

# **Reciprocal Spaces**

Otherness, Knowledge, & Implications

In

Theatetus, Sophist, & the Statesman

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In the Sophist, Plato is captivated and driven by an intense desire to come to terms with the being of the sophist. We, as moderns, might imagine a sophist, as some sort of ancient hybrid between an ambulance-chasing lawyer, a magician, and debate team champion. We might dismiss the sophist as, well, sophistical. We wonder, therefore, why Plato is so bewitched by the essence of the sophist. The answer lies not in the sophist but in that in which he purports to transact – knowledge and Knowledge. For Plato the fact that the sophist may dispense and dwell in knowledge hits too close to home. Plato can not simply ignore the sophist as he might ignore a purveyor of potions, tonics, and cure-alls. Knowledge is the heart and soul of philosophy and the sophist may indeed possess it, or at least provide insights into the question – What is Knowledge? The sophist can not be beloved and befriended nor criticized and castigated until Knowledge itself is understood. The Sophist then is not, primarily, a hunt for the sophist but furthers the search for Knowledge as initiated in Theatetus. We will begin our own foray into understanding Knowledge by investigating the Otherness of, and in, the Sophist.

### **Part I, Otherness – What is it & where do we find it?**

Plato culminates a long investigation of non-being with:

*“Therefore it’s necessarily the case that Non-being is, both in the case of Motion and with respect to all the kinds. For with respect to all, the nature of the Other, by producing each as other than Being, makes each not-being. So in this sense we will correctly say that all things are for the same reasons non-being and again, because they partake of Being, that they both are and are being.”<sup>i</sup>*

By this point in the dialogue, Plato has demonstrated that every being has non-being inherent in it; each being has Otherness. A man or a truck has within its essence that it is *other* than every other being. When I see a truck I see its attributes (blue, tall, metal) and apprehend its essence - the truckness of the truck (the weight that transports weight). Included in its truckness is that it is other than car, boy, and building.

Plato's forms imply that all trucks must have the same essence, but perhaps the Otherness in any given truck makes each truck have its own truckness. Yesterday, for example, I saw an oil truck (carrying well, of course, oil). Its essence includes notions of energy, money, industry, and power, whereas that of a dump truck includes dirt, earth, movement, and a child's toy. In any case, when I apprehend either truck, I sense the Otherness within each. Each not only reveals its essence to me (or I reveal its essence, or through our commerce with one another the essence is revealed) but part of its essence is that it is Other than everything else. The truck shouts that it is a truck and whispers that it is not a car; it is not a bush (well, maybe the oil truck belongs to Bush); it is not a cat. In the same way, a man's being shouts: "I am your father," and it whispers, "I am not your brother, nor friend, nor uncle." Being is shouted; non-being is whispered. The being of a being conveys both that which it is and that which it is not. Our apprehension of a being is not divorced from its non-being. When we see and say book we concomitantly see and say not-pen, not-man, not-door.

Plato goes to great lengths to develop the Otherness of being and I wonder what his intent was. Perhaps the length is necessary to justify the parricide of such a great man as Parmenides. Plato seems conflicted over the demise of Parmenides' injunction that we must not utter that "non-being *is*." When Plato admits non-being into all that *is*, he rocks the foundation of the conception of existence. It is much easier to say that a book *is* than to say that a book both *is* and *is not*. To call into question the Oneness of being as a stable, and apparently tenable, Weltanschauung would not have come easy to Plato. Perhaps that is why he goes into such detail, justification, and rationalization before uttering the unutterable.

The parricide of Parmenides comes on the heels of the division process in which Plato cuts and cuts until he yields six concepts of the sophist. What is the link between the division process and the establishment of non-being (the parricide)? Is it causal? Incidental? Tangential? What is really going on? It is interesting that the need to kill Parmenides grew from the process of division itself. Using it, the Stranger and Theaetetus hit a wall in their hunt for the sophist. The sophist could be seen lurking in falsehood - in the shadows of truth. How could this be? The shadow itself must be the Otherness inherent in the truth. It is ironic that the division process that seems so cut and dry, in which everything is divided into two, this or that, hot or cold, legged or winged, leads to the conclusion that everything partakes in Sameness, and that everything partakes in Otherness. The being of each being is not categorical; it is not isolated. The being of every being mixes with the being of other beings.

