**Section 1**

Why Plato chose to designate the upper tier of his ontology by ‘being’ (*on, onta, einai, ousia*), and some 20th century interpretations

* Traditional: *to on* is what exists, and in labelling Forms *mallon onta* Plato is designating them as ‘more existent’.
* Revisionary contributions by Vlastos, Kahn and Owen (among others)
* Building on but disagreeing in part with each of these, Brown (1986 and 1994) proposed what Leigh has labelled the ‘semantic continuity thesis’ re the verb to be in Greek.

**Section 2 Plato and the term *ousia****. ousia* was used for wealth, possessions’, a use also found in Plato. In T1 Plato introduces and artfully draws attention to a new use, glossing it as ‘what it is’.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**T1** *Euthyphro* 11a6-b1, (and compare *Meno* 72a)  
And it seems, Euthyphro, that **though you were asked what the pious is (**ὅτι ποτ’ ἐστίν), you don’t want to reveal to me **its *ousia***, but rather to tell me something it suffers, saying that it suffers this, to be loved by all the gods. But **what it is** (ὅτι δὲ ὄν )you haven’t yet said.

**T2** *Phaedo* 65d9-e2 (Simmias has agreed there is a just, a beautiful and a good)  
I’m talking about them all, so for example about size, health and strength and in a word **about the being (*ousia*) of all other things, what each in fact is (** **ὃ τυγχάνει ἕκαστον ὄν):** is it through the body that what’s truest of them is perceived?

**Introducing** ***ousia* to refer to forms in general**:

**T3a** *Phaedo* 76d7 ff (the conclusion of the argument from recollection)  
εἰ μὲν ἔστιν ἃ θρυλοῦμεν ἀεί, καλόν τέ τι καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ **πᾶσα ἡ τοιαύτη οὐσία**,  
If those things we always talk about are, some beautiful and good and **the whole being of this sort**

**T3b** (Simmias picks up the usage, 77a): ‘… our argument rightly comes down to this, that our soul exists before we have come to be, equally as does that ***ousia*** of which you were now speaking.

***Ousia* in *Republic***: only rarely used for essence; see (i) Glaucon relays the *ousia* and *genesis* of justice (359a5), picking up 358c1-2 ‘I’ll tell you what justice is and what it originated from.   
(ii) 534b3, Ἦ καὶ διαλεκτικὸν καλεῖς τὸν λόγον ἑκάστου λαμβάνοντα τῆς οὐσίας; Compare 533b2, dialectic as the method that attempts to grasp, concerning each thing, what it is.

Very frequently used in *Rep* as introduced in *Phaedo* (**T3a**,**b** above) for the realm of noetic beings, or for the mode of being of such entities. For example:  
**T4** *Rep* VI, 485a10-b3 Let this be stated about the philosophic natures: they love any learning which reveals to them that being which always is and does not wander around between coming to be and ceasing to be (ἐκείνης τῆς οὐσίας τῆς ἀεὶ οὔσηςκαὶ μὴ πλανωμένης ὑπὸ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς)   
Books VI,VII and IX frequently use *ousia* to refer to the forms generally (contrasted with *genesis* e.g. 525c6) or to their mode of being, sometimes coupled with *alētheia* (e.g. 585d3).[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Section 3** *Einai, on* and *ousia* in the two arguments distinguishing *gnōsis* and *doxa* in R V.

**The first argument** (475e-476d) from ‘the ones and the many’s’, for **insiders** (475e6-7 “*You*, Glaucon, will admit …); cf. 507a7-b9, the Expanded Reminder, **T13** below )

**The second argument** (476d7-480a13), from ‘what is vs. what is and is not’, ostensibly to convince the sight-lover but ‘concealing from him that he is not in a healthy state’ (476e1-2)

