

**Plato's Two-Fold Being: An Annotated Abridgment of Leonard J.  
Eslick's "The Dyadic Character of Being in Plato"  
(AD Supp, Version 1)  
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BOOKS QUOTED FROM OR REFERENCED:

- James Collins (Intro. and Comm.), Leonard J. Eslick, *Readings in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, “The Dyadic Character of Being in Plato”
- Plato, *The Sophist*

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NOTES:

- **RETYPE AD PAPER (V09N).**
- This document was written in the 1970s, and apparently was intended to be a companion to “Plato’s Non-Being”. It is heavily based on, and quotes without attribution, “The Dyadic Character of Being in Plato,” by Leonard J. Eslick. Although it is primarily an abridgment of an essay from a book, there are a few original additions by AD, hence it is categorized as a V09N Paper and not Book Notes. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc., have not been corrected to conform to the book except in the case of Plato quotes, which are corrected to match the book. All abbreviations have been spelled out. If anything is unclear grammatically or otherwise, please consult the book.
- We have at least three versions of this paper. All three have the same base, but one has AD handwritten revisions, one has no revisions, and a third has student revisions. The following version has AD revisions and is the version which Anthony selected to put in his “Notes and Papers” box a.k.a. “AD Supp,” AD Supplementary Material, pp. 1287-1295. It is missing the last page (paragraph and a half), which is filled in from PLA 3 papers\_8Hyp\_Non-Being\_2foldB.PDF. All AD handwritten revisions/additions are in curly {} brackets. Many of the revisions are made above the word without crossing out

the word underneath and in some cases it is not clear whether it is meant to add to or replace the word/s underneath.

- This essay references components of Anthony's metaphysical chart (quadrants, rings, rulerships); the reader is referred to *Astronoesis* for further discussion of these terms.

## PLATO'S TWO-FOLD BEING: AN ANNOTATED ABRIDGMENT OF LEONARD J. ESICK'S "THE DYADIC CHARACTER OF BEING IN PLATO"

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### PLATO'S TWO-FOLD BEING

If Being is conceived of in a univocal way, i.e., as homogenous and undifferentiated, then all Being is one. All Being is one when the second quadrant is considered as an undifferentiated, simple and unchanging Unity {or substance of Prajna or the ring structure of rulerships}.

Plato, however -- confronted with the stubborn facts of multiplicity and change -- thought it necessary to disagree with Parmenides of Elea. He makes the remark that we have to establish by force that "what is not" {functioning intelligibles} in some respect "has Being" {'is'} . . . and conversely, that "what is" {the ideas} in a way "is not" {their manifestation}. (Sophista, 241 D)

For Plato, the problem of the One {substance} and the Many {function} demands for its solution something which Father Parmenides would not permit: the existence of "non-being" {function, being in act}. We are to conceive of this problem as having two approaches.

On the one hand, we have the {second quadrant substance} to symbolize the notion of the unity of Being. On the other hand, the same can be conceived to consist of the One {substance} and the Many {functioning}. The Many {function} will {each be a one.}

Plato will not willingly admit of intrinsic essential differences within Being itself {the substance of prajna} -- just like Parmenides. However, he has to account for knowledge and multiplicity. He introduces a startling innovation: the dyadic character of Being itself.

For Plato, to be is to be one. (It is essential to remind ourselves at this point that here Being and Unity are not convertible . . . as, for instance, in Aristotle.) To be, for Plato, is (at the same time) to be other than One {or capable of differentiation}. The second hypothesis (of Parmenides), the one which is is distinguished from the unity taken simply in itself. This "one which is" as distinguished from the unity taken simply in itself makes clear that an existing unit is a composite of two distinct elements: Unity and Being {Being & its attributes}.

Unity taken strictly in itself is absolutely simple and indivisible and can be the subject of no predication whatsoever (first hypothesis). But every Being -- that is any existing unit is something else other than an indivisible unity, although indeed that indivisible unity is its ultimate essence.

The Platonic notion of Separation operates to divide a Being from its own essence, from its own unique aseity. If this Being were only simple indivisible unity, it could not enter into participation and the relations of discourse: it would be completely and utterly devoid of any relationship to anything whatsoever. An existing unit, however, is always a composite: a differentiated whole of parts. The Unity itself cannot be a divisible whole-of-parts. And, for Plato, nothing could be unless -- in some sense -- it were first a One and indivisible unit: separate from all others, a stable and unique term unconstituted by its relations.

