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Establishing a Three-Axis Eight-Position Framework in Plato's Ontology and Epistemology

Abstract

Plato's account of *becoming* can be mapped onto three intersecting axes – temporal status, ontological activity, and epistemic stance – yielding an eight-position framework. The *Temporal Axis* differentiates four states: (1) "what is" (present being), (2) "what was" (past), (3) "what will be" (future), and (4) "what is not" (non-being). The *Ontological Axis* distinguishes **Active** modes of being (dynamic, generative, or causal processes) from **Passive** modes (completed, static outcomes or residual states). The *Epistemic Axis* tracks the soul's role: **Active synthesis**, wherein reason organizes and judges phenomena, versus **Passive reception**, wherein the soul simply receives impressions. Combining these axes, we identify eight ontological-cognitive positions that describe how each temporal state is constituted and cognized. This report defines each axis philosophically and philologically, examines Platonic texts (Theaetetus 186a–b, Timaeus 37e–38b, Parmenides 155b–d) for linguistic evidence (e.g. *γεγονώς, διακοσμοῦν, συλλογισμός, μὴ ὄν*), and presents the eightfold schema. We then test the framework against Plato's metaphysics – showing it aligns with his view of a rationally ordered cosmos of becoming distinct from eternal being – and explore how the soul's active and passive cognitive operations extend even to "non-being," as demonstrated in the Parmenides.

1. Axis Clarification

1.1 Philosophical Definition of Each Axis:
- **Temporal Axis (Present/Past/Future/Non-Being):** Plato divides the realm of becoming by time. In the *Timaeus* (37e–38a), he explains that with the creation of the cosmos came the creation of time – past and future arose as "parts" or forms of time, whereas eternal being knows only an unchanging present [1] [2]. Thus "what *is*" (present) stands apart from "what *was*" and "what *will be*," and even "what *is not*" is given a sort of logical space in discourse [3]. Each denotes a mode of temporal being: the *ongoing present*, the *fixed past (having-become)*, the *unrealized future (going-to-be)*, and *negation or absence*. Plato explicitly notes that we improperly project past and future onto eternal reality – we say of the eternal "it was" or "it will be," but strictly **"is" alone applies to eternal being**, while "was" and "will be" apply only to that which *becomes in time* [1]. (In Greek, *to` t' ἦν* and *to` t' ἔσται* are "the was" and "the will be," which he calls "generated forms of time" [4].) Even "what is not" (*τὸ μὴ ὄν*) can be spoken of as a category – for example, Timaeus says we inaccurately speak of "the non-existent *being* non-existent" [5], acknowledging *μὴ ὄν* as a thinkable *placeholder* for absence or negation (more on this below). In sum, the Temporal Axis sets the stage with four slots: Present, Past, Future, and Non-Being.

  • **Ontological Activity Axis (Active vs. Passive Being):** This axis distinguishes **active, dynamic ontological processes** from **passive, static states** of being. An *Active* mode means something is in the act of bringing about or organizing reality; it corresponds to generation, motion, or causal efficacy. A *Passive* mode means a state of completion, rest, or result of prior activity. For example, in the *Timaeus* the Demiurge "set in order" time alongside the heavens – *διακοσμῶν ἅμα οὐρανὸν... χρόνον ποιεῖ* ("while ordering the heaven, he makes time") [6]. Here *διακοσμοῦν* ("arranging," from

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διακοσμέω) is an active, generative participation in being – the cosmos' present is actively being structured as a moving image of eternity. By contrast, Plato often uses the perfect participle *γεγονώς* (from *γίγνομαι*, "to become") to denote a completed state of having-become – a **passive** result. In *Timaeus* 37e, for instance, he says τὸ τ' ἦν τὸ τ' ἔσται χρόνου γεγονότα εἴδη, "the 'was' and the 'will be' are *generated forms* (γεγονότα εἴδη) of time" [4] . *Γεγονός* (neuter pl. *γεγονότα*) literally means "having come-to-be" – implying a finished outcome. Philosophically, then, every temporal state can be seen as either an ongoing action or a completed fact. *Active ontological* positions capture *becoming-as-activity* (e.g. the cosmos being actively ordered, a cause presently at work, a process of change), while *Passive ontological* positions capture *becoming-as-outcome* (e.g. a thing that *has become* what it is, a state that simply *is* as a result of a prior cause). Dynamic vs. static, generative vs. resultant – this dichotomy is the ontological axis.

- **Epistemic Axis (Active Synthesis vs. Passive Reception by the Soul):** This axis identifies how the **soul** or mind relates to the above states. Plato's epistemology in these texts distinguishes the soul's **active** cognitive efforts from its **passive** perceptions. **Active synthesis** is the mind's faculty of *λογισμός* or *συλλογισμός* – reasoning that actively *combines*, compares, and judges inputs. **Passive reception** is the mind's state when it simply *undergoes* impressions or appearances without organizing them. In the *Theaetetus* 186b–d, Socrates explicitly differentiates the soul's active and passive roles. Certain things, he notes, **"the soul itself through itself examines"**, whereas others are delivered via the body's powers [7] [8] . For example, through sight and touch we passively receive qualities like colors or warmth, but the *being* of those things, their *sameness or difference*, etc., the soul must *actively sort out*. Socrates concludes: "Knowledge is not in the sensations (*πάθημα*), but in the reasoning (*συλλογισμός*) about them" [9] . Here *συλλογισμῷ* (dative form) means "by reasoning/calculation," capturing the active, synthesizing work of the intellect. The soul can *try to decide* or judge by mentally assembling perceptions – for instance, determining that "this is the same object as that one I saw before" or "this thing is larger than that." This is an active process of *putting together* (Plato uses *συμβάλλουσα*, "throwing together, comparing") impressions [8] . On the other hand, when the soul simply *receives* a sight or sound, without yet judging it, it operates in a passive mode (akin to a blank wax tablet taking an imprint, as Plato later analogizes in *Theaetetus* 191c). In sum, the Epistemic Axis ranges from the soul as an **active knower** (engaged in *νόησις*, judgment, recollection, predication) to the soul as a **passive perceiver** (experiencing raw appearances or feelings without analysis). Both poles are crucial: Plato holds that perception alone "has no share of truth" until the active intellect works upon it [9] , yet those very raw inputs are the necessary basis that the intellect must receive.

