

CHAPTER 2

Platonic and Stoic Powers

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2.1. INTRODUCTION

Attic Greek made it likely that Plato would come to reflect on the subject of powers: for one standard way of referring to properties in this language, whatever your metaphysics, is by using the definite article plus a verb in the infinitive, which we would naturally translate as a participle phrase.¹ Put crudely, if your natural way of referring to the property of *being F* is as, literally, “the F-ing,” then you are already closer than users of less beautiful languages to the idea that *being F* is a

¹ In what follows, translations from Plato are painfully literal and my own; the texts of Plato and Aristotle I cite are from the standard *Oxford Classical Text* editions observed in the bibliography. These in turn rely on the pagination of Plato’s Renaissance editor Stephanus and Aristotle’s 19th-century editor Bekker. In the case of the former, I refer to the Stephanus page, paragraph, and line numbers where this might be helpful, to the page and paragraphs alone where such specificity is not needed.

matter, no more or less, of having the power to F, to become *an F-ing thing*.²

But it was surely inevitable that Plato would come to reflect on the subject of powers given a large part of the subject matter of his dialogues. In so frequently making Socrates the protagonist of his philosophical dramas, a figure to whom he had (a) given the prioritization of a certain sort of knowledge, it was inevitable that he would (b) reflect carefully on the only clear contemporary instances of knowledge, the skills that craftsmen learn and deploy.³ In thinking carefully about these skills, their subject matter, what they produce and the natural demands on their means of production, Plato came to think about abilities as such, and found himself originating a metaphysics of powers.

In this chapter, Sections 2.2 and 2.3 set out Plato's main general innovations in powers theorizing; Section 2.4 treats of the most profound

2 There is a perfect example of these articular infinitives at *Gorgias* 474b2–5. Plato has at least three further semantic devices for speaking of powers (this list makes no pretense at being exhaustive). Firstly, (i) the noun *dunamis* and its cognate verb in the middle voice, *dunasthai*. These words had been in currency long before Plato wrote: *dunamis* occurs throughout Homer, Theognis, and Hesiod to refer to, among other commonplaces, the physical strength of individual men or armies of them, or to the buying power of riches; throughout the works of the nascent mathematics of Plato's day to mean "square" or "square root" (Plato himself seems to have had a hand in developing the second meaning; see *Theaetetus* 147d–148b); and throughout the growing Hippocratic corpus to mean "curative property." No less important for Plato's talk of powers is (ii) a complex verbal expression comprising the Greek word for "such" (as in "such a gem as this"; *hoios*), a conjunctive particle *te*, and a verb in the infinitive; where that verb is F, the whole expression (*hoios + te + Inf. (F)*) means literally "is such as to F," or more elegantly: "is able to F," hence (with the provisos in the main text) "has the power to F." The equivalence of these semantic devices is conveniently illustrated for present purposes by the equivalence between *Theaetetus* 184e8 and 185b8, to take one example from many. Thirdly there is (iii) the Greek means of attributing possibility in a very general sense to a subject, using a finite form of a verb (*exeinai*) and a pronoun in the dative; and finally (iv) perhaps the most general sense of possibility, a form of the verb "to be," *einai*, together with another verb in the infinitive. The study of Joseph Souilhé, *Etude sur La Terme ΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ dans Les Dialogues de Platon* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1919) is still relevant and helpful, but marred by the absence of connections between its subject, (i), and such other means of modal expression as these.

3 For the prioritization of a certain sort of knowledge, see, e.g., *Meno* 71b; for the idea that only craftsmen (and not politicians and sophists) know at least about what they practice, if nothing else important, see *Apology* 22d. For the ideas behind (a) and (b) coming beautifully together, see *Gorgias* 447c9–d5, where Socrates inquires what is the power of Gorgias the Rhetorician's skill. It is quite clear in the context that Socrates takes this to be a mere verbal variant on the standard Socratic question "What is F?," whose answer is prioritized in the *Meno* over those to such questions as "What kind of a thing is F?"

and consequent hypothesis of his theorizing, made in the *Sophist*; and Section 2.5 observes the development of these ideas in the early Stoa from Zeno to Chrysippus. Two shared views emerge from both Plato and Stoicism. Firstly: both sought to distinguish powers from other kinds of modality, and in this respect, they were no less successful than the considerably more lionized Aristotle. Secondly: both manifest tendencies to be not only realists about powers, but also consciously to raise the question of whether powers might be the fundamental grounds of more familiar properties.⁴ But for good reasons, as I shall show, neither Plato nor the Stoics are prepared to offer a decisively positive answer to that question, and indeed have reasons to be suspicious of any such answer.

