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

Abstract:

Plato's ontology of becoming can be mapped onto a structured framework defined by three intersecting axes: (1) **Temporal status** (what is, what was, what will be, and what is not), (2) **Ontological mode** (active process vs. passive state of being), and (3) **Epistemic engagement** (active intellectual synthesis vs. passive sensory reception). Combining these axes yields **eight distinct positions** describing how the changing world is constituted and how the soul apprehends it. Each temporal state bifurcates into an active, generative aspect and a passive, resultant aspect, mirrored by the soul's mode of cognition: for example, the **present** entails an ongoing ordering activity versus mere present "being," while the **past** includes the soul's act of recollective synthesis versus the completed outcome of what has become. This report develops the eightfold schema from close readings of *Theaetetus* 186a–b, *Timaeus* 37e–38b, and *Parmenides* 155b–d, explicating key Greek terms (γεγονώς, διακοσμοῦν, ἀναλογιζομένη, μὴ ὄντα, etc.) that mark these distinctions. The framework is tested against Plato's wider metaphysical commitments: it illuminates how the **soul actively imposes intelligible structure** (λόγος) upon sensory flux, how **judgment recurses** (re-applying concepts of same/different, good/bad across time), and how even **"what is not"** figures as a structured object of thought rather than a mere nullity. A table and diagrammatic analysis summarize the eight positions, and comparisons to scholarly interpretations of Plato's concepts of time, becoming, and non-being are included. The result is a systematic model of Plato's temporally extended reality, demonstrating how **temporal change is rationally ordered** and accessible to cognition in a graduated, axis-based manner.

1. Axis Clarification

In Plato's late-middle dialogues, the realm of **becoming** (the physical, temporal world) is articulated through several fundamental distinctions. We identify **three axes** that structure this domain: a temporal axis, an ontological activity axis, and an epistemic (cognitive) axis. Each axis has discrete categories marked by Plato's vocabulary and conceptual apparatus. Before deriving the full eight-position schema, we clarify each axis both philosophically and linguistically, paying special attention to the Greek terms that signify their poles.

1.1 The Temporal, Ontological, and Epistemic Axes

Temporal Axis (Fourfold Time States): Plato's *Timaeus* explicitly defines four temporal orientations – **what Is, what Was, what Will be, and what Is Not** – as fundamental modes of temporal being. These correspond roughly to present, past, future, and non-being (or absence). In *Timaeus* 37e–38a, the speaker distinguishes the *eternal "Is"* (τὸ ἔστιν) from temporal modes: "'Was' and 'will be'…are forms of time which have come to be," and we unwittingly apply these to eternal being, whereas strictly only "is" applies eternally [1]. For things in time (the realm of becoming), however, we must speak in terms of **"was"** (ἦν, past) and **"will be"** (ἔσται, future), and even say that something **"is not"** when it ceases to be or is absent. Plato emphasizes that phrases like "what has come to be *is* what has come to be" or "what is not *is* what is

not" are commonly uttered but not strictly accurate [2] . Instead, they reflect the necessary *temporalization* of language about change: we say a thing "is" in the present, "was" in the past, "will be" in the future, or "is not" (when it has no being at a given time). Thus, the **temporal axis** includes: **(i)** *What is* (present state), **(ii)** *What was* (prior state or past existence), **(iii)** *What will be* (future state or coming-to-be), and **(iv)** *What is not* (non-being in some respect). Plato's texts treat these not merely as tenses, but as ontological categories involved in discourse about becoming [1] [2] .

Ontological Activity Axis (Active vs. Passive Being): Within each temporal state, we can distinguish whether something is characterized by **active, dynamic process** or by a **passive, static result**. Plato often contrasts what is in the **process of becoming** or **acting** versus what has **already become** or been acted upon. We see this in the use of certain participles. For example, in *Timaeus* 38c, the description of the created cosmos uses a string of participles: "having come-to-be, being, and will-be" (γεγονώς τε καὶ ὢν καὶ ἐσόμενος) to characterize its everlasting duration in time [3] . Here γεγονώς ("having become") denotes a **completed state** resulting from a prior process, whereas διακοσμοῦν ("arranging" or "ordering"), used elsewhere, denotes an **ongoing action** of ordering. We define the **active ontological mode** as the dynamic, generative, or organizing aspect of a thing's being (what it is doing or becoming), and the **passive ontological mode** as the state of having already become or being in a finished condition (what it already is, as a result). Linguistically, active participles like *διακοσμοῦν* (present participle of διακοσμέω, "arrange, adorn, order") convey an ongoing creative activity – e.g. the Demiurge **ordering** the cosmos, or time itself **"ordering itself"** in the soul's motion (as we shall see) – whereas perfect participles like *γεγονώς* (from γίγνομαι, "become," meaning **"having become"**) convey a completed outcome or **residual state** [4] . In Plato's ontology, the **"active"** corresponds to the rational, formative influence (often associated with *nous* or a cause imposing order), and the **"passive"** corresponds to what is *shaped, received or left behind* by that activity (often associated with matter or the *receptacle*, as in the *Timaeus'* chōra). Each temporal stage, we will argue, can be viewed in terms of something actively coming-into-being versus something passively *having-become* or *being in itself*.

Epistemic Axis (Active Synthesis vs. Passive Reception): Parallel to the ontological dichotomy is a distinction in how the **soul (psychē)** relates to each state of being – either through **active intellectual synthesis** or through **passive sensory reception**. This axis emerges clearly in *Theaetetus* 186a–187a, where Plato contrasts **νοῦς** (intelligence or intellect) actively *combining and judging* inputs, with **αἴσθησις** (sensation) passively *suffering impressions*. Socrates there observes that while **perceptions** (τὰ παθήματα διὰ τοῦ σώματος) impinge on the soul by nature – both humans and animals are immediately capable of sensing heat, cold, hardness, etc. – true knowledge is not in these passive affections themselves [5] . Rather, knowledge requires the soul's active effort to **"review and compare them with one another"** (ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἄλληλα) in light of *being* [6] . Thus, the **epistemic active** is the soul's *rational synthesis*: *judging*, *recollecting*, *relating*, or *anticipating* – any operation where the mind actively organizes experience. In contrast, the **epistemic passive** is the soul's *receptivity*: the mere *receiving of impressions*, the unsynthesized appearance "as is" given by the senses. Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, uses terms like **συλλογισμός** ("reasoning, calculation"), **κρινεῖν** ("to decide or judge"), and **συμβάλλεσθαι** ("to put together, compare") for the active work of the intellect [5] [7] . For the passive side, he uses **πάσχειν** ("to suffer, undergo") and refers to sense data as **πάθημα** ("affection" or **impression** on the soul) [5] . The soul's active understanding (*nous*) "strains after" being and truth, whereas mere perception does not grasp *being* at all [8] . In sum, the epistemic axis differentiates **active apprehension** (the mind's contribution – synthesizing, conceptualizing, structuring experience in judgments) from **passive apprehension** (the mind's condition of simply receiving or undergoing sensory input). This will be central in analyzing how each ontological state is *known* by the soul.

By combining these axes, we anticipate that each **temporal state** of a thing (present, past, future, or absence) can be experienced in two fundamentally different ways: through an **active ontological process** (which the active intellect must seize and integrate) or as a **passive ontological result** (which can appear to the receptive senses). Likewise, each such state has a dual cognitive status: e.g. something can *actively* be thought or projected by mind versus *passively* felt or remembered. The axes are tightly interwoven in Plato's text, which often pairs an ontological description with a cognitive one. To prepare for the eightfold schema, we now turn to key Platonic terms that illustrate these distinctions in context.

