

The *Koinōnia* of Non-Being and *Logos* in the *Sophist* Account of Falsehood

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Resumen: En el *Sofista* 260e3-261a2, el Extranjero eleático afirma que para demostrar que la falsedad es, él y Teeteto deben primero rastrear qué son el habla (*lógos*), la opinión (*dóxa*) y la apariencia (*phantasia*), y luego observar la comunión (*koinōnia*) que el habla, la opinión y la apariencia tienen con el no-ser. El extranjero, sin embargo, nunca discute explícitamente la comunión del habla, la opinión y la apariencia con el no-ser. No obstante, se presume que dicha comunión es implícita en su explicación de la falsedad, dada su afirmación de que se necesita observar esta comunión para demostrar que la falsedad es (260e5-a2). Este artículo busca hacer explícita la comunión que el habla tiene con el no-ser. Sostengo que el habla tiene comunión con el no-ser en el sentido de que las cosas y las acciones que este combina entre sí por medio de sustantivos y verbos no necesitan combinarse de modo tal que revele (*δηλοῖ*) cómo el ser de un discurso dado se combina ontológicamente con otros seres.

Palabras clave: Falsedad; afirmación falsa; no-ser; verdad; Platón; *Sofista*; *koinōniai*; *lógos*

Abstract: At *Sophist* 260e3-261a2, the Eleatic Stranger claims that in order to demonstrate that falsehood is, he and Theaetetus must first track down what speech (*logos*), opinion (*doxa*), and appearance (*phantasia*) are, and then observe the communion (*koinōnia*) that speech, opinion, and appearance have with non-being. The Stranger, however, never explicitly discusses the communion of speech, opinion, and appearance with non-being. Yet presumably their communion is implicit in his account of falsehood, given his claim that observing that communion is needed in order to demonstrate that falsehood is (260e5-a2). This essay seeks to make the communion that speech has with non-being explicit. I argue that speech has communion with non-being in that the things and actions speech combines together by means of nouns and verbs need not be combined in a way that reveals (*δηλοῖ*) how the being a given speech is about combines ontologically with other beings.

Keywords: Falsehood; false statement; non-being; truth; Plato; *Sophist*; *koinōniai*; *logos*

At *Sophist* 260e3-261a2, the Eleatic Stranger claims that in order to demonstrate that falsehood is, he and Theaetetus must first track down (διερευνητέον) what speech (λόγος), opinion (δόξα) and appearance (φαντασία) are, and then observe (κατιδεῖν) the communion (κοινωνία) that speech, opinion, and appearance have with non-being. Although the Stranger goes on to develop both an account of what speech, opinion, and appearance are (262b2-263b3, 263d10-264b2) and a demonstration that falsehood is (262e9-264b4), he does not explicitly discuss the communion of speech, opinion, and appearance with non-being. Yet presumably the way speech, opinion, and appearance commune with non-being is implicit in his account of falsehood, given his claim that they must observe that communion before demonstrating that falsehood is (260e5-a2).

This essay seeks to make the communion that speech has with non-being explicit. To that end, I begin by examining the way the Stranger frames the objection that speech does not have communion with non-being and the contrast the Stranger highlights between how beings combine ontologically and how speech combines things (πράγματα) and actions (πράξεις) by means of nouns (ὀνόματα) and verbs (ῥήματα). I argue that the communion of speech and non-being is the difference of the nature of speech from the nature of beings. This difference in nature, I contend, is expressed, on the one hand, by the way that vocal signs (τὰ τῆς φωνῆς σημεῖα) such as nouns and verbs fit together (ἀρμόττειν) and, on the other hand, by the way that things that are (ὄντα) fit together. Speech has communion with non-being in that the things and actions speech combines together by means of nouns and verbs need not be combined in a way that reveals (δηλοῖ) how the being a given speech is about combines ontologically with other beings¹.

