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THE GREEK VERB "TO BE" AND THE CONCEPT OF BEING

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I am concerned in this paper with the philological basis for Greek ontology, that is to say, with the raw material which was provided for philosophical analysis by the ordinary use and meaning of the verb einai, "to be". Roughly stated, my question is: how were the Greek philosophers guided, or influenced, in their formulation of doctrines of Being, by the pre-philosophical use of this verb which (together with its nominal derivatives on and ousia) serves to express the concept of Being in Greek?

Before beginning the discussion of this question, I would like to say a word about the implications of posing it in this form. I take it for granted that all thinking is conditioned to some extent by the structure of the language in which we express or formulate our thoughts, and that this was particularly true for the Greek philosophers, who knew no language but their own. However, I do not assume (as many modern critics seem to do) that such linguistic conditioning is necessarily a limitation, or a disadvantage. A partial disadvantage it may be, since a logical confusion can arise easily in one language which would be impossible in another. But a philosopher - even a philosopher ignorant of other languages - is always free to make a distinction which the language does not make for him, just as he is free to ignore a distinction built into the vocabulary or syntax of his speech, when he does not find this linguistic datum of philosophic importance. (A familiar example of the Greek philosopher's freedom in this respect is the irony which Socrates displays whenever he refers to Prodicus' practice of distinguishing between the meaning of near-synonyms.) The fact that Greek philosophy has been fruitfully translated into other tongues - notably into a language so different as Arabic - suggests that it is not language-bound in any very narrow sense.

On the other hand, it is clear that any given language permits the native speaker to formulate certain notions, or to make certain distinctions, more easily and more spontaneously than others. To this extent, one language - and I mean one natural language, of course - may be philosophically more adequate than another. In this sense, I would suggest that ancient Greek is one of the most adequate of all languages, and that the possession of such a language was in fact a necessary condition for the success of the Greeks in creating Western logic and philosophy - and, I suspect, also for their success in creating theoretical science and rigorous mathematics, but this second point might be harder to defend.

In any case, I do not intend to argue the superior merits of Greek as a language for philosophy, nor to maintain any general thesis about the relationship between philosophic thought and the structure of a given language. I mention these larger questions only to make clear that I wish to leave them open. All I hope to show is that some features of the use and meaning of einai, - features which are less conspicuous or entirely lacking for the verb "to be" in most modern languages - may cast light on the ontological doctrines of the Greeks by bringing out the full significance, and the unstated presuppositions, of the concepts expressed by esti, einai, on and ousia. In other words, I propose to use the philological material in a purely instrumental way, not as a stick with which to beat the ancient thinkers for ignoring distinctions which we take for granted, but as a tool for the more adequate understanding of the Greek doctrines from their own point of view, including those ideas which the Greeks could take for granted but which we are inclined to ignore.

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It is scarcely necessary to emphasize how important a role the concept of Being has played in the philosophical tradition which stretches from antiquity through the middle ages down into modern thought. Except perhaps for the concept of Nature, it would be hard to mention a philosophic idea which has enjoyed a comparable influence. The concept of Being is still very much alive today, at least in German philosophy: witness Heidegger's intensive study of what he calls the Seinsfrage, and Gottfried Martin's recent definition of "Allgemeine Metaphysik" by reference to the classical question: Was ist das Sein? Yet we cannot blink the fact that, in English and American philosophy at any rate, the concept of Being is likely to be regarded with great suspicion, as a pseudo-concept or a mere confusion of several distinct ideas. The most obvious distinction which seems to us to be ignored in the notion of Being is that between existence and predication. The logician will go further, and point out that the word "is" means one thing when it represents the existential quantifier, something else when it represents class-inclusion or class-membership, something else when it represents identity, and so forth.

I shall here leave aside the distinctions based upon the logic of classes and the strict notion of identity (as governed by Leibniz' law), because I do not find these distinctions reflected or respected in the actual usage of the verb "to be" in Greek, or in English either for that matter.<sup>1</sup> But the distinction between the "is" of existence and the "is" of predication is now so well established in our own thought, and even in the usage of our language, that it cannot be ignored in any discussion of Being. I begin, therefore, with the classic statement of this distinction by John Stuart Mill, who claimed that

many volumes might be filled with the frivolous speculations concerning the nature of being . . . which have arisen from overlooking this double meaning of the word to be; from supposing that when it signifies to exist, and when it signifies to be some specified thing, as to be a man, . . . to be seen or spoken of, . . . even to be a nonentity, it must still, at bottom, answer to the same idea . . . . The fog which rose from this narrow spot diffused itself at an early period over the whole surface of metaphysics. (Logic I, iv. i)

Mill's distinction has not only been built into the symbolism of modern logic; it has also been taken over, with remarkable unanimity, into the standard descriptive grammars of ancient Greek. Although the distinction was almost a new one for Mill, it has now become traditional.<sup>2</sup> I shall not question the use of this distinction in logic, but I have very grave doubts about its appropriateness in Greek grammar. For one thing, there is the practical difficulty of applying Mill's dichotomy. I can find no evidence for such a distinction in the usage of the classical authors, who pass blithely back and forth between uses which we might identify as existential and copulative. I have seen exegetes frowning their brow over the question whether Plato in a given passage of the Sophist means us to take einai in the existential or the copulative sense, whereas in fact he shows no sign of wishing to confront us with any such choice.