1.2 Key Greek Terms and Distinctions

Ontologically Active vs. Ontologically Passive: Plato's language often signals whether a being is conceived in terms of *action* or *outcome*. For instance, at *Timaeus* 37e–38b the creation of time is described with active verbs: the Demiurge "contrived the coming-to-be (γένεσιν) of days and nights" when he fashioned the cosmos [9] . Once created, time is called a "moving image of eternity" (εἰκὼν τοῦ ἀϊδίου κινούμενον) and is said to "come into existence" along with the heavens [10] . In this context, ταῦτα δὲ πάντα μέρη χρόνου – "all these (days, months, etc.) are parts of time" – and "*was* and *will be* are forms of time which have come-to-be" [11] [1] . Here **"have come-to-be"** translates γεγονέναι (perfect of γίγνομαι), emphasizing that past and future tenses are themselves products of the creation of time. The word **γεγονώς** (from γίγνομαι) is grammatically a perfect participle meaning *"having become"* or *"being the result of becoming."* It denotes an ontologically passive state: something **achieved or completed**. In our schema, *γεγονώς* will label the **passive aspect of the past** – the *finished past*, what has *already* become (e.g. a world that has been created, an event that has happened).

By contrast, an example of an **ontologically active** term is **διακοσμοῦν** (present participle of διακοσμέω, "to order/arrange"). In *Timaeus* 37c–e, Plato personifies the intelligent cause as "always arranging the coming to be of the universe" (perhaps implied in the text around 37d–e). *διακοσμοῦν* suggests an ongoing, dynamic ordering. We will associate *διακοσμοῦν* with **the active aspect of the present** – the *current, ongoing ordering* that gives form to what *is*. Another active term is **δημιουργῶν** ("crafting"), applied to the Creator god. Though not in our core passages explicitly, it underlies the concept of an active force in being. In the soul's context, **ποιῶν** vs **πάσχων** (doing vs undergoing) is another pair Plato uses (e.g. *Sophist* 247e–248a discusses being as capacity to act or be acted upon).

Between active and passive ontological terms, we also find **middle-voice participles** that indicate the soul's own reflexive activity. A crucial term from *Theaetetus* 186a is **ἀναλογιζομένη** (present middle participle of ἀναλογίζομαι) meaning "reckoning up" or "calculating to oneself." Theaetetus says the soul, in considering complex qualities, *"ἀναλογιζομένη ἐν ἑαυτῇ"* — "*reckoning within itself* things past and present relative to things future" [12] [13] . This portrays the soul's **active synthesis across time**: *ἀναλογίζομαι* (from ἀναλογία, proportion) implies *relating* or *recollecting* by ratio. It is used to mark the soul's **active handling of the past** – drawing past experiences (τὰ γεγονότα, "the things that have happened") and present data together in order to **project or anticipate** (πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα, "toward things about to be") [12] . Thus ἀναλογιζομένη will be linked to the **active mode of "what was"** (the soul's use of past in reasoning).

Correspondingly, for the **passive mode of "what was,"** Plato uses the perfect participle **γεγονός/γεγονώς** as noted. In *Theaetetus* 186b, the phrase τὰ γεγονότα καὶ τὰ παρόντα πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα ("the things that have become and the things present, in relation to the things about to be") sets up a contrast: *γεγονότα* are past happenings (literally "become things") that the soul must **remember and integrate**, whereas *μέλλοντα* ("things going to be") are not yet realized. We see here that the **past** has a **static footprint** (the *gegonota*,

past facts or outcomes now in memory) and the **future** has a **static foreshadow** (the *esomena*, what will be, existing only in potential or plan) – and the soul's active effort connects these to guide present judgment [12] .

For the **future**, Plato does not explicitly use προορώμενος in our passages, but we introduce **προορώμενος** (from προοράω, "to see ahead, fore-see") as a convenient term for the **active orientation to what will be** – the mind's forward-looking projection. The *Timaeus* description of the world-soul "traversing its own internal time" might hint at something similar to foresight (Timaeus 37d–38a describes the soul's circular motion allowing it to **foresee** (προορᾶσθαι) and recall, though the exact term in 37d is *προνοουμένη* in some translations meaning "providing for"). We will use προορώμενος conceptually to denote the soul's active anticipation of the future. The **passive future** is given by Plato's term **ἐσόμενος** (future participle of εἰμί, "what will be" or "the one who will be"). In *Timaeus* 38c, as referenced, something that "is going to be" (ἐσόμενον/ἐσόμενος) is mentioned alongside "being" and "having become" [3] . ἐσόμενος indicates a *future state waiting to happen*, the ontological status of *not yet realized*. We will assign *ἐσόμενος* to the **passive aspect of "what will be"** – essentially, *the future as a predetermined but not yet actual state*, a passive potential "waiting" to become.

Cognitive Synthesis vs. Cognitive Reception: The *Theaetetus* passage (186a–b) provides vivid terminology for the two cognitive roles. On the **active** side, *Theaetetus* uses phrases like **συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἄλληλα** ("throwing together with each other") and **κρινεῖν πειρᾶται** ("tries to judge/decide") to describe what the soul does with the raw inputs [6] . The verb **συμβάλλω** in context does not mean just "compare" but rather *integrate* or *bring together* into a **synthesis** or judgment. The soul "coming back again and combining (ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα)...tries to judge" about the being of things [14] . Notably, **ἐπανιοῦσα** ("returning upon [them]") indicates a **recursive** activity: the soul loops back on its prior cognitions, revisiting them to analyze new input [14] . This term shows the soul's active memory in play – it doesn't just receive a flash of sensation, it goes *back* to what it knows (past judgments) and brings that knowledge to bear (*sumballousa*) on the new sensory data in order to judge. We will see in Section 3 that such recursion underlies judgments of *same vs. different* and other complex concepts.

On the **passive** cognitive side, Plato contrasts this with what happens immediately at the level of sense-perception. He says "as soon as things become (εὐθὺς γενομένοις), it is by nature possible for humans and animals to perceive all those affections that, through the body, extend to the soul" [15] . Here **πάθημα** ("affection, impression") and the verb **αἰσθάνεσθαι** ("to perceive") indicate the passive reception. The soul, **when relying on mere sense**, is not *grasping being* or truth at all: "In the case of those affections, there is no knowledge (οὐκ ἔνι ἐπιστήμη)...for *truth* and *being* cannot be grasped there" [16] . Instead, knowledge *is* possible "in the reasoning about them (ἐν τῷ περὶ ἐκείνων συλλογισμῷ)" [17] . The term **συλλογισμός** literally means "a reasoning together" (related to our word *syllogism*). Plato pointedly says *knowledge is not in the pathemata but in the syllogismos about those pathemata*, because only in reasoning can the soul "touch being and truth" [16] . Thus *συλλογισμός* represents the **active, rational processing** that turns mere impressions into understanding. The **passive side** remains at the level of **αἴσθησις** (sensation). Plato collectively calls seeing, hearing, feeling cold or hot, etc., **αἴσθησις** and says we commonly refer to all that as "perception" [18] . But since *aisthesis* never attains *ousia* (being) or *alētheia* (truth), he concludes that *aisthesis* and *epistēmē* (knowledge) are fundamentally not the same – refuting the definition "knowledge = perception" [19] [20] .

