

The Structure of Forms in Plato's Theory of Forms

Róbert Toth

*A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)*

© Róbert Toth, 2023

Thesis supervisor: prof. Vasilis Politis

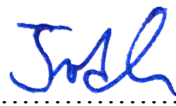
School of Social Sciences and Philosophy,
Trinity College Dublin

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the Library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

I consent ~~/do not consent~~ to the examiner retaining a copy of the thesis beyond the examining period, should they so wish (EU GDPR May 2018).


.....

Summary

Title

The Structure of Forms in Plato's Theory of Forms

The overall aim of the dissertation

The overall aim of this PhD dissertation is to consider and examine the relations between Forms in Plato's theory of Forms. Undertaking this task does not require a full account of Plato's theory of Forms, rather it requires a systematic and comprehensive investigation of how, according to Plato in different dialogues and different stages of his philosophical career, each Form is related to other Forms. For the purpose of this dissertation, I treat as familiar Plato's claim that sensible things are what they are in relation to and by participating in particular Forms.

The main thesis of the dissertation is that Plato always, both before and after the *Parmenides*, in which he appears to submit the theory of Forms to critical investigation and assessment, held a single coherent view about the relations between Forms. This is the view that each Form, in addition to being what it is *in virtue of itself* (e.g. the Form of justice being, in virtue of itself and being the very thing it is, a certain harmony of the soul) has a number of properties *in virtue of its relation to certain other Forms*. According to this account of Plato's view, which it is my aim to defend, each Form has a determinate structure, which consists of a combination of what it is *in virtue of itself* (*kath' auto*) and what it is *in virtue of its relation to certain other Forms* (*pros allo*).

This overall thesis of the dissertation is of particular interest and significance, not least because it goes against a dominant (though not universally accepted) view in the literature, according to which Plato changed his mind radically about this issue and question in and when he wrote the *Parmenides*. According to this widely held view among critics, which it is my aim to argue against and refute and replace with a positive account, Plato, before the *Parmenides* and in such major dialogues as *Republic*, *Phaedo* and *Symposium*, held that individual Forms are what they are simply in virtue of themselves, and that Forms do not stand in relations to other Forms. Likewise according to this widely held view of Plato's Forms and the theory of Forms, Plato came to realise in the *Parmenides* that each Form must stand in relations to other Forms, and he developed this view further in such dialogues as the *Sophist*.

A major aim of this dissertation is to argue against this dominant view in the literature and to show that, on the contrary, Plato holds, throughout these dialogues (including *Charmides*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Parmenides* and *Sophist*) a single coherent view about Forms, what they are in virtue of themselves, and what they are in virtue of their relations to each other.

Chapter 1

In this chapter I consider and analyse what it means for Forms to be atomic, that is, not to stand in relations to each other. This, of course, is not my own view of Forms, but the analysis is necessary in order to have a clear and well-defined target of my investigations and criticisms.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4

In these three chapters I examine and analyse that passage early in the *Parmenides* in which Socrates challenges Parmenides to show how Forms might display opposite properties. I show that this passage can be understood, and has been understood by critics, in a number of very different ways. In particular, and most important for my purpose, I argue that the passage can be understood *either* as involving the claim that Forms cannot display opposite properties *or* as not involving this claim at all but being rather an expression of a positive and constructive question and *aporia*, that is, the question how Forms can display opposite properties.

Chapter 5

In this chapter I put forward and articulate and defend my own positive proposal regarding the relations between Forms; and, in doing so, I draw substantially on what has been achieved so far in the dissertation. According to my proposal, two things are, for Plato, internal requirements of any adequate theory of Forms. First, each Form has a multiplicity of properties. Secondly, each Form must stand in relations to other Forms.

Chapters 6 and 7

In these two chapters I begin by introducing the distinction in *Sophist* 255c–d according to which each thing is what it is partly in virtue of itself (*kath' auto*) and partly in virtue of its relations to things that are Forms. I distinguish a variety of ways in which this passage can be understood and has been understood by critics. I argue that the right way of understanding the distinction is indeed in the metaphysical sense (as opposed to various semantic ways in which the passage has been understood by critics) of a basic distinction between what something is in virtue of itself and what it is in virtue of its relation to Forms. I argue that this is indeed Michael Frede's account of Plato's distinction, and I argue that my distinctive way of understanding it differs from Frede's in a number of notable ways.

Chapter 8

In this chapter I identify and examine a number of criticisms and objections that critics have raised against Frede's account of Plato's distinction; and I show how these objections can be answered, also by drawing on my own variant of Frede's account.

Chapter 9

In this chapter I examine the commonly held view that, for Plato, the Form of a quality *F* is itself *F* (= self-predication). I argue that Plato was never committed to self-predication, either expressly or as a consequence of his view of the relations between Forms.

Acknowledgements

*To Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas;
for they taught us to marvel at Being.*

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to prof. Vasilis Politis, who was guiding me and my whole research for almost five years, and without whom I would not be able to write this dissertation in the first place. You became my mentor and my personal paragon of honest academic work. The academy still has a chance as long as there are people like you around.

Katka, you are the glimpse of eternity in this ever-changing world of temporality, my heart and my home. Thank you for being who you are.

I would not have started this journey at all without the study at the Collegium of Anton Neuwirth, which changed everything. I am grateful to all the people working there – my colleagues and my dearest friends, who turned a computer scientist into a philosopher.

Lastly, I would like to thank the wonderful crew of Triple Five Coffee Jozefská, where the majority of this work was written. So long and thanks for all the coffee!

Veritas

Contents

Introduction.....	10
The standard reading and my proposal.....	10
The methodology of the project and its related problems.....	12
The motivation and consequences of the project.....	17
Part I: The atomicity of Forms	
1 The logical options of the atomicity of Forms.....	22
1.1 The atomicity of Forms.....	24
1.2 Atomicity as simplicity.....	25
1.3 Atomicity as independence.....	33
2 Parmenides, the turning point of the Theory of Forms.....	50
2.1 The logical analysis of the first question.....	52
3 The logical analysis of the second question.....	64
3.1 The negative reading in general: the statement imparts an impossibility.....	65
3.2 Countering the negative reading.....	67
3.3 The compresence of opposites as the cause of the negative reading.....	76
3.4 The positive reading: The statement is a constructive challenge.....	108
4 The logical analysis of the third question.....	120
4.1 Explanation A: Plato's thinking evolved and he just realised the problem.....	121
4.2 Explanation B: Plato explains the fine points of his Theory.....	125
4.3 Explanation C: Plato is undergoing an exercise in logic and dialectics.....	128
4.4 Explanation D: The dialogue is meant as criticism of other philosophers.....	132
5 My proposed reading.....	136
5.1 Reassessing the atomicity of Forms.....	137
5.2 Plato's shift of focus: an alternative reading.....	139
5.3 The communion of Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues.....	141

Part II: The relations of Forms

6 Two ways of speaking of beings in Plato.....	158
6.1 Pros alla – kath auto distinction in the Sophist.....	164
7 Three interpretations of the passage.....	172
7.1 Interpretation A: A distinction between single- and multi-place predicates.....	173
7.2 Interpretation B: A distinction between self-subsisting (substantial) and dependent (accidental) beings.....	178
7.3 Interpretation C: A distinction between beings referenced to themselves and beings referenced to other things.....	187
8 Criticisms and problems of Frede’s account.....	198
8.1 Leigh’s criticism of Frede’s account.....	198
8.2 Brown’s contribution to the interpretation of the Sophist.....	214
8.3 Tracing the origin of the kath auto – pros alla distinction.....	227
9 Self-predication and Forms.....	236
9.1 The origins of the naïve general theory of self-predication.....	237
9.2 An account of the limits of self-predication in the Charmides.....	244
9.3 The relevance to the Theory of Forms.....	258
References.....	270

Introduction

This dissertation sets out to investigate the structure of Forms in Plato's metaphysical Theory of Forms, as presented by Plato in his dialogues. This investigation will be carried out following the twofold perspective from which we might look at the problem of the structure of Forms: first, we might analyse each Form in itself and ask whether it has any internal structure. And second, from the perspective of external connections the Form might have, under which we could investigate its possible relations to other Forms. These two perspectives of looking at the structure of Forms correlate to two notions of *atomicity* of Forms: atomicity understood as their internal simplicity, and atomicity understood as their isolation from other Forms.

Among the historical as well as contemporary scholars, both of these notions of atomicity—and each in several different variants—have been claimed to be present in Plato's Theory of Forms. It will be an aim of this dissertation to argue against such interpretations of Plato's Theory of Forms, and also against the alleged development of Plato's thinking which these interpretations require. I will defend a thesis that Plato never held that Forms are atomic in either of the senses and I will show that, on the contrary, the view that Forms have several properties and are related to each other can be traced back even into the early dialogues, and is maintained by Plato in the late dialogues as well.

The standard reading and my proposal

Regarding the theory of Forms, there exists among scholars a commonly held developmentalist theory claiming that before the *Parmenides* (and in its first part), Plato considered Forms to be atomic and unmixed among each other. Allegedly, it is only throughout the second part of the dialogue where Plato decided to start rethinking his position. Depending on the precise subkind of the developmentalist approach, Plato since then either completely abandoned the Theory, or under the weight of criticisms changed his mind about the Forms being atomic and later updated the Theory to allow them to relate to each other.

This view itself presupposes a certain chronological sequence of the dialogues in the corpus. At least the *Republic*, the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium* are taken to be pre-Parmenidean—that is, written before the dialogue *Parmenides*—, and are claimed to

contain the early doctrine of the Theory of Forms, where the Forms are separate and isolated from each other. On the other hand, the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* are treated as late, post-Parmenidean dialogues,¹ based on the observation that Plato explicitly speaks about communion and hierarchies of “kinds”.² Whether these “kinds” are still interpreted as Forms depends on the particular branch of the developmentalist reading. They are either understood as interrelated Forms in the late “revised” Theory of Forms, or as some different entities (e.g., as universal terms) that play the role in a new theory put forward by Plato to replace the Theory of Forms that was beyond repair.

One of the aims of my project is to argue against this interpretation. One reason for this is that it is simply not plausible. Developmentalist’ claim is mostly based on what is missing in Plato’s pre-Parmenidean dialogues, namely the explicit claim that Forms *do* interrelate. Now, there is an infinite number of topics and assertions that can be (veridically) shown to be *not* present in some dialogue, but that *per se* can never be used as a proof for a claim that Plato rejects that particular missing statement. Just as it is very problematic to claim—as some critics do, based on the bare fact that Forms are not mentioned in the *Theaetetus* at all—that by the time of this dialogue, Plato has abandoned his Theory of Forms altogether.³

Secondly, I reject this view simply because I am going to defend my own proposal which speaks against it. The previous problems are usually taken by developmentalists to construct a proof that up until this point, Plato held that Forms are atomic, and in the *Parmenides* he is forced to reconsider his position. However, I believe “the most likely story” of the *Parmenides* is different. My proposal is that **Plato never held that Forms are atomic**—on the contrary, the view that Forms are relational and non-atomic can be traced even into the dialogues preceding the *Parmenides*, as I will show below. At the same time, however, it seems that **up until the *Parmenides*, Plato did not give an account of these interrelations**, and thus in the *Parmenides* he decided to submit this feature of Forms to scrutiny for the first time.

The two notions of atomicity are interconnected and mutually support each other in such a way that if either of them is assumed, the other can be shown to be true as well as its necessary corollary. Thus, if we presuppose a variant of internal simplicity of Forms, it is

¹ I will be using the terms “pre-Parmenidean” and “post-Parmenidean” to refer to the events and works (mostly Plato’s own) written before and after, respectively, Plato’s *dialogue* *Parmenides*, and not *Parmenides* the historical figure.

² For this division of dialogues, see e.g. Gill 2012, Introduction.

³ For the discussion about the possible abandonment of the Theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus*, see e.g. Adalier 2001.

relatively easy to show that Forms cannot be in communion with each other. And vice versa, denying that Forms are interrelated will more or less directly lead us to the conclusion that each Form can only have one property corresponding to its own essential character. In my analysis of different developmentalist positions, I will show that they all contain one or both of these assumptions, which led their authors to postulate a twofold development in Plato's thinking. First, Plato's denial of plurality of properties in Forms is challenged in the *Parmenides*, where it is shown that Forms need to have several properties in order to be and to be conceivable at all. And second, his view that Forms are not in any communion with themselves is then directly retracted in the *Sophist*, where the differentiation of the senses in which Forms have their properties is introduced.

But if it could be shown that Plato did not at any point hold either of these notions of atomicity, another interpretative way opens up, which would maintain the fundamental unity of Plato's thinking throughout the dialogues and would not require us to postulate dramatic changes into Plato's Theory of Forms, and thus to discard as no longer valid Plato's claims connected with the Theory of Forms from the earlier dialogues. Therefore, to counter these views, I will analyse the two notions of atomicity through the examination of the two primary dialogues, *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, to which will correspond the two parts of the dissertation. I will investigate different logical options of their interpretation and, with the help of the supplementary dialogues from the pre-Parmenidean era, I will show that Plato expected both the communion of Forms and the Forms to have multiple properties. Thus, I will show that not only is it not required to postulate development in Plato's thinking in order to give plausible meaning to the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, but moreover such interpretations contradict what Plato already said in the dialogues preceding the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*.

The methodology of the project and its related problems

Three principal methodological questions offer themselves immediately the moment a project promising to enquire about the structure of Forms in Plato's Theory of Forms is proposed. **Most importantly**, it might be asked whether such a project should not start with an extensive chapter providing an account of Forms themselves: that is, above all and at the very least, what they *are*. The problem in providing that account is that it would greatly inflate the extent of the project, which has already in its aim enough problems as it is now. There are several very different theories about the nature of Plato's Forms. From the generally accepted ones, claiming that Forms are eternal particulars existing outside of the

physical world, through a theory that Forms are universal abstract nouns, up to the definition of Forms as logical predicates. Giving a proper account of these (and many more) theories, and deciding for and defending a single one amongst them would take a project on its own.

Still, the request is understandable and legitimate, and the question cannot be easily dismissed. Therefore, where the topic allows that, my method will be to stay neutral towards particular theories of what Forms are. Most problems I will examine in the thesis will allow me to stay uncommitted to any definite answer to Forms' nature, provided that I have identified a minimal set of properties that are widely accepted to belong to Forms, as, for example, their unchangeability, eternity and intelligibility, and that are required for my project. One of the more controversial properties of Forms is their separateness, since some of the scholars I will be analysing have proposed that Plato in a later stage of his career abandoned the idea that Forms exist separately from the particulars participating in them. While responding to this theory is not my direct aim, I will nevertheless address it indirectly, since I will disagree with the underlying idea that any such dramatic development occurred in Plato's Theory.