2.2. POWERS AND POSSIBILITIES

Whatever they are, powers are *ways* for things to be, known as *modal* properties, after the Latin *modus* for extent, quantity, or manner. A moment's reflection shows that they must lie on some sort of spectrum between stronger and weaker modalities. So long as the value of *p* entails no contradiction, *p* is logically possible, even if it is false, and this is the weakest and most ubiquitous modality. Such a mere possibility is too easily activated, because it is activated by literally every circumstance, to deserve the name of "power." Meanwhile there are modalities whose exercise is altogether more substantial, enjoying quite determinate organs and results, such as the ability *to boil filtered water in a kettle*, or the ability *to read the morning's news in French*. But these seem to be nothing more than determinates of more general powers, such as the power to boil liquids and the power to read French, and it is these less determinate powers that matter when we are counting powers for the purposes of science. One may indeed read the morning's news in

4 For the prominence of this question in the contemporary debate about powers, see Jennifer McKittrick's chapter in this volume.

French, but this will not be an extra power over and above one's less determinate power to read French.

Plato makes much in his works of the fact that skills are powers to accomplish opposites. It is taken as uncontroversial at *Republic* 333e that he who best knows how to guard against disease is also the expert when it comes to causing that disease in others undetected. It is by a single psychological state, the doctor's expertise, that he is capable of bringing about opposites such as health and sickness.⁵ This observation at least allows Plato to begin the task of distinguishing between *being possible* and *being powerful*, in at least two significant passages, from the *Theaetetus* and *Crito* respectively.

The sort of modal contrast I have in mind is best introduced by an example. It is *possible* for me to toss a coin and turn up tails: but I do not have the *power* to do that. If I did, then I could exercise that power always to throw heads instead: I could withhold the tails-throwing aspect of my gift and always make heads turn up, as a wicked surgeon may not just refrain from setting your leg properly, but set it so poorly it will never heal, an evil consequence not even the most malicious non-expert will have the know-how to bring about. But of course, I have no such power as thus to guarantee heads, or always to eschew snake eyes from my dice rolls. Such results as I get are mere accidentally realized possibilities for me: I have not the control over them that a power would require.⁶

Such a distinction is manifested in the third part of the *Theaetetus*, which is occupied like the rest of the dialogue with the quest for an analysis of knowledge. Theaetetus's third proposed answer is that knowledge is to be analyzed as true belief together with some suitable accompanying formula, some *logos*. The discussion naturally turns to what kind of formula would make the difference between merely

⁵ Aristotle distinguishes between such rational powers and their non-rational brethren at *Metaphysics* 1047b35–1048a24.

⁶ See Anthony Kenny, *Will, Freedom and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 135–37.

believing something correctly, and knowing it; one candidate is a list-like account expounding the relevant parts of the object of belief. For instance, knowing how to spell a name will be a matter of (i) believing that the name is to be spelled in such-and-such a way, and (ii) being able also to list the syllables and their letters in the correct order. But Socrates quickly (*Theaetetus* 207e) observes that this is surely not enough for knowledge: even if you grasp in some sense that Theaetetus's name begins with the Greek letter Theta (θ), and perhaps get the remaining letters out in the right order, you will *not* know how to spell it if you do not realize that one and the same letter is the first one of the distinct name Theodorus. Start that name instead with a Tau (τ), and you will reveal your ignorance even of how to spell Theaetetus's name, despite your persisting in spelling out its *logos* by beginning correctly with a Theta and proceeding no less correctly in order.

In other words, even if it is *ex hypothesi* possible for you to do something—to spell Theaetetus's name properly (to satisfy only (i))—that does not entail you have the *power* to do it, for supposedly you will lack that power if you go wrong on the first letter of “Theodorus.”⁷ A modern parallel might help. You might take yourself to know how to spell the Christian name “Christian,” and try to prove it by listing the letters of that name in order. But getting so much as this right will not be tantamount to knowing how to spell it if, on being invited to spell the different but related word “Christianity,” you stumble at the first letter and start with a “k.” If that is your idea of “Christianity,” you do not support the conditions required even for knowing how to spell “Christian.” There is merely something you can do without having the power to do it, like rolling a 6.