¹ For the translation of δηλόω in this context as “reveal”, “disclose”, “show” and “make manifest”, rather than “indicate” or “signify”, cf. Sallis, J., *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1975, pp. 525–530; Bergomi, M., “Making Sense of Δήλωμα (Plato’s *Cratylus*, 423b and Beyond)”, in: *Akropolis: Journal of Hellenic Studies*, v. I (2017), esp. 85.

1. Preliminary Considerations: The Sophist's Objection and the Stranger's Response

The account of false speech in the *Sophist* digression follows the Stranger's demonstration that non-being is. The Stranger has not only shown that non-being is, but that there is a form non-being that has its own nature and is an *ousia* no less than being itself (258b9-c5). Having completed his account of non-being, the Stranger assesses where he and Theaetetus are in their project of using bifurcatory division to define sophistry. Their task had initially been interrupted by the objection that falsehood is impossible because there is no such thing as non-being (236c9-237a4, 239c4-241b3). The Stranger's account of non-being dealt with that objection. Yet with this account in place, the Stranger tells Theaetetus that they must face another objection to the possibility of falsehood (260d5-e3).

1.1. The Sophist's objection

Like the original objection, this new objection is put into the mouth of the sophist. The Stranger says that the sophist will now object that "some forms participate in non-being, while others do not, and speech and opinion are among those that do not participate" (260d6-8; τῶν εἰδῶν τὰ μὲν μετέχειν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος, τὰ δ' οὐ, καὶ λόγον δὴ καὶ δόξαν εἶναι τῶν οὐ μετεχόντων)². The sophist will argue that "opinion and speech do not have communion with non-being" (206e1-2; δόξα καὶ λόγος οὐ κοινωνεῖ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) and that "without this communion established, falsehood is not at all" (260e2-3; ψευδὸς γὰρ τὸ παράπαν οὐκ εἶναι ταύτης μὴ συνισταμένης τῆς κοινωνίας). The Stranger presents the sophist as willing to grant the account of non-being developed so far (260c11-d6). Hence, the sophist will grant that non-being is a kind and that it is distributed through all beings (κατὰ πάντα τὰ ὄντα διεσπαρμένον) (260b7-8), insofar as each being is not those from which it is different. What the sophist will not grant, and what the Stranger has not explicitly shown, is that speech, opinion, or appearance participate in non-being. Although the Stranger has demonstrated that non-being is a form, he has not explicitly claimed that anything participates in non-being. The Stranger has so far claimed that participation in the form different is what is responsible for the fact that each being is in various ways a

² Translations are my own, in consultation with Brann, E., Kalkavage, P., Salem, E. (trans.), *Plato: Sophist or The Professor of Wisdom*, Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 1996; Rowe, C. (trans.), *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

non-being. Thus, the sophist has found room to object that although perhaps some forms participate in non-being, speech, opinion, and appearance do not.

Participation in the typical sense, however, does not seem to be what is at stake in the sophist's objection³. The typical formula for participation in form is that x is F because it participates in F . In the *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates claims that things other than the beautiful are beautiful because they participate in the beautiful (*Phaed.*, 100c3-102a1). Likewise, earlier in the *Sophist*, the Stranger claimed that motion is a being because it participates in being, motion is the same because it participates in same, and motion is different because it participates in different (*Soph.*, 255e3-256d9). The claim "motion is not" is an inference from the fact that motion is different due to its participation in different. Thus, motion is not same because it participates in different relative to same; motion is not being because it participates in different relative to being (see esp. 256b2-4). The point of contention in the sophist's objection, however, is not whether speech is not whatever differs from it. The sophist grants what the Stranger has demonstrated up to this point. Consequently, he grants that speech is not whatever it differs from, and that speech is a non-being in the sense that it is different from the form being. The participation in non-being that the sophist's objection denies to speech, therefore, is an atypical sense of participation. The participation in non-being relevant to the sophist's objection is a participation that results in the possibility of saying what is not. If speech participates in non-being, speech can be false; whereas if speech does not participate in non-being, all speech will be true (see 260c1-3)⁴.