Additionally, one of the features of Plato's Theory of Forms which will be assumed throughout the thesis, is the view that Forms for Plato do not play merely a linguistic role, but that they also have a metaphysical role independent of human cognition and language. Forms allow sensible things (and also other Forms, as we will see) to have the characteristics they have precisely by the latter standing in relation of participation with the former. Thus, Forms provide metaphysical explanation of these characteristics by each Form acting as an ontological grounding for one particular characteristic. This is in fact one of the distinctive features of Plato's philosophy, and as such this view is not particularly controversial; it might even be considered "standard" in Plato's scholarship. Nevertheless, it is not accepted universally by all Platonic scholars, and for this reason it is important to note that I will in this dissertation presuppose such understanding of Plato's philosophy.

It is the view which Plato communicates in the *Phaedo* when he has Socrates telling Cebes that "all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful", since "it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful".⁴ At the very least, I take it, this tells us that Plato in postulating a Form seeks for explanation and justification of the character in question – and that on an ontological, not merely logical or linguistic level. The answer to the Socratic

⁴ *Phaedo* 100d–e; translated by G. M. A. Grube (1997).

τί ἐστι? (“What is X?”) question—uttered while we are looking at the manifold beautiful things and having in focus precisely the fact that they are all beautiful—is the Form of Beauty. Then again, the answer to the *τί ἐστι?* question, when asked about the Form of Beauty itself, is *again* the same Form of Beauty, because Forms are the basis of causation and explanation. Therefore, although I will remain neutral with regard to the precise specification of the nature of Forms, since such specification is not needed for the purpose of this dissertation and its main thesis, I will treat as familiar and accepted at least this Plato’s claim, namely that sensible things are what they are *in relation to* and *by participating in* particular Forms.

Secondly, a similar issue can be raised by asking whether, to take on my project, I also need to consider whether Plato *actually had* a Theory of Forms at all. Harte sums up that “not everyone agrees that Plato has what should be described as a theory of Forms”,⁵ as she addresses this question in her short, but very illuminating chapter on Plato’s metaphysics. It has been suggested, for example, that Plato was not so much interested in creating a positive Theory, with the dialogues serving as “vehicles for doctrine”, but that he meant them as “more open pieces of philosophical thinking, constructed in part so that they engage the reader”.⁶ This would clearly speak against any definite, doctrinally understood Theory of Forms. Again, the question cannot be fully answered in my project, as it would require focusing on different passages in Plato’s corpus, and selecting and evaluating a completely different set of literature. Yet, I believe my unitarian approach to interpreting Plato’s Theory of Forms will nevertheless shine a light on the question, since it will show that there is a remarkable consistency in Plato’s way of speaking about the atomicity and relations of Forms even among chronologically distant dialogues – a feature which speaks in favour of the existence of *some* Theory of Forms, or at least of a consistent set of views which Plato held with regard to the atomicity and relations of Forms.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that despite the critique of the doctrinal interpretative attitudes to Plato’s dialogues, it has also been recognized that “there is equally no reason, however, to think that dialogues thus understood as philosophical conversations should be completely agnostic about any conclusion at all”.⁷ Even the opponents of a dogmatic reading of Platonic corpus today admit that “the skeptical interpretation is flawed”,⁸ as Gonzales put it:

⁵ Harte 2008, p. 193.

⁶ McCabe 2015, p. 27.

⁷ McCabe 2015, p. 27.

⁸ Gonzalez 1995, p. 13.

While the dialogues may be unsystematic, it is clearly not the case that they contain only problems, refutations, and questions. They suggest some sort of positive philosophy. If one wants to claim that this positive philosophy is not a “system” nor a set of “doctrines,” then the burden is on one to explain what exactly it is. [—Gonzalez 1995, p. 13]

Thus, the question about the Theory of Forms does not have to be answered by a straight ‘yes’ or ‘no’ – the dichotomy is false, because there clearly *are* some pieces of “positive philosophy” in Plato’s way of speaking about Forms, and properly recognising them does not require one to submit to the existence of a complete, all-encompassing Theory of Forms. And that, in fact, is all that is needed for the purposes of my dissertation, since it deals only with parts of the Theory of Forms – namely those that are primarily connected with the (denial or acceptance of) atomicity and relations of Forms.

Thirdly, it might be objected that by drawing the clash between the developmentalist and unitarian approaches to Plato (and by defending the latter one), I am uncritically assuming a false dichotomy between these two interpretative options. It is true that if one undertook to create a complete taxonomy of all Platonic interpretations, both historical and contemporary ones, the most general division of them would probably not be the one between the developmentalist and unitarian approaches, but between the “doctrinal” and “sceptical” readings of Plato.⁹ For the first question a Platonic scholar needs to ask and answer to himself—even before attempting to interpret what he sees in Plato’s writings—is whether he takes Plato to be communicating *any doctrines at all* to his readers. As summed up by Wolfsdorf:

The history of the reception of Plato has been described as oscillating between two poles, doctrinal and skeptical. [...] Doctrinal interpretations maintain that Plato conceived of the dialogues as containing and conveying knowledge. Accordingly, such interpretations focus on the positive doctrines and conclusions that emerge from discussions in the texts. Skeptical interpretations understand Plato to be an epistemological skeptic of some kind. Accordingly, they focus on aporiai and inconclusiveness in the discussions in the texts.

[—Wolfsdorf 2008, pp. 4–5]

To this extent, my thesis might be said to assume a “doctrinal” interpretation of Plato, since it presupposes that there indeed *are* some doctrines or positive philosophical

⁹ For an excellent summary of historical approaches to Plato, see Wolfsdorf (2008), subchapter “1.2 *Interpreting Plato*”, pp. 4–7. For a systematic overview of different possible interpretative stances to Plato’s dialogues, see Gonzalez (1995), chapter “1. *Introduction: A Short History of Platonic Interpretation and the Third Way*” (esp. pp. 1–13). The whole book (edited by) Gonzales is also an excellent source for a wide variety of alternative or “third way” interpretations of Plato.

For an overview of the development of Platonic scholarship in the 20th century, with an attempt to formulate the “dogmas” of the mid-century Platonic scholarship, see Press (1996). The most recent development of the last 25 years is summarised in a follow-up version of the article in Press (2018).

advancements that Plato wants to communicate to us, his readers.¹⁰ In doing so, this dissertation takes an approach similar to Aristotle and Plato's immediate successors in the Old Academy, who treated Plato doctrinally¹¹ – and, on the other hand, it rejects the fully-aporetic approach which “portrays Plato as a skeptic refusing to advance philosophical doctrines of his own and instead using his argumentative, poetic, and rhetorical skills to undermine conceit and promote open-ended inquiry”, as Gonzalez described.¹²

However, this does not mean that I am assuming a fully doctrinal stance under which every question Plato raised in his dialogues eventually gets its ultimate answer. The dissertation focuses on the questions of the atomicity and relations of Forms, and thus the field in which I assume a generally doctrinal approach is limited to these topics. In other words, I take it that there *are* some positive claims which Plato made with regard to the atomicity and relations of Forms (as I already expressed in my answer to the previous objection). However, I also believe this initial assumption will show itself as highly reasonable, since the dialogues which deal with these topics display remarkable similarities both in the way of stating these problems, and in their answers to them – as will be demonstrated in the course of this dissertation.

There are probably several more difficult and complex questions that are not central to the topic of my project, and yet will nevertheless require my attention because they are somehow connected to or have a bearing on the issues central to the project. Generally, my methodological approach in these cases will be to address such issues not preemptively, but only as they appear in the course of the natural development of the thesis. That way only the relevant and necessary aspects of these questions will be addressed, thus keeping the project within its scope, and at the same time it will be maintained that they are seen and examined through the perspective of the main project goal.

¹⁰ However, it should also be noted that there is a disagreement between Platonic scholars on the question whether the entire *unitarian – developmentalist* division might be subsumed under the dogmatic side of the *dogmatic – sceptic* division. For example, Benson takes “the developmentalist / unitarian dispute to presuppose a doctrinal interpretation of Plato” and, consequently, he takes “the doctrinal / nondoctrinal dispute to be roughly orthogonal to the developmentalist / unitarian dispute” (Benson 2015, p. 8, n. 20.). But Wolfsdorf, on the other hand, claims that “in principle both developmentalist and unitarian interpretations may be doctrinal or skeptical interpretations” (Wolfsdorf 2008, p. 6, n. 9.).

¹¹ As noted by Wolfsdorf 2008, p. 5.

¹² Gonzalez 1995, p. 3.

The motivation and consequences of the project

The motivation of the project arises from the importance of the question of the structure of Forms in Plato's Theory of Forms itself. The problems of simplicity and interrelation of Forms deserve serious treatment, but although they have already been examined by many critics,¹³ when the topic is discussed, it is too often done so with almost tribal tendencies among commentators: some claim that it is obvious that Forms are and always were interrelated for Plato, while others assert that it is absolutely without doubt that Plato only realised their interrelation later and it is precisely this realisation that caused a serious shift in his Theory. This situation itself calls for examination, since, philosophically speaking, not much can be done when the discussion devolves into "arguments from obviousness". To avoid the same "obvious story" pit, my methodology will be different. I will be analysing the project questions and its related issues through logical analysis of possible options of interpretation. The examination of the historical and state of the art discussion won't be avoided nor ignored, but these different theories will be looked into (and challenged) through their position in this logical analysis.

Therefore, the obvious positive consequence of the project will be, first and foremost, the resulting proper analysis of the key questions related to the structure of Forms in Plato's Theory of Forms. Moreover, if my thesis that Forms are and always were necessarily interconnected will be successfully proven, this would entail several other outcomes. Firstly, the thesis will pose a strong argument against the developmentalist theory and its claim that the early and the late Theory of Forms—if there indeed is a late theory of Forms—are fundamentally different and incompatible.

Secondly, my thesis is independent of the widely-accepted general theory of self-predication which claims that each Form itself must have the character it provides to its participants. It seems to me that this reading of Plato's Theory is simply wrong, and if I will be successful in offering a plausible account on structure and interrelation of Forms which does not depend on self-predication, it will be a very solid ground on which further argumentation against this view will be possible.

¹³ The question of the atomicity of Forms—either understood as their simplicity or as the denial of their interrelations—is one of the oldest and most disputed ones in Plato's scholarship. We will examine the different stances critics took both in the past and today in the first chapter, *1 The logical options of the atomicity of Forms*. The goal, however, will not be to cover an entire scholarship from the *historical* perspective, but to cover all *logical* options of understanding atomicity, and merely *illustrate* these positions by specific critics who adopted them.

Third, the developmentalist accounts of Plato's thought have one sympathetic and almost tempting feature in common: they allow connecting the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle by "bridging" them with the late, developed Plato, thus creating a "smooth transition" from Plato to Aristotle. However, as I will show throughout my work, to postulate a smooth philosophical transition from Plato to Aristotle requires us to read into late Plato (post-Parmenidean dialogues in particular) the thoughts of which we have no actual written record in those works themselves.

And ever since the publication of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962, we should be aware that the idea of the gradual, uninterrupted progress in sciences is in many cases merely a false attempt of harmonising the developments that were not a smooth transitions, but actually a very disrupting steps in the progress of a particular science. Aristotle's philosophy was not a "small step forward" from late Plato – instead, it was a huge leap from it. And if we might learn something from the reception of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies and how different they were in their later developments—for example, by contrasting the philosophies of St Augustine and of St Thomas Aquinas—, it would be precisely the same fact that Aristotle's philosophy was, already in its origins, a revolution away from Plato. On the other hand, if my unitarian interpretation of Plato's philosophy is correct, it allows us to place this philosophical development where it is more natural to occur: not *inside* the philosophy of a single man, Plato – but *between* the philosophies of two great philosophers, a teacher and his pupil: Plato and Aristotle.

Part I:
The atomicity of Forms

1 The logical options of the atomicity of Forms

The investigation of the structure of Forms—and, thus, of the accompanying problem of the atomicity of Forms—is undoubtedly one of the dominant topics of Plato’s late dialogues. The most notable evidence for the fact that Plato was indeed preoccupied with the problem appears in the dialogues *Parmenides* and *Sophist*.

In the *Parmenides*, the whole second part (from 137c ff.) consists of a host of antinomies structured by Parmenides into eight hypotheses, which are all driven by Socrates’ earlier request (129b) that he should show him Forms exhibiting in themselves opposite properties. Depending on the angle of argument in each particular hypothesis, both interlocutors always end up either with an account of Forms in which they are all interrelated, with the result that each Form must bear the characteristics of every other Form¹⁴ and thus loses its own unique identity, or with an opposite extreme where no Form is related to any other, but ends up lacking even its own proper characteristic. The issue is clearly serious enough to bring thoughts of both dialecticians even to consider dropping the Theory of Forms altogether, although they undoubtedly and with evident confidence quickly reject the idea (135c).

The *Sophist*, a dialogue now considered to be later than the *Parmenides* by virtually all contemporary critics, seems to take on from where the earlier dialogue left off. In the first part (till 249d), Plato investigates how a false speech is possible, and to do that, he needs to “insist by brute force both that *that which is not* somehow is, and then again that *that which is* somehow is not”,¹⁵ with the result that *Being* and *Non-Being* themselves must somehow blend. The second part continues with “an account of how we call the very same thing [...] by several names” (251a) and leads into the explicit discussion about the interrelation of selected “most important” Forms (254c ff.).

Based on this evidence, I accept the reading that the main motivations of the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* are the problems of interrelation and simplicity of Forms, and I will build upon this reading in the following text. It is true that in the past, several very different interpretations of the message of the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* were proposed by

¹⁴ “Each Form” and “every other Form”: that is, each Form or every other Form, respectively, from a complete set of Forms referred to in the dialogue.

¹⁵ *Sophist* 241d, trans. by White (1997). Throughout this chapter, I will standardly use the translation of the *Sophist* by Nicholas P. White (1997), unless noted otherwise.

critics. For example, it has been claimed that the *Parmenides* is not to be taken as a serious treatise on the Theory of Forms, but as a parody of the positions that Parmenides and Zeno themselves defended. Alternatively, it was also seen as a criticism of Eleatic or Megarian logic,¹⁶ which the logical absurdities of the second part should help to reject. Yet another approach was to understand *Parmenides* as an elaborate exercise in dialectics, which Socrates was meant to receive in order to become a proper philosopher.¹⁷ I will briefly address these alternative readings, but I will not consider them in full in this work for two reasons. Firstly, because after reading these interpretations, I do not personally see them as being plausible, and the word-extent of the present work is too limited to address all alternative approaches and readings in due length. But secondly and more importantly, it is currently a well-accepted standard reading in the Platonic scholarship that the simplicity and interrelation of Forms are indeed the principal problems that are being put under scrutiny by Parmenides' criticisms.¹⁸ Similarly, the fact that the *Parmenides* was meant by Plato as a serious treatise is now accepted by most critics.¹⁹

* * * * *

The purpose of this first part of the work is to consider the problem of atomicity of Forms from the perspective of the *Parmenides*, where it is for the first time systematically put under the philosophical scrutiny by Plato himself. The current part of the work is divided into five chapters. Each of the first four chapters will offer a critical analysis of the state of the art discussion about one specific problem connected with the atomicity of Forms. This analysis will be undertaken, for each of the relevant issues, through the examination of the possible logical options that might serve as answers to the particular problem. This **first chapter** offers a critical analysis of the notion of atomicity of Forms itself. Due to the inherent vagueness of the term, different readings of atomicity will be provided first for the atomicity understood as *simplicity*, then followed by the atomicity understood as *independence* of Forms. At the end of the chapter, we will turn to the *Parmenides*, where the problem of simplicity and interrelation of Forms is verbalised and addressed for the first time in Plato's corpus, and their self-sufficiency and atomicity are

¹⁶ E.g. Burnet 1914/1928, pp. 253ff.; and Taylor 1926/1955, pp. 349ff.