The same distinction appears among higher stakes at *Crito* 44d. *Crito* has tried to persuade Socrates, who is spending his last days in a

7 In short, a true belief about how to spell a name together with some justification for it—being able to list the letters in the correct order—is insufficient for knowledge. It is a pity Gettier alone gets the credit for such cases in the literature; he was pipped to the post, not just by Lewis Carroll's broken clock that is right twice a day, but by several further millennia.

jail in Athens, that he ought to have more care for his public standing, for the reason that the masses enjoy the power to do a great deal of harm to those who fall from public favor. Socrates replies that while it might *appear* that the Great Unwashed enjoy the power both to harm and benefit him, in reality they have no real power over either outcome. For they bring about whatever they do by mere hap, as when ordinary humans toss coins or roll dice; for they act in these cases without knowledge. They have no skill for causing harm or benefit, unlike the imagined doctor of the *Republic* passage cited above. This impotence does not stretch to inertia: Socrates knows perfectly well that it is possible for the masses to harm him, and no less possible for them to benefit him. It is *possible* for them; but they have no *power* to bring about these ends.

2.3. INDIVIDUATING POWERS

If powers were the same entities as their organs, they would be easy to spot and count; picking out the soluble painkillers in the pharmacy would be as easy as counting the brown eyes among its staff. But it would also be indicative of a mistake, namely that of confusing a power with its vehicle. Plato consistently resists this mistake; among his many reasons perhaps the most powerful one is his conclusion in the *Phaedo* that causes are not merely sufficient for their effects but required by them, the first step on the path to taking causes as entities that necessitate what they cause.⁸ But this leads naturally to the distinction between a power and its vehicle. For although you might initially

⁸ For the argument that this is so, see D. T. J. Bailey, "Platonic Causes Revisited," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no. 1 (2014): 15–32. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Causality and Determination," in *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind: Collected Papers*, vol. 2, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 133–47. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Causality and Determination," in *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind: Collected Papers*, vol. 2II, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 133–47 traces the assumption that causes must be not merely sufficient but also necessary for their effects in Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, and Russell. I would add Aristotle to the list.

suppose that it was the vodka that made me tipsy, this would be a mistake if you also think causes commensurate with their effects. It was the *alcohol* that made me inebriated; vodka was merely its vehicle. Consuming the vodka may have been sufficient to intoxicate me but it was hardly necessary, since the same quantities of whisky would have done just as well. Therefore, the drinks I took were not the cause of my drunkenness but merely the vehicle for the causally powerful agent in the process, alcohol itself. It was my drinking *alcohol* that caused my state; that was what was sufficient for it. My drinking vodka was not sufficient; it was too unnecessary for what happened.

Plato manifests his appreciation of such facts in a passage from *Republic* Book V. It is explicitly directed at a group for whom Plato coins a name, the *philotheamones* (“lovers of spectacles”), philosophically deficient folk who have got as far as recognizing that there are many beautiful sensible things, but have not yet accepted the reality of the single individual these beautiful things have in common, the form Beauty itself. They can perhaps be brought to grasp this, once they comprehend that only such things as forms are the objects of one of our most distinctive powers, knowledge. But persuading such culture vultures will accordingly require providing them with further information about powers. Hence, Plato has Socrates provide a criterion for the individuation of these entities, which begins with the observation that they are somehow occult:

(R) Let us say that powers are some kind among [the] beings, by which we and anything else are able to do whatever we are able to do. I mean for example sight and hearing are powers, if you can understand the kind of which I wish to speak.

I understand, he [Glaucou, Plato’s brother] said.

Listen, then, to what strikes me about them. For in the case of a power I see neither color nor shape nor any other such property like the many others to which I turn my eyes when I distinguish for myself between one thing and another. Rather, in the case of a power

I look to that single thing alone: that to which it is related and what it achieves; and in this way I call each one a power; and that which is related to the same thing and achieves the same thing I call the same; and that which is related to something else and achieves something else I call another. (*Republic* 477c1–d5)

According to the conclusion of this argument, *knowing* and *believing* are distinct powers (for the former always yields truth as its result, while the latter is not so reliable); and this entails that knowing and believing are powers exercised on different objects. They apply to different things much as seeing and hearing apply to different things. Supposedly one can no more have a mere belief about something knowable, or know something one might otherwise merely believe, than one can exercise the power of sight on a sound or the power of hearing on a color.

Notoriously, the remainder of the *Republic* does very little with the surprising conclusions Plato wrings out of (R); one obvious reason was that he had not made up his mind about how far he would let powers take him in his own metaphysics. I offer two reasons for attributing such indecisiveness to Plato here.

Firstly, the powers here either mentioned or distinguished (sight, hearing, knowing, believing) are each of them a clear case of a “one-over-many,” the one being the power and the many being its contingent realizations in the organs or souls of living beings. Plato denies that such powers as sight and hearing are to be individuated by their vehicles, or else they would be as detectable by the senses as eyes and ears are. But for this reason, it is striking that Plato is not here or elsewhere tempted to make powers among those non-sensible entities about which he is at such pains to theorize, the forms. It might be that he thought powers respectable enough to be counted; but too world-bound, too indebted to the distinct material vehicles of their realization to merit some higher version of reality standing behind them.

