

## Plato's defence of the Forms in the *Parmenides*

In Plato's *Parmenides* we find objections against the Forms which Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* presents as arguments that refute the theory of Forms. Plato does not refute those objections. This led many philosophers to suppose that the *Parmenides* initiated a new, critical phase in Plato's thought, in which he radically revised the theory of Forms presented in the *Republic*.<sup>i</sup> I shall argue that Plato in the *Parmenides* defends the Forms by pointing to his presentation of them in the *Republic*.

Parmenides reflects on his criticism of the Forms in the *Parmenides* as follows: 'And yet, these difficulties and many more still in addition necessarily hold of the characters (*anankaion echein ta eidê*), if these characteristics of things that are exist (*ei eisin hautai hai ideai tôn ontôn*), and one is to distinguish each character as something by itself (*kai horieitai tis auto hekaston eidos*). The result is that the hearer is perplexed and contends that they do not exist, and that even if their existence is conceded, they are necessarily unknowable by human nature. In saying this, he thinks he is saying something significant (*kai tauta legonta dokein ti legein*) and, as we just remarked (*kai, ho arti elegomen*), it's astonishingly hard to convince him to the contrary. Only a man of considerable natural gifts will be able to understand that there is a certain kind of each thing, a nature and reality alone by itself, and it will take a man more remarkable still to discover it and be able to instruct someone else who has examined all these difficulties with sufficient care.' (134e-135b, tr. R. E. Allen) Allen remarks: 'It is evident from this single passage that Parmenides does not suppose that his criticisms of the theory of Ideas are a mere tissue of fallacies. On the contrary, they are deep and serious, and raise difficulties that must be thought through if the theory of Ideas is to be sustained. Socrates, young and inexperienced, has not yet thought them through with sufficient care.'<sup>ii</sup>

Allen's remark that Parmenides supposes that his criticisms of the theory of Ideas are deep and serious strangely contrast with Parmenides' words that a man who pronounces such criticisms 'thinks he is saying something significant'. For these words clearly imply that all criticisms of the Forms, those put forward by Parmenides and many other criticisms that 'necessarily hold of the Forms' (*anankaion echein ta eidê*) only seem to be significant. Allen's words 'that Parmenides does not suppose that his criticisms of the theory of Ideas are a mere tissue of fallacies' chime strangely with Parmenides' insistence at 133b that a man who pronounces such criticism is putting forward fallacies (*pseudetai*, 133b7); it is to this passage that Parmenides refers at 135a5 with the words 'and, as we just remarked' (*kai, ho arti elegomen*). Allen's assertion that Parmenides' criticisms 'raise difficulties that must be thought through if the theory of Ideas is to be sustained', for 'Socrates, young and inexperienced, has not yet thought them through with sufficient care' can be properly 'appreciated' if we realize that in Allen's view the criticisms raised by Parmenides are directed against the theory of Forms, which 'is essentially that of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*' (Allen, p. 105). How could Plato possibly identify the Socrates of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* with the young and inexperienced Socrates of the *Parmenides*?

Allen writes in his 'Comment': 'The *Parmenides* is narrated by Cephalus of Clazomenae, who has heard it from Plato's half-brother Antiphon, who heard it in turn from Pythodorus, a

student of Zeno, who was present at the original conversation ... This structure is designed to produce a sense of remoteness from the conversation (p. 69) ... The conversation that follows is a fiction: it could not have occurred, and it is important to its interpretation to realize that it could not have occurred (p. 71) ... The *Parmenides* is fiction, meant to be read as such (p. 73) ... Cornford's argument by itself is decisive: "To suppose that anything remotely resembling the conversation in this dialogue could have occurred ... would make nonsense of the whole history of philosophy in the fifth and fourth centuries" (p.74)'.

Allen refrains from informing the reader that Plato in the introduction to the dialogue insists on the historicity of the discussion presented in it. Cephalus tells Adeimantus: 'These gentlemen here are fellow citizens of mine, much interested in philosophy. They've heard that your Antiphon used to associate with a certain Pythodorus, a companion of Zeno's, and that he can relate from memory the arguments that once were discussed by Socrates, Zeno and Parmenides, having often heard them from Pythodorus.' – 'True (*alêthê*),' said Adeimantus, 'for when he was a youngster (*meirakion gar ôn*), he used to rehearse them diligently (*autous eu mala diemeletêsen*)' (126b-c). It is worth noting that in the *Apology* Socrates appeals to 'Adeimantus the son of Ariston, whose brother Plato is present,' to testify against him if his brother suffered any evil at his hands (33d-34a). But most importantly, Adeimantus and Glaucon are Socrates' main interlocutors in the *Republic*; by referring to them in the opening sentence of the *Parmenides* Plato points to the *Republic* in which he gives reasons why any arguments raised against the Forms must be fallacious.

Allen maintains that it is important to the interpretation of the *Parmenides* to realize that it could not have occurred in reality; *pace* Allen, I am inviting the reader to view the dialogue as Plato wants him to view it, i.e. as a reflection of an event that did take place. The first important thing to realize is the following: if Adeimantus and Glaucon were aware of their half-brother's diligently rehearsing the arguments against the Forms he had learnt from Pythodorus, so the young Plato must have been aware of it.<sup>iii</sup> If born in 425, Antiphon was two or four years younger than Plato.<sup>iv</sup> This means that when Plato was twenty, Antiphon was sixteen or eighteen, that is of the age that corresponds to him being a youngster (*meirakion*) when he was diligently rehearsing the arguments against the Forms.

This is significant; for Diogenes Laertius says that Plato was twenty when he 'listened to Socrates in front of the theatre of Dionysius'. The event was dramatic, for Plato 'was about to compete for the prize with a tragedy', but having listened to Socrates 'he consigned his poems to the flames with the words "Come hither, O fire-god, Plato now has need for thee."' Diogenes adds that 'from that time onward, having reached his twentieth year (so it is said), he was the pupil of Socrates' (D. L. iii. 5-6). To appreciate the relevance of Diogenes' account of Plato's dramatic philosophic encounter with Socrates to our understanding of the *Parmenides*, we must view it in the light of Aristotle's account of Plato's conception of the Forms. Aristotle says that Plato in his youth embraced the Heraclitean doctrines 'that all things are in constant flux' (*hôs hapantôn aei reontôn*). Engrossed in the Heraclitean view of reality, Plato encountered Socrates 'who was the first to have stopped his mind by fixing it on definitions of ethical concepts (*peri horismôn epistêsantos prôtou tèn dianoian*). Having accepted him (*ekeinon apodexamenos*); because of this he came to think (*dia to toiouton*

*hupelaben*) that this [i.e. Socrates' bringing his mind to a stand-still on definitions] was taking place concerning different entities and not the things we perceive by our senses (*hōs peri heterōn touto gignomenon kai ou tōn aisthētōn*) ... these kind of entities he called Forms (*houtos oun ta men toiauta tōn ontōn ideas prosêgoreuse*, 987a32-b8). Like Aristotle, Diogenes says that prior to his dramatic meeting with the philosophizing Socrates Plato philosophized (*ephiilosophēi*) as a follower of Heraclitus (*kath' Hērakleiton*, iii. 5). The fact that Dionysius Laertius appears to have been unaware of the profound philosophic significance of Plato's 'listening to Socrates in front of the theatre of Dionysius' enhances the credibility of his account of its dramatic impact on Plato.

If Plato's philosophic encounter with Socrates was as dramatic as Diogenes and Aristotle describe it, it must have been very worrying for his relatives, especially for his older brother Adeimantus. This is no empty speculation, for in the sixth book of the *Republic*, that is after Socrates introduced the Forms in the fifth book as the proper subject of philosophy in his discussion with Glaucon, Adeimantus says to Socrates 'that those who pursue philosophy (*hosoi an epi philosophiian hormēsantes*), when they don't just touch on it for the sake of their education (*mē tou pepaideusthai heneka hapsamēnoi*), abandoning it when they are young (*neoi ontēs apallattōntai*), but engage in it longer than that (*alla makroteron endiatripsōsin*), most of them become very strange (*tous men pleistous kai panu allokotous gignomenous*), not to say utterly devious (*hina mē pamponērous eipōmen*), and that those who seem to be the best (*tous d' epieikestatous dokountas*) are at least made useless to their cities by this occupation which you extol' (*homōs touto ge hupo tou epitēdeumatōs hou su epaineis paschontas,achrēstous tais poleis gignomenous*, 487c6-d5). And so we may well see why the young Antiphon was encouraged to rehearse diligently Parmenides' arguments against the Forms.

