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Platonic Ideas and Appearance in Aristotle's *Topics*

Abstract: This study offers a new interpretation of a well-known Aristotelian argument against some basic tenets of Plato's theory of Ideas. The argument is formulated in *Top*. VI.8, 146b36–147a11. According to Aristotle, in order to be successful, certain definitions require the presence of the qualification "apparent" in the definiens (*e.g.* "wish is a desire for the apparent good" and "appetite is a desire for the apparent pleasure"). Aristotle claims that for someone who believes in Platonic Ideas it would be difficult (if not impossible) to offer a definition of something apparent. The difficulty is particularly acute in the case of the apparent good. This happens because the Platonists (or at least some of them) believe that there cannot be Ideas of something apparent and that Ideas are spoken of relative to Ideas only. My reconstruction of the argument in the *Topics* shows that Aristotle does not purport intentionally to deceive his (Platonic) interlocutor (as some commentators claim). Nevertheless, he partly misses his target. The discussion of Aristotle's argument leads to an analysis of philosophically important points such as the qualification "apparent", the concept of "the apparent good", the possibility of different types of predication, and the behaviour of relatives.

1 Introduction

The account of the relation between Platonic Ideas and appearance, as Aristotle develops it in the *Topics*, lies at the heart of this study. According to Plato, Ideas represent the highest form of reality; by contrast, an appearance is removed from reality and is often deceptive. In other words, the relation between Platonic Ideas and appearance amounts to the opposition between reality and appearance. This is a central theme in Plato's ontology; it is discussed in many pages of his dia-

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logues and has important consequences both for his epistemology and for his ethics.

The opposition between reality and appearance is also the source of many philosophical difficulties that attracted the interest of several ancient thinkers and modern scholars. Aristotle is one of those who focused their attention on these problems. In a passage in the *Topics* (VI.8, 146b36–147a11), he criticises the Platonic standpoint and claims that the relation between Platonic Ideas and appearance leads to undesirable consequences when it is used in a definitional context. But Aristotle bases his criticism on two ontological assumptions about Platonic Ideas that he does not justify. Furthermore, his criticism of the Platonic viewpoint presupposes that his Academic interlocutor lacks a sophisticated theory of predication. Aristotle's strategy against Plato's ontology is not easy to evaluate because its intent is not immediately clear. Is Aristotle making use of sophistic means simply to confuse his adversary? Or is he deploying an attack to destroy his interlocutor's general viewpoint? Or, again, is Aristotle engaging in a serious philosophical debate with the precise aim of revising specific philosophical views?

My discussion of these alternatives leads to a new interpretation of an important Aristotelian argument against the Platonic doctrine in the *Topics*. It also sheds light on several philosophically significant points such as the qualification "apparent", the concept of "apparent good", the possibility of different types of predication, and the behaviour of relatives.

Section 2 introduces the context of the argument (in *Top.* VI.8, 146b36–147a11) and section 3 offers an analysis of it. Section 4 examines and assesses the most important interpretations of this passage and explains why they are not satisfactory. Section 5 reconstructs the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of Aristotle's criticisms of the basic tenets of Plato's theory of Ideas and puts forward a new interpretative line that avoids the limits of earlier readings.

2 The Aristotelian Perspective in the Topics

A discussion developed in a passage from chapter 8 of book VI of the *Topics* offers us the opportunity to analyse Aristotle's view on the relation between Platonic Ideas and appearance. It also gives us a particular framework to study the problems raised by this relation. In order to characterize this framework properly, it is necessary to illustrate the structure of book VI of the *Topics* and the position occupied by chapter 8. Book VI, the longest in the *Topics*, should be read together with chapters 1–3 of book VII. The central subject of book VI is the discussion of

one of the four predicables, namely definition.[1] According to Aristotle, a definition is a phrase (λόγος) that indicates the *what-it-is-to-be* (*Top*. I.5, 101b38), *i.e.* the essence. It follows that someone will fail to define if he fails to indicate the essence of the object considered (*Top*. VI.1, 139a32–34). Such a failure can come about in a number of ways.

In book VI we find a sketch of many lines of attack (in Greek τόποι, also "commonplaces" or "commonplace rules") to be used against the interlocutor with the purpose of refuting his suggested definition, that is to say with the purpose of showing that his proposed account fails to indicate the essence of the object under discussion. Since the lines of attack are often presented very succinctly, in many cases they must be suitably developed and applied to the examples chosen by Aristotle. We should not forget that this book is refutative, that is to say it presents the ways to destroy a definition, but does not specify how to construct one (some constructive remarks will be outlined in book VII).

2.1 Book VI of the Topics

At the beginning of book VI, after an introductory chapter listing five general types of mistakes that can occur in a proposed definition, the attention is focused on poor definitions. They are the subject of chapters 2 and 3. Definitions, in so far as they are definitions, indicate the essence. Poor definitions still qualify as definitions: they are, however, poor because they are formulated in an unclear or redundant way (139b12–18).[2] Chapter 4 is concerned with a fundamental requirement of definitions: the definiens must be prior to and more familiar than the definiendum. This is the first commonplace regarding the failure to offer a correct definition.[3] The second commonplace is examined in chapter 5 and concerns problems regarding the genus; the genus is here considered not as a predicable on its own, but as one of the definiens' components. The other component,

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1 More precisely, Aristotle says that in any predication, the predicate must bear one of four relations to the subject: the predicate must be either the *definition* of a subject, or a *genus* of it, or a *unique property* of it (ἴδιον, alternative translations are also possible: *proprium*, *property, peculiarity*), or an *accident* of it.

2 In order to be good definitions, they must indicate the essence clearly and non-redundantly. For example, 'becoming is a passage (ἀγωγὴ) into being' is a poor definition because it contains a homonymous term (*Top*. VI.2, 139b20): the Greek ἀγωγὴ can mean (i) passage, movement, and (ii) education, training (see, e.g. *EN* X.9, 1179b31).

3 For a discussion of the meaning of the expression "prior and more familiar" in this context see Schiaparelli 2011.

namely the differentia, is discussed in chapter 6. Chapter 7 is concerned with the rules of "more and less". In chapter 8, a part of which will be discussed below, Aristotle is concerned with the rules for the definition of relatives. The remaining chapters (9–14) deal with opposites, inflections, Platonic Ideas, homonymy, composite and simple terms, and various sorts of error that may occur in the framing of a definition.

2.2 The Structure of Chapter 8 in Topics VI

The analysis of the definition of relatives in *Topics* VI.8 takes the form of a discussion of incomplete definitions; it concerns the cases where the proposed definition is incomplete since it leaves out an essential specification. This incompleteness renders the proposed definition unacceptable. For, as we saw above, according to Aristotle it is a necessary requirement of a definition that it express the essence of the thing to be defined. An incomplete definition does not express the essence and thus must be rejected.