One might be tempted to think that the sophist's objection here is a mere sophism⁵. The objection seems to use the notion of participation in a way that

³ Cf. Ambuel, D., *Image and Paradigm in Plato's Sophist*, Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2007, p. 164.

⁴ The text of 260c1-4 reads: μή μειγνυμένου μὲν αὐτοῦ τούτοις ἀναγκαῖον ἀληθῆ πάντ' εἶναι, μειγνυμένου δὲ δόξα τε ψευδῆς γίγνεται καὶ λόγος: τὸ γὰρ τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἢ λέγειν, τοῦτ' ἔστι πού τὸ ψεῦδος ἐν διανοίᾳ τε καὶ λόγοις γιγνόμενον (If it [viz. non-being] does not blend with those [viz. speech, opinion, and appearance], everything is necessarily true. But if it does blend, false speech and opinion come to be. For I suppose this is falsehood coming to be in thoughts and speeches: to think or to say things that are not). I gloss this as the claim that the communion of non-being and speech, opinion, and appearance makes false speech, opinion, and appearance possible, or, perhaps more precisely, brings them into being on the eidetic level, which is to say, renders them intelligible things that are (cf. Seligman, P., *Being and Not-Being: An Introduction to Plato's Sophist*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p. 95; Van Eck, J., "Falsity without Negative Predication: On *Sophistes* 255e-263d", in: *Phronesis*, v. XL, 1 (1995), p. 38; Hestir, B., *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 187).

⁵ Cf. Cornford, F. M., *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and Sophist*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1935, pp. 298-299, 302; Seligman, P., *Being and Not-Being: An Introduction to*

considerably misunderstands it and could only seem plausible to someone who was unfamiliar with what it means to participate in a form. Yet although there is doubtless some sophism at play, I do not think the objection is *merely* sophistic. The Stranger frames the sophist's objection so as to introduce the communion of speech and non-being. He then goes on to say that in order to demonstrate that falsehood is, he and Theaetetus must observe the communion of speech and non-being (260e5-261a1). While the sense of "participation" in the sophist's objection is atypical, there is nevertheless a "communion" between speech and non-being that the Stranger thinks is worth observing. I argue that this communion is the way that the form non-being, on the one hand, and speech, opinion, and appearance, on the other, differ in nature from the beings they are about.

The Stranger describes the form non-being as "the contraposing (ἀντίθεσις)⁶ of the nature of part of different and of the nature of being, which are set against one another" (258a11-b1; ἡ τῆς θατέρου μορίου φύσεως καὶ τῆς τοῦ ὄντος πρὸς ἄλληλα ἀντικειμένων ἀντίθεσις). How exactly this should be understood is a matter of significant controversy⁷. For our purposes, however, we only need note that the sort of contraposing definitive of the form non-being is one of a difference in nature. The contraposing is of the nature of a part of different and the nature of being. Thus, the focus is not, as it was earlier in

Plato's *Sophist*, 1974, p. 95; Crivelli, P., *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 222.

⁶ It is difficult to render the term ἀντίθεσις as used in the *Sophist* into English. "Opposition" is problematic because the Stranger is in this context arguing that non-being is not the "opposite" (ἐναντίον) of Being (257b9-c3, 258b3) ("opposition" is employed by Brann, E., Kalkavage, P., Salem, E. (trans.), *Plato: Sophist or The Professor of Wisdom*, 1996, p. 69). The English word "antithesis" is problematic because its primary sense is "opposition" and in philosophical contexts it has German idealist overtones that are arguably irrelevant to the *Sophist*. "Contrast" or "contrasting" are better, but "con-" suggests that the relationship between those which stand in "contrast" to one another is symmetrical, which I do not think is the case on the Stranger's account, Cornford, F. M., *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and Sophist*, 1935, p. 292; Crivelli, P., *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, p. 205, 212, 215–216. White (1993) uses "setting against," which captures ἀντίθεσις well, but as a two word phrase can be a bit unwieldy (White, N. P. (trans.), *Sophist*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, p. 52). Rowe (2015) uses "contraposition", which in its construction nicely parallels ἀντίθεσις, "contra-" matching ἀντί- and "position" paralleling θέσις (Rowe, C. (trans.), *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*, 2015, p. 161). Mitchell Miller suggested to me that "contrapositioning" would be better than "contraposition", since the "-ing" suffix better captures the -σις ending. Since "contraposing" is better English than "contrapositioning", that is the translation I have settled on. A weakness of "contraposition" and "contraposing" is that those terms have a determinate meaning in logic that should not be read onto the use of ἀντίθεσις in the *Sophist*.