But there is a graver theoretical disadvantage in the traditional dichotomy between the existential and the predicative uses of "to be". It confounds a genuine syntactic distinction - between the absolute and predicative constructions of the verb - with a further semantic contrast between the meaning "to exist" and some other meaning or absence of meaning. This fusion of a syntactic and a semantic criterion into a single antithesis could be justified only if

there were a direct correlation between the two, i.e. only if (1) the absolute use of the verb is always existential in meaning, and (2) the verb "to be" in the predicative construction is always devoid of meaning, serving as a merely formal or grammatical device for linking the predicate with the subject. But these assumptions seem to me dubious for English, and false for Greek. In English the existential idea is expressed by the special locution "there is" and not by the verb "to be" alone; there seems to be no idiomatic use of the absolute construction of "to be" at all. A sentence like "I think therefore I am" is possible only in philosophy. To the disappearance of the absolute construction corresponds the universal prevalence of the copulative use of "to be", which is required with all predicates other than finite verbs. In historical terms, one can say that the rule that every sentence must have a finite verb has resulted in such a great expansion of the predicative use of "to be" that the original, semantically fuller use of the verb has been obscured or lost, and really survives only in the isolated locution "there is". But this decay of the absolute usage in most modern languages may give us a false idea of the original range and force of the verb. In Greek, by contrast, where the absolute construction of "to be" is in full vigor, it does not necessarily mean "to exist" (as we shall see). On the other hand, since non-verbal predicates in Greek do not automatically require a copulative esti, the tendency towards a purely formal use of the verb, devoid of semantic content, is not as far advanced. Because the predicative verb is never obligatory, it may be used with a certain variety of semantic nuances.

My position, then, is that Mill's dichotomy is applicable to Greek only as a syntactic distinction between the absolute and the predicative construction, and that even from the point of view of syntax the distinction is not as easy to define as one might suppose. But semantically the distinction is worse than useless, for it leads us to take the idea of existence for granted as the basic meaning of the Greek verb. Now if by a word for existence one means simply an expression which we would normally render into English by "there is", then it is clear that the Greek verb esti often has this sense. But if existence is accepted as it usually is, as a fundamental philosophic concept, distinguished on the one hand from essence or from predicative attributes or from a propositional function such as  $F(x)$ , and conceived on the other hand as the positive feature whose negative antithesis is nothingness or nonentity or the null set, then I would be inclined to deny that this modern notion of existence can be taken for granted as a basis for understanding the meaning of the Greek verb. On the contrary, I suggest that a more careful analysis of the Greek notion of Being might provoke us into some second thoughts about the clarity and self-evidence of our familiar concept of existence.

Let me cite some evidence for what may seem the rather scandalous claim that the Greeks did not have our notion of existence. In the chapter of his philosophical lexicon which is devoted to the topic "being" or "what is", to on (Met. Delta 7), Aristotle distinguishes four basic senses of "to be" in Greek:

1. being per accidens, or random predication (i.e. "X is Y", without regard to the logical status of subject and predicate).
2. being per se, or predication in good logical form according to the scheme of the categories (e.g., when a quality is predicated of a substance). Here einai is said to have as many senses as there are categories, and Aristotle points out that a con-

struction with "to be" may be substituted for any finite verb, e.g., "he is walking" for "he walks".

3. einai and esti may mean "is true", and the negative means "is false". An example is "Socrates is musical", if one says this (with emphasis) because it is true.
4. Finally, "being" may mean either being in potency or being in act. "For we say that something is seeing both when it is potentially seeing (capable of sight) and when it is actually seeing."

Aristotle's procedure here is not purely lexical: he is analyzing ordinary usage in the light of his philosophical conceptions. But my point is that neither Aristotle's own conceptual scheme nor the normal usage of the verb obliges him to make any place for a sense of einai which we would recognize as distinctively existential. Furthermore, in every one of Aristotle's examples the verb is construed as predicative, although the general topic for the chapter is given in the absolute form, "what is".<sup>3</sup> The syntactic distinction between predicative and absolute construction is treated here as of no consequence whatever.

As a second illustration of the gap between Greek "being" and our notion of existence, I take the famous opening sentence from Protagoras' work On Truth: "Man is the measure of all things, of what is, that it is, of what is not, that it is not" (tōn ontōn hōs esti, tōn mē ontōn hōs ouk esti). This is as significant and emphatic a use of the verb as Greek can offer. Since the construction is absolute, we might be inclined to interpret the verb as existential here. But there are two difficulties in the way of such an interpretation. In the first place, Protagoras clearly intends to make men the measure of all things, i.e., of all matters of fact or alleged fact, not merely of questions of existence. His statement is more appropriate as the opening sentence of a work on truth if we give the verb a very general sense: "man is the measure of what is the case, that it is the case, and of what is not so, that it is not so." The second objection to understanding the verb as existential here is that Plato, when he quotes this dictum in the Theaetetus, immediately goes on to explain it by means of the predicative construction: "as each thing seems to me, such is it for me; as it seems to you, such is it for you" (hoia emoi phainetai, toiauta estin emoi). And he illustrates by the example of a wind which is cold for one man, but not for another. Unless Plato is radically misrepresenting Protagoras (which is at least unlikely), Protagoras himself must have intended his dictum to apply to facts stated in the predicative, and not merely in the existential form. Even if Plato were misinterpreting Protagoras, his interpretation would show that for a Greek philosopher, the meaning of a strong use of einai in the absolute construction is not necessarily existential. Plato's exegesis becomes entirely natural and intelligible if we understand the absolute use of einai as I have suggested: as an affirmation of fact in general, as "what is so" or "what is the case". The existential use, e.g. for an affirmation such as "there are atoms and the void", would then be included as a special case of the general factual assertion intended by Protagoras' statement hōs esti. If man is the measure of all things, "that they are so or not so", then he is the measure of the existence or nonexistence of atoms just as he is the measure of the being-cold or not-being-cold of the wind.