¹⁷ E.g. Ross 1951/1966, pp. 83ff.; and Robinson 1942a, 1942b.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. Gill 1996 (esp. chapter "*The Challenge*", pp. 104–109), Gill 2012 (esp. chapter "*I.1 Socrates' Theory of Forms in the Parmenides*", pp. 19–27), Gill 2022; Allen 1997 (esp. chapter "*Part I. Zeno's Paradox and the Theory of Forms*", pp. 76–103).

¹⁹ See subchapter [4.4 Explanation D: The dialogue is meant as criticism of other philosophers](#). For an overview of critics taking the dialogues seriously, see Gill 1996, chapter "*Introduction, Part II*", pp. 62–65. Cf. also Allen 1997 (esp. chapter "*Introductory Conversation*", pp. 69–72); Silverman 2002 (esp. chapter "*4 Refining the theory of forms*", pp. 104–136); Gill 2012 (esp. chapter "*2.1 Plan of the Exercise in Parmenides Part II*", pp. 47–57).

being called into question. The section will focus on the analysis of section 129, where Socrates challenges Parmenides to show that the Forms might display opposite properties just as the physical things do, and he seems to be “utterly amazed” if Parmenides was able to meet the challenge. In the following *three chapters*, the analysis will proceed in three consecutive, but separate questions stemming from the Socrates’ challenge: *first*, the subject of the amazement; *second*, Socrates’ reasons for amazement; and *third*, the analysis of Plato’s own reasons for bringing up the challenge in the *Parmenides*. The last, *fifth chapter* is dedicated to presenting my own positive proposal of Forms’ interrelatedness, which will connect the options already analysed in the previous chapters, but also prepare the ground for the second part of the work, where I will analyse the properties of Forms and the different ways in which we may predicate the features of Forms.

1.1 The atomicity of Forms

The first perplexity pertaining to the investigation of the structure of Forms, is the notion of “atomicity” itself, which the proponents of developmentalism put forward. Atomicity is of course just an umbrella term gathering under its extensive domain a wide range of different views all claiming that Forms are somehow simple or at least independent of each other, abstracting from the precise *how?* of their separation from each other.

Commentators defending the thesis that Plato ever thought Forms to be atomic have adopted different (and very often unclear) stances on what precise kind of atomicity they mean. Sometimes, atomicity itself is treated as the requirement of the early Theory of Forms, but in other cases it is only a consequence of a requirement of Form’s independence. Thus we have here, in fact, two very different interpretations of the notion of atomicity of Forms, both of which can be further specified in several different ways. It can either be construed as the requirement of their *simplicity*, which includes a variety of positions claiming Forms’ non-compositeness, or absence of parts, or them having only a single character that can be predicated of them. The possible denial of the inter-relation of Forms is then merely a consequence of this primary requirement of simplicity. Alternatively, atomicity might be seen as the result of Forms’ logical *independence* of each other, which in turn translates into a range of potential positions asserting different strictness of their separation, from the claim that Forms are existentially self-sufficient, to the extreme point that Forms are completely isolated from each other. Depending on the precise kind of this *independence*, its consequence might also be the requirement that

Forms are simple, since there is no other way they could gain other characteristics or “names”.

Needless to say, pinpointing the precise kind of atomicity that Plato is allegedly starting to give up during the *Parmenides* and has outrightly refused in the later dialogues is crucial if we want to understand the drama of the dialogue *Parmenides* itself. I will postpone until later an in-depth analysis of the different theories of atomicity that critics have to this day put forward. At this point, I will instead only list and briefly explain these positions, to give an overview of what might really be meant when someone asserts that Forms were at some point thought by Plato to be atomic.

1.2 Atomicity as simplicity

One way to understand the atomicity of Forms is through their internal structure. Provisionally, we might understand this *simplicity* of Forms as the claim that Forms only have one single characteristic. Radical as it may seem, this reading takes its credibility from the fact that, in dialogues before the *Parmenides*, whenever the Forms were examined, it was only done so *because of* and *through* their relation to physical things, where each Form caused one single characteristic to be present in the things which participated in the Form. From among the earlier and middle-period dialogues, Plato refers to Forms in *Euthyphro* (5+), *Hippias Major* (287), *Meno* (72), *Cratylus* (389, 439), *Symposium* (211), *Phaedo* (65, 74, 100–103), *Republic* (V.476, VI.506+, X.596), and *Phaedrus* (250) – and, questionably, at some more places. But when referred to in these dialogues, Forms are always treated separately; one Form at a time, and only as sources of characteristics for physical things.²⁰ Most importantly, each single Form is a source of only one single characteristic for its participants – and there seems to be no clear indication that the Form is *anything more* than that.

1.2.1 Simplicity as being called by one name only

Understood as simplicity, the strictest position on the atomicity of Forms would be the one explained to us by Plato himself. In the *Sophist*, the Visitor from Elea is going to “give an account of how we call the very same thing, whatever it may be, by several names” (251a). And he tells Theaetetus that there are certain young people and old

²⁰ Unless noted otherwise, I will use “character”, “property” and “characteristic” interchangeably in their loose, non-technical sense meaning a property that can either (a) be predicated of an object, or (b) that a Form provides to its participants.

late-learners, who proclaim that it is only possible to call each thing by its proper name, and attribute it nothing more:

It's impossible for that which is many to be one and for that which is one to be many. They evidently enjoy forbidding us to say that a man is good, and only letting us say that that which is good is good, or that the man is a man.²¹ (*Sophist* 251b–c; trans. by White 1997)

Hamlyn's account

One of the critics who defended this reading of atomicity was David Hamlyn, who ascribed this position to have originated from Antisthenes, but to be later adopted by Plato in his earlier Theory of Forms:

Antisthenes [...] maintained that nothing could be spoken of except by its proper expression, one expression for one thing. If so, what Antisthenes was saying was that every statement is a statement of identity. [—Hamlyn 1955, p. 290]

This position denies the possibility of ascribing several characteristics to any object. Applied to the Theory of Forms, it requires that each Form is called only by its own proper name, and nothing more can be said about it – thus making it completely atomic in description and, consequently, in its features. But if only the name itself can be stated about each thing, only identity-like statements are allowed. The Form of Good can only be Good, and the Form of Human can only be Human (or “Humane”). Hamlyn claims that “Plato himself was haunted by this bogey” and that the later “doctrine of the communion of forms was meant to exorcise it”.²²

Without the communion of forms there would, on Plato's view, be statements of identity only and to take this view would be to accept the paradoxes propounded by Antisthenes on the one hand, and the Eleatic and Megarian schools on the other. It would be to accept either the view that the world consists of a plurality of utterly distinct entities, or the view that the world consists of one entity only, with the consequence in either case that nothing could be said. [—Hamlyn 1955, p. 295]

According to Hamlyn, the logical doctrine of Antisthenes had two possible interpretations: either we could accept the “plurality of utterly distinct entities” by Antisthenes himself, or (together with Parmenides) the teaching of radical monism by

²¹ Note that in the original passage, this claim might be taken to apply generally to all kinds of things: sensible particulars as well as Forms. Whether it really applies generally is questionable, but it is not important for the purposes of our investigation; for even if it could be shown that it does not apply to all things, it is at least undeniably true about Forms, since this passage appears in the middle of the investigation of the “great kinds” – which is all we are interested in right now, in analysing the atomicity of Forms.

²² Hamlyn 1955, p. 290.

Eleatic and Megarian schools. In Hamlyn's reading, Plato was in his earlier Theory of Forms alternating between these two extremes and tempted to fall victim to both of them:

Plato himself was probably influenced by Eucleides of Megara, in his view of the form of the Good, and at the other extreme, a theory of discrete forms, if he ever held such, would have had consequences similar to those of Antisthenes' point of view. I wish to maintain that Plato was attempting, in the later dialogues, to escape the horns of this dilemma.

[—Hamlyn 1955, p. 291]

Despite the toning-down qualifiers ("probably influenced", "if he ever held such") with which Hamlyn formulates Plato's adoption of these extremes, it is beyond dispute that the argumentation of the whole article hinges on its unquestioned acceptance. Plato in Hamlyn's view leaned towards radical monism in his account of the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, while at the same time accepting a theory of discrete forms in other pre-Parmenidean dialogues. What is important is that both of these positions are based on the crucial assumption, which Hamlyn takes to be present in the early Theory of Forms, that "nothing could be spoken of except by its proper expression, one expression for one thing". And so in the *Parmenides*, according to this reading, Plato is realising for the first time that if Forms are not allowed to be complex at least in their description—that is, in asserting multiple characteristics about them—, they would not be able to play any role in his Theory of Forms whatsoever:

Parmenides' criticisms present Plato with a choice between making a form into a multiplicity and so sacrificing its functions *qua* form, and keeping it single but utterly distinct and unknowable because *qua* single it can have no relation with particulars.

[—Hamlyn 1955, p. 296]

Therefore, the purpose of the *Parmenides* is to realise this problem and somehow avoid both extremes present in the earlier Theory of Forms:

The arguments of the first part showed that a pluralism, without communion, such as was the dangerous tendency of the Platonic theory of forms, results in a position akin to that of Antisthenes, in which nothing can be said. The lesson of the second part is that there are similar dangers in the Eleatic direction.

[—Hamlyn 1955, p. 297]

Nehamas' account

A similar position, although for different reasons, was adopted by Alexander Nehamas. He claimed that for Plato, "there is, strictly speaking, only one way of having a characteristic, namely, being that characteristic itself".²³ From this follows that the

²³ Nehamas 1979, p. 98.

predicate “is” does, in a full and proper sense, only apply to things which have natures—and even then only to name that very nature of a thing. Nehamas expresses this as follows:

Nothing is identifiable independently of its nature, and a thing’s nature is precisely that respect in which a thing never changes, [...] if we see the “is” of predication in Plato as specifying the very restrictive concept “is what it is to be.” [—Nehamas 1979, p. 98]

But if the predicate “ X is w ” is applicable and true only if w is the very nature of X , then this in turn translates to the claim that each Form can only be called by one name—the name of its nature, that is, by its essence. Participation is then offered as Plato’s way of dealing with the fact that sensibles display multiplicity of properties. And it deals with the problem by asserting that a sensible is allowed to *have* several properties—and to be “so-called” by their names—only because it is *not* true that it really *is* any of them. A sensible participating in a Form is “named after” that Form,²⁴ so it merely *has* that feature attributed to it in a weaker sense by means of participation. On the other hand, the Form can be called by one name only, because it is called so *properly*—it really *is* that very nature after which it is being called, and thus cannot *be* nor *have* anything more:

The Forms’ participants are things which can be denoted by more than one name (the possibility being grounded in their participation in many Forms, after each of which they are named); by contrast, the Forms are things which can be called only by one name.

[—Nehamas 1979, p. 102]

This leads to a paradoxically-sounding result, that we may call sensibles by many names because they *are not* really what those names refer to, while we cannot do the same with Forms precisely because each of them really *is* some one thing to which their name refers. Nehamas then draws the following conclusion:

It follows that if something has any name, it can only have one name. For if a name specifies what a thing is, no two distinct names can apply to the same thing, since nothing can have two natures. Conversely, no name can name more than one thing, for these two, by hypothesis, distinct things would then have to have the same nature, and thus be one.

[—Nehamas 1979, p. 101]

The problematic feature of Nehamas’ account is that it contains the paradoxical result that the perfect being is more limited than the imperfect becoming: a sensible can be many things thanks to the fact that it is *not really* any of them, while the real being, the Form, is limited to be only one precise thing, namely its nature. Similarly to Hamlyn,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

Nehamas strictly distinguishes between the pre-Parmenidean and post-Parmenidean Theory of Forms, the reason for Nehamas being precisely that Plato needed to update his Theory to relieve it of this “One-Name Assumption” of the earlier dialogues and thus to allow Forms to be called by several names by means of blending together:

The *One-Name Assumption* is, of course, too restrictive; the Forms, too, must be capable of bearing more than one name. This is why the attack on Parmenides in the *Sophist* contains as its integral part the theory of the blending of Forms. For this latter theory asserts that the Forms, too, participate in one another. [...] It is not until he writes the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* that Plato questions this assumption and concludes that everything that is in some way *F* will also not be *F* in some other way.

[—Nehamas 1979, p. 101]

Commentary

The problem both of these interpretations have is that neither of them reflects the undeniable fact that Plato has been—and already from his earliest dialogues—asserting a number of different characteristics to Forms, and therefore has called them by many distinct names. To name just a few of them that are uncontroversially present in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues, each of the Forms is “that [what] really is”, “uniform by itself”, “remain the same” and never subdued to “any change whatever”, according to *Phaedo* 78d. Additionally, when speaking about the things that the soul investigates, Forms are also qualified as “pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging” (79d) and “divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble” (80b). *Cratylus* describes the Form of the Beautiful as what “is always such as it is” (439d), that is, a thing which “ever stays the same”, “isn’t changing” and is unable to “ever change or move” (439e). And *Republic VI* tells us that the Forms are “intelligible but not visible” (507c). Lastly, *Symposium* adds that the Form “always is”, “neither comes to be nor passes away” (211a) and is “itself by itself with itself” and “single in nature forever” (211b). Much more strikingly, Plato even says in *Protagoras* that “Justice is pious and Piety is just” (331b).²⁵

Not only have we here a host of different characteristics, but they are also of a wide variety of kinds: we see properties we could easily describe as ontological (ever existing, intelligible, not visible) or structural (uniform, indissoluble, single in nature), but also qualitative from the point of their own perfection (immortal, divine, deathless, pure) or with regard to mutation (itself by itself with itself, ever at rest, unchanging). To see Plato as ever holding that Forms are atomic and simple in the sense that they can only be called

²⁵ See subchapter [5.3 The communion of Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues](#) for the analysis of this passage.

by one name, when contrasted to all these characteristics he at the same time ascribed to them, seems almost as an absurd claim.