One wonders, then, if the validity of the division process is substantiated or weakened by this ironic result. We can draw either of two conclusions from this result; both of which are paradoxical. One might conclude that the process that divides, that is the process that denies mixing, is inconsistent with the result drawn from this very process – that things mix. This is the first paradox. On the other hand, if we do not accept the conclusion that everything mixes we have no way to reconcile the fact that the sophist is concealed in falsehood. For if falsehood is denied, then the sophist does not exist and our hunt for him is invalid. This is the second paradox.

The division process gives the reader a palpable anxiety that doesn't seem to subside until the Statesman and its schematization of the animal kingdom. Unlike the divisions of the animal kingdom, the cuts of the Sophist feel arbitrary, disingenuous, and pedantic. Plato seems to be purposefully antagonistic. He is generating these feelings to show the futility of the division process and, at the same time, prepare us for the inevitable parricide. That is, our discomfort with dividing will make the acceptance of mixing and non-being all the easier.

It seems that the death of Oneness is foreshadowed by the initial hunts for the sophist. The sophist is found to be “*a self-seller of learnables,*” “*a paid hunter of the young and the rich,*” “*an athlete practiced in argument-competition,*”<sup>ii</sup> and many more. How could a single person be at once this, and at once that, without partaking, a priori, in the other

identities? Plato leads us to the conclusion that a man can not be thought of in a singular role. Even a child knows such: “My dad is a doctor. He plays basketball. He volunteers with the Boy Scouts. Well, he’s my dad and I just like him.” When we learn of the six initial forms of the sophist we sense their arbitrariness and conclude that, like dad, the sophist’s roles inter-mix with one another.

Interestingly, the format of the dialogue itself feels like the division process. The conversation is cut in two - a part for the Stranger and a part for Theaetetus. Theaetetus, as junior partner, makes embarrassingly few comments of substance. He is reduced to a parody of himself, replying to the Stranger: “*By all means.*” “*Of course.*” “*Very much so.*”<sup>iii</sup> The dialogue is a monologue in disguise. This too, prepares the reader for the concept of Otherness. In its essence a dialogue contains the concept of not-being a monologue. Plato inverts the dialogue and its not-being-a-monologue comes forth vividly. In making the Stranger dominate the “dialogue,” Plato makes what should only be a hint of Otherness central to our experience it. We are taken aback because we know that the essence of a dialogue includes a scent of not-being-a-monologue, yet Plato saturates the dialogue with monologue-ness. At the same time, the reader senses that because Theaetetus isn’t pulling his conversational weight, something is missing – there must be something other to Theaetetus or more likely to the meaning of the dialogue. (This will be addressed in Part II.)

Perhaps the most enigmatic aspect of the dialogue is the Stranger himself. When we meet the Stranger, we apprehend his being as a man and his non-being is that he is not an Athenian. Professor if this note is still here then your student plagiarized my paper from pnca.edu slash tilda mlawton Normally, one would expect an author to introduce a stranger and reveal his nature in the course of the text. Plato chooses another approach. He does not disclose any new aspect of the Stranger in the entire dialogue. Rather, he elects to have the Otherness of the Stranger speak for itself. Because we do not learn anything about the being of the Stranger, his Otherness becomes increasingly apparent. Normally a stranger's being would show itself eventually; here the quiet whisper of his Otherness grows to a roar by the end of the dialogue.

Ironically, the word "Stranger" feels less and less strange as the dialogue continues. Initially, we process the term in a descriptive sense; that is, that we have encountered a person that we will come to know. Ultimately, the term feels like a nom de guerre. Plato / the Stranger are doing battle with accepted concepts of being and Theaetetus and the reader are assistants in their command. We no longer see the Stranger as an other but rather as the embodiment of Otherness. That is, that characteristic of being which has strength, power, and the ability to mix (fight) with being.

