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II.—PLATO'S *PARMENIDES*.

BY ROBERT SCOON.

ONE significant result of the increasing agreement among scholars on the historical order in which Plato's dialogues were composed has been the tendency to regard each of them as the expression of some philosophical interest in the author's mind at the time of composition; and this tendency has, on the whole been strengthened by many fresh and valuable studies of the later dialogues, which reveal attitudes to some degree new as compared with the earlier works. But the *Parmenides* is so extraordinarily difficult to interpret that it has not fitted well into any picture of Plato's intellectual development, and to a certain extent has been left as a kind of occasional piece by itself. Accordingly, I wish to explore the possibility of interpreting the dialogue as a documentary expression of Plato's state of mind at the time it was written.

It is generally conceded that it belongs to the same period as the *Theaetetus*, and that the latter must have been composed about 368, when Plato had been head of the Academy for twenty years. Since the *Theaetetus* discards the awkward device of reporting what somebody said that somebody else said, which is adopted in the *Parmenides* but not followed in subsequent dialogues, we may suppose that the *Parmenides* is the earlier of the two pieces. It would then form the first of the later group of dialogues, which were probably composed after a rather long interval from the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, during which Plato's energies were absorbed in teaching.

In order to avoid confusion, I shall refer to the historical philosopher after whom the dialogue is named as Parmenides, to the dialogue itself as the *Parmenides*, and to the *persona* of the dialogue as 'Parmenides'. So also with the historical Zeno, and the dialogue's character 'Zeno'. I shall summarize separately the two parts into which the work falls, and then try to interpret the whole.

I

The first part of the discussion is a conversation between 'Zeno', Socrates, and 'Parmenides' on the subject of 'Zeno's'

attempt to disprove pluralism by showing that "if the things that exist are many, then they must be both like and unlike, and that is impossible, for the unlike cannot be like nor can the like be unlike" (127e 1). Socrates suggests that a distinction should be made between like objects and the form of likeness, between unlike objects and the form of unlikeness; you can then suppose that any objects participate in both forms and thus are partly like and partly unlike, but the forms themselves apparently cannot participate in one another without losing their identities. Such a position would of course tend to weaken 'Zeno's' argument by showing that there is a perfectly good sense in which you can say that certain things are both like and unlike. At this point, however, 'Parmenides' intervenes with an attack on the doctrine of forms, for the purpose of denying the validity of the distinction between objects and forms which Socrates had introduced against 'Zeno'.

(1) *Analysis*. 'Parmenides' first argument (130b 3-e 4) is as follows. He gets Socrates to admit forms of likeness, unity, plurality, and such things; then of justice, beauty, goodness, and "all such things". But when he asks whether there are forms of man, fire, and water, Socrates confesses that he has often been puzzled about them; and when 'Parmenides' goes on to hair, mud, filth, and the most valueless and paltry objects, Socrates first flatly denies forms of such things, which are just what we see them to be. But then he admits that he really does not know why, if the argument for forms holds in some cases, it should not hold in all; and in the end he confesses that he simply restricts his attention to the cases about which he is sure, for fear that he would get into a mess of nonsense if he brought in the others. 'Parmenides' tells him that he will get over this squeamishness when he grows older and more philosophical, and on this note the argument stops.

Interpretation. It is clear that this attack concerns the extension of the theory of forms; it does not question the relation of forms to particulars, but rather the kind of cases to which the theory is applicable. And the hub of 'Parmenides' position is that there are cases which Socrates will not admit for fear of spoiling the whole theory, which he is, however, bound to admit on the basis of the argument for the cases he does admit. The context suggests that the argument to which 'Parmenides' refers is that where there is a many with a common character, there is a class form—an argument which is obviously assumed in several early dialogues (e.g. *Euthyphro*, 6d 11, *Phaedrus*, 249b 6, *Republic*, 596a 6), and which is stated by 'Parmenides'

later in the present dialogue and accepted without hesitation by Socrates (132a 1-5). 'Parmenides' point then is that, if you accept this argument in some cases, you must accept it in all.

What we have to ask ourselves is why Socrates should ever hesitate to do this; and that question, from the point of view I am exploring, really means: what aspect of the theory of forms, as expounded in the earlier dialogues, would make it difficult for Socrates to accept the cases of ridiculous, filthy, and vile objects, which 'Parmenides' brings up against him. The answer I would suggest is: that side of the early theory which interpreted the form as a kind of ideal, which particulars try to reach but fall short of. In the *Phaedo*, for example, persons, sticks of wood, and other similar objects are said to 'desire' or 'wish' to be perfectly equal, but to 'fall short of' or 'be incapable of' or 'worse than' this complete equality (74a 6; d 6, 9; e 1; 75a 2; b1, cf. *Meno*, 72c 6-9); and these expressions, of course, are exactly those which are used of a person with an ideal, such as justice or holiness. If we accept Aristotle's testimony that Socrates busied himself with ethical questions, we can think of the young Plato, still under the spell of his master, but endowed with much more originality than he gave himself credit for, as so impressed with the reality of the qualities Socrates had stood for that he thought of them in the same category as the qualities of natural objects, and then assumed that these natural objects were related to their qualities as men were related to their ideals. There is no indication in the early dialogues that Plato distinguished moral qualities from the others, for he treats equality, similarity, unity, beauty, holiness, justice, and goodness all alike; and the unsystematic classification given in the passage of the *Parmenides* under discussion is the first hint of any differentiation.