What is the significance of Plato's conceiving the Forms on listening to Socrates when he was twenty years old<sup>v</sup> for our understanding of the *Parmenides*? Most importantly, it means that Parmenides' arguments against the Forms diligently rehearsed by Antiphon had no impact on Plato's conception of the Forms. It is in the light of this fact that Plato wants his readers to see his derogation of Parmenides' arguments against the Forms as fallacious at 133b and as merely appearing to be of significance at 135a6. He prepares the reader for this derogation by Adeimantus' remark that Antiphon diligently rehearsed the arguments when he was a youngster 'though now, like his grandfather of the same name, he spends most of his time on horses'. The arguments presented in the dialogue did not turn Antiphon into a philosopher. Plato re-emphasizes this aspect of the *Parmenides* in the introductory scene in the *Symposium*, where we learn that Plato's brother Glaucon, who like Adeimantus knew of Antiphon's rehearsing of Parmenides' arguments against the Forms, prior to his listening to the speeches on love 'which were delivered by Socrates, Alcibiades, and others at Agathon's supper', i.e. in the *Symposium*, was 'running about the world, fancying himself to be well employed, but was really a most wretched being' (173a1-3, tr. Jowett).

The *Parmenides* thus poses a question: When and under what circumstances Plato could have been interested in defending the Forms by writing a dialogue in which he would present Parmenides, one of the most important pre-Socratic philosophers, putting forward

arguments against the theory of Forms and characterizing them as fallacious (133b), and only seemingly significant (135a), without refuting them as such in the dialogue itself, but merely indicating that such arguments had no effect on his own conception of the Forms and pointing to the *Republic* as the way to seeing the Forms immune to any arguments raised against them? This scenario makes no sense if we think of Plato teaching philosophy in the Academy, for in those circumstances it was his spoken word and his presence that provided the best defence of the Forms. The situation alters dramatically if we think of him as facing the prospect of leaving his disciples in Athens with the intention of living in Sicily for the rest of his days, of which his *Seventh Letter* informs us. For in that case, in the *Parmenides*, though bodily absent, he would remain standing in their midst exposed to the most formidable objections raised against the Forms by the foremost and most revered philosopher of the past, finding the objections fallacious and void of any true significance. In the *Laws* Plato says that truth (*alêtheia*) is the beginning of every good thing and that he, who would be blessed and happy, should be from the first a partaker (*metochos*) of the truth, that he may live a true man as long as possible, for then he can be trusted (730c1-4). This was the principle that guided Plato throughout his life ever since he discovered the truth – he identified the Forms simply with truth in the *Phaedrus* (248b6), his first dialogue, and he did so when he introduced Glaucon to the Forms in the *Republic* (475e4) – and it is in the light of this guiding principle that he wanted the *Parmenides* to be read.

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In the *Seventh Letter* Plato says that he was interested in politics from his youth: ‘I thought that as soon as I should become of age I should immediately enter into public life’ (324b). But the more he looked at the political situation in his own city through all its vicissitudes, the more disillusioned he became about any meaningful part he could play in it, until he came to the view that mankind will have no cessation of evils until true philosophers obtain political power or those who hold political power turn to true philosophy. When he came to this view, he went on his first journey to Italy and Sicily (326a-b). In Syracuse he associated with Dion, a young aristocrat, whom he instructed in what he believed was best for mankind and advised him to realize it in action (327a). And so it happened that when some twenty years later Dionysius I died and his son Dionysius II became the ruler of Syracuse, Dion appealed to Plato to come to Sicily and help him in turning the young tyrant to philosophy: ‘Holding these right views, Dion persuaded Dionysius to summon me; and he himself also sent a request that I should by all means come with all speed, before any others should encounter Dionysius and turn him aside to some way of life other than the best ... mentioning also how great a desire he [Dionysius] had for philosophy and education ... so that now, if ever (he concluded), all our hopes will be fulfilled of seeing the same persons at once philosophers and rulers of mighty States.’ (*Seventh Letter* 327d7-328b1, tr. R. G. Bury)

And so it happened that in 367 B.C. Plato went for the second time to Sicily. He obviously went there with the intention to stay there, devoting his remaining life to the fulfilment of his ideal of uniting philosophy with political power. But it soon became clear that the situation at the court of Dionysius II was very different from what Dion and he had hoped for: ‘On my arrival I found Dionysius’ kingdom all full of civic strife and of slanderous stories

brought to the court concerning Dion. So I defended him, so far as I was able, though it was little I could do; but about three months later, charging Dion with plotting against the tyranny, Dionysius sent him aboard a small vessel and drove him out with ignominy.’ (*S. L.* 329b7-c4, tr. Bury) But Plato stayed in Syracuse for a whole year at Dionysius’ insistence. His stay had been ended by the outbreak of war: ‘I urged Dionysius by all means possible to let me go, and we both made a compact that when peace was concluded Dionysius, for his part, should invite Dion and me back again, as soon as he had made his own power more secure ... and I gave a promise that upon these conditions I would return.’ (338a3-b2)

Leaving Athens for Sicily ‘with all speed’, Plato had no time to prepare his disciples in the Academy for his departure: ‘If he [Dion] had spoken thus, what plausible answer should I have had to such pleadings? There is none. Well then, I came for good and just reasons so far as it is possible for men to do so; and it was because of such motives that I left my own occupations, which were anything but ignoble, to go under a tyranny which ill became, as it seemed, both my teaching and myself.’ (*S. L.* 329a5-b3, tr. Bury)

During that year in Syracuse Plato must have thought a lot of his students in the Academy. When he says that he ‘urged Dionysius by all possible means’ (338a3) to let him return to Athens, while promising to come back, we may presume that he was thinking of his disciples, of how to prepare them for his intended final departure. The arguments against the Forms raised in the *Parmenides* allow us to surmise that during the year of his absence the theory of Forms got under attack in the Academy. Plato’s theory of Forms was inextricably linked to his view that States can be well governed only if philosophers become rulers, for he identified the Forms with truth, and only those who know the truth can govern the States well. These two thoughts are expressed in the *Republic*, where Socrates proclaims: ‘Until philosophers are kings in their cities, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils.’ (473c11-d6, tr. Jowett) Asked by Glaucon to defend this thesis, Socrates defines philosophers as ‘the lovers of the vision of truth’ (*tous tês alêtheias philotheamonas*, 475e4), thus identifying the truth with the Forms.

Socrates substantiates the envisaged connection between philosophy and political power in his subsequent discussion with Glaucon: ‘Inasmuch as philosophers only are able to grasp the eternal and unchangeable, and those who wander in the region of the many and variable (*hoi de en pollois kai pantoiôs ischousin planômenoi*) are not philosophers (*ou philosophoi*), I must ask you which of the two classes should be the rulers of our State?’ – Glaucon: ‘And how can we rightly answer that question?’ – Socrates: ‘Whichever of the two seem best able to guard the laws and institutions of our State – let them be appointed guardians.’ – Glaucon: ‘Very good.’ – Socrates: ‘Neither, I said, can there be any question that the watcher who is to guard anything should have eyes rather than no eyes.’ – Glaucon: ‘There can be no question of that.’ – Socrates: ‘And are not those who are verily and indeed wanting in the knowledge of true being of each thing (*hoi tôi ontî tou ontos hekastou esterêmenoi*), and who have in their souls no clear pattern (*kai mêden enarges en têtî psuchêi echontes paradeigma*), and are unable to look like painters at the absolute truth

(*mêde dunamenoî hôsper graphês eis to alêthestaton apoblepontes*) and to that original to repair (*k'akeise aei anapherontes te*), and having perfect vision thereof (*kai theômenoî hôs hoion te akribestata*) to frame laws about beauty, goodness and justice, if not already framed, or to guard and preserve order where it exists – are not such persons, I ask, simply blind?' – Glaucon: 'Truly, they are much in that condition.' – Socrates: 'And shall they be our guardians when there are others who, besides being their equals in experience and falling short of them in no particular of virtue, also know the very truth of each thing?' – Glaucon: 'There can be no reason for choosing others.' (484b3-484d9, tr. B. Jowett)

Faced with the task of defending the Forms, Plato had to find the way of refocussing the eyes on the *Republic*. This he does in the *Parmenides* by opening it with the words: 'When we arrived at Athens, we met Adeimantus and Glaucon in the Agora'. These two brothers of Plato are Socrates' main interlocutors in the *Republic*; the philosophic discussion which they mediate in the *Parmenides* is dramatic. Socrates, who is very young (*sphodra neos*, 127c5), questions Zeno who has just finished reading his treatise to his Athenian audience: 'What does this mean, Zeno? If there are many things, then they must be similar and dissimilar, but that is impossible; for dissimilar things cannot be similar nor similar things dissimilar. Isn't that what you say? ... Isn't this the point of all your arguments, to demonstrate that things cannot be many?' (127e1-10) When Zeno agrees that this is the case, Socrates turns to Parmenides, who is quite old (*eu mala presbutês*): 'I understand that Zeno here wants to be in one with you not only in the other form of love, but also in his writing. For in some way he wrote the same thing as you ... for you say in your poems that All is one ... he says that it is not many.' (128a4-b2) When Zeno confirms that Socrates is right, the latter asks: 'Do you not acknowledge that there exists, alone by itself, a certain Form of similarity (*eidôs ti homoiotêtos*), and an opposite one to it, that of dissimilarity, and that of these, being two, you and I and all other things get a share?' (128e6-129a3)

Socrates maintains that there is nothing strange if things, such as stones and pieces of wood (129d3), become similar by partaking of similarity and dissimilar by partaking of dissimilarity, but that he would be greatly surprised if the Forms themselves in themselves (*auta kath' hauta ta eidê*) could be shown to have contradictory qualifications, such as similarity and dissimilarity, multitude and the one, rest and motion, and all such Forms (*kai panta ta toiauta*, 129d7-e1).