But secondly, if the ready countability of powers is enough for them to gain *some* purchase on being, their qualifications are somewhat

besmirched by the manner of their introduction. The ability to state (R) is a power Socrates manifests here in *Republic V*. His manifesting a power in stating (R), a claim about powers, therefore raises the inevitable question of how (R) relates to itself: what (R) itself says about Socrates's power to judge that (R). In a dialogue seldom connected with the *Republic*, the *Charmides*, Plato has his participants discuss this question of various powers' possible reflexivity, of what can happen when these powers are trained on themselves. No doubt I can see my eyes in the mirror or hear my ear when it pops. But are these states of affairs tantamount to vision seeing *itself* as well as other things, and audition hearing *itself* as well as other things? The discussion in the *Charmides* (167a–169a) does not settle the matter; its considerable sophistication tends toward skepticism on the issue. If the objects of sight are nothing but color and shape, then sight will see itself only if sight enjoys color and shape. But for the reasons just discussed, it does not; at best these properties belong only to its vehicle in each one of us, and even that relation is one of contingency.

Anxieties related to those in the *Charmides* bear on our understanding of (R). Since Socrates and his interlocutors here manifest a power—namely the power to distinguish between knowledge and belief by deploying (R)—over what is *that* power set, and what are *its* results? Ideally the result of exercising some power to make an important distinction would be *knowledge*. Someone coming to exercise this power would know, among other things, that despite a view popular among modern epistemologists, knowing is not a special kind of believing, any more than seeing is a kind of hearing. But if the power to make such distinctions as (R) has knowledge as its result, then by the consequences of (R) itself, the objects of this distinction would have to be the objects of knowledge, forms. But that is not the object of the power to judge that (R). For as we have just seen, Plato is not tempted to think of knowing and believing as forms, even if like sight and hearing they are plainly non-sensible ones-over-many.

Nothing can safely be inferred about Plato's acceptance of (R). The same is true of the next passage he wrote about powers, which like (R) is formulated explicitly for the benefit of the philosophically unaware.

2.4. THE *SOPHIST*

In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger is engaged in defining the figure of the Sophist, by which he is brought to the larger issue of what *being* is, since Sophists are engaged in, among other activities, deceptions concerning it. The Stranger describes the dispute between the Giants, crude materialists who believe in nothing they cannot hold in their hands, and the Friends of Forms (hereafter, FFs), theorists who suppose that *being* is enjoyed solely by the non-bodily, and who relegate all change to a supposedly never-overlapping class of *becomings*. According to the Stranger, the Giants at least can be improved (as perhaps the *philotheamones* of the *Republic* could be), should they be willing to make a concession in the direction of powers:

(S) I mean (i) that anything whatever possessed of a power, either for acting on another of any nature, or for being affected even in the smallest respect by the most trivial thing, and even if only once: every such thing really is [a *being*]. I propose (ii) to set as a criterion for the beings, that they are nothing other than power. (*Sophist* 247d8–e4)

Note that we are initially offered, in (i), only the claim that having a power is always sufficient for enjoying being. It is compatible with this claim by itself that there are some further genuine beings that lack power altogether—as one might initially suppose true of Plato's immutable forms. But this possibility is closed off by (ii), which affirms there is no *being* beyond [those entities enjoying] power.

While the wording of (S) will be of importance later on, I shall here for simplicity's sake take (S) as constructing the following biconditional, the Eleatic Principle:

[EP] X is a *being* if and only if X is or has some power.

As with (R), the purport of this new proposal flares and fizzles. Much as we are never told how the *philotheamones* respond to (R), it is not at all clear to what destinations the [EP] takes those from whom it seeks bilateral concessions. Neither party is likely to find itself entirely satisfied by the genie of dynamism that emerges. It gives the Giants, previously adamant in having *being* exhausted by *body*, too many powerful entities that nevertheless do not seem to be plausible cases of bodies; if *justice* is a body that makes other just entities just, then it is an odd sort of body to be sure, and to that extent perhaps a concession too far for the Giants. But the [EP] seems to threaten no less the purity of the FFs' sense of *being*, if now they must include within it objects liable to the cloudy impermanence of change. How, the FFs would ask, can something so comparatively fleeting as to be scarcely an entity at all, nevertheless also be powerful, especially if the "power" is no more than that of being susceptible to affection by others, and to that extent warrants the scare quotes?