Apparently the first questioning of this position arose, not with regard to negations such as the not-just, nor even with forms of evil like injustice, but in connexion with what is foul and petty. Socrates seems to suggest here in the *Parmenides* that it would subject the whole theory of forms to ridicule to suppose that every piece of filth falls short of pure and perfect filthiness, but is trying to be as filthy as possible under the limitations of sensuous existence. If you say that every thing is 'worse than' (*φauλότερον*, *Phaedo*, 74e 2) some perfection, what are you going to say about the 'worst' things (*φauλότατον*, *Parmenides*, 130c 7), which do not appear to be trying to reach perfection at all, and yet can hardly be supposed to aspire to imperfection? But the inclusion of hair in the list at which Socrates balks

suggests that there are natural classes which neither aim at anything beyond themselves nor fall short in any respect—they just are what the senses declare them to be.

Thus this first criticism of 'Parmenides' may be interpreted as bringing to light a difficulty in the early doctrine of forms, which had combined the idea of class with that of perfection or ideal. And the fact that Socrates in the dialogue frankly admits the difficulty and offers no defence may be an indication that Plato is questioning his former position. The final remark of 'Parmenides' that when Socrates gets more philosophical training, he will give up his attitude of disregard for things that are popularly considered petty and ridiculous, would suggest that in the future the theory of forms would be developed in the direction of a more scientific idea of class or species.

(2) *Analysis*. 'Parmenides' second argument (130e 4-133a 10) concerns the relation of a form to its particulars, and contains a number of distinct points, which may be differently organized ; but the following analysis seems to me best on the whole.

(i) 'Parmenides' first (130e 4-131e 7) attacks the notion of participation according to which a form is said to be present in the particulars. He makes Socrates admit that either the whole form must be present in every particular or else only a part of the form is present in any particular ; in the first case, the form will be multiplied, in the second case, divided. And in either case the unity of the form has vanished. There are also impossible paradoxes in the special case of the large, the equal, and the small.

(ii) The rest of the argument (131e 8-133a 10) is complicated, but it seems to turn on the conception of similitude between a form and its particulars. 'Parmenides' shows that if you argue for a form as an explanation of the common character in a group of objects, your logical principle gets you into an infinite regress ; for as soon as you have a form, it and its particulars, *ex hypothesi*, have a common character, and you will need another form to explain that, and so on *ad infinitum*. When Socrates tries to avoid these consequences by the extraordinary suggestion that the form may be a thought "in our souls" (presumably this means that a single abstract thought can be an image of many separate but similar things), 'Parmenides' shows that a common character of things must be an object of thought, which has both a reality and a unity not constructed by the mere thinking of it ; and therefore, if a form (*e.g.* equality) is a thought, all the particulars participating in it (*e.g.* sticks) will necessarily be thoughts, and then you will be forced to say

either that all these things think or else that they are unthinking thoughts. Without further ado Socrates gives up this line of defence and tries to take cover in the simple position that forms are patterns fixed in nature, particulars are likenesses of them, and participation is resemblance; but 'Parmenides' has no difficulty in showing that this is merely another way of describing the common character, which, as he previously proved, paves the way for an infinite regress. And there this second argument ends.

Interpretation. We must now ask, as we did under the first argument, what aspect of the earlier theory of forms could justify this attack; and we can put this question more concretely by asking why Socrates in the present passage has to submit to 'Parmenides' multiplying and dividing the forms, as if they were so many concrete objects. The answer I would suggest is: precisely because the forms had been conceived like concrete objects in the early dialogues. 'Parmenides' point that either the whole form or merely a part of it must be present in any particular is plausible only if the form is conceived as a thing to which the part-whole idea is applicable; and it is noteworthy that Socrates does not demur when 'Parmenides' asserts that participation must be either in wholes or in parts.

