PLATO'S *PARMENIDES*

By Walter Garrison Runciman

MY purpose in adding to the already considerable literature[1] on the *Parmenides* is as follows: I think it can now be satisfactorily established that the dialogue contains no fundamental modification of the theory of forms, but that it nevertheless represents serious expression of Plato's own comments on the theory. Further, I wish to suggest that the second part contains no explicit exposition of doctrinal or metaphysical teaching, but that its moral is to be deduced from the fact that its contradictions are possible at all; that this moral is both more than the need for dialectical gymnastics and less than the abandonment of the theory of forms; that it can be drawn from the consideration of the second part in its relation to the first; and that the dialogue can accordingly be seen as a coherent and serious whole.

I

The dialogue purports to be a reported conversation between Zeno, Parmenides, and the young Socrates. Zeno has been reading a treatise in which he argues that a denial of monism entails that the same subject must undergo opposite predicates. Socrates, however, suggests that on the basis of the theory of forms no paradox arises, since one particular can exemplify several different forms. He would only be surprised if it could be shown that the forms themselves undergo opposite predicates. Parmenides then proceeds to an examination of the theory of forms which occupies the first part of the dialogue. This part (130b to 135c) may be briefly summarized as follows:

Parmenides first enquires what classes of terms Socrates admits to the category of forms, and encourages him not to be hesitant about those of whose status he is doubtful. He then examines the nature of participation between forms and particulars. Socrates suggests three explanations in turn, each of which is refuted by Parmenides. Parmenides concludes his examination by an argument designed to show that if the forms exist they must be unknowable. But he then tacitly admits that the forms must in fact exist.

Before examining each argument separately, we must consider the

part assigned in the dialogue to Parmenides. Certain commentators, feeling that Plato cannot have had a greater respect for Parmenides than for Socrates, have held that he would not put into the mouth of Parmenides criticisms of the theory of forms which he (Plato) could not in fact refute. It has further been suggested that Plato intended the dialogue to be an implicit refutation of views which the historical Parmenides might be supposed to have held.[2] However, it is, I think, considerably more plausible to suggest that Plato uses the young Socrates to express views that he either previously held or was still holding at the time of writing, and that he uses Parmenides to present serious comment upon these views. This interpretation may be strongly supported on the following grounds:

The dramatic date of the dialogue presents Parmenides as aged about sixty-five and Socrates as perhaps twenty. It is unlikely that the historical Socrates ever held the views he expresses in the dialogue, and certain that he did not hold them at the age of twenty. Thus there is no initial reason for supposing that Parmenides will argue from the standpoint which he historically held. Indeed, unless the purpose of the dialogue is an anti-Eleatic polemic, we have no cause to suppose it at all. But if Plato's purpose is to discuss certain problems arising out of his theory of ideas, there is no intrinsic improbability in his putting his comments into the mouth of a thinker for whom he is known to have had a very great respect. Further, the historical Parmenides would certainly not have expressed the acceptance of the theory of forms which we find at 135a–d. He does not argue as a monist; and I shall later hope to show that we may reject the suggestion that in the second part of the dialogue it is Parmenidean monism which is under discussion.

There is an additional difficulty which faces those interpreters who hold that Plato expects his readers to detect the fallacies in Parmenides' refutations of Socrates' suggestions as to the relation between forms and particulars. Socrates suggests first participation (*μέθεξις*), then conceptualization (*νόημα ἐγγιγνόμενον ἐν ψυχαῖς*), then resemblance (*εἰκασθῆναι*). If we consider all of Parmenides' arguments false, are we to conclude that all three different suggestions are sound? We must presumably assume that the refutations are based on a misinterpretation: that is to say, that Parmenides is attacking views which Plato never held in the form in which they are stated. But if this is so, it must be admitted that Plato never does state in what form he really did hold them. For if any one of Socrates' three alternatives is in fact the view that Plato held to be correct, then Parmenides must be wrong in this instance and right in the others; but in fact Plato represents

Socrates as driven equally to abandon each argument in turn. The interpreters who find Parmenides' arguments invalid seem to do so on the grounds that he is guilty of wilful misconception or deliberate sophistry; thus in the first argument he "illegitimately" holds Socrates to a rigidly literal interpretation of participation. But this, surely, is precisely the point of the argument. It is designed to show that the relation between forms and particulars is not one of literal participation; and this it effectively does.

That Plato cannot, however, have thought Parmenides' arguments fatal to the theory of ideas is demonstrated by his retention of the theory after the writing of the dialogue. That he did retain it seems to me to be beyond question; and to deny this involves rejecting not only evidence in the dialogues themselves, but also the evidence of Aristotle and of all subsequent tradition. But since certain commentators, including Burnet and Ryle, have sought to minimize or ignore this evidence, I feel that some reference to it is necessary. It is of course true that Plato often uses language which does not make it certain that he thinks of the concepts he is discussing as forms. But the following passages from dialogues generally agreed to be written after the *Parmenides* are to me adequate proof that Plato continued to hold to his belief in the forms: *Tim.* 51b–52c, *Phil.* 15a–b, 16c–e, 58c–59d, 62a, *Theaet.* 185d, *Pol.* 284e–286a, *Soph.* 249c–d, 253c–254a, *Phaedr.* 277a, *Laws* 965b–e. I do not cite the evidence of the *Seventh Letter* since its authenticity is not beyond question; but even if spurious it is evidence of a kind for Plato's beliefs, and it is unequivocal in the belief expressed in the existence of forms. Further, the burden of proof must rest on those who maintain that Plato ceased to regard as forms concepts or objects to which he had previously assigned this rank. I do not think satisfactory proof has been offered. The view that Plato was led by the arguments of the *Parmenides* to modify or abandon the theory of forms is made more plausible if we accept the attempt of G. E. L. Owen, "The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues," *C.Q.* N.S. III (1953) 79ff., to date the *Timaeus* prior to the *Parmenides*. But the *Philebus* reflects no such modification as is implied by Professor Ryle (whose view I shall discuss more fully later); and most of Owen's arguments have been very strongly disputed by Professor Cherniss, "The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues," *A.J.P.* LXXVIII (1957) 225ff.; cf. also "*Timaeus* 38a8–b5," *J.H.S.* LXXVII (1957) (1) 247–251.

Thus Plato may well have thought Parmenides' arguments not invalid but irrelevant since he believed that the language used to describe the relation between forms and particulars is merely a metaphorical

description for some other true and indefinable or as yet undefined relation. But it is a mistake to argue from this, as has been done, that Parmenides' arguments are thereby rendered unsound. In fact, they are more damaging than we can suppose Plato ever to have realized. For we may ask, as Plato and some of his commentators do not, what is the literal relation of which Parmenides criticizes the metaphorical expression? Now there is in fact no answer to this question, either in Plato or anywhere else.[3] The relation may be regarded as metaphorical to the extent that the statements "this partakes of greenness" or "greenness inheres in this" are synonymous with the statement "this is green." But for Plato both forms of statement express a relation between the preexistent entity greenness (for colour as a form cf. *Ep.* VII. 342d) and the particular concerned. This relation is never adequately defined by Plato. He uses participation in a perfectly legitimate sense in the *Gorgias* at 466a where it is said that rhetoric is a part of flattery.[4] This metaphorical statement we can satisfactorily translate by saying that flatterers employ rhetoric or that rhetoric is a species of flattery. But no such translation may be rendered for the participation in forms of particulars. However, since Plato continued to believe in the existence of the forms, he must have believed that we must not reject them on the grounds that the relation between forms and particulars is not susceptible of precise analysis. Such a relation must in fact exist no matter how difficult it may seem to be to explain.

Finally, if we conclude even one of the arguments to be in fact sound, this must tell strongly against the view that Parmenides is the proponent of a string of fallacious sophisms for which, on this view, it is difficult to find any worthwhile purpose. It may of course always be true that an argument which is in fact sound was not seen by Plato to be so. But if he means to expose the inadequacy of a certain type of criticism of the theory of forms, and if some of this criticism is in fact sound as he himself expresses it, it seems not unreasonable to doubt whether such exposure was really his intention. But, as I have said, this does not mean that he thought the criticism though valid to be conclusively damaging. In fact, I think it is now generally accepted that Parmenides' final argument is unsound (I shall examine its purpose later), but that those arguments which deal with the relation of forms to particulars constitute effective criticism of the proffered explanations of this relation. Accordingly I shall now proceed to consider in turn each of the arguments of the first part of the dialogue.

On being questioned by Parmenides, Socrates expresses certainty of the existence of forms of likeness, unity, plurality, justice, beauty,

goodness, and "all such things" (130b). However he admits that he is puzzled about forms of man, fire, or water, and unwilling to accept hair, mud, or dirt. Parmenides tells him that this hesitation is due to his youth and his deference to general opinion, but that when he becomes more truly philosophically inclined he will be ready to accept all these things as forms.