1.2 Key Greek Terms and Philological Distinctions:
To ground these axes in Plato's language, we consider several Greek terms that mark the contrasts:

- **Ontologically Active vs. Passive:** In the *Timaeus* and *Theaetetus*, *active* ontological terms often are present participles conveying ongoing action, whereas *passive* ones are perfect participles conveying completed existence. We have already noted *διακοσμοῦν* ("ordering/arranging") [6] as describing an active cosmic cause (the Demiurge arranging the universe in time). Conversely, *γεγονώς/ γεγονός* ("having become") [2] denotes a finished state. At *Theaetetus* 186b, Theaetetus uses the aorist participle *τὰ γεγονότα ("the things that have come to be*") in contrast to *τὰ παρόντα* ("things present") and *τὰ μέλλοντα* ("things about to be") [10] , indicating past events as completed facts. Another pair of terms: *ποιῶν* vs. *πεποιημένος* (making vs. made) could illustrate the same active/passive contrast (though those specific forms don't appear in our passages, the concept of the Demiurge as

δημιουργός actively *crafting* versus a crafted product is implicit in *Timaeus*). In sum, linguistically an active participle (ending in -ων, -ουσα, e.g. *διακοσμῶν*, "ordering") signals an ongoing action, while a perfect or aorist participle (ending in -ως, -ον or similar, e.g. *γεγονώς*, "having become") signals a completed outcome. Plato exploits these nuances to distinguish a world in flux from the states it passes through.

- **Cognitive Synthesis vs. Passive Reception:** The *Theaetetus* provides rich vocabulary for this distinction. An important term is *συμβάλλουσα* (from *συμβάλλω*, "to throw together, compare"). At 186c, Socrates describes the soul *"coming together and comparing [things] with one another"* – in Greek, *αὐτὴ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἄλληλα κρίνειν πειρᾶται* ("the soul itself, returning [to itself] and comparing them with each other, tries to judge") [8] . *Συμβάλλουσα* here is the soul's active combining of two impressions (e.g. it compares two sensations to judge same vs. different). This term underscores *active synthesis*: the soul is not just a passive mirror but an agent that *juxtaposes and evaluates*. By contrast, Plato uses terms like *πάθημα* ("affection, experience") to denote a passive sensory occurrence. At 186d, he says humans can sense *"all those things that, straightaway upon becoming, are present to us by nature via the body"* – essentially the immediate feelings produced by external stimuli [11] . These *παθήματα* are *received* by the soul through the body; they are not yet processed or judged true/false. In that same passage, Plato draws the line: *"in the case of those [mere sensations] there is no knowledge, but in that [activity] concerning them – the reasoning – there is"* [12] . The word used for "reasoning" here is *συλλογισμός* [12] , essentially "calculation" or "computation" (literally a *collecting together of logoi*). Notably, *συλλογισμός* can imply both the act of *analyzing* (active) and the internal *result* or account (which the soul can hold as a passive record). Thus, Plato's diction itself bridges active and passive mind: the soul *calculates* (active), but the calculation yields an imprint of truth in the soul (passive, as stored knowledge). Another relevant term is *νοεῖν* ("to think" or "apprehend by mind"), used for the soul's intellectual grasp of something. While *νοεῖν* doesn't appear in our passages, Plato often contrasts it with *αἰσθάνεσθαι* (to perceive); *νοεῖν* is active understanding, *αἰσθάνεσθαι* is passive sensing. For example, in *Sophist* 248–249 he notes the mind *"powerfully attempts to contemplate being"* whereas perception just perceives becoming – a similar active/passive cognitive divide.

- **Temporal Categories – Greek Terms:** Plato's texts explicitly name the temporal modes. In *Timaeus* 37e-38a, we find: **ὄν** (present participle of "be," used as a noun, "what is"), **γεγονός** (perfect participle "what has become" – past), **ἐσόμενον** (future participle "what will be"), and **μὴ ὄν** ("what is not") [13] [14] . For instance, at 38a he writes: *τὸ γεγονὸς εἶναι γεγονὸς καὶ τὸ γιγνόμενον εἶναι γιγνόμενον, ἔτι τε τὸ γενησόμενον εἶναι γενησόμενον καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν μὴ ὂν εἶναι* ("that what *has become* is [acknowledged as] *become*, what *becomes* is *becoming*, what *will become* is *going to become*, and that *what is not* is *not*") [15] . This somewhat tongue-twisting line shows Plato systematically laying out the four categories and saying our ordinary expressions for them are "inaccurate" – because we often treat them as states of *being* when only the present truly *is*. But linguistically, we have labels for all four: *ὄντα* (beings, present things), *γεγονότα* (things that have become), *τὰ ἐσόμενα* (things that shall be), and *μὴ ὄντα* (non-beings). In *Theaetetus* 186a–b, Theaetetus uses the same vocabulary in describing how the soul ponders good and bad: he says the soul, in considering good vs. bad, is *"calculating within itself (ἀναλογιζομένη ἐν ἑαυτῇ) the things that have happened and the present things in relation to the things that will be"* [10] . Here *τὰ γεγονότα* (the happened) and *τὰ παρόντα* (the present) are set *πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα* (toward the things about to be). This phrase confirms that the mind deliberately brings past and present into comparison with the future – a temporal synthesis. Notably, *μὴ ὄντα* (non-beings) appears a few lines later in the *Theaetetus* discussion in a different context: when puzzling over false

judgment, Socrates says it's as if one tries to affirm *"that which is not"*, *τὸ μὴ ὄν*, which is paradoxical (this foreshadows the problem of non-being addressed in the *Sophist*). We will return to *μὴ ὄν* in section 2 and 4. For now, the key point is that Plato's terminology carves out these four temporal modes clearly, allowing us to treat each as a distinct locus of ontological and epistemic activity.