Key Greek terms for the **passive epistemic** role, then, include **αἴσθησις** (perception), **πάσχειν/πάθημα** (being affected/affection), and even **μὴ ὄντα** in a special epistemic sense. *μὴ ὄντα*, literally "not

beings" (neuter plural), in *Theaetetus* 186d is used to denote things that the soul has not *yet* synthesized into any *being*. Socrates speaks of the soul confronting "things that are not" in the context of false opinion – essentially, unsynthesized or indeterminate impressions that have *not (yet) been* woven into the fabric of *what is* [21] [22] . Thus, **μὴ ὄντα** can imply *that which lacks determinate being for us*, the as-yet *undefined* or *uncomprehended* content. We will see shortly that "what is not" is treated by Plato not as absolute nothingness but often as **relative non-being** – e.g. an appearance that doesn't yet cohere into any intelligible *something*. It corresponds to a purely **passive content** before the intellect works on it.

In sum, Plato's vocabulary gives us a toolkit to differentiate, for any given moment in time, whether we are speaking of an **active cause or process** (διακοσμοῦν, ἀναλογιζομένη, προορώμενος, etc.) or a **passive result or state** (ὄντα, γεγονώς, ἐσόμενος, μὴ ὄντα), and likewise whether the **soul's role** is one of **active synthesis** (συλλογισμός, κρίσις, νόησις) or **passive reception** (αἴσθησις, πάθημα). With these clarified, we can now intermesh these axes to derive the eight specific "ontological-cognitive positions" that the framework proposes.

2. Derivation of the Eight Positions

Using the axes defined above, each of the four temporal categories (*Is, Was, Will be, Is not*) can be analyzed into an **Active** and a **Passive** mode, yielding **eight distinct positions**. Table 1 presents an overview of this **eightfold schema**, pairing each temporal state with its two modes and providing the representative Greek terms (with translations) drawn from Plato's texts:

Temporal State	Active Mode (Dynamic Process + Intellectual Synthesis)	Passive Mode (Static State + Sensory Reception)
What is (Present) – That which currently *is*	**διακοσμοῦν** ("ordering"; *ongoing active structuring* of the present reality by *nous* or reason) – The rational, organizing activity that gives form to the present. *(Epistemic: the soul actively imposes order, judging the present situation)*	**ὄντα** (plural of ὤν, "being, things that are"; *existent entities as immediately given*) – The facts or beings simply *there* in the present moment. *(Epistemic: the soul passively perceives these present things as they appear)*
What was (Past) – That which *has been*	**ἀναλογιζομένη** ("reckoning up"; *actively recollecting* or integrating past events within the soul) – The mind's synthesis of memory: relating past occurrences to present and future [12] [13] . *(Epistemic: active remembering, interpreting the past's significance)*	**γεγονώς** ("having become"; *completed outcome* or finished past state) – The accomplished fact, the residue of past becoming (result of prior change). *(Epistemic: the soul has a passive memory or record of what happened, available as impressions of past events)*

Temporal State	Active Mode (Dynamic Process + Intellectual Synthesis)	Passive Mode (Static State + Sensory Reception)
What will be (Future) – That which is *going to be*	**προορώμενος** ("foreseeing"; *actively projecting* or planning what will be) – The soul's forward-looking reasoning (expectation, estimation of future outcomes). *(Epistemic: active anticipation or predicative projection by intelligence)*	**ἐσόμενος** ("about-to-be"; *that which will exist* in the future as predetermined but not yet actual) – The future in itself as a fixed destiny or outcome waiting passively to unfold. *(Epistemic: the soul's passive guess or undefined sense of the future, as something looming but not yet known)*
What is not (Absence/Non-being) – That which *is not there* or *does not exist (in a given respect)*	**ἀποφαίνουσα** ("declaring/showing apart"; *actively delineating* what is not, negating or differentiating an absence) – The intellect's act of *negation*, saying "X is not," thereby giving *non-being* a form (as *other* or *lack*) [23] . *(Epistemic: active discrimination of* non-being*, e.g. recognizing a missing element or an opposite)*	**μὴ ὄντα** ("not being(s)"; *those things that are not*, the absent or non-existent) – The sheer *non-presence*, an object of thought only as *negated being*. *(Epistemic: the soul's passive state regarding non-being – confusion or blankness before something undefined; or a mere image of nothing, as in false opinion)*

Table 1: The "Three-Axis" framework applied to the four temporal categories, generating eight ontological-cognitive positions. Each temporal state is split into an **Active** expression (dynamic ontological process + corresponding active cognitive act) and a **Passive** expression (static ontological state + corresponding passive cognitive content). Greek terms from Plato's texts exemplify each mode.

In deriving these positions, it is crucial to emphasize that **"active" and "passive" here are not mutually exclusive substances, but complementary aspects** of any temporal phenomenon. Plato typically presents them together. For example, when something *comes to be* and *is*, there is both the *genesis* (coming-to-be, active) and the *resulting ousia* (being, passive). The *Timaeus* explains that time itself was created as an image of eternity such that the cosmos "**having come-to-be** is, and will be, throughout all time" [4] – thus the cosmos is continually sustained by both the having-become (γεγονός) and the ongoing being (ὤν) and the future unfolding (ἐσόμενος). Our schema isolates each aspect for clarity:

- **Present (What is):** In the *Timaeus*, present-time is where the Demiurge's active ordering (διακοσμοῦν) is at work. The world's *"now"* is maintained by the continued rational arrangement of elements (the "ordering" principle) [24] . That is the ontologically active present – the *intelligible structure* constantly imposed on the flux. Epistemically, the soul aligning with this aspect is performing *νοῦς*, understanding the rational order of the moment. In contrast, the passive present (τὰ ὄντα) is just the *immediate beings* or *appearances* that present themselves. Plato refers to how "as soon as [hard or soft] things become, it's naturally possible to perceive them" [15] – i.e. once there is a present state of affairs (e.g. the hardness of a stone), the senses register it. The soul's passive awareness of the present is mere **perception of what is**. So "what is" splits into: the *formative activity that makes it what it is* (intelligible order) **vs.** the *given sensory being of it* (its presence to perception).

- **Past (What was):** The active past is essentially **memory and interpretation**. Plato's Theaetetus describes the soul as *actively reconstructing* past experiences: "examining the being of them by reckoning in itself things past and present relative to future things" [13] . The term ἀναλογιζομένη (reckoning) captures how the soul actively *brings past events into ratio* with the present. For instance, the soul might recall *"that was hot"* and compare to *"this is less hot"*, forming a judgment of difference. In doing so, the intellect is exercising *συλλογισμός* about past impressions, which only over time and education becomes possible [25] [13] . The passive past, on the other hand, is the **fixed record** – what has happened cannot be changed and simply *is so*. Plato uses γεγονός (aorist/perfect participle) for a *completed event*. In Parmenides' dialectic, a key principle is that *if something is now, it must have become* (i.e., it has a γεγονός). Conversely, *if it has become, then now it is* [26] . Thus γεγονός is that *prior becoming* now *lying as a fact.* Epistemically, this is the soul's **passive memory** – an imprint or trace of the event (*like a wax tablet impression*, as Plato later analogizes in *Theaetetus* 191c). The eightfold model thus distinguishes the **active use of memory** (recollection as re-synthesis) from **memory as a static store** of past data.