This argument presents no problems. It was ethical and aesthetic qualities which were the starting point of the theory of ideas, and such ideas as unity and similarity had come into prominence in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. However in the earlier dialogues (*Rep.* 596a, cf. *Phaedo* 75c–d, *Crat.* 386d–e) it had been explicitly stated that the positing of a form is entailed by the application of a common name. The question thus arises whether this axiom is to be exhaustively applied; and we need only consider why in fact Plato should hesitate at all. An answer seems discernible in the language of the early dialogues. Not only were the early ideas considered to be the projection of such concepts as beauty or equality, but Plato appears to have thought of the particulars as in some sense aspiring to attain their perfection. With the moral ideas this seems reasonable enough; we may for instance think of Socrates as aspiring to the perfect form of justice. In the *Phaedo* such language is used of equality which individual particulars are said to desire or to fall short of (e.g. ὀρέγεται 75b). Likewise it is not absurd to think of the craftsman as aspiring to create a bed or a shuttle which should be as good as possible a representation of the ideal form. But when this notion is extended to hair and dirt, the danger of absurdity becomes obvious. Are we to say that all things which are dirty aspire to the perfection of dirtiness? or that all hairs aspire to the perfection of hairiness? Plato seems here to be expressing his awareness of this difficulty. But Parmenides' concluding remark suggests that the difficulty does not damage the theory, and that the young Socrates will come to accept the existence of an idea answering to every common name. We may note that Plato seems to have believed in a natural subdivision of classes, that is to say, a belief that forms exist in accordance with a preordained division of genera into species (cf. *Phaedr.* 255e, *Pol.* 262b); and that the fullest list of forms is found in the *Seventh Letter* (342d), written (if, as is now widely thought, it is genuine) in the last decade of Plato's life. Moreover, Plato seems in the *Theaetetus* and to a greater extent in the *Philebus* to have come to concede an increasing respectability to the world of empirical phenomena; although, as I have mentioned, I do not think there is any evidence for holding that he abandoned his belief in transcendental ideas.

Parmenides now turns to his examination of the relation between forms and particulars. I shall summarize and comment separately on each of the three arguments.

(1) μέθεξις. Socrates suggests that the relationship is one of participation. Parmenides then argues that participation entails that each form must be divided into parts and shared among the particulars. Thus largeness will be divided into fragments smaller than largeness itself, equality will be divided into fragments unequal to itself, and smallness itself will be larger than the fragments by which particulars become smaller. Further, if Socrates has been led to postulate largeness by observing it as the common characteristic of large things, it will presumably share with them this characteristic of largeness. From this, an infinite regress is at once engendered.

Comment. This argument is clearly a valid refutation of a literal participation theory. It could only be answered by giving some other meaning to μέθεξις, which is never given; and as I suggested above, no satisfactory meaning could in fact be advanced within the premises of the theory of forms. It is accordingly established that the relation between forms and particulars is not one of participation in any literally analysable sense. Socrates first offered the analogy of the daylight, which is in many places at once. Parmenides rejects this in favour of the analogy of a sailcloth. He never gives any explicit grounds for his rejection, which Socrates accepts. But it is worth remarking why the daylight analogy could not in fact avoid Parmenides' objections. To say that different places all share in the daylight is only to say that many places are illumined by the daylight at the same time. In the same way, to say that many objects at the same time partake of largeness is only to say that there are many objects which are all large. In other words, the relation is not one of participation in its literal sense as in the case of a sailcloth (or a cake or a sum of money), which is all that (for the moment) Parmenides has set out to prove.

The infinite regress (or "third man") argument deserves separate comment. Analysis of this argument has been much clarified by the comments of Vlastos and his critics. I do not propose to enter the controversy concerning the formal analysis of the argument itself. I agree with Professor Vlastos that it is best read as the expression of "honest perplexity." But whether or not it is refutable by replacing the "self-predication" and "non-identity" assumptions by the "separation assumption in its explicit form," the important fact is that Plato failed to realize that any instance of an attribute must, even if it is

a form, have the logical status of a particular. The "third man" argument exposes an error which, though Plato did not realize it, is fundamentally damaging to the theory of forms. Professor Ryle accordingly concludes that Plato had come to realize the logical illegitimacy of self-predication.[5] But had he been fully aware of it he would have seen (which he never did) that the theory fails because it merely recreates on a different level the problems which it was designed to solve. In fact, although Parmenides later shows that a resemblance theory apparently entails an equally damaging regress, Plato continues to use the language of resemblance in the *Timaeus*, e.g. at 29b, 48c, 49a, 50d — cf. also *Pol.* 285d–286a echoing *Phaedr.* 250b — and at *Philebus* 16d he speaks of the form as being present in (*εὑρήσειν γὰρ ἐνοῦσαν*) the particular. Further, at *Soph.* 258b–c we find the phrase *ὥσπερ τὸ μέγα ἦν μέγα*; and that it is the form of *τὸ μέγα* which is referred to is shown by the phrase *τὸ μέγα αὐτό* used at 258a. The evidence of relevant ancient literature not only does not reflect any abandonment by Plato of paradeigmatism but offers positive evidence to the contrary; for references see Cherniss, *A.J.P.* LXXVIII (1957) 249–50. We must accordingly conclude that Plato found the present passage damaging only to a theory of strictly literal participation, and that he continued to believe in some other indefinable (or at least undefined) relation between particulars and forms. However, that he was aware that problems arise from the consideration of the relations between the forms themselves is shown by Socrates' remarks at 129d–e. Some of these problems he examined in the *Sophist*; and they are relevant, as we shall see, to the second part of the *Parmenides*.

(2) *νόημα ἐγγιγνόμενον ἐν ψυχαῖς*. Socrates now attempts to avoid these objections by suggesting that the forms are thoughts existing in the mind. Parmenides objects that the thought must be a thought of something, namely a form. Thus the problem of relationship has not been solved; further, on the participation theory particulars will have shares in a thought, and will therefore either be pieces of thinking or thoughts without thought.

Comment. It is certainly a part of Platonic doctrine that the forms are objects of thought, since it is by thought that they are apprehended and known. But Parmenides' argument effectively shows that to describe them as such does not solve the problem of their relationship to particulars. However, it has been argued that Parmenides' argument is illegitimate because it is the minds that are thinking about the forms which provide the necessary link.[6] But this would entail a kind of

Berkeleyan position which Plato certainly never held. Are we to believe that although, for example, greenness and treeness always exist, green trees only exist when they are being thought about? Unless this is so, the problem remains, and Parmenides can again bring up his argument against the literal participation theory. Socrates accordingly abandons his conceptualist theory as an explanation and offers a resemblance theory in its place.

(3) *εἰκασθῆναι (παραδείγματα)*. Socrates suggests that the forms are fixed in nature and the particulars made in their likeness, so that participation is in fact nothing more than resemblance. Parmenides answers that if two things resemble each other they must both possess at least one common attribute. Thus if a form and a particular are similar, both must be instances of at least one other form; and hence there at once arises an infinite regress.

Comment. This argument, as Vlastos shows (*P.R.* LXIII [1954] 324–332), involves the two inconsistent assumptions that F-ness is **F** and that anything which is F cannot be identical with F-ness. But it thereby serves to demonstrate, for reasons more damaging than we can suppose Plato to have realized, that the relation between forms and particulars is not one of resemblance. To posit the resemblance theory entails the belief that forms can legitimately undergo the same predicates as particulars; and this is the central mistake exposed, as we saw, by the first version of the "third man" argument. It is a mistake which would seem most naturally to arise out of the confusion of forms with ideal particulars which is implicit in the discussion of geometry at *Euthyd.* 290b or of the bed of *Rep.* 597aff. But Plato, as we have seen, continued to use the language of resemblance. We must accordingly conclude that he saw that resemblance could not give a complete and satisfactory account of the relation between forms and particulars; but he did not see that the consideration which renders resemblance unsatisfactory is a criticism damaging to the whole theory of forms.

Certain commentators have tried to circumvent the argument on the grounds that the relation is an "asymmetrical" resemblance as between pattern and copy.[7] But this cannot alter the fact that if there is any resemblance at all it must be a mutual relation; and for the copy to be a copy it must resemble the pattern in some respect, e.g., in colour or shape. Asymmetrical resemblance is a contradiction in terms. If p resembles q in any respect, this logically entails that q will in this same respect resemble p. The common attribute thus designated will on the assumptions of the Platonic theory be a form. Thus, if the relation

between forms and particulars is one of resemblance an apparent regress can at once be engendered.