With the three axes defined – temporal distinctions, active/passive being, and active/passive mind – we can now derive the full eightfold schema by combining them.

2. Derivation of the Eight Positions

By intersecting the four temporal categories with the active/passive modes, we obtain **eight distinct positions** in which a temporally characterized entity is understood in either an active (dynamic, synthesized) or passive (static, received) way. Each "what is/was/will be/not" thus has two aspects: one emphasizing *becoming* or *agency*, and one emphasizing *being* or *result*. We justify each and then present the schema in tabular form.

- **"What is" (Present)** splits into an **Active present** and a **Passive present**. The *active present* corresponds to *ongoing structuration* – reality in the making *right now*. Plato personifies this in the cosmic order: time itself is said to be *διακοσμηθέν* ("arranged") at creation [6], and even now the world's order is upheld by the intelligible rotations of the cosmic soul. We can think of Active Present as *"the present as actively organized."* Greek example: *διακοσμοῦν τὸν χρόνον* – "organizing time" [6] – Timaeus depicts the creator god doing this. Cognitively, the soul mirrors this by actively structuring present experience (e.g. *nous* imposing order on the flux of impressions). The *passive present*, on the other hand, is *"the present as a static being."* In Greek, simply *τὸ ὄν* or *τὰ ὄντα* ("that which is"/"things that are"). This is the *given* present reality, **being-thus** at this moment, without regard to how it came to be. It's what the senses encounter instantly. For instance, *Theaetetus* 186c: *"τὴν δὲ γε οὐσίαν καὶ ὅτι ἔστὸν... αὐτὴ ἡ ψυχὴ... κρίνειν πειρᾶται"*, "the *being* of them, and the fact *that they are*, the soul itself tries to judge" [8] – here *ὅτι ἔστὸν* ("that they are") refers to the bare presence (passively given), which the soul then actively evaluates. In summary, Present = (a) an active, structuring now, and (b) a passive, extant now.

- **"What was" (Past)** divides into **Active past** vs. **Passive past**. The *active past* is essentially the act of *recollection* or reflective synthesis of memory – the soul actively bringing past events to mind and making sense of them. Plato uses the term *ἀναλογιζομένη* (from *ἀναλογίζομαι*, "reckon back") for this retrospective reasoning [10]. Theaetetus describes the soul as *"ἀναλογιζομένη ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὰ γεγονότα...,"* "calculating within itself the things that have happened," in order to judge good and bad by comparison [10]. This is Past-as-active: the mind *working* on past data (we might also think of the active "narration" or interpretation of history). The ontological side of an active past could also be seen in causes now gone but that were once at work (for example, an artisan's activity that produced an artifact – once active, now only its result remains). In contrast, the *passive past* is the past as a fait accompli: **the state of having-become**. In Greek, *γεγονός* (neuter pl. *γεγονότα*) encapsulates this: it means "that which has become" [2]. At 186b, Theaetetus speaks of *τὰ γεγονότα* in reference to past events now fixed in time [10]. Passive past is thus the archive of being: what **is no longer becoming, but** is **in the sense of having happened.** It can only be accessed by memory (passively, as impressions in the soul) or by records. We note Plato's insight that even these "fixed" past facts are inert until the mind recalls and uses them – hence knowledge of the past requires the active axis (memory, recollection) interacting with this passive store (*Mnemosyne*, the muse of memory,

embodies this interplay: she *holds* past images but must "speak" them actively through the poet's recollection).

- **"What will be" (Future)** yields an **Active future** and **Passive future**. The *active future* is the domain of **projection, anticipation, planning** – the soul's forward-looking synthesis. In the *Theaetetus* we see this in the word προορώμενος ("seeing ahead," anticipating) used to characterize the mind's orientation to what will come. (Theaetetus implies the soul *"looks forward (*προορώμενος*) to live as safely as possible"*, though this phrase is from a later commentary fragment [16] , it captures the idea that the rational soul plans for the future). More concretely, πρόνοια (forethought) would also exemplify active engagement with the future. Theaetetus 186b again covers this: the soul, in figuring out the good, *"looks to the future"* by relating present and past to what is *about to be* [10] . Ontologically, an "active future" could mean causes currently at play whose outcomes will manifest later (e.g. a seed actively growing – oriented toward the future adult plant). The *passive future*, by contrast, treats the future as an already-fixed eventuality – *the destined* or *inevitable*. The Greek term τὸ ἐσόμενον or τὸ μέλλον (literally "what is going to be") denotes something that will happen, considered as if it were an object or state in its own right. In *Timaeus* 37e, Plato says *"ἐσόμενον"* as a noun for the future, and he calls such future (and past) notions *"forms of time"* that came to be [2] . *Passive future is the idea of a future event as determined or waiting in the order of time (once the causal network is set, the outcome* will be*). It is the "not yet" that is already implicit. Epistemically, the soul's passive relation to the future is expectation or probabilistic impression – e.g. one "has an inkling" of what will happen without actively reasoning it out (perhaps by habit or instinct, a passive anticipation). It is noteworthy that in Plato's view, we cannot have* knowledge *of the mere passive future (since it's not actual yet), but we have* belief *or* conjecture*. Only through active projection (like the astronomer predicting eclipses via understanding of celestial order) can the future be rationally engaged. So the future too has a dual aspect: the* possible/foreseeable future *which reason actively models versus the* fated future *which simply* will occur *(or, from the present perspective,* might occur* *to us).*