These remarks are intended to render plausible my claim that, for the philosophical usage of the verb, the most fundamental value of einai when used alone (without predicates) is not "to exist" but "to be so", "to be the case", or "to be true". It is worth noting that this meaning of the verb, which appears among the four uses listed in the chapter of Met. Delta summarized above (where

Aristotle recognizes the sense of truth even in the predicative construction, when esti appears in the emphatic initial position, 1017A 33-35) is later described by Aristotle as the "strictest" or "most authoritative" sense of "to be" (Met. Theta 10, 1051B 1: to kuriōtata on). Recent editors, notably Ross and Jaeger, are unhappy about this statement, and would like to "emend" it in various ways. My argument suggests that they are wrong, and that the text is entirely in order. I understand Aristotle to be saying that, from a philosophic point of view, this use of einai is the most basic and the most literal meaning of the verb.

In any case, quite apart from the question of philosophic usage, there is absolutely no doubt that this meaning of "to be" (namely "to be so, to be true") is one of the oldest idiomatic uses of the verb in Greek, and indeed in Indo-European. In particular, the present participle \*sont- of the I.-E. verb \*es -- forms one of the standard expressions for truth, or for what is the case, in many different languages. A derivative of this participle still serves as the normal word for "true" and "truth" in languages so far apart as Norwegian (san and sant) and Hindi (sat, satya).<sup>4</sup> In English we have a cognate form of this old I.-E. participle of "to be" in "sooth", "soothsayer". When Gulliver's Houyhnhms call a lie "saying the thing which is not," they are not only speaking classic Greek (as Swift no doubt knew) but they are also speaking authentic Indo-European (which he could scarcely have guessed).

In Greek, this I.-E. idiom is represented in Attic by the frozen use of the participle in the dative, tōi onti, "really, truly", by the equivalent adverbial form ontōs, and by the absolute use of the finite verb in esti tauta, "these things are so", -- one of the standard formulae of assent in the Platonic dialogues. The free use of the participle in this sense also occurs in Attic, but it is more characteristic of Ionic prose (as in the fragment of Protagoras). The fullest evidence is in Herodotus, where Powell's Lexicon lists ten instances of the idiom. For example, when Croesus asks Solon who is the happiest of mortals, the wise Athenian refuses to flatter the king but tōi onti chrēsamenos, "using verity" -- sticking to the truth -- he answered: Tellus of Athens (Hdt.I.30.3).

Much more evidence might be cited, but this should suffice to show that the old I.-E. use of \*es- for "to be true, to be so" is well preserved in Greek, and particularly in Ionic, the dialect in which the language of Greek philosophy first took shape. Some of the implications of this fact may be suggested if we briefly consider the possibility of interpreting the "being" (eon) of Parmenides in this sense. His initial thesis, that the path of truth, conviction, and knowledge is the path of "what is" or "that it is" (hōs esti), can then be understood as a claim that knowledge, true belief, and true statement are all inseparably linked to "what is so" -- not merely to what exists but to what is the case. If we understand the verb and participle here as in Herodotus and Protagoras, Parmenides' doctrine of Being is first and foremost a doctrine concerning reality as what is the case. But if this is a valid interpretation, the familiar charge against Parmenides -- that he confused the existential and the predicative sense of "to be" -- is entirely beside the point. For as we saw in connection with Protagoras, both the existential and the predicative uses of the verb are special cases of the generalized usage for truth and falsity, for affirmation and denial.

Of course it may still be true that Parmenides' argument contains a fallacy of equivocation. But the task of an interpreter is to show precisely what sense of einai the philosopher begins with, and how he inadvertently passes

to another. This task is a delicate one, and it must not be short-circuited by introducing the modern dichotomy between existence and predication as a prefabricated solution.

Before leaving this first, most general sense of einai -- which I will refer to as the sense of verity or the veridical usage -- I would call attention to two points. The first is the close logical connection between this usage and the grammatical function of the verb in predication. For every fact, every case of being-so, can be formulated by a predicative usage of "to be" (even if this formulation happens to be logically misleading, as in a predication of existence: e.g., "John is existent"). Without this unlimited flexibility of the predicative construction, it is hard to see how the verb einai could ever have acquired its very general sense of "to be so". Furthermore, any predication in the indicative normally implies an assertion, and an assertion means a claim to truth. Hence, although I have denied that the predicative use of einai forms a distinct pole in a basic dichotomy of usage, I do not mean to deny the fundamental role played by this construction in the total meaning of the verb, and most particularly in the sense of verity.