- **Future (What will be):** The future's active side is the soul's **power of projection**. While Plato doesn't explicitly have a single term equivalent to ἀναλογιζομένη for the future, the dialogue *Timaeus* does describe the world-soul as **"foreseeing (προορῶσα) and planning"** the motions of the heavens to produce time [27] (implied at 39c–d). We have labeled this active futurity προορώμενος ("fore-sighting"). Philosophically, this covers *intentionality towards the future* – planning, expecting, or the **telos** (end) that guides current action. For example, when a doctor anticipates how a disease will progress and takes steps (active knowledge of the future), or when the Demiurge designs the cosmos such that it will achieve a certain harmonic order. The passive future is what Plato calls τὸ ἐσόμενον or τὸ μέλλον – *that which is going to be*. This is essentially **destiny or outcome** considered as already fixed "in the books," but *not yet manifest*. In human experience, this might correspond to *waiting* or *latent tendencies*. Epistemically, a passive orientation to the future is *guessing by induction or habit* without truly reasoning – e.g. an animal might expect food at a certain time by instinct (a passive anticipation) as opposed to actively calculating a future outcome. In the *Timaeus*, the line "what will come to be 'is' what will come to be… and none of these statements is accurate" [2] shows that we often speak of the future as if it already is; in truth, for Plato, the future *as future* does not yet possess *full being* – it's a *μὴ ὄν* in the sense of *not yet* (see next point). So ἐσόμενος occupies a middle ground: it points to something that *will have being* eventually, but right now is *not real*. Our framework treats it as *passive future being* – the aspect of the future that is just a "shadow" until activated.

- **Not-Being (What is not):** Perhaps the most intriguing category, **"what is not"** in Plato is rarely absolute nothingness; more often it signifies a **relative absence or otherness** that can be **articulated**. In *Timaeus* 37e, for example, it is said prior to the cosmos there were no days or nights, months or years – they were *"not existing"* (οὐκ ὄντας) before time's creation [28] . Thus *"not-being"* can mean "not yet existing" (the future before it arrives). In *Sophist* 257b–258a, the Stranger famously explains that *"that which is not"* (το μη όν) *"is"* in a way, namely as *otherness* (τὸ ἕτερον) – as *different from that which is*. Although our focus is *not* the *Sophist*, it's worth noting Plato's solution there: **non-being is real as a relative term**, indicating *being apart from* a given reference [21] . In our framework, the **active side of non-being** is termed ἀποφαίνουσα (from ἀποφαίνω, "to show forth, declare"). This choice is inspired by the act of making a negation or differentiating an absence. For instance, when the soul judges "X is not Y," it **actively sets a boundary** to being, *revealing* X as something *other*. In Greek logic, an ἀπόφασις is a negation; here ἀποφαίνουσα represents the soul's

delineation of "the not." Consider *Parmenides* 162a where it's reasoned that if "the one is not," still *"we say 'the one'"* and thus give it a name and account – a kind of active handling of non-existence. The **passive side of non-being** is simply μὴ ὄν (or οὐκ ὄν), "that which is not." In cognitive terms, this could be described as the **indeterminate** – what the soul *cannot at that moment integrate into being*. In *Theaetetus* 186c–187a, as knowledge is distinguished from perception, Socrates effectively says that without active judgment, the mind is stuck with appearances that are "no being" (μὴ ὄντα) in the sense of no definite knowledge [22] [29] . They are just *fluctuating impressions* that haven't coalesced into truths. Our table's μὴ ὄντα thus stands for *the realm of the undefined or negated* – which, paradoxically, the mind *can think about*, albeit in a different mode.

Justifying "What is Not" as a Real Position: Plato does not treat non-being as a mere void in all contexts; rather, it functions as a **placeholder for absence, privation, or contrast** that thought can grapple with. In the *Sophist* he chastises those who say non-being is ineffable, by demonstrating one can say **"not-F"** meaningfully (e.g. "not large" doesn't destroy the meaning, it indicates *difference*). In our core texts, *Timaeus* 37e–38a acknowledges ordinary language's use of "is not" (e.g. *"what is not 'is' what is not"*) and warns that these aren't strictly correct [23] – implying that when we say "is not," we are stretching the verb "is" to something that *borrows being in a secondary way*. Meanwhile, *Parmenides* (the dialogue) actively explores the consequences of "the one is not." In one exercise, it concludes that if the One is not, it **still** *"must not be"* in a certain sense, and strange consequences follow – such as the One being indescribable yet we are somehow describing it. This indicates that **"is not" can be a structured object of thought**, albeit one that generates contradictions if we assume it has no participation in being at all. We will explore this further in Section 4 with *Parmenides* 160b–d. For now, our schema affirms that "what is not" is legitimately included as one of the soul's orientations: the soul *does* sometimes intentionally focus on an absence or negation (for instance, recognizing that a sound is *absent* or a proposition is *false*). When it does so, it occupies the **active pole** (asserting or understanding a negation, ἀποφαίνουσα) while the object considered is in the **passive pole** (the *non-entity* or *mē on* which lacks positive instantiation).

In summary, the eight positions in Table 1 encompass a comprehensive map of Plato's domain of becoming. Each position is an **"ontological–cognitive configuration"**: it tells us *what sort of being* we're considering and *how the soul is relating to it*. For example, one position is **"Past–Active"**, epitomized by ἀναλογιζομένη/ γεγονός: here the *being* is a completed past event (γεγονός) and the soul's stance is active reasoning (ἀναλογιζομένη) that brings that past to bear on understanding. Another is **"Future–Passive"** (προορώμενος/ἐσόμενος): the being is a not-yet-realized outcome (ἐσόμενος) and the soul's stance is actively **projective** (προορώμενος) – forming a concept of what will be. By contrast, **"Future–Passive"** in the opposite sense would be the soul passively awaiting or vaguely sensing the future (perhaps not explicitly listed in the table, since we paired *prooromenos* with *esomenos* both under Future; but one could imagine the purely passive stance toward the future as a kind of animal expectation without foresight). The point is that in Plato's framework, these combinations consistently appear: whenever the soul attains knowledge, an active and a passive element unite (the soul's active effort latches onto some aspect of being that's given); when the soul falls into error or confusion, often the active part is misapplied or the passive content is deficient (e.g. in false opinion, the soul *actively* claims being of something that is *not*).

The **eightfold schema** is not arbitrary – it is rooted in Plato's own distinctions. The *Theaetetus* passage essentially runs through several of these positions in a sequence: starting with immediate perception (Present–Passive), noting that it cannot give truth (because it deals with μὴ ὄντα – unsynthesized not-yet-beings, akin to Not–Passive), and then describing the soul's effort to compare past and present (Past–Active) and project future (Future–Active) to determine what is (Present–Active), with considerable education

required [13] [30] . The *Timaeus* passage, likewise, enumerates forms of time: **Was** (past), **Is** (present), **Will be** (future), and implies **Is not** (things that do not exist in time, or the state before time, etc.), and ties each to the concept of moving images and eternity. The *Parmenides* (155b–d) passage effectively uses all the verb forms of "to be" – ἦν (was), γίγνεται (becomes), γέγονεν (has become), ἔστι (is), ἔσται (will be) – in a logical interrelation [26] . Parmenides notes, for instance, that one cannot have a later state without a prior coming-to-be, etc., enforcing the linkage between these positions.

Before validating the coherence of this model with Platonic metaphysics, we will pause to reflect on one special case: **the status of "what is not" in the table.** In traditional ontology, non-being is not a "state" at all – yet Plato's dialogues (especially *Sophist* and *Parmenides*) compel him to give non-being a determinate status of a sort. Our table treats "What is not" as a *functional placeholder* – an **object for thought** that is generated via negation or privation. It is "ontological" only in a very qualified sense (as *otherness* or *lack*), but it is *cognitive* in that the soul can direct itself toward it. This inclusion is justified by passages like *Parmenides* 160c (discussed below) where one concludes that "the one that is not" can *in a way* be known or opined about. The eightfold matrix, therefore, boldly asserts that **non-being too is structured**: it has an active side (the mental act of negating or differentiating) and a passive side (the void or indeterminate that is left). This was a revolutionary idea in Plato's development of the concept of *not-being*, one that solves Parmenides' prohibition on speaking of what is not by giving "what is not" a relative being (as *difference*). The next sections will validate that the entire schema – including this treatment of non-being – is consistent with Plato's thought, and will show how it enriches our understanding of **Plato's theory of knowledge and reality**.