After agreements that to know is to know something that is, and that what fully is fully knowable, while what in no way is is *pantē(i) agnoston,* comes :  
**T5** Socrates’ ‘plant’ early on in the argument: 477a6-8  
If something is such that it both is and is not, wouldn’t it lie between what purely is and what in no way is (μεταξὺ ἂν κέοιτο τοῦ εἰλικρινῶς ὄντος καὶ τοῦ αὖ μηδαμῇ ὄντος)   
and for such a *metaxu* we must seek something between *gnōsis* and *agnosia.*

**T6** Recalling T5:(478d5) we said earlier that if something turns up that **both is and is not at the same time (*hama on te kai mē on*)**, it will lie between what purely is and what totally is not;(478e1 paraphrase):that’s what we must find, to be the object of *doxa*, that which shares in both being (*einai*) and not being (*mē einai*).

The sight-lovers’ many beautifuls appear and are both beautiful and ugly, hence both beautiful and not beautiful (and the same for just/unjust; pious/impious; double/half; large/small etc.).

**T7** Πότερον οὖν ἔστι μᾶλλον ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν τοῦτο ὃ ἄν τις φῇ αὐτὸ εἶναι;  
Is each of the many, any more than it is not, that which someone says it is? (479b9-10)   
That is, each of the many Fs is F and not F in equal measure.   
Glaucon’s response? To recall the riddle of the eunuch (who is and is not a man) and the bat (which is and is not a bird) (479b10-c5).

**T8** Socrates asks Glaucon: ‘have you a better place to locate them [the many Fs that are F and not F] than between being (*ousias*) and not being (*tou mē einai*)? (479c6-7)  
*Ousia* here is just a variant on *to* *einai*, see 478e1 and 479c8-9[[3]](#footnote-3)

**T9** *Dissoi Logoi* 5.5: καὶ ταὐτὰ ἔστι καὶ οὐκ ἔστι· τὰ γὰρ τῆιδ’ ἐόντα ἐν τᾶι Λιβύαι οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐδέ  
γε τὰ ἐν Λιβύαι ἐν Κύπρωι. καὶ τἆλλα κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον. οὐκῶν καὶ ἐντὶ  τὰ πράγματα καὶ οὐκ ἐντί[[4]](#footnote-4)  
And the same things are and are not, for the things that are here are not in Libya …….So things are and are not.  
Here too we have an ‘inference’ from ‘is and is not such and such’ to ‘is and is not’.

How to account for the move from ‘ the many Fs are and are not F at the same time’ to ‘the many F’s are and are not’ (and as such are objects of *doxa*, not of *gnosis, so the sight-lovers gignōskein ouden)*

**Section 4 Brief review of Brown’s ‘semantic continuity’ thesis, and reconsideration**

* To retain: Greek ‘*einai’* is one and the same verb whether complete or incomplete, with the same meaning. The complete, existential, use of the verb is not a hidden ellipsis, but is potentially completable. *Pace* Vlastos,[[5]](#footnote-5) a Greek speaker did not ‘know the difference between the ‘is’ in *Troy is famous* and *Troy is*’. These points can explain many aspects of the treatment of *einai, on* etc. in Plato. No sharp divide, but rather a continuum, between complete and incomplete uses.
* To reconsider: (i) The semantic continuity theory’s claim that *every* use is potentially completable (What about T4 τῆς ἀεὶ οὔσης?) .(ii) Does it need to claim that ‘complete being *is …derived from* incomplete being, without merely reducing to it’? (Brown 1994,228)

**Section 5 *Ousia*, *on* and ‘*ho esti*’ in Book VI**

More on who the philosophers are; they must know ‘*hekaston to on*’, each being (484c6, d4-5); compare 486d10-11

**T10** (= T4) *Rep* VI, 485a10-b3 Let this be stated about the philosophic natures: they love any learning which reveals to them that being which always is and does not wander around between coming to be and ceasing to be   
Here we get the first claim (in *Rep*) that forms are eternal, ἀεὶ οὔσης.   
*Phthora* as the counterpart of *genesis* makes clear that the claim is about coming into being, not (or not simply) coming to be.

