philosophers have been drawn to the proposition that everything is identical with itself, for it seems to exemplify that rock-hard relationship in reality that it has been philosophy’s special business to articulate. Here we can become captured by the picture of a series being a limited instance of the law of identity. Each step in a series is connected with its predecessor and successor, in some respect, with the same rigidity that each thing is related to itself. This, in turn, can further the illusion that the series has an antecedently given structure that our symbolism merely traces out. In other words, *a misuse of the notion of identity, in particular, a mesmerized fascination with the notion of self-identity, can lead one into a Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics and theory of meaning of the kind that Wittgenstein was most anxious to reject.*

(Fogelin, 1987, p.152, my italics)

This is a view that Wittgenstein held consistently throughout his career. And, not only did Wittgenstein think that talk of identity and self-identity should be eliminated, but he also thought that the problems that philosophers were addressing in relation to these notions were pseudo-problems caused by misuse of language and talk of identity:

People say again and again that philosophy doesn’t really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks... It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as we still have the adjectives ‘identical’, ‘true’, ‘false’, ‘possible’, as long as we continue to talk of a river of time, of an expanse of space, etc. etc., people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves starting at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up.

(Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 15e)

**Realisation: no sense without structure; no sense without properties**

In ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, Wittgenstein notices that, in the case of attributing qualities that involve degrees or gradation, such as the brightness of a light, we have an
example of an impossibility that is not logically impossible: ‘A has exactly one degree of brightness’ cannot be true at the same time as ‘A has exactly two degrees of brightness’. The paper contradicts the statement that Wittgenstein makes in the *Tractatus* about the logical independence of atomic facts (6.37) and suggests that the concept of Tractarian Object cannot cope with real numbers, rendering mathematics impossible. This undermines Wittgenstein’s assertion at 6.03 of the *Tractatus* that cardinal numbers can be account for on his theory, and that mathematics is a logical method (6.2) which can be accounted for using the logic set out in the *Tractatus* and nothing else because of the status of mathematical propositions as ‘pseudo-propositions’ (6.2) which ‘express no thoughts’ (6.21). Wittgenstein demonstrates a fairly flippant attitude towards mathematics in the *Tractatus*, e.g., 5.43 and 6.2341; this turns out to be a mistake.

At the time of writing the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein was comfortable with relegating some propositions to the class of ‘nonsense’, including some mathematics, but he had no intention of losing all of mathematics, despite his elimination of the identity relation.

Whereas Wittgenstein wanted to eliminate talk of identity, existence, and similar terms, these are precisely the terms that Plato saw the importance of saving – it is precisely these concepts that, in the *Sophist*, save the Dream Theory from collapse into nonsense and put forward a robust account of how objects are structured into meaningful thought and speech about the world.

In this chapter I have argued that the Dream Theory and *Tractatus* lack the object-property distinction and present similar object-only ontologies. I have also argued that Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* demonstrate the flaws of such theories and the need for a second type of logical atom: properties. Identity is a particularly fundamental structuring element that Wittgenstein’s theory attacks but which is needed to allow meaningful propositions and mathematics.

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144 The so-called ‘colour-exclusion problem’ is discussed by Proops (2017) in section 5.1.
Final conclusions

In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein suggests that the logical atoms of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* are similar to the primary elements of Socrates’ Dream in the *Theaetetus* (P.I. §46). In this thesis I have argued that there are two key similarities between the *Tractatus* and the Dream: they both propose the existence of a single type of logical 'atom’ and they both reject the object-property distinction. I have suggested that Plato used the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* to demonstrate the flaws that are found in object-only ontologies, like the *Tractatus*, in support of his Platonist metaphysics.

Both the *Tractatus* and *Theaetetus* raise questions about the need for structuring elements to explain how strings of names are transformed into meaningful propositions. Both agree that language presupposes transcendental structuring elements that are not subject to change: for Wittgenstein, structure is provided by the logical form of a proposition and strange objects which have no properties yet contain within themselves all combinatorial possibilities; and for Plato, by the Greatest Kinds and other concepts under which we shuffle objects. Both result in limits to what we can meaningfully and truthfully speak about. The different choice of fundamental building blocks of reality, and corresponding logical atom, means that the limits of true speech are entirely different from one another.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein suggests that we can only speak about the arrangements of objects in the world, not about the eternal transcendental structures that enable those arrangements. Plato shows that this position is incoherent and takes the opposing view about what aspect of the world gives meaning to language.

Russell characterises the two sides of the debate as follows:

> The world of universals... may also be described as the world of being. The world of being is unchangeable, rigid, exact, delightful to the mathematician, the logician, the builder of metaphysical systems, and all who love perfection more than life.

> The world of existence is fleeting, vague, without sharp boundaries, without any clear plan or arrangement, but it contains all thoughts and feelings, all the data of sense, and all physical objects, everything that can do either good or harm, everything that makes any difference to the value of life and the world.
According to our temperaments, we shall prefer the contemplation of the one or of the other.

The one we do not prefer will probably seem to us a pale shadow of the one we prefer, and hardly worthy to be regarded as in any sense real.

(Russell, 1912(a), p. 57)

Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* can be read as two parts of one larger dialogue which contrasts these opposing approaches and demonstrates their consequences. Plato shows us that Tractarian-type theories are unable to explain how strings of words are transformed into meaningful propositions about the world. Such theories relegate all propositions and mathematics to the class of nonsense.

Whilst Wittgenstein acknowledges that, strictly speaking, the propositions of the *Tractatus* are nonsense, he did not appreciate, until much later in his career, that the *Tractatus* reduced *all* propositions and mathematics to nonsense. I have argued that Plato, on the other hand, foresaw this problem and presented a solution in the *Sophist*: the introduction of a second type of logical atom with a different (metaphorical) shape which accounts for how logical atoms combine to create propositions with unity.

I have shown that the version of logical atomism that Plato presents in the *Sophist* looks more Fregean than Tractarian. Wittgenstein rejected Fregean distinctions and the idea of a second type of atom representing properties on the basis that atoms are necessarily featureless and indistinguishable, but this comes at a high price – too high for Plato.
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