⁷ E.g., Robinson, D. B., "Textual Notes on Plato's *Sophist*", 1999, p. 157; Van Eck, J., "Not-Being and Difference: On Plato's *Sophist*, 256d5-258e3", 2002, pp. 77–78; Crivelli, P., *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, pp. 216–218.

the digression (esp. 255e3-257a6), on what we would today call “numerical difference”. In the context of the *Sophist*, we can say that beings numerically differ insofar as they participate in same relative to themselves and participate in different relative to one another. I am contrasting numerical difference so defined to difference in nature. By “difference in nature”, I mean the difference of one nature from another. In the case of forms, each numerical difference has a corresponding difference in nature. According to the Stranger, each form “is different from the others not because of its own nature, but because of participating in the *idea* of different” (255e4-6; ἐν ἕκαστον γὰρ ἕτερον εἶναι τῶν ἄλλων οὐ διὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ μετέχειν τῆς ἰδέας τῆς θατέρου). For example, the difference of the form rest from the form motion is a numerical difference, since the form rest and the form motion each participate in same relative to themselves and in different relative to one another (255e3-256d9). Yet the difference between the form rest and the form motion is also a difference in nature, since each form has one unique nature, with the result that if the form rest—the form whose unique nature is the nature of rest—is different from the form motion—the form whose unique nature is the nature of motion—the unique nature of rest can be said to be different from the unique nature of motion. The numerical difference forms have in relation to one another is what enables us to speak of the unique nature of each form as different from the unique nature of another. As we will see in Section 2 of this essay, the difference in nature of speech relative to the nature of beings is the communion that speech has with non-being. Before turning to that communion, however, we will do well to consider how the Stranger frames his response to the sophist’s objection.

1.2. *The way the Stranger frames his response*

The Stranger’s account of what speech is begins with an emphasis on the difference between forms, letters, and names. The Stranger says, “Come then, just as before we spoke concerning forms and letters (περὶ τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ τῶν γραμμάτων), let us again in like manner make an examination, this time concerning names (περὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων)” (261d1-3)⁸. The Stranger explains that what he wants them to examine is “whether all fit together with one another, or none do, or whether some are willing to fit together with one another, while

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⁸ The word ὀνόματα (names) is here used in a wide sense that includes what the Stranger will differentiate as ῥήματα (verbs) and ὀνόματα (nouns) in the narrow sense. See Brown, L., “The *Sophist* on Statements, Predication, and Falsehood”, 2008, p. 452; Crivelli, P., *Plato’s Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, pp. 223–224.

others are not” (261d6-7; εἴτε πάντα ἀλλήλοις συναρμόττει εἴτε μηδέν, εἴτε τὰ μὲν ἐθέλει, τὰ δὲ μή). Earlier in the digression, the Stranger had asked this question concerning forms, and used the way letters fit together into syllables and words to help clarify how forms fit together (251c8-254d2). Theaetetus, therefore, is familiar with this sort of question. The answer in the case of both forms and letters was that some determinate forms or letters are able to fit together with one another while other determinate forms or letters are not. Hence, when faced with the same question about names, Theaetetus immediately and confidently replies that some are able to fit together with one another, while others are not (261d8). The Stranger responds by saying, “Perhaps you mean something of this sort: when [names] are said in succession and also disclose something (δηλοῦντά τι), they fit together, whereas when they signify nothing (μηδὲν σημαίνοντα) in sequence, they do not fit together” (261d9-e2). Theaetetus, however, is baffled by this response (261e3)⁹. It becomes clear that he agreed that names combine like letters and forms do, without considering the nature of naming or speaking and without observing the difference between how things combine in the case of speech, on the one hand, and how they combine in the case of forms or beings, on the other¹⁰. The Stranger, therefore, offers an account of the composition of speech and sets it in contrast to the composition of beings.