Forms in their plurality, free of contradictory qualifications, as Socrates proposed them to be, obviously threatened Parmenides' thesis that All is one, and so Pythodorus – the original narrator in whose house the discussion took place (127b6-c5) – expected Zeno and Parmenides to be discomforted by what Socrates was saying. Instead, they listened to him attentively and in admiration (130a). Then Parmenides began to question Socrates: 'Do you think, as you say, that there are certain Forms (*einai eidê atta*), of which these other things (*hôn tade ta alla*) having a share get their names (*metalambanonta tas epônumias autôn ischein*)? As for example, things that get a share of similarity become similar, of largeness large, of beauty and justice beautiful and just?' (130e5-131a2) When Socrates agrees, Parmenides points out that the theory of the many sharing in the Forms, thus stated, cannot be right. For each thing that gets a share must get a share of the whole Form or of a part of

it. If the whole Form is to be in each of the many, then being one and the same it would be present at once as a whole in things that are many and separate, and thus it would be separate from itself. If only a part of the given Form is to be in things that share in it, then the Forms themselves become divisible (*merista*). (131a4-e2) When Parmenides then asks ‘in what way will the others get a share of the Forms, when they cannot get a share by part nor by whole?’ (131e3-5), Socrates cannot answer: ‘By Zeus (*Ou ma ton Dia*), it does not seem to me to be easy (*ou moi dokei eukolon einai*) to determine this kind of thing (*to toiouton oudamôs diorisasthai*, 131e6-7).’

Socrates’ perplexity prompted Parmenides to make a conjecture: ‘I think that you came to think (*oimai se oiesthai*) that each Form is one (*hen hekaston eidos einai*) from the following (*ek tou toioude*); when many things appear to you to be large (*hotan poll’atta megala soi doxêi einai*), there seems to be one Form perhaps (*mia tis isôs dokei idea einai*) which is the same as you look on all of them (*hê autê einai epi panta idonti*), whence you believe that the large is one (*hothen hen to mega hêgêi einai*).’ Socrates replies: ‘What you say is true’ (*Alêthê legeis*, 132a1-5).

It is worth noting at this point that all difficulties in which Socrates got entangled ensued from his having derived the Forms from the many things. The theory of Forms conceived by the young Socrates was very different from the Forms conceived by Plato. As Aristotle pointed out in the *Metaphysics*, what made Plato conceive the Forms was Socrates’ fixation of mind on definitions of moral terms: Plato saw the Forms to which Socrates’ fixation of mind on definitions pointed.

Having correctly diagnosed the epistemological provenance of Socrates’ theory of Forms, Parmenides pressed on with his objections against it. After Socrates had agreed that since many things appeared to him to be large, he thought there must be one Form of largeness, Parmenides asked: ‘And what about the large itself (*Ti d’auto to mega*) and the others, which are large (*kai t’alla ta megala*), if in the same way you look on them all with your soul (*ean hōsautôs epi panta têi psuchêi idêis*), will not there appear again some one large (*ouchi hen ti au mega phaneitai*), by which they all appear to be large (*hōi tauta panta megala phainesthai*)? ... So another Form of largeness (*Allo ara eidos megethos*) will have made its appearance (*anaphanêsetai*), that came to be alongside largeness itself (*par’auto te to megethos gegonos*) and the things which have a share of it (*kai ta metechonta autou*), and upon all these another (*kai epi toutois au pasin heteron*), by which all these will be large (*hōi panta tauta megala estai*); and so you will not have one of each Form (*kai ouketi dê hen hekaston soi tôn eidôn estai*), but they will be infinite in number (*alla apeira to plêthos*).’ (132a6-b2)

Socrates attempted to escape this difficulty by viewing the Forms simply as thoughts. The passage in which this attempt is discussed appears to have been long misunderstood; I therefore put the whole passage in R. E. Allen’s translation:

‘But Parmenides, said Socrates, may it not be that each of the characters is a thought of these things, and it pertains to it to come to be nowhere else except in souls or minds? For in that way, each would be one, and no longer still undergo what was just now said? –

Parmenides: ‘Well, is each thought one, but a thought of nothing?’ – Socrates: ‘No, that’s impossible.’ – Parmenides: ‘A thought of something, then?’ – Socrates: ‘Yes.’ – Parmenides: ‘Of something that is, or is not?’ – ‘Of something that is.’ – Parmenides: ‘Is it not of some one thing which that thought thinks as being over all, as some one characteristic?’ – Socrates: ‘Yes.’ – Parmenides: ‘Then that which is thought to be one will be a character, ever the same over all?’ – Socrates: ‘Again, it appears it must.’ – Parmenides: ‘Really? Then what about this: in virtue of the necessity by which you say that the others have a share of characters, doesn’t it seem to you that either each is composed of thoughts and all think, or that being thoughts they are un-thought?’ – Socrates: ‘But that is hardly reasonable.’ (132b3-c12)

At this point an attentive reader must wonder on what basis could Parmenides view Socrates as saying ‘that in virtue of the necessity by which the others have a share of characters, each is composed of thoughts and all think, or that being thoughts they are un-thought’. In fact, Parmenides says something very different; Allen, Cornford, Jowett, Novotný, the Czech translator, and presumably all other translators back to Schleiermacher misplaced the necessity of which Socrates speaks and to which Parmenides refers.<sup>vi</sup> So let me give my translation of the passage:

‘But may not each of the Forms (*Alla mê tôn eidôn hekaston*) be just a thought of these things (*êi toutôn noêma*), to which it would appertain to be nowhere else (*kai oudamou autôi prosêkêi engignestai allothi*) than in souls (*ê en psuchais*). For in this way each would be one (*houtô gar an hen hekaston eiê*) and would no more suffer (*kai ouk an eti paschoi*) what was said just now (*ha nundê elegeto*).’ – Parmenides: ‘What then (*Ti oun*)? Is each thought one (*hen hekaston esti tôn noêmatôn*), but thought of nothing (*noêma de oudenos*, ‘but thought of not even one’)? – Socrates: ‘But that’s impossible (*All adunaton*).’ – Parmenides: ‘But a thought of something (*Alla tinos*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Yes (*Nai*).’ – Parmenides: ‘Of something that is, or of something that is not (*Ontos ê ouk ontos*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Of something that is (*Ontos*).’ – Parmenides: ‘Is it not of something that is one (*Ouch henos tinos*), which that thought thinks to be on all (*ho epi pasin ekeino to noêma epon noei*), to wit a Form which is one (*mian tina ousan idean*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Yes (*Nai*).’ – Parmenides: ‘Won’t this then be a Form (*Eita ouk eidos estai touto*), to wit this which is thought to be one (*to nooumenon hen einai*), always being the same on all (*aei on to auto epi pasin*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Necessarily, again, it appears so (*Anankê au phainetai*).’ – Parmenides: ‘What then (*Ti de dê*)? Is it not so by the necessity that compelled you to say that things participate in the Forms (*ouk anangkêi hêi t’alla phêis tôn eidôn metechein*), or does it seem to you that each thing is composed of thoughts (*ê dokei soi ek noêmatôn hekaston einai*) and that all think (*kai panta noein*), or being thoughts (*ê noêmata onta*) they are unthinking (*anoêta einai*)?’ – Socrates: ‘But this does not make sense either (*All’ oude touto echei logon*).’ (132b3-c11)

As can be seen, Socrates explicitly qualified as necessary Parmenides’ suggestion implied in his question ‘Won’t this then be a Form, to wit this which is thought to be one, always being the same on all?’ And his ‘again’ (*au*) makes it clear that with the ‘Yes’, with which he answered Parmenides’ previous question, he expressed a necessity as well. The first

suggestion thus qualified by Socrates as necessary is expressed in Parmenides' words 'Is it not of something that is one, which that thought thinks to be on all, to wit a Form which is one?' It is this dual necessity to which Parmenides refers when he asks: 'Is it not so by the necessity that compelled you to say that things participate in the Forms?' If so, Socrates' idea of the Forms being thoughts leads him back to the Forms embroiled in the problems of participation, which he tried to escape. But Parmenides is well aware that Socrates might still maintain that the Forms are just thoughts, but in that case he would have to choose between two possibilities: 'or does it seem to you that each thing is composed of thoughts and that all think, or being thoughts they are unthinking?' These two possibilities Parmenides does not qualify as necessary, and Socrates discards them as making no sense.