A first approach to the [EP] naturally has Plato's readers focused on what its author predictably understood to count clearly as a being. Any form F is a being, for Plato, if anything is. If the [EP] is right, then any form F will have [either an active or a passive, disjunction-inclusive] power. Plato often speaks of his forms as changeless, which sounds as if it excludes *being dynamic* in any sense.⁹ But if by "power" the [EP]

⁹ For example, forms are frequently described as "always the same in the same respects" at: *Phaedo* 78c6, d2-3, d5-8, e2, 79a2, a9, d5-6, 80b2; *Symposium* 211b1-5; *Timaeus* 28a2, a6-7, 29a1, a7, 35a2, 37b3, 38a3, 48c6, 52a1; and "uniform" at: *Phaedo* 78d5, 80b2, 83e3; *Symposium* 211b1; *Republic* 612a4.

intends, not endowment with any old power, but endowment specifically with the power *to cause* or figure in an explanation, then the [EP] is not in fact as fresh and novel as it first appears. For Plato has already treated of his forms as causes (*Phaedo* 100c4–6, 101b10–c9), and as figuring in explanations (100b3–9, 100c6–7, 101c4), without that seeming to undermine their changelessness. Indeed, when Plato writes about forms being causes, he writes as if they are the only possible causes of whatever they cause, for *only* they will be suitably commensurate with their effects.¹⁰ Plato here has a theological precedent: it is a commonplace of Greek cosmological thinking that something, namely God, is both about as causally active as a thing can be (by virtue of, for example, creating the sensible world, or being the object of aspiration for all living things within it) while not himself being altered in any sense by his own causal activity.¹¹

If by “power” the Stranger means “has the power to be a cause,” there is nothing very revisionary about the [EP] after all: Plato, in the *Phaedo*, had already restricted that power to beings alone, the forms, and to this extent the [EP] is just a new formulation of Platonism. But then why should *materialists* accept a criterion for *being* with *that* provenance? At the same time, there is no indication that this *is* the Stranger’s intention, and every suggestion in the formulation (S) that “power” is to be read generously and *not* restricted by Plato’s demanding constraints on what causation might be.¹² For those constraints were already far too intimately associated with his own personal conception of *being* to settle any dispute to which the Giants are party.

10 For an argument that this is so, see Bailey, “Platonic Causes.”

11 For a paradigmatic later statement of this doctrine, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b2–8.

12 Read generously, but not as generously as possible. The [EP] would fail at any task at which it is reasonably directed if, for example, making true any old predicate counts as activating a power. For then *non-being* will count as a being, since non-being is, among other things, part of the subject matter of the *Sophist*, and was *made* so by Plato himself. We see here another reflection of the idea from Section 2.2: it may be *possible* for non-being to be written about in, say, a great dialogue; but this is hardly anything by way of non-being finding itself *empowered*.

If this is so, then the [EP], if he accepted it, does indeed announce a shift in Plato's thinking. For example, he several times rejects the idea that X causes F-ness, on the grounds that X itself is no more F than un-F (see, for example, *Phaedo* 66a, 74b, 100b; *Hippias Major* 289c–d; *Republic* 523–24). Color cannot make a thing beautiful, because the same color in a different context will look ugly. Purple might seem to make the robe beautiful but in fact it has no such power, for when purple is used for flesh-tones, it looks downright ugly. According to the *Phaedo*, if something is not a cause, it is not a form. According to the argument of which (R) is the major premise, if something is not a form, it is not a being. But if the [EP] requires a somewhat generous conception of power, it will reclassify as beings properties which earlier dialogues deemed non-starters as causes. It may be that purple is never the cause of beauty, but that hardly means that the color of purple things is inert and undynamic, literally powerless; it is at least a respectable candidate for causing circumstances that hold little interest for Plato, such as my seeing purple whenever I do. Being such as to bring that about is tantamount to having some power, which in turn by the [EP] is tantamount to enjoying being, a status Plato previously awarded forms alone.

Other dialogues tell firmly against Plato's enthusiasm for the [EP]. The *Timaeus* rehearses the familiar distinction between genuine beings, forms, and those items that merely change and become, sensible particulars. But the *Timaeus* innovates in introducing us to a third kind of thing, Space (also known as the Receptacle, 49a5–6): this is the underlying cause which the Demiurge uses as an infinitely plastic substrate with which to produce impermanent, mutable particulars, which nevertheless have been copied from forms, the only other genuine beings. Space stands to all sensible particulars much as the substance gold stands to particular gold rings, bracelets, and necklaces.