Let us regroup now and see what Plato has provided. We saw that the division process led to the paradoxical conclusion that non-being mixes with being and therefore that the division process, which denies mixing, itself must be denied. We noticed that the



multiple personalities of the sophist point to the need for Otherness. And finally, we saw that the format of the dialogue along with the enigmatic nature of the Stranger vividly demonstrate Otherness. In part II we will wonder more Otherness and its implications for Knowledge.

## **Part II, Otherness & Knowledge – How are they related?**

The presumed search for the sophist follows, by a day, Theaetetus' dialogue with Socrates in which they hunt for knowledge in a myriad of ways, each leading to the next, and each shot down in turn. The hunt took them through a dizzying array of leads, false leads, promising vistas, contradictions, wind-eggs, insights, conundrums and enigmas. Theaetetus must have been reeling from the day and it is a wonder that he came back for more. He expressed his exhaustion to Socrates: *“Yes, by Zeus, and I for one have said even more on account of you than all I used to have in myself.”*<sup>iv</sup> It feels like Theaetetus has just run an intellectual marathon. When he returns to hunt the sophist, not only is he exhausted, he is utterly confused about what knowledge is and how one can make sound judgements about anything, let alone the sophist, who by all accounts appears to be very knowledgeable. Perhaps, this explains why Theaetetus responds in such a subservient manner to the Stranger. One must imagine that Theaetetus is constantly asking himself: “What are we doing here? How can we discuss this when nobody even understands knowledge? I want to go home and do some proofs.”

Throughout their conversation, Socrates and Theaetetus consistently try to define knowledge succinctly. Each definition fails and their failure is parallel to the division process in the hunts for the sophist. In the Sophist, the hunts fail because the sophist can not be fully investigated without admitting Otherness. In Theaetetus, the definitions of knowledge fail because each definition attempts to address the being of knowledge without admitting its non-being. Inherent in any knowledge and especially the knowledge of Knowledge is its Otherness – that which it is not. By denying Otherness, Socrates and his look-alike are committed to a futile way of looking at knowledge. An early passage shows that they are trapped:

*“No one in speaking ... would come to say and opine, ‘The other is an other.’ ... for I mean it in the following way: no one opines that the ugly (is) beautiful or anything else of the sort. ... So, it’s impossible in opining both to opine the other as an other.”<sup>v</sup>*

By insisting on defining knowledge by only what it is, and not by what it is not, Socrates and Theaetetus are destined to failure. Like all beings, knowledge has Otherness. By the end of the dialogue, Socrates alludes to the need to look at Otherness as it relates to Knowledge and this becomes the point of departure for the remainder of our investigation (into Knowledge): *“Then, it seems, if the speech is asked what knowledge is, it will answer, ‘Right opinion with the knowledge of difference’.”<sup>vi</sup>*

“Knowledge of difference” is key and we must *“put it to the torture”<sup>vii</sup>* if we are going to understand Knowledge fully. Let’s begin by looking at some mathematics. A point is defined as that which has no parts. A modern textbook defines parallel lines as lines that do not intersect. In both these examples, the negation appears to be paramount, but it is

not. Rather in both cases, we have a instinctual understanding of the subject without referring to the negation. We think of a point as a “tiny-winy” dot. We think of parallel lines as lines that, as a child might say, “go forever and ever,” without getting closer. The negation in the formal definitions serves to stabilize our understanding through what the subject is not; that is, through its Otherness. In both cases, our instincts reveal a primary apprehension of the essence of the subject and Otherness gives us secondary access.

Interestingly, Theaetetus himself raises a similar issue in the discussion of irrational numbers. In this case, the Otherness of irrational numbers is that they are not commensurable in length. The primary way we apprehend irrational numbers, however, is that they are roots of non-perfect squares. That they are non-commensurable stabilizes our understanding but is not the core of it. This is not surprising because it is difficult for us to visualize non-commensurability.