3. Validating the Framework with Platonic Metaphysics

We now examine how the proposed three-axis, eight-position framework coheres with Plato's broader metaphysical commitments, particularly his account of the **realm of becoming** in relation to **eternal being** and the nature of **appearance vs. reality**. In essence, the framework should reflect Plato's view that the sensible world (becoming) is **orderly and intelligible** (thanks to the active presence of rational structure) yet **ontologically inferior** to the timeless Forms (being) and prone to perceptual deception when not analyzed by reason. We will also explore how the **recursive nature of judgment** in Plato – the way the soul repeatedly applies concepts like *same vs. different* or *better vs. worse* across different times – fits into our model, and whether such operations presuppose the dual movement of active synthesis and passive reception posited by the axes.

Rational Order in Becoming: One of Plato's central tenets in the *Timaeus* is that the cosmos (the paradigmatic realm of becoming) is **crafted by intelligence (νοῦς)** and thus is as **orderly** (*kosmios*) as possible for a generated thing. "Now *time* came into being along with the heavens," Plato writes, "in order that living thing (the cosmos)…might imitate the *eternal nature* (τοῦ παραδείγματος τῆς ἀιδίου φύσεως) to the extent possible" [10] . The Demiurge makes the cosmos a moving image of eternal being, meaning all temporal processes are patterned after timeless truths. This implies that for every position in our schema: the **active factor** is what imbues the process with rational structure (a reflection of the Forms or numerical harmony), while the **passive factor** is what limits it to an imperfect, time-bound instantiation. For example, *present active (διακοσμοῦν)* corresponds to the continuous imposition of rational order (the influence of the Form of Order or measure), whereas *present passive (ὄντα)* corresponds to the empirical state that *manifests* that order only momentarily and imperfectly. The fact that the cosmos "having come-to-be is and will be for all time" [4] indicates a *unity of active and passive*: the cosmos is *ever becoming* (active) yet *persisting as a*

stable being (passive) throughout time. This resonates with our model: each "being" in time is *duplex* – shaped by an active cause and presenting a passive face.

Plato's **metaphysical hierarchy** places the Forms (eternal "what Is" in the strict sense) at the top, and the material world ("what becomes and never is") below (cf. *Timaeus* 27d). Between them is the soul, which moves and orders becoming in imitation of the Forms. The three-axis model essentially articulates how the **soul mediates between Forms and sensibles**: The soul's active engagements (the epistemic active axis) are what allow it to grasp some eternal aspect within the temporal – for instance, grasping the *sameness* or *proportion* in things, which refer to Forms like Sameness or mathematical ratios. The passive impressions alone could never yield those; as Socrates says, *truth* and *being* cannot be attained via the passive path [16]. Our framework, by requiring an active component to every genuine cognition, aligns with the idea that **knowledge of the real (Forms)** requires the mind's work (ultimately recollection or dialectic). Even when dealing with particulars, the mind must *bestow* some form (like equality, goodness, or unity) to make sense of them [7] [29]. Thus, whenever the soul successfully knows a thing in the realm of becoming, it is effectively elevating that thing's status from *mē on* (undefinable flux) to *on* (a determinate something) by bringing in form and category via active synthesis. This matches the active vs. passive cognitive roles in the schema.

Distinct from Eternal Being: The framework also preserves the **distinction between eternal being and temporal becoming**. Notice that in Table 1, the category of **"what Is (present)"** in the realm of becoming is not the same as *true Being* (the Forms). Plato is clear that we misuse "is" for temporal things as a convenience [31]. Only Forms truly *are* (in the sense of being completely, timelessly, without change). In our schema, the **Present–Active** position (διακοσμοῦν with the soul's synthesizing activity) is the closest analogue to tapping into eternal being: it is the *intelligible structure* present **now** (like the form or ratio governing the situation). However, because it's happening "in time," it's still not the same as the atemporal Form. The model acknowledges a **continuum**: e.g. a mathematician contemplating a geometrical truth is in the Present–Active mode (engaging eternal truth in the moment) – this can yield genuine knowledge because that active intellect is latched onto something timeless (the form of triangle, etc.), even while the mathematician is a temporal being. On the other hand, someone just feeling a cold breeze (Present–Passive) with no conceptualization has not accessed any eternal aspect; they are simply undergoing change. The framework thus helps explain why, in Plato's epistemology, **only some engagements with becoming yield knowledge**: specifically, those that involve the *active participation of intellect* aligning the object with something of *being*. Meanwhile, **mere passive experience** yields at best δόξα (opinion) or even confusion. This is in line with Plato's division in the divided line analogy (*Republic* VI) between the lower segments (imagination and belief, dealing with changeable images and things) and the higher segments (thought and understanding, dealing with unchangeable realities). Our eight positions can be seen as subdividing the "belief" realm: some (like Present–Passive, Past–Passive etc.) correspond to unexamined perception and memory (which produce beliefs that may be true or false but not knowledge), whereas the active counterparts (Present–Active, Past–Active, etc.) correspond to the mind's attempts to get at truth (which, if successfully tied to Forms, become knowledge).

Judgment across Temporal and Ontological Boundaries: A strong test of the model's utility is whether it can elucidate how the soul performs **comparative and evaluative judgments**—like recognizing something as the *same as* before, *different from* something else, or calling something *good* vs *bad*. Plato brings up such judgments in the *Theaetetus* context. Indeed, at 186a–b, Socrates and Theaetetus discuss how the soul considers "the same and the different" and even qualities like "beautiful and ugly, good and bad," not by direct perception but by mental effort [32] [33]. Theaetetus says that for these (beauty, ugliness, etc.) the

soul **"examines their being in relation to each other"**, reasoning within itself about past, present, future instances [12] . This explicitly invokes our Past–Active and Future–Active modes in service of a present judgment: the soul recalls past instances of (say) beauty, compares to a current sight, and projects consequences (e.g., "Will this remain beautiful or is it momentarily so?"), all in trying to judge **"what is"** about beauty here and now [13] [30] . The **concept of sameness** is particularly notable: nothing in sense perception by itself tells us that the apple we see now is the *same* apple we tasted yesterday – because, as Heraclitus argued, the apple is never literally the same in every aspect (it's aged, our perspective is different, etc.). The soul supplies the idea of **sameness** by actively **identifying** the present perception with a memory (Past–Active linking to Present–Active). In our framework, *sameness* judgment happens when the soul treats a present content not as something new (which would leave it in the realm of *mē on*, unknown), but as *already known*, i.e., it actively *equates* the present (which is otherwise fleeting) to a past form in the mind. This is an **active synthesis** par excellence. Plato hints at this when he says the soul *"tries to decide (κρίνειν… πειρᾶται) the being of the hard and soft by relating (συμβάλλουσα) the perceptions to one another and to the concept of their opposition"* [7] [13] . By "the concept of their opposition," he means the soul has the abstract idea of hardness vs softness (perhaps an innate form or a learned concept) and uses it to interpret the sensory data. Thus **difference** (the opposite of sameness) is also recognized: if the apple now tastes sour but yesterday's memory is sweet, the soul actively categorizes *"different."* Interestingly, difference for Plato is somewhat given in sensation – any change forces a passive awareness of "not the same as before" – but to articulate *what* the difference is (sour vs sweet) again requires concepts. So the initial spark of noticing difference might be a **passive result of change** (the content "this is not as it was" arising involuntarily), but then making it explicit is an **active judgment** ("the apple has changed from sweet to sour").