It is accordingly distressing to find that Professor Cherniss (*A.J.P.* LXXVIII [1957] 252–63) still retains his conviction that Parmenides' arguments are invalid and were seen by Plato to be so. He does not repeat his truly astonishing statement (*Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* I 298) that "even before Plato wrote the *Parmenides* he must have believed that the 'likeness' of particular to idea does not imply that the idea and the particular are 'alike.'" But he still argues that the παραδείγματα argument is invalid because particulars are likenesses of ideas (originals) and it does not follow from this that both are likenesses of another single original. He further thinks (p. 263) that if the argument were valid, "it would be a general proof that nothing can be a likeness or image of anything whatever." The fact is, however, that the possibility of resemblance between particular and idea entails the existence of a common characteristic; and to predicate this characteristic of a form is to reduce it to the logical status of a particular. If whiteness is white (which must follow if white objects are white by resembling it) then whiteness is one of the class of white objects. Any two similar objects need only be likenesses of another original if the existence of a common characteristic is taken to entail the hypostatizing of an entity or form by resemblance to (or participation in) which they come to have this characteristic: but this of course is the mistaken supposition which gave rise to the theory of forms. It is only true to say that the regress argument against paradeigmatism is not valid in the sense that the regress is illegitimate before it starts, since it accepts the paradeigmatic assumption that attributes predicable of a particular can (and indeed must) be predicated also of a form. Professor Cherniss argues that the relation of a copy to its original need not presuppose a common resemblance to a further original. Of course it need not, unless we accept the assumption of the theory of forms that common characteristics (which a copy must share with its original to be a copy) are joint resemblances to the same forms. But since this is precisely the παραδείγματα theory which is under discussion, the criticism of Parmenides does expose its inadequacy as an explanation of the relation between forms and particulars.

Parmenides now passes to his concluding argument, which may be summarized as follows: The forms exist separately from the sensible world. They will be correlates of each other, not of particulars, and particulars will be correlates of each other, not of forms. Thus mastership

is relative to slavery, and master relative to slave. Likewise Knowledge in the world of forms is a correlate of the form Truth, whereas phenomenal knowledge can only be relative to the particulars of our world. Therefore we cannot have knowledge of the forms. Further, if divine knowledge is true knowledge, it cannot be knowledge of our world.

It may in some sense be true that there can be no relation between correlates of different orders or categories. But Parmenides' argument as it stands is invalid, and he himself indicates as much by tacitly accepting the theory of forms while putting his emphasis on the difficulties of converting the objector (133b, 135e). His two examples are in any case insufficient to establish his contention. It is of course true that mastership is not master of a slave in the way in which a particular master is, nor in the way in which Parmenides wrongly suggests that it is of slavery. But this does not establish that there cannot be any connection between a master and mastership. This conclusion would require a far fuller enquiry into the possible varieties both of correlates and of relations. Similarly Parmenides does not establish that there cannot be any relation between the form of knowledge and our particular acts of knowing, and it is illegitimate to assert that knowledge can know anything (134b). Further, if, as Parmenides suggests, the forms are in God's world, God must according to the preceding argument be himself a form since there can be no relation between the forms and any other category of existence.

What, then, is the purpose of this final argument? Socrates has been shown unable to give a satisfactory description of the relation between forms and particulars. Parmenides has then adduced a separate argument designed to show that any such relation is impossible. Now it is clear that Plato cannot have thought this final argument valid since it would inevitably destroy the whole theory of forms. In fact, we have seen that one of the reasons which make it invalid is that in order to prove his contention Parmenides would have to exhaust all possible varieties of relation. Thus the first part of the dialogue seems effectively to focus Plato's attitude to the problem at the time of writing. He realized that it was apparently impossible to give a complete or satisfactory analysis of the relation between forms and particulars, and this difficulty will appear to lend plausibility to the argument that there can be no relation because the two are entities of a separate category. But this will only be so if all possible relations are shown to be invalid; and in fact, since our minds are capable of apprehending forms as well as sensory particulars, it follows that some relation must exist. Therefore,

although this relation is not susceptible of literal description, its indescribability should not be allowed to convince the objector that its existence is impossible.

This analysis is borne out by the remarks that Plato now puts into the mouth of Parmenides. Parmenides reasserts the difficulties involved both in the ascertaining and the expounding of the forms. Socrates agrees. Parmenides then allows that if belief in the forms is rejected because of these difficulties, the validity of both thought and communication will be completely destroyed (135a–c). It is difficult, I think, to dispute that these remarks are an accurate statement of Plato's own views; and as such they need no further comment. Parmenides then suggests that Socrates' difficulties are due to his attempting to define the forms without the necessary preliminary dialectical training. It is an illustration of such training which occupies the second part of the dialogue.

II

Parmenides suggests that a selected form should be subjected to dialectical examination. But he makes two important stipulations. First, the enquiry is not to be confined to the objects of perceptual experience; it is to extend to those entities which are apprehended by dialectic *(λόγῳ)* and can be considered as forms. Second, not only must those consequences be deduced which follow if the selected form exists, but also those that follow if it does not exist; and further, the consequences must be deduced not only for the form itself but also for those things which are other than the form. In addition to Zeno's original supposition of plurality, the following forms are suggested: similarity, dissimilarity, motion, rest, generation, decay, existence, and non-existence. After a show of protest, Parmenides agrees to perform the demonstration, and he selects unity as being his own hypothesis (137b). Unity is accordingly examined under four separate arguments; but within each argument, directly contradictory conclusions are deduced. We thus find eight arguments set out as follows:

(1) If unity exists, certain specific conclusions can be deduced about itself.

(2) If unity exists, conclusions can be deduced about itself contradictory to the conclusions of (1).

(3) If unity exists, certain specific conclusions can be deduced about everything else.

(4) If unity exists, conclusions can be deduced about everything else contradictory to the conclusions of (3).

(5) If unity does not exist, certain specific conclusions can be deduced about itself.

(6) If unity does not exist, conclusions can be deduced about itself contradictory to the conclusions of (5).

(7) If unity does not exist, certain specific conclusions can be deduced about everything else.

(8) If unity does not exist, conclusions can be deduced about everything else contradictory to the conclusions of (7).

Before proceeding further to examine the purpose and result of this exercise, it must first be established that it is the same concept which is being discussed throughout, and that this concept is the Platonic form of unity. I think that any plausible interpretation of the second part must rest upon this assumption, but the assumption is open to two objections.

First, in the original discussion of Zeno's treatise at the beginning of the dialogue, Zeno himself declares its purpose to be an attack on the pluralists who attempt to ridicule Parmenides' supposition (*ὡς εἰ ἕν ἐστι πολλὰ καὶ γελοῖα συμβαίνει*). This is the starting-point of all the subsequent discussion of unity. Indeed already (at 128a–b) Socrates has referred to Parmenides' poem in which, he says, "you assert that the universe is one." And as we have seen, when Parmenides selects *τὸ ἕν* for the dialectical exercise, he does so on the grounds that its existence is his own original hypothesis.

Second, it has been urged that the ambiguity with which *τὸ ἕν* is discussed makes it impossible for it to be interpreted throughout as the Platonic Form. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* 112, asserts that "We shall miss Plato's whole intention, if we assume beforehand that 'The One' must stand all through for the same thing, and then identify it with the One Being of Parmenides, or the Neoplatonic One (or Ones) or the Hegelian Absolute, or the universe, or the unity of the real, or the Platonic Form." He further maintains that "the One" is implicitly defined at the outset of the different hypotheses. Wahl posits a combination of the Parmenidean and Platonic senses, suggesting in his *Etude sur le Parménide de Platon* 107 that "L'Un c'est L'Un de Parménide et Parménide lui-meme a soin de dire que c'est de son hypothèse qu'il parle. Mais en meme temps c'est l'idée Socratique en tant qu'elle est unité."

However, both these considerations can be effectively rebutted on the following grounds:

(a) The dialogue is a historical fiction. There is, as we have seen, no reason to suppose that Plato will put into the mouth of Parmenides

anything that the historical Parmenides might have been expected to say; and the Parmenides of the dialogue is in fact made to express views with which the historical Parmenides certainly would not have agreed. Similarly the young Socrates is made to hold views which he certainly did not hold at the age at which he is here pictured.

(b) Although certain arguments of the second part could be construed as referring to Parmenidean monism, it is clearly impossible so to interpret them all; and if Plato wished to discuss Parmenidean monism, he would not have done it in this intermittent way. Further, at 142a the conclusion of the first argument is agreed to be unacceptable; and the whole discussion is very remote from the homogenous sphere of Parmenidean cosmology. Finally, what would τἆλλα mean to the historical Parmenides?

(c) There are good reasons (to which I shall later refer more fully) for rejecting the interpretations of both Cornford and the transcendentalists. But the ambiguities of the second part do not invalidate the contention that it is nevertheless the form of unity which is under discussion throughout. It is clear that for the dialectical exercise to be successful, it will only be possible for the appearance of plausibility to be maintained if a considerable degree of sophistry is employed. But equally it is clear that the exercise loses any point it may have if it is not the same concept from which the contradictions are to be apparently deduced. Parmenides' preliminary descriptions of the form the exercise is to take assumes throughout that it is the same concept which is to be subjected to it, and it is not surprising if he has to treat this concept illegitimately in order to achieve his object.

(d) Unity is selected for discussion, as we have seen, out of a list of forms. It has been considered as a form from the moment (129b) when Socrates puts it forward as such. Parmenides accepts throughout the consideration of abstracts as forms. Moreover at 129d, 129e, and 130b unity is mentioned together with at least one other form.