After giving up on his abortive attempt to view the Forms as mere thoughts, Socrates made one more attempt to save the Forms: 'Above all it appears to me like this (*Malista emoige kataphainetai hôde echein*): these Forms (*ta men eidê tauta*) stand in the nature as paradigms (*hôsper paradeigmata hestanaï en têi phusei*), the other things (*ta de alla*) resemble them (*toutois eoikenai*) and are likenesses of them (*kai einai homoiômata*) and this participation (*kai hê methexis hautê*) of other things in the Forms (*tois allois gignesthai tôn eidôn*) is nothing other than their becoming a resemblance of them (*ouk allê tis ê eikasthênai autois*).' Parmenides asks in response: 'Then, if something resembles the Form (*Ei oun ti eoiken tôi eidei*), can that Form fail to be similar to that which has come to resemble it (*hoion te ekeino to eidos mê homoion einai tôi eikasthenti*), in so far as that became similar to it (*kath' hoson autôi aphômoiôthê*)? Or is there any way (*ê esti tis mêchanê*) by which the similar can be similar to not similar (*to homoion mê homoiôi homoion einai*)?' Socrates replies: 'There isn't (*Ouk esti*).' Parmenides: 'And that which is similar to similar (*To de homoion tôi homoiôi*), must it not of necessity (*ou megalê anakê*) participate in the same Form (*henos tou autou eidous metechein*)?' Socrates: 'Necessarily (*Anankê*).' Parmenides: 'This, by participating in which the similar things are similar (*Hou d' an ta homoia metechonta homoia êi*), will it not be the Form itself (*ouk ekeino estai auto to eidos*)?' Socrates: 'By all means (*Pantapasi men oun*).' Parmenides: 'So it is not possible for anything (*Ouk ara hoion te ti*) to be similar to the Form (*tôi eidei homoion einai*), nor the Form (*oude to eidos*) to anything else (*allôi*); for otherwise (*ei de mê*), side by side with the Form (*para to eidos*) another Form will always show itself forth (*aei allo anaphanêsetai eidos*), and if that were similar to anything (*kai an ekeino tôi homoion êi*), another again (*heteron au*), and thus a new Form will never cease to come to being (*kai oudepote pausetai aei kainon eidos gignomenon*), if the Form (*ean to eidos*) becomes similar to that which participates in it (*tôi heautou metechonti homoion gignêtai*).' Socrates: 'It is very true what you say (*Alêthestata legeis*).' Parmenides: 'So it is not by similarity that other things (*ouk ara homoiotêti t' alla*) participate in the Forms (*tôn eidôn metalambanei*), but one must look for something else (*alla ti allo dei zêtein*) by which they participate (*hôi metalambanei*).' Socrates: 'It seems so (*Eoike*).' (132c12-133a7)

Parmenides introduced the notion of the infinite regress with the example of the Form of largeness, then he parried Socrates' attempt to escape the infinite regress by viewing the Forms merely as thoughts by reducing thoughts back to the Forms, and finally showed that Socrates' attempt to save the Forms by viewing them as paradigms ended again in the

infinite regress with its infinite multiplication of the Forms. In all these cases the infinite regress was generated by the derivation of the Forms from the many things qualified in the same way.

Plato, who has not derived the Forms in this way and was well aware of the pitfalls to which such derivation led, used the oge of the infinite regress to make it clear that each Form must be just one. In the tenth book of the *Republic* Socrates introduces the notion of three kinds of bed: bed existing in nature (*en têi phusei*, 597b6), which is created by God, bed created by carpenter, and bed created by painter. Concerning the first, he tells Glaucon: 'God, whether by choice or from necessity, made one bed in nature and one only; two or more such beds neither ever have been nor ever will be made by God.' – Glaucon: 'Why is that?' – Socrates: 'Because even if He had made but two, a third would still appear behind them (*anaphaneiê*)<sup>vii</sup> of which they again both possessed the form, and that would be the real bed and not the two others.' – Glaucon: 'Very true.' – Socrates: 'God knew this, I suppose, and He desired to be the real maker of a real bed, not a kind of maker of a kind of bed, and therefore He created a bed which is essentially and by nature one only.' (597c1-d3, tr. Jowett)

Plato could be confident that the salvo of objections against the Forms in the *Parmenides* would remind his disciples of this passage in the closing book of the *Republic*. The passage in the *Republic* in its turn was bound to turn his disciples' eyes to his first dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, in which he introduced the Forms as uncreated eternal beings from which God derives his divinity thanks to his nearness to them (*pros hoisper theos ôn theios estin*, 249c6). For only in the light of the *Phaedrus* could Plato's toying with god as the creator of the idea of bed in the *Republic* be properly understood. In the *Phaedrus* Plato introduced the Forms as the true Divinity, the crime of which Socrates was found guilty and for which he was executed. What protected Plato against prosecution was the amnesty which the democrats passed in 403 after their defeat of the Thirty tyrants.<sup>viii</sup> – All this was bound to reinforce the import of the dramatic setting of the *Parmenides*: Plato was from his early days well aware of Parmenides' objections against the Forms.

#### Plato's staging of the greatest difficulty concerning the Forms

Subjected to Parmenides' scrutiny, Socrates proved unable to defend the Forms, and Parmenides invited him to reflect on it: 'Do you see then (*Horais oun*) how great is the difficulty (*hosê hê aporia*) if someone distinguishes as Forms beings in themselves (*ean tis hôs eidê ontâ autâ kath' hautâ diorizêtai*)?' – Socrates: 'I do indeed (*Kai mala*).' – Parmenides: 'Rest then assured (*Eu toinun isthi*) that you so to speak not yet even begin to grasp how great the difficulty is (*hoti hôs epos eipein oudepô haptêi autês hosê estin hê aporia*), if you're going to posit one Form each, of things which are, ever defining it as a separate entity (*ei hen eidos hekaston tôn ontôn aei ti aphorizomenos thêseis*).' – Socrates: 'How come (*Pôs dê*)?' – Parmenides: 'There are many other difficulties (*Polla men kai alla*), but the greatest is this (*megiston de tode*): If someone should say that the Forms cannot be known (*Ei tis phaiê mêde prosêkein autâ gignôskesthai*) if they are such as we maintain they

must be (*onta toiauta hoia phamen dein einai ta eidê*), to a man saying this (*tôi tauta legonti*) one could not show (*ouk an echoi tis endeixasthai*) that he is saying a falsity (*hoti pseudetai*), unless he, who denied their knowability, happened to be a man of great experience (*ei mê pollôn men tuchoi empeiros ôn ho amphisbêtôn*) and natural ability (*kai mê aphuês*), willing to follow a man who would show him the Forms in the course of a lengthy undertaking, beginning from a far (*etheloi de panu polla kai porrôthen pragmateuomenou tou endeiknumenou hepesthai*). The man compelling them to be unknowable could not be persuaded otherwise (*all' apithanos eiê ho agnôsta anankazôn auta einai*).’ (133a11-c1)

The objection that the Forms cannot be known is thus qualified as false right from the outset. This qualification transcends the *Parmenides* by pointing to a man ‘demonstrating the Forms in the course of a copious and lengthy undertaking’. Plato points thus to the *Republic* where in the fifth book he demonstrated that only the Forms can be known, for only they truly *are*. This pointing to the *Republic* has been prepared in the introductory scene to the *Parmenides*, in which Plato’s brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon mediate its narrative – in the *Republic* they compel Socrates to transcend his philosophic ignorance, outline the Form of justice and ascend to the Form of the good – and by the preceding three sets of arguments, in the course of which Parmenides implicated the Forms in the infinite regress with its infinite multiplication of Forms, which point to the tenth book of the *Republic* in which Plato used the threat of the infinite regress to ascertain that each Form is just one.

After thus pointing to the *Republic* as the place where the answer to the difficulty is to be looked for, Parmenides discusses the problem that the Forms are what they are in their relation to one another, but not in relation to things among us, and that the things among us are related only to one another, but not to the Forms (133c8-d5). He elucidates this point by an example: ‘If one of us is a master or slave of someone (*ei tis hêmôn tou despotês ê doulos estin*), he is surely not a slave of master itself, what master is (*ouk autou despotou dêpou, ho esti despotês, ekeinou doulos estin*), nor is a master the master of slave itself, what slave is (*oude autou doulou, ho esti doulos, despotês ho despotês*), but being a man (*all' anthrôpos ôn*), both these belong to a man (*anthrôpou amphotera taut' estin*). But mastery itself (*autê de despoteia*) is what it is of slavery itself (*autês douleias estin ho esti*), and slavery in like manner (*kai douleia hêsautôs*) is slavery itself of mastery itself (*autê douleia autês despoteias*). Things in us do not have their power in relation to things there (*all' ou ta par hêmin pros ekeina tên dunamin echei*), nor things there in relation to us (*oude ekeina pros hêmas*). Rather (*all'*), as I say (*ho legô*), things there belong to themselves and are relative to themselves (*auta hautôn kai pros hauta ekeina te esti*), and things among us are in the same way relative to themselves (*kai ta par' hêmin hêsautôs pros hauta*).’ (133d7-134a1)

The significance of Parmenides’ chosen example will become clear when Parmenides returns to it at the close of Plato’s staging of the difficulty.