The approach the Stranger takes in giving his account of speech is to offer an analysis of what he calls the first (πρῶτον) and smallest (ἐλάχιστον) sort of speech (262c10, 263a3-4)¹¹. From the examples he uses, it is clear that what the Stranger has in mind by the “first” and “smallest” sort of speeches are two-word statements¹². Thus, by “first” he means the most basic or fundamental, and by the “smallest” he means that composed of the fewest words: one name or noun (ὄνομα) and one verb or predicative expression (ῥήμα)¹³. Given that it would be unnatural to call this sort of thing a “speech” in English, I will sometimes translate “logos” as “speech” and at other times translate it as “statement”, depending on the context¹⁴.

⁹ Cf. Sallis, J., *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, 1975, p. 526.

¹⁰ Cf. Crivelli, P., *Plato’s Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, p. 223.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹² Cf. Denyer, N., *Language, Thought and Falsehood in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1991, chap. 9; Crivelli, P., *Plato’s Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, p. 227.

¹³ Cf. Crivelli, P., *Plato’s Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, p. 224.

¹⁴ For how to read λόγος in this portion of the *Sophist*, see Xenakis, J., “Plato on Statement and Truth-Value”, in: *Mind*, v. LXVI, 262 (1957), pp. 167–168.

The nature of speech calls for a certain compositional structure among the sorts of vocal signs (τὰ τῆς φωνῆς σημεῖα, see 262d9) that compose it. The Stranger points out that neither a set of nouns said in succession —such as “lion stag horse” (262b9-10)— nor a set of verbs strung together —such as “walks sleeps runs” (262b5)— compose a statement. Instead, nouns and verbs combine together to form statements. It is in this sense that some determinate vocal signs fit together while others do not.

While the nature of speech calls for a compositional structure among vocal signs, the nature of beings calls for a compositional structure among things that are. In his account of falsehood, the Stranger initially describes what I am calling “things that are” as forms (261d1), but ends by simply calling them “things” (πράγματα) (262d8). These “things” are clearly the “things that are, things that are coming to be, things that have come to be, or things that will come to be” that the Stranger claims speech is about (262d2-3; περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἢ γιγνομένων ἢ γεγονότων ἢ μελλόντων). Just as in the case of speech some determinate vocal signs fit together with one another whereas others do not, so in the case of beings some determinate things fit together with one another whereas others do not (262d8-e1). What it is to be human, for example, fits together with what it is to understand, while it does not fit together with what it is to fly. Humans are a kind of being that understands, not a kind of being that flies.

Although in the case of both speech and being (οὐσία) some of the determinate constituents of each fit together with one another whereas others do not, there are significant differences in their compositional structures. The things combined are different: vocal signs in the case of speech and things that are in the case of being. More importantly, the norms according to which they combine are different. Any noun, for example, can fit together with any verb or predicative expression (ὄημα) to compose a statement, regardless of the things they respectively signify¹⁵. In the case of things that are, in contrast, each fits together with others in a unique way. Angling, for instance, fits together with expertise, hunting, and various kinds of fishing in a way that no other kind does. In this respect, the norms that govern the composition of things that are —the norms known by the expert in dialectic (253b9-d3)¹⁶— are much more stringent than those that govern the composition of a speech or statement.

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¹⁵ Bluck, R. S., “False Statement in the *Sophist*”, in: *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, v. LXXVII, 2 (1957), p. 183, n. 9.