The discussion has three main parts. (1) The first deals with accounts of different types of relatives (146a36–146b19) and is subdivided into three subparts: 146a36–146b9; 146b9–12; 146b13–19. (2) The second main part deals with proposed accounts that are incomplete because they do not specify the quantity or the quality or the place or other characteristics (146b20–35); it comprises three subparts: 146b21–24; 146b24–37; 146b27–35. (3) The third main part is concerned with proposed accounts that are not adequate because they do not contain the qualification "apparent" (146b36–147a11). This part is my present concern.

3 The Text Concerning Platonic Ideas and Appearance

Let us look at the way Aristotle presents his argument in the last part of chapter 8, which deals with accounts that are incomplete because they leave out the qualification "apparent". The text is the following (*Top*. VI.8, 146b36–147a11):

T1

146b36	Ἔτι ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρέξεων εἰ μὴ πρόσκειται τὸ φαινόμε- νον, καὶ ἐφ' ὅσων ἄλλων ἁρμόττει, οἷον ὅτι ἡ βούλησις
147a1	ὄρεξις ἀγαθοῦ, ἡ δ' ἐπιθυμία ὄρεξις ἡδέος, ἀλλὰ μὴ φαι-

νομένου ἀγαθοῦ ἢ ἡδέος. πολλάκις γὰρ λανθάνει τοὺς ὀρεγο-
μένους ὅ τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ ἡδύ ἐστιν, ὥστ᾽ οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον ἀγαθὸν
ἢ ἡδὺ εἶναι ἀλλὰ φαινόμενον μόνον. ἔδει οὖν οὕτω καὶ τὴν
ἀπόδοσιν ποιήσασθαι. ἐὰν δὲ καὶ ἀποδῷ τὸ εἰρημένον, ἐπὶ
5   τὰ εἴδη ἀκτέον τὸν τιθέμενον ἰδέας εἶναι. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἰδέα
φαινομένου οὐδενός, τὸ δ᾽ εἶδος πρὸς τὸ εἶδος δοκεῖ λέγε-
σθαι, οἷον αὐτὴ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ ἡδέος καὶ αὐτὴ βούλησις
αὐτοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. οὐκ ἔσται οὖν φαινομένου ἀγαθοῦ οὐδὲ φαινομέ-
νου ἡδέος· ἄτοπον γὰρ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸ φαινόμενον ἀγα-
10   θὸν ἢ ἡδύ.[4]

146b36   Furthermore in the case of desires, and in all the other cases where it applies,
            see whether "apparent" is not added; for example that wish is desire for a
147a1   good, or appetite is desire for a pleasure, but not for an apparent good or
            pleasure. For often those who desire are not aware of what is good or pleas-
            ant so that it is not necessary for it (*sc.* the object of their desire) to be good
5   or pleasant but only to appear to be so. Hence the rendering should also
            have been of this sort. Even if he renders what has been mentioned, the
            person who posits that there are Ideas must be led to (argue about) the Forms.
            For there is no Idea of anything apparent, and the Form seems to be spoken
10   of in relation to the Form, for example appetite-itself is for pleasure-itself and
            wish-itself is for good-itself. Hence it will be neither for an apparent good nor
            for an apparent pleasure; for it is absurd that there be an apparent good, or
            pleasure, itself.

Aristotle's line of thought is convoluted and difficult to unfold. For this reason, it
is useful to look at the structure of the argument. This text can be divided into two
parts: (i) two proposed accounts are criticised and a solution, whose purpose is
to avoid the criticism, is put forward (146b36–147a5); (ii) the difficulties involved
in the application of this solution, if the interlocutor believes in Platonic Ideas or
Forms,[5] are presented (147a5–11). In these lines Aristotle openly confronts some
Platonic theses.

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4 This text corresponds to Brunschwig's edition (Brunschwig 2007). With respect to Ross' edi-
tion printed in the OCT (Ross 1958), at 147a5 Brunschwig reads ἀποδῷ instead of προσαποδῷ. The
English translation is mine.
5 Following Aristotle's practice, I use "Form" and "Idea" interchangeably.

3.1 Aristotle's Analysis of the Two Proposed Accounts

At the beginning of T1 Aristotle analyses two proposed accounts, namely (1) "wish is a desire for a good" and (2) "appetite is a desire for a pleasure" (146b37–147a3). The immediate context suggests that (1) and (2) cannot be accepted because they are not complete and must be improved by the addition of "apparent" (φαινόμενον), which is a qualification of the relatum.

It is worth remarking that (1) occurs also at the beginning of the chapter where Aristotle says: "he (*sc.* the interlocutor) should have said that knowledge is a belief in a knowable and that *wish is a desire for a good*" (146b5–6). This suggests that (1) should not be criticised. Does this create a tension in the text? The answer is negative: in the context of the first occurrence, Aristotle was considering a different commonplace. More precisely, he was investigating whether the relatum of the genus was expressed; for he instructed the dialectician to "examine whether, in the definition, that in relation to which it (*sc.* the thing defined) is said – either itself or with respect to the genus – is not mentioned" (146a37–146b1). Thus, Aristotle was not interested in the qualification of the relatum, as he is in T1. In other words, at the beginning of the chapter, (1) "wish is desire for a good" was chosen as an example of a case where the definiens, *i.e.* "a desire for a good", mentions the genus' relatum, *i.e.* a good. This strongly suggests that, in the first part, Aristotle is likely to have something else in mind; perhaps he is talking about all the cases where people desire a non-apparent, and hence genuine, good. Alternatively, he could simply be ignoring a defect in the proposed definition that is not germane to the line of attack under consideration in that context.

By contrast, in the final part of the chapter, Aristotle assumes that some people might choose as the object of their desire something that appears good. The same line of argument can be applied to account (2). This means that the dialectician's strategy in criticising the proposed accounts (1) and (2) is to show that the crucial qualification "apparent" is needed but not expressed.

3.2 The Qualification "Apparent"

The qualification "apparent" plays a key role in this commonplace and needs to be explained. The Greek word corresponding to "apparent" is φαινόμενον, namely the middle-passive participial form of the verb φαίνω. In the active φαίνω means "bring to light" or "cause to appear", whereas in the middle-passive φαίνομαι means "come to light" or "appear". The middle-passive form φαινόμενον ("apparent") and its cognates can be used in several ways. According to some commen-

tators, we can distinguish two uses of "to appear" (φαίνεσθαι).[6] Let us follow this suggestion and call these the factive and the neutral use. In the first case, speaking of something as an apparent *F* implies that the appearance is true so that the thing that appears to be *F* is *F*. This happens in all the occurrences where "an apparent *F*" is equivalent to "a clear *F*" or "an obvious *F*".[7] An example of the factive use is present in Aristotle's definition of a perfect syllogism in *APr*. I.1, 24b23–24: "a perfect syllogism is a syllogism which needs nothing else apart from the assumptions for the necessity (*sc.* of something following from these assumptions) to appear (φανῆναι, *i.e.*, to reveal itself)". In the second case, speaking of something as an apparent *F* leaves it open whether the thing is or is not *F*. In other words, the qualification "apparent" implies neither truth nor falsehood: for this reason, an adequate rendering of the verb in its neutral use is "seem" or "look".