- **"What is not" (Non-being)** also bifurcates into an **Active** and **Passive** mode, a subtle but crucial distinction. It might seem odd to treat "what is not" as having modes at all – isn't non-existence simply nothing? Plato's nuanced approach in dialogues like the *Sophist* and *Parmenides* shows that *"what is not" can be meaningfully spoken of, in different ways.* The *passive* side of non-being is straightforward: **"the non-existent as such,"** pure absence or privation – τὸ μὴ ὄν in its most inert sense. This is the sense in which one might say "X is not" and mean X simply does not exist or is not present. Plato often treats this as a limit case: it's not a real entity, but a negation or otherness. In the *Timaeus* passage, τὸ μὴ ὄν is listed among the "inaccurate expressions" – we talk about non-being, but strictly it isn't an *actual state* like the others [5] . However, Plato does *not* conclude that μὴ ὄν is entirely meaningless. This brings us to the *active* side of "what is not": **the mental act of negation or differentiation.** In Plato's dialectic, to think or say "not X" is to actively define something by what it lacks or by what it is other than. We might dub this the *"what is not" as a* functional *position rather than a blank nullity.* A term illustrating this is ἀποφαίνουσα (from ἀποφαίνω, "to declare/show off, especially to deny in context"). Though not from our core passages, consider that in any logos (statement), the negation "is not" involves an active *judgment* by the soul. The soul *apophantically* (assertively) *indicates* non-being – for example, stating "Theaetetus is **not** tall" actively differentiates Theaetetus from the set of tall things. In the *Sophist*, Plato defines τὸ μὴ ὄν not as absolute nothing but as *"that which is* other (ἕτερον) than the thing in question" [17] . *Thus, the* active non-being *position in our framework is when the soul posits or considers an absence: it marks a difference, an exclusion, a missing piece. We see a clear example in* Parmenides *160b–d (discussed more in section 4) where the*

interlocutors reason about "the one that is not" and find themselves still talking about something – *they are actively giving structure to non-being by thinking its implications. In summary,* Passive "what is not" = *sheer non-existence (e.g. "the present king of Atlantis" – there simply isn't one; it's non-being as an empty reference).* Active "what is not"* = the mental or linguistic handling of that non-existence (e.g. formulating "Atlantis's king is not present" as a meaningful statement, or delineating zero as a number). Plato treats the latter as a legitimate part of reasoning (otherwise false statements or denial would be impossible), while the former remains, as it were, the ontological zero that has no qualities.

Putting this all together, we can present the eightfold schema. Each row is one of the four temporal states, and we show its active mode (ontologically and epistemically active) and passive mode (ontologically and epistemically passive):

Temporal State	Active Mode (Dynamic cause / cognitive synthesis)	Passive Mode (Static result / cognitive reception)
What is (Present)	**Actively structuring "Now"** – e.g. *διακοσμοῦν χρόνον* ("ordering the present world/time"); the soul's **organizing insight** that shapes momentary experience into order [6] . (Present as ongoing **becoming**; the *flux* being formed.)	**Being in the present** – *τὸ ὄν* (that which *is*); the **given state** of things right now, e.g. a perception currently impinging on us. (Present as a **fixed snapshot**, *being-thus*.)
What was (Past)	**Active recollection** of the past – *ἀναλογιζομένη τὰ γεγονότα* ("reckoning within oneself the things that have happened") [10] ; the mind **synthesizing memory** and drawing lessons. (Past as **actively thought**, re-constructed in judgment.)	**Having-become** – *τὸ γεγονός* ("what has become") [2] ; the **factual past** itself, fixed and unchangeable. (Past as **completed being**, the inert record of events; passively stored as memory or history.)
What will be (Future)	**Active projection** toward the future – *προορώμενος / προνοητικός* ("looking ahead", forethought); forming plans, predictions, or expectations by reasoning. The soul **anticipating** outcomes (e.g. "seeing" an eclipse before it happens via calculation).	**Destined future** – *τὸ ἐσόμενον* ("what will be") [2] ; the **awaiting state** that will come to pass, viewed as if fixed. (Future as **pre-figured** or fated outcome; something one might passively expect or fear without analysis.)
What is not (Non-being)	**Active negation/differentiation** – *ἀποφαίνουσα τὸ μὴ ὄν* ("pointing out the not-being"); the soul's **articulation of absence** (saying "X is not Y", or conceiving a null value). In dialectic, positing "the One is not" and examining it – *reasoning* about non-being [18] . (Non-being as a **thought-object** in logos, defined by contrast to being.)	**Non-existence itself** – *τὸ μὴ ὄν* ("the not-being") as pure lack. The **null state** devoid of determination. (Non-being as **mere absence**: e.g. a missing chair, a fictional or unreal thing – nothing there unless given form by thought.)

Each of these eight positions describes a unique configuration of ontology and epistemology. For example, "Past-Active" (recollective synthesis) is very different from "Past-Passive" (the past itself sitting unalterable in the archive of time), yet both pertain to "what was." Plato's texts support each link: we have seen textual

evidence of the mind actively engaging past (*Theaet.* 186b) and future (186b again, and implicit in *Timaeus* 37d where the Demiurge plans a moving image of eternity), and of the acknowledgment of passive past (*γεγονός*) and future (*ἔσται* as said of becoming, not of eternal being [19]). The "what is not" row is supported by Plato's allowance that even non-being can be talked about in a structured way (see Section 4). The table thus encapsulates the *domain of becoming* (since eternal "what always is" lies outside, in the realm of Forms) in a comprehensive schema: every temporal mode of becoming, seen as a dynamic process or as a static state, and correspondingly grasped by the soul in action or in reception.

Justifying "What is not" as a functional position: Plato explicitly argues in the *Sophist* that non-being (**to` mē on**) is "otherness" rather than utter nothing [17] . In our framework, "what is not" is not a dark void but a structured *placeholder* that the soul uses in thought – for example, when distinguishing one thing from another by saying "X is not Y." The *Theaetetus* hints at this as well: when discussing false opinion (191a–c), the difficulty arises of thinking "what is not" – meaning the soul can *attempt* to think a non-real object, and this is puzzling unless we allow that *non-being* has a sort of intelligible reality as "something *other* than being." Our schema respects that by giving "what is not" an active role: it's the position where the soul's **dialectical negation** operates. We will see in Section 4 that in the *Parmenides* exercise, treating "the one that is not" as a legitimate object for reasoning leads to meaningful (if paradoxical) conclusions, showing Plato did treat non-being as *thinkable*. So rather than a mere negation with no content, "what is not" (especially in Active mode) functions as a **structured absence** – a way to refer to and reason about what isn't there, in order to clarify what *is*. This is indispensable for Plato's method of inquiry, which often proceeds by negations and differences (e.g. we understand justice in part by understanding it is *not* injustice, etc.). Thus including "what is not" completes the field of possible objects of intellection in the realm of becoming. It reminds us that *δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν φύσει πώς ἐστι νοητόν* – clearly "the not-being" is in some way by nature *knowable* or conceivable (to adapt *Parmenides* 160b-c reasoning, where they must concede the One "is not" still *is* an object of thought).

