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REVISTA DE FILOSOFIA

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IS *DYNAMIS* A DEFINITION OR A CRITERION OF BEING IN PLATO’S *SOPHIST*? RE- INTERPRETING *SOPHIST* 247D-E IN LIGHT OF THE HIPPOCRATIC METHOD IN THE *PHAEDRUS* ¹

ÉS *DYNAMIS* UNA DEFINICIÓ O UN CRITERI D’ÉSSER EN
EL *SOFISTA* DE PLATÓ? REINTERPRETACIÓ DEL *SOFISTA* 247D-E
A LA LLUM DEL MÈTODE HIPOCRÀTIC EN EL *FEDRE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the issue of whether the power (*dynamis*) is a criterion of being, or a definition of being at Plato’s *Sophist* 247d8-e4. I propose a new solution to this problem in light of the Hippocratic Method Passage at Plato’s *Phaedrus* 270d, arguing that, when one takes this parallel passage into account seriously, the *dynamis* proposal at *Sophist* 247d8-e4 only provides a criterion of being. This paper first gives some preliminary remarks on Plato’s discussion of the notions of ‘definition’ and of ‘criterion’. Then I argue that the *Phaedrus* passage is a proper parallel passage of the *dynamis* proposal passage. After establishing the understanding of *physis* as essence in both the Hippocratic Corpus and Plato’s dialogues, this paper provides a detailed textual analysis between the Hippocratic Method Passage and the *dynamis* proposal passage. I demonstrate that the *dynamis* proposal at most provides a necessary condition of being, which falls short of being a proper definition of being. Therefore, the *dynamis* proposal only points to a criterion of being.

Keywords: criterion of being, *dynamis* proposal, Hippocratic, *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*.

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RESUM

Aquest article discuteix la qüestió de si el poder (*dynamis*) és un criteri de l'ésser, o una definició de l'ésser, en el passatge 247d8-e4 del *Sofista* de Plató. Proposo una nova solució a aquest problema a la llum del Passatge del Mètode Hipocràtic del *Fedre* (270d) de Plató; i argumento que, quan es té en compte seriosament aquest passatge paral·lel, la proposta de *dynamis* en el *Sofista* 247d8-e4 només proporciona un criteri de l'ésser. En primer lloc, aquest article fa algunes observacions preliminars sobre la discussió de Plató en relació amb les nocions de 'definició' i 'criteri'. Després, argumento que el passatge del *Fedre* és un passatge paral·lel apropiat de la proposta de *dynamis*. Després d'establir la comprensió de *physis* com a essència tant en el Corpus Hipocràtic com en els diàlegs de Plató, aquest article ofereix una anàlisi textual detallada entre el Passatge del Mètode Hipocràtic i el passatge de la proposta de *dynamis*. Demostro que la proposta de *dynamis* proporciona, com a molt, una condició necessària de l'ésser, que es queda curta quant a definició adequada. Per tant, la proposta de *dynamis* només apunta a un criteri de l'ésser.

Paraules clau: criteri d'ésser, *Fedre*, hipocràtic, proposta de *dynamis*, *Sofista*.

0. INTRODUCTION

In the section of the Gigantomachia at Plato's *Sophist* 245e6-249d5, the chief speaker, the Eleatic Visitor, is engaging with the «giants» (the materialists) and the so-called «friends» of Forms (the immaterialists),² with regard to the question of being. When he replies to the materialists' contention that only that which is material is or exists, the Eleatic Visitor puts forward a «*dynamis* proposal» at *Sophist* 247d8-e4, relating the power (*dynamis*) to being. This proposal is raised again (though not successfully in my opinion) when the Eleatic Visitor deals with the «friends» of Forms later (248b5-6), but my main concern in this paper is to focus on the passage where he initially proposes it. The *Dynamis* Proposal Passage runs as follows:

I [i.e. the Eleatic Visitor] say, then, that a thing genuinely is if it has some power, *of whatever sort*, either to act on another thing, *of whatever nature*, or to be acted on, *even to the slightest degree and by the*

2 I shall not delve into the question of the identity of these two groups, which is not important for the present purpose.

most trivial of things, and even if it is just the once. That is, what marks off the things that are as being, I propose, is nothing other than power. (*Soph.* 247d8-e4; tr. Rowe, modified, my emphasis)