One might wonder whether there is also a third, "contrafactual" use of φαίνομαι.[8] In this case, speaking of something as an apparent *F* would imply that the appearance is false and that the apparent *F* is not *F*. Although, at first glance, this might match with our ordinary linguistic intuitions and it would be highly tempting to introduce the contrafactual use, it is difficult to find unequivocal evidence to support it. I was not able to find such unequivocal evidence in Aristotle.

I shall avoid taking sides on the issue of the existence of a contrafactual use. Rather, I would like to draw attention to another semantic aspect that seems to concern φαίνομαι: the aspect of contextual restriction. Let us observe that φαίνομαι has a broad semantic spectrum that can be suitably restricted. On some occasions, the context imposes an adequate restriction. In order to have a better grasp of this proposal, let us look at the following phrase at the beginning of the *Sophistici Elenchi*: "(we shall speak about) apparent refutations, which, however, are fallacies but not refutations (φαινομένων μὲν ἐλέγχων, ὄντων δὲ παραλογισμῶν ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐλέγχων)" (*SE*, 164a20–21). The relative clause seems to require that the use of "apparent" is the neutral one (otherwise the relative clause would be pointless: the description of certain arguments as "apparent refutations" would already imply that the arguments in question are not refutations). But the relative clause, by restricting apparent refutations to those which are not refutations, may be plausibly taken to introduce a contextual restriction

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6 For example, Irwin 1987, 113 f., talks about a first use that he calls "veridical" and contrasts it with a use "with no implication that the appearance is true".

7 Bonitz 1870, 809a34–35; LJS *s.v.* φαίνειν.

8 The use of φαίνομαι is contrafactual when the state of affairs to which the verb is applied is required not to be the case.

of the extension of phrases of the form "an apparent F". This contextual restriction ensures that if anywhere in the *Sophistici Elenchi* something is called "an apparent *F*", it is supposed to be regarded as something that appears *F* without being *F*. The initial position of the restriction of apparent refutations renders it particularly apt to be the first move of a contextual restriction that governs the whole treatise.

In the discussion about the adjective "apparent", an important question that should be asked is whether "apparent" must be taken as "perceptually apparent". Although "apparent" can be used in this way, it would be strange to suggest that in the context of T1 the expression "apparent good" is synonymous with "what perceptually appears to be good". There is certainly something more at stake than a mere perceptual appearance of good; for Aristotle is not dealing with what appears (or only appears) to the senses. Thus we need to find a different way of being apparent. A well-known passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* contains the different use of φαινόμενον suited to our purposes. Aristotle is describing the method to be adopted in a dialectical context when some people disagree on a certain difficult topic and says: "We must, as in the other cases, set out the appearances (τιθέντας τὰ φαινόμενα) and first go through the puzzles. In that way we must prove, ideally, the truths of all the reputable opinions [...], or, if not of all, of most of them and the most important" (VII.2, 1145b2–6). Most scholars agree that the appearances mentioned above coincide with reputable opinions (ἔνδοξα, sometimes rendered as common beliefs); that is to say, the appearances can be what is believed to be the case.[9] This warrants the assumption that when Aristotle talks about the apparent good he need not (or not exclusively) refer to what appears good to our senses, but he might well refer to what we believe to be good.

It is important to add that in the context of *Top.* VI. 8 we do not have to see a reference to the technical distinctions concerning φαντασία set out in *De An.* III.3. They are probably a refinement of the basic doctrine contained in the *Topics*: since there is no trace of the refined doctrine in *Top.* VI. 8, it would be forced to import them here.

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9 Owen 1986, 243; Irwin 1987, 109–111 and *passim*.

3.3 The Expression "Apparent Good"

The phrase "apparent good" occurs in several Aristotelian texts: it expresses a fundamental concept in the discussion of central issues concerning his ethics, psychology and philosophy of action.[10] Given the limits of this paper, it is not possible to go through all the occurrences of "apparent good" in Aristotle. It suffices to offer a brief survey of the important places where it is discussed; in particular, two occurrences are most closely connected to our study. The first is in *De An.*, III.10, 433a27–29: "The object of desire always moves but this is the good or the apparent good"; the second occurrence belongs to *EN* III.4, 1113a23–4: "Without qualification and in truth, the object of wish is the good, but for each person it is the apparent good". These passages imply that both the good and the apparent good are forces motivating the agent to act in a certain way.

Scholars agree that the concept of apparent good is different from that of unqualified good and they hold that the unqualified good is identical to the genuine good; but they offer (at least) two interpretations of the concept of apparent good. According to the first, when we desire an apparent good, the thing we desire is in fact good and apparent to us, *i.e.* somehow present in our awareness. This means that, even though the apparent good is in fact good, it does not necessarily appear as good: for example, it could appear as pleasant.[11] The use employed here does not occur in our text T1. For, at 147a2–4, Aristotle says: "For often those who desire are not aware of what is good or pleasant so that it is not necessary for it (*sc.* the object of the desire) to be good or pleasant, but only to appear to be so". In other words, the apparent good that is desired could fail to be good.

According to the second interpretation, the apparent good *seems* or *looks* good to a particular agent, but this appearance may be false.[12] This reading uses "apparent" in a neutral way: it leaves open the possibility that the agent could be wrong.

Let us return to T1 and ask how "apparent" is used when it is part of the expression "apparent good". We should consider three alternatives. First, we might be dealing with the factive use of "apparent". But there are reasons to think that the factive use is not a likely option. If in the context of T1 Aristotle were using "apparent" in a factive way, he would be speaking of what is genuinely good. This would, however, sit uncomfortably with the claim that some agents who feel desire "are not aware of what is good [...] so that it is not necessary for

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10 Moss 2012, xi.
11 Irwin 1990, 331 f.; Corcilius 2011, 123–125.
12 Moss 2012, 7.

it (*sc.* the object of their desire) to be good" (147a23). In other words, the fact that we desire something is not sufficient to guarantee that it is good: it is not the case that everything desired is also good. Furthermore, the factive use of "apparent" would pose some problems for Aristotle's immediately following argument. As we shall see below, Aristotle claims that for someone who believes in Platonic Ideas it would be difficult (if not impossible) to offer a definition of the apparent good. This is due to the fact that there cannot be Ideas of what is apparent. But if "apparent good" refers to what is in fact good, Aristotle's objection becomes very weak: it is far from granted that those who believe in Platonic Ideas would have difficulties in positing the Idea of what is apparently good where "apparently" is equivalent to "genuinely" or "manifestly". For these reasons, I am not inclined to endorse this option.

Second, I have argued that "apparent" either has a contrafactual use or can be contextually restricted with an effect equivalent to that of a contrafactual use. But in T1 "apparent" could hardly be employed in any of these ways; for the apparent good would be what seems good without being so. Obviously, saying that wish is desire for what – as a matter of fact – is not good would not be a helpful definition because one can wish for something that – as a matter of fact – is good.