The second point I wish to make about the veridical usage is its essential ambiguity. "To be true" is not quite the same thing as "to be the case". What is true or false is normally a statement made in words; what is the case or not the case is a fact or situation in the world. The veridical use of einai may mean either one (or both), just as our own idiom "it is so" may refer either to a statement or to the fact stated. Now there is a one-to-one correspondence, or rather a relationship of mutual implication, between what is the case and the true of the statement that it is the case. The statement that the door is open is true if and only if the door is in fact open. This logical equivalence of truth and fact is no doubt the unconscious basis of the ambiguity of usage of ta onta in an expression like legein ta onta, which we may translate either as "to tell the truth" or "to state the facts" (although the second rendering is the more literal). In an expression like ho eön logos in Herodotus, however, we can only render the phrase as "the true account". But of course the account is true precisely because it states the facts as they are; because it says what is the case. Because of this necessary connection between truth and fact, no confusion normally results from the ambiguity in the veridical use of einai. But this ambiguity may nevertheless turn out to be of considerable importance in understanding the relationship between language and reality which the Greek philosophers take for granted. The relationship which this ambiguity reflects seems to me to play a fundamental role both in Plato's doctrine of Forms and in Aristotle's notion of essence (to ti ên einai). It is not irrelevant to recall that Plato's description of the Forms as ta ontos onta may be rendered equally well as "what is truly true" or "what is really real". The language of Greek ontology naturally lends itself to the view that the structure of reality is such as to be truly expressed in discourse. For the Greek concept of truth is precisely this: ta onta legein hōs esti, ta mē onta hos mē esti, to say of the things that are (the case) that they are, and of the things that are not that they are not.<sup>5</sup>

I said earlier in criticism of Mill's dichotomy, that the absolute construction of einai is not necessarily existential in meaning. This claim has now been vindicated by our discussion of the veridical sense of the verb. For although this sense is quite distinct from the meaning "to exist", it is normally expressed by the absolute construction. Of course it may be found in the predicative construction as well. Consider Aristotle's example: esti Sokratēs mousikos, Socrates is musical, he really is so. This sense of verity

is actually implicit in every assertion, latent in every predicative use of "to be" for a statement of fact. (That is why some philosophers claim that to say of a statement that it is true is simply to make the statement over again.) But in any given sentence, the latent veridical value of "to be" may be brought out by emphasis, or by an unusual position early in the clause (as in Aristotle's example). A moment's reflection will show that this is to some extent true even for the English verb "to be". If we emphasize the verb in pronunciation we bring to light a veridical value which otherwise passes unnoticed: "the man is clever, I tell you!" A similar effect is obtained by contrasting "the man is clever" with "the man seems clever". We may here leave open the question of whether this veridical value of the English verb could be considered part of its proper meaning, or whether it accrues to the predicative verb simply in virtue of the truth claim implicit in any predication in the indicative. There is at all events an intimate connection between the predicative usage and the sense of verity, as I have already observed. But if the veridical value of "to be" is almost never called to our attention in English, that is not the case for the predicative construction in Greek, where an emphatic use of the verb in this sense is often indicated by an unusual position, or even by repetition.<sup>5</sup> When we recall that the usual formula for truth is absolute in form (as in to on or esti tauta), we see that here is one fundamental semantic value of einai which is quite indifferent to the syntactic distinction between absolute and predicative construction.

In the remainder of this paper I will discuss two other features of the use and meaning of einai whose philosophical role is not as basic as that of the veridical sense which has concerned us thus far, but which nevertheless throw some interesting light on the development of Greek ontology. The first feature is what is known in comparative linguistics as the durative aspect. The second feature has not been generally noticed and seems to have no definite name. I shall call it the locative value of the verb.

A. The durative aspect. Since the time<sup>of</sup> Meillet it has been well known to linguists (though, unfortunately, not always to Hellenists) that the stems of a Greek verb are characterized by a sharp aspectual contrast between the present-imperfect, the aorist, and the perfect. This aspectual distinction is to a large extent independent of tense, since both present and past-imperfect tenses are formed from the "present" stem, and the same temporal opposition occurs between perfect and pluperfect, again without change of stem. The aorist in turn is not necessarily a past tense, not even in the indicative (cf. the so-called "gnomic aorist"). The difference of verbal stem corresponds to a difference in the point of view from which the action or state is considered: the present-imperfect stem represents action as durative, as a state which lasts or a process which develops in time; the aorist represents the action, by antithesis, as nondurative, either as the process pure and simple without regard to time (the unmarked aspect), or at the moment of reaching its end (the "punctual" aorist). The perfect represents not the process itself but rather a present state resulting from past action.<sup>7</sup>

Most Greek verbs possess all three of these stems, or at least two; but the verb einai is one of a rather small class of verbs which have no aorist and no perfect.<sup>8</sup> All tenses of einai (present, imperfect, and future) are formed directly from the single, present-durative stem. The absence of an aorist stem is a feature which einai inherited from its Indo-European ancestor \*es-. But whereas the aspectual restriction has been faithfully preserved in Greek down to the present day (so that the modern Greek verb eimai "to be" has no aorist and no perfect), in most languages the conjugation of \*es- has



been completed by introducing aorist or perfect forms from a different verbal root. Thus Latin incorporated fui, futurum into the system of esse, just as English acquired be, been from the same root, and was, were from another source (cf. German war, gewesen). As a result, the verb "to be" in these languages has lost (or at any rate gravely weakened) the aspectual value which characterized the I.-E. stem \*es-, whereas the Greek verb einai, has faithfully preserved, or even strengthened, its durative character.