Space is the patient of something else's empowerment—paradigmatically so if dynamism comes in degrees, for according to *Timaeus's* conception, Space is the most mutable entity in the Universe.

For it and only it can be used to shape literally any changeable object.¹³ According to the [EP], Space should count as a being if anything does, for to be sure it is subject to the exercise of powers. And indeed, it does so count at *Timaeus* 52a8. But that is because it turns out that Space is much more like the forms than the sensible items it somehow underlies. For it is everlasting and does not endure so much as the properties, let alone the changes, characteristic of changing sensible entities. *Timaeus* could hardly be more emphatic: Space is forever receiving all things; but for all that, *in no way does it ever take on any shape even so much as similar* to those things for whose being it is the material support (50b8–50c2).¹⁴ If this is so, then the idea that Space is itself dynamic, in virtue of accommodating all manner of pressure from all manner of powers, is mistaken: it is not so much as *like* the things it otherwise supposedly *becomes*. Space itself is more akin to the forms spoken of in texts presumably formulated prior to (S), the changeless entities on which the Demiurge trains his eye when manufacturing the Universe, than any of his products.

In short, the danger is that Space counts as a genuine *being* only to the extent that properly considered it is not a thing that *becomes* anything: its very passivity is really a sham. For to precisely that extent, it neither exercises any power itself, nor changes as a result of the activation of any other power. It therefore satisfies the left hand side of the biconditional [EP] but not the right hand side, and is thus seemingly a counterexample to that principle, one more serious for Plato's mature metaphysics than the modest case of color just imagined. To put the point in modern terms, the Receptacle of becoming in Plato's *Timaeus* is in many ways like a thin particular, an individual considered shorn of all its properties. Absent all my properties, and whatever featureless

13 For the idea that a being F, F in virtue of the power to F, is more F to just the extent to which it more enjoys the power to F, see *Hippias Minor* 375d7–376a1.

14 If that strikes you as a contradiction, perhaps the reason is that it should. For an amusing history and diagnosis of this ever-popular strand of philosophical thinking, see P.T. Geach, *Truth, Love and Immortality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), Chapter 3.

unit remains has no cards either to play or be dealt. *I* may be forever changing; but that is me full-fledged who changes. The bare individual beneath my properties, if there is such a thing, is not itself changing; rather it is the changeless persistent that supports all of those changes, a thing which therefore cannot *be*, by the [EP].

What would Plato have preferred—the positive suggestions he has Timaeus make about Space counting as a being, which require it to be dynamic if the [EP] is also true? Or is Space as such non-dynamic, as Timaeus seems confidently to state? If the answer to the second question is “yes” and Space is also a *bona fide* being, then Plato did *not* accept the [EP], at least when theorizing at his most positive and creative in the *Timaeus*.

We are here appropriately brought back to the themes with which we began: not every change is the manifestation of a power, and powers are not generally to be confused with their vehicles or organs. Plato’s contribution here is to identify, in his treatment of Space, something seemingly mutable whose various changes are plausibly *not* manifestations of a power, let alone a power supported by some distinct, determinate organ. If I walk into a room, I have manifested *my* power to change my location; but something seems wrong with saying that *the room* has manifested *its* power to be occupied afresh: it was too passive to be that active. And what would the vehicle be for this power—the whole room, the extension of the room, the empty space of/in the room before I entered? Nothing quite fits. Nor by itself is the room empowered to bring about the contrary state of affairs of my being absent from it. Anyone tempted by the idea that Space, even a field-like Space, underlies material things will accordingly be unwilling to suppose powers foundational in their ontology.

As with (R), Plato’s inclination to follow (S) is a trail that can be followed for only a few steps before his tracks peter out altogether. I have argued that this is hardly an accident, given his commitments elsewhere.

2.5. STOICISM

The Stoics were materialists with a striking similarity to Plato's Giants; indeed, they are in some ways inverted Giants.¹⁵ For the latter, when confronted with the shortcomings of materialism, initially respond with defiant parsimony, holding that if a thing is not a body, then "for this reason it is not a being at all" (*Sophist* 247c4–7). Meanwhile the Stoics were boldly promiscuous, holding by contrast that if there is such a thing as X, then X must be a body, and hence the class of the bodily is far more inclusive than pre-Stoic materialists, even ones of Plato's invention, were prepared to argue.

The Stoics therefore had a well-developed enthusiasm for taking all manner of entities as corporeal, without any of the bashfulness of the Giants. Some examples: (i) the soul; (ii) virtue, knowledge, and mental states in general; (iii) anything of which one can correctly predicate goodness; (iv) night and day; even (v) the truth itself.¹⁶ But alongside this inflationary corporealizing was something much more traditional, the view that some of these entities are basic relative to all the rest. These are the cosmological principles of Stoicism, and also the origins of the tension in the Stoic attitude to powers.