The third, and last, alternative is the best interpretative option: in T1 "apparent" is used in a neutral way. That is to say, when he speaks of the apparent good, Aristotle leaves it open whether what appears to be good is good or not.

4 The Difficulties for an Interlocutor Who Believes in Platonic Ideas: Two Interpretations

Aristotle identifies some difficulties in the application of the line of thought that suggests to include "apparent" in the definiens (147a5–11 in T1). Specifically, he thinks that the solution just envisaged, namely the addition of "apparent" in the definiens, is problematic for those who believe in Platonic Ideas and are committed to certain theses about them. This passage has been extensively studied and scholars have offered two main interpretative lines.

Cherniss, Düring and Verdenius are among the most distinguished representatives of the first line of interpretation that is particularly uncharitable towards Aristotle.[13] They all agree that the reasoning in T1 is a conscious dialectical trick,

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13 Cherniss 1962, vol. 1, 1–9; Düring 1968; Verdenius 1968.

but they offer different reconstructions of the deceiving argument. Cherniss holds that in T1 Aristotle's aim is deliberately to baffle those who believe in Ideas. More precisely, Aristotle's strategy would consist in setting one against the other two basic features of Platonic ontology, namely the phenomenal aspect of the sensible world and the absolute nature of transcendent Ideas. If the respondent, who believes in Ideas, accepts the requirement that in certain cases he ought to add "apparent" in the definiens, then his definition will be overthrown. Since definitions are concerned with Ideas and since an Idea is related only to an Idea, "desire itself" cannot be defined in relation to an "apparent good" because this would require the allegedly absurd existence of a *transcendent* Idea of the *apparent* good.[14]

According to Düring, the argument against the Platonic interlocutor in T1 is sophistic. Düring believes that no Platonist could ever postulate an Idea of the absolute desire. He grants that if there were an Idea of the absolute desire, then Aristotle would be right to argue that it would require the existence of an Idea of the absolutely-apparently-good, an absurdity in a Platonic context. Aristotle's argument, however, does not get off the ground because a Platonist would never accept an Idea of the absolute desire.[15]

The thrust of Verdenius' criticism is that there is no basis for Aristotle's claim that the Platonic interlocutor could be led to an absurdity and hence refuted. The argument in T1 is flawed since "apparent" (φαινόμενον) is used equivocally. On the one hand, when Aristotle speaks of the object of desire as the "apparent good or pleasant" at 147a1–2, "apparent" is equivalent to "deceptive". Since in a standard Platonic doctrine nothing rules out the Idea of the deceptive, the concept of apparent-itself (in the sense of deceptive-itself) does not lead to an inconsistency. On the other hand, in Plato's philosophy, "apparent" is used to indicate the phenomenal aspect of the perceptible world that is opposed to the reality of the intelligible world. In this sense of "apparent", there could not be an apparent-itself because the phenomenal world is merely an image of the intelligible world.[16]

A slightly more benevolent reading is suggested by De Vogel when she considers T1 as a witness of Aristotle's critical attitude towards the Platonic doctrine of Ideas. She does not accuse Aristotle of advancing a purely eristic reasoning. Rather, she believes that the aim of the argument in T1 is to shed doubt on the assumption that Ideas are related only to Ideas (an assumption which is one of

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14 Cherniss 1962, 8.
15 Düring 1968, 203–216.
16 Verdenius 1968, 37–38.

the premises of the argument that creates difficulties for the Platonists). This assumption totally isolates Ideas from the phenomenal world. By finding faults with it, Aristotle would, therefore, be criticising the transcendence of Platonic Ideas. This is not a rejection of the theory of Ideas in its entirety, but it is a way to show that it contains problematic aspects.[17]

A second line of interpretation radically different from that proposed by the aforementioned scholars is offered by Owen, who partly addresses and expands on De Vogel's reading. His analysis of the complex argument in T1 is based upon the distinction between two levels of predicates, namely A-predicates and B-predicates. More precisely, A-predicates are those that are truly said of an Idea in virtue of its status as an Idea (*e.g.* "immutable"), whereas B-predicates are those that truly apply to an Idea in virtue of the particular concept it represents (*e.g.* "animal" in the case of Man).[18] Two cases need to be considered. First, if it is possible to show that an Idea possesses incompatible A-predicates, there are serious difficulties for the supporters of Ideas since their doctrine would be undermined by the presence of a paradox. Second, if the Idea's selected predicates belong to different levels (*i.e.* one is an A-predicate and the other is a B-predicate), it will be more problematic to claim that there is a straight incompatibility between them. So, more reflexion is needed before rejecting the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, or a part of it, on the grounds that it contains a paradoxical aspect. Owen suggests that the argument in T1 involves predicates belonging to different levels.

Let us apply this interpretative suggestion to the case at hand and focus our attention on two predicates in T1. The first predicate is "real" (it corresponds to the Greek prefix αὐτό, "itself") and indicates the *real* nature of Ideas (*e.g.* the *real* wish or the *real* good). This is an A-predicate since it belongs to an Idea in virtue of its status as an Idea (any Idea is *real*). The second predicate is "apparent" (which renders the Greek φαινόμενον) and introduces an element of deception into the object it qualifies (*e.g.* the *apparent* pleasure or the *apparent* good).

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17 De Vogel 1968, 93, 95–96.
18 Owen subdivides the latter into B1-predicates and B2-predicates. He explains that, on the one hand, "B1-predicates [...] can be applied to the Idea in virtue of the general logical character of the concept for which it stands"; for example, in the view of the Academy, Man is correctly described as an entity itself (καθ' αὐτό) and not as a relative (πρός τι). On the other hand, "B2-predicates belong to the Idea because [...] they are simply accepted as serving to define the particular concept in question. Man, for example, is two-footed and an animal". Owen 1968a, 109. Since this subdivision has a limited application and plays no role in Owen's interpretation of T1, we shall leave it aside.

This is a B-predicate since it is attributed to an Idea not in virtue of its status as an Idea, but in virtue of the particular concept it represents.

The fact that the two predicates involved in the reasoning in T1 belong to different levels is not, however, sufficient to rule out the presence of an inconsistency. For someone might still suspect that a *real apparent* good or a *real apparent* pleasure is paradoxical. In other words, there is a legitimate and important question to be asked in the context of T1, namely whether a Platonist can admit the existence of something that is a *real apparent F*. Owen believes that a Platonist should not admit it. For if something has the function of making things apparently *F*, it cannot be a paradigm of *F-ness*, nor can it be a paradigm of anything which hinders *F-ness* (because, in this case, it would be an Idea not of the appearance of *F-ness* but of some other property). Hence Aristotle has a point when he claims that the sort of reality attributed to the Ideas precludes the occurrence of the qualification "apparent" in any of their characterizations.