What is the philosophic significance of this morpho-semantic fact? I think it may help us to understand (1) the Greek notion of eternity as a stable present, an untroubled state of duration, (2) the classical antithesis of Being and Becoming, and (3) the incommensurability already noted between the Greek concept of being and the modern-medieval notion of existence.

Let me illustrate these points briefly. (1) The gods in Homer and Hesiod are theoi aien ontes, "the gods who are forever." In this and in a whole set of related uses, einai has practically the sense "to be alive, to survive". The gods are forever because they are deathless beings: their vital duration continues without end. Now, strictly speaking, the gods are not eternal. As the Theogony informs us in some detail, they have all been born: their vital duration had a temporal beginning. It is the philosophers who introduce an absolute archē or Beginning which is itself unbegun, a permanent and ungenerated source of generation. The initiator here is probably Anaximander, but we can see the result more clearly in the poem of Parmenides. His being is forever in the strong sense: it is ungenerated (agenēton) as well as unperishing (anōlethron). Limited neither by birth nor by death, the duration of What is replaces and transcends the unending survival which characterized the Olympian gods.

(2) Parmenides was also the first to exploit the durative connotations of einai by a systematic contrast with gignesthai, the verb which normally provides an aorist for einai, and which expresses the developmental idea of birth, of achieving a new state, of emerging as novelty or as event. In Parmenides as in Plato, the durative-present aspect of einai thus provides the linguistic underpinning for the antithesis in which Being is opposed to Becoming as stability to flux.<sup>9</sup>

(3) This intrinsically stable and lasting character of Being in Greek -- which makes it so appropriate as the object of knowing and the correlative of truth -- distinguishes it in a radical way from our modern notion of existence, insofar as the latter has preserved any of the original semantic flavor of Latin existere. For the aspectual features of the Latin verb are entirely discrepant with those of einai, and actually closer to gignesthai. Etymologically existere suggests a standing-out or a stepping forth, a coming-into-being, an emergence out of a dark background into the light of day. The linguistic structure of the verb reinforces this idea, since the preverb ex- implies the completion of a process while the aspect of the reduplicated present is punctual rather than durative (in contrast to stare).<sup>10</sup> Instead of an antithesis to Becoming, existentia provides as it were the perfect of gignesthai: the state achieved as a result of the process of coming-to-be. And in fact the sense of existence was originally acquired by the verb in the perfect: the existent was conceived literally as "what has emerged", id quod exstitit.<sup>11</sup> Now what has emerged into the light of day is in a sense the contingent, what might not have emerged and what might easily disappear once more. Under the influence of the Biblical notion of Creation, and the radical distinction between essence and existence which follows from it in the medieval

doctrine of created beings, these linguistic connotations of existentia were preserved and developed at the theoretical level in the concept of a state of being which is intrinsically provisional and precarious, hovering on the verge of nothingness.<sup>12</sup> These connotations have even survived the separation from Biblical theology and the translation into German, as one can see from Heidegger's account of Dasein as a foundationless Geworfenheit, a state of being thrown where one has no place to stand.

The connotations of enduring stability which are inseparable from the meaning of einai thus serve to distinguish the Greek concept of Being from certain features of the modern notion of existence. The final point in our analysis of this meaning will help to bring the two notions together.

B. The locative value of the verb "to be". In considering what one may loosely call the expression for existence in a number of non-Indo-European languages -- that is, the expression which serves to translate "there is..." or il y a -- I was struck by the fact that many (though not all) such expressions involve some allusion to place or location. Thus in the African dialect Ewe the verb where renders "there is" or "exists" means literally "to be somewhere, to be present". In Turkish var and yok mean "there is" and "there is not", respectively, but var is also used for statements of place and yok for absence. Now in Indo-European the situation is often comparable. Not only is existere itself a spatial metaphor, vaguely implying some local context, but expressions like "there is" and "il y a" make explicit use of the adverb for definite place. It is interesting that in European languages where the old I.-E. \*es- has been preserved in the expression of existence, it has retained its ancient existential force by the addition of such a local adverb: English "there is"; Italian c'è, ci sono; German dasein. And in Russian, where the archaic forms yest and niet (from \*es-) serve by themselves for "there is" and "there is not", they also may mean "is present" and "is not here". Our words "present" and "absent" themselves reflect the old locative use of the verb, derived as they are from the obsolete participle of sum which survives in historical Latin only in these forms: ab-sens, prae-sens. The corresponding I.-E. idiom is well represented in Greek: apesti, paresti.