Now there are many passages in the early dialogues in which a discussion of forms is introduced by the question, "Do we say that justice (beauty, goodness, etc.) is something?" (e.g. *Phaedo*, 65d 4-8, 103c 11; *Protag.*, 330c 1, 358d 5; *Meno*, 76a 1). Another common way of talking about a form in the early dialogues is not by the abstract term 'justice' (δικαιοσύνη), but by the phrase 'the just by itself' (τὸ δίκαιον αὐτό); and this expression contains the suggestion that 'the just by itself' is to be understood in contrast to the just that is mixed up with other things in some sensible object. The just by itself is a thing which exists like other things, but it is unlike other things in being by itself, pure and unadulterated. From this point of view it is possible for Plato to say that this thing that is just by itself somehow gets into other things and makes them just. And he can also say not only that ordinary just things are 'like' that which is just by itself, but also that the just by itself is itself just (equality is equal, *Phaedo*, 74d 6; beauty is beautiful, *Phaedo*, 100c 4, 5; justice is just, holiness is holy, *Protag.*, 330c 4, 5, e 1).

Such expressions show how far Plato's early view was from a concept of qualities; and, moreover, they suggest that what he had in mind was frequently not a form at all, but a kind of thing.

The truth is that many of the passages which are usually taken as evidence for his theory of forms contain no mention of forms at all, and are best interpreted as expounding a doctrine of essences, or intelligible things, or real natures; and in other passages, such as *Republic*, X, 596, 597, "the bed which is really bed" seems to be interchangeable with "the form of beds".

Thus 'Parmenides'' second argument in the passage under discussion may be understood as bringing out the inconsistency between this talk about things by themselves and the concept of form. If you argue for a form on the basis of a common character in certain things and then treat the form as another thing, (a) the question of whole or part can be raised with regard to the form-thing in its relation to the other things and cannot be satisfactorily answered, and (b) the concept of similarity can be applied to the form-thing and other things, so that you have a new form-thing, and ultimately an infinite regress. Neither of these consequences would follow unless the form were conceived as a thing; and the difficulty suggests that the theory as a whole should be developed in a less material and more metaphysical direction.

There is, however, an additional complication in the (b) part of this argument, involving the idea of similarity, which is extraordinarily difficult to interpret. The gist of it, I think, can be given fairly in this way: when Socrates suggests that participation is resemblance, 'Parmenides' argues that in that case the form must resemble the object in so far as the object resembles the form, and this statement lays the foundation for the infinite regress. The main difficulty concerns the translation of the Greek words for resemblance, for the words may mean either likeness in what we should call a symmetrical relationship, or an asymmetrical pattern-copy relation; and it seems clear that 'Parmenides'' argument would be valid for the first rendering, but invalid for the second. On the evidence of this particular passage I do not find it possible to conclude definitely in favour of either interpretation; nor can I find references in earlier dialogues, which obviously involve the symmetrical relation, although there are passages in which objects are called resemblances of forms (e.g. *Phaedrus*, 250). Hence we must interpret the present passage by means of general considerations, and I submit the following. It will be recalled that at the beginning of the dialogue Socrates in his discussion with 'Zeno' introduced the form of likeness; now if equality is equal, beauty is beautiful, justice is just, etc., then likeness must be like. In that case would it not be difficult for Plato to escape from the

symmetrical relationship? Indeed, to the extent that Plato had in mind essences, such as the pure beautiful or the perfect equal, it seems to me likely that he assumed a symmetrical relation of resemblance between them and the particulars. From this point of view the argument of 'Parmenides' could be interpreted as a criticism of this conception of participation and forms, and a hint that the form should be conceived more clearly as an original and unique pattern.

(3) *Analysis*. 'Parmenides' third argument (133a 11-135b 4), which is described as the most damaging of all, concerns the separation of the forms. He first gets Socrates to admit that there are no forms "among us", that is, in the world of our ordinary experience, where nothing is pure "by itself"; and the implication of this position is plainly that the forms must exist in a realm of their own. Now 'Parmenides' takes the case of correlatives, like master and slave, and argues that, if there is a form of mastership, it must be correlative to the form of slavery. A particular master is correlated with the particular slave of whom he is the master; but mastership by itself is correlative with slavery by itself, and both belong to the realm of forms. 'Parmenides' then proceeds to apply this principle to the special case of knowledge. Knowledge by itself will be correlative with truth by itself, and each branch of this knowledge with a corresponding kind of being; but all *our* knowing is particular knowings, correlated with particular objects in our world, and since the forms are admittedly not in our world, it follows that we can never know them. It also follows that God, who presumably knows the forms, cannot know the contents of our world. Thus, as 'Parmenides' points out, we are led in the end to two realms which have no relation with one another; we are in one, and the forms in the other.

Interpretation. If now we ask, as before, what aspect of the early theory of forms could give rise to this criticism, we shall do well to start with the admission of Socrates in the present passage that any being which is pure by itself could not exist in our world (133c 6). It is clear that this statement refers to a position which contrasts the forms with concrete objects to such an extent that they seem to constitute two separate realms. The germ of this position may be recognized in those passages in the early dialogues, which stress the eternal purity and identity of the forms, together with the changeable and impure character of natural objects; and it appears more fully developed in the doctrine of two worlds, the visible and the intelligible, in the *Republic*. Furthermore, by the side of this doctrine there

is the view that the soul can apprehend the forms only to the extent that it is freed from the trammels of bodily circumstance ; and in spite of such suggestions as the philosophic practice of death in the *Phaedo*, the poetic ecstasy of the *Phaedrus*, and the doctrine of reminiscence, it would not be difficult for a critic to show that, putting religious enthusiasm aside, we cannot know the forms in any real sense in this life.