4.1 Assessment of the Two Interpretations

Let us evaluate the two interpretative lines. Cherniss' interpretation faces problems that render it unconvincing. First, he fails to explore alternative (and more charitable) reconstructions of the reasoning in T1. Second, he presents Aristotle's argument against Platonic Ideas as doomed from the start. This is because he relies on a general and questionable assumption about the *Topics* as a whole. More precisely, he assumes that the dialectical procedure described and employed throughout the *Topics* does not carefully investigate or earnestly refute any philosophical doctrine. But this assumption can be challenged. In his examination of rival philosophical views elsewhere in the *corpus*, Aristotle makes serious use of the dialectical procedure: different conceptual standpoints are accurately analysed before being rejected or partly taken on board.[19] If Cherniss' assessment of the Aristotelian dialectical procedure were correct, it would lead to the unpalatable consequence that we should discredit all fruitful comparison that Aristotle makes between his own views and those of other thinkers. Before endorsing this position, however, it is necessary to inquire further into Aristotle's aims in the *Topics* and, more in particular, in T1. In a different part of this study, the view that Aristotle's aim is not sophistic will be put forward.

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19 Owen 1968a, 104.

Düring's objection crucially depends on the presupposition that the Platonists would never accept the Idea of absolute desire. But he gives no explanation and this presupposition remains unargued for. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that there could not be the Idea of absolute desire. Would the Platonists say that desire is indefinable? Or would they swallow the claim that certain definitions do not have Ideas as their objects?

Verdenius' criticism is also not convincing. He attributes to Aristotle a poor strategy based on the deliberate use of equivocation to overthrow the Platonic position. Now, Aristotle was well aware of the unwelcome consequences brought about by equivocation. For, at the beginning of *Topics* VI, he alerts us to the fact that, in the formulation of definitions, it is incorrect to use "obscure language" since "the language of definitions ought to be the clearest possible seeing that the purpose of giving a definition is to make something familiar" (*Top.* VI.1, 139b12–15). In particular, equivocal expressions should be banned in a definitional context (*Top.* VI.2, 139b19–31). Furthermore, in the *Sophistici Elenchi*, Aristotle warns us that a refutation based on an equivocation has only the appearance of being valid (*S.E.* 4, 165b23–166a21). Thus, Verdenius' claim that the commonplace addressed in T1 is deliberately based on an equivocation saddle Aristotle with a sophistic approach that, as I have already pointed out, there are good reasons to question. As we shall see later, deception is not Aristotle's default strategy in the *Topics*.

Since De Vogel's views are discussed and developed by Owen, we do not need to examine her position in detail. We can turn our attention to the second interpretative line and consider Owen's reconstruction of the argument in T1. The distinction between two levels of predicates is fruitful since it opens up a different way of reading Aristotle's strategy against the Platonists: it is a strategy that does not saddle him with the charge of deliberately baffling his interlocutor. As a consequence, the dialectical procedure described and adopted in the *Topics* does not collapse into a form of eristic reasoning but remains a good method to discuss and challenge different philosophical views. In particular, when we apply the distinction between levels of predicates to the argument in T1, we can see that Aristotle had reasons to question some tenets of an unsophisticated version of Plato's theory of Ideas. But in Owen's proposal there is a limit. Although the distinction between different levels of predicates allows an attractive reconstruction of Aristotle's point in T1, it seems highly speculative as it is presented without a philosophical or historical context. In what follows, an alternative and new interpretation will be put forward in order to overcome this limit.

5 A Different Interpretation

It is helpful to consider once again the reasoning in T1. It is easy to see that, according to Aristotle, two conditions must be met for the refutative argument to be developed. That is to say, (a) in proposing a definition the opponent must mention the qualification just discussed, *i.e.* "apparent" (147a5); (b) the opponent must be committed to the theory of Ideas (147a5–6). If these two conditions are satisfied, the opponent should be led to reason about the Ideas. In particular, he must be led to admit that his definition has an Idea as its object (and any believer in Ideas would be easily led to admit this).

Moreover, the refutative argument is based on two ontological assumptions about Ideas. The first is that there cannot be Ideas of anything apparent (147a6–7); the second is that an Idea is spoken of relative to an Idea (147a7).[20]

When the two ontological assumptions are introduced, they are not justified and so we must enquire into them. But before looking at their plausibility, it is helpful to show their place in the argument whose structure can be rendered in the following way:

(1) There cannot be Ideas of anything apparent (first assumption, 147a6–7);
(2) An Idea is spoken of relative to an Idea (second assumption, 147a7);
(3) The Idea of appetite is a desire for the Idea of the apparently pleasant (from 2 in the case where appetite is for the apparently pleasant; 146b37–147a2 and 147a5);
(4) There cannot be an Idea of the apparently pleasant (from 1).
(5) The Idea of appetite will not be a desire for the apparently pleasant.

Some words are needed in order to explain better the key steps of this argument.[21] Sentence (3) depends on (2) since it is an application of the general claim that an Idea is spoken of relative to an Idea to the particular case where the Idea of appetite (*i.e.* appetite-itself) is for the Idea of apparently pleasant (*i.e.* the apparently-pleasant-itself). Sentences (3) and (4) are inconsistent since (3) introduces the Idea of apparently pleasant, an Idea whose existence is denied by (4). We should remember that sentence (3) is the result of leading the opponent to Ideas, namely leading him to frame his definition in such a way that it is explicitly speaking of

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20 A detailed investigation of these two assumptions will be offered below. The investigation will also include an analysis of Aristotle's own formulation of the second assumption, namely "the Form seems to be spoken of relative to the Form" (147a7), that I read as "an Idea is spoken of relative to an Idea".

21 If we replace "appetite" and "apparently pleasant" with "wish" and "apparently good" in (3), (4) and (5) we obtain a perfectly analogous argument.

Ideas. Given the inconsistency resulting from (3) and (4), Aristotle rejects (3) and concludes (5).

If the refutation is effective, Aristotle has shown that in a Platonic framework it is highly problematic to give a definition of something that relates to an appearance because the crucial qualification "apparent" cannot be included in the definiens.

5.1 Is the Refutation Based on Premises (1) and (2) Effective?

The argument, at first glance, is valid. One might raise doubts, as Verdenius did, concerning the ambiguity of "apparent", but a decision about this specific issue can only be reached after examining the claim to truth of the argument's first two premises. For, if these two premises can be shown to be acceptable in a Platonic context without an ambiguous use of "apparent", the argument will be acquitted from the charge of invalidity. Let us then turn to these two premises with regard to which two cases must be distinguished.

Case (A): premises (1) and (2) express basic features of Ideas and are accepted by the interlocutor (most likely a member of the Academy). If this happens, the refutation is effective. The interlocutor has to accept that, in a Platonic framework, it is difficult (if not impossible) to give a definition of something that relates to something that enjoys a certain characteristic only apparently.

Case (B): premises (1) and (2) are not accepted by the interlocutor. In this case, Aristotle or the dialectician applying the commonplace-rule must argue for them. In this circumstance, it is necessary to understand how premises (1) and (2) could be argued for as the lack of adequate support would undermine the effectiveness of the refutative argument.