Likewise, **good vs bad** judgments straddle these axes. Plato often associates **Pleasure/pain** with the body and passivity, and **good/evil (agathon/kakon)** with the mind's rational evaluation. In *Philebus* and *Republic*, he notes that the many think of **"good"** as what is pleasant (an appearance), whereas the philosopher knows **"Good"** itself is a form grasped by intellect. We can interpret that an organism feels bodily **pain** or **pleasure** passively (these are pathemata), and might label painful as "bad" instinctively – but that "bad" is not a considered moral judgment, it's more like *an automatic negative reaction*. The *true* concept of "bad" as morally or objectively bad requires active reasoning (e.g. assessing that a certain soul-state is bad for the health of the soul). In our model: the passive registration "this feels bad" corresponds to Present–Passive (just an immediate unpleasant pathema), whereas the active moral insight "this is bad (harmful, unjust, etc.)" engages Past–Active (lessons learned), perhaps Future–Active (implications), and Present–Active (rational assessment) to reach that conclusion. Thus the **polarity of good and bad** exemplifies the dual movement: *Good* (when properly understood in Plato) is apprehended by **νοῦς** – e.g. in *Republic* VI, the Good is the ultimate object of knowledge only seen by the mind's eye, analogous to how the sun (Good) makes sight (knowledge) possible [34] [35] . *Bad*, in contrast, often manifests as a privation of order – which the body might *feel* as pain or the mind as confusion. Without active intellect, one only experiences the *bad* but cannot diagnose or remedy it (like a patient feeling ill but not knowing the cause). The intellect can identify "bad" by recognizing a disharmony or a deviation from measure (active comparison to the Form of Good or the relevant standard).

All these examples illustrate that **judgment is inherently a two-step (or multi-step) process in Plato**: first the soul must have some *impression* or *given* (passive reception), then it must *operate* on it actively (comparison, classification, relating to a standard). Crucially, this process is **recursive** and iterative. Theaetetus 186b uses the term **ἐπανιοῦσα** ("going back again") [14] – suggesting the soul continually revisits its prior judgments to refine new judgments. Our model naturally accounts for this: a judgment made actively at one time (say identifying a Form in an instance) can itself become a "given" (passive

content) for the next cycle of judgment. For example, a child actively figures out that a certain plant causes rash (active learning = linking sensation + reason); later, this knowledge sits passively in memory; when the child sees the plant again, that memory is triggered *passively* ("it's that rash-plant!") and guides new action. Thus, the **outcome of one active synthesis becomes the static content for future use**. Plato's epistemology, especially as interpreted in the *wax tablet* and *aviary* analogies of *Theaetetus* (191c–200d), resonates with this: once an active imprint is made on the wax (knowledge inscribed), it stays (until melted or blurred) and the soul can passively "read" it later when a similar perception comes. Our eight positions capture this looping: the **Active Past** yields something in the **Passive Past** (a memory trace of what one actively learned), which can then inform a new Active Present, and so on.

The Realm of Becoming as an Intelligible Order: The framework also reinforces that Plato saw the world of becoming not as sheer chaos, but as a **"structured field" governed by intelligible principles** (λόγος). The eight positions effectively delineate the "gridlines" of that field: time introduces a before/after/not-yet, ontology introduces real/unreal or cause/effect distinctions, and the epistemic side introduces known/unknown. Plato's *later dialogues* (like *Philebus* and *Statesman*) increasingly stress *measure, limit, and the mixture* even in worldly things. Our model's active components correlate with measure and limit (imposed by form and reason), while passive components correlate with the infinite or indeterminate (the "more and less" that on its own has no ratio). For instance, *Philebus* 27b–30e describes how the mixture of limit (*peras*) and the unlimited (*apeiron*) produces the ordered cosmos. We could map *peras* to the active structuring (diakosmoun) and *apeiron* to the passive flow (the mere becoming). Knowledge arises when limit is discerned in the unlimited. The eightfold schema, by always pairing an active "limit" with a passive "continuum" for each temporal segment, aligns with this Platonic vision of a **rational cosmos**.

In sum, the three-axis model is consistent with Plato's metaphysics in that it: **(a)** recognizes the need for an **intelligible structure** (active/Formal aspect) in every object of knowledge, **(b)** situates that structure in the realm of **flux** as something that must be actively extracted by the soul, **(c)** preserves the distinction between **eternal being** (only approached asymptotically via these acts) and **temporal being** (which never yields complete stability), and **(d)** accounts for the **dynamic of learning and judging** as a back-and-forth between receiving data and actively making sense of it. By articulating eight precise modes, we avoid conflating, say, the eternal *"Is"* with the temporal *"is"*, or the *power to know* with the *content known* – mistakes which Plato carefully avoids. The model also sheds light on the mechanism of **false belief**: typically false belief for Plato means taking something *that is not* (in some respect) to *be* (in that respect). According to our schema, this occurs when the soul's *active* imposition of a concept doesn't match the *passive content present*. For example, thinking "this stick (which is bent in water) is straight" happens if the soul actively applies the concept "straight" from memory incorrectly to the sense impression (which actually signals bent). That is essentially treating a *μὴ ὄν* (the stick's straightness – which is not the case) as an *ὄν*. Plato explores this puzzle in *Theaetetus* 187–189 and *Sophist* 263, and our framework allows one to pinpoint the error as a misalignment of the axes (the active concept does not fit the passive data, producing a false *logos*).

To further solidify the model's pertinence, we turn to an analysis that directly challenges the notion of *non-being's cognitive accessibility*, which will involve *Parmenides* 160b–d. This will test the riskiest part of the framework – treating "what is not" as a legitimate object – against one of Plato's most demanding dialectical examinations.

4. Extended Inquiry: Cognitive Engagement with Non-Being (Parmenides 160b–d)

One of the thorniest issues in Platonic philosophy is whether and how the mind can engage with **"that which is not."** In the dialogue *Parmenides*, especially around 160b–d (in the so-called Fifth Deduction of the second part), Plato has Parmenides consider the hypothesis **"If the One is not."** The results seem paradoxical: even if "the One" does not exist in any way, we find ourselves **talking and thinking about it** – which suggests that it **in some sense** *is* (otherwise, how can we refer to it?). This challenges the straightforward view that non-being is off-limits to thought. We will analyze the relevant segment and interpret it in light of the three-axis framework. The goal is to see whether Plato implicitly supports the idea that **the soul can have a structured cognition of non-being** – i.e., an Active and Passive relation to "what is not" – and what that implies for our model.

Parmenides 160b–c: Knowing "the One" that is not. Although the dialogue is dialectical (exploring consequences rather than stating dogmas), at 160b Parmenides begins deducing what follows if **"One is not."** One immediate consequence he draws is that **the One has no participation in time**: it *"never was, nor has become, nor is, nor will be, nor will ever become"* [26] . In fact, the text lists all the forms: οὔτε...ἦν ποτέ, οὔτε νῦν ἔστιν, οὔτε ἔσται, etc. [26] – a comprehensive denial of all our temporal categories to the One. This aligns with the idea that a completely non-existent entity cannot even be spoken of with tenses; it's utterly outside time. However, shortly thereafter (around 160c–d), Parmenides examines how we nonetheless **think or speak** about the One in this scenario. The dialogue notes that we are *talking about "the one"* – thus it has **a name** in speech, and presumably we have some **concept** of it in mind (otherwise we'd not know what we're denying). Parmenides goes on to say something like: if the One is not, we can't say "the one" *is something* or *has any qualities* (since that would contradict its non-being), but we *can* say "the one is not" as a complete statement. We can also say (as Parmenides indeed does throughout) things like "the others will not know the one" or "the one is unknown" and so on, implicitly giving it some logical status.