In summary, the eight positions are:

1. **Present-Active:** the ongoing creation/ordering; the soul's active perception of *now* (with understanding).
2. **Present-Passive:** the immediate factual present; the raw "is."
3. **Past-Active:** the act of recalling and making sense of what was.
4. **Past-Passive:** the fixed past itself, as a completed fact.
5. **Future-Active:** the act of forecasting, planning, or intending what will be.
6. **Future-Passive:** the future as the inevitable or expected, "what will happen" (awaiting realization).
7. **Non-Being-Active:** the mental/logical handling of negation and absence (saying "is not," distinguishing, hypothesizing the non-existent).
8. **Non-Being-Passive:** sheer non-existence – blank nothing or undefinable otherness by itself.

This schema is not imposed arbitrarily on Plato's thought; it emerges from a close reading of the dialogues. By seeing how Plato speaks of time (*was/is/will be* [1]), of causation and change (*ordering* vs. *become* [2]), and of knowledge and belief (active *reasoning* vs. passive *perception* [9]), we find natural pairs that justify each cell. The framework essentially systematizes Plato's view of the **realm of Becoming (τὸ γιγνόμενον)**: it is ordered in time, in a constant tension of activity and outcome, and our soul engages with it by both shaping it with ideas and receiving it through sensations.

3. Framework Validation in Platonic Metaphysics

Having constructed the three-axis model, we now test its coherence with Plato's broader metaphysical commitments and illustrate its explanatory power for Plato's descriptions of cognition:

Coherence with Plato's Metaphysics of Being and Becoming:
Plato consistently distinguishes the *eternal, unchanging being* of the Forms from the *transient, shifting realm* of becoming (cf. *Timaeus* 27d–28a). Our framework explicitly confines itself to the domain of becoming – the world "undergoing generation in time." Plato says the cosmos *"has come to be"* (γενέσθαι) and thus is an object of opinion via perception, whereas true being (Forms) "always is" and is grasped by intellect [20] [21]. The three-axis model captures exactly the structure of this cosmos of becoming: it is in time (Temporal axis), it is governed by causes and results (Ontological axis), and it is accessible to a mix of perception and reasoning (Epistemic axis). This resonates with what Mary Louise Gill and others observe: Plato's *Timaeus* treats the cosmos as a rational order (**λόγος**) imposed on chaotic necessity, meaning everything in time is **rationally structured** despite its mutability. Our Active modes correspond to the presence of *λόγος* and *νοῦς* (reason) operating within becoming (the Demiurge's intellect, or the world-soul organizing the heavens, or our soul applying concepts), while Passive modes correspond to the aspect of becoming that is *mere receptacle* or result (*ὕλη* or the "nurse of becoming," as Timaeus calls the material substratum at 49a). In this sense, the framework aligns with the metaphysical bifurcation: it shows how the rational principle (Form or cause) interacts with the changing world. For example, *Present-Active* (diakosmoun, ordering the present) can be seen as the Form of Order actualizing in time, whereas *Present-Passive* (onta, things just being) aligns with the visible tangible world that results [22] [1]. The model also underscores Plato's notion that *becoming is a mixture* – it "partakes of being and non-being" in a way (as Plato hints in *Timaeus* 28a: the generated world is perceptible and not eternal, so in a sense it *is* and *is not*). In our schema, any given thing in the world of becoming has one foot in being (the momentary *is*, the achieved form) and one in not-being (it *becomes* and passes away, or it falls short of true being). The axes illustrate this: the passive aspect of a thing (e.g. an apple's shape now) gives it a temporary *being*, while the active aspect (the process of change, growth, decay) shows it *not-being* the same, always in flux. Thus, the eight positions framework is a detailed unpacking of how the realm of becoming can still be talked about in terms of *what is* (ontologically and epistemically) *without collapsing into Parmenidean monism or Heraclitean chaos*. It honors Plato's middle way: the cosmos is ordered and intelligible (**like** being) yet changing and impermanent (**unlike** true being) [23] [24]. In scholarly terms, it supports a *Unitarian* reading of Plato's epistemology: the "common notions" we use (being, sameness, difference, etc.) are indeed the trace of Forms within our cognition of the sensible [25]. Our Active epistemic axis (soul using concepts) corresponds to those Form-derived *koina* (common notions), which suggests the model is faithful to Plato's solution for how knowledge is possible of becoming – namely, by *bringing being (forms) to bear on becoming* [24]. In the table, every Active mode involves such an injection of rational structure (hence *knowledge* or *true opinion* can reside there), whereas Passive modes alone would leave us with mere shifting appearances (not knowledge). This dovetails with Socrates' conclusion in *Theaetetus* 186d: "Knowledge is not in the experiences but in the reasoning about them" [9]. Our framework doesn't invent this claim; it spatially represents it.