5.2 The Analysis of Premise (1)

Let us begin our analysis with premise (1), namely the view that there cannot be Ideas of anything apparent. Some Platonic evidence to support it might come from the claim, often found in the dialogues, that Ideas are paradigms or standard samples of certain properties (see *Euth*. 6e4, *Parm*. 132d2). Further Platonic evidence comes from *Rep*. X, 596e–597b. Here Plato distinguishes the product of a painter, which is *what appears* to be a bed, from that of the carpenter, which is some bed, and that of the god, which *is* a bed. We could, then, argue as follows: if an Idea had nothing but the appearance of a certain property, or if it had some

traits that preclude the full realisation of that property, then it would be absurd to attribute to it the status of Idea; in other words, the Idea of the so-and-so cannot be only apparently so-and-so. Thus, by virtue of their status, Ideas cannot be qualified as apparent.

This argument, however, is not immune to criticism. Let us consider an example. Our opponent might well grant that a sophist is someone who has knowledge of what is apparently true. This is a case of knowledge of what is apparently so-and-so. If it is true to say that the object of knowledge are Ideas, as Plato seems to admit in the *Republic*, this might induce us to introduce Ideas of what is apparently so-and-so. Furthermore, in *Soph*. 236a, Plato talks about an artist who produces images that appear to be beautiful. Suppose that it is true to say that an artist in producing an artefact is copying from a model, *i.e.* from an Idea (see *Rep*. X, 596b–c: "the makers look towards the appropriate Idea in making the beds or tables we use, and similarly in the other cases – surely no craftsman makes the Idea itself"). It follows that, in the case of images that are apparently so-and-so, the artist is copying from the Idea of what is apparently so-and-so. Even though the interlocutor might have an answer to this criticism, he should at least be faced with it in this context.

There is another problem. The inference from premise (1) that there are no Ideas of anything apparent is threatened by the failure of distinguishing between two different types of predication, namely definitional and ordinary predication. For our present purposes, we do not need to look at the details of this distinction (a few words about its historical context will be added at a later stage). It suffices to say that definitional predication concerns Ideas and occurs when the predicate-expression attempts to convey the nature of the characteristic of which the Idea is the paradigm. This can happen either when the predicate-expression is the whole definiens-expression ("Man is a rational animal"), or when it is part of the definiens-expression ("Man is an animal"), or when it is the definiendum-expression itself ("Man is a man"). Ordinary predication occurs when the denotatum of the subject-expression instantiates a characteristic signified by the predicate-expression ("Fido is young", "Socrates is white", "Man is instantiated").

To have a better grasp of this point, let us look at another example: consider the Idea of movement and ask whether it is in movement. In the case of definitional predication, it will be true to say that it is in movement ("movement" is the definiendum-expression itself). In the case of ordinary predication, it will not be true to say that it is in movement. For the Idea of movement, in so far as it is an Idea, is motionless.

With this distinction in mind, let us ask whether the Idea of the apparently pleasant is apparent. Two answers are possible. First, if the copula expresses

definitional predication, then the answer will be affirmative. In this case, the qualification "apparently pleasant" is the definiendum-expression in the definition of the Idea of the apparently pleasant. Second, if the copula expresses ordinary predication, then the answer will be negative. For the Idea of the apparently pleasant does not have the characteristic of being pleasant nor that of being apparently such.

This analysis shows that the argument involving premise (1) could be challenged by an interlocutor who understands and uses the distinction between different types of predication. In other words, the discussion of premise (1) shows that it involves problems that raise serious doubts about the efficacy of the refutative strategy deployed in this line of attack.

5.3 Non-Refined Predication in Topics VI

In the context of T1 there is no evidence for saying whether the interlocutor or the dialectician is aware of the distinction between different types of predication. For this reason, it is very difficult to understand whether they are able to use this sophisticated conceptual tool in the argument against Plato's theory of Ideas (147a5–11).

This passage makes a rather unrefined point about predication. An analogous approach is adopted in *Top*. VI.6, 143b11–32, where Aristotle's attack is partly directed against some ontological theses concerning Platonic Ideas. More precisely, Aristotle's main target is the division of the genus by negation and his discussion comprises two arguments. In the first, at 143b11–23, he attempts to prove that the genus cannot be divided by two determinations one of which is the negation of the other; for the negative determination cannot be a differentia of the genus. In the second, at 143b23–32, he warns us that the argument sketched in the immediately preceding lines is an effective commonplace against those who believe that genera are Ideas, *i.e.* numerically one. A full-fledged analysis of the two arguments goes beyond the limits of this study. It is sufficient to observe that in this commonplace Aristotle takes a naïve stance on the sort of predicates that could be applied to Platonic Ideas. More precisely, in *Top*. VI.6, 143b14–17 and 23–32, he says:

T2

143b15   Every length is either breadth-less or having breadth, since everything either the affirmation or the negation is true, so that also the genus of line, which is length, will be either breadth-less [ἀπλατές] or having breadth [πλάτος ἔχον]. [...]

143b25

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> The commonplace just mentioned will be helpful against those who posit that Ideas exist. For if length-itself exists, how will it be predicated of the genus that it has breadth or that it is breadth-less? For one of them must be true of every length, if it is going to be true of the genus. But this does not happen; for there are both breadth-less lengths and lengths which have breadth. So that the commonplace will be helpful only against those who say that each genus is one in number. Those who posit Ideas do this: for they say that length-itself and animal-itself are genera.

The second sentence of T2, namely "of everything the affirmation or the negation is true" (143b15–16), is a formulation of the principle of excluded middle. It is the logical principle upon which Aristotle grounds his refutation. The principle of excluded middle, however, holds in the case of ordinary predication and not in that of definitional predication. For example, if we are making an ordinary predication and we say that Socrates either is or is not male, our statement will be true. But if we are defining the species human being, it is not true to say that it either is or is not a male. Similarly, when Aristotle asks "how will it be predicated of the genus [*i.e.*, length-itself] that it has breadth or that it is breadth-less?" (143b25–26), the correct answer is that in definitional predication neither applies. If the interlocutor gives the correct answer, then the refutation will be blocked.

Before turning our attention to another text of the *Topics*, it is necessary to emphasise that understanding T2 in the light of the distinction between different types of predication yields a significant result. That is to say, this reading allows a positive and original interpretation of the passage under scrutiny in that it poses a challenge to Aristotle's argument that is grounded in distinctions that were available in the historical context to which the *Topics* belong (more on this later). In this respect, the present reconstruction overcomes the previously mentioned limits of Owen's proposal.[22]

5.4 Sophisticated Predication in Topics V

In another passage from the *Topics*, Aristotle attributes to his Platonic interlocutor a more sophisticated theory of predication. In V.7, 137b3–8, Aristotle draws a distinction between properties belonging to Ideas insofar as they are Ideas, on the one hand, and properties belonging to Ideas insofar as they are the bearers of

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22 Owen 1968a, 115 f.

the properties they impart to the individuals that partake of them, on the other. At 137b6–8 Aristotle says:

T3

> 137b6   [...] in as much as being motionless does not belong to man-itself *qua* man, but *qua* Idea, it could not be a property of man to be motionless.

