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# On the Unity of Plato's Parmenides

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## On the Unity of Plato's *Parmenides*

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Classics Honors Thesis

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σοφώτερον ἢ καθ' ἡνδρα συμβαλεῖν ἴπην.

“Words far too wise for men to understand.”

-Euripides, *Medea*, 675.

Upon its first reading, the *Parmenides* may appear to be incomprehensible or incoherent, philosophically and as literature. The first part consists of an apparent refutation of the theory of forms familiar to the reader of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The second part consists of a long stretch of arid argumentation which discusses the most abstract subjects which seem to have nothing to do with the lively argumentation of the first part of the dialogue. Add to that the fact that Socrates is brought to *aporia* in the first part and utterly silent in the second part. It does not appear that the dialogue is a unity in any sense.

There remains to this day no consensus on the *Parmenides*' purpose, as witnessed by the numerous books published just in the last few decades, not to mention the generations of previous scholarship. A very cursory glance at some of the more important commentators, especially for philosophers and classicists in an Anglo-American context, is in order.

Proclus acknowledges that there were several schools of interpretation of the *Parmenides* before his time. There were those who viewed the dialogue as a polemic against the Eleatics (631).<sup>1</sup> There were others who viewed it as a logical exercise only, denying the claims of the polemicists (633). These commentators essentially believed that the *Parmenides* was a text book of identifying sophistry and faulty logic. There were also metaphysical interpretations. Proclus

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<sup>1</sup> From here, all citations from Proclus and Plato will be parenthetical, citing the numbers given in the margins of the respective texts.

reports that some of them hold the opinion that “the intent of the dialogue is directed towards matters of substance”(635). Besides these metaphysicians were those who believed the work discussed being (636). Proclus himself takes the occasion of his commentary on the *Parmenides* to discuss aspects of Neoplatonic philosophy (638). The entire commentary is shot through with Neoplatonic terminology and concepts.

We have an abundance of modern commentators as well. Burnet’s chapter in *Greek Philosophy*, Taylor’s chapter in *Plato: The Man and his Work* and his translation of the *Parmenides*, as well as Cherniss’s article on the *Parmenides* all advance a similar thesis, though emphasizing different interests. We can conveniently group these commentators into the Procline category of “anti-Eleatic”. Burnet says that the object of the dialogue is not to defend the theory of forms so much as to “show that the hypothesis of the Megaircs [later day Eleatics] has even more absurd consequences”<sup>2</sup> than accepting the doctrine Socrates lays out in the dialogue. Taylor holds a slightly more extreme position. “The *Parmenides* is, all through, an elaborate *jeu d’esprit*”,<sup>3</sup> composed at the expense of the Megarans. Cherniss reaches a similar conclusion. The second part of the dialogue “is a parody of the Eleatic method applied to the doctrine of Parmenides”.<sup>4</sup>

Cornford rejects this position quite handily in his 1939 work, *Plato and Parmenides*. The theory “in its extreme form” “charges the prince of philosophers with the most wearisome joke in all literature”.<sup>5</sup> Much of his book is spent discussing the philosophical tradition of the Eleatics. His opinion is that the sense of the terms “one” and “being” change within the second part of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Greek Philosophy* 263

<sup>3</sup> *Plato: The Man and his Work* 351

<sup>4</sup> *Selected Papers* 297

<sup>5</sup> *Plato and Parmenides* vii

*Parmenides*.<sup>6</sup> He says, for example, that the One of the first deduction is the Parmenidean One Being, and the conclusion of that section leads to a denial of all predicates to such a One. “It has been proved that the One of the Parmenides, if it is said to be (as he said) absolutely one, unique and without parts, cannot have a whole series of attributes which Parmenides assigned it”.<sup>7</sup>

Father William Lynch wrote a book called *An Approach to the Metaphysics of Plato through the Parmenides*. His work, as his title proclaims, tends towards a very positive metaphysical interpretation of the dialogue. Lynch believed that one can find an outline of Plato’s metaphysics in this dialogue. “I believe that our analysis of the *Parmenides* leaves us in a much better position to construct a brief but important sketch of a good number of basic positions in Platonic metaphysics”.<sup>8</sup> This view marks participation as “the central instrument of Platonism”. Brumbaugh wrote a book soon thereafter, also on the *Parmenides*. Much of its length is taken up with a logical reconstruction of the entirety of the second part of the dialogue. He concludes that “the argument is serious, explicit, careful, and sequential”().<sup>9</sup> He decides that the hypotheses are meant to lead us to a conception of the mind in which we distinguish strongly between *διανοία* and *νοῦς*. He appeals to the *Republic*’s divided line as a precedent.<sup>10</sup> At around the same time Vlastos wrote several articles all about one particular argument, the so-called “third man” regress. He is notable because of his exclusive focus on that small part of the dialogue, and how for a time the first part of the dialogue was treated in isolation from the second part. We should note that this had become such a topic of discussion that Meinwald titled an article summarizing the main points of her book “Good-bye to the Third Man”.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 111.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 134.

<sup>8</sup> *An Approach to the Metaphysics of Plato through the Parmenides* 235

<sup>9</sup> *Plato on the One* 189

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 197.

More recently we have R. E. Allen (1983), Mitchell Miller (1986) and Constance Meinwald (1991). They are convenient to group together partly because their books all share the same title (*Plato's Parmenides*). Allen's reading uses "the structure of *Parmenides* as a control on the interpretation of individual passages".<sup>11</sup> He views the dialogue as aporetic. The end result is an awareness of the necessity of reviewing and reflecting upon our premises.<sup>12</sup> He is also notable for insisting, against Cornford, that the subject of the deductions is the same throughout, the form of unity.<sup>13</sup> Miller is admirable for his attention to the *Parmenides* as a dramatic whole. He connects the method in other Socratic dialogues to the present dialogue and concludes that the *Parmenides* works in a very similar way to the earlier works. He sees the coincidence of several characters between the *Republic* and the *Parmenides* as quite important, a sign from Plato that we should have the *Republic* in mind when we read the present dialogue.<sup>14</sup> Meinwald, on the other hand, tends toward a more logic centered approach than Allen and Miller. Her central point is that Plato is attempting to forward the idea that there are two types of predication: predication πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα (toward the others) and πρὸς ἑαυτό (toward itself).<sup>15</sup> There are many other books and articles on the dialogue, but these have appeared to be the most useful and the most commonly cited works on the *Parmenides*.

The purpose of the present essay is to demonstrate that, just like Parmenides' one being, the apparent multiplicity and incoherence of the dialogue is only an illusion. With a more thorough understanding of the dialogue its purpose comes into focus: to act as a clarification of the theory of forms. Quite a bit of the work of the dialogue is spent discussing the bizarre and outlandish consequences of several premises and assumptions which may be made when

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<sup>11</sup> Allen, *Plato's Parmenides* xi.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 338.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 208.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* 15.

<sup>15</sup> Meinwald, *Plato's Parmenides* 70.

discussing the forms. The main metaphysical purpose of the dialogue is to demonstrate that material and immaterial substances are quite different, and that the theory of forms suffers from the most difficult troubles when immaterial substances are thought to be too much like material substances. We are able to tell that mistakes have been made by the characterization of the various figures of the dialogue, especially the mistakes made by the young Socrates in the opening movements of his discussion with the elder Parmenides.

The other purpose of the dialogue is to serve the purpose of training as mentioned in the second part of the dialogue. There, Parmenides says that Socrates has to undergo some serious dialectical gymnastics in order to more fully understand the theory of forms. In the same vein, the dialogue serves as education for the philosopher who has already been persuaded of the truth and value of philosophy, and in the case of Plato's students, has entered the Academy. This is not a dialogue for the conversion of souls to pursue philosophy; it is for the converted in order to hone their skills. Dialogues like the *Republic* might serve as a more reasonable entrance to Platonism, or more likely, general philosophical studies today.

The Good, so important in the *Republic*, is conspicuous in the *Parmenides* for its virtual absence. *Republic's* Socrates holds the form of the Good above all the other forms, including knowledge and truth (508e). In the *Parmenides* on the other hand, the form of the Good is mentioned but once (130b) and is in company with other forms. It enjoys no special status in this dialogue? Are we to take this as troubling? I believe that we shouldn't. The present dialogue is of limited scope and purpose. Plato certainly treats of ethics and the moral implications of the forms elsewhere. This dialogue serves as a demonstration of the proper way to think about participation and the importance of training for a philosopher, and does not set out to explain the order of the

form world. As such, we will not find it if we look for it without going far beyond what the *Parmenides* says. Which is not a bad thing; it is simply beyond the scope of the present paper.

One clue as to the unity of the dialogue is given by Socrates when he says that it would be truly astonishing that someone should show that the forms partake and mix with each other (129e). This is fulfilled, as it is shown that at least some of the forms partake of some of the other forms. It is hinted at in the first section, and aspects of it can be salvaged from the relevant portions of the second part. Something else ought to be recognized: though much of the dialogue hinges on a misunderstanding of participation of forms, no actual theory emerges, either in this dialogue or elsewhere. I don't think that Plato ever actually explained how his key concept worked. I feel justified in this opinion because Plato rather famously says in the seventh *Letter* that no one can actually express in words or write down how the metaphysical truth actually is *per se*. "There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself"(341c-d). So I think that it is not inappropriate to say that true understanding of participation is utterly beyond the scope of the dialogue and even more so the present essay. Nevertheless, I do think that the dialogue does function to purify our understanding of the forms, so that we may remove those understandings which stand in the way of the inspiration mentioned by the Master himself. And so it is that everyone in the dialogue accepts the theory of forms as true. Parmenides himself, the one who reduces Socrates to aporia, is not seeking to destroy the theory but refine it. He also seeks to refine Socrates. The theory of forms acts as a starting point for all subsequent philosophical inquiry, and is thought by Plato to be required in order to do

philosophy, as is attested by Parmenides' claims on the impossibility of thought without the forms.

We will discuss the entire dialogue, according to the program instituted by Proclus in his great *Commentary*, i.e. by a discussion of the characters. From there, we will discuss in order the context of Socrates' proposal of the theory of forms, his theory, the objections of Parmenides, and the dialectical exercise.

Let us begin with the narrator, Cephalus. That is, he is the narrator who gives the report of the dialogue to us, the audience. He is from the city of Calzomenae (οὐκοθεν ἴκ Κλαζομενῶν 126a) accompanied by his countrymen, who are also philosophers (πολλοταί τε ἡμεῖς εἰσι, μάλα φιλόσοφοι 126b). We have little on this man besides what is said in 126-127 of this very dialogue. This particular Cephalus appears nowhere else, and is probably the literary creation of Plato. We could perhaps compare this character with the *Republic's* Cephalus. It is at this man's house, a Syracusan metic (Nails 85), that the conversation of the *Republic* takes place. He is portrayed as quite old (μάλα πρεσβύτης 328b) and is a retired money-maker (χρηματιστής 330b). At practically the first opportunity, he withdraws from the conversation with Socrates on justice (331d), though he had earlier said (328d) that he very much liked conversation. The Syracusan withdrew as soon as he was worsted by Socrates in argument, and Polemarchus, his son and heir in everything, takes over (331d). By his journey, and by his reciting of this dialogue to us, the audience, the present Cephalus demonstrates how different he is and more diligent and philosophical than the other Cephalus.

Another detail is interesting, namely, Cephalus' hometown. Calzomenae is of course the city which produced Anaxagoras.<sup>16</sup> He is mentioned by Socrates just prior to his death in the *Phaedo*, as a thinker youthfully read but later discarded (97b and following). His particular

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<sup>16</sup> Diogenes Laertius vol I pg 135



doctrines need not detain us; suffice to say that he was one of the physicists of Ionia, investigating physical phenomena in the same spirit as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaxamenes, though active in the generation following Parmenides. Taylor makes Cephalus and company explicitly be members of the school founded by Anaxagoras. In addition, he notes that Socrates was "the favorite pupil of Anaxagoras' successor Archelaus"<sup>17</sup> and therefore Socrates would have been of interest to the men from Clazomenae. This is mentioned in Diogenes Laertius, in the life of Archelaus.<sup>18</sup> Miller also notes the Anaxagorean connection,<sup>19</sup> though he does not make the travelers members of Anaxagoras' school. In addition, Anaxagoras himself goes unmentioned in this dialogue. I agree with Miller who says "Thus Plato establishes a loose, tacit association"<sup>20</sup> between the historical Anaxagoras and the literary characters present. A final note on this Anaxagorean connection. Proclus, in his great commentary, discusses the allegorical meaning of the characters of the dialogue. Proclus distinguishes the Italian (i.e. Eleatics, Parmenides and Zeno), those who were interested in intelligible form and dealt little with the "study of the objects of opinion" (659), and the Ionians, natural scientists. Socrates and Plato represent for Proclus, as it were, the fusion of Ionian and Eleatic philosophy. Athens serves as the center of the Greek world; in Plato's time, politically, and in Proclus' time, philosophically. But let us delve no further into Neoplatonism, at least not here.

We move on to characters who are more familiar and better remembered from the *Republic*, Adeimantus and Glaucon. In that dialogue, Glaucon is mentioned as being the son of Ariston (Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος 327a), and Adeimantus is his brother (Ἀδείμαντος ὁ τοῦ Γλαύκωνος ἀδελφός 327c). In the *Republic*, the two brothers serve as Socrates' main

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<sup>17</sup> *Plato: The Man and his Work* 352.

<sup>18</sup> Diogenes Laertius vol I pg 147.

<sup>19</sup> Miller 25-28.