This passage has generated a hotly-debated issue among the commentators: whether the *dynamis* proposal implies a criterion of being, or a definition of being in the *Sophist*? This issue is firstly related to the construal of a crucial sentence: «τιθεμαι γὰρ ὅρον ὀρίζειν <δεῖν>, τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις»³ («That is, what marks off the things that are as being, I propose, is nothing other than power.» *Soph.* 247e3-4, Rowe's translation, modified slightly). It also concerns with the meaning of *horos* (to put it in another way, whether we must understand *horos* as a «boundary», «mark»—which may imply a criterion; or rather as the more technical «definition»), together with the formulation of the *dynamis* proposal itself. Some scholars, such as Owen, Notomi, and notably González (and to some extent, Leigh), argue that this proposal provides a definition of being;⁴ whereas others, such as Cornford, Bluck, Politis (and to some extent, Brown), hold that the *dynamis* proposal only points to a criterion (or mark) of being, which is insufficient to obtain a definition of being.⁵ In addition, there are also some commentators who hold a neutral attitude to this issue (although some of them may actually lean to one option or another, such as Leigh), and those who simply do not distinguish clearly between the notions of a criterion of being and a definition of being.⁶

3 For the *Sophist*, I use the new text (Duke et al. 1995) of the «Oxford Classical Texts». Cf. Cornford 1935: 234 n. 1; Guthrie 1978, 139 n. 2 for some different understandings of this sentence. Cf. also Runciman 1962: 77 n. 1 for the discussion of some emendations and the construal of the Greek text.

4 Cf., for example, Owen 1971: 229-230 n. 14; Notomi 1999: 218 n. 25; González 2011. Leigh claims that her interpretation is open to this problem, but it seems that she still prefers the «definition» option, which can be attested from her frequent use of the verb 'define', cf. Leigh 2010: 81-82.

5 Cf., for example, Cornford 1935: 234 n. 1, 238; Runciman 1962: 77; Seligman 1974: 32; Bluck 1975: 93; Politis 2006: *in passim*. Brown (1998: 193) argues that if the *dynamis* proposal is not rejected at last, this proposal gives a criterion of being. Given that she does not think that Plato rejects this proposal in the end, it can be argued that she prefers the «criterion» option.

6 Guthrie (1978) is a notable example. Although he had argued that *horos* should be understood as a definition, rather than a criterion (1978: 139 n. 2), he still wrote down «Materialists and idealists: the criterion of being (245e-48d)» as the title of the relevant section (138). Cf. also Rijk 1986: 101; Ambuel 2007: 113; Kahn 2013: 105.

Against this background, in this paper I aim to provide a new solution to this problem, in light of the Hippocratic⁷ Method Passage at Plato's *Phaedrus* 270d. First, it is worthwhile to quote this passage in full.

Isn't this the way to think systematically about the nature of anything? First, we must consider whether the object regarding which we intend to become experts and capable of transmitting our expertise is simple or complex. Then, if it is simple, we must investigate its power: *what power it has of acting upon another thing, and through what means; or by what other thing, and through what means, it can be acted upon*. If, on the other hand, it takes many forms, we must enumerate them all and, as we did in the simple case, investigate how each is naturally able to act upon what and how it has a natural disposition to be acted upon by what. (*Phdr.* 270c10-d7; tr. Nehamas and Woodruff, modified, my emphasis)

I shall argue that if we take this parallel passage into account seriously, it will be evident that the *dynamis* proposal in the *Sophist* only implies a criterion of being. The reason is that there exist some crucial differences on Plato's characterization of the *dynamis* proposal and the Hippocratic Method in the two passages respectively. In the first section, I will give some preliminary remarks on the difference between the notion of definition and the notion of criterion in Plato. In the second section, I will argue that it is reasonable to take the Hippocratic Method Passage as a proper parallel passage of the *dynamis* proposal passage, which is neglected by most scholars. Then in the third section I shall turn to the meaning of *physis* in the Hippocratic Corpus and Plato's dialogues, arguing that *physis* refers to the nature and essence in the Hippocratic Corpus and Plato's dialogues. Finally in Section 4, I will compare the two passages in the *Sophist* and the *Phaedrus*, and defend that the *dynamis* proposal in the *Sophist* lacks some