Thus einai is quite normally used for "to be somewhere" (with the place specified by an adverbial word or phrase), to be in the presence of, or remote from, some definite point of reference. This usual dichotomy between the existential and the predicative usage of the verb would require us to treat this locative use of the verb as merely "copulative". For the traditional doctrine assimilates the adverbial expression of place to a nominal predicate: it treats "John is in the garden" as if it were syntactically parallel to "John is a gardener". But this assimilation, like the dichotomy on which it is based, seems to me radically mistaken. For grammatical and philological reasons which cannot be fully presented here, I am inclined to regard the locative as a distinct and fundamental use of "to be", from which the truly copulative use (with predicate nouns and adjectives) might itself be derived. But regardless of whether or not the locative use is more fundamental than the predicative, I would insist that it is closer in meaning to what is usually called the existential sense of the verb. So intimate is the link between these two uses that I would myself prefer to speak in hyphenated terms of the existential-locative sense. For example, nearly all of the uses of the verb in Homer which we would recognize as existential are at the same time statements of place, and it might be urged that the distinctly existential value of the verb derives merely from its emphatic position in the sentence.<sup>13</sup> On this view, a statement of existence is as it were an emphatic (or in some cases a vague and generalized) statement of place: "there is an X" means "here, there, or somewhere in the

world is an X".

The importance of the locative associations of einai for an understanding of the ordinary existential use of the verb may be a matter on which philologists will disagree. But I think there can be no disagreement on the close connection between the ideas of existence and location in Greek philosophical thought. We have from Presocratic times the well-established axiom that whatever is, is somewhere; what is nowhere is nothing.<sup>14</sup> As Plato puts it (stating not his own view, but that of Greek common sense), "we say that what is neither on earth nor anywhere in heaven is nothing at all" (Tim. 52B). If existence and location are not identical in Greek thought, they are at least logically equivalent, for they imply one another. That is, they do for the average man, and for the philosophers before Plato. Hence the nous of Anaxagoras, which is as spiritual or "mental" a power as he could conceive, is nonetheless thought of as located in place, namely in the same place "where everything else is" (fr. 14). The principle of Love for Empedocles is an invisible force of attraction and a general law of combination by rational proportion, but it is also to be found "swirling among" the other elements, "equal to them in length and breadth" (fr. 17, 20-25). Even the Being of Parmenides, the most metaphysical concept in Presocratic thought, is compared to a sphere, and conceived as a solid mass extending equally in all directions. It is not merely that Greek thought was instinctively concrete: the very notion of being had local connotations. And so Plato, when for the first time he clearly introduced non-spatial entities into a philosophical theory, was careful to situate his new Forms in a new kind of place. What we are in the habit of calling the "intelligible world" is presented by Plato quite literally as an intelligible region or place, the noētos topos, conceived by analogy with the region known to sense-experience, but sharply contrasted with it, in order to serve as the setting for Plato's radically new view of Being.

How did the new view of Being arise? There could be many answers to this question. I would like to end by suggesting one which may at the same time serve as a summary of the main points I have tried to make.

We began by admitting with Aristotle and Mill that "to be" is not univocal, and that any doctrine of Being is obliged to reckon with a plurality of senses. Furthermore, the range of meaning of einai in Greek is likely to be wider and richer than that of the corresponding verb in any other language -- and certainly richer than the verb "to be" in most modern languages. For that very reason, the traditional dichotomy between the existential and the predicative use of the verb would have to be rejected for Greek as a hopeless oversimplification, even if it were not vitiated from the start by the confusion between a syntactic and a semantic criterion. The syntactic distinction between the absolute and predicative constructions is a problem for grammarians, and perhaps a difficult one. But I do not see that it is of any great importance for an understanding of the philosophic usage.<sup>15</sup> Even more negligible is the question of the omission of the verb esti, which is sometimes regarded as a characteristic feature of the copulative construction. (In fact the omission of the verb seems to be a purely stylistic feature, dictated by considerations of elegance or economy, and with no necessary relation to the syntax or meaning of the verb. The view that the predicative verb may be omitted, the existential not, is a pure myth. Democritus' famous statement in fr. 19, "by custom (nomos) there is sweet, by custom bitter, by custom hot, by custom color, but in reality there are atoms and the void," is the very model of an existential assertion, but the verb "to be" is omitted in every clause, including the last).

What I have tried to do, then, is to clarify the semantic content and

diversity of einai by concentrating on three features which are often neglected, and which are largely indifferent to the syntactic variation between absolute and predicative construction. These three features -- which I call the veridical, the durative, and the locative (or locative-existential) values of einai -- although they do not directly account for every particular usage of the verb, seem to point to what is most fundamental for its use in philosophy. The durative aspect, being inseparable from the stem, colors every use of the verb, including every philosophical use. Whatever the real entities are for a philosopher, these are the entities which endure. The locative connotation, suggesting as it does a concretely spatial and even bodily view of what is, inclines Greek philosophy towards a conception of reality as corporeal. This fundamental corporealism (which in Greek thought is not necessarily materialistic, but is compatible with hylozoism or even with panpsychism) is a persistent trend in Presocratic philosophy, as we have noted; it is not altogether absent from Aristotle; and it asserts itself with equal force in the rival Hellenistic cosmologies of the Stoics and the Epicureans. (It was still alive in the gnostic view of God from which St. Augustine struggled to free himself). To claim that the Greek view of reality was so persistently corporeal because their verb "to be" had local connotations would no doubt be an exaggeration. But the two facts are related, and the relationship may be illuminating in both directions.