Beings are constituted to be what they are entirely by the relations into which they enter. The whole of Reality (if these Beings are taken as the ultimate term) becomes a flux; knowledge is destroyed, for it is without any stable enduring object, i.e., an indivisible unit, or indivisible essence of a unit.

On the other hand, if only the indivisible Unit exists -- and “exists”, perhaps, is incorrect here -- and if it is in no sense a whole-of-parts (i.e., a Many), then the complete separation of each thing from all results in the complete obliteration of all discourse.

It is this apparent conflict which gives rise to what we have referred to as the “two-fold character of Being”. Somehow Being must be both Unity (which seems to be static) and a divisible, dynamic Whole-of-parts. It must be both in itself and in relation.

Plato set himself the task in the *Sophista* of defining what is meant by the term “Being”. As perhaps a side issue of this careful investigation into Being, he left open the possibility of coming to understand or of discovering something about “non-being”.

The dialectical method is applied to the task of discovering the precise meaning of the term Being as used by previous philosophers. As you remember, previous philosophers said that the ultimate principles of the universe were two . . . like hot and cold. What do they mean when they say that both and each are?

They must mean that Being is a third over and above the two principles. But then they contradict themselves, for [Note: Eslick has ‘or’] they must mean that “Two” will resolve into one: Being. The answer from Elea is not much greater: two names, “Being” and “One” are applied to the oneness of All, and at the same time affirm the absolute unity of Reality. This of course is also contradictory.

Being is a Whole-of-parts: Being not being Unity Itself, there will be plurality. Or Being is not a Whole-of-parts: in this case, there are two possibilities. If wholeness exists, then Being does not exist: hence, there will be plurality. If wholeness does not exist, then Being cannot come into being as a complete determinate Number. In any case, there will be Plurality in contradiction to the Parmenidean One.

The investigation of prior philosophers reveals that Being is itself a complexity to be grasped, and that it is not as evidently understood as was first thought. What we are shown are the arguments of materialism and of idealism.

Plato then puts forth a conception of Being. He proposes as a sufficient mark of real things the presence in a thing of the power-of-being-acted-upon or of acting-in-relation to however insignificant a thing. This is the famous doctrine of Being as Dynamis, or simply: no Being is completely self-enclosed and separated in complete isolation from all others; nothing can be unless it exists in relation to others. Clearly, Being is to be viewed as able to become other than itself. No Being, therefore, is totally and absolutely immobile.

Somewhere {*Sophist* 260A, student edit; Eslick has 259E} Plato says that all our discourse owes its existence to the weaving together of the forms. Obviously we cannot think here of the forms as indivisible units in complete isolation and utterly simple. In order to have a world of true Being {Intellectual Principle & its ideas or content} which can be the object of knowledge, the separation and self-existence of the forms (or the Ideas, or Henads) is necessary.

Since these Henads are immutable, they are the proper object of knowledge, rather than sensible things which are always becoming. The separation of the Ideas or Forms -- which is necessary if they are to be true Beings -- seems to conflict with their knowability. A new position has to be established here.

Perhaps we can schematize this new position somewhat like this:

In the Tetrad, where we have the line of the Rulerships, each of the Rulerships can be an object of knowledge. But they must be separated from the Henad. We cannot deal with the Henad, the indivisible simplicity of a Unit. But we can deal with the Being of the Henad as an object of knowledge. It is this Being of the Henad which becomes intelligible to the intellect.

In 249 D of the *Sophista*, Plato says, "On these grounds, then it seems that only one course is open to the philosopher who values knowledge and the rest above all else. He must refuse to accept from the champions either of the one or of the many Forms the doctrine that reality is changeless; and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represents Being as everywhere changing. Like a child begging for both, he must declare that Being or the Sum of Things is both-at-once: All, i.e., unchangeable, and All, i.e., in change." [Eslick: "...that all reality is changeless; and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represents reality as everywhere changing. Like a child begging for "both," he must declare that Being or the sum of things is both at once--all that is unchangeable and all that is in change."] Obviously, he is avoiding the pure position of the Monist just as much as the position of the "Fluxists".

If Reality is one Absolute Unity, knowledge is impossible: knowledge involves predicating one thing or another. And if Reality is Absolute Change, knowledge is likewise impossible: every term would resolve into its relations. In order to save knowledge, it is necessary to show both how the forms can be separate and how they can at the same time interweave and participate in one another. Is this possible?