7 When I say «Hippocratic» in this article, I do not indicate the historical Hippocrates of Cos, but only mean that the authors of the Hippocratic Corpus. It is generally acknowledged nowadays that it is very hard to identify the «genuine» works of Hippocrates in the Corpus, and that it is likely that many treatises in the Corpus are written by people who do not belong to the so-called Hippocratic school. Cf. Craik 2014: xx-xxiv; Eijk 2016 with further references. Thus, I will keep the unity of the Corpus into minimum (for the problem of the unity in the Corpus, cf. Craik 2014: 286-291). And as I shall argue below, I only contend that the understanding of *physis* as essence is common throughout the Hippocratic Corpus.

significant elements, compared to the method which can provide the definition of beings in the *Phaedrus*. This implies that the *dynamis* proposal cannot point to a full definition, but rather a criterion of being. It should be noted that although this paper focuses on an issue in the Platonic scholarship, it will also have a wider implication for our understanding of ancient philosophy and metaphysics in general. In the first place, by examining the Hippocratic method, my paper will enable us to be in a better position to see how Plato was indebted to the ancient medical tradition. Second, it can be noted that when Plato considered the relation between being and power, he did not simply lean towards a materialist position.⁸ Rather, his *dynamis* proposal urges us to explore the notion of *dynamis* in ancient philosophy more carefully. Finally, the discussion of the definition and the criterion of being in my paper can also shed light on our understanding of being in a more general way.

1. SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON 'DEFINITION' AND 'CRITERION' IN PLATO

It is not the place to give a thorough discussion on the distinction between the notion of definition and the notion of criterion in Plato. For our purposes, I shall put forward some general and fairly uncontroversial proposals on the definition and criterion in Plato. In the first place, the notion of *horos* at *Soph.* 247e3 is not informative when scrutinizing the distinction between a definition and a criterion. As Brown argues, *horos* can be used to indicate a «definition», since this usage appears many times both in and out of the *Sophist*; but one still cannot exclude the possibility that *horos* has the meaning of a «mark» and a «boundary», when Plato uses the word in this place, which will imply the «criterion» option for the *dynamis* proposal.⁹

Now, what is a definition for Plato? I think in this case, it is instructive to use Aristotle's account on definition. One may object that it is question-

8 As I shall argue below, although the Eleatic Visitor mentions the *dynamis* proposal when engaging with the «friends» of Forms (*Soph.* 248b5-6), they do not accept this proposal (248c1-10). Hence the *dynamis* proposal is raised at least *primarily* against the materialists (the improved «giants»). Also, it is in the ancient medical tradition that being is often related to power.

9 Cf. Brown 1998: 192-193. Owen (1971: 229-230 n. 14) mentions some texts where Plato may indicate a «definition», when Plato uses *horos* and its cognates. Cf. also Rijk 1986: 101 n. 12; Leigh 2010: 82 n. 32 for more references.

able to use Aristotle to interpret Plato. However, since both Plato and Aristotle are essentialists, i.e. they both believe in the existence of essences and definitions, it is not so controversial to appeal to Aristotle's discussion of definition on a general level. In any case, Aristotle seems to follow Plato's inquiry into the definition and essence. According to Aristotle, the definition is a *logos* signifying «what it is» (*An. Post.* 93b29) or essence (for example, *Metaph.* 1031a12). Admittedly, Aristotle's theory of definition is very different from Plato's, but it can hardly be denied that Plato would also agree that a proper definition must signify what a thing is (i.e. an answer to the *ti esti* question, which is also endorsed by Aristotle at *An. Post.* 93b29), that is to say, the essence of a certain thing.¹⁰ Therefore, I think that in the *Sophist*, if the *dynamis* proposal does point to a definition of being, it must also state the essence of being.¹¹

Having argued that the definition of *x* should refer to the essence of *x* for Plato, now we turn to the notion of criterion. I think that it is helpful to refer to Politis (2015)'s requirements of definition,¹² as they can shed light on how to understand the concept of criterion in Plato: If one account satisfies the following requirements of definition, it will be a proper definition. These requirements are (R1) the standard requirement, (R2) the generality requirement, (R3) the unity requirement, (R4) the explanatoriness requirement and (R-EXT) the co-extensivity condition. In this way, if the *dynamis* proposal can make it the case that the being will satisfy all these requirements, then this proposal must point to the definition of being.¹³ In contrast, since according to the *dynamis* proposal, a criterion or a boundary is some-

10 Politis (2015: chapter 1) defends that one needs to signify the essence when answering a *ti esti* question in Plato's early dialogue. And I do not think Plato has any reason to give up this basic idea in the *Sophist* and the *Phaedrus*.