<sup>20</sup> Miller 25

interlocutors throughout books II-X; here they are quickly superseded by their half brother, Antiphon. Miller views this as a notice to the audience that Plato has two different approaches to philosophy in the two dialogues: exoteric in the Republic and esoteric in the Parmenides (19). The Republic is philosophy for those not yet initiated. The brothers are, despite their excellence (357a) not actually philosophers themselves. At several places, they demand that Socrates explain and justify himself and philosophy the "the basic point of view of the nonphilosophical many" (19). The Parmenides has Socrates himself serving as the interlocutor, at least for the portion in which the interlocutor contributes something to the discussion. The Parmenides does not set out to convince anyone to do philosophy. It is only for those who are already initiated, so to speak, and already value its pursuit. It shall be noted at the end of this brief discussion of Glaucon and Adeimantus that they are the full brothers of Plato.<sup>21</sup>

Next we have Antiphon, Plato's half brother (τὸ δὲ ἄλλο μὲν τὸ μὲν ἡμιμητρὶ 126b). The father, rather than Ariston, was Pyrilampes, and the mother, Perictione was the same.<sup>22</sup> Antiphon is introduced to recite the dialogue between Parmenides and Socrates. He learned it from Pythodorus, the one who was actually present for the conversation (126c). But even with a great memory, this man, Antiphon, has not turned out to be a philosopher, and is engaged most of the time in a thoroughly non-philosophic activity, horse riding. One may compare this to another example of a horseman in Attic literature. Phidippides the horse loving son has driven his father Strepsiades into bankruptcy in Aristophanes' Clouds, prompting the action of the play and the latter's joining of Socrates' school. In any event, Plato has given us a warning through his brothers: just because one is intellectually acute or have an impressive faculty of retention, does

<sup>21</sup> The People of Plato, Debra Nails. 2, 154. A work of prosopography regarding the characters appearing in Plato's dialogues. Hereafter, cited as Nails.

<sup>22</sup> Nails 31 It will be useful to consult Plato's family tree given by Nails on page 244 of her book in order to see a more schematic view of the family.

not mean that one will be a good philosopher. So much for the characters whom Cephalus meets directly. Pythodorus must be mentioned because he is the one who taught Antiphon the conversation. He failed, apparently, to get him to stay with philosophy. There are a few other mentions of him elsewhere, such as his military career in Thucydides.<sup>23</sup> He is also mentioned as one of those who paid Zeno a great sum in order to be taught, as related in the Alcibiades (119a). But besides this we know relatively little.

Next we have Zeno the Eleatic.<sup>24</sup> The dialogue here described by Antiphon took place on the occasion of Zeno delivering a reading of his treatise to those who wished to listen. It is in response to this work that the young Socrates proposes the theory of forms. He is here portrayed as Parmenides' scholar, in his forties (Ζήνωνα δὲ ἄγγεῖς τὴν τετταράκοντα τότε εἶναι, εἰμήκη δὲ καὶ χαρίεντα ἔδειξεν 127b). He was, according to the present account, also in his youth the object of Parmenides' affections. Socrates makes note of their friendship, thinking it a motivation for Zeno's book (128a). Socrates accuses him of attempting to fool his listeners into think the logician was saying something different than Parmenides (128b). Zeno corrects Socrates, saying that deception was not the intention--not that it would be difficult (128c)! He holds the book as being a support for Parmenides, and openly, by saying that monism's pluralistic opponents are in worse condition than Parmenides, on their own premises. Zeno also notes that the treatise was written when he was younger, and originally published in an unauthorized copy. After Socrates' speech (128e-130a), Zeno is said to have been listening to Socrates attentively and smiling along with Parmenides (τοῦ δὲ πάνυ τε ἀπὸ προσέχειν τὴν νοῦν καὶ θαμνὲς ἐξ ἄλλήλους βλέποντας μείδιον ἢ ἄγαμένους τὴν Σωκράτη 130a). Parmenides then takes over the discussion. The last we hear from him, Zeno has joined the others

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<sup>23</sup> Nails 259.

<sup>24</sup> Diogenes Laertius vol ii pg 435

in asking Parmenides to engage in the dialectical exercise (136d). Does our literary Zeno have anything to do with the historical Zeno?

Aristotle treats four of Zeno's paradoxes of motion in the *Physics* (239b9-240a18). That is, Zeno attempted to show that motion, according to the premises of his opponents, is self-contradictory. The first of these is more thoroughly laid out at *Physics* 233a21-31. Zeno tried to show that it is impossible to come into contact with infinite things in a finite time" (233a23). To get around this Aristotle says that there is a difference between divisibility and magnitude, and that Zeno had confused them. Aristotle holds that infinite divisibility is possible, but not infinite magnitude. As per the understanding of the treatise put into Zeno's mouth in the *Parmenides*, it has been presumed that the paradoxes of motion were premised in a similar way as the paradox of the many, namely, to assume the opposition's premises and use a reduction ad absurdum. Zeno is not attempting to demonstrate the impossibility of motion but to show that on the premises of his opponents, they are bound to deny the possibility of motion, and then to concede the very thing they regard as an extravagant paradox in *Parmenides*".<sup>25</sup>

Another commentator notes: "The statement of Plato supports the interpretation which the paradoxes themselves support, namely that Zeno was not trying to prove that motion is impossible because continuity consists of multiple parts but that, if continuity consists of parts, if it can be analyzed into discrete quantities or synthesized from them, motion is impossible".<sup>26</sup> Proclus also tells us that Zeno's book had forty arguments (694).<sup>27</sup> In any event, there were even more arguments which Aristotle in the *Physics* or the literary Socrates in the *Parmenides* (i.e. Plato) could have harped upon; but Plato chose the paradox of the many and Aristotle those of

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<sup>25</sup> Taylor, *Plato's Parmenides* 112-113

<sup>26</sup> Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy* 157.

<sup>27</sup> This is a problematic statement which raises questions far beyond this essay; Dillon treats the question of whether Proclus had access to the actual, and now lost, book by Zeno, in his introduction to the translation of the commentary pgs. xxxviii-xliii.

motion. I shall treat the question of historical figures in Platonic dialogues when we reach the sketch of Parmenides.

We move on to Socrates. This is the same literary Socrates as in the other dialogues, except (obviously) the "young Socrates" in the Statesman. The Socrates in the Parmenides is quite young (ἐπιναί τότε σφόδρα νέον 127c). This Socrates is, as usual, marked by a keenness of argument, noted several times by Zeno and Parmenides (128c, 128e, 130a, 135e). Besides his keenness is a certain immaturity, which is emphasized in several places. First, Zeno corrects Socrates about the intention behind the treatise (128c). The young Socrates was quite ready to assume, without properly understanding, the situation regarding the book's writing and publication (as was mentioned just above). Later, in the questions regarding the forms, Socrates' youth and inexperience are again demonstrated. He shows much confidence about ascribing forms to some things, like the general concepts (being, likeness, magnitude), and the moral qualities (good, just, beautiful). He expresses doubt regarding the natural kinds, forms of the elements and the species. He also confidently denies the existence of forms of the worthless things. Parmenides does not explicitly say that Socrates has made a mistake by having this opinion of the extent of forms. He implies it, saying that Socrates holds such an opinion because philosophy has not yet fully taken hold of him; again, Socrates is in need of additional training in order to hone his natural talents, echoing the failure of Adeimantus, Glaucon, and Antiphon to flower philosophically. If Socrates had more training, he wouldn't think about the extent of forms based upon the opinion of the many (130e). This seems to mean that we ought to say that there are forms for all of the kinds, elements, and mixtures of elements, even the "base" things. A bit further on, Socrates again shows that he is inexperienced by saying that the forms are like the day, and then being forced to concede to Parmenides that a sail is a better metaphor given the

present understanding of participation (131b). Parmenides doesn't give a similar comment in this situation as he did in the question of the extent of forms, but I think that a mistake again has been made, due to Socrates' inexperience. Parmenides, at the end of the first section, says that Socrates has erred only in positing forms too soon, not in positing them at all (135c-d). A dialectical exercise is thus in order, which takes up most of the space of the dialogue.

Why does Plato give us this young Socrates? There are a few ways to view the literary role of his character. We could understand him as being a stand-in for Plato and his understanding of the forms in the middle period. But I am reluctant to say that Plato was self-critical to the point of formulating arguments (or taking arguments formulated by others) against the core of his own philosophy for the purpose of rejecting the theory. For other reasons I think that Plato never rejects the theory of forms, and that the objections raised in the first part of the dialogue are answerable. So, if the young Socrates is a literary stand-in for Plato as an author and philosopher, that role is performed for the sake of demonstrating that the theory of forms is not wrong, but that it can fall prey to objections if it is improperly understood. Burnet was reluctant to adopt the view that Plato used Socrates as a mask, as it were, for himself in the dialogues. But Burnet was committed to the historical accuracy of the depiction of Socrates in the dialogues. We will discuss this further below, and it will be shown that we do not need to hold this view. Another way in which to understand the literary role of the young Socrates was vehemently rejected by Burnet. That is, Socrates is meant to represent Plato's students in the Academy, or those in general who wish to understand the theory of forms. This idea, that the young Socrates is meant to represent "some callow Academic who held his own theory in a crude form should be credible to no one. We might be reluctantly convinced that Plato used Socrates as a disguise for himself; but it would surely have been impious to represent his own immature disciples under the

revered name of his master. The fact that it has to make assumptions of that kind ought to be fatal to this line of interpretation".<sup>28</sup> We may compare this opinion with the opposite one held by Miller. "Bearing in himself the potential of genuine philosophical insight, he represents the aspiring Academician's innermost goal and task".<sup>29</sup>

This young Socrates may perhaps evoke some other young men elsewhere in Plato. Compare first the impetuous Polus in the *Gorgias*. He holds a brief, preliminary verbal skirmish with Chaerephon on behalf of Gorgias, Polus' master (448a-c). He gives Chaerephon rather rough treatment (448b). Later, (461b) Polus jumps back into the argument, muscling out his master. He calls Socrates rude for his treatment of Gorgias (461c). Socrates, here older, thanks Polus, sarcastically, for interrupting, as it is good for young men to correct their elders. Told he must not give long speeches, Polus protests the restriction. Other examples of young men include the eponymic Charmide and Theaetetus. Charmides is a polite young man, and is brought to *aporia* about the definition of temperance (*Charmides* 162b). And Theaetetus is helped along by Socrates the midwife (*Theaetetus* 150c). Both are inexperienced. It seems to me that Plato was interested in portraying, among other types, young men; the present young Socrates is one of several such characters in Plato. His rudeness and inexperience show that Socrates is immature as a man. We are to extend this immaturity to his further need for intellectual development and understanding of the forms.

We are now come to the most important figure in the dialogue: Parmenides raises the problems with the forms in the first part of the dialogue, and directs the deductions in the second. We are struck by a dilemma almost immediately: What are we to make of this literary

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<sup>28</sup> *Greek Philosophy* 256

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

Parmenides? Is he supposed to be historical? A very brief review of relevant material seems in order.

In his poem, Parmenides relates how he is taken by mares in a chariot to the goddess, who welcomes him and says that he must be taught about “both the unmoved heart of persuasive reality and of the beliefs of mortals, which comprise no genuine conviction”.<sup>30</sup> There are two ways, says the goddess; one, that being is, which is the path of persuasion, and the other, of a thing which is not, knowledge of which is impossible.<sup>31</sup> “Mortals with no understanding stray two headed”<sup>32</sup> along the second way. This is because being and thought are the same thing.<sup>33</sup> The goddess then warns Parmenides not to give in to “the empirical way”<sup>34</sup> of the senses. This is because the way of the senses is not the way of being. Rather, Parmenides is enjoined to use reason alone. The goddess then begins a discussion of being. Being is neither created nor destroyed; it is a whole; it is unique; it is not moved and it is perfect; and it does not exist in the past or the future. Rather, it can only be said to exist in the present, because past and future would mean it could change.<sup>35</sup> Parmenides also hears from the goddess that the only thing from which something could come to be is Not-being; but Not-being necessarily is not. Therefore nothing comes to be. Without past and future, the other condition for change, time, is eliminated. Next, Being is utterly homogeneous, and in a state of utter perfection.<sup>36</sup>

Our interpretive problem is that the literary Parmenides would by all accounts appear to not hold the same opinions as the historical Parmenides. The present philosopher seems, nay, is very much a partisan for the theory of forms! For example he says “Only a very gifted man can

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<sup>30</sup> Coxon pg 54, fragment 1, 29-30

<sup>31</sup> pg 56, fragment 3

<sup>32</sup> fragment 5

<sup>33</sup> fragment 4

<sup>34</sup> Fragment 7

<sup>35</sup> Fragment 8

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*



come to know that for each thing there is some kind, a being itself by itself” (135b). Further on, Parmenides asserts even more strongly the necessity of the existence of forms. If one rejects the forms, “he will destroy the power of dialectic entirely” (135c) and so too philosophy. Parmenides’ criticism of Socrates amounts to saying that Socrates put forth the theory of forms too soon. In addition, Parmenides applies Zeno’s modified method to his “own” hypothesis, the one. Here it seems that Plato is making both the literary and historical Parmenides appear at once; the “hypothesis of the one” is clearly supposed to refer to the historical. But the historical Parmenides would never endorse the theory of forms, nor would he apply Zeno’s method to his own thesis. This is because Zeno’s method is to apply a *reductio ad absurdum* against an argument in order to demonstrate that there are problems with the premises. It was originally developed to defend Parmenides’ thesis, and so I find it unlikely that the historical Parmenides would turn his own weapons, so to speak, upon himself. Parmenides is depicted here an old man, sixty five, of distinguished appearance. Note also that in the *Sophist*, the old Socrates recounts a conversation with Parmenides (217c). This is plainly a reference to the present dialogue, another piece of evidence which serves to demonstrate that we should not consider the present dialogue and characters as historical. I also find justification in considering the present Parmenides to be non-historical because of the work done on the so-called “Socratic question”, the extent to which the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues is the historical Socrates. It is commonly said that the Socrates of the dialogues is not necessarily the historical one; I believe that we, on similar grounds, can say that we are not dealing directly with the historical Parmenides.<sup>37</sup>

We have one other named character, the young Aristotle. This is of course neither the famous philosopher nor a reference to him in a literary form. It is generally accepted that the

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<sup>37</sup> See Penner’s article, “Socrates and the Early Dialogues” (pgs 121-169) in Kraut for a more detailed discussion.

dialogue was written around 367 BC, when Aristotle had only just joined the Academy.<sup>38</sup> Besides the chronological problem Plato gives us a notice that the present Aristotle became one of the Thirty Tyrants in 404 BC (127d). That is, Plato is explicitly telling us that this Aristotle was a historical person; his Athenian readers would have known who this Aristotle was. We have independent testimony and minor notices in other works, such as in Thucydides and Xenophon.<sup>39</sup> So, this man was real and perhaps Plato's contemporaries would have known who he was. This Aristotle is made to be the respondent in the latter part of the dialogue, as the youngest and least likely to raise objections to the exercise (137b). This is a strategy which is taken up by the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist* (217d), in order to avoid "a trouble-maker". Like Charmides (Nails 90), he joined the Thirty, perhaps another warning to the readers of the present work. Just as Charmides forces Socrates to be his teacher in temperance (176d), Aristotle mostly follows along uncritically. Each in their own way, violence and blind obedience, Plato seems to say, could have contributed to the later career of these men.