It is possible that what Hamlyn wants to say instead, is that Plato only in the *Parmenides* realised the logical consequences of ascribing multiple names to Forms, and not that he previously altogether denied them. To this it must be replied that under such reading, his account loses its bite and its correctness becomes indemonstrable: for if Plato nowhere directly denied the possibility of ascribing multiple names to Forms, and only later gave an account on the logical consequences of this fact for his Theory, it becomes impossible to prove that these consequences were an unexpected surprise for him. And, as I will show during the analysis of the *Parmenides* in the next chapter, it is in fact more plausible to read Plato as expecting to give an account on these issues precisely in the *Parmenides*.

1.2.2 Simplicity as non-compositeness

Secondly, another very different claim might be made when it is said that the Forms are atomic: namely that they have no parts and are therefore non-composite.

Moravcsik's account

One of the proponents of this reading was Julius Moravcsik who claimed that Plato in the earlier dialogues considered Forms to be simple and without parts:

Both in the *Symposium* (211b) and in the *Phaedo* (80b) the Forms are characterized as “simple in nature”—a description that hardly fits elements of a field of entities interrelated in various ways. [—Moravcsik 1973b, p. 326]

However, in later dialogues, and especially in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, Plato progressively starts using a so-called method of collection and division. This method is seen by some commentators as a replacement for the old Theory of Forms, which also yields different results:

In the middle period dialogues the Forms are conceived of as a set of self-sufficient independent entities, each uniquely characterized by singular referring expressions from which one can derive the predicate that characterizes the participants of that Form. In the later dialogues Plato is still interested in giving a unique characterization of each Form, [...] but this effort is now tied to the recognition that the interrelations among the Forms must also be reflected in the ontology. [—Moravcsik 1973b, p. 326]

In other words, while the earlier Theory of Forms was driven by the Forms that were, first and foremost, bearers of a single nature-revealing characteristic they provided to their participants, in the later dialogues these same Forms are put by the method of collection and division into hierarchies of more-and-less general Forms, where the more general Forms contained the more particular ones as their parts. As a consequence, in the later dialogues “we find Forms as parts of several other Forms, or as an entity that can have other Forms as parts”,²⁶ and thus they are, according to Moravcsik, no longer non-composite as they were initially.

Meinwald’s account

Similar account seems to be given by Constance Meinwald, who in the *Parmenides* sees the emergence of the distinction between two kinds of predications: *ordinary* predication and *tree-like* predication. The latter kind “holds in virtue of a relation internal to the subject’s own nature, and can so be employed to reveal the structure of that nature”.²⁷ What is important for our current analysis is the fact that Meinwald takes predications of this kind to work across the whole genus-species tree:

Let us consider the sort of genus-species tree familiar from the Linnaean classification system. [...] In such a tree, a kind *A* appears either directly below or far below another kind *B* if what it is to be an *A* is to be a *B* with a certain differentia (or series of differentiae) added. That is, the natures of *A*’s and *B*’s are so related that being a *B* is part of what it is to be an *A*. In any such case, *B* can be truly predicated of *A* (or of the *A*) in relation to itself, and so can *A*, and so can any of the differentiae *D*. The idea here is that this kind of predication is grounded in the structure of the nature in question: *A*’s nature is what it is to be (an) *A* – that is, (a) *B* with ... with *D*, and it is in virtue of this that the predications hold.

[—Meinwald 1992, pp. 378–379]

As we can see, Meinwald takes (at least some of the) Forms to be organised in genus-species trees. It is not clear from Meinwald’s account whether there is only one such tree (encompassing all the existing Forms) or several of them (thus Forms would be arranged in disjoint groups internally organised in trees), but that is not important for this moment. The relevant fact is that, under Meinwald’s reading, if there is *at least one* such tree, then the more deeply we will traverse into that tree, the more *complicated* the nature of the Form in question gets. This is precisely because “what it is to be an *A* is to be a *B* with a certain differentia (or series of differentiae) added”: “*A*’s nature is what it is to be

²⁶ Moravcsik 1973b, p. 326.

²⁷ Meinwald 1992, p. 378.

(an) *A* – that is, (a) *B* with ... with *D*". The characteristics of a Form start to pile up, and because they are all part of Form's very nature, they are all essential—they *all together* constitute what the Form itself *is*.

Thus the Form of Justice would no longer be "what it is to be just" (full stop), but "what it is to be virtuous and then, in particular, what it is to be just" (or, possibly, virtuous *by* being just). Similarly, but from the reverse perspective, the fact that both Socrates and Protagoras have *humanity* can no longer be explained simply by appealing to the Form of the Human in which they both participate, because that wouldn't be a full explanation: they are in fact participating in the nature of the Form of the Human, which is not a *point*—a single place in the genus-species tree (the leaf where the Form of the Human lies)—but a *path*, a line connecting the series of points from the Form of the Human (which is the leaf point) all along to the top Form in the tree.

The upshot is that it is no longer possible to define any particular Form *X* (except, perhaps, the tree-top one) on its own, because its nature—what it is by itself—can be explained only in terms of the series of differentiae $D_n \dots D_1$ leading towards the top of the genus-species tree, where finally the definition of the Form *X* would be finalised by adding its last part, the nature of the top Form *A*. The confirmation that Meinwald sees the nature of Forms as *composite* can be found in his definition of the *tree-like* predications as "employed to *reveal the structure* of that nature".²⁸ In the account where the nature of the Form has structure (consisting of the "stops" on the genus-species path), it is hard to see the Form itself as a non-composite, atomic thing.

According to Meinwald, the emergence of the distinction between two kinds of predications in the *Parmenides* marks an important turn in the development of Plato's Theory of Forms. As Meinwald puts it, "we ought to regard Plato as telling us that his middle-period works do not contain a fully and adequately developed theory of Forms".²⁹ In the earlier dialogues, Plato could only attribute to Forms self-predication sentences in the form "*A* is *a*", which maintained the atomic, non-composite character of their natures. The innovation of the *Parmenides* allows Plato to attribute to Forms self-predication sentences in the general form "*A* is *x*" – and "where *A* and *X* are not identical this is equivalent to asking whether *X* appears above *A* in *A*'s tree".³⁰ This is caused by the fact that "because of the structures of the trees that lie behind them, predications *pros heauto* are

²⁸ Ibid., p. 378 (emphasis mine).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 372.

³⁰ Meinwald 1991, p. 69.

transitive”.³¹ Meinwald’s interpretation would allow Plato to deal with problems introduced in the second part of the *Parmenides* – but, as we have seen, it will also change the nature of the Forms by introducing composite structure and complexity to their essences.

Commentary

To both of these interpretations, my answer—which I will only shortly outline here—would be that both accounts lack the proper analysis of compositeness. Plato’s later use of the method of collection and division to discriminate more and less general Forms does not necessarily mean that we will “find Forms as parts of several other Forms, or as an entity that can have other Forms as parts”, as suggested by Moravcsik, nor that their natures would spread out through the whole genus-species tree path, as Meinwald argued. The analysis of all of the properties that such Forms would need to have—and *how* will they obtain them—is needed to assess the unity, compositeness, single-ness and separability of Forms. Furthermore, the analysis of these terms themselves in the context of what Plato himself wrote about the Forms is needed in order to decide whether it makes sense to speak of “parts” of Forms in the first place. Not only do both accounts lack these analyses, but they do not even offer us any clearly expressed conclusions on this topic.³²

1.3 Atomicity as independence

An entirely different perspective from which the atomicity of Forms can be viewed, is to understand it as their independence from each other. Under this view, Forms are atomic in a sense of their self-sufficiency, or even their mutual isolation from each other. The common basis of these positions is the view that there is in Plato’s metaphysics a strong metaphysical dividing line between Forms and particulars. The precise reasoning behind this metaphysical difference depends on the particular reading of the atomicity as independence, but in all of them it is required by definition that each Form is strictly a *participandum*, while each particular is strictly a *participans* – thus, the idea that Forms too

³¹ Ibid., p. 82.

³² Due to the limited extent of this dissertation, I will not have an opportunity to deal specifically with the simplicity of Forms understood as their non-compositeness, since that would require a full analysis of the method of collection and division in Plato’s late dialogues. However, even with such an analysis, the decisive result is questionable, since it is not clear to me whether Plato at any point in his career succeeded in offering a fully worked-out theory of the trees of Forms, as the above interpreters claim he did.

But in any case, the assumption of the atomicity of Forms, which I will be challenging throughout the dissertation, will analogically also apply to this branch of interpretations, since I will try to show that the fact that Plato spoke differently about Forms in pre- and post-Parmenidean dialogues does not necessarily mean that there was any shift in his *thinking* about them, and, in turn, that any significant development of Plato’s doctrine actually occurred.

would somehow become dependent on each other is simply contradictory and thus unacceptable in the framework of Plato's Theory.

1.3.1 Independence as isolation – Ryle's account

The complete isolation is the strictest possible reading of Forms' independence, claiming that Forms are completely unrelated to each other. Not only can they not participate in each other, but there are no non-participating relations among them either, since they cannot *by definition* enter into any relations at all. Despite its restrictive character, this reading was highly influential at the time when it was proposed by Gilbert Ryle and vigorously defended in his famous article *Plato's 'Parmenides'*.

Despite the age of Ryle's article (which was first published in 1939), it is important to look closer at his views – not only because of the mere fact that his position is one of the logically possible options of the atomicity of Forms, but also for two other reasons. *First*, Ryle's article successfully argued for the complete seriousness of the *Parmenides*, a feature strongly disputed at the time by such renowned scholars as Burnet or Taylor.³³ Ryle proved that, contrary to some views, *Parmenides* is fully intelligible after all and we must read it as a serious treatise, which was meant seriously by Plato himself and understood so by Aristotle. The issue of the second part “was not a sham issue and the intricacies of the argument not gratuitously manufactured”, as Ryle summarised.³⁴

The *second* reason why Ryle's contribution to the scholarship remains important is also more directly relevant to the thesis of this dissertation: Ryle's article occasioned a huge wave of support for the developmentalist reading of Plato's Theory of Forms among Plato's scholars. And despite the fact that many of the partial claims which Ryle made throughout his article were later somewhat moderated or even completely refuted by other scholars,³⁵ the impetus which the article gave, to the developmentalist readings remained influential for a much longer time. While before and around the publication of Ryle's article, both the unitarian and the developmentalist readings of Plato were common and relatively tied, after its publication the scales of balance started to progressively lean towards the developmentalist ones. Thus, even though I will ultimately disagree with

³³ See subchapter 4.4 *Explanation D: The dialogue is meant as criticism of other philosophers*.

³⁴ Ryle 1939/2009, p. 4.

³⁵ One of the views that were subsequently moderated by later critics is, for instance, Ryle's claim that Forms cannot enter into any relations and thus that the relation of participation is logically impossible (cf. Silverman 2002, pp. 144–145). An example of a completely refuted claim (or at least *generally accepted* to be completely refuted), is Ryle's view that the *Parmenides* consists of two completely unrelated pieces of works only later patched together (cf. Owen 1970, *passim* but esp. 'Additional note' on pp. 371–372; Gill 1996, *passim*; Allen 1997, *passim* but esp. p. xii).

Ryle's interpretation of the *Parmenides* and of the development of Plato's Theory in the later part of my dissertation,³⁶ his "epoch-making study", as Silverman called it,³⁷ nevertheless marks an important milestone in the history of Plato's scholarship.

How, then, did Ryle justify his view that Forms cannot by definition enter into any relations at all? In brief, Ryle maintained that Forms are universals and as such, they simply cannot enter into any relations at all. From its very beginning, the Theory of Forms seemed to involve a strange feature of Forms having a double character: each Form was a *particular*, since it was a separately existing individual, but at the same time also acted as a *universal*, since it provided its essential character to each and every thing which exhibited that feature:

Form is taken to be something answering to any general predicate, noun, verb or adjective, in such a way that any significant abstract noun will be the proper name of such a something. And it is because there exist such somethings that many ordinary objects can be characterised by a common predicate. To ascribe a predicate to something is to assert that this something stands in some relation to a Form. So if a thing is an instance of something, there exist two objects, the instance and that of which it is an instance. And there is the special relation between them which constitutes the former an instance of the latter. [—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 6]

According to Ryle, the time has come in the *Parmenides* for Plato to realise that this cannot be so. What is the problem with such a theory? The crux lies in the fact that to ascribe any relation whatsoever to a universal is an illegitimate step, since a universal is not a bearer of properties or relations, because "universals are not substances, or abstract nouns are not proper names, and sentences in which we talk as if they were are logically vicious" (p. 33):

The theory of Forms maintained that Forms are terms in relational propositions; namely, that about any Form there will be the true proposition that something does or might stand in the relation to it of exemplification. So this was a doctrine of Substantial Forms, for according to it each Form would be a substance, since it would be an 'entity' possessing at least one relational property. [—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 11]

Thus we can maintain *either* the universality, *or* particularity of Forms, but *not both* at the same time. A *particular circle* might be circular, large, red-coloured and crossing another circle. On the other hand, circularity is *universal*: it cannot be any of these properties – but it might be present in *many* circles. And since the goal of the Theory is to

³⁶ See subchapter 3.1 *The negative reading in general: the statement imparts an impossibility* and section 3.4.2 *Formal properties and the atomicity of Forms*.

³⁷ Silverman 2002, p. 4.

provide universal explanations for the many different characteristics, each exhibiting itself in many particular things, the universality of Forms is *a given* by definition, and the only logical possibility left is to discard the particular character of Forms. Doing so, however, “de-substantialises” the Forms, which inevitably leads to the consequence that there can no more be any relations between Forms and their instantiations:

When we say such things as that there is no relation between greenness or circularity and its instances, [...] what is meant is that abstract nouns are not proper names, so that to ask what is the relation between the nominee of such a noun and something else is an illegitimate question. The semantic function of abstract nouns is something other than that of denoting subjects of qualities, states, dimensions or relations. To enquire after the qualities, states, positions, sizes or relations of circularity or unity or civility is to ask a nonsensical question.

[—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 11]

What is more, by denying the possibility of Forms having any relations to their instances, we also need to strip Forms of the possibility of having any properties themselves, since they would gain them precisely by instantiating themselves and other Forms. In other words, in order to be able to ascribe some characteristic to a Form, that Form would have to become an instantiation of some other Form – universal which stands for that characteristic. And this is doubly impossible, since, first, only particulars can be instantiations of qualities and characters, and we have already rejected the idea of substantial Forms. And, further, because instantiating some universal would require the Form as a universal to become related to another Form (which is also a universal) – and this, as we have seen, is also impossible, because universal cannot have relations, as it is not a relation-bearer. A Form cannot stand in any relation to anything whatsoever, and this forbids even its relation to itself. This, in turn, poses a major problem for the Theory of Forms, insofar as Plato believed that (at least some) Forms can be the instances of their own essential character:

The theory of Forms is logically vicious if it implies that all or some universals are instances of themselves or of other universals of the same family with themselves. And Plato had, apparently, once thought that beauty was beautiful and goodness was good; maybe he had thought that circularity, and circularity alone, was perfectly circular.