11 We may wonder what word Plato uses for signifying the essence. It is well-known that Aristotle uses a technical phrase τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι for essence, which is invented by Aristotle himself. Aristotle also uses *ousia* to signify the essence, cf. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus*, 545a32-50. In Plato's dialogues, *ousia* can also be regarded as the essence, as many scholars do. Cf., for example, Politis 2010: 91-97 for the case of the *Phaedo*; cf. also Ast, *Lexicon Platonicum*, vol. 2: 491-493. Of course, *ousia* in Plato can also denote a variety of things, such as being, existence, etc. But what I would like to emphasize here is that *ousia* can be understood as the essence in Plato, but not exclusively.

12 Cf. Politis 2015: chapter 2, esp. 44-56.

13 Although these requirements are not independent with each other, some may entail others, cf. Politis 2015: 56-59.

thing which can help one to distinguish beings from non-beings (cf. again *Soph.* 247e3-4), it can be argued that a criterion will only satisfy *some* but not all of the requirements mentioned above.¹⁴ Therefore, the notion of the criterion is broader than the notion of the definition, since the former only needs to satisfy fewer requirements than the latter. Definition is a far more technical and restricted notion; if *x* is a definition of being, it must be a criterion of being also. These brief remarks on the notion of definition and of criterion are sufficient for the purpose of this paper, because, as I shall argue below, the *dynamis* proposal is at most only a necessary condition of being. A necessary condition, unlike a sufficient condition, need not satisfy all requirements of definition, so it can merely point to a criterion of being, rather than establishing a definition of being directly. In order to substantiate this thesis, I shall take the Hippocratic passage in the *Phaedrus* into account in the following sections.

2. *PHAEDRUS* 270D AS A PROPER

PARALLEL PASSAGE FOR THE *DYNAMIS* PROPOSAL

In the *Sophist*, when the Eleatic Visitor speaks of the *dynamis* proposal, he argues that if something has power (*dynamis*), which acts on other things or is acted upon by other things, it will be regarded as a being (247d8-e4). I will return to the details of this text later; now I would like to propose that it is not difficult to remind that the notions of power and of acting on (as well as being acted upon) are not uncommon in Plato's dialogues, especially in his late dialogues.¹⁵ As is noted by some scholars,¹⁶ first, in the *Theaetetus* 156a, Plato also mentions the notions of power and acting when he discusses a theory of perception. Second, in the *Phaedrus* 270d, Plato mentions the so-called Hippocratic Method. He proposes that in order to know the nature of everything (ὅτουοῦν φύσεως), we should

14 R2, R3, R4 entail R1 (cf. Politis 2015: 56), so an account that satisfies R2, R3, R4 and R-EXT (which is a «consequence» of R3, cf. Politis 2015: 55) will be regarded as a definition. However, if an account satisfies none of these requirements above, it is not even a criterion, because in this case, this account cannot enable one to distinguish beings from non-beings.

15 Cf. also González 2011: 70-74 for the discussion of other dialogues, but he does not pursue our problem further.

16 Apart from González, both Guthrie (1978: 140) and Cornford (1935: 234-238) mention these passages.

consider the power and its acting. In this section, I will firstly argue that the *Theaetetus* passage cannot be a proper parallel passage of the *dynamis* proposal in the *Sophist*. Then I shall defend that the *Phaedrus* passage should be a proper parallel passage of the *dynamis* proposal. And it is highly possible that Plato has this passage in mind when he speaks of this proposal in the *Sophist*.