One last note on characters will suffice. It is noted (127c) that certain unspecified people had also come to hear Zeno. They are mentioned one last time at 136e as among those begging Parmenides to engage in the exercise. They are nameless, featureless and, in the present dialogue, without reported speech. Compare then the lists of those present at Cephalus' home in the *Republic* (328b-c), or those at Socrates' death in the *Phaedo* (59b-c).

Our scene is Pythodorus' house on the occasion of a reading of Zeno's treatise. Parmenides, presumably because he has heard the treatise read before, was out but returns just as the action begins. Pythodorus is said to have heard it before as well, and so does not listen. Socrates has the first recorded speech. He begins to say what he understands Zeno's treatise to

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<sup>38</sup> See Taylor's *Parmenides*, Appendix C, "Aristotle and the Parmenides", pg 128-134

<sup>39</sup> Nails 57.

mean. It is not said what exactly the “the first hypothesis of the first argument (127d) is; whatever it is, it probably has to do with what Socrates says, the impossibility of the plurality of things. This is because the many things would be “both like and unlike” (127e); they would thus contain in themselves opposite, contrary predicates, something impossible. The argument is not developed any further because of the dramatic function of Socrates’ question, and indeed, even the mention of Zeno’s hypotheses in the first place. That is, it is meant to serve as an opportunity, dramatically, to introduce the theory of forms. As such, it is hard to tell how the hypothesis would be worked out, what assumptions are necessary to reach its conclusion, and similar considerations. But this is to remind us that Plato does not intend to use this dialogue as an exposition of the history of philosophy or doxography, but rather, another purpose. But in any event, we can briefly talk about the form of the hypothesis as it is presented. It is indeed valid, *modus tollens*. That is, if P, then Q; not Q; therefore not P. If plurality, contrary predicates; no contrary predicates; therefore no plurality. Zeno agrees with Socrates’ interpretation of this point. Socrates concludes the purpose of the book is to demonstrate that things are not many, “in opposition to everything that is commonly said”(127e).

Socrates rudely attacks Zeno for perceived pretentiousness. Zeno has tried, Socrates claims, to bamboozle his audience into thinking that Zeno is not merely supporting Parmenides by using *reductiones ad absurdum* against the pluralistic opponents of monism. As discussed above, this attack is meant to show the immaturity of the young Socrates. Zeno gently corrects Socrates, saying that the work was the product of his own impetuous youth. Now, Zeno has grown up. The purpose of the book, indeed, is to help Parmenides, but it was never meant to fool anyone. And that is not even hard, said Zeno. He rejects now the competitive drive which

produced the work in the first place, but not the validity of the argument forms or the conclusions reached.

Socrates relents from *ad hominem* and proposes a solution to the problem of plurality brought up by Zeno's treatise: this is what he was going to do, before he sidetracked himself by his own rudeness and abused Zeno. Enter the form. It is, says Socrates,  $\alpha\tau\ \kappa\alpha\theta\ \alpha\tau$ , "itself by itself". This should be understood in two ways. The Greek preposition  $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}$  has several meanings; there are several which operate along with the accusative case, as  $\alpha\tau$ , the third word in the phrase, must be. Among these meanings are two more relevant. The first is something like "according to", that is, "by virtue of". It also has a spatial sense, of separation. So, the form is separate from indefinite others and is the cause of its own qualities.

Socrates immediately propose the existence of two forms which would help explain the immediate perplexity of the paradox of the many, a form of likeness and a form of unlikeness. With respect to each, other, as to what forms they are, like and unlike are unlike each other. With respect to their existence as forms, there are like. Therefore, by means of these forms, things come to be like and unlike. The sense of "the many" is then further elaborated: "you and I and the other things we call 'many'"(129a). That is, the many consists of the sensible, which, according to appearances and our perceptions, are plural. The sensible gain their qualities from "getting a share of the form." The sensible gain the appropriate quality "to the extent that they get a share"(129a); Socrates then gives three examples. A like thing becomes like by getting a share of the like; an unlike thing becomes unlike by getting a share of the unlike; a thing, like and unlike, comes to be that way by getting a share of both of the forms. What would be strange, says Socrates, about the sensible having shares of like and unlike if the qualities are independent of the things which are the physical examples and have a share of the form? The forms are the

stable backdrop upon which the sensible have their many qualities. Socrates is, as it were, trying to save the sensible from monism. Zeno is arguing “in opposition to everything that is commonly said”, that is, against both the philosophers of plurality and the report given generally by the senses. For, by common sense alone, it does appear (and quite obviously) that, in Zeno’s formulation, the things are indeed many and come to be like and unlike. In that regard Socrates’ theory could be said to accord more to common sense. It is not exactly clear with respect to what the particulars are said to be like and unlike. Socrates will give an example of how one can say that a sensible has contrary qualities with respect to different sets of referents.

Socrates qualifies his earlier statements. If one could show the forms themselves to have contrary qualities, now, that *would* be something! “If he could show that the kinds and forms themselves have in themselves these opposite properties, that would call for astonishment”(129c). But as it is, it is no surprise at all that the sensible can have contrary qualities. For example, to use the like/unlike categories, we can say that something is like and unlike at the same time. With respect to itself it is like, given we are talking about the same entity at the same time. That is, there is such a thing as self identity. With respect to itself at a later time, it is unlike. With respect to a blue thing, a red thing is unlike. With respect to a round thing, another round thing is like. So, if we consider a blue and a red sphere, we have two objects which are both like and unlike in different respects. If we consider the properties as having some sort of existence outside of the particular sensible, on Socrates’ account, it is more plausible to accept the report of the senses (at least, more than the monists do, who reject the entire affair). Socrates mentions another pair of contraries, one and many (129c). He says that, just as the sensible come to be like and unlike by partaking of the appropriate form, so things come to be one and many, by a form of unity and a form of plurality. And just as we said above, that the

things can be like and unlike with respect to different things, it is also possible that things be both like and unlike, in different respects, at the same time.

Again, Socrates says it would be astonishing if it should be demonstrated that a form is both one and many. Another example, more concrete, of how a given sensible may be said to be one and many at the same time: a given person, considered by himself, is many, because he made up of various parts of the body. Arms, head, hands are all different from each other, and also they themselves have parts. But next to another person, our first person will be considered on (129c-d). Therefore, Socrates is both many and one. But this again is not troublesome, given that Socrates is merely, in a sense, a sensible. The property of plurality and the property of unity are held with respect to another sensible or group of sensibles, and are held by virtue of an independently existent form, to use Socrates' formulation. Book A is many, in that it has many pages, all distinct from each other, and a binding, distinct from the pages. The binding is many as well, with both the cardboard and the glue. But the Book A is distinct and hence a unity, with respect to Book B. With respect to its own parts, A partakes of plurality; the pages each partake of likeness with the other pages, as far as they are pages, and unlikeness, as far as they have different words printed upon them. All through, we would uphold this experience, says Socrates, by appealing to the explanatory forms.

Socrates reiterates his point again; when one speaks of "the same thing" "many and one" (129d), he is merely proving that "something". A particular sensible is both many and one. This agrees with what is normally said, and says Socrates, is not at all troubling. Socrates concludes his speech. He says what would really be surprising is if one were, after demonstrating that the forms were separate, one were then to show that they were mixed together in any way. He then compliments Zeno for the rigor of his treatise and arguments, but asks for someone to debate

Socrates on his own theory. The doctrine as laid out so far seems to consist of these points: the sensible have their properties by virtue of the forms; forms are separate from the sensible; forms explain the particular quality which they embody, and need not be explained nor appeal to something else for the quality which is theirs; the sensible have the various contraries in them. Is this indeed the same, or similar, doctrine as expressed elsewhere in Plato? For that we turn briefly to the *Phaedo*.

The *Phaedo* of course depicts the last hours and death of Socrates, and contains a long discussion of the soul. In the course of the dialogue forms are theorized. We will skip over the majority, as only some parts of the dialogue are of direct interest here. It is established that there is a difference between soul and body, and that the two apprehend things differently, the soul by reason and the body by the senses. The philosopher knows that the senses deceive. The body itself is a barrier to the true and proper acquisition of knowledge (65b). By reasoning, things become clear to the soul. The freer the soul is from the burden of the body, the better it can reason (this is developed at some length, especially with regard to its moral aspect, but that need not detain us here). Socrates then brings up forms (65d). The first three mentioned, the Just, Beautiful and Good, are endorsed by Simmias (65d). And Simmias admits, he has never perceived any of them with his eyes or with any of the senses. Three other forms are specifically listed here, Bigness, Health, and Strength. "In a word, the reality of all other things, that which each of them essentially is"(65e). Socrates holds that these are grasped by thought alone. Socrates continues speaking about the distracting body and how it keeps us from pure knowledge.

The next bit of discussion of the forms occurs several pages later in the discourse on recollection. First, Socrates holds as already demonstrated that "learning is recollection"(73b).

(This is a concept that also appears in the *Meno*). He uses everyday example to establish a principle, that objects, similar to and dissimilar to their referents, can be used to evoke the memory, and hence, to lead to recollection, of something else (74a). So he moves on to the case of equality and Equality itself (74a). It is posited, as a starting point, that Equality itself exists. We have not gained knowledge of it by observing particular sensibles which happen to be equal. The following sentence seems a bit odd: “do not equal stones and sticks, sometimes, while remaining the same, appear to one to be equal and to another to be unequal?” (74b). I take this phrase as an acknowledgment of the fact that equality and similar ideas are necessarily relations. That is, with respect to one stick, the stick being considered is seen as equal, and with respect to another stick, unequal.<sup>40</sup> So we see here, that on the surface, a given stick partakes of opposites. (Consider again why it is that young Socrates in the *Parmenides* offered the theory of forms in the first place).

But the forms Equality and Inequality do not undergo this. Therefore they are separate from the things which happen to be in various respects, equal or unequal. Connecting back to the earlier statement about recollection, we move to the relative status of forms and things; just as there is a “deficiency in their being such” that goes along with being a thing that evokes the memory, so too with particulars and forms (74d). It is said that when one experiences a particular he gets the sense that he has only apprehended an inferior type of reality. The things we perceive “strive to be like” whatever the quality of the given form is. And we had knowledge of the true quality before by super-sensory means. And given that perception begins at birth, it must be that this knowledge came to us before that (76e). Again, lead by the discussion of the soul and death we move to talk about forms. We begin by asking, what sort of thing is liable to be dispersed

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<sup>40</sup> I believe that Socrates is using the examples of sticks and stones to highlight the concept of equality by appealing to the intuitive notion of equal lengths. It is easy to imagine and quantify.



(78b)? (This, in order to ascertain whether the soul is such to be destroyed after death). We are introduced to things composite and noncomposite. A composite is “liable to be split up into its component parts” and the opposite for the noncomposite. (This is a point that will be returned to later in the deductions). Things that “always remain the same” are associated with not being composites, and composites are said to change. Here, we are given the idea that the forms are without change. But the particular sensible which have those qualities constantly change (78d). Socrates then shows that the soul, being an invisible thing like the forms, is not subject to change. It is therefore not possible for it to be a composite, and so it does not disperse at death (79b-c).

Closer to the end we come to the doctrine more explicitly laid out. Socrates says that a beautiful particular is such because it “shares” in the form of Beauty (100d). It is very interesting that here Socrates characterizes this approach as “the safest answer”(100e) from which he will not “fall into error”. He says the same for the large and the small. But, so much for the forms in the *Phaedo*. I believe that this demonstrates that the doctrine put forth by the literary young and old Socrates are in fact the same. The theory of forms put into the mouths of both the young and the old Socrates hold that there are supersensory objects, independent of material objects which grant the predicates to the particulars.

We return to the *Parmenides*. The philosopher Parmenides takes his place as the primary speaker (130a), a position he retains for the remainder of the dialogue. Socrates had feared, while he was giving his speech, that Zeno and Parmenides would become annoyed. But instead they listened attentively, looking like they admired Socrates. Parmenides compliments Socrates and so begins the next phase of the dialogue. He asks if the theory so outlined above is Socrates’ own, to which Socrates agrees. So the separateness of the forms from the sensibles is affirmed.

Parmenides asks for continuing clarification regarding the forms. He asks, of what sort of sensibles are there corresponding forms? Or, to put it another way, which entities and properties need to have forms to be what they are? We proceed to four different categories of entities and properties with differing responses on Socrates' part. First Parmenides asks if Socrates holds the things about which he had just discussed with Zeno—the general properties<sup>41</sup>—are held by particulars by virtue of the forms. This is a formality of a question, as it is clear that of course Socrates holds this opinion; it was on account of the general properties that Socrates introduced the forms in the first place. So, it is natural that Socrates upholds his earlier opinion here. And again, we remember that the general properties are qualities such as like and unlike. There will be much discussion of these general qualities later in the dialogue, especially in the second portion.