[—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 7]

As Ryle summarises it: “we are ready to declare with confidence that no ‘universal’, i.e. no quality, relation, magnitude, state, etc., can be one of its own instances” (p. 7), and Plato’s mistake in the earlier Theory of Forms was exactly “in treating universals as if they were particulars” (pp. 11–12). To give his theory a grounding, Ryle turns his attention first

to the series of criticisms put forward by Parmenides, and then to the philosophical exercise in the second part of the dialogue. Ryle takes the passage containing Parmenides' criticisms (130b–134e) as Plato's pointing out the vicious and insurmountable consequences of his own Theory of Forms, which cannot be saved unless the requirement that Forms are separate individuals is dropped. All the attempts of Socrates to explain the relation of participation—that is, to answer the question “What sort of a relation is this relation of exemplification?” (p. 6)—have failed. And, as Ryle explains (pp. 6–13), they *must necessarily* have failed, as they are provided by Plato to securely show that “any answer must collapse, since the question itself is logically vicious, which entails that the theory of Forms, in its present shape, is logically vicious” (p. 6).

Why must any answer fail, and how is the question inherently vicious? Answering these questions is, Ryle claims, the purpose of the antinomies of the second part of *Parmenides* (137c–166c), which Ryle decides to examine next (pp. 13–21). The eight hypotheses attend to four questions and in pairs give contradictory answers, which are nevertheless equally false or absurd (or, depending on the perspective, equally true and thus contradictory and absurd). The fact that this is so should alarm us that the question itself contains some logically fallacious premise, which must be revealed in order to make any progress:

For prima facie we should expect that if a given proposition is shown to be logically vicious, its contradictory must be automatically validated. But if both a proposition and its contradictory are logically vicious, both entailing contradictory consequences, then the viciousness of those propositions is of a more radical order.

[—Ryle 1939/2009, pp. 13–14]

For example, “contradictions arise as well from the denial as from the assertion that Unity or any other εἶδος exists” (p. 20), and this and the other antinomies show us that there is a deeper-seated problem in our question, and the problem is precisely that universals simply cannot have properties or figure in relations. Though Ryle is “not satisfied that this is the message of the dialogue” (p. 21), he nevertheless maintains that *this also* is true of what's happening with Plato's Theory in the *Parmenides*. In fact, his main thesis is that “*Parmenides* is an early essay in the theory of types” (p. 19) and that Plato “was beginning to see that there are different types of concepts” (p. 22). So the ultimate message of the dialogue is Plato's realisation and articulation of the need for differentiation between *formal concepts* and *genus-species concepts* – the need which had never before appeared in the whole history of western-world philosophy, and to which the *Parmenides* bears the very first testimony:

The criticisms of the doctrine of Substantial Forms given in the dialogue [...] do not directly yield an answer to the problems which they raise. But the road is cleared for an answer to them, a road which was blocked by the fascinating but erroneous theory which they dispose of.

The road is now cleared for the advance which was partially made in the *Sophist*, where for the first time the possibility and the need of a theory of categories or types is realised. The distinction between generic concepts and formal concepts is here seen or half-seen, and logical enquiries are at last capable of being begun. [—Ryle 1939/2009, pp. 36–37]

The “ultimate message” is not of a primary importance for us now, but nevertheless we can clearly see how it presupposes and requires the more basic message, which I have explained above: ***Ryle takes it that in the Parmenides, Plato formulates the fundamental realisation that Forms cannot be substances or particulars, since they are in fact universals, and as such cannot enter into any relations or have any properties:***

Plato realised or nearly realised that antinomies necessarily arise from the attempt to make any concept whatsoever (from the most specific to the most categorial) a subject of attributes. To assert or to deny that a concept does or does not exemplify itself or another concept is to assert something illegitimate, no matter what that concept may be. A quality or a relation neither has nor lacks any quality or relation. The name of a quality or relation cannot significantly occur as the subject of an attributive or relational sentence. Abstract nouns cannot assume the roles of proper names or demonstratives.

[—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 20]

This realisation forced Plato to completely abandon the Theory of Forms, and thus after *Parmenides* he radically reworked “the young Socrates’ simple theory of Substantial Forms” (p. 20) into something completely new. He drops his notion of substantial Forms altogether, and instead adopts the theory of universals, atomic and isolated in their complete independence of each other:

It has long been recognised that in the whole period which includes the writing of the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Politicus* and the *Philebus*, Plato’s thinking is not entirely, if at all, governed by the premisses of the Theory of Forms. [...] Whatever its sublimity and inspiration-value, the Theory of Forms had been from the start, *inter alia*, a doctrine intended to resolve certain puzzles of a purely logical nature. [...] It fails to be a satisfactory theory, for the reason, mainly, that exactly analogous questions arise about Substantial Forms to those questions about the instances of Forms which the theory had been intended to resolve.

[—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 36]

Commentary

Ryle's account is exhaustive and well-argued, but it implicitly relies on two fundamental assumptions which he nowhere motivates nor defends. First, that Forms are universals *simpliciter*, and when Plato uses universal nouns to refer to them, he means *just that*. And second, that Plato was, from the very beginning, interested more in logical and linguistic problems, than in ontological and ethical ones.

The first assumption is best expressed by Ryle himself: “where the young Socrates went astray was in treating universals as if they were particulars” (p. 11–12). According to Ryle, Plato always believed that Forms are universals, but somehow implicitly assumed some features specific to particulars: namely that they have relations and properties. At some point of his career, he also adopted a view that Forms are substantial particulars – which would be in line with Aristotle, who reported that Plato separated Forms, whereas Socrates did not (*Metaphysics* XIII.1078b). Ryle refers to this stage of Plato's philosophical thinking as the “doctrine of Substantial Forms” (p. 11, 35, 36) or the “theory of Substantial Forms” (p. 20, 36, 37). The ultimate discovery of *Parmenides* then lies in the fact that Plato for the first time realised that, being what they are, Forms cannot enter into relations, nor have any properties attributed to them if they should also serve their purpose as universals – on pain of contradictions resulting from the exercise given by Parmenides.

Once we grant that Plato at some point in his philosophical career—whether from the very beginning of postulating Forms, or only after the *Parmenides*—actually adopted a view that Forms are, strictly speaking, simply and merely universals, the entire account of Ryle is clear and undeniable, and his conclusions unescapable. But this single assumption is nowhere explained and puts the entire account under the huge hypothetical “if”. Ryle is on a slippery slope: he starts with the assumption that we use universals to describe the same one feature we recognize in many things (which is undeniable), then he explains in detail that universals cannot have relations and why this must be so (which is also uncontroversial). Finally, he notes that in Plato's Theory, Forms are what we are appealing to whenever we are examining these universals. And from this he concludes that Forms are universals *simpliciter*, and therefore cannot have relations. Ryle's argument can be formally expressed as follows:

Ryle's argument: The impossibility of substantial Forms

Premise 1: Universals cannot have relations.

Premise 2: Forms are (explanatorily) behind the features which we (1) recognize in many things, (2) universalise and (3) call by universal abstract nouns.

Conclusion: Forms are universals, and therefore cannot have relations.

Let us recall once again that Ryle's ultimate reason for dismissal of substantial Forms is that "no 'universal', i.e. no quality, relation, magnitude, state, etc., can be one of its own instances" (p. 7). That is all well and good, but what does it really tell us about Forms? Not much, unless we presuppose that Plato's Forms are merely universals. The fact that "no universal can be its own instance" only implies that the *universal itself* cannot be its own instance – naturally so, since circularity cannot be circular and greenness is not green, as Ryle noted. He, however, draws more from this, namely that *the Form* cannot instantiate itself, since the Form is—for him, but arguably not for Plato—merely a universal, and nothing beyond that. Thus, whether the Form of One can be *one*, or the Form of Being *be* depends precisely on whether we take these Forms simply as universals.

It should be clear that in a state of affairs described by saying that "the Form of One is *one*", it is not "oneness" *as universal* which instantiates itself, but the Form of One *as being* which instantiates its essence, *oneness*. The fact that we sometimes refer to the Form itself by the universal name "Oneness" cannot be wrongly taken to mean that we refer merely to oneness *as universal*. Instead, at least in Plato's metaphysics, this must be understood as a mistaken use of language insofar as such sentences are understood as referring to universals. ***In complete opposition to Ryle's conclusions, it is precisely by treating Forms merely as universals that we would "assert something illegitimate" and be "committing a breach of 'logical syntax'".***³⁸ Whenever we colloquially call Forms by abstract universal nouns, we risk that by doing so, we will sooner or later confuse what we are referring to and thus become prone to violating the language.

The risk of this unwarranted logical leap in treating Forms has been well recognised by Owen, who criticised Vlastos for calling Form of *F* for any particular *F* simply "*F*-ness". Owen noted that by doing so, Vlastos obscures the real referent that stands behind the words:

Vlastos obscures the point by saying "any Form can be predicated of itself ... *F*-ness is itself *F*". The very fact that Plato could assume without question that αὐτὸ τὸ μέγεθος is

³⁸ Ryle 1939/2009, p. 20 and 34.

big (e.g. *Phaedo* 102e5, cf. *Parmenides* 150a7–b1 and 131d), whereas in English such an assumption about *bigness* makes no sense, should give us qualms at rendering the title of the Form conventionally in such contexts by an abstract noun (Vlastos’ “*F*-ness”).

[—Owen 1957, p. 105, n. 8]

But this all is so immediately evident that Ryle couldn’t think otherwise either, unless he was absolutely convinced that for Plato, Forms were *just universals* which he somehow, improperly and accidentally, substantiated.

However, I am convinced that Plato couldn’t ever be content with such a position. The universal merely describes a character common to all the things which possess it. That we can call *beauty*, for example, a universal, is based on the fact that we recognise the same feature of being *beautiful* in many different things. For this fact alone, no Theory of Forms is necessary, since any theory of universals could explain it with equal precision. But Plato’s substantial Forms were meant to do more than that: they were postulated by Plato to explain how is it possible in the first place that we encounter the same feature in different things existing in completely different spatio-temporal conditions, and which never were in any contact whatsoever. That is, Forms do not merely *describe* or *capture* the “raw fact” of universals – they provide metaphysical *explanation* of this fact by each Form acting as an ontological grounding for one particular universal.

Our ability to create the word “beauty”—to conceptually universalise this feature—depends on the underlying fact that the instances of “being *beautiful*” are open to universalisation in the first place – that is, that they can properly *be universalised*. And this, in turn, is possible only thanks to the fact that these characters, despite being in things which are all extremely different, are in some sense *always the same*. How is it possible that the same beauty can be seen in a beautiful girl, beautifully crafted pot and beautiful goddess Aphrodite? How is it possible that we can even use the same word to some feature we identify in otherwise so different things? To say that this is because *beauty* is a universal is not to answer the ontological question at all, it is merely to conceptualise. But for Plato, these questions are not merely about *conceptual* unity of these features, but first and foremost about their *ontological* unity, which in turn allows the *conceptual* unity to arise as well.

Historically, many different philosophical theories were proposed as solutions for the problem of universals, with varying degrees of reality granted to the universals themselves.

The point here is not to prove that Plato's solution is necessarily *the* correct one,³⁹ but merely to acknowledge the Theory of Forms *precisely as* specifically Plato's solution to the problem, and to recognize that accepting Ryle's rendering of Plato's philosophical development means embracing the idea that Plato was willing to trade his solution for no particular solution at all – even more, that he became *disinterested in the question itself*. For it remains the fact that there is no demonstrable positive attempt to answer these questions differently in any of the post-Parmenidean dialogues. Thus, ***if we together with Ryle read the Parmenides as dropping the Theory of substantial Forms, then we are forced to also accept the conclusion that Plato had no desire whatsoever throughout the rest of his later career to find any other answer to these problems either.*** For in case he *would* have been still interested in these problems and remained searching for the answers to them, then even if he was ultimately unable to find any definitive solution to replace the old Theory, it is highly unlikely that there would be absolutely no traces of these attempts in any of the post-Parmenidean dialogues.

But it seems to me that, if there are no traces of such attempts in these dialogues, the more probable answer might be that Plato did *not* discard the Theory after all, and since he dealt with and solved the difficulties it entails in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, he saw no need to reiterate the problems of universals in the dialogues to follow. In Plato's Theory of substantial Forms, the “unification” of universals is possible precisely by the fact that Forms are eternal, immaterial beings existing in pre-eminent sense, which provide their character to many particular things participating in them, but always remain the same. Thus, Forms are the basis for the fact that some particular feature *is still the same* in all the places where it occurs. Our ability to create a universal—any *real* universal which properly captures the thing's essence (*Cratylus* 423e) and “at the natural joints” (*Phaedrus* 265e)—is based on the fact that Forms provide the features to their participants and thus each of the features is everywhere the very same, despite being present in and exhibited by many things that are in other aspects very different.

Thus, ***each Form provides an ontological basis and explanatory foundation for its essential character, which its participants gain by means of participation.*** To claim with Ryle that Plato abandoned the Theory of substantial Forms and adopted no particular theory with equal explanatory power in its stead, means to adopt a view on Plato's development in which Plato would not only lose the explanatory foundation of the *stability*

³⁹ In other words, this is *not* to say that a universal cannot be the *cause* of things having that property; it is to say that some further account is needed in order to explain how that property might stay the same in different things – an account like the one which was later provided by Aristotle.

of universals—that is, the principle which *allows* any universalisation in the first place—, but he would also flatly ignore from that point on the questions with which he was most intrigued since the beginning of his career. Not only did Plato more than sufficiently prove his chief interest in these questions by his repeated inquiries into the *essences* of universals with his “*What is it?*” (τί ἐστὶ) questions – he told us in the *Parmenides* itself that despite all the difficulties that were raised, discarding the Theory is simply not an option. And this is even more important and revealing given the fact that it is acknowledged by the same person which posed all the difficulties – old Parmenides himself:

“Yet on the other hand, Socrates,” said Parmenides, “if someone, having an eye on all the difficulties we have just brought up and others of the same sort, won’t allow that there are forms for things and won’t mark off a form for each one, he won’t have anywhere to turn his thought, since he doesn’t allow that for each thing there is a character that is always the same. In this way he will destroy the power of dialectic entirely.”