Parmenides goes on to focus on the main point, the difficulty concerning the knowability of the Forms: ‘And knowledge too (*Oukoun kai epistêmê*), that which is knowledge itself (*autê men ho esti epistêmê*), would be of that which is the truth itself (*tês ho estin alêtheia*), of that it would be knowledge (*autês an ekeinês eiê epistêmê*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Of course (*Panuge*).’ – Parmenides: ‘Yet again, each of the sciences (*Hekastê de au tôn epistêmôn*), which is (*hê estin*), would be knowledge of each of the beings, what each is (*hekastou tôn ontôn, ho estin, eiê an epistêmê*). Not so (*ê ou*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Yes (*Nai*)’ – Parmenides: ‘But the knowledge which we have (*Hê de par hêmin epistêmê*), wouldn’t it be knowledge of the truth which we have (*ou tês par hêmin an alêtheias eiê*), and again each science which we have (*kai au hekastê hê par hêmin epistêmê*), wouldn’t it happen to be knowledge of each of the things that we have (*tôn par hêmin ontôn hekastou an epistêmê sumbainoi einai*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Necessarily (*Anankê*).’ – Parmenides: ‘Moreover (*Alla mên*), we do not have the Forms themselves, as you agree (*auta ge ta eidê, hês homologies, oute echomen*), nor can they be among us (*oute par hêmin hoion te einai*).’ – Socrates: ‘Of course not (*Ou gar oun*).’ – Parmenides: ‘But presumably, the kinds themselves, what each is, are known by the Form of knowledge itself (*Gignôsketai de ge pou hup’ autou tou eidous tou tês epistêmês auta ta genê ha estin hekasta*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Yes (*Nai*).’ – Parmenides: ‘Which we don’t have (*Ho ge hêmeis ouk echomen*).’ – Socrates: ‘No (*Ou gar*).’ – Parmenides: ‘So none of the Forms is known by us (*Ouk ara hupo ge hêmôn gignôsketai tôn eidôn ouden*), since we do not have a share of knowledge itself (*epeidê autês epistêmês ou metechomen*).’ – Socrates: ‘It seems not (*Ouk eoiken*).’

If Plato’s Parmenides had been interested merely in presenting Socrates with the greatest difficulty confronting the Forms, this was the point to stop, but he goes on to consider what it implies: ‘Unknown to us (*Agnôston ara hêmin*) is the beautiful itself (*kai auto to kalon*), which is (*ho esti*), and the good (*kai to agathon*), and everything we accept as being the Forms themselves (*kai panta ha dê hês ideas autas ousas hupolambanomen*).’ – Socrates: ‘That’s the danger’ (*Kinduneuei*)’ (134b14-c2).

Jowett and Allen completely misjudged the situation, the former translating Socrates’ *Kinduneuei* ‘It would seem so’, the latter ‘Very likely’. Socrates’ ‘That’s the danger’ should be taken seriously as the expression of great unease he begins to experience at this point. Equally misleading is their rendering of Parmenides’ response to Socrates’ *Kinduneuei*. Jowett translates ‘I think that there is a stranger consequence still,’ Allen ‘Consider then whether the following is still more remarkable.’ Parmenides accentuates Socrates’ ‘That’s the danger’ by saying ‘See then this, which is even more appalling than that’ (*Hora dê eti toutou deinoteron tode*).

Parmenides explains: ‘You’d say, presumably (*Phaiês an pou*), that if there is a kind itself of knowledge (*eiper esti auto ti genos epistêmês*), it is much more exact (*polu auto akribesteron einai*) than knowledge that we have (*ê tèn par hêmin epistêmên*), and so too of beauty, and all the rest (*kai kallos kai t’alla panta houtô*).’ – Socrates: ‘Yes (*Nai*).’ – Parmenides: ‘Then if anything else has a share of knowledge itself (*Oukoun eiper ti allo autês epistêmês metechei*), nobody has the most exact knowledge more than god (*ouk an tina mallon ê theon echein tèn akribestatên epistêmên*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Necessarily (*Anankê*).’

– Parmenides: ‘Will then the god be able (*Ar’ oun hoios te au estai ho theos*) to know things among us (*ta par’ hêmin gignôskein*), having knowledge itself (*autên epistêmên echôn*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Why not (*Ti gar ou*)?’ – ‘Because, Socrates, we agreed (*Hoti hômologêtai hêmin, ô Sôkrates*) that neither those Forms have the power they have in relation to things among us (*mête ekeina ta eidê pros ta par hêmin tèn dunamin echein hên echei*), nor things among us in relation to those (*mête ta par hêmin pros ekeina*), but only themselves in relation to themselves (*all’ auta pros hauta hekatera*).’ – Socrates: ‘This has been agreed (*Hômologêtai gar*).’ (134c5-d8).

At this point Parmenides returns to his master-slave example to bring home to Socrates the appalling consequences of the greatest difficulty facing the Forms expressed in the agreement they have just reached: ‘Then if in the god’s realm (*Oukoun ei para tôi theôi*) is the most exact mastery itself (*hautê estin hê akribestatê despoteia*) and the most exact knowledge itself (*kai hê akribestatê epistêmê*), neither would their mastery ever master us (*out’ an hê despoteia hê ekeinôn hêmôn pote an desposeien*), nor would their knowledge know us (*out’ an epistêmê hêmas gnoiê*) or anything else where we are (*oude ti allo tôn par hêmin*). But similarly (*alla homoiôs*), we do not govern them (*hêmeis te ekeinôn ouk archomen*) by our authority here (*têi par hêmin archêi*), and we don’t know anything divine (*oude gignôskomen tou theiou ouden*) by our knowledge (*têi hêmeterai epistêmêi*), and they again (*ekeinoi te au*), by the same account (*kata ton auton logon*), are not our masters (*oute despotai hêmôn eisin*) and don’t know human things (*oute gignôskousi ta anthrôpeia pragmata*), being gods (*theoi ontes*).’ – At this point Socrates regains his irony: ‘But this argument threatens to be too admirable (*Alla mê lian thaumastos ho logos*), if one deprives the god of knowing (*ei tis ton theon aposterêsei tou eidenai*).’ (134d9-e8)

Parmenides reiterates that ‘the Forms are necessarily involved in these and many other difficulties (*tauta mentoi kai eti alla pros toutois panu polla anankaion echein ta eidê*), if these Forms of beings exist (*ei eisin hautai hai ideai tôn ontôn*), and if one is going to define each Form itself’ (*kai horieitai tis auto ti hekaston eidos*). So that the hearer is perplexed (*hôte aporein te ton akouonta*) and contends that they do not exist (*kai amphisbêtein hês oute esti tauta*), and that even if they do exist (*ei te hoti malista eiê*), they are necessarily unknowable by human nature (*pollê anankê auta einai têi anthrôpinêi phusei agnôsta*). And when he says this (*kai tauta legonta*), he appears to be saying something (*dokein te ti legein*) and, as we just remarked (*kai, ho arti elegomen*), it’s astonishingly hard to convince him to the contrary (*thaumastôs hês dusanapeiston einai*). (134e9-135a3).

The words at 135b6-7 ‘as we just remarked (*kai, ho arti elegomen*), it’s astonishingly hard to convince him to the contrary (*thaumastôs hês dusanapeiston einai*)’ refer to the words at 133b9-c1 ‘The man compelling them to be unknowable could not be persuaded otherwise (*all’ apithanos eiê ho agnôsta anankazôn auta einai*), the word *dusanapeiston* (‘it’s astonishingly hard to convince him’) at 135a7 refers to *apithanos* (‘could not be persuaded’) at 133c1. Plato thus neatly connect the introduction to the ‘greatest difficulty’, in which Parmenides said that a man raising any arguments against the Forms ‘is saying a falsity’

(*pseudetai*, 133b7), with his closing reflections, in which a man raising objections against the Forms ‘only seems to be saying something’ (*dokein te ti legein*, 135a6).