It is, I would suggest, these passages in the early dialogues, which allow ' Parmenides ' in the present argument to make the bald assertion (133e 5) that the forms and the objects of our experience have no connexion with one another, and which seem to leave Socrates without any rejoinder. It is quite true that there are passages in these early dialogues which clearly assert that the soul uses sensations to reach forms (*Phaedo*, 75a 5-7, e 3, 76a 1, 2 ; *Phaedrus*, 249b 7, 8) ; and the position that forms are present in objects and make them what they appear obviously implies an organic relation between the two realms. But ' Parmenides ' argument may be interpreted as bringing out the basic inconsistency between this view in which the forms rest firmly on the objects of our experience, and the other view in which they are opposed to and separated from these objects. His point is that if you insist on the conception of what is "separate by itself", it loses all connexion with experience and becomes absolutely unknowable.

II

The second part of the dialogue (135b 5-end) opens with an admission by ' Parmenides ' that if we are moved by all the difficulties just rehearsed to give up the whole theory of permanent forms, we shall be left without understanding of anything, and reasoning will become impossible. When Socrates agrees, but is unable to suggest how to keep the forms and avoid the difficulties, ' Parmenides ' says that the whole trouble lies in the fact that Socrates has set up the forms without an adequate philosophical training, such as ' Zeno ' has ; and the rest of the dialogue is taken up with an elaborate illustration of this ' method '. The ' method ' turns out to be that of setting up any hypothesis, and then deducing consequences.

But ' Parmenides ' makes two preliminary suggestions, which ultimately have great significance. The first purports to be merely a reiteration of an earlier observation of Socrates himself, that ' Zeno ' might very easily prove any visible object to be both one and many, but it would be very surprising if he could

prove that oneness was the same as plurality. 'Parmenides' now takes this remark of Socrates as justification for ruling out all reference to experience and restricting his illustration to purely theoretical or *a priori* concepts.

His second suggestion is to the effect that the method of 'Zeno', when completely developed, will include the setting up of opposite hypotheses for the deductive process. The historical Zeno had merely taken the hypothesis of his opponents and shown that it led to contradictory or absurd conclusions; but 'Parmenides' now implies that the idea of contradiction can be extended from the process of deduction to the original hypothesis, and thus the perfected method will embrace the deduction of consequences from opposite starting points.

'Parmenides' then proceeds to illustrate the working of this perfected method, as applied to 'his own' concept of 'the one', in eight arguments. These may be schematized as follows:

A. If you simply assume 'one', all you can say is: 'one'. It cannot have parts, beginning, end, middle, place, motion, rest, or even existence; nor can it be perceived, named, or known. Conclusion: "But can these things about the one possibly be so? I do not think so" (Argument 1).

Comment. The hypothesis from which this argument starts is literally: "if there's one" (*εἰ ἓν ἔστιν*), and differs from the succeeding hypotheses, which read: "the one if it is" (*sc.* exists, *ἓν εἰ ἔστιν*, Arguments 2, 3, 4), and "the one if it is not" (*sc.* does not exist, *ἓν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν*, Arguments 5, 6, 7, 8). Thus the first argument really assumes the bare idea of oneness, and shows that from this bare idea the process of deduction yields only the negation of every other idea. Since these other ideas include the idea of otherness (139b 4), this hypothesis can have no opposite; and in fact the only opposite to assuming oneness would be not assuming oneness, in which case there would be no argument. Hence the remaining arguments are constructed on hypotheses in which the idea of existence or non-existence is combined with oneness.

B. If one exists (where 'one' and 'exists' are specifically said to have different meanings, 142c 4),

- (a) existent-one forms a whole with parts which have otherness and in fact any other quality, including contradictions (Argument 2).
- (b) the others are: (i) any other thing, including contradictions (Argument 3).
- (ii) nothing but others (Argument 4).

The general conclusion for B is : " Thus, if one exists, the one is both all things and nothing, alike with reference to itself and to the others " (160b 2, 3).

C. If one does not exist,

(a) it, (i) since it must be known and distinguished from others before it can be denied, must have a character which exists, and hence it must itself exist, which contradicts the hypothesis ; and, moreover, it becomes the subject of all sorts of contradictory predicates (Argument 5).

(ii) since it does not exist, is a nonentity and has no character at all (Argument 6).

(b) the others, (i) since the one does not exist, will have to be other than one another ; but this implies that each of them is a one, which contradicts the hypothesis that no ' one ' exists. They will therefore only seem to be one, and, moreover, will seem to be all other kinds of contradictory things (Argument 7).