As regards the *Theaetetus* passage, Guthrie has already given some reasons to specify the difference between this passage and the *dynamis* proposal.¹⁷ Firstly, the theory of cognition is different between these two dialogues: in the *Theaetetus*, the sense object acts upon the sense organ; whereas in the *Sophist* 248d, it is the sense organ (or the subject of knowing) that acts upon the sense object (or the object of knowing). However, Brown claims that the theory of perception in the *Theaetetus* is a piece of evidence for the proposition that in the *dynamis* proposal, it is also the object that acts on the subject.¹⁸ That being said, her argument has been rejected by Leigh rightly.¹⁹ Therefore, I think Guthrie's original proposal is still reasonable. Secondly, Guthrie defends that the «all-is-motion» school—to which the notions of power and of acting are directly ascribed—has been distinguished from the materialists in the *Theaetetus* (155e-156a). Thus, this *Theaetetus* passage cannot be a proper parallel passage of the *dynamis* proposal, because the *dynamis* proposal is (at least primarily) aimed at materialists in the *Sophist*, and they should be distinguished from the so-called «all-is-motion» school in the *Theaetetus*. Third, according to Guthrie, Plato can hardly agree with this theory of power attributed to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, but he may have a more positive attitude to the *dynamis* proposal in the *Sophist*. I think Guthrie's three arguments above are fairly convincing, so that the *Theaetetus* passage cannot be taken as a proper parallel passage when one deals with the *dynamis* proposal. Furthermore, as González points out, the theory in the *Theaetetus* will not be «a definition of being but the obliteration of being».²⁰ However, even if we took the *Theaetetus* passage as a parallel passage, this passage would be unhelpful to resolve our problem as to whether the *dynamis* proposal in the *Sophist* implies a criterion of being or a definition of being; thus there is no need to consider this passage in this paper.

17 For all these arguments, cf. Guthrie 1978: 140.

18 Cf. Brown 1998: 196-203.

19 Cf. Leigh 2010: 69-72.

20 González 2011: 70.

Now let us turn to the Hippocratic Method passage in the *Phaedrus*. Some scholars have mentioned this passage when they discuss the *dynamis* proposal. For instance, apart from the scholars mentioned above,²¹ Seligman holds that the *dynamis* proposal may have an origin in the writers of medicine, and points to the *Phaedrus* passage.²² Kahn also argues that the *dynamis* proposal is anticipated in the *Phaedrus* 270d, which shows Plato's interest in the research of nature.²³ However, although many of them regard this passage as a parallel passage of the *dynamis* proposal, none of these commentators makes an informative discussion on the relationship between the *Phaedrus* passage and the *Sophist* passage, with regard to our problem. As Mansfeld suggests, this *Phaedrus* passage on powers is often neglected by the commentators; but if we considered these two passages together, it would have some crucial consequences on the interpretation of the *Sophist*.²⁴ This is what I would like to take up in this paper.

However, Guthrie has rejected this possibility, and proposed three arguments to emphasize the difference between the Hippocratic Method passage and the *dynamis* proposal passage.²⁵ Now I have three reasons to argue against his contention. First, Guthrie maintains that the discussions in the two passages are not the same, but I do not think this general appraisal can exclude the possibility that one passage can still be a parallel passage of another. And given that Guthrie does not distinguish the notion of criterion from the notion of definition, his argument on the difference between the two passages will be less convincing. Secondly, Guthrie claims that Plato appeals this method to Hippocrates, who is concerned with powers. Perhaps Guthrie's implication is that it is not clear whether Plato would agree with Hippocrates on this point. However, I think that Plato at least would accept this method in the sensible realm. In any case, Plato claims that the Hippocratic Method will be regarded as the «true account» (ἀληθὺς λόγος, *Phdr.* 270c10). Moreover, Plato's agreement on Hippocrates has been well-received by Galen in antiquity. Galen in his *Method of Medicine* and *On Hippocrates' Nature of Human* proposes the agreement (or Plato's

21 However, González's (2011: 73-74) brief treatment of the passage in the *Phaedrus* does not shed much light into my discussion; he does not notice the crucial difference between these two passages, as I shall defend below.

22 Seligman 1974: 32 n. 4.

23 Kahn 2013: 105 n. 6.

24 Mansfeld 1980: 350-352.

25 Guthrie 1978: 140.

assent to Hippocrates)²⁶ between these two respectable people, by pointing to the Hippocratic Method passage in the *Phaedrus*. Galen refers to this passage three times in his works (*MM* 10.13-14 Kühn; *HNH* 15.4, 104 Kühn). Admittedly, one may contend that given his Platonic agenda Galen is unreliable. However, since it is hard to find any strong counter-evidence on this testimony, we can reasonably take Galen's word on this issue. Furthermore, Kahn also argues persuasively that the Hippocratic Method reflects what is held by Plato, given his interest in the study of natural philosophy in the late dialogues.²⁷ In this way, we can conclude from above that there is no reason to think that Plato only attributes the study of powers to Hippocrates in the *Phaedrus* 270d, but rejects this method himself. Third, Guthrie's last argument is that the discussion in the Hippocratic Method is raised *ad hoc*, which is aimed to oratory. However, even if the context of the Hippocratic passage is aimed at oratory in the first place, nothing prevents us from saying that this method can also be applied to a wider context. Therefore, Guthrie's proposal is unconvincing, and we should still take the Hippocratic Method passage as a proper parallel passage of the *dynamis* proposal.