Neither the locative nor the durative values of einai, however, explain the peculiarly momentous role of this term in the development of Western philosophy. Local concreteness and stable duration account for certain characteristic features of the Greek concept of Being; they do not account for the concept itself. In order to understand what Being means for Plato, for Plotinus, and for Aristotle in the Metaphysics, we must above all bear in mind the double sense of verity and fact which I emphasized in the first part of my paper. Being for these philosophers as for Parmenides means what is or can be truly known and truly said. To on is first and foremost the object of true knowledge and the basis or the correlative of true speech. It is by reference to these two terms, epistēmē and logos, that the philosophical concept of Being has its unity and its importance. Thus for Plato, the stable realm of Being is the proper object of knowledge as Becoming is of true opinion.<sup>16</sup> And it is in virtue of this relationship to knowing, and to the parallel concept of noein, that Plato is able to introduce a range of entities which are not bodily and not located in space.

The entities which populate Plato's noētos topos are usually interpreted as universal terms. But if "term" means "noun", it is clear that the Forms must be more than that, if their mingling and interconnection is to make discourse possible (Sophist 259E). Without entering upon an exegesis of the theory of Forms, I would like to suggest that the Forms could be thought of as "predicates" in Quine's sense, not as terms alone but terms-plus-copula: not as Justice, for example, but as being-just. Whatever else it means for an individual thing to participate in a Form, it certainly means that the Form is truly predicated of it, or in Quine's terminology that the Form as predicate is true of that particular thing. This is perhaps what Plato has in mind when he says that all Forms share in to on (Soph. 256E): they share in Being not simply as existent realities but as being-so in some determinate way, as being-what-they-are. (Here and throughout the Sophist, Cornford's rendering of the strong or absolute use of einai as "existence" seems to me systematically misleading). The being of the Forms so understood also makes better sense of Aristotle's to ti ēn einai, a strange formula which he never feels called upon to explain. The formula means quite literally a thing's being-what-it-is, not merely the content or character of what it is (to ti esti),

but its being determinately so, as a man or a dog or a triangle.

The Forms of Plato and the essences of Aristotle are certainly not propositional in character, but they might thus be compared to open sentences, with an unfilled place for the subject. Even this comparison is far from satisfactory (since neither Form nor essence is a linguistic entity), and it is put forward with all the diffidence it deserves. What I mean to suggest is that Form and essence should be understood as proposition-like or proposition-generating. And even if this turned out to be false for the special doctrines of Form and essence, my main contention here would not be affected. For my contention is, first, that the terms on and onta are normally and idiomatically used for facts of a propositional structure; and, second, that just as to eon in Herodotus regularly constitutes the object of a verb of knowing or saying, so "being" enters philosophy as the object of knowledge and true speech. Now it is only natural for the object of knowing to be conceived of after the pattern of propositions, for what can be known and truly stated is what is the case: a fact, situation, or relationship, not a particular thing or "object" as such. The chief discrepancy between the Greek concept of Being and the modern notion of existence lies precisely here, for we normally assign existence not to facts or propositions or relations, but to discrete particulars: to creatures, persons, or things.

Of course the Greek use of einai for localized existence tends to blur this distinction, since what is somewhere is normally an individual entity, precisely the kind of thing to which the modern notion of existence applies. When what is is used in this locative sense, it inevitably tends to be conceived as thing-like rather than as fact-like. It is not so much that the Greeks lack our notion of existence, as that they lack our sense of its distinctness from essence or from the being-so of fact and predication. This is true not only for the metaphysicians, but also (as we saw) for a philosopher of common sense like Protagoras.

To put the matter in a nutshell, the ontological vocabulary of the Greeks led them to treat the existence of things and persons as a special case of the Bestehen von Sachverhalte. It is remarkable that not only onta but every other Greek word for "fact" can also mean "thing", and vice versa. (Cf. chrēmata = pragmata in the fragment of Protagoras; ergon in the contrast with logos: "in fact" and "in word" gegonota as the perfect of onta, etc.) This failure on the part of the Greeks (at least before the Stoics) to make a systematic distinction between fact and thing underlies the more superficial and inaccurate charge that they confused the "to be" of predication with that of existence.

It may be thought that the neglect of such a distinction constitutes a serious shortcoming in Greek philosophy of the classical period. But it was precisely this indiscriminate use of einai and on which permitted the metaphysicians to state the problem of truth and reality in its most general form, to treat matters of fact and existence concerning the physical world as only a part of the problem (or as one of the possible answers), and to ask the ontological question itself: What is Being? that is, What is the object of true knowledge, the basis for true speech? If this is a question worth asking, then the ontological vocabulary of the Greeks, which permitted and encouraged them to ask it, must be regarded as a distinct philosophical asset.