(*Parmenides* 135b–c; trans. by Gill & Ryan 1997⁴⁰)

* * * * *

This, then, brings us to the second assumption Ryle made, namely that Plato was, from the very beginning, interested more in logical and linguistic problems, than in ontological and ethical ones. As Silverman splendidly summarised: “Ryle’s article occasioned a ‘linguistic turn’ in the examination of Plato’s later philosophy. To read Ryle, it seems that front and center in Plato’s mind are worries about the logical behavior of concepts.”⁴¹ In Ryle’s view, *Parmenides* is merely a most indicative example of this general attitude of Plato, since he ultimately sees the dialogue as “an early essay in the theory of types” (p. 19), in which Plato “was beginning to see that there are different types of concepts” (p. 22). In a nutshell, he claims, “the *Parmenides* is a discussion of a problem of logic—as part of the *Theaetetus* and most of the *Sophist* were discussions of problems in logic” (p. 37). And he expands a little below what he means by it, and names all the things we should *not* expect to find in the *Parmenides*, with several all-important metaphysical topics included among them:

I do not think that the dialogue could or should be interesting to a student who is primarily anxious to know Plato’s later views about the human soul, or God, or immortality, or physics, or Parmenidean Monism. For, as I read it, the dialogue contains no references to such topics and no premisses from which conclusions about these topics can be deduced.

⁴⁰ In what follows, I will standardly use the translation of the *Parmenides* by Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan (1997), unless noted otherwise.

⁴¹ Silverman 2002, p. 142.

The dialogue is an exercise in the grammar and not in the prose or the poetry of philosophy. [—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 37]

But Ryle must have assumed this to be a more general approach of Plato, not just one peculiar to the *Parmenides* or changing precisely in this dialogue. For if this were so, Ryle would have spotted the problem of his first assumption. The fact that he didn't realise what Plato would lose by bartering his substantial Forms for abstract universals implies that Ryle probably thought that there wasn't any real loss after all – and that's only possible if Plato was, in his reading, interested primarily in the “problems of logic” and “in the grammar” all the way along. And indeed, this is confirmed by Ryle saying that “whatever its sublimity and inspiration-value, the Theory of Forms had been from the start, *inter alia*, a doctrine intended to resolve certain puzzles of a purely logical nature” (p. 36).

As I have already outlined above in my response to the first assumption, this is not what Plato was interested in *primarily*. It is indisputable that he was *also* interested in problems of logic and grammar, since those are the “tools of the trade” of every philosopher: the scrutiny of language and logic is needed insofar as they can hinder the advances of philosophy. For many philosophers, philosophy is just this; but Plato shows all signs of a philosopher interested in reality itself, not just our way of thinking of it, formulating and presenting it. Plato is interested in finding the *source* of these common properties we encounter in sensible things, not just the *name* for these phenomena. To say that Plato discarded his Theory of separate, individual Forms in favour of a theory of universals would require, first and foremost, some proof that Plato has become uninterested in finding the source of the stableness of properties in the sensible realm, and decided to only seek for the means to properly naming them. Let us look at the description of the Form of Beauty (“the Beautiful”) that Plato gives us in *Phaedo*:

I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. That, I think, is the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error. This is the safe answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful. (*Phaedo* 100d–e; trans. by Grube 1997⁴²)

We can learn much about Plato's interests and the nature of the Forms from this very short passage. First, the formulations “all beautiful things are beautiful *by* the Beautiful” and “it is *through* Beauty that beautiful things *are made* beautiful” clearly tell us that Plato in postulating a Form seeks for explanation and justification of the character in question.

⁴² In what follows, I will standardly use the translation of the *Phaedo* by G. M. A. Grube (1997), unless noted otherwise.

And the Form is obviously the *source* and the *reason* “through” and “by” which the beautiful things gain their beauty—the Form itself “made” them beautiful! And the *Republic* VI tells us the same story: “all the things that we thereby set down as many [...], we set down according to a single form of each, believing that there is but one, and call it ‘the being’ of each”.⁴³ Each Form is there called *the single being* of the innumerable instances of its essential characteristic that we perceive in the many things that possess it—precisely because they have it only by participating in one single Form, which is the real, single, one and being.

Second, the passage uncovers something about Plato’s philosophical interests. “It is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful” – this he considers “the safe answer for me or anyone else to give”, the foundational and safest claim about Forms. This is the root of the Theory of Forms, and at this point, Plato “will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship” (note, however, that the relationship itself is assumed as necessary), because *how* this all happens is a posterior question and, as we have seen from the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, not at all an easy one; crucially important is the fact that beautiful things are made beautiful *by* the Form of Beauty, which is the cause and explanation of them being beautiful in the first place. Giving an account of participation, together with finding the proper words to describe this relation is only *secondary*. For Plato, the observation of the ontological dependency of participants on Forms is *primary* both in order of importance and in order of certitude.

* * * * *

The obvious objection that offers itself is that Plato colloquially speaks of Forms *as if they were* universals: he refers to the Form of Tallness as “Tallness itself” (*Phaedo* 102d); in *Parmenides* he deals with “largeness itself” (e.g. 132a); the ladder of love in *Symposium* leads to “this Beauty” (211c), and many more. Can these formulations be interpreted as Plato’s assertions that, strictly speaking, Forms are universals *simpliciter*? I believe that the answer is a resolute “no”, and this for several reasons.

First, it is not always and everywhere that Plato refers to Forms as universals. This answer is so plain that it almost sounds philosophically uninteresting; yet it is decisive. It is simply undeniable that in giving names to Forms, universal abstract nouns are only one of the ways Plato uses – and not even the preferred one, judging from the frequency with which it is used. Indeed, it is quite the opposite: the most common way of naming Forms is

⁴³ *Republic* VI, 507b. In what follows, I will standardly use the translation of the *Republic* by G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve (1997), unless noted otherwise.

by using adjectives with the definite article τὸ “the” (such as τὸ καλόν, “the beautiful” in *Hippias Major* 295c); the identifier αὐτὸ meaning “(it)self” (αὐτὸ καλόν, “a beautiful itself” in *Cratylus* 439c), or both (αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, “the Beautiful itself” in *Phaedo* 100c). *Second*, the host of characteristics that Plato attributed to Forms, which we examined above in my commentary to the possible reading of simplicity of Forms as being called by one name only,⁴⁴ speak strongly against the interpretation that Forms are, or ever could be, merely universals. *Third*, to treat Forms as merely universals would render every discussion about the “separateness” of Forms in Plato’s corpus at least dubious, if not altogether nonsensical. Plato arguing for the home of Forms, “the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging” (*Phaedo* 79d), would entirely lose its point – as well as a substantial part discussing the two realms of the intelligible and of the sensible in the sun analogy of the *Republic* VI (506e ff.).

Thus to argue that Forms are universals, one would have to first prove that when Plato speaks of Forms as anything else than as universals, he is doing so only in a loose and inexact sense, and that the only strict way of speaking about Forms is precisely when he is using universal abstract nouns. To adopt Ryle’s reading would require us to strip much of what Plato has written about Forms throughout his corpus, and Ryle hasn’t provided any convincing arguments for doing so. While, on the other hand, adopting a reading that Forms are substantial entities only sometimes referred to as universals would require no such amending of Plato’s philosophical positions. Ryle’s account is therefore an unwarranted logical leap, which makes an analytical philosopher out of Plato, all the while ignoring that he was always first and foremost interested in reality itself, independent of our own interpretation of it and the ways of expressing it.

1.3.2 Independence as non-participation

Alternatively, we may adopt a slightly more relaxed interpretation of the atomicity of the Forms, maintaining only that Forms do not participate in each other, and are therefore mutually separated in the proper sense of the word. This reading requires less amount of sophistication than the other accounts of atomicity—one could even say it is “plain” or “obvious”—and is in fact the one which can most easily be implied from Plato’s corpus itself – that is, if one is ready to imply it from what Plato did not say. As was already mentioned above, pre-Parmenidean references to Forms are, almost in unison, connected with the need to explain the physical and social world around us. It was mostly *because of*

⁴⁴ See section *Commentary* of subchapter [1.2.1 Simplicity as being called by one name only](#).

and *through* their relation to physical things (and human-related problems) that Forms were needed. Thus, Plato was looking for the nature of Smallness and Largeness, Cold and Fire, Health and Strength, of Just and Pious itself, human artefacts, kinds of animals (e.g. bees), Beauty and Good, and, lastly, of Odd and Even (and numbers generally).

This means, in the first place, that physical things need Forms to provide them with all these qualities through participation, and in turn each Form has its own unique character it provides to these.⁴⁵ However, Forms also (and already in early dialogues) have several other characteristics on top of their single, unique character each of them provides through participation. Leaving out controversial properties (as being unitary or partless), they are all undoubtedly regarded at least as unchanging, eternal, non-perceptible by the senses, intelligible, and existing (being) in the pre-eminent sense.⁴⁶

Yet before the *Parmenides*, Plato never mentions how Forms gain these other characteristics, never even pausing long enough to at least articulate this as a genuine question. It follows naturally that we might want to read this as an indirect proof (or, at least a hint) that this was not a question at all, because for earlier Plato each Form simply had these characteristics and did not need any cooperation at all with other Forms in order to gain them. This is strengthened even more by the realisation that when referred to in these dialogues, Forms are always treated separately; one Form at a time, allegedly without a hint of their communion at all.⁴⁷

Secondly, we have seen that the properties or characters that were examined in the earlier dialogues were the ones that these physical things themselves exhibited. The Forms that Plato needed for these purposes can therefore be (loosely speaking) described as providing aesthetic, ethical, physical and (to a limited extent) mathematical qualities. But from the *Parmenides* onward, Plato suddenly started to be interested in the properties that can be characterised as logical, ontological or structural—properties such as Unity, One-ness, Many-ness, Difference and Sameness. This suggests a serious shift in Plato's thinking, and one way to explain that change is precisely to claim that Plato in the *Parmenides* realised that Forms cannot be atomic in terms of their non-participation in

⁴⁵ I will, for the sake of brevity, colloquially refer to Forms' specific, unique character they provide through the relation of participation as "their own" character or property.

⁴⁶ As we have already seen in my commentary to the possible reading of simplicity of Forms as being called by one name only – see section *Commentary* of subchapter [1.2.1 Simplicity as being called by one name only](#).

⁴⁷ I say "allegedly" because there are, in fact, several hints of the cooperation of Forms in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues. Notable examples of these are in *Republic* V.476a, VI.500c and VII.531c–d. These allusions are, however, vigorously denied by proponents of developmentalism. I state it here only factually, as the examination of the relations among Forms will be the task of the following parts of the dissertation.

each other, because they themselves have multitude of properties that are in need of explanation.⁴⁸

Lastly, since the very first references to it, there is an observable asymmetry in the relation of participation. It is described as a bond between the thing that “always is and neither comes to be nor passes away”, and “those others [that] come to be or pass away” (*Symposium* 211a–b). On the one hand, there is the Form, a self-subsisting, self-sufficient “donor” of characteristics, and on the other, “acceptors” with all their characteristics being completely dependent on participation. The former is the being in a prominent sense, “the real”, that which “really is” (*Phaedo* 78d)—while on the latter side we have things that “never in any way remain the same as themselves” (*Phaedo* 78e), each of which “never really is”, if we are allowed to refer to a (most probably) post-Parmenidean dialogue *Timaeus* (28a). There is a (at the very least implied) difference in the *kinds of beings* that Forms and their participants are. This difference is to a great extent diminished, if not completely eliminated, once we allow Forms to stand on both sides of the participation-relation. And that exactly seems to have happened by allowing the Forms in the *Parmenides* (and in the dialogues to follow) to become in communion with each other.

To sum this up, we have three different grounds to see this kind of atomicity—atomicity as non-participation of Forms—in pre-Parmenidean dialogues. Firstly, while Plato thought that the characters that the physical things exhibit are in need of further explanation, he never mentioned the same should apply to Forms, although he was already aware that Forms also have, in addition to their own characters, many other properties. Secondly, the qualities that he was originally interested in were the qualities applicable (perhaps not *only*, but always *also* and *predominantly*) to physical things, while later his focus shifted to qualities that predominantly concerned Forms. Thirdly, participation was from the very beginning articulated as an asymmetrical relation between two different kinds of beings: self-sufficient intelligible Forms on the one side, and on the other not even properly existing, ever-changing physical things.

⁴⁸ That is, in addition to their own characters. We might argue that the single unique, proper character of each Form does not need any additional explanation, since the Form itself is its *explanans*: the Form either has or itself is this essence. However, if Forms have some other properties—as we have seen they have, according to Plato—, then the presence of *those* in Forms is not (at least not directly and immediately) explained by the existence of the Form itself, and thus calls for further justification.

2 *Parmenides*, the turning point of the Theory of Forms

After the logical analysis of the notion of atomicity, the *Parmenides* is the dialogue where we need to continue our investigation, as whichever reading of atomicity we might prefer to adopt, it is in the *Parmenides* where the interrelation of Forms is first dealt with, and their self-sufficiency and atomicity are being called into question. The turning point seems to be the section 129, where Socrates challenges Parmenides to show that the Forms might display opposite properties just as the physical things do:

If someone showed that the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like – that, I think, would be a marvel; but if he shows that things that partake of both of these have both properties, there seems to me nothing strange about that, Zeno – not even if someone shows that all things are one by partaking of oneness, and that these same things are many by partaking also of multitude. But if he should demonstrate this thing itself, what one is, to be many, or, conversely, the many to be one – at this I'll be astonished.

(*Parmenides* 129b)

Plato informs us about the importance of this passage by having Socrates proclaim three more times in just a few following lines (129c–130a) his amazement, if Parmenides were to be successful in his business. A host of commentators have already addressed these well-known lines of the *Parmenides*, and a multitude of different answers have been provided to the question “Why would Socrates be so surprised?”⁴⁹ Yet I believe the logical analysis of Socrates’ amazement is still occluded, as there are, in fact, three distinct questions to be asked, each of which is important on its own:

1. ***What exactly would cause Socrates’ amazement?***

in other words: *What underlying statement that Socrates adopted is being challenged?*

2. ***Why would he be amazed by this?***

in other words: *Why is the challenge of that statement troubling for Socrates?*

⁴⁹ We will address the most influential of these different interpretations throughout this and the following two chapters. Again, the goal of these chapters will not be to *historically* cover all commentators, but first and foremost to analyse the different *logically* possible interpretative positions, and only *then* to provide some particular examples of the most influential interpretations to *illustrate* these positions.

3. *Why would Plato be challenging that statement here and now?*

in other words: *What is the wider purpose of bringing out this challenge in the Parmenides?*

Critics tend to mix these questions together and answer with one complex theory, without precisely delineating what questions they are giving answers to.⁵⁰ The second question is, naturally, connected to the first one, but they still need to be seen as two different problems. While the first question asks what is the *substance* of Socrates' amazement—that is, the statement the denial or acceptance of which intrigues Socrates—the second one is interested in explaining why that statement is causing his amazement in the first place. The third question goes, in some sense, beyond the *Parmenides*, if we treat chronologically successive dialogues as possible responses to the problems raised in the *Parmenides* itself. This chapter will provide an analysis of possible answers to these three questions in sequence.