Our sources suggest that the Stoics had a criterion for body, as being extended in three dimensions and resistant to the touch.¹⁷ There is further evidence that they regarded the property of *being bodily* as at least coextensive with, if not ultimately analyzable as, *being such as to interact causally with [other] bodies*. For them, if X is a body then X is at least a possible object of causal interaction, the very criterion the [EP]

15 Throughout this section I rely on the texts and translations of A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds. and trans., *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1987; hereafter "LS."

16 For evidence: (i) Nemesius *Nat. hom.* 78, 7–79, 2; 81, 6–10 (=LS 45C, D); (ii) Aëtius 4.11.1–4 (=LS 39E); Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1084F–1085A (=LS 39F); (iii) Seneca *Ep.* 117, 2–33 (=LS 60S); (iv) Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1084C–D (=LS 51G); (v) Sextus Empiricus *PH* 2, 81–3 (=LS 33P).

17 There is evidence at Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* vii 135 (=LS 45E); and Galen, *On which qualities are incorporeal* 19, 483, 13–16 (=LS 45F).

suggested for *being*. Are the Stoics therefore making a bid for global dynamism, according to which powers underlie even more familiar properties such as *being a body*? Do they see powers as foundational to their ontological structure?

The answer is tantalizingly ambivalent. In one sense the answer is “no,” for (i) the Stoics were at some point, like other materialists, tempted by *reductionism* about powers. They saw the appeal of taking powers’ activation as depending on more fundamental properties and relations of bodies such as temperature, density, and relative motion. But in another sense the answer is “yes,” for (ii) Stoic physics is also underpinned by entities, the principles, whose most informative characterization is in terms of power predicates: it is in virtue of their unique powers that they differ from less fundamental bodies. The remainder of the paper expounds these positions.

(i) requires a temporary excursion into the highly controversial subject of the Stoic theory of Categories, in particular what they called the third and fourth genera. It is difficult from the modern point of view to see exactly what their Category theory is a theory *of*: it cannot have been formulated with the same intentions as Aristotle’s system of ontological types ordered by some, possibly plural, priority relations. For the same entity can recur in diverse Stoic categories. It approximates, at least, to some story either about different kinds of property individuals can have, or the different ways in which individuals having these properties may be described. The third category is that which subsumes its entities under some sort of relation, where those relations hold in virtue of features nevertheless intrinsic to the individuals so related. By contrast the fourth category includes relations whose obtaining or failure to obtain make no difference to the nature of the individuals so related (or not): it deals with what is possible for an individual without that generally being sufficient to manifest any genuine power. Only examples will clarify what is intended.

Simplicius gives us the following examples of a relation in the third genus: knowledge, or perception, is always knowledge or perception

of something or other.¹⁸ There is this much that is relative about these states. But the properties in virtue of which we have these powers, to know or to perceive, are anything but relative: they are determined by non-relative material properties of a thinking subject—his state of mind (where this is yet another body) or the configuration of his sense organs. As Aristotle appreciated, when one comes to know about Socrates, it is not Socrates who changes even though what was once true of him—that you were ignorant of him—is now false.¹⁹ It is *you* who has changed; or rather as the Stoics would say, it is the state of your ruling part, the material thing in virtue of which you have any mental powers at all, that changed. It cannot be that your state of knowledge alters without this thing altering; nor can that alteration be anything merely conventional, any more than one can taste sweetness or know the calculus merely by convention. Such powers cannot be activated by *fiat*, as Sweden decided by *fiat* to drive on the right instead of the left on 3 September 1967. Even if there is some relativity involved in the *intentionality* of such mental states, the material factors that make them knowledge or perception are intrinsic to the ruling part.

The same is true of those bodies which activate our mental powers. Sugar is sweet, *at least to human beings*, and admitting to this much is a concession to some sort of relativism about the powers of sugary foods. Alcohol intoxicates us while catnip does nothing for us; the latter's effectiveness is relative only to cats. But that in virtue of which sugar is sweet to us at least—*that* is no relative matter, but instead one settled by the intrinsic material character of sugar. Simplicius attributes this view to the Stoics in the passage just cited: if sugar were to alter the extension to which its sweetness is relative, by failing to taste sweet to humans or starting to taste salty to them—well, any stuff with these

18 Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Categories* 165, 32–166, 29 (=LS 29C).