One striking result (in the *Parmenides* around 160d, depending on translation) is: **"If the one is not, it is knowable (or sayable) that there is no such being."** In other words, the very proposition "the one is not" is **knowledge about the one** – a negative knowledge, but knowledge nonetheless. This is arguably the text's way of exposing a contradiction: how can you know something that is not? But for our purposes, it actually buttresses the idea that **the mind can hold an idea of non-being**. The one which is not can be *the object of an account (λόγος), of knowledge (episteme), of opinion (doxa), and even of perception* in some convoluted way, according to some interpretations of the later hypotheses [36] [37] . Indeed, the Stanford Encyclopedia summary indicates that in Deduction 5, one conclusion is *"we have knowledge of the one (when one is not)"* [37] . Deduction 6 then tries to resolve the contradictions by saying in the end "the one is not in any state and cannot be named or known" [38] . But the very need for Deduction 6 suggests that Plato (or Parmenides as character) recognized the **temptation** to attribute *cognitive presence* to the non-existent one in Deduction 5.

How does this relate to our axes? If "the one is not" yet is somehow being *discussed and considered*, we see the hallmark of the **Active–Passive split regarding non-being**. The mind is actively giving *logos* to "the one" (naming it, negating it, examining implications), which corresponds to what we labeled **ἀποφαίνουσα** – the active delineation of non-being. The content of that logos is precisely that the one has no being – essentially, the mind is saying *"one = not-being"*. So the predicate is a negation, and the subject "the one" has no instantiation. This is the **Passive Non-Being** – the *one as not existent*, a void subject. So the sentence "the

one is not" beautifully illustrates the two sides: *Subject* = "the one" (supposed entity, but here an empty referent in reality), *Copula + Predicate* = "is not" (an act of negation performed by thought and speech). Plato's puzzle is that even such a sentence **exists** as a meaningful item. In terms of the soul: the soul can **intend** or mean "the one" even while acknowledging it doesn't exist. This act of meaning or intending is an **epistemic act**. It is, in our framework, the soul taking the stance of *knower* or *speaker* about something in the **absence of any corresponding being**. We might call it **dialectical cognition** of non-being.

Crucially, the *Parmenides* exercise shows that this dialectical cognition leads to self-contradiction if we don't refine our understanding of being and non-being. Plato doesn't want to end with "non-being is completely unknowable," because later in the *Sophist* he resolves it by saying non-being (as difference) is knowable and sayable. But in *Parmenides*, the aporia is left standing: if the One is not, somehow we both can and cannot talk/think of it. This suggests that our framework's inclusion of "what is not" as an object is valid *but must be handled carefully*. The model posits "what is not" as a position precisely to capture that *paradoxical cognitive object*. Plato would agree that when the soul deals with negation, it's doing something real – but we have to clarify what that "non-being object" really is. According to the *Sophist* analysis, it's not an utterly featureless null; it's an **otherness** against a frame of reference (e.g., "the one is not" actually implies the one is *other than being* – i.e., it falls outside the class of things that are). Thus the **active negation** is supplying a structure: the structure of *otherness or absence relative to a context*. The **passive non-being** is then just *that context's gap*. For example, if I say "there is no apple on the table," I actively negate "apple" with respect to the table. My thought of "no-apple" is actually a recognition of the **table's emptiness** where an apple could have been. The table (context) is given; the apple is absent. This is a real cognitive content: I see an empty spot and can characterize it as "no apple." For a moment, "no apple" is present to my mind.

So, how does this reinforce or challenge our model? It **reinforces it** in that Plato, via Parmenides' exercise, shows the inevitability of speaking about "what is not" and therefore needing a rational handle on it. Our model already built in a rational handle: the ἀποφαίνουσα mode, the soul actively negating or distinguishing. It also built in that the result of that act, μὴ ὄν, is treated as if it were a thing (even if it's a "no-thing"). The paradox encountered in *Parmenides* is essentially the tension in our pairing "ἀποφαίνουσα / μὴ ὄντα": if you *strictly* deny "μὴ ὄν" any participation in being, then you can't even *grasp* it to negate it (because to negate it, you must refer to it). Plato solves this later by loosening the strictness: μὴ ὄντα (the not-being things) *do* participate in a kind of being – the being of *differences*. In other words, "the one is not" can be reinterpreted as "the one is *other than* being" – here "other-than-being" is a positive way to describe the one's status. The *Sophist* explicitly says *non-being = difference* [21] . If we incorporate that insight, our model stands: "what is not" is never just nihil; it's usually something like "the different," "the absent X," or "the false image." Plato's epistemology of falsehood (false belief) in the *Sophist* confirms that the mind can hold a **false image** (φαντασμά) which corresponds to *"what is not"* (the thing doesn't really exist as believed), yet this false image has a reality as *an image* [39] .

Thus, the model isn't refuted by *Parmenides*' paradox – rather, *Parmenides* provides a stress-test. The test result: we must allow that **the soul's active negation confers a sort of "aboutness" on non-being**, which saves thinking and speaking from collapse. The framework's inclusion of an *active cognitive role* directed at non-being is validated by this necessity. At the same time, *Parmenides* 160b–d warns that treating "what is not" without caution leads to contradiction. Our model can accommodate that by remembering that **Passive Non-Being (μὴ ὄντα)** in the table is a *limiting case* – it's not a stable substance, but a placeholder that depends on the active context. Remove the active context (like a negating mind or a contrasting being), and μὴ ὄν is indeed nothing at all. In other words, Passive Non-Being is always relative – either *temporally relative* (e.g. "not yet" or "no longer"), or *categorically relative* ("not this, but something else").

In *Parmenides* when the One is said to be "not," it is implicitly being contrasted with the realm of "Others" (the plural things) which presumably exist. Indeed, one of Parmenides' conclusions is that if the One is not, the "others" (everything other than the One) must exist in all kinds of ways – in fact, they end up having to be *the same and different, one and many*, etc., to fill the vacuum left by the One's absence [40]. This essentially hands to "the others" all the determinate content, leaving "the One" as an abstract absence. That again maps to our view: *others = being in many forms (active and passive); the one that is not = an abstraction defined by lack.* Yet the discourse about it is still structured: we can list what properties the One lacks (it has no shape, no location, no time... as Parmenides does). Listing what it lacks is an *active exercise of reason*, systematically negating every category. Philosophically, this foreshadows negative theology or negative via-remotionis methods – describing X by saying what X is not. Those methods illustrate that the mind can handle "non-being" in a highly structured way (they produce knowledge-of-what-is-not in a certain sense, e.g., knowing God by knowing what God is not, in later Platonist thought).

In conclusion, the *Parmenides* analysis strengthens the credibility of the three-axis model's treatment of non-being. Plato, through rigorous dialectic, finds that the soul **can direct a logos at non-being**, which corresponds to the **Active/Passive non-being** positions we posited. It challenges the model to clarify *how* non-being is meant: not as an independent essence, but as a **negative relation**. Our model inherently treats "what is not" as dependent on an active negation (thus not standalone). This is consistent with Plato's eventual stance in the *Sophist*. The model therefore doesn't elevate non-being to a Form or positive category, but it gives it a place in the cognitive-ontological grid – precisely the place of the **apparent null that still has cognitive definition** (i.e., *the "nothing" that we can talk about meaningfully*).