By adopting this approach, I do not mean to imply that these questions can be *fully resolved* without looking at each other. Against such a course of action, an objection could be (rightly) raised, that we are introducing a separation where there is none; after all, we are here dealing with a single, unitary piece of text, which must therefore be analysed as such. The answer to this objection is that *precisely* in order to fully understand the concerns of Plato in this section (and possibly in the whole dialogue), we need to look at different kinds of causal questions separately. The *what?* of this section (that is, what is the subject of challenge) does not immediately tell us the *why?* of it (why is it a challenge), and this in turn does not instantly reveal the answer to the wider *in order to?* question (the purpose of raising that challenge).

It is of course equally true that embracing a specific answer to the first question (by saying, for example, that the challenge is about the fact that there cannot be opposite properties in Forms) limits the scope of logically compatible answers to the second and third questions. And, vice versa, if I approach this text by having in advance adopted a specific answer to the third question (because, for example, from my previous study of the pre- and post-Parmenidean dialogues I have already firmly decided for myself that Plato's Theory of Forms dramatically differs between these two groups of dialogues, so that there

⁵⁰ We will see this in our analysis of the different answers provided by critics for these three questions. Most often, the answers provided are not meant to address any single of these questions, but all of them combined. This fact is also demonstrated by the mere absence of any clear and systematic differentiation of these three questions (or of any similar set) in the commentaries to recent translations of the *Parmenides* (e.g. Gill 1996, Allen 1997, but also Cornford 1939).

must be a serious shift of Plato's thinking in the *Parmenides* itself), the plausible answers I could give for the first two questions would again be limited to those that can be held coherently with my answer to the third question.

The purpose of my approach is therefore to adequately recognize both the sameness and the difference of these questions: they are genuinely distinct, because no two of them can be "reduced" to the other one (as the answer to neither of them can be unfolded so as to fully provide the answer to the other two). At the same time, the answers we give to these questions affect themselves reciprocally, as the content-matter of these questions is the same (the text itself). The questions must therefore be *analysed separately*, but *resolved in cooperation*.

At the same time, this way of proceeding has the added (and highly needed) benefit of revealing the hidden preconceptions about these questions we might hold. When approaching this important section of Plato's corpus, most Platonic scholars already have their own (reasonably chosen and possibly even well-defended) preconceptions about the answer to (at least) one of these three questions, which then leads to automatic dismissal of some of the logically possible answers to other two questions, because while they are logically possible, they are incompatible with their own answer to the other question. If we begin reading the text by already having firmly decided the answer to any one of these questions, we are not doing justice to the text itself – and the easiest way to avoid the mistake is to preserve the distinctness of these questions in our mind and to address them one by one.

2.1 The logical analysis of the first question

What exactly would cause Socrates' amazement?

in other words: *What underlying statement that Socrates adopted is being challenged?*

The first question is crucially important, as it deals with the *matter* of the problems posed in section 129. Unless we understand precisely *what* underlying statement that Socrates adopted (or is believed to have adopted) is being challenged, we cannot move on to ask why is this particular challenge troubling or astonishing for him, nor why did Plato decide to raise this challenge here in the *Parmenides*. As I have already suggested, my approach is therefore to at least analyse possible answers to this question, even if not immediately deciding which one of them is *the* correct one.

2.1.1 Explanation A: The rejection of essential opposites

One possible answer as to why Socrates would be so amazed is that he is convinced about the rejection of essential opposites in Forms. According to this reading, Socrates simply denies that Forms could somehow possess the property opposite to their own, essential character. Thus, Socrates would be amazed if “the likes themselves come to be unlike”, “the unlikes like”, “what one is, to be many”, or “the many to be one”. Taking $F(f)$ to mean the Form of the quality f , and *opposite- f* to describe a property opposite to the property f , we can formally describe these as follows:

Socrates would be amazed if...

- “*the likes themselves come to be unlike*”,
that is, if $F(\textit{Like})$ has property *opposite-Like*;
- “*the unlikes like*”,
that is, if $F(\textit{opposite-Like})$ has property *Like*;
- “*what one is, to be many*”,
that is, if $F(\textit{one})$ has property *opposite-one*
(interpreting *many* as opposite of *one*, and thus equal to *opposite-one*); or
- “*the many to be one*”,
that is, if $F(\textit{many})$ has property *opposite-many*
(interpreting *one* as opposite of *many*, and thus equal to *opposite-many*).

We can see that while the contradicting characters of physical things do not raise Socrates’ eyebrows, because each one of their characters was supposed to be explained by the single Form having that single character, it *would* pose a problem for Socrates if Forms themselves would have these opposite properties. More generally, *Explanation A* can then be stated in the following way:

Explanation A: The rejection of essential opposites

$F(f)$ cannot have both properties f and *opposite- f* .

However, without properly discriminating between the first and the second question, we might be tempted to explain Socrates’ amazement immediately in terms of the second question, as critics often do. One of these cases is exemplified when the rejection of essential opposites is taken to automatically mean the rejection of opposite causal effects:

Explanation A2: The rejection of opposite causal effects

$F(f)$ cannot have both properties f and *opposite- f*

because

$F(f)$ cannot be the cause of both f -ness and *opposite- f* -ness in physical things.

Indeed, this view is well-aligned with previous discussions about Forms in the earlier dialogues, where Forms are presented as the causes and explanations of characters that physical things have by their participation in Forms. In the *Phaedo* we hear Socrates saying:

If someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful [...] [and] that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful. (*Phaedo* 100d–e)

Because the nature of Forms is such as to give physical things these qualities, they simply cannot also have the qualities opposite to those they provide. If Forms had both opposite properties, it would be possible for them to be the causes of both opposite properties: the Form of Beauty could be the cause of a thing being beautiful just as much as it could be a cause of (the same or different) physical thing's ugliness. Thus we have Socrates telling us a story about what he thought when he was a little younger:

I thought my opinion was satisfactory, that when a large man stood by a small one he was taller by a head, and so a horse was taller than a horse. Even clearer than this, I thought that ten was more than eight because two had been added, and that a two-cubit length is larger than a cubit because it surpasses it by half its length. (*Phaedo* 96d)

He, however, later realised that these “causes” were not worthy of being called by that name, because in some cases they seemed to have provided the reasons for very opposite things. A small man is just as shorter by a head from the large one, as the large one is taller by a head from the small man—the very same head being in one case the cause of smallness, while in the other the cause of largeness—, and so it is with other examples. Socrates was previously confused, because of “not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause” (*Phaedo* 99b), and therefore he is now searching for the *real* causes.

Gill lists this as the first principle of Plato’s causality, and although I do not agree with her overall argument, she is right in stating that “a cause should explain one sort of effect and not its opposite, and for that reason Socrates rejects other purported causes of beauty”.⁵¹ The conclusion is that a real cause (i.e., Form) should always cause the same effect, and never the opposite one. When we now return to the *Parmenides*, we can see why Forms are not allowed to have both properties opposite to each other. It is precisely because they would then be no longer causing only one single character, but possibly more of them. That would lead us to the same problem as previously with a head being a cause of both smallness and largeness, and thus bringing back Socrates’ “confusion” from his younger years.

However, the rejection of opposite causal effects is in fact a logical jump from mere rejection of essential opposites, for it silently presupposes two things. Note that it is really an answer to the second question—and only *one of* the possible answers to it—and not to the first one (in contrast to the rejection of essential opposites, which *is* an answer to the first question). Firstly, then, the rejection of causal opposites presupposes that if we adopt the rejection of essential opposites as an answer to the first question, there are no other possible answers to the second question, and that these two questions can therefore be merged into one.

But secondly, and more importantly, it must be noted that Socrates does not say anything about the presence of the property f in the Form of f , only that it would be amazing to see *opposite- f* in the Form of f . The passage at hand does *not* tell us that “ $F(f)$ has property f ”. The fact that Socrates says that “if someone showed that the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like – that, I think, would be a marvel” does not necessarily mean that the Likes themselves *are* like. It seems to me that many critics have inferred that the claim

$F(f)$ cannot have both properties f and *opposite- f*
means (by implication) that
 $F(f)$ has property f (and thus cannot *also* have the property *opposite- f*).⁵²

But that simply does not follow from the text, and thus the inference cannot be drawn unless it is supported by some accompanying argumentation from other textual sources

⁵¹ Gill 2012, p. 22.

⁵² Gill is not the only one to draw this conclusion. I suspect that this mistaken inference is one of the principal sources of the widespread “general self-predication theory”, which we will analyse in chapter [9 Self-predication and Forms](#).

beyond the text at hand. For example, Gill’s first principle of causation presupposes that if the Form of f would have the property *opposite-f*, it would suddenly be able to cause *opposite-f-ness* in its participants. This, however, means that it is (for Gill) precisely by means of having the property f , that the Form of f is able to cause f -ness in its participants. It is true that if we were to claim that “ $F(f)$ does not have property f ” (e.g., Form of Beauty is not beautiful), the line “if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself” (*Phaedo* 100c) would call for an explanation, as it seems to imply that Beautiful itself is beautiful. But here we are merely stating the definition of *Explanation A* based on the analysed passage of the *Parmenides*, which alone and in itself neither asserts nor rejects the claim that “ $F(f)$ has property f ”. Even if we take the *Phaedo* passage into account, it only suffices to assert that the Form of Beauty is beautiful, but is not sufficient for asserting that “ $F(f)$ has property f ” for each form F in general.

Yet Gill generalises its misrepresented reading: in the *Phaedo* 101a–b, Plato gives several reasons why the head cannot be the cause of largeness in things, and one of them is that a head is itself a small thing, and “this would be strange, namely, that someone is made bigger by something small” (101b). Gill takes the passage to mean that since the head “is itself a small thing” and *this* is one of Plato’s reasons that disqualify it from possibly being the cause of largeness, it follows that “the cause of largeness should be large”.⁵³ Therefore the Form of Largeness must be large, and in general, each Form must have the character it provides to its participants, since the third principle of causation tells us that “if x causes something to be F , [...] x is itself F (and in no way *not-F*)”.⁵⁴ But that is precisely what does *not* follow from Plato’s words! The fact that the head cannot be the cause of largeness, because it is a small thing, does not imply that the Form of Largeness must be *Large* – only that the Form cannot be *small*.

Similarly, ***neither can self-predication be (directly) inferred from the rejection of opposite causal effects.*** That the Form of f causes f -ness in its participants does not necessarily mean that it itself must be f -like. Gill claims self-predication to be the third principle of causation and infers it from three short passages in the whole corpus.⁵⁵ However, the first two (*Phaedo* 100c just mentioned and *Protagoras* 330c) merely assert that the Form of Beauty and Justice is beautiful and just, respectively, and there is no reason to assume from their context that they generalise. That the alleged meaning can be safely read from the third one (*Greater Hippias* 292e) is very spurious. I will return to the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 22, n. 13 (quoting from note’s continuation on the following page).

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 23, n. 15.

problem of self-predication in Forms later in the work.⁵⁶ For this moment, what is important for our reading is that the *Explanation A* can be rephrased once more by stripping out the implicit assumption that the Form of *f* should have the property *f*. The logically simplest explanation of Socrates' amazement would then be that he simply denied that Forms could have character opposite to the one they are providing to their participants, without asserting anything about their own essential character:

Explanation A*: *The rejection of opposite characters*

F(f) cannot have property *opposite-f*.

F(opposite-f) cannot have property *f*.

In other words, the cause of amazement would simply be the presence of property *opposite-f* in the Form of *f*.

2.1.2 Explanation B: The rejection of logical opposites

The second explanation is similar to the *Explanation A* (in its original formulation) in not allowing Forms to have opposite properties. However, it is also more general in not assuming that one of these opposite properties must necessarily be *the* essential property which the Form provides to its participants. Formally, this requirement can be defined in this way:

Explanation B: *The rejection of logical opposites*

F(f) cannot have both properties *g* and *opposite-g* (for any *f* and *g*).

In this case, the exclusion of particular property is not tied to Form's own essential character, but based on logical incompatibility of *any* two opposite properties *g* and *opposite-g* being together in the Form of *f*, irrelevant to the possible equality of *f* and *g*. In other words, the rejection of logical opposites not only says that the One cannot be many, or that the Form of Beautiful cannot be ugly, but also that the One cannot be both ugly and beautiful, and the Form of Beautiful cannot be both one and many.

We might notice that the first amazement passage cited above (129b) seems to clearly speak in favour of *Explanation A* over *B*, as the pairs of opposite properties selected as examples by Socrates always included Form's own essential property. However, going deeper into the dialogue, we are being told that the problem does not arise only in cases where one of the opposite properties is the Form's own essential character. Thus in

⁵⁶ See chapter 9 *Self-predication and Forms*.

Hypothesis 2 of the *Parmenides* (142b–155e) we have, for example, Being which is one and many at the same time (144a–e), with the unacceptable result that while being is a single, unitary Form, at the same time it “is chopped up into beings of all kinds, from the smallest to the largest possible, and is the most divided thing of all; and the parts of being are countless” (144b). And “not only is it the case that the one being is many, but also the one itself, completely distributed by being, must be many” (144e), because “oneness is attached to every part of being” (144c). Similarly, the One is described as both resting and in motion (146a), “both different from the others and itself, and the same as the others and itself” (147b), and “both like and unlike the others” and “like and unlike itself as well” (148d). It “both touches and does not touch the others and itself” (149d) and “is both equal to, and greater and less than, itself and the others” (151b).

These, and many other problematic opposites are spread over all the hypotheses of the second part of the dialogue, all of them denying the principle of non-contradiction, because the logically incompatible opposites seem to spread over all of the Forms. Thus, if we want to take these opposites into account, we either need to doubt the seriousness of these claims and disregard most of the second part of the *Parmenides* as being nonsensical, or we need to adopt this explanation over the *Explanation A*: Socrates is amazed simply because he cannot accept the presence of *any* opposite properties in the Forms themselves (because they are logically incompatible), not only of those opposites which are related to Form’s own essence.

2.1.3 Explanation C: The rejection of multitude

Yet another, even more general answer can be given to the first question. The cause of Socrates’ amazement might be that up to this point, he held that Forms cannot contain or in any way participate in multitude. Formally speaking, *Explanation C* can be stated as follows:

Explanation C: The rejection of multitude

$F(f)$ cannot have both properties g and h (for any f, g and h).⁵⁷

Later in this project I am going to argue that this answer is the correct reading of what is going on in the 129 passage—although it was up to this day mostly ignored or

⁵⁷ Note the all-encompassing nature of the *Explanation C*: the rejection of the multiplicity of properties (*Explanation C*) is not limited to the cases where one of the properties is the Form’s own unique property (as in the *Explanation A*), nor to the cases where the properties are opposite to each other (*Explanation B*).

overlooked by commentators, with a notable exception of Cornford in his *Plato and Parmenides* (1939). At this point, however, we only need to examine this reading as one of the logically possible answers to the first question we are analysing.