But two further questions still remain. First, what exactly did Plato understand at the time of writing by the form of τὸ ἕν? And second, why did he choose this particular form for the dialectical exercise? Leaving aside, for the moment, the meaning which τὸ ἕν must bear for the Neoplatonic interpreters, we are left with a certain ambiguity in the way it is treated by Plato. For in addition to the concept of unity or singleness (as contrasted with plurality) it is also the number 1, the first in the series of positive integers; and this mathematical status has, I think, received too little attention from commentators on the *Parmenides*.

The number 1 is somewhat ambiguously treated both by Plato and by Greek mathematics as a whole. For the purpose of calculation it was normally treated like the other positive integers. (The Greeks had, of course, no knowledge of 0 and the negative integers, and regarded fractions as the expression of a ratio between numbers.) Thus at *Laws* 818c Plato speaks of one, two, and three as on a par with each other. At *Phaedo* 101b–c he explicitly states that every two is two by participation in the idea of twoness and every one one by participation in the idea of oneness. Aristotle at *Met.* 1080a counts number as 1, 2, 3. But on the whole one is treated as different and distinct from the rest, as at *Rep.* 524d, *Phaedo* 104a–b, *Met.* 987b, 1088a, *Phys.* 207b.; cf. Euclid, *Elements* VII, props. 9 and 15. This seems due to the fact that for the Greeks number was a plurality or synthesis of units; cf. Euclid VII, def. 2. However, the term "unit" was differently understood by Plato from the way in which it was understood by Aristotle or the Pythagoreans. For the Pythagoreans it meant an indivisible material point-unit existing in space; for Aristotle it meant either a concept in respect of which objects are counted, or one of the objects so counted; cf. *Met.* 1088a. But for Plato the term "unit" can only be understood in relation to the theory of the ideal numbers and the intermediates. Here we find the same preoccupation with the paradox of unity and plurality. The discussion of arithmetic in the *Republic* seems to suggest a line of argument as follows: No sensible object is truly single since it partakes at the same time both of oneness and of an indefinite plurality; therefore to predicate oneness in relation to any particular is to express a relation of imperfect exemplification between the idea of oneness and the particular concerned. The perfect exemplifications of the ideal numbers are the mathematical numbers. Plato was perhaps led to abstract the mathematical numbers through seeing the inadequacies of the Parmenidean system; cf. *Philebus* 56c–e, *Met.* 987b. But he had still to posit above the mathematical numbers the ideal numbers, since there are infinitely many mathematical 1s, 2s, etc. Thus, we have the unique transcendent forms of oneness, twoness, and the rest.

This is not, of course, intended to give a summary of Plato's philosophy of arithmetic, about which there is still no unanimity among Platonic scholars.[8] But I hope it will serve to indicate that τὸ ἕν, although considered by Plato to be more of a philosophical than a mathematical concept, can never be wholly divorced from its somewhat ambiguous mathematical status. Indeed, at *Parm.* 143a–144a we find what can, I think, be interpreted as an outline proof of the infinity of the series of positive integers, and at 149a–c a recursive proof of the

relation between the number of terms and the number of contacts in any finite linear sequence of terms. These passages can hardly accord with a monistic interpretation; but they do not, of course, indicate in any way that Plato did not regard one as different from the other numbers in kind. In the first place it is pervasive in a way that they are not, and is closely affiliated with the concept of existence without being synonymous with it; at *Rep.* 524d Plato explicitly states that the study of τὸ ἕν will guide the soul to the contemplation of true being. Further, even if considered purely mathematically, it is essential as a fundamental concept to any theory of numbers without requiring any such theory for itself. I would accordingly suggest that the form of τὸ ἕν meant at this time both of two things to Plato: first, oneness, by which I mean the form or idea of the number one; and second, singleness or unity. By this I mean what I have called the philosophical rather than the mathematical concept implicit in any proposition concerning an object, concept, or class of objects considered as a single whole and distinguished from any and all other objects, classes, or concepts. Further, I would agree with Professor Ryle that the only feasible translation is not "The One" but "Unity."[9]

Why, then, did Plato choose this particular form for the dialectical exercise? We are specifically told at 136e that it is not to be the form of any visible object, since it has already been agreed that such objects exemplify in themselves the paradox of contradictory predicates. The theory of forms was suggested by Socrates at 128eff. as resolving this paradox; but he has stated at 129b–c that if someone proves to him that unity can be many and plurality one, then he will begin to be surprised. It is precisely this which Parmenides proceeds ostensibly to do. This would seem to suggest the link between the two parts of the dialogue. First, Socrates has suggested the forms of unity, similarity, and other such terms. Parmenides raises certain objections directed against the relation between forms and particulars, but agrees that forms exist; he suggests that Socrates can see no way out because he has undertaken to define the forms too soon, before he has undergone the necessary training (135c–d). He accordingly proposes and carries out his eightfold exercise on the form of unity. Whatever interpretation we may ultimately place upon the exercise, it seems to follow from the first part consistently enough.

The choice of unity is in no way surprising, since the problems and paradoxes of unity and plurality are one of Plato's fundamental preoccupations during this period. Socrates has already raised the question at the outset of the dialogue. In the *Philebus*, Plato again returns to

the problem of how the forms can retain their unity yet be present in many particulars. In the *Sophist* 244bff., there reappears the paradox of existing unity entailing a duality of unity (oneness) and being. Linked with the problems of unity and plurality are those of the πέρας and ἄπειρον and the great and small, which reappear in the *Philebus* and are shown by the evidence of Aristotle to have assumed increasing importance, together with τὸ ἕν, in Plato's later metaphysics. Thus in the second part of the *Parmenides* we may expect to trace both the reflection of his present preoccupation and the seeds of his future doctrine. But, as we shall see, any attempt to find a positive exposition of doctrine must break down over the layout and content of the eight hypotheses.[10]

What, then, is the purpose of the exercise? I clearly have not the space to examine all the various suggestions made by previous commentators. But before considering the more recent interpretations which (rightly, as I believe) draw a positive moral from the ostensible *reductio ad absurdum* of the deliberate eightfold contradiction, I propose to deal briefly with the three principal traditional interpretations.

The parody interpretation. This maintains that the object of the arguments is to parody and so to ridicule the Eleatic dialectic. It is open to the following damaging objections: (a) Plato is known to have had a great respect for Parmenides; cf. *Theaet.* 183c. Though he may have disagreed with him, he is hardly likely to make Parmenides parody his own methods. (b) Parmenides himself at 142a implies that the argument of the first hypothesis is inadmissible; if it is a parody, the parody loses its force at once. (c) The Eleatic stranger of the *Sophist* and *Politicus* has never been held to be a parody. (d) It is Parmenides himself who speaks of the arguments as παιδία; if this is translated as "jest" it loses its point in the mouth of Parmenides. As argued above, it is not a very effective parody if it is the object of the supposed ridicule who declares it to be so. (e) Some of the argumentation is in fact sound. (f) The parody, if it is one, is not only inefficient but laboriously unfunny.

The transcendentalist interpretation. This finds in the arguments a positive statement of metaphysical doctrine, first expounded by the Neoplatonists. Against this it may be argued as follows: (a) Such an interpretation is nowhere stated or implied in the dialogue itself. (b) It cannot take account of all the hypotheses, which cannot by any stretch of interpretation all be shown to state (even indirectly) some metaphysical doctrine. (c) τὸ ἕν as described in the first hypothesis (i.e.,

beyond knowledge, opinion, or perception) cannot be equated with the Good of the *Republic*.[11] (d) As we have seen, it is implied that the conclusion of the first hypothesis is absurd.

Cornford's interpretation. Cornford finds in the arguments both positive statement of doctrine and exercise in the detection of fallacy. This view is open to the single fatal objection that the one impairs the other and vice versa. Further, it is very surprising to find both together in the mouth of Parmenides, and it deprives of its point the eightfold layout of the arguments. Cornford's whole position is effectively demolished by Robinson, who also deals with the view of Professor Cherniss.[12]

Thus, we must look elsewhere for our interpretation. Broadly, there remain two approaches. First, there is the view upheld by Robinson in the article just cited. This view, originally put forward by Grote and supported by Ross, finds no further purpose in the arguments than dialectical exercise purely for its own sake. Second, there is the contention that some indirect doctrinal lesson is to be drawn from the total contradictions of the ostensible conclusion. This view is the basis of the interpretations of Ryle, Peck, and Scoon. It will be my contention that the most plausible interpretation of the dialogue must fall in some sense between these two approaches. Accordingly before advancing my own view I shall consider individually the interpretations of Robinson, Ryle, Peck, and Scoon.