The second category Parmenides inquires into is that of the ethical qualities so familiar to us from the *Phaedo*. The present dialogue treats with this type of form very little. We note the repetition of the expression ἀπὸ τῶν καθ' αὐτὰς as an explanation for how the forms operate, themselves by themselves. So far, we have secured two categories. The third is not as certain. Are there forms for the species and the elements, “human being, or fire, or water?”(130c). Socrates hesitates on this count, not really willing to grant that these sorts of things have forms with respect to being the particular kind. And it appears at first blush that there is no reason, as the theory has been so far formulated, to posit forms for these sorts of entities. The form of human, for example has no opposite, and the theory was introduced in the first place to allow for the compresence of opposites in the sensibles. Therefore, there seems to be no need to make this leap. So we see here a distinction between the forms of, say, unity and fire. And I posit that it is

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<sup>41</sup> Such as like, unlike; equality, inequality; one, many; rest, motion.

safe to say that they would be forms in different ways. The distinction has yet to be made, but this could be understood as an anticipation of the distinction between substance and attribute.

But on further reflection, it could also seem that it is not too outrageous to posit forms for these sorts of things, once one has posited forms for the qualities. The forms are what makes the things are the way they are. In addition, it would seem as though that if one were willing to say that the qualities, such as unity or justice, have an existence, independent of any embodiment, one would not be willing to grant that the elements and the natural kinds have an independent existence external to the world of experience. Here Socrates demonstrates his inexperience, by not fully understanding the extent of his own theory. I find it quite likely that we are supposed to read this statement by Socrates as a mistake. Socrates is forced to appear unsure and doubtful about the full implications of his own theory. Also, with regard to the theory of forms being introduced in the present dialogue in order to explain the compresence of opposites, this does not hold up with respect to the ethical forms either, unless we wish to say that those forms, like beauty and justice, have corresponding forms of ugliness and injustice. So, the result is that we are to reject the restrictive account of the population of the form world offered by the present Socrates.

There is another line of evidence which may be referred to in order to show that perhaps Socrates has made an error. We can look at statements positing the existence of the forms of the sorts of things above described elsewhere in Plato's works. For example, in the *Philebus*, Socrates, before saying that the following is a matter of controversy, speaks of a form of man, "man as one, or ox as one, or the beautiful as one, and the good as one" (15a). Following this Socrates discusses the problems of the one and the many, that is, dispersal (15b), problems which will be addressed soon in our dialogue. In addition, a form of fire is mentioned in the *Timaeus*; or

rather, it is asked whether such a thing can exist: “Is there such a thing as Fire by itself?”(51b). In developing this point, Plato appeals to the relative instability of sense perception and the difference between understanding and true opinion. And, granted that there is such a difference, there must be forms, as understanding can only be about stable objects of reference. The relative dating of the *Timaeus* is controversial, but the *Philebus* at the least is understood to be one of the last works written, and hence some time after the *Parmenides*. In any event, I believe that these abbreviated references may be read as supporting the idea that Socrates has made a mistake by denying forms of the natural kinds and elements, because they are mentioned as existing elsewhere. The fourth and last category to be considered are the things “totally undignified and worthless”(130c), “hair, and mud and dirt” and those sorts of things. Socrates affirms that these things are beyond the scope of forms with slightly more confidence than his denial of forms for the third category. He says it would be too strange if things like these had forms. Those objects are merely what they appear to be, not having a share in the higher reality of the forms. Again, we ought to be tipped off that an error has occurred. The first warning is from Socrates himself, immediately after he has denied that there are forms for the fourth category. That is, the base things have no share of the forms (or rather, by virtue of being base things, or with respect to their identity as base things, such objects do not partake of forms; that they may partake of forms with respect to some property is not ruled out). Socrates explains why he rejects the existence of such a thing as the form of mud: when he does so, he considers that there are forms of such things for the sake of self-consistency. But whenever he does so, he denies them, in order not to fall “into some pit of nonsense”(130d). Part of the problem or so it seems, is that Socrates is being arbitrary in his choices of things which have forms, and that he doesn’t elaborate at all on what he means by “nonsense”. The next piece of evidence which may convince us that Socrates

has made a mistake comes from Parmenides. The philosopher tells Socrates that he thinks in this way because philosophy has not yet fully gripped him, as it will later (130e). What will Socrates do when he is gripped by philosophy? I agree with Miller that this is an example of the use of Socrates as a stand-in for the audience; that is, the present Socrates is meant to show what novice philosopher is now, and references to other dialogues indicate what the novice philosopher could develop into.

The mature philosopher will no longer base his opinions on those of others. In this specific circumstance, he will not reject the theory of forms, or the expansion of the role of forms, merely because it is not an opinion which other people hold. Parmenides is thus saying that the philosopher does not simply conform to what people in general hold or believe to be true; the philosopher seeks out the truth itself. And granted that Parmenides is going to say later on that the forms are necessary for philosophy (135c) then we can say that, within the context of the dialogue, we must posit the forms of all things, as well as all qualities. Another aside on the interests of the philosopher and the opinion of the many would seem to be in order. In a few other places Plato touches upon the appropriateness of the philosopher speaking about objects commonly held as base or unworthy of discussion. For example, while engaging in the process of collection and division in the *Sophist*, the Visitor makes a rather long aside (227a-b). He says that with respect to his method, it does not matter what the apparent value of the categories into which he is dividing things is. All things are subordinate to the pursuit of truth. The Stranger again, this time in the *Statesman*, makes a comment on his method, much to the same effect. “[S]uch a method of argument as ours is not more concerned with what is more dignified than with what is not, and neither does it at all despise the smaller more than the greater, but always reaches the truest conclusion by itself” (266d). We also have examples of the explicitly

unphilosophical or anti-philosophical talking about or acting against Socrates. In the *Symposium*, for example, a drunken Alcibiades berates Socrates for engaging in discussion about unworthy things. “If you were to listen to his [Socrates’] arguments, at first they’d strike you as totally ridiculous; they’re clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He’s always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners” (221e). Or, the most famous example of all, the conviction of Socrates by the Athenians. In these few examples I hope to have shown that Parmenides’ comment on the independence of the opinion of the philosopher is echoed elsewhere in Plato’s works.

Besides these considerations, we may also look at the issue in the context of the theory of forms. It would seem that, if certain objects in a world in which forms exist do not themselves need to partake of forms in order to be what they are, then either this class of beings exists independently of the forms or their existence is an illusion. Is it a worse consequence to uphold that the worthless objects are or are not dependent upon an external source for their being? On one interpretation, this would give the worthless things far too much priority within the ontology of the world in which sensibles partake of forms. They would exist, independently of the forms. And meanwhile the noble and good things would all exist ontologically dependent upon the forms, and in a certain sense, ranked behind the inferior things, given that the best sorts of things in the general context of Greek philosophy are those which exist independently. The other outcome of saying that the inferior things exist without forms is that they do not have a much lower level of existence, as they are only apprehended, on the current model, by the senses. Now, it has been discussed elsewhere that the senses are, for Plato, not to be highly trusted. It would seem that Plato might be getting too close to the historical Parmenides’ opinion for Plato’s own taste if he were to adopt the thesis that the inferior things do not have forms, because on this

reading their being is closer to being illusory, just as Parmenides held the entire realm of the experienced world. Therefore, I hold that we ought to think that Socrates is being portrayed as having made an error when it comes to his denial of the extent of forms to the natural kinds and elements as well as the base substances.

Parmenides continues to the next step. The current state of the theory as laid out by Socrates and qualified by Parmenides is as follows: There are forms of some qualities; some existent things lack forms; the forms are participated in by their correspondents; the corresponding things gain their qualities from this participation; the forms are separate from the particulars, and particulars from forms. Parmenides restates what Socrates means by participation. Some of the material objects get their quality, and thus their name, from the form in which they participate (131a). It is by virtue of the form that is common to a class that that class is said to exist. To all this Socrates agrees. But what of what does participation actually consist? Parmenides gives two ways: either a particular gets a share of the whole form or it gets a share of part of the whole form. He follows up the disjunction by asking whether there is any other way to describe “having a share”. Socrates agrees that these are the only two senses of the expression, and that there is no other way to have a share. And we are inclined to agree, at least at first. If one considers something like a pie, the disjunction makes perfect sense. I can eat either part of the pie or all of the pie. These are the only two ways in which I can “have a share” of the pie. There are only parts and wholes, and no other categories. This is at least the case with material objects. With that in mind, we must be careful while attending to this argument, as another error is about to creep in.

Parmenides reminds us that the form is itself one (131a), to which Socrates agrees. This reminder flows directly into the next point, that if the form is a unity and it is not divided when it

is participated, then it follows that the form, when participated, becomes separate from itself (131b). There would thus be many copies of the same form, one for each of the particulars that participate in it. But that would make it so that there was more than one form that granted the relevant quality, with respect to the particulars (it will be shown below that we can also generate an unlimited number of form copies if we make and follow a few other assumptions). The other (bad) way we could understand this consequence is that each particular does in fact participate in the whole form of each quality that corresponds. But the only thing to which the form corresponds is that given sensible, i.e. a class of one. This severely, if not completely undermines the explanatory use of the theory of forms. Because if there are forms for each thing, say A and B, rather than for the general category of “thinghood”, then there is nothing that A and B have in common, and so it would not even be appropriate to call them both “things” (as a properly named thing is so called because of its participation in a class of things commonly named).

By agreeing to the disjunction Parmenides offers, that there are only two ways of having a share of something, Socrates has made a critical error. He has overlooked the possibility that this need not be a disjunctive case at all. And he has forgotten one of the primary attributes given the forms earlier on: their separateness from the particulars. Is it necessary that the same categories of having a share should apply to the forms as it does to the particulars? This is exactly the question that we are meant to ask ourselves when we come to this point of the dialogue. I hold that if there is a way out, it is by recognizing that an error was made at the start, rather than in the process of argumentation. Socrates will attempt to save himself; but his failure reflects the fact that instead of starting over again, as he should, he simply pressed onward without properly examining the premises of the argument.



Socrates attempts a defense by issuing an analogy. Participation is like a day, he says. The day “is in many places at the same time and is none the less not separate from itself”(131b). The analogy, I hold, does not even need to be criticized by Parmenides in the next breath; it is by itself incapable of acting as a reply to Parmenides’ dilemma. First we should ask ourselves what constitutes a day. Is Socrates referring to the time period, a series of twenty four hours, or the light, day light, that comes from the sun? First of all, the day has parts, as each unit of time within the whole can be seen as a part of the day. So, the whole day is not present in all of its parts, as one o’clock is distinct from two o’clock and so on. Or he has made a mistake by saying that one period of time is capable of being present in a series of other points of time. The other way is to say that Socrates is referring to the light. But the light itself is in parts, and given our understanding of how light works now, as a series of photons, i.e. discrete particles, it seems as though this interpretation is none too different from the following sail analogy. Why doesn’t Socrates use the analogy of the sun, like he does in the *Republic* (517b-c)? But this probably would not hold up against Parmenides’ criticism either, given our starting point. The sun in the *Republic* sheds its light upon the things in the intelligible realm; it does not directly touch them. So in that instance, the forms were viewed as separate, even from each other. Socrates’ use of an analogy is meant to make us remember and look forward to the experienced Socrates of the *Republic* by making a similar, yet flawed analogy. But the problem with these analogies lies in the fact that Parmenides is assuming a theory of participation which is explicitly the same as that of physical sharing. That is the crux of the issue, and it is that premise that has to be rejected in order to make any progress of our understanding of the forms.

Parmenides reminds us of this starting point, i.e. the material conception of participation, while giving us his version of the analogy. He gives us the image of a sail stretched out over and

covering a group of people. The participants are such by virtue of being covered (131c). This explicitly follows the physical conception of participation and the divided nature of an object which covers over other objects. Socrates reluctantly agrees to this. In his next reply, Parmenides fully draws out the implications of the above analogy. That is, the whole sail is not over each participant, but only a part of the sail is over each participant, according to where the participant is.

The next problem proceeds directly from the previous one. That the forms are divisible is our starting point (131c). But Socrates is still unwilling to say that forms can be divided. Parmenides agrees, though he was the one who forced the dichotomy on us in the first place. Now we have a new reason to consider absurd the idea that forms are divisible, besides being contradictory to what we held about forms earlier, that they were unities. The purpose is to say how absurd it is to grant the predicate large to participants in the large. So, given that each participant has a part of the large as its share, and axiomatically, a whole is necessarily larger than any part, the things that are large are large “by a part of largeness smaller than largeness itself”(131d). It is the same trouble with the equal and the small. If one has only part of the equal itself, one cannot actually be equal to anything. The case is even more acute for the form of the small. A part of the small is smaller than the form of the small, as per the axiom above stated. And so, there is a small thing smaller than the small itself, so why shouldn't the part of the small itself be the form of the small?

It is thus concluded that it is absurd to say that a particular can have a partial share of any form at all, especially the general forms and forms of magnitude. Both of the alternatives laid out at 131a have been shown to have absurd consequences. Participation by the particulars in the whole form leads to either the form's self-alienation or the creation of one member classes, both

of which undermine the theory of forms. On the other hand, allowing for the forms to be divided leads to absurdity as well. Similarly to Zeno's dialectic, Parmenides has here employed a *reductio ad absurdum*, whose result is that we are supposed to start over again from the beginning and question our premises. And that was, participation of forms is the same in kind, or at least explainable, in terms of having a share with respect to a material object. But our difficulties lead us to think that this starting point is in error. And given that forms are maintained as necessary by Parmenides, we should conclude that participation in forms is utterly unlike the participation of, that is, having a share in, material objects. This sets the status of the forms as immaterial objects on a more secure footing and more openly so than before.