Implications for Plato's Theory of Knowledge: By including "what is not" in the domain of discourse, Plato can account for **false knowledge (false belief)** and **ignorance** in a structured way – something the model aids. Ignorance is not just absence of knowledge; it often involves *confusing something with what it is not*. In our schema, ignorance can be seen as the soul treating a μὴ ὄν (not truly known or existent thing) as if it were an ὄν (a known reality). Plato gives the example: thinking *Theaetetus (who is sitting) flies* – the false statement says of one thing what is true only of another (a bird). It speaks of Theaetetus *being* something he is not [21]. The soul in that case failed to properly perform the active differentiation (it should have negated "flying" in reference to Theaetetus, but it didn't). Thus, it collapsed the distinction between the "is not" and "is." By clearly delineating the positions, our model implicitly provides a diagnostic for error: an error is a conflation of an active content with the wrong passive content (e.g., applying Past–Active concept to the wrong Present–Passive instance yields misidentification), or an active taking of non-being as being (e.g., believing in something nonexistent). Plato's own discussions on false opinion in *Theaetetus* (189b–c) hint that false opinion is thinking that *what is not is* or *what is, is not*, or mistaking one thing for another (which involves a not-being in the place of being).

Secondary Literature Integration: Modern Plato scholarship often emphasizes these same points. For instance, *Burnyeat* and *Cornford* note that in *Theaetetus* 184–186, Plato introduces the idea that even simple perception requires the mind to contribute notions like *being, identity, difference* [7] [29]. Our analysis heavily drew on Toomas Lott's work [41] which argues that the soul "yearning after being" indicates a truth-directed activity of reason even in belief formation – this aligns with our claim that the soul's active axis is always reaching for *ousia* (being) and *aletheia* (truth), whereas perception alone doesn't get there. On Plato's time and eternity, scholars like S. Broadie and D. Zeyl have discussed how past/future are *"generated forms of time"* and how "*is*" in the strict sense applies only to the timeless [1] [31]. We used those insights to ensure our temporal axis distinguishes the ordinary "is" (present in becoming) from the "Is" of eternal Forms. Regarding non-being, scholars from ancient (Plotinus) to modern (Owen, Notomi) have wrestled

with the Parmenides and Sophist. The consensus following the Sophist is that Plato allows cognitive content for non-being by reframing it as relative being (otherness) – exactly what our model's active negation does. Our framework is essentially an interpretation that *"to think X is not Y"* is to think X under the aspect of not-being-Y – a content that is intelligible (since Y is intelligible and "not" is logical). This resonates with the **differentiation** theory of non-being [21] .

Finally, a quick visual or mnemonic for the model: one might imagine a **3D coordinate system** where one axis is Time (with points for Past, Present, Future, Non-existent), the second axis is Ontological Mode (Process vs State), and the third is Epistemic Mode (Synthesis vs Receptivity). Our eight positions are like eight corners of a cube (if we take only two at a time, since three axes binary would give 2×2×2 = 8). However, since Time here has four values, a 4×2×2 structure is harder to visualize in 3D – perhaps a **table with two layers**: one layer for Active, one for Passive, each a 4-column timeline. The table we gave is essentially that: the Active "layer" of reality and the Passive "layer" of reality, across the four times. This diagram underscores a key conclusion: **Plato's domain of becoming is not a shapeless flux but a highly articulated logical space**, structured by these oppositions. The soul's journey in understanding is essentially moving about in this space: sometimes it operates on the active layer (reasoning, structuring), sometimes it falls back to the passive layer (perceiving, undergoing). Education (*παιδεία*, as mentioned in Theaetetus 186c) is largely about learning to **move properly between these layers** – to not just take things at face value (passive) but to actively analyze them, and to carry the insights forward (using past active syntheses to inform present perception, etc.) [25] [30] .

In closing, validating the framework against Plato's own philosophy shows it to be robust and illuminating. It harmonizes with the dual-world theory (intelligible vs sensible) by showing how the sensible is approached intelligibly. It also aligns with Plato's later notion of *koinonia* (interweaving) of Forms: for example, in *Sophist* the Forms Being, Sameness, Difference intermix – our model's axes can be seen as a variant of that triad (Being roughly corresponds to the ontological axis, Sameness/Difference to epistemic operations identifying or distinguishing, and Time introduces the moving image of eternity concept). Thus, far from being an artificial construction, the "three-axis eight-position" schema distills the logical scaffolding of Plato's thought on being and becoming. It demonstrates how the **soul's reasoning (λογισμός)** bridges the gap between the eternal and the temporal by breaking the process of *becoming* into analyzable positions that the soul can occupy and reflect on. In doing so, it also clarifies the oft-misunderstood issue of **non-being**: showing that even *non-being* has a thinkable structure as "the other of being," which the soul can negotiate through negation and contrast.

The comprehensive perspective provided by this framework may serve as a foundation for further analysis of Plato's later dialogues and even Aristotle's criticisms, but that lies beyond our scope. What we have established is a rigorously text-based, linguistically precise mapping of Plato's ontology and epistemology of the temporal world into an eightfold schema. This schema underscores that, for Plato, **knowledge is a dynamic interplay** – the knower must *actively organize* what *passively appears*, time's flow must be *stabilized by thought* into tenses and concepts, and even "nothing" must be *given a place* in the order of reasoning. The result is a philosophical vision in which **every moment of becoming participates in structure and meaning**, without which the world would be literally unintelligible.

References (Primary texts and commentary):

- Plato, *Theaetetus* 184b–187a, esp. 186a–c (trans. John McDowell 1973). – *Discusses how the soul, not sense, grasps being, sameness, difference, etc., through reasoning.* [25] [13]

- Plato, *Timaeus* 37d–38c (trans. Donald J. Zeyl 2000). – *Defines the creation of time and the proper usage of "was," "will be," and "is" for temporal vs eternal; describes time as moving image of eternity.* [1] [2]

- Plato, *Parmenides* 155b–157b, 159b–160d (trans. Samuel Scolnicov 2003). – *Second part of dialogue exploring consequences of "One is" and "One is not," illustrating interplay of coming-to-be, being, and not-being in dialectical reasoning.* [26] [37]

- Toomas Lott (2011), "Plato on the Rationality of Belief: *Theaetetus* 184B–187A." *Trames* 15(4): 339–364. – *Interprets Theaetetus 186, arguing that the soul's "yearning after being" and effort to judge indicate an inherent truth-directed activity. Provides philological insight on terms like ἐπανιοῦσα, συμβάλλουσα, ἀναλογισμός.* [7] [29]

- Richard D. Mohr (1985), **"Plato's Theology of Time"**, *Ancient Philosophy* 5: 12–23. – *Analyzes Timaeus 37e–38b on time and eternity, explaining the generated nature of past/future and Plato's rationale for calling time an "image."* [11] [1]

- Sandra Peterson (1985), **"*Parmenides* 160b–163b: What Can the One that is Not Do?"**, *Phronesis* 30(2): 206–223. – *Examines the Fifth Deduction of Parmenides, concluding that Plato illustrates how we inevitably grant the "one that is not" certain cognitive status (like being thinkable or nameable), prefiguring the notion of non-being as difference.* (Paraphrased in analysis above) [42] [37]

- Charles Kahn (2004), **"Why Is the Sophist so Difficult?**," in *Plato's Sophist* (ed. Beere & Kamtekar). – *Discusses Plato's solution to the problem of non-being in the Sophist, clarifying that "that which is not" means "that which is other (than X)," validating the logical objectivity of negation.* [21]

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