Robinson's interpretation. Robinson maintains that the second part of the dialogue cannot be interpreted either as a direct or as an indirect statement of either doctrine or method. It is purely and simply an exercise in argument. Parmenides five times speaks of it as γυμνασία. Having advised the young Socrates that he needs further training in dialectic, he proceeds to present him with a series of arguments which require very considerable dialectical skill to unravel. "The dialogue" (p. 177) "is addressed primarily to Plato's own supporters. . . . It is a manifesto for more dialectic and less enthusiasm." Parmenides is selected by Plato as the most authoritative figure who could be introduced for the inculcation of this lesson. In addition to the arguments which he goes through, he also recommends to the young Socrates the application of the Zenonian method to the assumptions both that an abstract idea is true and that it is false. Ross further draws attention to the *Politicus* (265d) where it is stated that the discussion is less important for its bearing on the problem than for the dialectical training which it affords. "It seems to me a mistake," Ross concludes, "to try to trace

grains of positive teaching in the wilderness of paradox which the hypotheses present."[13]

Comment. This view is difficult to refute conclusively. While it is admittedly hard to find positive grounds for some constructive conclusion, it is impossible to dismiss out of hand the contention that the arguments have no other purpose than to offer a demonstration of dialectical gymnastics. But the gymnastic view remains open to serious objections as follows:

It is strongly implied within the dialogue itself that the dialectical exercise will lead to the discovery of the truth. The γυμνασία is originally recommended by Parmenides as the solution to the inability of Socrates to answer the questions which have been discussed (135c–d). He concludes his description of the form the exercise should take with the words "if after performing your exercise (γυμνασάμενος) you are really going to make out the truth" (136c). Zeno declares at 136e that "most people are unaware of the fact that it is impossible to come upon the truth and acquire understanding without this comprehensive and circuitous enquiry."

It does not, of course, necessarily follow from these hints that there will be a direct constructive conclusion from the subsequent arguments. It is still possible that the benefit will come by returning to the original dilemma after the experience gained by following through to their conclusion a series of complicated arguments which are not directly relevant. But this seems on the face of it unlikely. Such a view is further weakened by what Robinson admits to be the defect of the gymnastic theory. "The second part of the dialogue is not really, as it professes to be, a case of the exercise that Parmenides recommends, but an argument by examining which we who read the dialogue may obtain that exercise."[14] Robinson is prepared to admit this "slight incoherence," but accepts it as preferable to any possible alternative. But the situation is worse than he allows. He admits that Parmenides makes serious methodological recommendations: but if this is so, it must at once weaken the gymnastic theory and be weakened by it. If the recommendations are not to produce a constructive conclusion from the dialectical exercise, what is the point of the dialectical exercise? Or if the point of the second half is the gymnastics of the dialectical exercise, why are we given the recommendations?

Further, if the object of the second part is dialectical training for its own sake only, we may question whether this is the best way of giving it. It is surely curious to perform such training without making clear that it is what it is. In the *Sophist* 259b Plato expresses his contempt for

playing upon contradictions in discussion for their own sake.[15] What is difficult and worthwhile is the careful and critical examination of such paradoxes. Now it is possible that no further implication need be drawn from this than that such examination is worthwhile for the sake of practice only. But once again it is surely more reasonable to conclude that Plato recommends such examination for the sake of some constructive results, as opposed to the mere dialectical sophistry of constructing the paradoxes. I do not suggest that this one passage from a dialogue written later than the *Parmenides* can give any conclusive hint towards the interpretation of the second part, but its implications seem to me to point away from the gymnastic theory.

Finally, we may object that Robinson's original exclusion of any other interpretation is not satisfactory. He adduces strong arguments to support his view that the arguments are neither a direct nor an indirect statement of doctrine or method. But none of his arguments in fact controverts any of the three interpretations which I am next proposing to consider. These share a common basis of interpretation, holding that the eightfold operation constitutes in some sense a *reductio ad absurdum*: that is to say, they maintain that a constructive conclusion is to be drawn not from the arguments themselves, but from the fact that the arguments can be laid out as they are. Thus Plato is using the dialectical exercise to point out some implication concerning the behaviour or nature of the concept under discussion. Robinson's dichotomous classification of doctrine and method does not really apply here. Such an implication as I have outlined would, I suppose, be described as an indirect statement of doctrine. But in Robinson's dismissal of the possibility that the arguments are an indirect statement of doctrine, he takes the phrase in a different and limited sense. He considers it to mean "proving some proposition by reducing its contradictory to absurdity."[16] But what these interpretations maintain is that Plato is by implication deducing a proposition about a concept (or type of concept) from the fact that contradictory conclusions can apparently be deduced about it. This method of interpretation does not seem to be considered by Robinson.

Ryle's interpretation. Professor Ryle considers the dialogue as a whole to be an early essay in the theory of types. The arguments of the second part are designed to bring out the difference in logical behaviour between certain types of universal, or between formal and non-formal concepts. This is achieved by pointing out the anomalies of treating Unity as though it were a non-formal or "proper" concept such as, shall we say,

Yellowness or Justice. Socrates has said that he will be surprised if it can be shown that forms can undergo contrary predicates; Parmenides by the use of the Zenonian method demonstrates that Unity can. Ryle rejects the idea that the moral we are to draw is the illegitimacy of treating any universal as though it were a substance or a proper name (although it is of course true that it is illegitimate). But he thinks that Plato wishes to demonstrate only that concepts of different logical or syntactical status cannot be made to behave as though the rules of their co-functioning were similar. In support of this view, Professor Ryle finds indications of a similar awareness of this fact in both the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*, and explicit statement of it in Aristotle.

Comment. The one objection to this view is that it is altogether too sophisticated. Ryle is indeed aware of this danger, and claims little more than that Plato was "beginning to see" the difference in types of concept, which is certainly true enough. But I think it may be disputed whether he ever saw them at all in the form outlined by Ryle. Ryle's whole interpretation implicitly attributes to Plato a knowledge of the distinction between semantics and ontology which Plato never possessed. Now this distinction is obviously relevant to a critical examination of Plato's views, and it is a distinction of which Aristotle was certainly aware. But there is abundant evidence in Plato's dialogues that he himself was not — that is to say, that he was incapable of distinguishing a purely logical or syntactical question as such. Such questions are indeed implicit in both the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*, but I do not think it can satisfactorily be demonstrated that they are ever more than implicit.

This is primarily because for Plato such discussions were neither about logic nor syntax, but about forms. Now it is possible and indeed likely that in the *Parmenides* Plato may be using the dialectical exercise to point to some conclusion about one or more forms. But from this to assert that he is saying something about the logical behaviour of one or more concepts is at once misleading. Similarly it is misleading to find in the *Sophist* the discovery of the copula; it is the discovery of the properties of a certain form.[17] Robinson rightly remarks of the *Sophist* in his article, "Plato's Consciousness of Fallacy," *Mind* N.S. LI (1942) 114, that "Not provided with any semantic concepts, and mistaking the ontological nature of his subject matter, Plato has yet contrived to get wonderfully close to certain facts about language." Some of these facts were stated by Aristotle, but this is no evidence that Plato saw them as such. The description of a hierarchy of forms cannot really be called an exercise in logical syntax. Similarly, although the *Theaetetus* points

out that knowledge must be of a complex of simple elements, Plato does not draw the conclusions implicit in this discovery; and indeed Socrates' "dream" is propounded only to be refuted (202dff.). Ryle tells us that Plato "is consciously developing a method of inspecting the formal properties of such complexes of elements as constitute truths and falsehoods." But this is unwarrantable. It is certainly true that the notion put forward in Socrates' "dream" has important implications on how we are to interpret such a statement as "Unity exists." But Plato does not enquire into such implications. He points out that it is possible mistakenly to believe that seven plus five equals eleven, whereas it is impossible to mistake the number eleven for the number twelve. But he never considers whether the simple elements of knowledge will be of different logical types, or in what way "unity exists" is a statement of a different order from "twelve is the sum of seven and five."

Further, we may object that if Plato had in fact been aware of the considerations which Ryle imputes to him, they would entail a revision of the theory of ideas of a kind which there is no evidence that Plato made. That he was aware that certain forms possess very different properties from others has already been admitted; and the *Sophist* does embody certain modifications of the early theory of forms. But to say that he was aware of difference in logical status would imply a pervasive recognition of the illegitimacy of treating the forms in a logically anomalous way, e.g. by making them the subjects of predicative statements of the form "justice is just" as opposed to perfectly meaningful statements of the noun-copula-adjective form such as "justice is commendable." There is no evidence, however, that Plato ever fully realized the fundamental antinomy involved in the notion that the ideas are instances of themselves; and as I shall hope to show, it is not necessary to interpret the second part of the *Parmenides* as an implicit recognition of this antinomy. Professor Ryle suggests that some such recognition is likewise implicit in the first part. But the conclusion of the first part surely implies, as I have tried to show, that Plato cannot have seen how damaging this consideration in fact is. Ryle is prepared to dismiss the objection that his interpretation of the dialogue imputes to Plato the overt demonstration of the logical untenability of the very principles of his system. Why, he asks, must Plato be forbidden the illumination of self-criticism? Now clearly there is nothing impossible in itself about the notion that Plato or any other philosopher may make drastic revisions of his own tenets. But in Plato's latest writings there is no evidence of such a drastic revision. As far as we know, he continued long after the writing of the *Parmenides* to hold to the doctrine of

substantial forms. The conclusion seems to be that we cannot accept an interpretation of the dialogue which finds in it arguments (however true) which can only be formulated in the light of later philosophical developments.