“By Zeus!” cries Socrates at the conclusion of the problems of wholes and parts (131e). The other assumed premise in the above arguments, which will appear again soon, is that the forms are themselves in the class of objects which possess the quality of which they are the exemplar, that is, they are self-predicating. Hence we were able to derive the strange conclusions that the part of the small itself was itself smaller than the form of the small (131e). This is brought about by saying the small is small. Why do we have to say that the forms are themselves in the class of objects which partake of the quality or kind which the forms grant through participation? It would seem that the objections which we raised earlier against Socrates' selectiveness when it came to the scope of the forms applies here too. The source for this doctrine is clear. It was desired that the forms justice, beauty and the good, along with the other ethical forms as well as some of the general predicates, like unity, ought to actually be whatever quality it was that they granted to the particulars. But, coupled with the materially influenced conception of participation, just things and beautiful things come to be that way from partaking of a part of the form which is less just than the just and less beautiful than the beautiful. So we

see that the conception of participation along the lines of material existence is not compatible with self-predication and leads to strange and unacceptable outcomes.

I also hold that self-predication can itself be removed. This may seem to be quite a loss when it comes to the forms like justice. But given that we also are, on the reading we have adopted, to suppose forms of the third and fourth categories, with respect to the form of man, is it (he, I suppose) somehow himself a man, in a way that that agrees to the way in which we say that men in the sensible realm are men? Many of these qualities only have meaning in the sensory realm because they are concepts of time and space, which have nothing to do with immaterial objects. This does not keep the immaterial objects, *per se* from being the source of the various qualities, even those proper only to the sensible realm. When it comes to man, for example, it is improper to actually hold that the form of man is himself a man. The form is the basis upon which we have knowledge of the class. If the form of man itself is a man, how could we ever experience the form as a man, with it not being material? Because the way in which we experience men are through the senses. The forms of being and a few others are however special cases, which we will return to later, as I do not believe that none of the forms are self-predicating; only the ones that have predicates improper for immaterial substances.

Parmenides raises another difficulty with Socrates' theory of forms, one based upon our recent concern, self-predication. He asks Socrates, when you see a group of large things, do you infer that there is a common characteristic among them that makes them all large (132a)? Socrates agrees. Parmenides then asks whether Socrates perceives the form of the large with his mind's eye and considers the large itself within the class of the large things, then there must appear a form by virtue of which the form of the large itself is large (132b). Hence, a potentially unlimited number of forms can proceed if we say that a form needs another form by virtue of

which it holds its own quality. One way that this may be dealt with is to reject self-predication in most cases, like the present largeness example. This will only work so far because as I said before, some of the forms have to actually possess the quality which they bestow on other things by virtue of participation, like the form of being. The other way in which we can stop the regress is by saying that it is acceptable to say that the form is the cause of the appropriate quality in itself and in the others. We can just say that the form explains itself, and it is impossible and improper to demand any further explanation. Again, this might be defensible on the grounds of separation and the difference between immaterial and material objects. So the problem that has plagued us continues, that is, mistakenly ascribing the attributes of material objects to the immaterial.

Parmenides begins another argument against Socrates' conception of the forms, this one also brought about by the misunderstanding of the theory of participation and material versus immaterial. He asks Socrates, when you see a group of large things, do you infer that there is a common characteristic among them that makes them all large (132a)? Socrates agrees. Parmenides then asks, when Socrates perceives the form of the large with his mind's eye and considers the large itself within the class of the large things, does there appear a form by virtue of which the form of the large itself is large (132b)? Hence, an unlimited number of forms may proceed, which contradicts what was said before, that the forms are unique. This objection also undermines the theory as presently understood by removing the explanatory aspect of the forms a layer back each time one examines the form. Under this conception, the forms are not allowed to fulfill their main purpose, to be the source of the predicates for the sensibles. We could just say that we do not need to go back further than the first form in order to explain its presence in the class of the large things. But the other way of dealing with the problem is to say that a predicate

like large is not properly applied to any form, even the large itself, because size is necessarily bound to the material and spatial realm.

Socrates will make two more attempts to show that he understands his own theory. (I won't say "save the theory" because the existence of the forms is a given in this dialogue. Socrates is only attempting to come up with defenses against Parmenides, not actual opponents). The first is the suggestion that the forms are thoughts (132b-c) and the second is that the particulars participate in forms in a relationship of reflection (132c-133a). Parmenides rejects both in short order. Let us deal with the first approach, "forms as thoughts".

Now this may seem to not run afoul of the difference between material and immaterial substances. What could be more immaterial, on our assumed dualistic understanding, than thoughts, which properly occur only in minds? And these minds are themselves immaterial. Therefore the forms do not fall prey to the objections of participation as raised above. The forms in this understanding exist only in the mind, and do not suffer from the contradictions discussed above. How would the forms work on this model? (We'll give this model a bit more thought before Parmenides dismisses it). Now we have said that the forms are the source and explanation of the predicates of the sensibles. Earlier, we had said that the forms also existed independently, at least of the particulars. Does not placing the forms in minds make them contingent upon the minds?

Another problem emerges: this conception gives far too much power to the mind, depriving the sensibles and thus the forms of their proper status (we should only really worry about the forms by Platonic standards). The forms are thus demoted from external standards, existing independently of observers (and in addition of the sensibles in general) to being categories imposed by the mind upon experience and sense data. I find this remarkably similar to

the Kantian move from metaphysics to epistemology, but it would be anachronistic to say that Plato was here preempting Kant. But in any event, by making this move we go from speaking about the thing to speaking about how it is experienced. The forms are thus no longer independent. Rather the mind imprints them upon experience. And the question of what the things experienced are like in themselves is left behind.

Parmenides in his own way attacks Socrates' theory. He gets Socrates to practically overturn himself in a few short lines. First, Socrates concedes that the thoughts must be thoughts of something, and that this something is an existent entity (132c). And the thought is of the form of the relevant predicate. Therefore the form, if it is thought of, exists independently of the mind. So though there may be a thought of something, there has to be an external referent for the thought in the mind. If the thought is of something which grants the predicates to the sensibles, then it has to be the form. So on Socrates' own admission, the form could *still* exist independently of the mind, leaving us right back where we started.

Parmenides moves quickly on to his next point. He goes back to assuming that Socrates' theory of the forms as thoughts (as if he hadn't simply rejected this approach after the first line of questioning). Given that forms are thoughts, and participation exists, does that not require that everything think? That is, if the predicates exist in things because they are thought about, would they lose their predicates if they ceased to be thought about? Or, on the other hand, the sensibles must all think in order to maintain their predicates. But Socrates is unwilling to grant that (132c). So much for the forms as thoughts. In any event, the forms have been robbed again of their explanatory function and their independence. In addition, starting from the mind abandons an examination of the things-in-themselves, so to speak, something which Plato most assuredly did not wish to grant.

Socrates proposes the reflection theory: the sensibles participate in the forms by becoming like them. We've moved back from epistemology to metaphysics. The forms are patterns or paradigms this time (132d). Again Socrates is attempting to avoid the troubles which come about through the misconception of participation. Parmenides again attempts to undermine this approach by showing up the difficulties involved with similarity and imitation. If A is like B, asks Parmenides, mustn't B be like A? Consider a cardboard cutout of a circle that is used to trace circles onto pieces of paper. Those circles are then cut out of the paper, and rather than just being a representation of a circle on paper, it is in fact its own circle. Is the cutout like the rubric? Yes; they are both circles of the same diameter and have the same dimensions, with respect to being circles. But they are different in being made out of different things, they different colors (potentially) and they have different thicknesses (that is, in their z-axis as opposed to their x- and y-axes, which show up in the circle). So in one respect the particular reflects the form, but in other ways it does not. Especially with the actual forms, it is understandable that we may admit of differences more substantial than color or thickness. We mean something like the difference between material and immaterial substances. We may also note that as per our understanding of the forms, the forms must all necessarily be temporally prior to the particulars. That is, with respect to the things in this world, the forms are always preexistent, because they have always existed.

But Parmenides also says that since participation is being similar, and being similar is being like, after a fashion, and one becomes like by partaking of the like, then all participation consists per se of taking a share of the form of the like. And in order to take a share of the form of the like, one must become similar to the like itself, which necessitates taking a form of the like. And so on. Socrates is of course committed already to likeness being one of the forms



(129a). So he has to accept Parmenides' objection. And this particular objection does not seem to rest on the spurious and unnecessary grounds that the problems over participation did, namely, the divisibility of the forms. But here we have another boundless regress. We can get our way out of it by perhaps simply saying that we need not go any further than the first layer of the form of like, and that it alone explains everything. But I would be more satisfied with throwing the concept of imitation out entirely as too metaphorical. It already assumes a level of corporeality which I am unwilling to grant to the theory of participation. Even if one imagines an object reflected in a mirror, the fact remains that reflection is a physical phenomenon. And it is very hard to think about exactly what the sensibles and the forms have in common except the fact that they exist. But besides this there aren't similarities between the two groups.

Maintaining our thesis, the existence of the predicate granting forms, has proven to be very difficult. But Socrates, and we with him, has only just begun to appreciate the difficulties which arise from positing immaterial substances. Parmenides says that there are many troubles, but only gives us what he says is the most difficult one: If the forms are as they have been described above, they cannot even be known (133b). And it is impossible to refute the claim unless the objector was willing to listen to a very long series of apparently idle arguments. But, if not, he will not be persuaded that there are forms and that they are the cause and source of the predicates. Socrates asks for clarification. The first step: Each form must be separate from us, because we are sensibles. (Socrates has apparently abandoned his opinion that the forms are thoughts from 132b). His alternatives, forms as thoughts and forms as paradigms have both failed, so we are still stuck on the problem of participation. And as shown above, participation is wrongly said to be either of part of the form or of the whole form. So, there is no way for participation to work. And in addition, as it was established in the first question, the extent of

forms, we have precedent for saying that even in a system in which there are forms, some of the sensibles have an independent existence, or at least, with respect to certain parts of their existences. This is easily extended to cover other predicates and objects; why just stop at mud when beautiful things could exist per se in the material realm too? Let us follow Parmenides. He uses the example of master and slave. The master in the material realm and the slave in the material realm hold their predicates as master and slave with respect to each other. And mastership and slaveship have their being, says Parmenides, with respect to each other. There is no mixing between the two realms, and mastership has nothing to do with a particular slave, and slaveship has nothing to do with a particular master (133e-134a).

From this example Parmenides moves on to knowledge. This domain, knowledge, has not yet been mentioned in this dialogue. We are not told to which of the four classes of things knowledge belongs. The first thought would be to place it among the second category with beauty and justice. But knowledge seems of such a different kind than those things. It also doesn't belong in the third category. Again, perhaps we see the limited nature of this dialogue. We should not be looking for an epistemology here, just like we shouldn't look for an ethics. The form of knowledge must be of truth itself. "Particular knowledge" is about particular things, on the same model. But *we* as particulars have nothing to do with forms at all. This is a consequence of the radical separation of the particulars from the forms and a lack of a viable theory of participation. Therefore, we have no knowledge of the forms. And God would not have knowledge of the particulars either, because there would be no communication between the two realms (again, note the symmetry between the material and immaterial realms). There is no need for this symmetry per se, just as there is no need to assume that participation has to occur similarly to share holding in physical objects. This argument also is beginning to have Epicurean

undertones (though Epicurus was some time off at the writing of the dialogue). So, just as people in the material realm can have no knowledge of the ideal realm, so any persons who happen to exist in the ideal realm can know nothing about anything in the material realm. Socrates makes a pious objection: “If God is to be stripped of knowing, our argument may be getting too bizarre”(134e). Parmenides reminds us yet again how difficult this all is, to posit immaterial substances. Yet, it is necessary, because without external referents, all discourse and also philosophy would be impossible (135b-c). Therefore, we must, if we accept these premises, adopt the theory of forms.

So ends the objections. Parmenides says that Socrates has a noble project, but he is not yet ready to fulfill it (135c). He recommends dialectical training on Zeno’s model. But we will go beyond Zeno’s dialectic says Parmenides, by considering not only the implications of upholding a hypothesis, but also denying it (136a). We remember that Zeno’s method, both historically attested and noted in this particular dialogue, consisted of hypothesizing plurality and then demonstrating that the term as commonly understood lead to contradiction, so the theory of plurality had to be abandoned. So what is the point of adding the second part of the deductions which Parmenides prescribes? It will serve as a *reductio ad absurdum* to demonstrate that the theory of forms presently constructed, that is, with the understanding of participation on a physical basis, has to be abandoned. A few notes on dramatic detail and methodology are in order. The begging of Parmenides by the group much resembles the request made of Antiphon to make the recitation here reported (127a). Parmenides of course agrees. And it is a much more difficult thing, in the dramatic context of the dialogue, for Parmenides to come up with this argument and go through the whole thing than it is for Antiphon to merely recite it. We see how much greater a request it was to ask Parmenides to undertake this task than it was to ask

Antiphon. Zeno, whose method is used, conspicuously avoids having to go through the whole argument himself. He also notes that it would be inappropriate to ask for a demonstration of this kind before a large group, perhaps another oblique reference to the *Republic's* large crowd of listeners. (One could also mention such groups that gather to listen to conversation with sophists like *Gorgias* or *Protagoras*). There, the conversation was less rigorous and geared toward a more general audience. This conversation is specialized, rigorous and addressed only to the few. It is given for the benefit of those who are already initiated into philosophy. Also, as in *Republic* the interlocutor recedes in importance in the final part of this dialogue. One notable treatment of this was Cornford's translation and commentary, which for the most part did not bother to provide all of Aristotle's responses. On the other hand, Brumbaugh viewed Aristotle's responses as quite important for determining how to understand certain passages uttered by Parmenides. For example, in the very beginning of the first set of arguments about the one, Parmenides says "Then there cannot be a part of it nor can it be a whole" to which Aristotle replies "Why?"(137c). Brumbaugh says: "This is marked as a theorem by the response, which is a question whenever a theorem or a subordinate proof within a theorem is introduced"(55). In any event, young Aristotle is notable for being so colorless. He lacks even the negative characterization which Socrates receives. He seems mostly to just go along with what is being said, only asking questions when prompted. He has so little characterization that it is difficult to tell if he actually is not really thinking, or he is acting out of deference for Parmenides and his orders. Indeed, Parmenides selects Aristotle for this very purpose, to not bring up diverting objections, which Socrates certainly would have brought up if he remained the interlocutor.