(ii) since there is no ' one ', will be collectively nothing.

Hence there will be nothing at all (Argument 8).

The general conclusion for B and C is : " whether one exists or does not exist, it and the others, both with regard to themselves and to one another, are and are not and appear and do not appear to be absolutely everything " (166c 2-5).

If we look back over this second part of the dialogue, we see that three conclusions have been given, corresponding to the three main subdivisions of the argument, which I have labelled A, B, and C. The first conclusion states flatly that the results cannot possibly be true ; the second and third conclusions are in the form of outright and obvious contradictions, which would have the same effect as the first. Thus we may say that this whole second part is a *reductio ad absurdum*.

III

We may now put the two parts of the dialogue together and face the problems involved in its general significance. ' Parmenides ' is the chief speaker in both parts ; but in the first part he criticizes the Platonic theory of forms, while in the second part he offers a specimen of his own argumentation, which turns out to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of it. But to many scholars,

ancient and modern, it has seemed as incredible that Plato, speaking through 'Parmenides', should have criticized himself, as that he should have used 'Parmenides' to make Parmenides absurd; and accordingly the greatest ingenuity has been expended in finding hidden significance behind the 'ostensible' situation—the criticisms of the forms must be somehow fallacious, and the arguments in the second part must have some valid secret locked up in them. My own approach, however, working on the hypothesis that the dialogue may express Plato's state of mind when it was composed, suggests a more straightforward or, if you like, naïve interpretation.

This attitude implies, with regard to the first part, that Plato is bringing up real difficulties involved in his earlier theory of forms, and I have tried to show what these difficulties were. I find nothing inherently improbable in the supposition that Plato went on thinking about the forms after he wrote the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, that this thinking brought to light certain difficulties in the theory, and that he expressed these difficulties in another dialogue. It was apparently not his way to bring out revised editions, but rather to go on producing; and an author who had both the dramatic power to produce the *Symposium*, for example, and at the same time the desire to follow truth "whithersoever it carries us", might, I think, publish criticisms of his own earlier views. If anyone says that Plato must have had in mind the answers to these objections, I can only plead my own *naïveté*—he may have had the answers completely formulated for all I know, but my respect for him does not seem to require me to assert this without evidence; and what he seems to say here is just that these particular interpretations of forms do not stand up under analysis, but that there must be forms of some kind to account for rational discourse. Furthermore, I do not contend that all the suggestions of Socrates and the objections of 'Parmenides' in the present dialogue are based on views expressly stated in earlier dialogues; indeed, I believe this is pretty clearly not the case with Socrates' mentalistic interpretation of forms and with 'Parmenides' symmetrical similarity between forms and particulars. These seem to be possible implications of earlier views, that were of philosophical interest to Plato at the time he composed this dialogue.

With regard to the second part of the dialogue, I wish to urge that it is not incredible as a *reductio ad absurdum*, if it concerns, not Parmenides, but 'Parmenides', that is to say, if it is pointed not at the doctrines of the historical philosopher of Elea, but

at a certain rationalistic position which Plato could not accept. I must accordingly deprecate both the emphasis on a dramatic date about a hundred years before its composition, with the implication that Plato is merely reproducing the philosophical issues of the previous century, and also the attempt to make it appear that Plato is primarily concerned with the methods and ideas of the historical Zeno and the historical Parmenides. The endeavour to make history out of Plato's dramatic settings seems to me in general a very doubtful proceeding; and in the case of the *Parmenides*, if it involves the supposition that Socrates at the age of twenty discussed his theory of forms with the Eleatic philosopher, it would be definitely improbable in the light of the autobiographical section of the *Phaedo*, which represents Socrates in his youth as engrossed in the investigation of nature and as coming to something like forms a good deal later.

Furthermore, the 'Parmenides' and the 'Zeno' of this dialogue are clearly different from the historical figures of the same names. Parmenides took a definite position and argued that the world "must needs be" what he said it was—there was no hypothesizing, such as we have in the present dialogue. The best interpretation of Zeno seems to be that he took just as definite a stand as his master, but attacked the views of his opponents by showing that their presuppositions involved contradictory consequences. He started, therefore, with those presuppositions, and did not set up contradictory hypotheses; and the so-called method of 'Zeno' in this dialogue is presumably an invention of Plato himself, as is suggested by the second preliminary observation of the second part, that Zeno's procedure must be extended. Furthermore, the concepts with which 'Parmenides' works in this dialogue are different from those of Parmenides and Zeno. The main idea of Parmenides was "What is", a single, eternal, indivisible sphere, which is clearly not the same as the one of this dialogue. Also Parmenides definitely maintained that "it is", whereas Plato considers the possibility that the one is not; and for Parmenides there could be no 'others', and neither he nor Zeno ever used the expression, so far as we know. It is therefore a mistake to suppose that Plato is here concerned primarily with Eleatic monism.