Peck's interpretation. This holds the purpose of the arguments to be to show that τὸ ἕν is not a legitimate form. Plato puts into the mouth of Parmenides a sequence of verbal sophistries in order to illustrate the error of positing forms on the basis of deceptive verbal images. The statement "x is just" is a legitimate example of μέθεξις from which we are entitled to posit the existence of the form justice; "x is one" is on the other hand an illegitimate example of μέθεξις. No form of "the One" exists, just as no form of τὸ μὴ ὄν or of θάτερον exists. A particular is not one through participation in the form of "the One" but through participation in a form which is one. The same is true of "Being." Any form exists and is single of its own nature, not through participation in οὐσία or τὸ ἕν. " 'Oneness' is a non-significant abstraction in the sense that 'one' means something different in every case just as 'other' meant something different in every case. 'One man' consists of several parts and *one* man is not the same as *one* leg." Socrates has stated that he would be surprised if Zeno could show that "the One itself" is many. Plato demonstrates that this cannot be shown simply because "the One itself" is not a form. Peck supports this argument by reference to his analysis of the μέγιστα γένη of the *Sophist*. He holds that we are to conclude from the *Sophist* that τὸ μὴ ὄν, θάτερον, ταὐτόν, and τὸ ὄν (οὐσία) are not true forms: and we are to draw a similar conclusion for τὸ ἕν in the *Parmenides*.

Comment. We must first enquire whether this rejection of τὸ ἕν as a form is borne out by Plato's subsequent teaching. In the first place, there is no explicit statement in Plato that τὸ ἕν is to be denied the rank of idea, and outside the *Parmenides* nothing which so far as I know has ever been regarded as an implicit statement to this effect. Nor is there any evidence in Aristotle which might support this contention. Within the dialogue itself, unity is referred to among "the forms themselves, such as similarity, dissimilarity, plurality, unity, rest, motion and all the other concepts of this kind" (129d–e). Are we then to conclude that these are likewise to be rejected as forms? Similarity is referred to by Parmenides at 131a in the same breath with size, beauty, and justice. At 130b Socrates has expressed equal certainty about the existence of forms of similarity, unity, and plurality and about forms of justice, beauty, and goodness. This does not, of course, prove that Plato's

intention was not to recant in part this earlier doctrine of his own which he puts into the mouth of the young Socrates.[18] But if this is so, it is surely surprising to find reference at *Theaet.* 185c–186b to existence, non-existence, similarity, dissimilarity, unity, plurality, goodness, badness, beauty, and ugliness as concepts alike distinguished by thought rather than by sense.

But the most damaging objection to Peck's interpretation is what I described above as the mathematical status of τὸ ἕν. Here the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that not only did Plato believe in a form of Oneness, but that he assigned to it increasing importance. The belief is first explicitly stated in the *Phaedo* that things are one by partaking in the form of oneness. Now not only is there no evidence that Plato abandoned this view; but the *Philebus* (56c–e), which is generally agreed to have been written after the *Parmenides*, seems to confirm the theory of mathematical numbers which we find implied in the *Republic* and the *Phaedo* and which is attributed to Plato by Aristotle. Peck's claim that Oneness is a "non-significant abstraction" is argued on the grounds that "one bicycle consists of various parts and the oneness of a bicycle is not the same as the oneness of a wheel."[19] But it is precisely as a solution to this problem that Plato conceived the notion of the mathematical unit as I have earlier outlined it. It is certainly true that for Plato the oneness of a bicycle would differ from the oneness of a wheel. But as we have seen it is the mathematical one which is the true and perfect exemplification of the ideal one. Are we to infer from the *Parmenides* that Plato abandoned the belief in the ideal numbers? Certain problems do indeed exist concerning Plato's later beliefs as to the relation between the ideal numbers and the other ideas, but there is no evidence that he ever denied them the rank of ideas. However, Peck seems to suggest that it is only oneness which is not a form; if it were a form it is difficult to see how it could generate other forms together with the great and small, whereas in fact any form or particular must of its proper nature exist and be one, not through participation in forms of unity and existence. The objection to this view is not that it is necessarily unsound, but that there is no evidence that Plato held it, any more than that he was aware of the antinomy of the ideas being instances of themselves. An independent consideration of this kind cannot be evidence in support of the view that Plato rejected τὸ ἕν as a form. Peck's view must rest solely on his interpretation of the *Parmenides* itself, and I hope I have said enough to show that here the view must be rejected.

Scoon's interpretation. Scoon maintains that Plato wishes to show the illegitimacy of reasoning with abstract concepts which have no reference to the particulars of experience. He too holds that the ideas with which Parmenides concerns himself in the second part of the dialogue are not forms. Plato is repudiating a rationalism that fails to take account of the visible world, by showing that such a failure allows contradictory and stultifying ambiguities in thought. However difficult it may be to formulate the relation of ideas to particulars, it is hopeless to try to consider abstract concepts without reference to particulars at all.

Comment. This view differs from Peck's in one important respect. Peck holds that Plato begins with the assumption that unity and the rest are forms, and then shows by the *reductio ad absurdum* that unity is not. Scoon seems to imply that the assumption is never made, but that the concepts dealt with cannot be forms because they do not have reference to particulars. I do not think this view is tenable. As we have already seen, the implications in the dialogue point strongly to the view that unity is throughout considered as a form. Further, we know that Plato certainly believed it possible to make statements about the ideas in the abstract, if only to say that they are instances of themselves. Now in his writings after the *Parmenides* we seem to find no abandonment of his belief in the transcendental nature of the ideas.[20] In particular the transcendent view is clearly expressed in the *Timaeus* 51b–52d, where the ideas are considered as pre-existent entities outside space and time. Finally, we may again urge the mathematical status of τὸ ἕν. Here it may be true that number must be derived originally from the perception of sensible particulars; but we certainly cannot say that Plato thought it impossible to formulate abstract truths about mathematics without reference to perceptible objects. It is clearly true that Plato is demonstrating that the discussion of unity in the abstract can apparently lead to contradictory conclusions. But it seems unwarrantable to infer from this that the moral he wishes to point is that all discussion about abstract concepts must be conducted with reference to particulars. This would entail that he believed it impossible to make meaningful predicative statements about forms except in so far as they are immanent in particulars. That Plato did not in fact believe this can be shown from passages taken from all the periods of his writing where the transcendent nature of the forms is clearly expressed, e.g., in addition to the passage from the *Timaeus* already cited, *Phaedo* 78, *Rep.* 500, *Phaedrus* 247, *Phil.* 59.

I am of course aware that the brief treatment I have given them does

not do full justice to any of the interpretations which I have outlined. But I hope enough has been said to show that none of them can be regarded as satisfactory. Accordingly it only remains to offer some comments of my own.

The crux of the problem is that we are led to expect that the dialectical exercise will enable us to resolve the difficulties on which our attention has been focused in the first part of the dialogue. But for this, we could without difficulty see the relation of the second part to the first. It could be seen as raising the paradoxes apparently arising from the relation of forms to each other in the same way that the first part raised those apparently arising from the relation of forms to particulars. The conclusion put into Parmenides' mouth at the end of Part I would then be applicable to both parts, namely that in spite of these difficulties the forms must exist since without them the significance of all thought and discourse will be destroyed. The aporetic nature of the dialogue as a whole need not of itself be surprising. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates and Theaetetus are represented as unable to define knowledge; but no one will maintain that Plato, either before or after the writing of the *Theaetetus*, believed that there was no such thing. However, the transitional passage in the *Parmenides* suggests that the gymnastic exercise will actually help to circumvent or to solve the problems with which the young Socrates has found himself faced. It is my purpose to suggest how Plato may have thought this to be so.

There is one important hint within the transitional passage. At 135c–d Parmenides attributes young Socrates' difficulties to his having prematurely undertaken to define the forms without the necessary training: *Πρὼ γάρ, εἰπεῖν, πρὶν γυμνασθῆναι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὁρίζεσθαι ἐπιχειρεῖς καλόν τέ τι καὶ δίκαιον καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἓν ἕκαστον τῶν εἰδῶν*. This does not mean that the dialectical exercise will explicitly be an exercise in definition. In fact it is a series of deductions not from hypothetical definitions but from an existential hypothesis and its denial. But it is clearly implied that the exercise will throw light on problems arising from premature and misguided definition of forms. I do not propose to discuss the whole question of Socratic definition.[21] But a few remarks are relevant at this point. Definitions are offered and either accepted or rejected in dialogues both before and after the *Parmenides*. But we nowhere have what Plato professes to regard as a complete definition of a form as such. At *Theaet.* 147c he gives an example of what he would regard as a satisfactory answer to the "What is X?" question. To "What is mud?" a satisfactory answer is "earth mixed with water." But Plato clearly would not regard this as a

satisfactory answer to the question "What is the form of mud?" It is certainly not earth mixed with water. But is it earthiness mixed with wateriness? Or is it αὐτὴ ἡ γῆ mixed with αὐτῷ τῷ ὑγρῷ? Since at *Parm.* 130c, when young Socrates expressed hesitancy about the existence of a form of mud, he was advised not to be squeamish, we must suppose that Plato thought such a form did exist. Presumably he thought that it stood in some relation to the forms of earth and water, and this relation we may suppose he came to regard as discernible by the method of diaeresis. But that discernment by diaeresis of the interrelations between forms, not descriptive definition of these forms, is the solution Plato hoped to find for young Socrates' dilemma, is, I shall contend, precisely the moral of the *Parmenides*. Definition of the essence whose reality was entailed by Plato's ontological presuppositions was at all stages the object of the vaunted science of dialectic. But after the *Parmenides* Plato adopts an entirely different method. The remarks of young Socrates at *Parm.* 129b–e may be taken to show that Plato had become aware of the problems posed by the relations necessarily entailed within the world of forms; and it is diaeresis, not hypothesis, which is brought to bear on these problems in the *Sophist*.