What is the subject of the deductions? Is it the same throughout, or does it differ? Are they just forms, or are sensibles included? This is one of the points on which the commentators

disagree. Cornford, following Proclus, is a representative of the opinion that the subject differs. “Since it is obvious that the One of Hyp. I is a different thing from the one of Hyp. II, we should be prepared for further shifts of meaning in the later hypotheses. We shall miss Plato’s whole intention, if we assume beforehand that “the One” must stand for all through the same thing”.<sup>42</sup> Allen starkly disagrees; he holds that throughout the second part only forms are discussed, calling the alternative the “ambiguity theory”.<sup>43</sup> Now let us remember that Parmenides has said that *his* thesis will be examined, and that Socrates stated it earlier, “the all is one”(128a). But the one discussed here is most certainly not Parmenides’ One. If the all were one, how could the one be said to participate in the others? Not only could it not grant predicates to others participating in it, it could not gain predicates itself, as Parmenides’ one is the only existent thing in his system. We should remember that we are not necessarily bound to interpret all historical characters in Plato in a parochially historical fashion. We need not think that the present work should be put in the same category as the introductory chapters to the *Physics* or *Metaphysics*.

We hold, with Allen, that the subject throughout is the same; it is the form of unity. We do not need to interpret the hypotheses as actually commenting upon the historical Parmenides’ one being because it is said throughout the following arguments said that the one participates in other forms, especially the form of being. If we were actually talking about the Parmenidean one, there would be no need to discuss external referents, and one would not have to explain the existence of being contingent upon any other being.

There are several assumptions and premises in place at the beginning of the second part of the *Parmenides*; Aristotle and Parmenides do not start over fresh. For example, the problematic conception of participation on a whole/part basis remains, reminding us that

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<sup>42</sup> *Plato and Parmenides* 112.

<sup>43</sup> Allen, 210.

Socrates has failed to give an account. But it is also the case that despite this defective understanding, the forms are still given an explanatory and causal role with respect to the predicates in the particulars. In addition, the forms cannot admit of their opposites, but particulars can. Some of the sensibles have a certain type of independent existence. Finally, thoughts must have external referents.

We shall be striving to show that the purpose of the deductions is to demonstrate that understanding the forms as having physical shares leads to contradiction; this is the result of the Part A. Part B results in the understanding that the forms are necessary for the existence of the others. The final conclusion notes that the entire enterprise has turned up nothing but contradictions, and so, we must understand that we can neither affirm the theory as it stands, yet we cannot deny the theory either. So we are lead to an understanding that conceives of the forms and their participation in a way proper for immaterial objects.

My treatment of the second part of the *Parmenides* is radically different from the first part. I have begun with an outline; the treatment of the arguments is broken down by numbers. For example, the first subdivision of the first argument is styled "1.1". This has been done because it is easier to refer back to these section headings than the Stephanus pages. Because of the way in which the argument unfolds, we must make constant reference to previous steps.

The Structure of the Second Part of the *Parmenides*, 137c-166c

Part A: 137c-160b: The one is.

1) 137c-142a: “If it is one.”

2) 142b-155e: “If one is.”

Appendix to 1 and 2 155e-157b: “If the one is as we have described it—being both one and many and neither one nor many and partaking of time.”

3) 157b-159b: “What the others would undergo, if one is.”

4) 159b-160b: “What properties things other than the one must have, if one is.”

160b: Conclusions to 1-4: “The others do not partake of and of the properties”; “Thus if one is, the one is all things and is not even one, both in relation to itself and, likewise, in relation to the others.”

Part B: 160b-166b: The one is not.

5) 160b-163b: “If one is not.”)

) 5 and 6 discuss two different senses of not-being

6) 163b-164b: “If one is not.”)

7) 164b-165e: “What properties the others must have, if one is not.”

8) 165e-166b: “If the one is not, but things other than the one are.”

166b: Conclusion: “Whether one is or is not, it and the others both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other.”

Part A: 137c-160b: The one is.

1) 137c-142a: "If it is one."

1.1) 137c: What does our hypothesis mean? As the very next phrase indicates, it means that the one, unity, possesses unity and no other predicates whatsoever. It follows that since the one is one, it is not many. Many is the opposite of unity (assume self-predication).

1.2) 137c-d: A whole is here defined as that which lacks none of its parts. Therefore, if a whole is a whole it has parts. Then the one is not a whole, as its parts would make it many, which has already been ruled out. It is already becoming clear where this is heading. Is it really necessary to define a whole as having parts? The premise, that we are dealing with a material object, or that the forms are participated in in a way similar to material objects, shows forth once more. The one which is a unity, as per our preceding discussion, is neither a whole nor does it have parts.

1.3) 137d: The one has no limit. Seeing as it has no parts, and given that beginnings, middles and ends are discernibly distinct parts, and given that the beginning and end of something provide it with limits, the one has no limit.

1.4) 137e.138a: The one has no shape, either. It partakes of neither round nor straight. These two shapes indicate some sort of geometrical limit, ruled out above. It is not a circle, as a circle is the collection of points equidistant from a center point, and this center would be a middle, and the collection of extremities would be limits. This has been admitted as lacking to the one (137d). In addition, being a straight line or having straight lines is also ruled out. A line is the shortest distance between two points; this line is in between and serves as a middle, and the two points are a beginning and an end, explicitly ruled out in 1.3. And the other shapes are derivative in one way or another from a circle and a straight line, as all regular polygons can be constructed from them.



1.5) 138a: The one is not in a location. This follows from the lack of parts. Location requires containment, posits Parmenides. If something is contained, the container touches the contained on its surface. For example, assume a ball in a box. The ball touches, at the very least, the box in one place, the place on which the ball rests on the relative bottom of the box. Besides this one point of contact between what we would in common sense terms call container and contained, the air itself contains in a certain sense the ball (and the box too while we're at it). And only part of the ball is touched by each part of the box, as well as parts of the air. The whole ball cannot be touched by all parts of the box at once. We ought to remember our discussion of participation, and how it was determined that the only way to have a share was to either possess the whole of something or a part. So, lacking parts, the one cannot be contained by something else.

1.6) 138a-b: But could it contain itself, or be contained by itself? This passage says no. If something is contained, it is contained by something else. Even if we grant that it is possible for one thing to contain itself, we would create two entities out of one, the contained and the container. But this violates the hypothesis, that the one is one. Therefore, unity does not contain itself. Remember that this is all predicated upon a physical understanding of containment.

1.7) 138b-139a: The one is not at all in motion. Motion is divided into two categories: spatial and qualitative. Parmenides demonstrates why the one cannot change in the second sense first. If the one were to be altered, it would no longer be one. If something can be changed, it is in fact many, because it differs from one discrete time to another. With respect to subject A, subject A at time one is different, and subject A at time two is different from the second A. So A has numerous aspects. But this goes against the strict unity of our hypothesis, so it must not be the case. The other sense of motion, spatial movement, is divided into two categories: circular motion and linear motion (138c). But these two types of motion both require parts. The circular

motion requires the thing in question to spin around its own middle, and a middle is excluded from the one (as are all parts, 1.2). It cannot move linearly either. Parmenides reminds us that the one cannot be in anything (1.5). And linear motion is the process by which something comes to be in something else. And to enter into something the subject must have parts. And it has been shown that the one does not have parts, so it cannot enter into anything. Therefore it cannot move linearly. We conclude: the one is unmoved entirely (139a).

1.8) 139a-b: The one can never be at rest. Rest is thus defined as a continuance of location. This would have required it to have entered into something before, which has been shown to be impossible (1.7). So, therefore, the one neither is in motion nor at rest, a seeming contradiction. How could it not be either? Here we get a taste of what thought about immaterial substance is like, the denial of predicates that we would normally view as disjunctive when we speak about material objects. This first apparent contradiction is no contradiction at all if we understand the one to not be a material object, but since the present assumption is that it is a material object, the present conclusion appears contradictory.

1.9) 139b-140d: The one is not similar or dissimilar to itself or the others. This seems like quite a claim, and even more of a contradiction than the earlier claim (1.8). The most obvious case is that it cannot be different than itself. If it were, that would be contradictory of its nature as one. The next case is also relatively easy, that it is not the same as the others. If it were the same as something else, it would be that thing, not the one. So the two easy cases are finished. Now for the more difficult cases. Note that the next (139c) statement is phrased “won’t be different from another”. That is, Parmenides is not stating this case as “the one is the same as another,” as he had just gotten through saying that was not the case. So being one does not mean that the one is different from the others. And, if the one has the predicate of being different from another, that

would be a predicate in addition to being the one, which would make the one more than one, contradicting the hypothesis (the one is one). In addition to this, it is said that the one is not different from anything by virtue of being one; Parmenides does not qualify the statement with “the others” or “another”; he merely says “different from nothing”. And the last and most difficult: the one is not the same as itself, a denial of self identity in stark contradiction to the foregoing. But the justification is the same: it is not for the one to be self-identical. The same and the one are separate. Perhaps to put it in more Platonic wording, in order to become the same as something the subject in question must have a share of the same. But the same is distinct from the one. Therefore, it cannot have a share. If the one is the same as itself, it is not one, and thus is not the same as itself. Parmenides continues on, showing that the one cannot be like or unlike anything. From 139e-140a, he makes this argument by referring to the fact that the forms are separate from each other. And because they are separate, the one cannot have another character, such as similarity. And so too with difference. So it is concluded that in no way, with respect to nothing, can the one be similar or dissimilar, like or unlike, the same or different. Equality and inequality are similarly disposed of (140b-d). Equality is defined as being “of the same measures as that to which it is equal” (140b). Parmenides exhausts all the variations of equality and inequality. Through having more or fewer measures, a subject is unequal to others, and having the same measures, equal. These measures are parts. So the one cannot have anything to do with equality at all, because this would violate the hypothesis.

1.10) 140e-141a: The one cannot have any sort of relation vis-à-vis age with itself or others. This is an application of the principle established in 1.8 and 1.9 regarding likeness and equality. The various words for temporal relations, older, younger, contemporary, indicate a relative equality

or inequality with respect to time. Time is thus ruled to be among the things that the one can have nothing to do with.

1.11) 141a-141d: The one is not in time. This is the expansion of the implications established in 1.10. Anything that is in time comes to be older than itself. In the unfolding of time, so to speak, the things in time are constantly changing. The level and pervasiveness of change upon a subject varies according to the subject's durability, but even if there is relatively change within a subject from one time to another, the subject at the later stage is strictly speaking distinct from the younger subject, if only because the older has existed for that much longer than the younger. So it is proper to say that a regular subject comes to be older and younger than itself; it is always coming to be older than the version of itself that existed before, and so the past version comes to be younger than the version that proceeds into the future. Since the one has no share of any difference, and age is a difference with respect to time, and aging is necessary for anything existing in time, the one cannot age, and it cannot be in time.

1.12) 141e-142a: The one is not, in any sense. Parmenides restricts time to the past, present and future tenses of verbs. This is a familiar move, and we ought to be wary of restrictions of terms based upon our conception of the material realm. The difference between material and immaterial substance reasserts itself. Is it really necessary to say that there are only three time, past, present and future? In any event, Parmenides then shows that if we assume these are the only tenses, then the one is not. Another important thing to notice in this section is that Parmenides here says that if something is, it has a share of the form of being. In this example, based upon the restrictions of past, present, and future, he says that the one has no share of the form of being, and so in no way is.

1.13) 142a: We have reached the first conclusion, and it seems like a bizarre ending. The one so conceived, as only being one, is not at all! It is not at all named or discussed and none know about it. Parmenides and Aristotle note the unacceptability of this conclusion. So we move on to the next section. This aside by the pair also frees us from having to accept the entirety of the previous arguments; we do not need to take all of it on equal weighting.

2) 142b-155e: “If one is.” Parmenides calls for a renewed inquiry, in order to reach a more favorable outcome.

2.1) 142b-c: We are given the meaning of our current hypothesis, if one is. Anything that is must by definition participate in the form of being. The one is. Therefore the one participates in being. Parmenides notes that the starting point of the previous section basically said, if the one is one. We are reminded of the failure of the last section: the one which was its subject did not exist. What premises are at work here? Perhaps the most important is the assumption that being is one of the predicates that is granted by the forms. That is, without a form of being, and the particulars having a share of being, they would not be. In addition, we see here the forms being said to need to participate in the form of being, or else even they would not be. So we see a limit placed upon the  $\alpha\tau\ \kappa\alpha\theta\ \alpha\tau$  liberty of the forms. Their very being is contingent upon the form of being, so in a sense the form of being is now prior to that of the other forms. The next move that Parmenides makes is to distinguish between various senses of the verb to be,  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\iota$ . We see here the distinction between the existential and copulative senses of the verb. To that the “one is” is existential, and to say that the “one is one” is copulative. Parmenides also defines what is meant by “is” in the existential sense. Existential  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\iota$  means to partake of the form of being.

2.2) 142c-d: The one is a whole and has parts. The being of the one is distinct from its unity. Therefore, the one is in a sense many, because multiple predicates are rightly made of it. All things that exist therefore are, in that respect, wholes with parts.