19 I infer that Aristotle held this from *Categories* 4A10–B19: even though they are receptive of contraries (truth and falsehood), statements or beliefs are not substances. For when they change their truth-value, it is not they who change but their subject matter.

effects would not really be sugar any more, for something intrinsic to sugary bodies would have to change if there were this consequent change in the extension over which sugar exerts its power; what we would have would no longer be sugar much as suitably warmed intoxicating drinks are no longer alcoholic. That is not an alteration in the *power* of alcohol; rather it is a change in the disposition of some particular liquid in virtue of some change in its chemical microstructure.

By contrast the changes that generate properties in the fourth Stoic category are not so materially infectious. One may gain or lose these properties without oneself changing at all, let alone activating a power. For example, even if at some time *X* is the man on *Y*'s right, this may cease to be so without any material change at all in *Y* (although there must be at least one, in *X*, even if not an intrinsic one). Another Stoic example we have: a man may cease to be a father on the death of his son, again without himself materially changing (although presumably his son changes and intrinsically so). In both cases predicates become or cease to be true of individuals without that being tantamount to the exercise of any power in them.

The distinction entails that the Stoics have a substantive answer to the very issue with which we began: what is the difference between a mere possibility, and the activity of a power? For the Stoics, genuine powers belong to their third genus: entities that are relative to other entities, but where this relation is constituted on both sides by intrinsic, non-dispositional properties such as material microstructure. But where things change relative to one another *without* requiring such intrinsic material alterations, they are not exercises of genuine powers, and hence call for their own genus, the fourth.

(ii) at least takes us to more recognizable metaphysical *dramatis personae*. These are the principles of Stoic physics (where principle, *archē*, means something closer to “cause” than to “rule,” although the two meanings are certainly associated in Stoic intentions). Like every other genuine beings in Stoic physics, they are themselves material, underlying all other material entities, and imbuing all of them with some

degree of animation, no matter how otherwise insignificant. Dylan Thomas doubtless hadn't the Stoics in mind when he wrote, "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower / Drives my green age . . . The force that drives the water through the rocks / Drives my red blood."²⁰ But the description of some natural, dynamic entity both underlying and guiding diverse macro-entities, from basic organic processes to deliberative human action, fits the early Stoa perfectly. For the Stoics there were two such forces, one active, one passive. That is, at the foundation of their ontology are bodies whose primary characterization is dispositional: one is such as to act, the other such as to be acted upon.

In fact, the details of their characterization provide a further reason to think the Stoics had the *Sophist* and perhaps the *Timaeus* in mind when formulating their views. For each Stoic principle in its own way exploits the conspicuously careful wording of (S). For each Stoic principle passes the [EP] only in virtue of the care with which (S) expressed it. Had the Stranger spoken more crudely and affirmed that *all* beings must be liable *both* to acting *and* to being acted upon, then the Stoic principles would have failed it. For one acts without ever being acted upon, while the other is acted upon without ever acting: both enjoy powers, but one is all action, the other all passivity. The Stoics Olympianized these roles by identifying the former with a male god, Zeus, and the latter with a female one, Hera. In less picturesque moods they identify the active principle as a sort of global efficient cause; and the passive principle they identify as matter, but whose role is somewhat similar to that of Space in the *Timaeus*.²¹ Action, passion: we here have entities whose distinctive features are purely dynamic. Besides the features common to all bodies, there is nothing more to the Stoic

²⁰ "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower" by Dylan Thomas in *Collected Poems* (London: Dent, 1952), 163.

²¹ For the later development of this field-like space in Stoicism's influence on Margaret Cavendish, see Marcy Lascano's chapter in this volume.

principles than one's capacity to affect alone, and the other's capacity alone to be molded by the former.

In sum, Stoic metaphysics brings into plain view something like Plato's ambivalence about powers. For both, it seems a live possibility that powers are foundational, underlying everything: that is one, albeit doubtful, way of taking the [EP]. I have argued Plato had reasons not to accept this conclusion; that the Stoics had their own reasons is considerably clearer, for Chrysippus's development of the third Category is likely a push in the other direction: powers are real, but themselves to be understood in terms of a thing's non-dispositional features; in terms, that is, of the local or relative motion of more or less warm, more or less dense bodies—in other words, states of affairs whose features lack the sort of occult nature Plato first pinned on powers in (R). But Chrysippus was developing Stoic physics in the shadow of his predecessor Zeno of Citium, who had first described the principles of Stoicism, and thus placed dispositional entities at the foundations of Stoicism. Whether Chrysippus was fully aware of the tension, and perhaps had opinions about resolving it, is an exercise for another occasion.