In this text, the distinction between different types of predication clearly points towards the distinction between definitional and ordinary predication. To be sure, the passage is compatible with different ways of distinguishing between types of predication. For example, it can support Owen's distinction between different levels of predicates. What are, then, the reasons for preferring and adopting a reading that is based on the distinction between definitional and ordinary predication? This distinction is to be favoured because it is already present in the philosophical and historical context in which the *Topics* were written. For, according to a well-established interpretative line originated by Michael Frede, in the *Sophist* there is evidence for attributing to Plato something like the distinction between ordinary and definitional predication.[23]

Should we conclude that the strategies adopted in different passages of the *Topics* are irreconcilable and highlight the presence of a severe tension in Aristotle's work? The situation is not so desperate; for there is a way to make sense of the difference in the approaches. Aristotle's choice of a specific line of attack is probably influenced by the type of interlocutor he is confronting. For example, if he is outlining a way to refute an interlocutor who adopts a naïve Platonic standpoint, he will not need to use a sophisticated theory of predication. It would be bizarre if Aristotle were to silence the interlocutor with sophisticated philosophical distinctions that are difficult for him to follow. After all, Aristotle argues that, in order to refute someone in a dialectical exchange, the dialectician should begin from beliefs held by the opponent.[24] There are other circumstances, however, where the interlocutor might be a more refined Platonist; that is to say the interlocutor, having read (*e.g.*) the *Sophist*, might be able to distinguish between different

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23 See Frede 1967, 30–35; Frede 1992, 309–401; Meinwald 1991, 67 f.; Mann 2000, 178 f.; Crivelli 2012, 122–133. Three passages of the *Sophist* are usually mentioned in order to credit Plato with this distinction of types of predication, 250c6–7, 255e3–6, and 257d14–258c6.
24 *Topics* I.2, 101a31–33, "we shall speak to them (*sc.* to the members of the public) not from the beliefs (δόξαι) of others but from their own beliefs (δόγματα) changing their mind about anything that may seem to us not to have been stated well". Here δόξαι and δόγματα are synonyms (Bonitz 1870, 202b54).

types of predication. In this case, Aristotle will be perfectly justified if he uses more sophisticated conceptual tools.

5.5 The Analysis of Premise (2): First Step

Let us turn to the analysis of premise (2), namely the thesis that an Idea is spoken of relative to an Idea. This analysis comes in two steps. The first is to understand the premise, which is not clearly expressed. Most probably, the thought behind it can be rephrased like this: it is believed that an Idea is said to be what it is relative to an Idea.[25] For example, appetite is said to be what it is relative to something else; for it is said to be appetite for something. In other words, the expression "*x* is spoken of relative to *y*" can be seen as an abbreviation of "*x* is said to be what it is relative to *y*". In the context of this commonplace, it means that the relata of Ideas of relative properties, for example pleasant and good, are Ideas.

Evidence to support this reading (namely that "the Form seems to be spoken of relative to the Form" is equivalent to "it is believed that a Form is said to be what it is relative to a Form") can be found in *Cat.* 7. In particular, at 6b6–7, Aristotle puts forward the claim:

> (α) "relatives, then, are all those things which are *called* precisely what they are of something else" (πρός τι οὖν ἐστὶν ὅσα αὐτὰ ἅπερ ἐστὶν ἑτέρων λέγεται).[26]

It is interesting to note that the Greek pronoun ὅπερ (singular of ἅπερ) is often used to introduce the genus.[27] This suggests that (α) can be expanded in:

> (β) "Some relatives receive the predication of their own name with respect to something else, while other relatives receive the predication of the name of their genus with respect to something else".

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25 The verbal form δοκεῖ ('it seems') alerts us to the fact that Aristotle is discussing someone else's opinion without committing himself to endorse it (see Brunschwig 2007, xxxvi–xxxviii).

26 It must be observed that the use of ἑτέρων does not imply distinctness and could be read loosely as we find in ancient treatments of relatives. For example, in *Philebus* 51c–d, Plato uses πρός τι ('relative to something') and πρὸς ἕτερον ('relative to something different') interchangeably. The secondary literature on relatives is vast, for the purposes of our discussion see, *e.g.* Brown 1986, 68; Crivelli 2012, 146.

27 See Bonitz 1870, 533b52–55.

For example, knowledge receives the predication of its own name, *viz.* "knowledge", with respect to something else (knowledge is always knowledge of a knowable); literacy receives the predication of the name of its genus, *viz.* "knowledge", with respect to something else (grammar is always knowledge of letters). Both cases are covered by ὅπερ. This fits very well with the main theme of the chapter of the *Topics* we are discussing, namely the definition of "a relative either with respect to itself or with respect to the genus (ἢ καθ' αὐτὸ ἢ κατὰ τὸ γένος)" (146b36–37).

At *Cat.* 7. 6b28, the point made in sentence (α) is picked up by a condensed formulation in the context of the following remark: "all relatives are spoken of in relation to correlatives that reciprocate" (πάντα δὲ τὰ πρός τι πρὸς ἀντιστρέφοντα λέγεται). In the immediately following lines (6b29–30), Aristotle introduces an example: "the slave is called a slave of a master and the master is called a master of a slave" (ὁ δοῦλος δεσπότου λέγεται δοῦλος καὶ ὁ δεσπότης δούλου δεσπότης λέγεται). The second occurrence of "slave" (δοῦλος) as well as that of "master" (δεσπότης) express the ὅπερ mentioned in sentence (α) – though in (α) we read the plural of ὅπερ, *i.e,* ἅπερ. The condensed formulation is repeated at 7a22–23: "all relatives then are spoken of in relation to correlatives that reciprocate" (πάντα οὖν τὰ πρός τι [...] πρὸς ἀντιστρέφοντα λέγεται).