¹⁶ Wiitala, M., “The Argument Against the Friends of the Forms Revisited: *Sophist* 248a4–249d5”, in: *Apeiron*, v. LI, 2 (2018), p. 190.

2. *The Communion of Speech with Non-Being*

With the preceding considerations in place, we are now in the position to demonstrate the thesis of this essay: that the difference of the nature of speech relative to the nature of beings is the communion of speech with non-being that the Stranger claims must be observed in order to demonstrate that falsehood is. There are three main reasons I think this thesis is warranted. First, the difference between the compositional structure of speech and the compositional structure of beings is a difference in nature rather than a numerical difference. Second, the Stranger's final statement of the difference between the compositional structure of speech and the compositional structure of beings occurs after his description of what speech is and before his demonstration that falsehood is. This is exactly where we would expect to observe the communion of speech and non-being according to the outline the Stranger presents of his account at 260e3-261a2. Third, the difference in nature and compositional structure between speech and beings is what makes false speech, or saying what is not, possible. Let us consider each in turn.

2.1. *The relevant difference between speech and beings is a difference in nature*

As I mentioned earlier, the sort of difference the Stranger identifies with the form non-being is the contraposing of the nature of being with the nature of the part of different set against it (258a11-b1). The form non-being, therefore, is constituted by a difference in nature, rather than simply a numerical difference. In the same way, the difference of vocal signs relative to things that are is not a numerical difference, since speech, vocal signs, nouns, verbs, and so on are all things that are. Speech and the vocal signs that compose it are beings, just like everything else. Thus, speech, nouns, verbs, and so on each share in a unique group of forms, just as angling or any other being does. Nouns and verbs, for example, are both a kind of vocal sign: verbs a kind that signify actions and nouns a kind that signify the things doing the actions (261e4-262a7). *Qua* things that are, vocal signs combine with other beings according to the norms that govern beings. *Qua* components of a statement, in contrast, vocal signs combine according to the basic linguistic norms that govern statement composition.

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According to the norms governing statement composition, any nouns can combine with any verbs to compose a statement. Given that verbs signify actions and nouns signify things doing actions, the norms that govern statement composition allow for a speaker to put together any things with any actions

by means of nouns and verbs (see 262e13-14 ff.)¹⁷. The norms that govern statement composition are indifferent to whether the determinate things and actions the speaker puts together in a given statement fit together “in reality”, which is to say *qua* things that are. The statement “Theaetetus flies”, for example, combines the thing Theaetetus with the action Flies by means of the noun “Theaetetus” and the verb “flies”. Yet *qua* things that are, Theaetetus and Flies do not fit together. In other words, the norms that govern beings do not permit the thing Theaetetus and action Flies to combine, whereas the norms that govern statement composition do permit them to combine. Ontologically, the thing Theaetetus fits with Sits and not with Flies. The noun “Theaetetus”, however, can fit together with any verb or predicative expression —“sits”, “flies”, “is a bird”, etc.— to compose a statement. The difference in the way things that are fit together and the way vocal signs fit together reflects the difference between the nature of beings, on the one hand, and the nature of speech, on the other. Thus, speech has communion with non-being insofar as its nature is different from the nature of beings and insofar as the structure it exacts on its constituent elements is different from the structure of beings.

2.2. *The location of the Stranger’s description of the difference between speech and beings*

According to the Stranger’s initial outline of his response to the sophist’s objection, he and Theaetetus are to observe the communion of non-being with speech, opinion, and appearance *after* tracking down what speech, opinion, and appearance are and *before* demonstrating that falsehood is (260e3-261a2)¹⁸. I think the Stranger’s account of falsehood follows this initial outline. The Stranger begins by giving an account of what speech is. We find out a little later that opinion and appearance amount to speech in different media. Opinions, according to the Stranger, are the assertions and denials of a speech that goes on in the medium of unvoiced thought (263e3-264a2). Appearances, in turn, are opinions that are present to someone through sense perception (δι’ αἰσθήσεως) (264a4-6). By giving an account of the noun-verb structure of speech, therefore, the Stranger has already given the core of his account of opinion and appearance. Consequently, all he has to do when he discusses opinion and appearance directly is state how they are speech in different media.