2.3) 142d-143a: The one is unlimited in magnitude. The being of the one has its own oneness, and the oneness of the one has its own being. Parmenides here derives an endless regress. Each of the two parts of a whole are made up of two parts each, and each of those parts proceed to be divided, and so on forever.

2.4) 143a-b: Unity and being are different. This is the same as 1.9, but this time it is used to show that the one is in fact many. Parmenides asks if we grasp the one in thought, will it appear one or many? Aristotle is corrected when he says that it will appear one. It is determined that by virtue of being or by virtue of being one, nothing is different.

2.5) 143c-d: We are given three properties which must adhere in the one as presently conceived: unity, being and difference. It is by virtue of the different that the being of the one and the unity of the one are themselves different from each other. Any of the two forms a pair, says Parmenides; this pair is composed of units which are themselves one each. For if they were many, we would not speak properly about the grouping in question when we say that it is a pair. And given that there are three properties, being, unity, and difference, which are under discussion, it must be the case that, since any of these three can be placed into a pair with either of the remaining two, there must be three discrete units.

2.6) 143d-144a: Parmenides discusses the generation of the numbers. We should note that this should not be taken to mean that the numbers come into existence; rather, it means that on the present account of the one, it is possible that the other numbers besides the one have their own existence, and that numbers besides the one are their own entities, rather than merely collections

of ones. There is no number “that need not be”(144a). This means that the numbers are unlimited in multitude, something that we would be willing to grant nowadays. Parmenides also, at the end of this section, gets Aristotle to agree that the numbers all partake of being. This leads directly to the next section.

2.7) 144a-c: Being is in all the beings, material and immaterial. This again plays on the earlier conception of participation as having a share. Being is divided up amongst all the beings which partake of being, that is, exist. And the form of Being is not at all lacking from any of the beings. And given that the numbers are among the beings, the form of Being and its parts must be countless.

2.8) 144c-e: The one is itself many, and countless. Each of the things that have being are themselves one; that is, all the beings are discrete units. Therefore, just as one is cut up and the beings partake of it, so all the ones partake of a cut up one. “So, being one, is it, as a whole, in many places at the same time?”(144c). Aristotle says that this is impossible. So, by virtue of being divided, the one is not a whole. This is because the one cannot be present in its entirety in all the units at once. But because all of the beings are units, being and unity are distributed into the same number of beings. “Neither is being absent from oneness, nor oneness absent from being”(144d). Therefore, the one is as many and as divided as being is.

The following arguments are parallel and contradictory to the main thrust of 1, and we can see that this is meant to be a systematic repetition of all the predicates and modes of being that were denied to the one earlier.

2.9) 144e-145a: The one is limited. By having parts, it has a limit. The parts are contained by the whole. And any container is a limit. We derive this bizarre result: “So the one that is is surely both one and many, a whole and parts, limited and unlimited in multitude”(145a).

2.10) 144a-b: The one so conceived has a shape. The parts necessitate limits, and the limits necessitate extremities, as in 1.3. So in distinction from the merely one unity of the first section, this one can have a shape, either round or straight, and so any of the geometric shapes are possible for the one so conceived.

2.11) 144b-e: The one is both in itself and in another. The one also has a location. This argument is divided into a several parts:

2.11a) 144b-c: The one is contained by itself. The parts of a whole are in the whole and, as parts of the whole, cannot be outside of the whole. The whole contains all of the parts. And the one is in all of the parts which make up the whole of the one to equal degrees. But in addition to being in all of its parts, the one is also in the whole of the one. So, the one is both the container and the contained.

2.11b) 144c-e: This derives the contrary position that the one is not in the parts of the one. The whole is not in its parts. It cannot be that the whole, which is greater than any of the parts, should be in all of the parts. But it must still be in *something*, for anything that is not in something is not at all. This follows the argument of 1.5 and its consequents.

So when we think about the one and its containment, we have to think about the one in two aspects, the first, as a whole, and two, its identity as its own parts.

2.12) 145e-146a: The one so conceived must be both in motion and rest. Parmenides spares us repetition of the types of motion; we remember alteration, as well as circular and linear locomotion as described in 1.7. The present conclusion, that the one is both at rest and in motion derives from 2.11, in which it is shown that in the one's various aspects, it is both in itself and in the others. In itself, it is at rest. And in another, in motion.

2.13) 146a-147b: The one is the same and different with respect to both itself and the others.



2.13a) 146a-c: The one is the same as itself. Parmenides lays out the table of the possible relations that something can have with any other thing, including itself. Besides sameness and difference, the aspects of whole and part are another way in which something can be related to anything else. Now it is granted that the one is not part of itself (146b). So that means that with respect to itself it cannot be a whole. But the one cannot be other than it is (146c). There is only a disjunct between sameness and difference. The one is not different from itself, so it is the same.

2.13b) 146c-d: The one is different from itself. Anything that is contained is contained by something other. And is what demonstrated (2.11) that the one is both in itself and in another. So, with respect to being contained by itself, the one is other than itself.

2.13b) 146d: The one is different from the others. Anything that is different is different from others that are different. And also, because all the others are different from the one with respect to being not the one, we have satisfied this requirement. We thus derive the common sense conclusion that the one is different from the others.

2.13c) Now we finish what we started, namely, that the one is the same and different with respect to both itself and the others. First, it is said that that the forms of sameness and difference are opposites, and that the two cannot be in the same thing with respect to the same thing. Because the different will never be in the same, it will never stay in a thing, because then it itself would be the same with respect to itself from one time to another. And the different would never be in the one or in the others. And, because it is by the different that things are different, the one could not be different from the others, nor the others different from the one, because there would be no cause for the difference; they would be undifferentiated from each other, that is, the same. The others, being not-one,

and in addition, not be different from each other by virtue of themselves (impossible, because difference is not in the character of the others per se (see 2.4 which demonstrates the fact that unity is different from the other predicates; so too for the others), nor can they be different by difference, because the difference does not abide. And the others, not-one, do not have a share of the one, because then they would be themselves one and lose the character not-one. This precludes the others from being the parts of a whole one, and the one cannot be a part of the others. “But in fact we said that things that are neither parts of the one nor wholes nor different from each other will be the same as each other”(147b). So it is that on the present model, we derive the contradictory conclusion of the one possessing both sameness and difference with itself and the others.

2.14) 147c-148d: The one is like and unlike, both itself and the others.

2.14a) 147c: With regard to difference, the mutual difference between the one and the others is necessarily the same; that is, they differ by the same amount each. So in that way, they are like.

2.14b) 147d-148a: Aristotle asks for clarification. Parmenides explains with the act of naming. So, when we use a name of a thing, we apply the name to it. We can do this either one time or more than one time. If the name is properly applied, the additional use of the names beyond the first does not make the name wrong. This Aristotle grants. Next, difference is posited as its own thing (i.e. we are talking about the form of difference). When we use the word “difference” we name the thing, the form of difference, and not something else. Whenever we use the word “difference” we mean the same thing (if we are speaking properly). That is, Parmenides is warning us against equivocation. So, insofar as the one has the property of difference and the others also has the different, they

have something in common, namely a share of the common form difference. So, by with respect to being different, the various subjects are in fact the same.

2.14c) 148a-c: Having a share of the same makes something unlike with respect to the thing that it has a share of the same. First, grant that like and unlike are opposites, an easy concession. So too, the different is the opposite of the same (2.13c). But the one was shown to be the same as the others (2.13c). And being the same and being different are opposites. And since (2.14b) it has been shown that in terms of having the same degree of difference, two things are the same, by symmetry, being the same leads to difference. But this is on the strength of the opposition between sameness and difference. So it is that we have a circle; if something is like by similarity it is instead unlike, and unlike by difference, actually, like.

This is all an exercise that is meant to make us ask, in what regards are things alike and in what regards are things different? Consider three shapes: a blue circle (A), a blue square (B) and a red square (C). Now take A: it is like B with regard to its color, blue. But it is different in shape. A is like C in shape, but different in color; and B and C are alike in shape. I think that we are supposed to understand the discussion of difference and sameness with respect to the various predicates, and that if we are careful with how we speak about in which ways the things differ, we will find ourselves with clarified thought beyond confusion. But first we must acknowledge that we must make these sorts of distinctions.

2.14d) 148c-d: Parmenides provides another argument for the fact that the one is both like and unlike the others. If a property is shared, and we mean the same thing when we name that property (no equivocation per 2.14b), then the things which share the property are like. But

in other regards, with other properties, it is other, and hence unlike. Therefore the one is both like and unlike the others.

2.14e) 148d: The one is then like and unlike itself. This follows directly from what was said earlier.

2.15) 148d-149d: The one is both in contact with and not in contact with itself and the others. Again, we will derive more contradictions from the concept of a one that is considered in a defective manner.

2.15a) 148d-148e: The one is in contact with itself and the others. Now it was earlier shown that the one is in itself; it was also shown that it was in the others (2.11). Therefore, the one must be in contact, because containment requires touching.

2.15b) 148e-149a: The one is not in contact with itself. Contact requires spatial continuity among the bodies involved in contact. The one would have to be next to itself to be in contact with itself. But that would make it two. Nothing can be in two places at once. Therefore it is not in contact with itself. (Note the very common sense premise which undermines the conclusion of 2.15a).

2.15c) 149a-d: The one is not in contact with the others. In order to be in contact with something else, as established in 2.15b, it must be separate. Parmenides then goes on a diversion regarding contact points and how there must always be one fewer contact point than there are things connected.<sup>44</sup> In any event, the purpose of this digression is to show that contact needs two discrete bodies. We also see a very important refutation of 2.6, which described the generation of the numbers. Here, the only number is one, so the other numbers are reduced to being mere collections of units. And if there is no other besides

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<sup>44</sup> A—B (the “—” a contact point per Parmenides’ argument). And so A—B—C, etc.

one, there is no pair which can touch. Therefore, Parmenides concludes, on these premises, the one is in contact with and not in contact with itself and the others.

2.16) 148d-151b: The one is both equal and unequal to itself and the others.

2.16a) 148d-e First, we must assume that the one and the others are equal by means of the equal, as equal is again one of the predicates distinct from the essence of the various forms and the sensibles. Parmenides then moves the discussion to the great and the small. In the same way that the subjects are equal, by means of the equal, so are they small, by means of the small.

2.16b) 148e-150c: There are two forms, largeness and smallness. And they are opposites. If something is small, the small is either in the whole of the subject or just a part. If the whole, either smallness would be “stretched out” and thus come to be equal to the subject; or it would contain it and be larger than the subject. But then the small would be larger or equal, not smaller. So it would not be performing its function. If the small is in just a part of the subject, other absurd consequences commence. It cannot even be in the whole of the part of the subject nor be around it, because then the small would be larger or equal with respect to something. Therefore, nothing can be small by the small so conceived. Only the small is small. This holds for the large as well.

2.16c) 150c-e: The one is neither larger nor smaller. The large and small are such only with respect to each other; we ought to recall the master/slave and mastership/slaveship discussion back in the first part of the dialogue (133a). And so, whatever is not larger nor smaller, that is, unequal, must be equal. So the one is equal to the others. At the same time, since the one lacks largeness and smallness within itself with respect to itself,

because only the small and large are small and large (2.16b) then it must be equal to itself. So, by joining these two lines of argument, the one is equal to itself and the others.

2.16d) 150e-151a: But the one must be greater and lesser than itself because it contains itself (2.11a).

2.16e) 151a-151b: There is nothing besides the one and the others. But to be they must be in something (1.5). By being in each other, the one and the others grant themselves a location. And by being in each other, they are both greater and lesser than each other. And so, the one is equal to, less than and greater than itself and the others.

2.16f) 151b-e: The one is also all these things with respect to number. We follow from 2.16e by adding the terms “measures”. This is much a repetition of the earlier discussion of equality with regard to measures (1.9).

2.17) 151e-152e: The one comes to be older than itself and younger and the same age, and at the same time, it doesn't. The one is in time, given the preceding. We are reminded that in 1.11 it was established that to be one has to be in time, because all verbs refer to various times, past present and future; these tenses are exhaustive and accurately describe all the ways of being. And given all this, the one becomes older and younger and the same with respect to its various versions throughout time. But it was established (2.14e) that the one does not become like itself. And age is just one of the ways in which something can be the same as or different from itself. So therefore, it is both in time and out of time, and all of the contraries.

2.18) 152e-153b: The one must be older than the others. Now, the others are other than the one by being a multitude. And so being a multitude the others are in one sense more than the one. And the lesser number came first, and the larger numbers proceeded from the one. This of course

assumes that the others actually came about after the one, based upon a faulty understanding of the forms' relationship to time.

2.19) 153b-153d: The one must be younger than the others. Here, there seems to be some equivocation, as the words "beginning" and "end" seem to be used here in a temporal sense, where before they were used in a spatial sense (such as the denial at 1.3 where the one is said to have no spatial limit, and no beginning, middle or end; and in 2.9, such a limit, with the parts end and beginning are supported). But if we just understand now that "beginning" and "end" are both spatial and temporal predicates, everything becomes clear. With respect to time, the beginning is the extremity that comes prior, and is when the subject comes to participate in being. And the end is the temporal limit of when it ceases to participate in being. Now the entire argument is based off the premise: "Could the one have come to be in way contrary to its own nature?"(153c). The beginning, middle and end of the thing existing in time are its temporal parts, similar to its physical parts. And because of this, the one is younger than the others.

2.20) 153d-154a: The one is the same age as the others, "in accordance with its nature". Each of the temporal parts of something are themselves one.

2.21) 154a-155e: In a similar manner as above, with respect to becoming like, unlike, equal and unequal to themselves and the others, so too does everything come to be everything with respect to everything, in terms of age. This is a simple application of the earlier principle, by understanding time in terms of space. And so the second portion of the second part of the *Parmenides* comes to a close, with a one that has all of the properties in all respects and also does not have all the qualities in all respects, and it does so at all of the times in temporal space.