It is instructive to add a further point concerning the literary aspect of the *Sophist*, which can strengthen the idea that Plato has the *Phaedrus* passage in mind when he writes the part of the Gigantomachia in the *Sophist*. When the Eleatic Visitor mentions the materialists, his interlocutor Theaetetus says that he had met a number of such people (*Soph.* 246a-b), which leads some scholars to argue that the materialists are just ordinary people. However, this hypothesis has been rejected by many commentators, and now it is generally held that Plato alludes to some philosophical schools and people particularly.²⁸ But it may still be at odds with Theaetetus' remark, as we often have difficulties in locating these people and philosophical schools precisely. Another appealing possibility is that Plato *also* has some physicians and doctors in mind when he mentions the materialist, because it would be easy to conceive that there were more physicians than philosophers, especially if we keep in mind the fact that the Hippocratic Corpus

26 When Galen refers to Hippocrates, he thinks at least a part of *On the Nature of Human* is written by the historical Hippocrates, but this work's authorship is not so certain, even if we have Galen's judgement here, cf. Craik 2014: 208-212, 289.

27 Cf. Kahn 2013: 138.

28 For this debate, cf. Cornford 1935: 231-232; Bluck 1975: 89-90; Guthrie 1978: 138 n. 2; Brown 1998: 187-189.

was written by a variety of authors, many of whom shared views with the materialists. If this is the case, then it will be more reasonable to take the Hippocratic Method passage into account seriously, when we examine the *dynamis* proposal.

3. *PHYSIS* AS ESSENCE IN THE HIPPOCRATIC CORPUS AND PLATO'S HIPPOCRATIC METHOD PASSAGE

I have argued that the Hippocratic Method passage should be taken into account properly when one interprets the *dynamis* proposal. Now given that the Hippocratic Method is aimed to the inquiry of the nature of anything (ότουοὺν φύσεως, *Phdr.* 270d1), I shall consider in this section what *physis* means in this passage, and whether this connotation can also be found in the Hippocratic Corpus. I will further argue that the notion of *physis* in the Hippocratic Method passage (*Phdr.* 270d1) and the Hippocratic Corpus should be understood as essence, which constitutes a definition for Plato. Of course, my intention is not to argue that *physis* is always identical to essence in Plato, but only that for this *Phaedrus* passage under consideration, there exists such an identity relation between *physis* and essence.

First, it is not difficult to find that Plato uses the word *physis* fairly frequently in the context of the Hippocratic Method passage (φύσιν at 270a5, b4, c1, φύσεως at 270c2, d1, e4).²⁹ Among these occurrences of the word *physis*, it can be noted that most of them signify the *physis* of *x*, which naturally implies that these occurrences of *physis* contain the same meaning. And in this kind of usage, the notion of «the *physis* of soul» at 270c1 is very helpful to determine the meaning of *physis* in the Hippocratic Method passage. The reason is that earlier in the *Phaedrus*, Plato thinks that self-motion is the *physis* of soul (φύσεως ψυχῆς, 245e6), he further explicates that it is also the essence of soul (ψυχῆς οὐσίαν, 245e3,

29 The φύσεως at 270e4 may not be a good candidate, because Plato also mentions «οὐσίαν» in the very phrase (τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς φύσεως), which may signify «the essence of nature». I think this phrase is only an emphasis of the essential nature, rather than «the essence of nature», cf. Rowe 1986: 206. It is cumbersome and uneconomic to distinguish among (1) *x*, (2) the *physis* of *x* and (3) the *ousia* of *physis* of *x*, and only (3)—understood as «the essence of nature»—could be the true definition for Plato. It is also difficult to find any evidence that Plato has ever proposed this threefold distinction.