Recursive Judgment across Temporal and Ontological Boundaries:
One benefit of the framework is that it illuminates the *recursive nature of cognitive judgments* in Plato's account. By "recursive" we mean the soul's ability to iterate comparisons – to judge a new experience by relating it to past ones, or to abstract patterns (Forms) and then back to new instances. Plato gives

examples of this in *Theaetetus* 185–186 with the so-called "common things" the soul perceives by itself: *Same vs. Different* and *Good vs. Bad*. Let's analyze these through our model:

- *Same/Different:* Suppose you plunge your hand alternately in cold and warm water – the water feels first cold, then warm. The raw sensations (παθήματα) simply occur (Passive present). But you recognize that it's *the same hand* experiencing both, and that the two waters are *different temperatures*. This recognition is an Active cognitive act: the soul *simultaneously recalls* the past sensation and compares it to the present, applying the notions "same" and "different." Plato notes that sight or touch alone cannot tell you *"the same"* or *"other"* – the soul *itself* must *"come together and compare"* (αὐτὴ... **συμβάλλουσα**) those experiences 8 . Our framework locates this at Past-Active + Present-Active working in tandem: the past impression is actively held in memory, the present is actively analyzed, and through their synthesis the concept of *difference* emerges. Meanwhile, at the purely passive level, the hand just felt one thing then another – there is no *knowledge* of difference until the active step occurs. The judgment "the second water is different (warmer) than the first" is *recursive* in that it refers back to a prior experience. It also presupposes a stable notion of "the same hand" – an identity over time (the hand's enduring being). That identity is not given by sense (senses only give momentary data); it's given by an active mental assertion of *sameness* (the Form of Same). So the soul's reasoning moves from present to past (or vice versa) and back again, and from particular sensations to universal categories and back. The model's axes allow us to track this: the soul in Active mode at time2 reaches back to content from time1 (which was lying in passive memory until reactivated) and actively identifies a relationship. This aligns with what scholars observe: Plato's argument here *"introduces the role of the soul... and the problem of the propositional nature of knowledge, anticipated by the* koina" 26   27 . *In plainer terms, even a simple judgment like "A is different from B" reveals the two-layer process: the difference is not in A or B by themselves (sense gave, say, "warm" and "cool"), but in the soul's comparison* – the soul imposes the structure "B is not A". The eightfold framework captures both layers: A and B as passive givens, and the comparative act as active.

- *Good/Bad:* Theaetetus remarks that among all things, *good and bad* especially involve the soul examining their essence "in relation to each other, by reckoning within itself the past and present against the future" 10 . This is a remarkably explicit description of *evaluative judgment* as a temporal, reflective process. How do we know what is good? Plato implies: the soul must recall past outcomes and present circumstances and project future consequences (τὰ γεγονότα καὶ τὰ παρόντα πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα) 10 . For example, a medicine might taste bad (present sensation) but the soul remembers that it led to health before (past experience) and so judges it *good* in the long run (future benefit). Here the dualities are rich: the body might passively feel pain (thus *"bad"* in a sensory sense), yet the mind actively deems the situation *"good"* by consulting a larger temporal horizon. Plato illustrates this dual evaluation in other dialogues (e.g. *Protagoras* 357b-c, weighing present pleasure vs future pain). In terms of our framework, the immediate **Passive present** feeling might be negative, but the **Active synthesis** of past-present-future yields a positive rational judgment. The soul's νόησις grasps the *good itself* (what truly benefits), whereas the passive affections often equate good with immediate pleasure. So there is a tension: the **Active axis** might render a judgment opposite to what the **Passive axis** suggests. (This resonates with Plato's division between the rational and appetitive parts of the soul in the *Republic*.) Our model helps to map this: the *active mind* can override the data of *passive perception* by virtue of referring to a timeless Form (Good) or at least a long-term understanding. Yet, notably, the *active* evaluation still depends on recalling passive impressions (memories of what happened before, sensations of what is pleasant/unpleasant). Thus a recursive loop: the soul takes up the passive material from multiple times, synthesizes it, and then

writes back a verdict (which itself can be stored as a new memory or belief). Plato's mention of συλλογισμός in this context is apt: it's like the soul is doing an internal calculation, summing up various inputs (*appearance A = sweet now, appearance B = sickness later*) and arriving at a reasoned result (*A is deceptively good; truly bad overall*). Modern scholars note that here Plato "centrally features recognizing... by sight *and* by memory and calculation" [28] – an insight captured in the above analysis. The eight positions show every ingredient: present sensation (now sweet), future consequence (will be sick), passive reception (taste buds pleased), active reasoning (mind foresees outcome) – all of which Plato packs into the soul's single act of γνώμη (judgment).

Dual Movement of Synthesis and Inscription:
These examples highlight that Plato's model of cognition isn't one-way. The soul not only *synthesizes* (actively judges), but also *receives and stores* impressions (passive inscription) which then become fodder for later syntheses. In our framework, Active and Passive modes continuously interact: the result of an active judgment can itself solidify into a passive "impression" or memory (an **inscribed** piece of knowledge), and conversely any passive perception can trigger an active process. Plato uses metaphors of writing to describe this. In *Theaetetus* 191d, he introduces the *wax tablet* analogy: the mind has a wax block "which is a gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses," on which our perceptions and thoughts are stamped, creating lasting imprints (memories or learned concepts) [29] [30]. If the wax is too soft or hard (too impressionable or too rigid), errors occur. This image beautifully aligns with our axes: the act of stamping a seal corresponds to an **active** moment (experience or learning) being turned into a **passive** record (an imprint in the soul). Later, when we recall, that record is passively sitting until the soul actively "reads" it off the wax. The *aviary* analogy that follows (197c–199b) similarly describes the mind as an aviary of birds (pieces of knowledge) that we *catch* or let *flutter* – again an interplay of actively grasping and passively having. Thus, Plato clearly envisioned a dynamic interplay: **synthesis (active organizing)** and **inscription (passive retention)**, alternating in the process of understanding. Our eightfold framework explicitly provides slots for both aspects at each time point, ensuring we can account for this movement. Recent scholarship underscores this point: *"there is no way for the empiricist to construct contentful belief from contentless sensory awareness alone... we need something else besides sensory awareness – in Plato's terms, we need the Forms."* [24] The Forms, when "imprinted" on our soul (passive possession of concepts), enable us to actively organize sensory content. Conversely, without sensory inputs, the soul would have no "data" to recall or judge about the temporal world. The framework's Active vs Passive axis within each temporal category ensures we remember both roles.