The philosopher will love ‘all of it (*ousia*)’ 485b5

**T11** 486a4-10 The philosopher must desire *tou holou kai pantos …theiou te kai anthropinou*. Then:  
Ἧι οὖν ὑπάρχει διανοίᾳ μεγαλοπρέπεια καὶ θεωρία παντὸς μὲν χρόνου, πάσης δὲ οὐσίας,  
 οἷόν τε οἴει τούτῳ μέγα τι δοκεῖν εἶναι τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον;   
When an intellect has such grandness and the surveying of **all time and all *ousia***, do you think that to such a person human life can seem something great?   
The narrow, technical sense of *ousia* (as in the recent T10) or a more general sense?

**T12** 490b2-7 (The philosopher pursues truth (490a1a) and strives *pros to on* (a8)…)

… οὐδ’ ἀπολήγοι  **τοῦ ἔρωτος**, πρὶν **αὐτοῦ ὃ ἔστιν ἑκάστου** **τῆς φύσεως ἅψασθαι** ᾧ προσήκει ψυχῆς ἐφάπτεσθαι τοῦ τοιούτου—προσήκει δὲ συγγενεῖ—ᾧ **πλησιάσας καὶ μιγεὶς τῷ ὄντι** **ὄντως**,  
 γεννήσας νοῦν καὶ ἀλήθειαν, γνοίη τε καὶ ἀληθῶς ζῴη καὶ  τρέφοιτο καὶ οὕτω λήγοι ὠδῖνος, πρὶν δ’ οὔ;  
Note a) the **erotic language** and b) grasping the nature of each “what is” itself

**T13** The Expanded Reminder at 507bc, of ‘things said before’ i.e. the arguments in Book V and ‘things said often elsewhere’ (**presumably includes *Phaedo*, *Symposium***), Paraphrase follows:   
**1)** we say that many beautifuls and many good things and so on are;  
**2)** and beautiful itself and good itself; taking each to be one form, we call each one ‘what is’ ὡς μιᾶς οὔσης τιθέντες, [**“**](https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q.html)**ὃ ἔστιν”** ἕκαστον προσαγορεύομεν.  
**3)** ‘and we say the first set of things is seen, not grasped by the intellect, whereas the forms are grasped by the intellect and not seen.’ Καὶ τὰ μὲν δὴ ὁρᾶσθαί φαμεν, νοεῖσθαι δ’ οὔ, τὰς δ’ αὖ ἰδέας νοεῖσθαι μέν,   
ὁρᾶσθαι δ’ οὔ.  
This comes just before Socrates launches into the Sun simile.  
Note that **2**) expands on what the earlier argument said about the ‘ones’—the beautiful itself and so on—by adding the technical formula [“](https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q.html)ὃ ἔστιν”, recalling *Phaedo* 75cd.  
**3)** replaces *R*V’s contrast between *doxasta* and *gnōsta* with the *Phaedo’s* contrast between visibles and intelligibles AND declares them to be disjoint.

For discussion of the **ὃ ἔστιν formula,** see Ademollo (2013).Realistic options, for e.g. ‘*ho estin ison’*, are (i) ‘what equal is’ and (ii) ‘what is equal’ . (i) is suggested strongly by the connection with the ‘what is it?’ question, as found in expressions such as ‘ask what it is’, ‘know what it is’ and so on.   
But (i) faces grammatical problems (viz. no definite article, word order).

Rowe’s judicious note (Penguin Classics) on **T13** passage 2) **ὃ ἔστιν : ‘**That is, what beautiful/beauty (good/goodness etc) is*and/or*what is beautiful (good etc.) namely in the beautiful (good …) things**.’**

Conclusions

Works referred to:

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1. Cf. Herrmann (2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Szaif (2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Delcomminette (2008) ‘here at least *ousia*, *to einai* and *to on* are synonyms and correspond simply to different forms of substantivation of the verb to be’ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Parallel drawn by Burnyeat (2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Vlastos (1973) 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)