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¹⁷ Cf. Crivelli, P., *Plato’s Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, pp. 230–231.

¹⁸ διὰ ταῦτ’ οὖν λόγον πρῶτον καὶ δόξαν καὶ φαντασίαν διερευνητέον ὅτι ποτ’ ἔστιν, ἵνα φανέντων καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν αὐτῶν τῷ μὴ ὄντι κατίδωμεν, κατιδόντες δὲ τὸ ψεῦδος ὃν ἀποδείξωμεν, ἀποδείξαντες δὲ τὸν σοφιστὴν εἰς αὐτὸ ἐνδήσωμεν. . . (260e3-264a2).

While giving his account of what speech is, the Stranger begins to differentiate its nature and compositional structure from that of beings (see esp. 261d1 ff.). Then, immediately after completing his account of what speech is at 262d6, the Stranger notes the difference in compositional structure between things that are, on the one hand, and vocal signs, on the other (262d8-e1). I am arguing that this marks the observation of the communion of speech and non-being that he places in stage two of his initial outline. To observe the difference in nature of speech relative to beings is to observe the communion of speech with non-being. The Stranger's demonstration that both truth and falsehood are qualities (ποιῖα) of speech, stage three in his outline, immediately follows (262e4-264b4).

2.3. The difference in nature of speech and beings is what makes false speech possible

The difference in nature of speech relative to beings is what enables determinate statements to have the quality of falsehood. Statements can be true or false because by means of the nouns and verbs that compose them things and actions are combined that may or may not fit together ontologically. As mentioned above, the norms to which vocal signs must conform in order to compose statements allow a speaker to combine things and actions in ways that violate the norms that govern the composition of things that are. Statements that combine things and actions by means of nouns and verbs in ways that violate the norms that govern the composition of things that are have the quality of falsehood. Statements that combine things and actions in accordance with the norms that govern the composition of things that are have the quality of truth.

The Stranger offers four descriptions of why the statement "Theaetetus flies" is false and one description of why the statement "Theaetetus sits" is true. The true statement says about Theaetetus "things that are as they are" (263b4-5; λέγει δὲ αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν ἀληθῆς τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ). The false statement, in contrast, says about Theaetetus (1) "things different from the things that are" (263b7; ὁ δὲ δὴ ψευδῆς ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων); (2) "things that are not as things that are" (263b9; τὰ μὴ ὄντ' ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει); (3) "things that are that are different from the things that are" (263b11; ὄντων δὲ γε ὄντα ἕτερα περὶ σοῦ); and (4) "different things as the same things and things that are not as things that are" (263d1-2; περὶ δὴ σοῦ λεγόμενα, <λεγόμενα>¹⁹ μέντοι θάτερα ὡς τὰ αὐτὰ

¹⁹ This emendation, adopted by Robinson, was first proposed by Charles Badham, *Platonis Euthydemus et Laches* (Jena: F. Frommann, 1865), xxxvii.

καὶ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα). Although how exactly these descriptions of true and false speech should be understood is controversial, the difference in nature between speech and beings is a key prerequisite in all the major interpretations recent commentators have put forward²⁰. Saying things different from things that are is possible because the things and actions a speaker combines by means of nouns and verbs need not be combined in the way that the things and actions the statement speaks about combine ontologically. Put otherwise, the things said in a given statement about the being that is its subject can be things that are different from, rather than the same as, the things that are in relation to that being. As the Stranger points out, “in relation to each thing there are many things that are and many that are not” (263b11-12; πολλὰ μὲν . . . ὄντα περὶ ἕκαστον εἶναί που, πολλὰ δὲ οὐκ ὄντα)²¹. To predicate things of the being that is the subject of a given statement, but things that are different from the things that are in relation to that being, is to say things that are not in relation to that being as if they were things that are in relation to that being. Therefore, saying things that are not, in the sense of saying what is false, is possible because speech can, by means of nouns and verbs, join things and actions that do not fit together *qua* things that are.