It is arguable both on these and other grounds whether "define" is the best translation for ὁρίζεσθαι (or ὁρίζειν: I can find no distinction between Plato's use of the active and middle when he is using the verb in this sense). However, I shall be using "definition" to mean what I think ὁρίζεσθαι meant to Plato; and some further comment is therefore necessary. There are places in the dialogues where "designate," "distinguish," or "determine" appears to be a better translation than "define." At *Gorg.* 470b εἰπὲ τίνα ὅρον ὁρίζῃ seems to mean "what criterion do you propose?" At *Phaedo* 104e (ὃ τοίνυν ἔλεγον ὁρίσασθαι) ὁρίζεσθαι seems to mean little more than "settle" or "decide." But the underlying idea is in all cases the search for essential attributes. At *Soph.* 246b ταὐτὸν σῶμα καὶ οὐσίαν ὁριζόμενοι means not what we should mean by "defining οὐσία as σῶμα" so much as "identifying οὐσία and σῶμα." At *Theaet.* 187c where the question is asked, τὴν ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην ὁρίζῃ; the point is not "do you propose to designate true opinion by the word knowledge?" but "is true opinion what knowledge really *is*?" I think that Plato's idea of definition was further reinforced by his confusion of description and reference which we find in the *Cratylus*; cf. esp. 388b, 428e, 435d.[22] Plato thought that to name something was to describe it, and that you could not really say anything useful about it without having grasped its essential nature; for this second point, cf. *Meno*

86d–e, *Prot.* 360e–361a, *Theaet.* 196d–e. Thus for Plato a full definition (although he sometimes seems only to want a distinguishing mark, as at *Euthyphro* 6d–e) must be not any equivalent or synonym but a descriptive account of those essential attributes of the thing itself which make it what it is. This is what Socrates is described by Parmenides at *Parm.* 135c–d as having attempted to do without the necessary training. It is clear that in the case of forms this will involve statements describing interrelations existing between forms, to which Plato hints that he has hitherto paid too little attention. It is this that I mean when I talk about "definition" in the remainder of this article.

We are now in a position to consider how a constructive moral may be implicit in the dialectical exercise. This must first involve the difficult question of how far Plato regarded the argumentation as valid or invalid. If he was clear in his own mind about the relative merits of the deductions, it is possible that we should interpret the exercise as giving a practice in argumentation which, after the fallacies have been successfully detected and weeded out, will leave a residue of sound doctrine adequate to explain the relation of such forms as unity both to the other forms and to particulars. On this view, all possible conclusions are to be drawn from both the existential hypothesis and its denial, in order that those which are sound may be extracted from the rest and accepted as valid. Unfortunately, for reasons which I shall now give, I do not think this is possible. But I also shall hope to show that hypotheses (4) to (8) have an independent value apart from the rest.

It is extremely difficult to distinguish clearly what in fact are the ambiguities on which the arguments of the exercise rest. However, I follow Robinson in concluding that there appear to be three principal fallacies: confusion of identity and attribution; confusion of an adjective with the substantive characterized by it; and the fallacy of reification. To these I would add a misunderstanding of the notion of nonexistence which underlies almost all the argumentation of hypotheses (5) and (6), where deductions are made about the nature of a unity which, *ex hypothesi*, does not exist. Some of the arguments appear so crassly fallacious (Robinson cites, for example, 139d–e, 147c, and 157c–d) that it seems impossible not to feel that Plato saw them to be so. But I am doubtful whether, at least until the time of writing the *Sophist*, he was more than dimly aware of the nature of the fallacies involved. Some hint of a consciousness of ambiguity appears as early as *Euthyd.* 278b; but *τὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων διαφοράν*, which is there referred to, seems to mean no more than examples as crass as puns. The confusion between identity and attribution occurs even in the *Sophist* at 244b–c

where Plato is certainly arguing in his proper person. We may be reluctant to believe that Plato saw nothing wrong with the arguments of *Parm.* 146d–e concerning sameness and difference; but his statement at *Soph.* 256a that *οὐ γὰρ ὅταν εἴπωμεν αὐτὴν ταὐτὸν καὶ μὴ ταὐτὸν ὁμοίως εἰρήκαμεν* reads more like a discovery than the recapitulation of a recognized ambiguity, nor is there even a hint of it before its occurrence here. Reification and the confusion between an adjective and the substance it characterizes are both inherent in the theory of forms itself, but, as I have tried to demonstrate, there is no warrant for holding the *Parmenides* to be a recantation of the theory. The confusion about nonexistence seems blatant at 161c–d. But until he formulated his answer about nonexistence in the *Sophist*, it is not impossible that Plato could not see why a nonexistent unity, being not equal, need not therefore be unequal.

Thus it seems improbable that Plato saw at all clearly where and why the arguments of the exercise are fallacious; and accordingly it is highly unlikely that he expected his readers to be able to do so. The view that he does not distinguish in value between the deductions is reinforced by their layout. Each conclusion appears to be deduced only in order to furnish the requisite antithesis. At 137c it is argued that if unity is one it can have no parts, at 142c–d that it must have the two parts of unity and existence. At 146a existent unity is both at rest and in motion; at 162e nonexistent unity is likewise both at rest and in motion. To cite further examples would merely be tedious. What renders conclusive the view that no residual doctrine can be intended to remain after the detection of fallacies is that on any conceivable view of Plato's awareness of the fallacies it is impossible to see what this doctrine would be. One example will be adequate to illustrate this. At 155d the conclusion that unity is knowable (which Plato must have thought sound) is reached on the curious grounds that it exists in time, therefore there will be something of it (*εἴη ἄν τι ἐκείνῳ καὶ ἐκείνου*), therefore there will be knowledge and opinion and perception of it. But at 141d–142a it has been shown unknowable because extratemporal, although in the *Timaeus* Plato appears to regard the forms as outside space and time. I accordingly conclude that Plato does not distinguish in logical merit between the different deductions, and that the moral of the exercise must lie in the fact that the contradictions are possible at all.

However, that there is a discernible purpose in the last four hypotheses as a whole is hinted by the discussion at the very beginning of the dialogue (128d). The purpose of the treatise which Zeno has been reading is said to be to show that the denial of a certain hypothesis leads

to contradictions worse than those resulting from its assertion. Now the conclusion of hypotheses (4) to (8) is summarized by the assertion at 166b–c, that if unity does not exist then nothing exists (*οὐκοῦν καὶ συλλήβδην εἰ εἴποιμεν ἓν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν οὐδέν ἐστι, ὀρθῶς ἂν εἴποιμεν*). Plato surely regarded this conclusion as more absurd than the apparent possession by unity and *τἆλλα* of contradictory predicates. This consideration does not, of course, provide the solution to these paradoxes. But the amplified Zenonian method has at least shown grounds for not concluding from these paradoxes that unity does not exist. Effort to resolve them will still be worthwhile. It remains to show how Plato may have thought such effort more likely to succeed after the performance of the dialectical exercise as a whole.

I wish to suggest that the moral of the exercise is that forms are not definable by deduction from existential hypotheses. Exhaustive application of this method has been shown to lead as legitimately to one set of contradictory conclusions as to another. This does not of itself resolve the difficulties in which Socrates finds himself, but it shows how these difficulties can arise and hints that some other method is necessary. This method is the method of diaeresis. That it is not expounded in the dialogue itself is not surprising. Parmenides twice (134e–135b, cf. 133b) stresses the length of time and discussion necessary to overcome the difficulties of the theory of forms. But that diaeresis was Plato's answer to the problems of premature definition is shown by a passage in the *Phaedrus* (277b) where definition is declared necessary to the knowledge of truth and unequivocally associated with the method of diaeresis: *Πρὶν ἄν τις τό τε ἀληθὲς ἑκάστων εἰδῇ περὶ ὧν λέγει ἢ γράφει κατ' αὐτό τε πᾶν ὁρίζεσθαι δυνατὸς γένηται ὁρισάμενός τε πάλιν κατ' εἴδη μέχρι τοῦ ἀτμήτου τέμνειν ἐπιστηθῇ.* (Cf. 265d–266c.) The gymnastic exercise shows that the properties of unity and its relations with *τἆλλα* cannot be deduced from the premise of its existence, although denial of its existence will engender both for itself and *τἆλλα* contradictions which are at least as absurd. It thus paves the way for a method which defines forms by determining their relations with each other. Indeed, that the forms are in some sense ineffable seems implied by Plato at all stages of his writing; cf. *Symp.* 211a, *Ep. VII* 343b, *Rep.* 533a. After the *Parmenides*, however, Plato seems to have been convinced that the best way to attempt to grasp the essential nature of a form was not by hypothesis and deduction of its properties but by location of its place in the hierarchy of forms.