5.6 The Analysis of Premise (2): Second Step

The second step of the analysis of premise (2) consists in understanding whether Aristotle intends to suggest that *every* Idea is relative to an Idea. Aristotle could hardly be making such a general claim (in no passage in the *corpus* do we find him suggesting that all Ideas behave like relatives). More likely, he is restricting his attention to Ideas of relative properties; we should note that this chapter concerns specific rules for rejecting proposed accounts of relatives. This theme is introduced by the following words: "if what is being defined is a relative either with respect to itself or with respect to the genus, examine whether, in the definition, that in relation to which it (*sc.* the thing defined) is said – either itself or with respect to the genus – is not mentioned" (146a36–146b1).[28]

It is interesting to observe that something like the claim that an Idea is spoken of relatively to an Idea seems to occur in other (non-Aristotelian) con-

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[28] There is some debate as to whether the Platonic or Academic class of relative entities (πρός τι) has the same extension as the Aristotelian class; see, *e.g.* Owen 1957, 107–110, and Fine 1993, 171–182.

texts. In particular, let us consider the objection raised by Parmenides in Plato's homonymous dialogue at 133c3–134a1. The details of this objection need not be reported, but it suffices to mention the general line of the argument. Parmenides says to the young Socrates: "Things in us do not have their power in relation to the Ideas, nor do they (*sc*. Ideas) have theirs in relation to us; but, I repeat, Ideas are what they are of themselves and in relation to themselves, and things that belong to us are, in the same way, what they are in relation to themselves" (133e4–134a1; the same point is made at 133c3–5 and at 134d4–7). One of Parmenides' examples is: "mastery-itself is what it is of slavery-itself; and, in the same way, slavery-itself is slavery of mastery-itself" (133e3–4). The cases presented by Aristotle have the same structure as Parmenides' examples, even though they do not mention the Ideas of mastery and slavery, but those of appetite, wish, pleasure and good. Hence, according to Aristotle, if the interlocutor accepts that an Idea is related only to an Idea, he is committed to the claim that appetite-itself is for the pleasant-itself, and, analogously, wish-itself is for the good-itself (147a8–9).

This shows that there is an important difficulty for those who accept premise (2). Consider knowledge-itself: it is correlative to truth-itself (134a3–4).[29] By contrast, knowledge in us will be knowledge not of truth-itself, but of truth in our world. It follows that truth-itself is not knowable by us. In the *Parmenides*, a further step is made (134b–c), namely that knowledge in us is not knowledge of the Ideas (which are identified with truth-itself). This objection is described as "the greatest difficulty" to which the young Socrates offers no reply.

As a last remark, it is worth noticing that a similar formulation of the view expressed in premise (2), namely the claim that an Idea is spoken of relative to an Idea, occurs in an argument criticising Platonic Ideas that we find in the *Peri Ideôn* (Alex. Aphr. *in Metaph*. 83.268: "If the equal is equal to an equal, there will be more than one Idea of equal. *For the equal-itself is equal to an equal-itself*. For if it were not equal to something, it would not be equal at all".[30]

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29 "So too – he (*sc*. Parmenides) said – knowledge itself, what knowledge is, would be knowledge of that truth itself, which is what truth is?" (Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἐπιστήμη, φάναι, αὐτὴ μὲν ὃ ἔστι ἐπιστήμη τῆς ὃ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια αὐτῆς ἂν ἐκείνης εἴη ἐπιστήμη). And the young Socrates answered, "Certainly" (Πάνυ γε).
30 Fine 1993, 188–190.

5.7 Review and Evaluation of Aristotle's Strategy: (1) Is Aristotle Arguing Sophistically?

How should we evaluate the method adopted by Aristotle to refute his opponent? In section 3 we saw that, according to some scholars, one of Aristotle's main goals in the *Topics* is to overthrow Platonic positions by launching lines of attack that purposely deceive and confound the interlocutor. We also saw that an alternative interpretation has been proposed that gives to Aristotle a better (less sophistic) strategy. According to this proposal, Aristotle is challenging a Platonic view and formulates a correct objection against the possibility that there could be apparent Ideas. This alternative interpretation, however, had some drawbacks: in particular, the conceptual tools it attributes to Aristotle have nothing corresponding to them in the background of the *Topics*.

The novelty of my proposal consists (not in finding a flawless reconstruction of Aristotle's criticism against Platonic Ideas, but) in providing the opponent with means that he can adopt to defend his standpoint from Aristotle's criticism. In other word, I argue that it is possible for the interlocutor to challenge the claim that no Idea can be qualified as apparent. The interlocutor can resist Aristotle's attack by making use of distinctions already present in the historical and philosophical framework of the *Topics*.

5.8 Review and Evaluation of Aristotle's Strategy: (2) What is Aristotle's Aim?

Aristotle does not purport to deceive intentionally his (Platonic) interlocutor. But what is his aim? At least two options worthy to be considered open up.

First, the aim could be to expose the presence of a contradiction in the theses held by the interlocutor. In other words, Aristotle could be concerned with the interlocutor's body of beliefs as a whole and might want to show that it is inconsistent. In this case, the interlocutor is forced to revise his or her theses: what is at stake is the internal coherence of his or her entire body of beliefs. For example, the aim could be to find a contradiction in the theses held by someone who endorses Plato's philosophy.

Second, Aristotle could be targeting (not an entire body of beliefs, but) a specific philosophical view. Then the aim would be the revision and, possibly, the improvement of a view that happens to be endorsed by the interlocutor at a certain stage of the debate. For example, the intent could be to lead the Platonic respondent towards a better understanding of the relation between Platonic Ideas and appearance.

It is not clear whether Aristotle adopts only one of these two options throughout the *Topics* or alternates between them. A complete discussion of this problem is too broad to be contained within the limits of this study. The presence of the two options in the *Topics* might help to explain why there seems to be a variation in the standards of the conceptual tools employed by Aristotle in the analysis of the opponent's standpoint. On some occasions (*e.g.* T1 and T2), rudimentary devices are deemed sufficient to address the interlocutor's beliefs. On others (*e.g.* T3), philosophically sophisticated means must be sought and applied to discuss more refined theses.

It is perfectly possible that an objection formulated against a naïve or a refined interlocutor is directed against a philosophical view that could be simple or more sophisticated. It is important to stress that, in this circumstance, the target is a certain philosophical view. It is equally possible that the difference between a naïve and a refined interlocutor amounts to the contrast between two bodies of beliefs. In this case, the target is (not a simple or more sophisticated philosophical view, but) a simple or more sophisticated body of beliefs endorsed by the interlocutor.

6 Conclusion

Aristotle claims that, in some cases, the presence of the qualification "apparent" in the definiens is a necessary requisite for the success of the definition. The qualification "apparent" is here used in a neutral way and leaves it open whether what appears to be so-and-so is so-and-so (*e.g.* whether what appears to be good, or pleasant, is good, or pleasant). Aristotle therefore believes that certain definitions can be successfully achieved only in the context of a philosophical doctrine that caters for the apparent so-and-so (*e.g.* the apparent good or the apparent pleasure). He criticises Plato's perspective because it leaves no space for the apparent so-and-so.

Aristotle's criticism, however, partly misses its target. This is not due to the fact that he is using sophistic means to deceive his interlocutor. Rather, it is due to fact that the success of his objection depends on two conditions: first, the interlocutor must accept that an Idea is relative only to an Idea and not also to a sensible particular; second, the interlocutor must fail to understand and use the distinction between different types of predication. If these two conditions are satisfied, then Aristotle or the dialectician can successfully deploy his line of attack. But if the interlocutor is not committed to the thesis that an Idea is relative only to an Idea or is able to distinguish between different types of predication, then

he can defend his position. In this case, Aristotle's strategy is not effective and requires further argumentative moves.[31]

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