Having done so, Parmenides envisages the time of Plato’s coming: ‘It will take a man of considerable natural gifts (*kai andros panu men euphuous*), who will be able to learn (*tou dunêsomenou mathein*) that there is a certain kind of each thing (*hôs esti genos ti hekastou*), and being by itself (*kai ousia autê kath’ hautên*), and an even more admirable man (*eti de thaumastoterou*) who will discover it (*tou heurêsontos*) and will be able to teach it to someone else (*kai allon dunêsomenou didaxai*) after having sufficiently and well examined all these things (*tauta panta hikanôs dieukrinêsamenon*).’ – Socrates embraces this prospect: ‘I agree with you (*Sunchôrô soi*), for what you say is very much according to what I think too’ (*panu gar moi kata noun legeis*). (135a7-b2)

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The discussion of ‘the greatest difficulty’ facing the Forms transcends everything that precedes and which follows it; in introducing it and in closing it Parmenides steps out of his historical persona and turns his eyes into the future, envisaging the coming of a man who will discover the Forms immune to the difficulties that Socrates could not answer. Parmenides’ next entry has nothing to do with Socrates’ ‘I agree with you, for what you say is very much according to what I think too (135b3-4)’ with which Socrates endorsed the unambiguous affirmation of the Forms with which the greatest difficulty is concluded by Parmenides.

What Parmenides is going to say next connects with his remark on Socrates’ failed attempts to defend the Forms, which preceded Parmenides’ introduction of ‘the greatest difficulty’. At 133a8-10 Parmenides said to Socrates: ‘Do you see, then (*Horais oun*), how great the perplexity is (*hosê hê aporia*), if someone were to define Forms that are alone by themselves (*ean tis hês eidê onta auta kath’ hauta diorizêtai*)?’ – Socrates: ‘Only too well’ (*Kai mala*). – At 135b5 Parmenides picks up that thread of thought: ‘And yet (*Alla mentoi*), if someone (*ei ge tis dê*), on the other hand (*au*), will not allow Forms of things to be (*mê easei eidê tôn ontôn einai*), in view of all these and other such difficulties (*eis panta ta nundê kai alla toiauta apoblepsas*), and will not define some Form of each thing (*mêde ti horieitai eidos henos hekastou*), he will not even have whither to turn his mind (*oude hopoi trepsei tên dianoian hexei*), since he will not allow a Form of each thing to be ever the same (*mê eôn idean tôn ontôn hekastou tên autên aei einai*); and so he will utterly destroy the power of discourse (*kai houtôs tên tou dialegesthai dunamin pantapasi diaphtherei*). Of this sort of consequence (*tou toioutou men oun*), it seems to me (*moi dokeis*), you are only too well aware (*kai mallon êisthêsthai*).’ – Socrates: ‘True (*Alêthê legeis*).’ – Parmenides: ‘What will you do about philosophy, then (*Ti oun poiêseis philosophias peri*)? Whither will you turn (*pêi trepsêi*) with all this unknown (*agnooumenôn toutôn*)?’ – Socrates: ‘I am not really sure I can see (*Ou panu moi dokô kathoran*) at present (*en ge tôi paronti*).’ – Parmenides: ‘For too early (*Prôi gar*), before being trained (*prin gumnasthênai*), you attempt to define (*horizesthai epicheireis*) something beautiful and just and good (*kalon te ti kai dikaion kai agathon*) and each one of the Forms (*kai hen hekaston tôn eidôn*) ... but drag yourself and

train yourself rather (*helkuson de sauton kai gumnasai mallon*) through what is regarded as useless (*dia tês dokousês einaiachrêstou*), and condemned by the multitude as idle talk (*kai kaloumenês hupo tôn pollôn adoleschias*). If not (*ei de mê*), the truth will escape you (*se diapheuxetai hê alêtheia*).’ (135b5-d6)

Socrates: ‘What is then the manner (*Tis oun ho tropos*), O Parmenides (*ô Parmenidê*), of the training (*tês gumnasias*)? – Parmenides: ‘This one (*Houtos*), the one you heard from Zeno (*honper êkousas Zênônos*). Except that I admired this of you, and you saying it to him (*plên touto ge sou kai pros touton êgasthên eipontos*), that you were not allowing to examine the wandering among things we see nor concerning them (*hoti ouk eias en tois horômenois oude peri tauta tên planên episkopein*), but concerning those things (*alla peri ekeina*) which one would in particular grasp by reason (*ha malista an tis logôi laboi*) and think to be Forms (*kai eidê an hêgêsaito einai*). – Socrates: ‘For it seems to me (*dokei gar moi*) that in this way (*tautêi ge*) it isn’t difficult (*ouden chalepon einai*) to show that things are similar and dissimilar and that they suffer anything else (*homoia kai anomoia kai allo hotioun ta onta paschonta apophainein*).’ – Parmenides: ‘And that’s fine (*Kai kalôs ge*). But it is also necessary to do yet this in addition (*chrê de kai tode eti pros toutôi poiein*), not only if each supposed thing is (*mê monon ei estin hekaston hupotithemenon*), to examine the consequences of the hypothesis (*skopein ta sumbainonta ek tês hupotheseôs*), but suppose as well if the same thing is not (*alla kai ei mê esti to auto touto hupotithesthai*), if you wish to be better trained (*ei boulei mallon gumnasthênai*).’ (135d7-136a2) – It is worth noting that Parmenides’ discussion of Socrates’ Forms proceeded along these lines. In the first part, which begins at 130e5 and ends at 133a9, Parmenides examines what happens if one posits the Forms as Socrates does, at 135b5-c3 he considers what would happen if one denied the being of Forms.

#### Parmenides’ propaedeutic exercise

Unsure what Parmenides’ propaedeutic exercise was to be all about, Socrates asked him: ‘How do you mean (*Pôs legeis*)?’ Parmenides explains: ‘Take, if you like, Zeno’s hypothesis, if many is. What must follow for the many themselves relative to themselves and relative to the one, and for the one relative to itself and relative to the many? If, on the other hand, many is not, consider again what will follow both for the one and for the many, relative to themselves and relative to each other. Still again, should you hypothesize if likeness is, or if it is not, what will follow on each hypothesis both for the very things hypothesized and for the others, relative to themselves and relative to each other. The same account holds concerning unlikeness, and about motion, and about rest, and about coming to be and ceasing to be, and about being itself and not being. In short, concerning whatever may be hypothesized as being and as not being and as undergoing any other affection whatsoever, it is necessary to examine the consequences relative to itself and relative to each one of the others, whichever you may choose, and relative to more than one and relative to all in like manner. And the others, again, must be examined both relative to themselves and relative to any other you may choose, whether you hypothesize what you hypothesize as being or as

not being, if you are to be finally trained accurately to discern the truth.’ (136a4-c5, tr. R. E. Allen)

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Parmenides’ endorsement of Zeno’s performance – (Socrates: ‘What is then the manner of the training?’ – Parmenides: ‘The one you heard from Zeno’, 13d7-8) – is significant, for Zeno demonstrated that Parmenides’ thesis that All is one holds good by showing that if there were many things, they would be implicated in contradictory qualifications, which is impossible (*touto de dê adunaton*, 127e3). Socrates shared Zeno’s assumption that things that are self-contradictory cannot truly be, and so he challenged him to show that such contradictory qualifications apply as well to Forms, which he could not envisage as being self-contradictory: similarity to be dissimilar, dissimilarity to be similar. For only if that could be done, Parmenides’ thesis could be upheld. Parmenides’ affirmation of Zeno’s enterprise indicates that the truth that is to be ‘accurately discerned’ (*kuriôs diopsesthai to alêthes*, 136c5) by means of his propaedeutic exercise is that All is one, and not ‘saving the forms’ as Samuel Rickless supposes.<sup>ix</sup> Zeno proved on the level of things that can be seen with the eyes that it is impossible for many to be, now Parmenides suggests doing so on the level of entities which one would grasp mainly by reason (*ha malista tis an logôi laboi*) and consider to be Forms (*kai eidê an hêgêsaito einai*, 135e3-4).

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Socrates: ‘An extraordinary procedure, Parmenides! I don’t at all understand. Why not explain it to me by hypothesizing something yourself, in order that I may better understand? – Parmenides: ‘You impose a difficult task for a man of my age.’ – Socrates: ‘Then you, Zeno, why don’t you explain it to us?’ – And Zeno laughed and said: ‘Let’s ask Parmenides himself, Socrates, for I fear it’s no light thing he has in mind. Or don’t you see how great a task you impose? If there were more of us, it would not be even right to ask it, for it would be unsuitable ... for most people do not realize that without this detailed ranging and wandering through everything, it is impossible to meet with truth and gain intelligence. So Parmenides, I join in Socrates’ request, so that I too may learn from you after all this time (*hina kai autos diakousô dia chronou*).’ (136d4-e4, tr. Allen).