Let us continue to hunt for the relationship between Knowledge and Otherness in speech. One possibility that looks promising to Theaetetus is that “*true opinion with speech is knowledge.*”<sup>viii</sup> Ultimately, and as expected, Socrates debunks this definition as insufficient. However, in the process, Socrates touches on Otherness and it is within it that our hope for an understanding of Knowledge lies. Socrates states:

*“...in short, whenever anyone gets the true opinion of anything without speech, his soul tells the truth about it but (the person) does not know, for whoever is incapable of giving and receiving an account is without knowledge of this very fact.”<sup>ix</sup>*

Socrates is describing knowledge in the absence of language and dismissing it as (only) truth-of-the-soul. This implies that knowledge does not come to be until language is applied to the truth-of-the-soul. This is strange. Imagine a person who can discuss the Pythagorean theorem in Greek, Latin, and French. This person's knowledge certainly must exist in a pre-linguistic form. The fact that there may be difficulties expressing the subtleties of the theorem in different languages does not mitigate the knowledge itself. An artist may possess knowledge of the human condition that he can express in multiple media. These media reflect a deeper knowledge that is free of language. An idiot savant may be able to identify large prime numbers but not be able to explain his algorithm. His knowledge is certainly not less than pure. In each of these examples, the knowledge lies apart from language but not completely divorced from it. For if it was, the idiot savant would not even be able to relate that what he "sees" is what we call prime numbers.

A perplexing question arises when we imagine the essence of Knowledge. Its essence must encompass that which is primary (the truckness of the truck) and its non-being (the truck is not a car). What then is the primary part of Knowledge - that which shouts "being?" And what is the secondary part - that which whispers "non-being?" Is the primary part truth-in-the-soul? Or is it that which we can give an account of through language?

As a teacher, my instinct is to answer that the deeper and closer knowledge resides to the soul the closer it comes to Knowledge. With this in mind, students today learn concepts

in many ways and through multiple modalities. Teachers are hoping that knowledge will take hold at the level of the soul. At the same time, we believe that when one can clearly express one's knowledge through language one demonstrates a deeper understanding.

### **Part III, Ourselves, Otherness & Knowledge**

When I consider the relationship between the central role of Otherness in the Sophist and the search for Knowledge in Theaetetus, I am led to a very different apprehension and understanding of Knowledge. Knowledge is not like other beings. The essence of other beings have a primary part (the bookness of the book) and a non-being part (the book is not a newspaper). **The essence of Knowledge is that it does not have a primary part (in the soul nor in language) nor a secondary other (in language nor in soul).** Rather the essence of knowledge is its reciprocity. Knowledge lies between the soul and language. Both the soul and language are other to Knowledge. Knowledge is itself in the commerce between the language and soul.

In Theaetetus, Plato discusses at length the relationship between letters, syllables, words, and speech. Each is a component of its successor and is “plaited”<sup>x</sup> together in the process of making speech. The letters themselves are not speakable nor knowable; nothing can be said about the letter “b,” but the syllables and the speech they generate are knowable. From where, then, does the knowledge in speech come? The relationship between the letters and the syllables is the same as that between the soul and language described

above. There is reciprocity. **Knowledge is found in reciprocity and it looks for reciprocal relationships upon which to impose itself.**

We see that if we want to access and or create knowledge we must attempt to operate in areas characterized by reciprocal relationships. The reason the Stranger fails in his initial hunts of the sophist is that he is operating purely in the realm of words and their definitions. Cutting these words and those words, while accepting some of these and some of those, is merely an exercise in language. Knowledge can not be found by manipulating language. Operating in words only is a defense mechanism against the fact that knowledge does not lie in words. One must be willing to expose the barbarian in oneself to access knowledge.

We see the insufficiency of operating in a single realm when people try to apply purely analytic thinking to solve non-analytic problems. To use an example that borders on cliché, consider a relationship between a man and his wife. Often the man will try to solve “the problem” at hand by language-based reasoning. The woman, for her part, operates from the soul. The man tries to manipulate words to gain knowledge of the situation; the woman tries to use emotions to reach the same goal. Neither is successful because the knowledge resides in the reciprocity.