Finally, the model remains consistent with Plato's insistence that **becoming is "ordered" (διατεταγμένον) and "measured" (μεμέτρηται)** (*Timaeus* 37a–c). Each temporal state is rationally accessible because each has an active rational aspect. For instance, time itself is described as having *number* – days, months, years (all "parts of time") – implying structure [31]. In our terms: the Passive present is just a flow, but the Active present (cosmic timekeeping) imposes a numerical order (e.g. the rotating heavens create the measure of a day [32]). Because of that order, the soul can come to know the patterns of becoming (astronomy, for example, grasps the cycles – an active intellect making sense of a passive observable repetition). This illustrates that the eight positions, though conceptually distinct, constantly work in tandem in real cognition. Plato's *Republic* 530a-531d even advises astronomers to use their intellect to discern the mathematical order behind the stars rather than just gawking – essentially, to engage the Active epistemic mode rather than only the Passive gaze [33] [34]. All these Platonic exhortations and analyses find a natural home in our framework.

In conclusion of this validation: The "Three-Axis Eight-Position" framework is not only *consistent* with Platonic metaphysics; it illuminates it. It shows how Plato can speak of the changing world in terms of *being* (by implicitly invoking these active rational structures), and how the soul can attain truth in a world of flux (by actively synthesizing the passive flux using eternal yardsticks). It also reveals why *non-being* must be included – without it, negation and comparison (saying X is *not* Y, or this *differs* from that) would have no place, and yet those are crucial for discourse and thought. This leads us to the final inquiry: Plato's treatment of *non-being* in cognition, most rigorously explored in the *Parmenides*.

4. Extended Inquiry: Cognitive Operations in Relation to Non-Being

One of the most challenging aspects of Plato's framework is the status of **"what is not"** – *non-being* – and how the soul can think or even know something that, by definition, is not. Our model has posited an active role for non-being (the soul's handling of negation), and we will now reinforce that by examining *Parmenides* 160b–d alongside other dialogues. The results will show that Plato indeed allows the mind a "mode of structured cognition" toward what is not, which in turn justifies our inclusion of *μὴ ὄν* as a bona fide category in the schema (albeit a peculiar one).

Parmenides 160b–d: Knowing "The One" that is not
In the second part of the *Parmenides* dialogue, Plato has Parmenides lead the young Aristoteles (not the famous Aristotle) through a series of hypothetical deductions. At 160b–d, they consider the hypothesis "If the One is not" (i.e. suppose 'the one' does not exist in any way). A remarkable thing occurs: even under this extreme negation, they find themselves attributing various things to "the One." Parmenides points out that even to say "the one" or to consider the proposition "the one is not," *we must have in mind what we are talking about*. Thus, *"the one which is not"* in a strange way *is* – at least *as an object of thought*. The dialogue notes, for instance, that from the assumption "the one is not," it follows that *the one is different from the others* and that *we have knowledge of the one* (otherwise we wouldn't be able to discuss it) [18] . In the summary of deductions provided by scholars, one result reads: *"If the one is not, then … we have knowledge of the one (D5A1C2)"* [18] . This is a striking statement: even non-existent, "the one" is in some manner knowable. What does this mean? Essentially, Plato (through Parmenides' dialectic) is highlighting that *thought can grasp a form or concept even when asserting its non-instantiation*. The One (as a concept) can be "known" or at least meant in a proposition, even while we hypothetically deny its existence. In our framework's terms, the soul is engaging in an **Active non-being** operation: it is entertaining the notion of "one" and actively negating its existence. The content "one" is being handled by the mind (we could say the Form of One is present to thought), but we apply the negative copula "is not" to indicate it has no instantiation in reality. This aligns with what Plato explains later in the *Sophist*: to say *"X is not"* is not to obliterate X from thought, but to say X *is other than* real or other than something else [17] . The *Parmenides* exercise is thus a training in acknowledging that even "non-being" statements convey some meaning – a crucial realization for avoiding the confusion of thinking that all speaking of non-existents is mere nonsense.

Parmenides 160c-d goes further to analyze implications: if the one is not in any way, it has none of the attributes of being (no place, no time, no motion, etc.). Yet, Parmenides somewhat cheekily continues to talk about "the one" throughout – demonstrating by example that the discourse *operates as if* the One were "there" in a sense, at least as a subject of conversation. The dialogue generates a bunch of contradictions (the One ends up seeming to both have and not have certain properties) precisely because *we are treating 'the one that is not' as something with a definable relationship to reality*. In fact, taken as a whole, the deductions in *Parmenides* show that the assumption "the one is not" leads to a contradiction – essentially concluding "if the one is not, then (paradoxically) the one *is* (in a way)" [35] . This outcome reinforces a

Platonic lesson: complete **absolute** non-being is unthinkable – whenever we try to conceive it, it sneaks in some aspect of being (even if only as an object in a statement). *"Nothing"* is not something you can speak or reason about without *in some sense* making it into a something. Therefore, the "Passive non-being" (utter nothingness) can never be truly grasped; the mind can only handle non-being by giving it *form* as an *other*. This is exactly what our Active/Passive distinction for non-being captures. The Passive side (*pure nothing*) is inaccessible to knowledge – "ineffable" in Plato's terms. The Active side (*structured nothing*) is how we *simulate* non-being in thought by giving it a form (like the One's form without existence, or like darkness as the absence of light, which we can conceptualize).

To put it plainly: **the reasoning process can engage with non-being, but only by *framing* it as a particular kind of thing (an absence of X, or an Other to Y).** This is the soul actively synthesizing a concept of non-existence. We see Plato do this in the *Sophist* when he frames false statements as "speaking of what is not" but clarifies that this just means speaking of something *other than the truth* (Sophist 263b-264d). The Stranger there says, we aren't actually attributing *absolute* non-existence to things in false statements, only *a different existence* than supposed (i.e. "not-being" = "being otherwise").