If Being is at one and the same time at rest and in motion, then Plato has to face the same question which he asked previously of those philosophers before him: how can we predicate hot and cold without contradicting ourselves? We see the employment of the dialectic method:

Obviously, these two forms are in contradiction or opposition to each other. Both are real. Both are necessary in order to account for discourse. Motion is, but it is not Rest; Rest is, but it is not Motion. It follows, therefore, that Being is both at Rest and in Motion, and yet is neither. The genus, taken in itself, is, in Platonic logic, other and separate from the species which participate in it. Being is neither Motion nor Rest; nor is Motion Rest, nor Rest Motion. When we come to speak of these things, how do we go?

Three possibilities are open:

- a) None of the forms combined [Note: Eslick has 'Forms combine'] and are related.
- b) All combine with all.
- c) Some have relations to others and some not.

Accept the first, and all thought is destroyed: here, obviously, no predication is possible. The second, if it were true, Motion while participating in Rest would stop, while Rest sharing in Motion would be in movement: obviously this one must go. The third is left, namely that some ideas or forms participate in others, but never all in all.

These three -- that two will not blend with each other and yet Being can be blended with both -- each is a form which is other than the others and yet the same with itself. Motion and Rest, however, cannot be either Other or the Same, for if Motion or Rest be identical with anything that is said in common of the two, Motion would be Rest and Rest would be Motion. Nonetheless, Motion and Rest do participate in Same and Other, for we have admitted that Motion is the same with itself, and other than Rest. Likewise for Rest.

What of Being and Same and Being and Other? They must be different. If Being were identified with Same, then Motion and Rest would also be identical, since they both participate in Being. In regard to Being and Other, Plato's text is important in establishing what we call the two-fold or dyadic character of Being on the joint foundation of Separation and Participation.

“Must we think of Other and Being as two names for a single kind? Perhaps. But I suppose you admit that, among things that exist, some are always spoken of as being what they are just in themselves, others as being what they are in reference to other things. Of course. And what is other is always so called with reference to another thing, isn't it? That is so. It would not be so, if Being and Other were not very different things. If Other partook of both characters as Being does, there would sometimes be within the class of different things, something that was different not with reference to another thing {but in fact}. But in fact we undoubtedly find that whatever is different, as a necessary consequence, is what it is with reference to another. . . . Then we must call the nature of Other a fifth among the Forms we are singling out.” (*Sophista* 255C-E)

Now of course there is some evidence that the question as to whether Other is a Form was debated. The Forms must have this two-fold character of existing in themselves and in relation. The “Other” is distinct from all Beings precisely in the fact that it is quite literally nothing in itself, no essence of its own. This is perhaps the origin of the question as to whether there can be Forms of relations.

In any event, the Other exists for Plato, and this is precisely the existence of “non-being” which was considered necessary to advance or to get around the Monism of Father Parmenides.

We said that the Ideas or the Forms as true Beings must have this double character of existing in themselves and in relation. And I must repeat that the Other is distinct from all Beings in that it is nothing in itself: it has no self-essence or essence of its own. Now what are the consequences?

Every Form is one in itself. By essence every form is identical, for every Form is a Unity. And this Unity is a principle by which form has or is. Yet each Form, although a unity, is not the Unity, the One, but is a reflection of it. Each is a reflection of the One in the Platonic material principle which [File AD SUPP 1287-1295 PLA 2-Fold Being AD Paper V3 P.PDF Ends; File PLA 2-Fold Being Alt ver. 2 P 6p.PDF Begins (pp. 5-6)] is called the Other in the *Sophista*, the “Unlimited” in the *Philebus*, the “receptacle” in the *Timaeus*, and the “Indeterminate Dyad” in the oral discourses. This can only mean that when intermingled with the One (this material principle) produces many images of the One. Part of these imitations of the One is non-being itself. It is this part of the Other in each Form which accounts both for the fact of their being other than the One and other than each other. There are, therefore, for Plato, no intrinsic differences between Beings in the essential order. The essence of a Being, which is simply indivisible unity, can in no way be the foundation of its differences from and relation to other Beings.

That which makes it to be other than the others is itself distinct from the Form itself. That is, all determination is negation; this is a supreme principle of the dialectic.

The ultimate subject of Platonic predication is non-being, not substance, ousia. The One is the essence of all the Forms. But to say what the One is is impossible. Knowledge, in its attempt to penetrate into the essence, attains instead only a description of qualities, that is, of the relative non-being of the thing. Any attempt to give a real account of any Form must necessitate giving an explanation of its relations to every other Form. Ultimate truth, in the order of essence, can never be attained because the real One never can be manifested in rational discourse.

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