The main interest of this second part of the dialogue can best be understood by contrasting 'Parmenides' first preliminary statement, ruling out visible objects (135e 2), with the position taken by Socrates at the beginning of the first part (129a; cf. 130b), where he makes a distinction between forms and objects that participate in them. However difficult it was for Plato

to conceive accurately the relation between forms and particulars, and however much he exalted the forms at the expense of particulars, still the existence of particulars (equal sticks, the many beautiful things, beds) was always a fundamental datum in his problem and an essential element in his theory. Precisely the opposite is the case with the concepts of 'Parmenides' in the second part of the present dialogue—they are pure and completely abstract ideas, never specified by reference to any data, and consequently never precisely anything definite. Hence the arguments slide around among the notions of one, the one, ones, oneness, in a thoroughly vicious way; and much the same is true of "the others". This second part therefore shows reason at work with ideas that have no specific reference to the particulars of experience, and by means of the *reductio ad absurdum* it suggests that this kind of reasoning is illegitimate. However difficult it may be to formulate adequately the doctrine of forms in relation to objects (first part), still the attempt to deal with ideas without relation to objects is hopeless (second part).

But is it only 'ostensibly' hopeless? Is there some hidden truth behind these contradictions, as the Neo-Platonists and others more recently have maintained? The main point here concerns the validity of the arguments, and on this question opinions differ so radically that Professor Taylor (*Plato: The Man and His Work*, p. 366) calls some of the reasoning "purely sophistical" and "clearly consciously sophistical", while Professor Cornford (*Plato and Parmenides*, p. 115) holds that "the great bulk of the deductions are sound". How is it possible for two careful scholars to assess the same argument in opposite judgments? We can get at the reason for the discrepancy by noting the conditions under which Cornford finds the soundness, namely, (1) treating the first few sentences of each argument as a disguised or masked definition, which is taken as a premise for the following deduction, and (2) allowing that new premises are furtively introduced in the course of the argument. Surely one must wish very badly to approve an argument, if one is willing to swallow disguised definitions and furtively changed premises. Wouldn't most of us, as well as Plato, hold that it is an essential character of reason to strip off disguises and masks and everything furtive? Nevertheless, under his conditions Cornford makes a remarkably strong case for the soundness of what he admits as deductive process, from which we may infer that whatever unsoundness the rest of us feel lies for the most part in the region of definitions and premises.

There is, however, a prior question, namely, whether Plato

himself made the distinction between premises and deduction at all. Is a disguised premise really a premise ? and is a masked definition really a definition ? I find no warrant in the text of the *Parmenides* for this distinction. The general form under which the arguments are introduced is typified by the first argument, which opens as follows : " if there is a One, of course the One will not be many. Consequently it cannot have any parts or be a whole. For a part is a part of a whole ", etc. (Cornford's translation). What we have here is an hypothesis and its consequences, but no definition or premise in any legitimate sense ; and the same is true of the rest of the argument. It is all an inferential process, except for the hypotheses ; and I find it impossible to escape the feeling that Professor Cornford simply takes as much of this process as is needed to justify the rest, and arbitrarily calls it a definition, for there is really no difference in the text between what he calls definition and what he calls deduction. Consequently he seems to me to be importing a distinction which Plato did not make, and in this respect to be unhistorical. It was really Aristotle who made the distinction between a formal process of deduction and the primitive concepts or original definitions from which it starts, and we should give him credit for it. Plato's *λόγος* and *λογισμός* were mental capacities or processes which embraced all that might be called dealing with general ideas, and included both the getting of them and the working with them, without distinction.

Thus what we have in these arguments in the second part of the *Parmenides* is the drawing out of the consequences from an hypothesis ; and the hypothesis contains one or more concepts (the one, existence) which are not defined, but simply named. These concepts are so vague that contradictory consequences can be drawn from them, and that all kinds of meanings can be read into them by Neo-Platonists and other interpreters. Under these conditions can we really say that the deductions are sound or unsound ? Even Professor Cornford has to admit (p. 115) that " a certain number are so vaguely worded that, with the evidence at our disposal, we cannot be sure of the true meaning ". Yet, unless the conclusions actually follow, there is no point in the process of inference and the contradictions are meaningless. Professor Cornford, however, has made out a very convincing case for the soundness of most of the inference, so that Professor Taylor's " purely sophistical " seems much too strong ; and I can see no reason why we should not suppose that Plato himself thought it was all sound enough

to make a *reductio ad absurdum*. Can we not say then that Plato has taken certain vague, abstract terms that had some obvious meanings in ordinary Greek usage, and drawn out contradictory sequelæ from them with so much plausibility that the net result is a conviction of fallacious thinking?