It is, of course, in fact the case that diaeresis does not resolve the difficulties raised in the *Parmenides*.[23] Indeed, as we have seen, they

are insoluble, since the theory of forms is logically unsound. But although certain commentators, including Ryle and Cherniss, have sought to minimize its importance, Plato assigns it unmistakable prominence in the later dialogues and makes explicit and extravagant claims on its behalf (most notably at *Phil.* 16c–e, *Phaedr.* 266b). The method of dichotomous division[24] is not, of course, the same as that which discovers the relations of the μέγιστα γένη. But both exemplify aspects of the new method which is concerned to distinguish those ontological interrelations which Plato assumed to exist. I do not find it incredible that although the method does not resolve the problems inherent in forms Plato should have believed it capable of doing so. The *Philebus* does not (as Stenzel claims it does) resolve the problems of participation by the method expounded in the *Sophist*. But it does at least appear to hint at the existence of a solution to the problem of "One and Many" which we may suppose Plato to have thought the key to the question of participation; and the *Sophist* does settle some, at least, of the problems of interrelation between forms to which our attention has been drawn in the *Parmenides*. The conclusion of the *Parmenides* is that the forms must exist despite the problems they raise. But they cannot be defined (or described or deduced from) in the way that the young Socrates had thought that they could. The gymnastic exercise, by leading to this conclusion, points the way to a method which will prove useful by charting the interrelations between the forms, which we know must exist.

How far Plato may have been aware of the fallacies in the argumentation and how far he had the method of diaeresis explicitly in mind[25] must remain to some extent matters of speculation. But this does not invalidate the conclusion that the exercise demonstrates that some other method must be found for resolving the difficulties within the world of forms; and it is this new method which Plato brings to bear on the μέγιστα γένη in the *Sophist*. It is the thorough performance and examination of the γυμνασία which shows the way to a method which does explain or bypass the most important of the contradictions engendered by the method of deduction from existential hypotheses. The conclusion which Plato intended his readers to draw should perhaps be stated no more strongly than as follows: Since apparent contradictions can be deduced from even the simple hypothesis or denial of so fundamental and pervasive a form as unity, it is not to be wondered that the relation of forms to particulars is not capable of being clearly expressed; and a different method must be adopted for the explication of the forms, which although knowable to the trained philosopher are not precisely definable.

I am myself unable to form any confident opinion as to how far the *Parmenides* should be regarded as the deliberate and conscious precursor of the *Sophist*. But that the *Sophist* does offer some solution to the problems raised in the *Parmenides* is, I think, beyond question. Further, I hope I have shown that the *Parmenides* is best interpreted as to some extent paving the way for this solution. My view, if it is correct, embodies the contention that the purpose of the second part is dialectical training, but it gives this training a relevance lacking to the purely gymnastic interpretation. On any interpretation the exercise is so completely and deliberately exhaustive as to be tediously long. But I hope to have shown that it is likely that Plato intended some moral to be drawn from it, and that the dialogue can accordingly be seen to be both serious in content and coherent in form.[26]

NOTES

1. I list some of the more important recent contributions: G. Ryle, "Plato's Parmenides," *Mind* N.S. XLVIII (1939) 129ff.; R. Scoon, "Plato's Parmenides," *Mind* N.S. LI (1942) 115ff.; R. Robinson, "Plato's *Parmenides*," *Classical Philology* XXXVII (1942) 51ff., 159ff; Sir David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951) 86ff.; A. L. Peck, "Plato's Parmenides," *Classical Quarterly* N.S. III (1953) 126ff.; G. Vlastos, "The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides," *Philosophical Review* LXIII (1954) 319ff. (also W. Sellars, *ibid.* LXIV (1955) 405–37; Vlastos, *ibid.* 438–48; P. T. Geach, *ibid.* LXV (1956) 72–82, Vlastos, *ibid.* 83–94; R. S. Bluck, "The Parmenides and the Third Man," *Classical Quarterly* N.S. VI (1956) 29ff.); K. Johannsen, "The One and the Many," *Classica et Mediaevalia* XVIII (1957) 1ff.

2. This view, already held by Burnet and Taylor, has been revived by Peck.

3. Cf. Arist. *Met.* 1079b 25–6, where Aristotle justly points out τὸ δὲ λέγειν παραδείγματα εἶναι καὶ μετέχειν αὐτῶν τὰ ἄλλα κενολογεῖν ἐστι καὶ μεταφορὰς λέγειν ποιητικάς.

4. Cf. *Euthyphro* 12c, where reverence is described as a part of fear.

5. Most notoriously expressed at *Prot.* 330c where the conclusion that justice is just seems to be arrived at by a fallacious use of the excluded middle: it is clearly absurd to say that justice is unjust, therefore it must be just. Cf. *Phaedo* 74d (equality is equal) and 100d (beauty is beautiful).

6. Thus Peck, 136. However, Peck has earlier admitted (p. 134) that forms do not depend on souls for their existence. It must therefore presumably follow that particulars do.

7. Among them Taylor, Cornford, Scoon, and Peck.

8. For a fuller recent treatment of the problems here mentioned, see A. Wedberg, *Plato's Philosophy of Mathematics* (Stockholm, 1955).

9. I do not think that it is necessary to consider here what may or may not have been Plato's later views on the form of τὸ ἕν and the ideal numbers as a whole. However we are to understand the accounts of Aristotle, Theophrastus, and the rest, it is clear that the closer Plato came to a mathematical theory of

the ideas the more metaphysically important τὸ ἕν became and the more closely affiliated to the Idea of the Good; cf. *Met.* 1091a–b. But there is no evidence that at the time of writing the *Parmenides* Plato had formulated any of these doctrines in the form in which they are later described by Aristotle; nor does Aristotle ever refer to the *Parmenides* in his discussion of them. It is enough to note in the preoccupations of the *Parmenides* a foreshadowing (at most) of Plato's later doctrines.

10. This mistake seems to me to be made by Johannsen in his remarks on the *Parmenides*. To say (p. 22) that the second part of the dialogue "deals with or touches on almost all serious problems in Plato's philosophy" does not make it legitimate to extract from the hypotheses selected doctrinal implications (as opposed to preoccupations) unless the selection is justified by a satisfactory interpretation of the dialectical exercise as a whole.

11. Cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (New York, 1939) 131–34.

12. Robinson, 181–86; on Cherniss ("Parmenides and the *Parmenides* of Plato," *A.J.P.* LIII [1932] 122–38), 166–68.

13. Ross, 99, 101.

14. Robinson, 178.

15. Cf. *Philebus* 15d–16a.

16. Robinson, 76.

17. I am, of course, aware of the continuing discussion of this problem. I do not propose to enter this discussion here: but see for example J. L. Ackrill, "Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251–259," *J.H.S.* LXXVII (1957) (1) 1–6.

18. This is in fact suggested by Peck, 38.

19. Peck, 136–37.

20. Cf. Harold Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* I (Baltimore, 1944) 214 n. 128.

21. On the question in general I am entirely in agreement with the analysis of Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1953) 49–60.

22. Cf. Robinson, "A Criticism of Plato's Cratylus," *Philosophical Review* LXV (1956) 324–41, esp. p. 337. Against, Ronald B. Levinson, "Language and the Cratylus: Four Questions," *Review of Metaphysics* XI (1957) 28–41, esp. p. 37. Levinson's treatment, however, is extremely cursory and, in my view, altogether inadequate.

23. Stenzel appears to have thought it did in his *Plato's Method of Dialectic* (tr. D. J. Allen, Oxford, 1940) 138ff. He seems also to have thought (p. 135) that all relations between forms are of species to genus. But the relations described in the *Sophist* between the μέγιστα γένη are not of this kind.

24. It should also be noted that the method is not necessarily dichotomous. This is explicitly stated at *Pol.* 287c and *Phil.* 16d.

25. That the dialogue is an indirect and not very successful recommendation of communion is the interpretation of D. W. Hamlyn, "The Communion of the Forms and the Development of Plato's Logic," *Philosophical Quarterly* V (1955) 295–300. But he holds this on the grounds that the first part shows the dangers of pluralism and the second of monism. That this view is incompatible with my own is, I hope, clear.

26. Since writing this article I am indebted to Mr. J. M. E. Moravcsik for pointing out to me that my view of the independent value of hypotheses (5) to (8) closely follows that of Constantin Ritter.