Bringing this back to our model: The **Active Non-Being** position is vindicated by Plato's dialectical practice. Whenever Plato's interlocutors say "not F" or "non-X," they occupy that position – they actively invoke an absence to make a point. Without it, Plato could not formulate criticisms (e.g. "Theaetetus is *not* flying" is how we state a fact – it involves μὴ ὄν). Our framework acknowledges this as a real mode in the ontology of discourse. Meanwhile, the **Passive Non-Being** (the thing that "is not" just isn't there at all) corresponds to what Plato would call τὸ παντάπασιν μὴ ὄν ("the wholly not-being") – which is indeed never an object of cognition. In the *Parmenides* deductions, whenever they treat the one as absolutely not existing, they run into the wall that *then nothing can be said*. To keep talking, they inadvertently treat it as *somehow present*. Thus, ultimate non-being eludes meaningful talk – a result consistent with the framework saying Passive non-being has no cognitive content *unless* converted to Active non-being by the mind.

Reinforcement and Challenges to the Model:
This understanding of non-being reinforces our model by showing that the "non-being axis" is needed and legitimately used by Plato. If we had excluded "what is not," we couldn't account for negation and falsehood in Plato's epistemology. With it included, we see that even negation follows the active/passive pattern: the Form or concept (e.g. One or F) is present to mind (like a Form "at large"), and we actively deny its instantiation – an interplay of being and non-being. The model also helps clarify a *constraint*: **non-being is always relative** in Plato. Our eight position grid should not be misread as putting non-being on par with being as a fully parallel category – rather, non-being (especially in Passive mode) is a *privative* category, parasitic on the concept of being. In fact, one could say there are really seven and a half categories: the eighth (passive non-being) is a null set. But acknowledging it is crucial for completeness, and Plato himself lists it among the "all those modes of expression" concerning time [5] precisely to say we use it even if it's inaccurate strictly.

One potential challenge is whether labeling "what is not" as an "ontological-cognitive position" stretches the notion of *position* – can we really call non-being a position *in ontology*? Plato's answer in the *Sophist* would be: non-being *in itself* is not a genuine *ontological* category (there is no Form of Nothing), but as *otherness* it is a real *ontological relation*. That is why in the table we describe μὴ ὄν passive as a "placeholder" – it's not an actual Form, but a logical spot in the structure of reality (the shadow cast by being). The cognitive activity around it (discriminating this shadow) is very much real. So our model accommodates this by treating the "what is not – active" as *the soul's way of delineating boundaries* (e.g. *"not-mortal"* to indicate immortal, etc.),

and "what is not – passive" as a boundary point (like 0 in the number line, which is no quantity, but extremely useful to mark the transition between positive and negative).

In *Parmenides* 160b–d we also see Plato exploring the *limits* of reasoning about non-being – it leads to paradox if taken too far, essentially driving the reasoner back to the conclusion that the absolute negation is impossible, hence some *being* must be acknowledged. In the dialogue, after examining both "one is" and "one is not" scenarios, the combined outcome is that neither hypothesis can be simply true without qualification, hinting at a more complex interplay (perhaps an anticipation of the true reality being beyond such binary hypotheses). For our purposes, the takeaway is: **the soul can engage non-being but cannot stay with absolute non-being**. It either treats it as an otherness (thus sneaking in being) or ends in contradiction. This dynamic tension is exactly what the third axis (Epistemic) brings to the fore: the soul's active effort versus what resists synthesis. Non-being is the ultimate resistant matter for thought – the passive void that thought keeps trying to fill.

In conclusion, the *Parmenides* analysis strongly supports the inclusion of "what is not" in the three-axis model as a distinct dimension. It shows that even in Plato's most abstract exercise, the soul's **συλλογισμός** and **νοεῖν** (reasoning and intellection) *can* "touch" non-being – but only by giving it form in discourse [18]. This reinforces the model by confirming that the soul's orientation isn't limited to positive being; it also comprehends *differences, absences, and negations* as part of reasoning. This is in full harmony with Plato's theory of judgment: to know *the truth* about the changing world, one often must know what *is not* the case (e.g. not eternal, not purely one, etc.). The three-axis framework, by carving out a place for non-being, ensures we do not inadvertently ignore this aspect.

Final Reflection:
Our "Three-Axis Eight-Position" framework has thus been tested against Plato's texts and found to be an insightful map of his ontology and epistemology of the sensible realm. It systematizes how Plato sees the interplay of time (past/present/future), reality (cause/effect, motion/rest), and knowledge (active intellection/passive perception). Engaging with secondary scholarship and the primary texts, we've seen that this model sheds light on difficult Platonic concepts: the *Theaetetus'* common notions as implicitly the mind's way of actively handling being in becoming [25] ; the *Timaeus'* claim that only "is" applies to true being whereas "was/will be" apply to becoming [1] – our model shows how "was/will be" indeed describe the passive aspects of temporal beings, and how the active intellect discerns those modes; and the *Parmenides–Sophist* treatment of non-being, which our model accommodates by distinguishing thought's negating activity from the nullity it targets. In doing so, the framework remains, as requested, **textually grounded** (every position is backed by Greek terms and passages) and **conceptually integrated** (all three axes work in unison to explain Plato's account of becoming). It clarifies how the soul orders its engagement with changing reality: by constantly oscillating between receiving the world and actively *making sense* of it – even to the point of handling what *is not*. Thus, even *non-being* "participates in the logic of *logos*," as a kind of shadow participant that reason can cast and consider.

In sum, Plato's ontology and epistemology of the temporal world can indeed be modeled by three intersecting axes, yielding eight positions. This model is not only a neat classification but also a narrative of how knowledge is possible in a world of change: the eternal structures (Forms, reasons) intersect with temporal moments, every "is" carries a "was" and "will be" in it, and the mind weaves together what the senses deliver, distinguishing what things are and are not. Such a perspective deepens our appreciation of Plato's genius – he provides the tools to understand *becoming* without abandoning the pursuit of *being*, by

engaging all these axes in our philosophical reasoning. The framework we have refined here is one way to articulate that intricate Platonic vision.

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