Plato does not point out just where the fallacy lies; but presumably he relied on his dramatic arrangements to supplement the express meanings of his text, and I wish to suggest that the contrast between the first and second parts may contain the clue. This contrast, as I have previously maintained, is between a theory that embraces both forms and objects, and a theory that leaves out the objects. The ideas with which 'Parmenides' works in the second part have the same names as the Platonic forms; but they are not forms, because they are not forms of objects. Hence Plato seems to suggest that the vagueness of 'Parmenides' terms results from his omission of objects. We might object that it is possible to define abstract terms properly, without raising any question of empirical data, and that when so defined, they will not yield contradictory deductions. But this seems possible to us only because we have had the benefit of Aristotle's formal logic; and I believe that Plato could not have taken this position. He seems to say that the absence of reference to objects allows ambiguities in concepts, which in turn permits them to be used for contradictory deductions, which stultify thinking about reality.

If this is the right interpretation of the second part, it is a mistake to suppose that Plato is here exhibiting the participation of forms in one another, to which Socrates had referred in his opening conversation with 'Zeno'. The terms with which 'Parmenides' deals here are not forms; and the combination and separation of forms is carefully and positively treated in the *Sophist*.

Thus the *Parmenides* as a whole is a study of reason, and reason appears in three rôles: (1) the knower of forms (Socrates); (2) the critic of the theory of forms ('Parmenides', first part); and (3) the manipulator of abstract, non-empirical concepts ('Parmenides', second part). The indications given in the dialogue suggest that Plato is prepared to accept the first two rôles and reject the third—he must have forms in order to account for knowledge, he is ready to recognize valid criticisms of his theory, but he repudiates a rationalism that turns its back on "the visible" world.

On this interpretation of the dialogue as a whole, it forms a companion piece to the *Theætetus*, which studies the claims

of sense-experience to give knowledge, as the *Parmenides* examines the rôle of reason in knowledge. Furthermore, both dialogues are mainly critical and destructive, even with regard to the forms; and they end without openly advancing any positive doctrine. Although the *Parmenides* suggests that reason is necessary for knowledge and for criticism, and the *Theaetetus* establishes a theory of sense-perception, they seem designed primarily to show what Plato was ready to reject, in preparation for his second great constructive effort in the series of dialogues from the *Sophist* to the *Laws*. In the most general terms it may be said that he rejects reason without sense-experience and sense-experience without reason as sole foundations for knowledge, just as later in the *Philebus* he will reject both pleasure apart from knowledge and knowledge apart from pleasure as sole constituents of the good.

IV

If the *Parmenides* expresses Plato's philosophical interests at the time of its composition, it should be possible to correlate the criticisms of the theory of forms in the first part with positions taken in later dialogues, and thus see how Plato tried to meet the difficulties.

The first difficulty, which concerned the extension of forms to objects which seem to have either negative value or no value at all, was apparently met by dropping the value aspect from the theory and conceiving the forms on the basis of real classes. Thus in the *Sophist* εἶδος and ἰδέα are used interchangeably with γένος, and the *Timaeus* specifically recognizes forms of corporeal objects. This idea of the common feature of a group of things "to which we apply the same name" (*Rep.*, 596a 7) had always been involved in the theory; but it is now freed from the restrictions of a valuational interest, so that it can be adequately illustrated by the instance, given in the *Theaetetus* (174b), of an inquiry into "what man is, and what powers and properties distinguish such a nature from any other" (Cornford's translation).

The second difficulty, which concerned participation conceived in a rather materialistic way, was apparently met by a more metaphysical approach. In the *Theaetetus* Plato expresses the idea of quality, coining a new word (literally, of-what-sort-ness) for the purpose; and the abstractness of the term would contrast with the concrete thinghood of the forms in some earlier de-

scriptions. Furthermore, he went on in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* to show that forms participate in one another, so that the integrity of a form is consistent with subdivisions or species ; and the whole theory is conceived on such an abstract level that there is no question of the form's losing its unity by this multiplicity or by the multiplicity of objects participating in it. Again, the tendency of the latest dialogues is to concentrate causal activity in soul, and there is no more talk of forms' "making" things what they are. Forms are principles of definiteness used by soul, and as such, can be generalized into the universal aspect of limit or finiteness in the world. The point of all this is that it moves on a metaphysical plane where it would be nonsensical to say that beauty is beautiful, and 'Parmenides' criticisms do not apply. From this standpoint it is misleading to say that the form is like the objects in so far as the objects are like the forms, for the likeness is definitely that of copies to an original pattern (*Timaeus*, 52), an asymmetrical relation which avoids 'Parmenides' infinite regress.

