In a recent article, I advanced an interpretation of "Plato’s Treatment of Relational Statements in the Phaedo", and contested H-N. Castañeda’s views on the same topic. Now Mark McPherran has argued that my attack on Castañeda is a failure and that my own views are "seriously flawed". In this reply to McPherran I should like to re-examine the two opposing views — mine and Castañeda’s — in the light of certain amplifications of the latter made by McPherran. I shall be particularly concerned here with the efficacy of each in explaining certain aspects of Plato’s middle period theory of forms.

Let me begin by repeating, very briefly, the two interpretations that we are concerned with of Plato’s treatment of relational statements in the Phaedo:

Castañeda: For every propositionally atomic sentence in the analysandum language containing n names the analysans will be a chain of n form-denoters. Thus “Simmias is taller than Socrates”, containing two names, will be analysed as “Tall (Simmias) — Short (Socrates)”.  

Matthen: Every propositionally simple statement about particulars in the analysandum language is concerned with some relation between particulars and a form. These relations, which we may call relations of participation, are expressed by the copula. However, the copula is ambiguous — it may express
either a binary or a triadic relation. Many (but not all) statements with more than one name involve the triadic "is", where the first term is the subject of the sentence, the second is a form and the third is a "parameter of evaluation". Thus "Simmias is taller than Socrates" will be analysed as "Is (Simmias, the Tall, Socrates)" or, in ordinary language, "Simmias participates in the Tall with respect to (pros) Socrates".

II

A good place to start testing the two theories is with my claims about Plato's problem, for this brings out what is to my mind the most important difference between my approach and Castañeda's.

My formulation of Plato's problem of relational statements makes it a problem about the semantic treatment of the phrase "than b" in "a is taller than b". Plato wants (e.g. at 100e5) "taller" to be a form-denoter - not "taller than b" - and (strikingly) "taller" to denote the same form as "tall". Moreover, it is clear that "a" is the subject of the sentence. Thus "a is taller than b" has to be analysed partly in terms of a's participation in the Tall. But now, what is the role of the remaining bit of our original sentence? — What is the role of "than b"?

Castañeda formulates the problem differently - he sees the problem to be dyadicity. How can one form be involved with two particulars?

An important, indeed crucial, constraint on the semantic treatment of the phrase "than b" is that it must be able to cope with what Plato views as contradictions. Thus a may be taller than b but not taller than c, thus by the terms of our problem it may both participate and fail to participate in the Tall. As Plato puts it, we must account in such a case for both things being in a, tallness and shortness (102b5).

It seemed to me natural to deal with these problems by making "than b" adverbially modify the copula, with the result that in a statement like "Simmias is taller than Socrates" what we have is Simmias participating in a modified way in the Tall, because this is compatible (I took it) with his not bearing another modified participation relation toward the same form. Thus where there is this possibility of "contradiction" participation will be of the modified variety.

It is a feature of my approach that the problem is the phrase "than b". My suggestion was that in "a is equal to b" the offending clause ("to b") can be done away with by paraphrase, because "a and b are equals" has a