I am not sure that Allen’s translation renders fully the meaning of Zeno’s last words; Zeno’s *kai* is intensifying; *hina kai autos* does not mean ‘that I too (i.e. as well as Socrates and the others)’ but ‘so that I myself’; *diakousô* means ‘listen to it from the beginning to the end’, ‘listen to it all through’; Zeno refers to his past experience, to what he had heard from Parmenides long time ago. This sheds light on the earlier passage, where we were presented with Zeno and Parmenides listening to Socrates’ original presentation of Forms ‘attentively’ (*panu autôi prosechein ton noun*) and ‘in admiration’ (*hôs agamenous*, 130a5-7).<sup>x</sup>

At the beginning of the discussion Socrates said to Parmenides ‘In your poems you say that All is one, and you provide fine and excellent proofs of this (128a8-b1),’ and so it is appropriate to ask whether the training presented as practiced by Parmenides of old, is

reflected in his poem. Both Parmenides (135 e2) and Zeno (136e2) refer to it as ‘wandering’ (*planê*) that one must undergo if one is to reach the truth. It thus corresponds to the introductory proem in the *Poem*: ‘Divine beings (*daimones*) brought me on the many-voiced road (*es hodon bêsan poluphêmon*) that carries a knowing man through all towns (*hê kata pant’ astê pherei eidota phôta*, fr. 1, 1-3) ... for this road is outside the path trodden by men (*hê gar ap’ anthrôpôn patou estin*, fr. 1, 27). Zeno says in the dialogue: ‘most people do not realize that without this detailed ranging and wandering through everything, it is impossible to meet with truth and gain intelligence’ (136e1-2). In the poem, the wanderer comes on this road to the Goddess who reveals to him ‘the unshakeable heart of the well-rounded Truth’ (*Alêtheiês eukukleos atremes êtor*, fr. 1, 29).

But there is more to it. For in the course of his propaedeutic wandering (*planên*, 135e2) in the dialogue, which is involved in taking the one as his hypothesis and asking ‘what must happen if one is or if one is not’ (*eite hen estin eite mê hen, ti chrê sumbainein*, 137b4), Parmenides enacts his ‘All is one’ on the level of entities ‘which one may grasp best by reason and consider to be forms’ (*ha malista tis an logôi laboi kai eidê an hêgêsaito einai*, 135e). Beginning with the one deprived of all qualifications, he represents in action his thesis that being of All, which is one, is thinking: ‘to think and to be is the same’ (*to gar auto noein esti te kai enai*, fr. 3 of Parmenides’ poem). Let us have a quick look at some moments of his derivation of ‘all’ from ‘the one that is’: ‘If one is ... “is” means something else than “one” ... the one which is, must be a whole of which “the one” and “being” are parts ... each of these two parts (*tôn moriôn hekateron*) must again have both “the one” and “the being” (*to te hen ischei kai to on*) ... and whatever part thus comes to be (*hotiper an morion genêtai*), it must have these two parts ... so that of necessity each always becomes two and never one (*hôte anankê du’ aei gignomenon mêdepote hen einai*) ... the one is thus unlimited in multitude (*Oukoun apeiron an to plêthos houtô to hen an eiê*, 142c3-143a3)<sup>xi</sup> ... But for whatever is two, isn’t each pair one pair? ... if any one is added to any pair, don’t they all become three? ... If there are two, must there not also be twice, and if there are three, thrice? ... So there will be even-times even [numbers] (*Artia te ara artiakis an eiê*), and odd-times odd [numbers] (*kai peritta perittakis*), and even [numbers] odd-times (*kai artia perittakis*), and odd [numbers] even-times (*kai peritta artiakis*) ... So if the one is, number must also be ... But if number is (*Alla mên arithmou ge ontos*), plurality is (*polla an eiê*) and infinite number of things (*kai plêthos apeiron tôn ontôn*); or does not number unlimited in multitude (*ê ouk apeiros arithmos tôi plêthei*) and having a share of being come to be (*kai metechôn ousias gignetai*)? (143d4-144a7).

The one that becomes many forms only a minor part, although a very important part of Parmenides’ ‘wandering’. The wandering as a whole ends with the words ‘whether the one is or is not (*hen eit’ estin eite mê estin*), it and the others (*auto te kai t’alla*), relative to themselves and to each other (*pros hauta kai pros allêla*), all in every way both are and are not (*panta pantôs esti te kai ouk esti*), and appear and do not appear (*kai phainetai te kai ou phainetai*, 166c3-5).<sup>xii</sup>

The question is, whether and in what way Parmenides’ propaedeutic exercise fits Plato’s strategy in defending the Forms in the dialogue. For it is not only much more thorough and

radical in dismantling the Forms with which Socrates challenged Zeno's 'many cannot be' and Parmenides' 'All is one', than the questioning to which Parmenides subjected Socrates, but it presents a serious challenge to Plato's Forms. The Forms Socrates brought in were derived from Socrates' observation of the many things that exhibited the same form; their dismantling by Parmenides was therefore innocuous as far as the Forms presented in the *Republic* were concerned, to which Plato in the *Parmenides* directed the eyes of the reader, as I have argued. But in his propaedeutic exercise Parmenides begins by hypothesizing a single given form as being, and then the same form as not being; thus he can generate contradictory qualifications in any form he chooses to investigate; to elucidate his method, he chooses 'the one' as an example (135e-137b).

In the *Parmenides* the underlying supposition, shared by Socrates, Zeno, and Parmenides, is that whatever suffers contradictory qualifications cannot truly be; the forms investigated within the framework of the Parmenidean exercise are deprived of true being by virtue of the contradictions concerning them, which Parmenides generates in the course of the exercise; true being belongs exclusively to 'All that is one' (128a-b). Plato appears to have been well aware of this problem when he wrote the *Republic*: 'Of just and unjust, good and evil, and of every other Form, the same remark holds: taken singly, each of them is one; but from the various combinations of them with actions and bodies and with one another, they are seen in all sorts of lights and appear many' (476a4-7, tr. Jowett). But since he didn't even dream of writing the *Parmenides* when he wrote these lines, he didn't find it necessary to justify and ontologically establish the plurality of the Forms (Justice, Goodness, Beauty, Courage ...), each of which is just one. This task he had to undertake after he wrote the *Parmenides*, and he did so in the *Sophist*, in which he dons the garment of a Stranger from Elea, whom Theodorus presents at the beginning of the *Sophist* as 'a friend of the disciples of Parmenides and Zeno' (*hetairoi tôn amphi Parmenidên te kai Zênôna*, 226a3-4). The Stranger proclaims himself to be a disciple of Parmenides at the point when he finds it 'necessary, in self-defence, to question the pronouncement of father Parmenides, and establish by main force that what is not, in some respect has being, and conversely that what is, in a way is not.' (241d5-7). For only thus can Plato establish the plurality both in the realm of spurious being, in which the sophist finds his domicile, and in the realm of true being, which is accessible only to the true philosopher.

One pole of Plato's strategy in defending the Forms remains as valid and effective concerning Parmenides' questioning of the forms within the framework of his propaedeutic exercise, as concerning Parmenides' earlier questioning of the Forms introduced by the young Socrates: By pointing to his brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon, and his half-brother Antiphon in the introductory scene, Plato presents himself as someone who knew of Parmenides' criticism of the forms from the time he himself conceived the Forms; the criticism was irrelevant concerning the Forms. But the other pole of his defence, his directing the eyes of the reader to the *Republic*, in which his Forms are presented, was powerless in respect of Parmenides' propaedeutic exercise. Concerning it, Parmenides' stepping out of his historical persona, in which he is presented in the dialogue, and turning into a prophet – 'It will take a man of considerable natural gifts, who will be able to learn that there is a certain kind of each thing, and being by itself, and an even more admirable

man who will discover it and will be able to teach it to someone else after examining sufficiently all these things (135a7-b2)' – is of paramount importance. Parmenides' propaedeutic exercise is all about his own past activities and achievements:

'I feel like the old racehorse in Ibycus [i.e. in Ibycus' poem], who trembles with fear at the start of the race because he knows from long experience what lies in store, to whom Ibycus compares himself (*heauton apeikazôn*), forced (*akôn*) as an old man (*ephê kai autos houtô presbutês ôn*) to enter the lists of love against his will (*eis ton erôta anankazesthai ienai*). When I remember how, at my age, I must traverse such and so great a sea of arguments, I am afraid.' (136e5-137a6, tr. Allen) Parmenides presented his exercise in the dialogue as indispensable, if Socrates was to be 'fully trained and thoroughly discern the truth' (136b4-5; cf. 135d5-6). Yet Plato's disciples and followers knew well, for the *Apology* testified to it, that as a result of his encounter with Parmenides Socrates was left in the state of philosophic ignorance.

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<sup>i</sup> G. E. L. Owen on this basis revised the generally accepted late dating of the *Timaeus*: 'The *Parmenides* and its successors gain in philosophical power and interest when they are read as following and not as paving the way for the *Timaeus*.' ('The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's dialogues', *Classical Quarterly*, 1953, vol. 3, p. 79.)

<sup>ii</sup> R. E. Allen, 'Comment', in *Plato's Parmenides*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 203).