3. Conclusion

I have argued that the communion of speech and non-being that the Stranger claims he and Theaetetus must observe is the difference in nature and compositional structure of speech relative to beings. The sophist’s revised objection to the possibility of falsehood is that some forms participate in non-being while others do not, and that speech, opinion, and appearance are among those that do not participate (260d5-8). This participation is described by the imagined sophist as a communion between speech and non-being (260d8-e3). Moreover, the Stranger claims that he and Theaetetus are to observe this communion before demonstrating that falsehood is (260e5-261a2). In order to determine what the communion of speech and non-being is, I had us consider how the Stranger describes the form non-being. The Stranger describes the form non-being as the contraposing of the nature of being and of the nature of part of different that are

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²⁰ See Brown, “The *Sophist* on Statements, Predication, and Falsehood,” 452ff.

²¹ This claim is central to van Eck’s (2014) reading of the Stranger’s account of false speech, with which I am generally in agreement. Cf. Bluck, R. S., “False Statement in the *Sophist*”, 1957, pp. 184-185; Van Eck, J., “Plato’s Theory of Negation and Falsity in *Sophist* 257 and 263: A New Defense of the Oxford Interpretation”, 2014, pp. 275–288.

set against one another (258a11-b1). Unlike the non-being associated with what we can call numerical difference, focused on earlier in the *Sophist* digression, the Stranger's account of the form non-being emphasizes what we can call difference in nature. Thus, to have communion with the form non-being presumably results in being rendered in some way different from the nature of being.

In the context of his discussion of speech, the Stranger highlights the difference in nature and compositional structure of speech and the beings that are its subject matter. Some determinate beings fit together with one another whereas others do not. In contrast, any nouns can fit with any verbs to compose speech. This difference in the compositional structure of speech, on the one hand, and beings, on the other, expresses the difference of the nature of speech relative to the nature of beings. The norms that govern the way vocal signs, such as nouns and verbs, combine to compose speech are not the norms that govern the way beings combine ontologically. In this sense, speech is not the beings it speaks about. The communion of speech and non-being that makes false speech possible, therefore, is not its difference from the form being (256d11-e2, 259a7-b1) or even from the being of each form (258e3, 259b1-7)²². Instead, it is the difference in nature and compositional structure of things that are *qua* combined *via* vocal signs according to the norms that govern statement composition from things that are *qua* combined according to the ontological norms that govern beings²³.

²² The relevant text of 258e3 reads τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἑκάστου μόριον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον... I follow Owen (1971), Van Eck (2002), Crivelli (2012), and Rowe (2015) in reading ἑκάστου here, instead of emending the text to ἕκαστον. See Owen, G. E. L., "Plato on Not-Being", in: Vlastos G. (ed.), *Plato: A Collection of Essays, I: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971; Van Eck, J., "Not-Being and Difference: On Plato's *Sophist*, 256d5-258e3", 2002, pp. 75-76; Crivelli, P., *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist*, 2012, p. 219; Rowe, C. (trans.), *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*, 2015, p. 162. In this I break with Campbell (1867) and the Oxford editions of both Burnet (1900) and Duke *et al.* (1995). For Robinson's defense of printing ἑκάστου in the Duke *et al.* Oxford edition, see Robinson, D. B., "Textual Notes on Plato's *Sophist*", in: *The Classical Quarterly* v. XLIX, 1 (1999), p. 158.

²³ I would like to thank Mitchell Miller, Colin Smith, Rachel Kitzinger, Eric Sanday, and the audience at the 2021 International Plato Society Mid-Term Meeting for helping me think through and further develop this account of the communion of speech and non-being.

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