—From here, Parmenides becomes less long winded, apparently tired of making exhaustive lists. The next 6 sections, plus the appendix, take up about ten Stephanus pages, while the previous two sections took up almost eighteen pages on their own.—

Appendix to 1 and 2 155e-157b: “If the one is as we have described it—being both one and many and neither one nor many and partaking of time.”

Now we have a slightly odd section, differentiated from sections 1-8; it does not start again as the others do, but takes the one as it is described in 2 and derives some more consequences from it.

A1: 155e-156a: The one as described comes to be in time and comes to stop partaking of time. And given our understanding of time and being, when it ceases to partake of time the one ceases to partake of being as well. So the one comes into existence and leaves existence, all at definite times.

A2: 156a-b: This is an application of the principle. First, coming to be is translated into technical Platonism. Given that when something is it partakes of being, so when it is coming to be it is coming to have a share. And when it ceases to be, it ceases to have a share. And Parmenides applies this to like and unlike, and small and large and equal. This binary will provide us with an interesting puzzle.

A3: 156b-c: Because being in time requires the participation as early enumerated, the shift between one opposite and the other must occur outside of time. For if one is not partaking of either of the contraries at a given time, one is not in that respect, the change must not exist within time. This is a demonstration of the oddness of the consequences of the dichotomy.



A4: 156d-157b: This transition is termed the “instant”,  $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\iota\phi\nu\eta\varsigma$ . And this holds not only with motion and rest, but also with all of the opposite predicates.

3)157b-159b: “What the others would undergo, if one is.”

We now move on to a consideration of the others with respect to the one.

3.1) 157b-158b: The others are other from the one, but are not deprived of the one, and the others are themselves complete wholes with their own parts. First, the others are differentiated from the one, as that is the very meaning of “other than the one”. Next, they are not completely bereft of the one. The others have parts. And parts are what make up wholes. And there must be many parts. Otherwise, the others would themselves be one in the way that the one is one. But that would mean that being one is something which is not reliant upon participating in a form. But with respect to being wholes, the others participate in the one. But the various parts must themselves partake of the one, because each part is one part of the whole. And the things that are different from the one must themselves be many, or else they would not be different from the one. And if neither many nor one, something is nothing (158b).

3.2) 158b-c: The things which partake of the one are a limitless multitude. If we examine the others as different from the one with respect to themselves, they must be multitudes, because they lack oneness per se. So if we abstract away oneness, and then consider the others, they will necessarily be a multitude, and there is no end to this multitude, because there is no one to act as a limit. That is, if we are willing to say that the others come to have oneness only with reference to the one and never with reference to themselves, allowing the one, so to speak, to perform its function.

3.3) 158c-d: The things other than the one both are limited and unlimited. When a part comes to be a unit, the parts then gain limits with respect to each other, which grants a limit to the whole. But on their own, the others are unlimited.

3.4) 158e-159a: The others are like and unlike themselves. This is easily derived; the others are both limited and unlimited; they partake of both limit and no limit. The properties, limited and unlimited, are opposites. So the opposites here adhere in the others. And, being like and unlike themselves in this manner, they admit the forms like and unlike themselves.

3.5) 159a-b: Conclusion: the others are all things, like and unlike, and all the rest, in all respects, both to themselves and the one.

We move on to the fourth full movement.

4) 159b-160b: “What properties things other than the one must have, if one is.”

4.1) 159b-c: The separation between the one and the others is complete and symmetrical. Everything is in these two categories, the one and the others; there is nothing outside of these two. The one and the others are never in the same thing.

4.2) 159c-d: We return to saying that what is really one does not have parts (1.1). And we reintroduce our conception of participation, as either of the whole or of the part. Now, the one is separate from the others, and cannot itself be divided. Therefore, the others do not at all partake of the one. And by not partaking of the one, the others are in no sense one.

4.3) 159d-e: And because they have nothing to do with one, they do not have the other numbers either. The others are not many either because of this deprivation of number.

4.4) 159e-160a: The others are not like or unlike the one. This is because they are deprived of number. By not partaking of one, they partake of none of the other numbers, and thus cannot have the opposites within them (such as like and unlike) because having the contraries makes

something plural. It follows that lacking these properties, the others do not have anything to do in any with likeness and unlikeness, and because something becomes like or unlike by partaking of likeness or unlikeness, the others cannot become like or unlike anything, either themselves or the one. So they cannot even be others, as that would mean being unlike the one.

160b: The Conclusion of Part A: “The others do not partake of and of the properties”; “Thus if one is, the one is all things and is not even one, both in relation to itself and, likewise, in relation to the others.”

This is a strange lesson. But what it tells us is that we must start over again by changing our premises regarding participation. But Part B is not the new beginning that we need, per se. It is a demonstration that we must not reject the forms, though we have reached absurd conclusions with them. Let us begin.

Part B: 160b-166b: The one is not.

5) 160b-163b: “If one is not.”

5.1) 160b-d: By saying that the one is not, what we really mean is, what are the consequences for denying the form of unity? First, Parmenides makes some methodological comments. He asks, what does our hypothesis mean? The hypothesis “not-one is not” is not just different from “one is not”, but the complete opposite. We are reminded that we are talking about the form, as Parmenides mentions the hypotheses “if largeness is not” and “if smallness is not”, and it has been established that largeness and smallness are forms. So when we say “one”, we mean the form of unity which is distinguished from all the others.

5.2) 160d-e: There is knowledge of the non-existent one. Now this is a strange saying. But if there were no knowledge of it, we could not even assert the hypothesis. There is another predicate that is applied to the non-existing one: it must be distinct from the others. So from the

beginning, we know *something* about this one, though it is, strictly speaking, not. Recall “forms are thoughts” and how Parmenides undercut that position (132b-c). He said that in order for something to be thought of, it must in some sense *be*.

5.3) 160e-161a: The one that is not partakes of various forms. This follows directly from 5.2. If it partook of nothing, we could not say anything about it. This concession, that the one that is not in some way partakes of forms, will be continued below.

5.4) 161a-c: The one has unlikeness with respect to the others, and likeness with respect to itself. Again, we said that the one that is not is distinct from the others. Therefore, as has been said many times, it must have this unlikeness, not with respect to itself but by partaking of unlikeness. And in addition, it is like itself, and partakes of likeness of itself by likeness.

5.5) 161c-e: Continuation. It is also not equal to the others and the others are unequal to it. And so the one also partakes of the form of inequality. From here, it is shown that the one partakes of the large and the small, by means of a connection to equality and inequality.

5.6) 161e-162b: And now the most outrageous statement of all! The one that is not must in some way partake of being, that is, a nonexistent one must exist! “The one *is* a not-being”(162a). If it isn’t a not-being, it must be a being, because those are the only two options. And even if it is a not-being, it still is. This could be confusion between existential and copulative “is”. Or, it could be a notice of the idea of potentiality. Consider something that is not at time 1, is at time 2, and is not again at time three. At time one, it partakes of non-being. At time 2, it partakes of being. At time 3, it partakes of non-being again. But we should note; just because we can have no experience with something, that is, if it participates in non-being, it does not mean that we can think about a thing that is not. Consider a piece of bread you ate yesterday. In the past it partook of being with respect to you. Then, you consumed it; the bread moved out of existence and no

longer partook of being with respect to the material world; it now partakes of non-being. But we can still think about the bread that is no longer. And since we must have an external referent for our thought, it follows that it is allowed for us to say that something that is not in one respect *is* in another respect. Otherwise, we could not talk about anything except for the things which exist in the present and which we can experience now. But Plato is committed to the existence of reality that goes beyond our mere senses, so it makes perfect sense that he would posit a not-being which in some sense is.

5.7) 162b-163b: The one which is not is neither at rest nor in motion. The one which is not is able to be altered; but at the same time, it cannot move.. That is, no not-being can be that way without having changed into that not-being. And for the third time, change is put into the category of motion (1.7). But the one that is not is not among the others, because it is not. Therefore it can have no location, because that would require a spatial relationship to the others, which it most manifestly lacks (1.5). So it could not have any of the spatial motion as described earlier. Nor can it change from itself, because then it would be other than one, as that would change what it is we are arguing about, and Parmenides has been remarkably scrupulous about saying that we are talking about the very same thing throughout this argument. The one cannot change or move in any of the enumerated types of motion. But being in no place, it cannot abide either. Hence it is neither in motion nor at rest. And then we derive the contradictory conclusion: if the one is not, it “both comes to be and ceases to be, and does not come to be or cease to be”(163b) to which Aristotle agrees.

6) 163b-164b: “If one is not.”)

6.1) 163b-d: If the one is not, it does not in any way partake of being. This may seem to be the same question as before, but Parmenides differentiates it. This time we start by saying that by

“not being” we mean the “absence of being”. We here say that when we say it is not, we *really mean* that it is not, unlike last time, when we didn’t really mean that one is not.

6.2) 163d-e: We are reminded that coming to be and ceasing to be just mean coming to have a share of being and ceasing to have a share of being. Anything that has no share of being could not possibly come to get a share of being. And so the one which is not never comes to be nor never ceases to be, because it could never get a share of being. And so it never changes, because this would require a change in the shares that it possesses. And so it never moves either; once we deny the motion of alteration to something, we also deny its ability to change location. But note that we could have also said that it cannot change location simply because it is not, and as not being has no location, and having no location, cannot change its location.

6.3) 163e-164b: The one which is not partakes of nothing at all, and nothing can be said of it or predicated to it. It is not in time, either. This is the absolute abject not-being.

7) 164b-165e: “What properties the others must have, if one is not.”

7.1) 164b-d The others must be other with respect to each other, because there is no referent one for them to be different from; I assume that we are using the one which is not in any way from 6. And so being other from each other they must be different from each other. And in addition, they are other with respect to being many, because there is no one; we cannot even give oneness to these others, because that would require them to partake in something which in no way is or that one of them be something which does not exist in any way whatsoever. They others would just appear to be many. And each of the masses is unlimited.

7.2) 164d-165a: Parmenides speaks about the others as they appear, not as they are. Without the referent, they can only appear to be one; they remain many. And they also appear to partake of the even and odd, but they can’t because there is no one. People will think that the others can be

categorized into convenient masses, but such categorization is only appearance, as there is no internal principle to enforce unity upon the others, nor any external force by which they can be one.

7.3) 165a-d: Depending upon the perspective of the viewer, the various object appear to be both many and one, even at the same time. This is because unity at this point is only apparent, and not real. And so, with no limit from without, the others appear to both be and not be everything in all ways and all respects at once.

And so we hurry along to the last section.

8) 165e-166b: “If the one is not, but things other than the one are.”

The others won't be one, as that would make them either the same as something which in no way exists, or it would require them to participate in something which does not exist. And, they cannot be many, because many is made up of units, which all have unity themselves. So, the others are neither many nor one. And they do not even appear to be that way. And, working off of the definition of what is not from 6, we learn that the others cannot appear to be what they are not; there is nothing other than the things that are, and if they appear to be something, that means that they aren't really whatever it is they appear to be. In fact, nothing can be predicated of the many without a one if we understand the common sense meaning of not-being as given in part 6.

“Then if we were to say, to sum up, “if one is not, nothing is”, wouldn't we speak correctly?”

So concludes Part B. Parmenides gives us one last flourish after all of the arguments, bringing to a close his sea of words.

“Whether one is or is not, it and the others both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other”(166b).

We can clearly see what the point of this whole exercise has been: to prove by *reductio*, that immaterial substance is necessary to make sense of the world. This is the lesson of Part B. And, it has acted to help us understand that we must put aside conceptions of the forms that liken them in any way to physical objects; this is what Part A says. I also believe that we can say a few things about the forms here.

Now, we have not reached a satisfactory understanding of participation, but we have established something like a negative theology; we now know how participation *cannot* work. We also know that the forms do not possess all of the properties which they must have in order to do what they do. For example, the forms must partake of being in order to be. But this does not mean that being proceeds all the forms. The forms are unchanging, but just because they are unchanging does not mean that we *have* to say that they do not participate in the other forms in any way at all. So none of the forms ever came to participate in being; it always has and always will. But that is not even the correct way to speak about forms. Another difficulty arose because we had constricted our use of verbs to tenses which have distinct temporal content. And so it was shown that something that is not in time simply cannot be. But we are freed from the physical conception of participation, and so too we can choose not to bind ourselves to past, present and future verbs, but we can also use tenseless ones to describe the way in which the forms are. And, by showing that the forms partake of each other, and that it is possible for them to do so yet still be forms, answers exactly what young Socrates said at the beginning of the dialogue. We have come full circle. The theory of forms has been in a sense reformed.

Even when we grant that there must be forms and that participation must operate in a way completely other than physical share-taking, we are left with a form-world of no certain order. It



is true that the form of the Good is not explicitly discussed here. Ethics, as well as epistemology, are conspicuously absent from this work. There is no thought as to how the theory of forms will effect morality. We risk falling into irrelevance. After looking at the one being of Parmenides, one is tempted to ask “So what?” This is the case as well with the present dialogue. “We have certainly come a long way,” says the weary dialectician, “but to what end?” What good does ice cold being and logic do?<sup>45</sup> We may save Plato and ourselves from these questions if we remember the limited scope and nature of the *Parmenides*. The subject is tightly controlled and the argumentation carefully focused. We do not need to fault Plato for not writing a work of ethics in the *Parmenides* or for giving us a map of the form world. Unlike Parmenides, we have all of Plato’s works, and so we can turn to his other writings for the answers to these questions which necessarily remained unresolved. But the important work of disabusing us of the notion of material shares has been achieved. And at the same time, it has been demonstrated that there must be forms (or so Plato would contend).

We need not reject the questions of ethics and epistemology; they simply do not need to be asked here. This dialogue’s purposes have been fulfilled. And, in that sense, the *Parmenides* is a unity.

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<sup>45</sup> Although strictly speaking temperature is a mode of being not suited to our inquiry.

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