<sup>iii</sup> The difference in age between Plato and Antiphon could not have been great; as Debra Nails informs us in *The People of Plato*, J. K. Davies says in *Athenian Propertied Families 600-300 B.C.* that the age of Antiphon's father Pyrilampes 'discourages any much later date' of Antiphon's birth than 425. The traditional date of Plato's birth is either 427 (D. L. iii. 2) or 429 (D. L. iii. 3); of these two dates I prefer the latter. Concerning the 427 date Diogenes Laertius says: 'Apollodorus in his *Chronology* fixes the date of Plato's birth in the 88<sup>th</sup> Olympiad, on the seventh day of the month Thargelion, the same day on which the Delians say that Apollo himself was born. Linking Plato to Apollo in this manner, this dating seems to me prima facie suspicious. In Diogenes it is introduced as follows: 'Speusippus in the work entitled *Plato's Funeral Feast*, Clearchus in his *Encomium on Plato*, and Anaxilaïdes in his second book *On Philosophers*, tell us that there was a story at Athens that Ariston [Plato's father] made violent love to Perictione [Plato's mother], then in her bloom, and failed to win her; and that, when he ceased to offer violence, Apollo appeared to him in a dream, whereupon he left her unmolested until her child was born (iii. 2). The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* opens its article on Apollo as follows: 'Apollo, the most Greek of all gods, in art the ideal of young, but not immature manly beauty ... He is often associated with the higher developments of civilization, approving codes of law, inculcating high moral and religious principles and favouring philosophy (e.g. he was said to be the real father of Plato).' Concerning the 429 date, Diogenes says that Plato was 'six years the junior of Isocrates ['Athenian orator of central importance',  *OCD*]. For Isocrates was born in the archonship of Lysimachus [436-435 B.C.], Plato in that of Ameinias, the year of Pericles' death' [429 B.C.]. Based on such data, this date sounds credible to me.

<sup>iv</sup> On Debra Nails' dating Antiphon was born in 422, for she revised the date of Plato's birth; in her view, Plato was born in 424/3 B.C. On her dating Antiphon was just a year younger than Plato. Since on Debra Nails' date of Plato's birth my dating of the *Phaedrus* would be made impossible – in *The Lost Plato* I've argued that Plato began to write the *Phaedrus* in (or before) 405 and ended it in 404, which on Nails' date of his birth would mean that he began to write it when he was nineteen, a year before becoming Socrates' follower (D. L. iii. 6) – I have discussed at length Debra Nails' dating in the 'Preface' to *The Lost Plato* (the 'Preface' consists of 'Eleven emails on *The Lost Plato* addressed to Classicists and Classical Philosophers'; to Nails' dating of Plato's birth is devoted the closing email XI entitled 'Time to give up?').

The Wikipedia entry on Plato appears to favour Debra Nail's dating of Plato's birth, which compels me to quote here at least the introductory paragraphs of the 1<sup>st</sup> point I am making in 'Time to give up?':

Debra Nails derives her main evidence from Plato's words in the *Seventh Letter*: 'I thought of entering public life as soon as I came of age. And certain happenings in public affairs favoured me ... a new government took power ... thirty officers with absolute powers ... Some of these men happened to be relatives and acquaintances of mine, and they invited me to join them at once.' (324b-d)

Debra Nails argues: 'It thus appears that Plato is turning twenty as the Thirty take control of Athens; and that he does not immediately accept the invitation to join them is unexceptional, given his youth ... The traditional dating also has difficulty explaining away the evidence of 'Letter 7', for Plato would have been of age, in his mid-twenties, to join the Thirty at once.'

*Pace* Debra Nails, on the traditional dating of Plato's birth there is no need to explain away the evidence of the *Seventh Letter*, for Plato's youth was not the reason for his not accepting the offer of joining the Thirty. He says: 'I considered that they [the Thirty] would, of course, so manage the State as to bring men out of a bad way of life into a good one. So I watched them very closely to see what they would do' (324d).

Plato's not rushing into accepting the offer to join the Thirty shows more prudence and maturity than one would expect from a young man who has just reached twenty.

<sup>v</sup> Debra Nails says: 'Diogenes (3.6), apparently drawing from Alexander Polyhistor's *Succession of Philosophers*, says that Plato was twenty when he began to follow Socrates (*t'ounteuthen dê gegonôs, phasin, eikotin etê diêkouse Sôkratous*); and APF [J. K. Davies' *Athenian Propertied Families 600-300 B.C.*], citing the anonymous *Life of Plato* and the Suda, provides the wider context: "Diogenes' statement that Plato met Sokrates when he was twenty is evidently part of the tradition that Plato was thirty at Sokrates' death and had been with him for ten years." ... It is, however, far more likely that Plato knew Sokrates for ten years than that he did not meet him until he was twenty.' *Pace* Davies and Nails, Diogenes does not say that Plato did not meet Sokrates until he was twenty; he says that Plato came to the theatre of Dionysius to compete with his tragedy, that having heard Sokrates in front the theatre, he burnt his poetry and became his follower, and that he was twenty when that happened. Obviously, Plato's presumed meetings with Sokrates prior to this occasion made no profound impact on him. As both Diogenes and Aristotle inform us, before he became a follower of Sokrates, Plato was a Heraclitean.

<sup>vi</sup> See three entries on my blog: on September 26, I became aware that Allen and Cornford share the same misrepresentation of Plato's text (I copied Cornford's translation on the margin of my copy of Burnet's Oxford edition of Plato and marked it as wrong; it must have been in the early 1980's when I spent most of my time in the Bodleian Library). In the evening of the same day it occurred to me to go back to Jowett; I found the same misrepresentation (see my second entry of September 26). Two days later it occurred to me that Jowett must have consulted the passage with Schleiermacher. And indeed, I found the same mistake in Schleiermacher (see my blog of September 28).

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. *anaphanêsetai* at 132a10 and at 132e7.

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. E. C. Marchant's 'Introduction' to Andocides' *De Mysteriis* where he refers to '*paragraphê* of Archinus,' a measure passed in 403 B.C., 'which enacted that anyone prosecuted for crimes committed before that date might plead that he was protected by the Amnesty'. (*Andocides De Mysteriis and De Reditu*, London, 1889, p. 23. Neither in the *Republic* nor in any other dialogue written after the amnesty could Plato present the Forms as eternal beings from which God derives his divinity. As I have argued in *The Lost Plato* (on my website), Plato wrote the *Phaedrus* prior to the execution of Polemarchus by the Thirty, to whom Sokrates in the dialogue refers as a model philosopher whom his brother Lysias should emulate (257b).

<sup>ix</sup> Samuel Rickless maintains: 'Parmenides makes it clear that the power of dialectic cannot be saved unless the forms themselves are saved. As a means of saving the forms, Parmenides recommends a process of training that focuses on forms and takes note of the fact that forms wander (in the sense of having contrary properties, such as being like and unlike: 135e1-7).' (*Plato's Parmenides*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, first published on internet Fri Aug 17, 2007; substantive revision Thu Jul 30, 2015). *Pace* Rickless, Parmenides does not recommend the training he suggests as means of saving the Forms, but as a training one must undergo if one is 'accurately to discern the truth' (*kuriôs diopsesthai to alêthes*, 136c5). The truth Parmenides had in mind was his thesis that All is one.

<sup>x</sup> Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics* that the Pythagoreans 'extend their vision to all things that exist, and of the existing things suppose some to be perceptible and others not perceptible' (989b24-26); 'they got their principles from non-sensible things' (989b31, tr. Ross). The ancients viewed Parmenides as an associate of the Pythagoreans (Fr. A4, A12, A40a, A44). If Parmenides were to uphold his thesis that All is one, he had to do so face to face with the Pythagorean doctrines; Plato's *Parmenides* shows us the way he (and Zeno) did it.

<sup>xi</sup> Parmenides presents most of his deductions in the form of questions to which he gets affirmative answers from his interlocutor, the young Aristotle who in 204 B.C. became one of the Thirty tyrants; In rendering the

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given text I have taken the liberty of representing them as affirmations. Thus Parmenides: 'so that of necessity each always becomes two and never one' – Aristotle: 'Quite so' (*Pantapasi men oun*) – Parmenides: 'Wouldn't the one thus be unlimited in multitude?' – Aristotle: 'It seems so' (*Eoiken*, 142e7-143a3) becomes in my text: 'so that of necessity each always becomes two and never one ... the one is thus unlimited in multitude.' From now on I shall render the questions as questions on the understanding that each is followed by Aristotle's affirmative answer.

<sup>xii</sup> Aristotle's account of the Pythagoreans in the *Metaphysics* allows us to presume that when Parmenides derived the infinite (*apeiron*), even and odd, number, and the unlimited multitude of things, he could not help thinking about the one of the Pythagoreans: 'Evidently, then, these thinkers [the Pythagoreans] also consider that number is the principle both as matter for things and as forming both their modifications and their permanent states, and hold that the elements of number are the even and the odd, and that of these the latter is limited and the former unlimited; and that the one proceeds from both of these (for it is both even and odd), and number from the One; and that the whole heaven, as has been said, is numbers.' (986a15-21, tr. W. D. Ross).