The third difficulty, which concerned the separation of forms to such an extent that they seemed to lose contact with experience, was met by a softening of the dualism. First, the forms are forms of objects, and thus rest definitely on a basis in sense-experience, as the classifications by the method of division (*Sophist* and *Statesman*) and the species of physical objects (*Timaeus*) imply. Secondly, although Plato continued to base the distinction between forms and objects on the distinction between reason and opinion, as he had in the *Republic* and the *Meno*, opinion is now given "a decidedly higher value" (Taylor, *Plato*, p. 340), and reason is more rational and less visionary. Finally, the sharp opposition between changeless forms and changing objects, as if they belonged to two different worlds and the one was what the other was not, is apparently dropped—there is now only one world, a more complicated world than the old dualism suggested, with four principles that co-operate. Plato tended to speak of the formal principle as the real factor, but he did not think of the other factors as unreal, and he specifically admitted life, soul, and intelligence to reality (*Sophist*, 248e 5).

Thus it is possible to correlate the criticisms of the theory of forms not only with the views expressed in preceding dialogues, but also with positions taken in the later dialogues. But this must not be taken to imply that the positions taken in the later dialogues were themselves without difficulties. There are obvious questions that arise in regard to these later views—

is the formal principle any more real than the three other principles ? is the pattern-copy concept metaphorical or mythical ? what is the relation between goodness and reality ? But I do not have to prove that Plato's later philosophy was perfect in order to show that it tried to meet the difficulties in his earlier thought.

If now we use the development of this theory of forms as a clue to Plato's general intellectual development, might we not put it in the following way ? His mind in youth, perhaps somewhat overstimulated by the military and political turmoil of Athens and especially by the shock of Socrates' trial and death, was marked by an extreme fertility, which poured forth a stream of brilliant works, developed from an original impulse to disclose the real genius of the master whom his countrymen had condemned and executed ; and the constructive momentum and richness of this period resulted in a wealth of suggestions, with a low degree of scholastic systematisation. This was as true of the theory of forms itself as of the other doctrines ; and it is accordingly a great mistake to consider it 'technical' and emphasize certain references, while neglecting others. The form of the bed in the *Republic* is apparently a form with as good a right as the form of beauty in the *Phaedo* ; a form is a thing, and also the form of other things ; it actually makes objects have its character, but nevertheless it does not change ; it is by itself, yet other things participate in it ; and it is necessary for us to unify our sensations by a process of reason to know a form, although we can only know the form by recollection of having seen it in a previous existence. These are various aspects of the theory in the dialogues down through the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* ; and the state of mind they reveal is typical of the whole thought of this period.

After these dialogues, there seems to have been a long gap in Plato's writing, during which no doubt his energies were absorbed by the Academy ; and when he returned to literary composition in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, he showed the effects of a careful, systematic, critical study of fundamental points, that is appreciably different from the buoyancy of his earlier dialogues, and that may well have originated in the questions of his students. It is noteworthy that three passages in the *Parmenides* (127c 5, 130e 1, 135d 6) emphasize the youthfulness of the Socrates whose theory of forms is being criticized ; and it is much more plausible to interpret these passages as expressing the feeling of the mature Plato toward his own early ideas than it is to suppose that they refer to the historical Socrates at a supposed meeting with the

historical Parmenides in the middle of the previous century. Plato is now frankly and carefully facing some of the difficulties in his youthful doctrines, and as ready to modify any that will not stand the test of criticism as he is to develop the views of other schools, like the Eleatic-Megarian and the Heraclitean-Protagorean, to their logical conclusions for his own present purposes.

After this clearing of the ground in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, Plato went on to a new constructive period, the results of which are expressed in the dialogues from the *Sophist* to the *Laws*. No one can follow him here as he works out the meaning of negation, wrestles with the idea of goodness, constructs a cosmology, and formulates a theory of motion, without realizing that his tremendous originality is still intact and vigorous, so vigorous in fact that it can drop Socrates and speak through other mouthpieces; but it is a more disciplined and sober, a less artistic and poetic capacity than that of the early period. It is a capacity which balances theories, and attempts compromises between extremes, and emphasizes mixture; and it tends to interest a different group of readers from those who become enthusiastic over the high soaring of the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*. It is a Plato much closer to Aristotle than the enthusiasts of the earlier Plato like to admit. But it is still Plato, and it still believes in forms. Surely it is unwise to speak, as Professor Taylor does (*Plato*, p. 348), of a "silence" regarding forms in the last group of dialogues, and say that "the forms are mentioned only in two of them: the *Parmenides*, where the doctrine is said to be that of Socrates in his early years and is criticized by Parmenides and Zeno, and the *Timaeus*, where it is put into the mouth of a fifth-century Pythagorean". The Greek words *εἶδος* and *ἰδέα* that are frequently used in the early dialogues, occur all through this last group; and while I have tried to show that there is an appreciable shift in the meaning, it is better understood as a development of the same idea than as one idea being displaced by a different idea. For Plato kept the old terms, and on the foundation of the theory there was no shift—Plato believed at the end, as he had at the beginning, that some kind of forms must be posited in order to account for the difference between reason and opinion, and to justify knowledge.