## NOTES

- 1 Of course both languages do have devices for making these distinctions, but they depend upon the use of definite and indefinite articles rather than upon that of the verb. And Greek is notably freer than English in the use (and omission) of both articles.
- 2 Mill believed that his father was "the first who distinctly characterized the ambiguity" (loc. cit.). See also the younger Mill's comments in the second edition of James Mill's Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind (1869), I, 182 n. 54.
- 3 How could the existential sense be fitted into Aristotle's analysis? There are two possibilities: 1) in the categorical use for primary substances, which "are" in the most fundamental sense, and 2) in the use of einai for potency and act. But the category of substance is actually referred to by a formula for "essence": ti esti (1017A 25), whereas the potency-act distinction can apply to any type of predication. One of the examples of potency is locational, and this approximates to our existential, as will be seen below: "the statue of Hermes is (potentially) in the stone" (1017B 7).

The modern distinction between copula and verb of existence is really quite irrelevant to the analysis of Met. Delta 7. But there are other passages in Aristotle which would require more careful study in this connection. For example, Aristotle (like Plato before him) recognizes the possibility of sophistic fallacy involved in shifting from the predicative to the absolute construction, from einai ti to haplōs einai (Soph. El. 167A 2; DeInt. 21A 18-28; cf. Met. 1030A 25-27). This led Grote to claim that Aristotle had anticipated Mill's discovery of "the two distinct functions of the substantive verb"; see his Aristotle (3rd ed. London, 1883). Since I hold Mill's distinction to be erroneous (at least for Greek), I am not inclined to claim it for Aristotle. It remains to be seen whether haplōs einai is adequately rendered as "to exist".

The medieval-modern concept of the copula has its historical roots in De Int. 16B 22-25 and 19B 19-22, but I do not believe that our copula is what Aristotle himself had in mind. Again, further discussion is called for.

The medieval distinction between essence and existence goes back to Post.An. II. 1. For this question, see below, n. 15.

- 4 See H. Frisk, "Wahrheit" und "Lüge" in den indogermanischen Sprachen, Göteborgs Hogskolas Arsskrift xli. 3 (1935), 4 ff.
- 5 Plato, Cratylus 385B 7, Sophist 263B; cf. Aristotle, Met. 1011B 27. The formula is implicit in Parmenides, and explicit in the fragment of Protagoras quoted above.
- 6 An extreme case, where repetition and initial position combine to turn the "mere copula" into a strong asseveration of truth, is Euripides. I.T. 721f.  

ἀλλ' ἔστιν, ἔστιν ἡ δίκην εὐσπλαγξίᾳ  
λίαν εἰσεῶσα μετὰ βολῆς, ὅταν τύχῃ.
- 7 See, e.g. Meillet, Introduction à l'étude comparative... (8th ed., 1937), pp. 195-97.

8 Meillet-Vendryès, Traité de grammaire comparée (1st. ed. 1924), p. 169, #270.

9. E.g. Theaet. 152D γίγνεται πάντα ἃ εἴ φαμεν εἶναι, οὐκ ὁρθῶς προσαγορεύοντες· ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτε οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίγνεται.

10. See Meillet-Vendryès, #275.

11 See Thesaurus Linguae Latinae V<sup>2</sup>, p. 1873,31. For the beginnings of the usage, see A. Ernout, "Exsto et les composés latins en ex-", Bull. société linguistique de Paris I (1954), 18. The aspectual contrast between esse and existere is partially preserved in the Spanish distinction between ser and estar.

12 I must here leave open the question of the influence of Arabic vocabulary upon the medieval distinction between essence and existence. It is certainly of great importance that the Arabs rendered to on and to einai by passive forms of the verb "to find" (W J D), so that "what is" in Greek becomes "what is found" (= "what exists") in Arabic. Since to find is to locate, or discover the place of, the idiom reorients "being" in the locative-existential sense. (Cf. the parallel French idiom se trouver). See the excellent remarks of A.C. Graham, "'Being' in Linguistics and Philosophy", Foundations of Language I (1965), 226-227. If a full history of the concept of existence is ever undertaken, it would also be important to study the use of ὑπάρχω, ὑπαρῆς from the Stoics on.

13 The standard cases involve initial position for the verb:

ἔστι πόλις Ἐφύρη μὲν Ἄργεος ἱππερότατο (Il. 6.152).  
ἔστι δὲ τις πόλις Μινυήτιος εἰς ἄλλα βάλλων ἔγχυθεν Ἀρήνης, ἔβη μείναμεν ἠὲ δῖαν (Il. 11.722).

A less emphatic, but still unusual position:

κρήτη τις γὰρ ἔστι, μέση ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πάντω (Od 19.172)

14 See Gorgias B.3.70, Diels-Kranz II, 280,26; the principle seems to have been used earlier by Zeno (D.-K. 29 A 24, Arist. Phys. 209A 4). See also Phys 208A 29, B 29 ff. (where it is traced back to Hesiod).

15 The one important philosophic doctrine which seems to turn on the syntactic distinction is Aristotle's separation of the questions ei esti and ti esti in Post.An. II,1. The question is too large for discussion here. The

fullest treatment is in S. Mansion, Le jugement d'existence chez Aristote (1946), who notes that Aristotle assigns no definite sense to the existence of a thing considered apart from its essence (p. 243; cf. 260-265).

16 Republic V 478A-E. Cf. Timaeus 28A-C2.