We must wonder more about reciprocal relationships and their potential to expose and or create knowledge. What are these reciprocal relationships? Are they natural or created?

Where do we encounter them? One sally into a definition of a reciprocal relationship is **the space between two beings that carries the essence of both without being comprised of either.** When Dr. Martin Luther King brought civil disobedience to the forefront, he was creating and operating in a space of reciprocity. In between the space of protest, which heretofore included violence, and the space of capitalism which maintains the status quo, he created the knowledge for change. His boycotts maintained the essence of traditional protest; they brought the attention of those with power to those without yet left behind the ugliness of violence. At the same time, boycott inverted the precepts of capitalism by opting out of services with prejudicial policies. In the space of civil disobedience, knowledge of racism flourished.

New knowledge is not always pleasant. When Osama Bin Laden ran two jetliners into the World Trade Center, he created a new space for knowledge. He brought the essence of war, killing for one's beliefs, into a reciprocal relationship with the being of American culture. He created a new space called Global Terrorism. In that space, new knowledge was created: Americans now know that security is not guaranteed by a defense department oriented towards war, that millions of people harbor hatred towards us, and that the global village is becoming an international network of tribal warfare.

When Einstein created the theory of relativity, he created a space between the universally accepted worlds of Newton and Maxwell. His theory maintained the utility of both

without being constituted of either. Physics now operates within this space as a matter of course.

Finally, let us return and look further into the structure of Knowledge. Its being and Otherness are neither shouts nor whispers but rather expression. Its being expresses that which is being expressed (civil disobedience) and Otherness expresses the context of the expression (between protest and capitalism). Otherness of Knowledge reaches out and joins existing spaces, so that the being of Knowledge has a foundation for expression.

At the same time, the Otherness of Knowledge has another axis which is, if you will, perpendicular. This axis extends to, and transacts with, falsehood. When we apprehend disobedience we not only perceive the spaces it lies between but we apprehend the falsity of all the false statements about it: Civil disobedience is a movement instigated by Communists. Civil disobedience is engendered by greed. Dr. Martin Luther King uses metaphor to manipulate. In the same way that we see and say not-book when looking at a pen, we see and say not-falsehoods when we apprehend Knowledge. Inherent in an equal sign is an understanding of not-greater, not-less, and not not-equal. Truth is bolstered by and, indeed, requires reference to a suite of falsehoods.

Falsehood is only slightly more difficult. It extends and transacts with truth so that its falsity can be understood. The statement that “two equals three” is understood as false when one already understands that “two equals two.” In some cases, the truth may not be



known but its existence is understood through contradiction. Contradiction can serve as a proxy for the truth. For example, we may never know the truth of the year 2000 presidential election but we recognize the contradictions in the statement: “The election proceeded in the full spirit of the founding fathers.”

In the pursuit of Knowledge we must concentrate first on reciprocal spaces and then the perpendicular axis will point to the falsehoods which transact with it. What is not clear is whether we create or discover reciprocal spaces. Was Osama Bin Laden’s approach always there waiting for a sadist to come along? I can not say. Nonetheless to create knowledge or access Knowledge one must find or create a space and operate in it long enough so that it does not feel like a space between others but rather as a space unto itself. Without a new space, one will shuffle back in forth between existing spaces investigating each in its own language without ever creating new knowledge. One must dwell in a new space until one feels comfortable there. With time, dwelling in a reciprocal space becomes an exploration, an investigation, and indeed, a home for Knowledge.

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<sup>i</sup> Plato’s Sophist, Translated by Brann, Kalkavage, Salem, Focus Philosophical Library, 1996, 256E

<sup>ii</sup> 231D

<sup>iii</sup> 224C

<sup>iv</sup> Theatetus, Translated by Seth Benardete, University of Chicago Press, 1986, 209E

<sup>v</sup> 190D

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