The first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (137c–142a) presents us with an atomic account of the One; that is, the One without any additional characteristic except its very own—namely, that it is one. As we will shortly see, this will amount to an understanding of atomicity as simplicity—either *Simplicity as non-compositeness*, or even stricter, *Simplicity as being called by one name only*. However, it does not start with this goal in view. The initial plan of the first hypothesis was to examine Parmenides’ claim that the One is one, and therefore cannot be many, as is stated by the opening line of the hypothesis: “If it is one, the one would not be many” (137c). So it is only the *many*-ness that is initially denied to the One. But, as a consequence of this initial premise, the One is in turn progressively stripped of any other characteristic and, as we shall see, eventually also of *being* and *oneness* itself.

As Cornford puts it, “we are told that the term ‘one’ is to be taken as excluding plurality altogether; the One is not to have any distinction of parts or to be in any sense many or diverse”.⁵⁸ And while the passage addresses only the One alone, its conclusion generalises to all the Forms. Each Form must be one, but cannot be *the One*, as it already is *Itself* (which is different from *the One* itself). Therefore each Form already contains Multitude, as it is both (1) whatever it itself is by its own nature, and (2) one. Thus in turn, each Form ends up having at least three different properties, as, on top of its own proper character and the character of being one, it is also many. And because it is both many and one, each Form inherently and necessarily carries the burden of the contradiction caused by the opposite properties it itself has.

If we, on the other hand, deny that any one Form is one and only allow it to be *Itself*, we would end up with the same conclusion that awaited the One at the end of the first hypothesis:

Therefore the One [or in general: *any Form currently examined*] in no way partakes of being, [...] in no way is, [...] neither *is* it in such a way as to be one [*itself-like*], because it would then, by being and partaking of being, be. But, as it seems, the One [*any Form currently examined*] neither is one [*itself-like*] nor is, if we are obliged to trust this argument. [...] Therefore, no name belongs to it, nor is there an account or any knowledge or perception or opinion of it, [...] it is not named or spoken of, nor is it the object of

⁵⁸ Cornford 1939, p. 115.

opinion or knowledge, nor does anything that is perceive it.

(*Parmenides* 141e, italicised generalised versions in square brackets mine)

This, again, is shown on the example of the Form of One, but generalises to all the Forms. Thus while we were initially only interested in examining whether Forms might hold opposite properties, the investigation has led us to consider whether it is even possible to call Forms by several different names in general – that is, to the question of atomicity of Forms understood as simplicity. The procedure of the very first hypothesis seems to be completely directed towards the goal of complying with this (unspoken) requirement of the logical exclusion of multitude. However, I believe Plato has given us a hint that this is also the reason for Socrates' amazement right in the 129 section. After the second amazement passage, Socrates continues with his speech:

He will say, when he wants to show that I'm many, that my right side is different from my left, and my front from my back, and likewise with my upper and lower parts – ***since I take it I do partake of multitude***. But when he wants to show that I'm one, he will say I'm one person among the seven of us, ***because I also partake of oneness***. Thus he shows that both are true.

(*Parmenides* 129c–d, bolded emphasis mine)

We are told that the reason why Socrates would not be amazed by seeing (previously mentioned) opposite properties in physical things is that these things partake both of multitude and oneness. Socrates demonstrates this on the example of opposite properties *one* and *many*. He shows that we can say that he is *many* (has property *many*-ness), because he partakes of multitude (that is, he participates in the Form of Many), and that he is *one* (has property *one*-ness), because he partakes of oneness (that is, he participates in the Form of One), without contradiction.

But while he has chosen as his exemplar for this demonstration the opposite properties *one* and *many*, the point of the argument is not in these particular opposite properties, nor that they are opposite at all (those would be the claims of *Explanation A* and *Explanation B*, respectively). The example is generalisable to other properties, and the point lies in the fact that there is multitude involved in Socrates, and therefore we can say all this without the fear of contradicting ourselves. Whenever multitude is involved, many characteristics can (potentially) be ascribed to the particular. And vice versa, when a thing is only one and does not “partake of multitude”, this is altogether impossible. And while Socrates sees no difficulty in mixing both multitude and oneness in one sensible being, it seems to be that Forms themselves have been, up to this point, taken to be not in any way *many*. I will argue in the sections to follow, that this exactly is the real challenge that is

posed to Plato's Theory of Forms in the *Parmenides* (although I will at the same time disagree with the interpretation that the challenge is unexpected or shocking for Plato).

2.1.4 Commentary

The reason why there are critics advocating each of the three logically possible explanations as the causes of Socrates' amazement seems to be the fact that all the hypotheses are dealing with the One. Incidentally, it is possible to explain the denial of the possibility that the One is also many (cf. the opening of the first hypothesis at 137c: "If it is one, the one would not be many") by all the three explanations. The One is essentially *one*, so the rejection of essential opposites (*Explanation A*) is enough to accommodate the denial of the opposite property of being *many*. Additionally, since *one-ness* is the logical opposite of *many-ness*, the rejection of logical opposites (*Explanation B*) is again sufficient as a reason for the denial. And, finally, it is also possible to explain the denial by the rejection of multitude (*Explanation C*), since the One being at the same time *one* and *many* immediately creates a multitude of characteristics in it.

The cause of confusion is therefore the fact that the initially-chosen examples might incidentally be explained by different theories. But as we go deeper into the dialogue, it is becoming progressively clearer that the first two explanations (*A* and *B*) are not successful in dealing with the problems presented by Parmenides. The third hypothesis shows us that "indeed we will have no further trouble in finding that things other than the One [...] have all the opposite properties" (159a–b). In other words, we will find out that the rejection formulated in *Explanation A* would not be sufficient to solve the problem, since it could only respond to the contradictions stemming from the fact that there are pairs of opposite properties, where one of them is the essential property of the Form.

But neither will *Explanation B* provide the sufficient grounding for all cases. For while it can be successfully utilised to explain the third hypothesis, the fourth hypothesis leads to the conclusion which contradicts the previous one, that "as it is, things other than the One are neither one nor many nor a whole nor parts, since they in no way partake of the One" (159d). While we might still read this merely as a denial of logical opposites and attempt to fix the problem by the rejection formulated in *Explanation B*, the reasoning behind the denial of these properties will reveal that neither this explanation will be sufficient:

So they are neither the same nor different, neither in motion nor at rest, neither coming to be nor ceasing to be, neither greater nor less nor equal. Nor do they have any other such

properties. For if the others submit to having any such property, they will partake of one and two and three and odd and even, of which it was shown they could not partake, since they are in every way entirely deprived of the one. (Parmenides 160a–b)

In other words, the problem lies in the fact that attributing any property whatsoever other than the property which properly belongs to each particular Form by its name creates multiplicity in it: “if the one has any property apart from being one, it would be more than one” (140a). That was why the others were “in every way entirely deprived of the one”: in an attempt to avoid multiplicity in Forms, so that they do not become “more than one”. And this is the contents of *Explanation C*, whose aim is to deny that any two properties *g* and *h* would be present in the same Form *F(f)* – on the basis of a sheer fact that two properties would already constitute a couple, and therefore a multitude. So we can try to deny these additional properties by saying that the One will only be one (and vice versa with all the other Forms), and nothing else:

It is not proper to one to be different from something, but proper to different-from-another alone, and to nothing else. [...] Therefore it won't be different by being one. [...] Yet if it isn't different by being one, it will not be so by itself; and if it isn't so by itself, it will not itself be so. (Parmenides 139c)

Thus, finally, *Explanation C* seems to be the statement that Socrates poses as a challenge to Zeno (and Parmenides), since only the rejection of multitude is general enough to cover all the cases of contradictions. Ultimately, we will see that the vicious consequences cannot be avoided even by rejecting the plurality of properties to a Form. For the regress continues further to the point where we realise that even attributing oneness to the One—or, in general, the character proper to any Form to that particular Form—creates this same multiplicity, because in saying that “the One *is* one” we already attribute being and oneness to the One, so the multiplicity is necessarily there – and this affects each and every Form we can possibly think of. For example, asserting that “the Beautiful is beautiful” leads to the very same multiplicity, because the Beautiful both *is* and *is beautiful*. But that precisely will be one of the principal tasks of the *Parmenides*: to realise (or allow the reader to realise) that any one property attributed to a Form is already enough to create a multiplicity within the Form itself – and therefore that multiplicity is unavoidable. Whether Plato actually anticipated this realisation or was surprised by it, is another question, which will be addressed throughout the logical analysis of the remaining two questions.

* * * * *

Based on the analysis of the text of *Parmenides* itself, *Explanation C* seems to be the most coherent interpretation of the cause of Socrates' amazement. Arguably, Socrates challenges the possibility of multitude in Forms – this, I take it (together with Cornford), is the *matter* of the problems posed in section 129, the answer to the first question: *What exactly would cause Socrates' amazement?* But despite the argumentation in favour of this explanation, which I have tried to provide above, the decision which particular answer to the first question one should ultimately adopt cannot be made without looking at the other two questions. For, as I have already pointed out, although the three questions must be analysed separately, they need to be resolved in cooperation.

This is because the answer to the first question does not on its own reveal the challenge of the *Parmenides* itself. It is merely the precise logical formulation of the statement that lies behind the words of Socrates telling us that he would be amazed “if someone showed that the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like”, or “if he should demonstrate this thing itself, what one is, to be many, or, conversely, the many to be one” (129b), or “if he could show that the kinds and forms themselves have in themselves these opposite properties” (129c). But it still remains unclear, first: *Why would Socrates be amazed by this?*; and second: *Why would Plato be challenging that statement here and now?* These are the tasks of the second and third questions, which are to be examined in the following chapters.

3 The logical analysis of the second question

Why would he be amazed by this?

in other words: *Why is the challenge of that statement troubling for Socrates?*

Now that the possible logical alternatives of the answers to the first question have been analysed, it is possible to ask *why* would Socrates be amazed by the raised challenge. In other words, now that we know *what* is (might be) the substance of the questions raised, we might look closer at the reasons why that challenge could be troubling or important for Socrates.

What only very few commentators did and do note is the subtle fact that Socrates' pronounced astonishment can be read (and understood) in two very different ways. Socrates might *either* be expressing his categorical disbelief that anybody would be able to show that Forms might contain essential opposites, or logical opposites, or multitude of properties (that is, any of the statements that we identified as the possible explanations in the analysis of the first questions), *or* he might simply be saying that he would admire the person capable of showing how is it possible, as it is an extremely hard thing to do.

In the first case, the challenge is a purely negative one: Socrates (and possibly Plato himself) is simply denying the possibility that Forms would in this respect be similar to particulars, and he is expressing his potential shock, were Zeno able to meet the challenge – for it would have a negative (possibly fatal) consequences for the Theory of Forms as he conceived it. Under this reading, Socrates later realises that this is indeed the case and learns his lesson the hard way by getting into paradoxes he cannot solve (at least not in the dialogue *Parmenides*) during the debate with Parmenides, which is constituted by the eight hypotheses of the second part of the dialogue.

Under the latter reading, however, the challenge is a constructive one. Socrates (and, again, possibly also Plato himself) has a genuine, positive interest in solving the challenge, and invites anybody capable of demonstrating it to do so. Parmenides himself takes up the gauntlet and leads Socrates through a long and winding philosophical exercise to show him how “the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like”, and that this is *already* present and can be seen in Socrates' own Theory.

This inherent ambiguity of Socrates' amazement had been spotted by Paul Shorey already back in 1931, but has been vastly overlooked by subsequent scholars since then. In

his short, but well-aimed *Note on Plato Parmenides 129-30*, he pointed this out, while himself adopting a constructive reading of Socrates' amazement:

What Socrates there says in substance is that to exhibit the contradictions of the one and the many in concrete material things is no great trick. Zeno's dialectics in that kind, he courteously says, is a valiant piece of work. But it would be much more wonderful and admirable to illustrate the same antinomies in the realm of abstractions, of pure thought, of ideas. [...] What commentators usually make him say is that he would be surprised (because he thinks it impossible) if anyone should find these contradictions in the ideas themselves. [—Shorey 1931, p. 91]

Shorey sums up the distinction in an accompanying footnote below his main text: “It is an ἀπορία, not an impossibility.”⁵⁹ We do not need to embrace Shorey's conclusion (at least not yet), but it is good to at least ponder over the clarity in which he expresses the dilemma we are in fact facing: ***are we to understand Socrates' amazement as presenting an aporia, or an impossibility?*** Indeed, the manner in which a critic will proceed with his investigation of the passage hangs first and foremost on her decision to read Socrates' amazement *either* as an expression of impossibility, *or* an articulation of a challenge. Whichever particular answer we will give to the second question at the end of the day will be, in the first place, to a great extent pre-determined by this prior fundamental choice. Yet an overwhelming majority of critics do not even comment on this choice. We should, therefore, pay close attention to the (implicit or explicit) reasoning behind any answer given to the second question by different critics. For this reason, my analysis of the second question will be commenced in terms of this primary choice of reading.

3.1 The negative reading in general: the statement imparts an impossibility

The negative reading of Socrates' challenge is today considered a *de facto* standard interpretation, and it has been like that for quite some time. Contemporary critics almost in unison agree that it is one of the goals of the *Parmenides* to confront and reject what Socrates is saying about the Theory of Forms, and the interpretation is only a matter of determining what precisely are the claims to be rejected, and on what grounds. Yet, despite the general agreement about this interpretation, none of the critics I have been able to read on this topic, provides any analysis or rationale of his or her choice. The reading has a

⁵⁹ Shorey 1931, p. 91, note 3.

status of widely-accepted choice, but it nevertheless seems to remain an *assumed* and *implicit* choice – and for this reason it must be challenged prior to be accepted.

One glaring example of the commentators who evidently fell into this assumption was Gilbert Ryle. Without even considering the possibility of alternative interpretations for Socrates' amazement and skipping any prior analysis, he simply assumed Socrates to be “gravely perturbed” by the idea of Forms having opposite properties:

Socrates repeats four times between 129b and 130a that he would be gravely perturbed if it were shown that not the instances of Forms but Forms themselves underwent opposite predicates. And we shall see that in the second part of the dialogue Parmenides takes up just this challenge. [—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 5]

Broadly speaking, any negative reading translates into the claim that Socrates' amazement imparts an impossibility, not an ἀπορία – to use Shorey's distinction. And the precise answer to the second question is then more or less directly determined by our adopted explanation of the first question. Taken negatively, the second question—that is, why would Socrates be amazed by the statement—might be rephrased as asking: *Why is the challenge of that statement troubling for Socrates?* And the answer which naturally offers itself is that the statement (adopted as the explanation of the first question) was crucial for the early Theory of Forms – or in any case at least a solid and unquestioned part of it. The survivability of the Theory then depends precisely on how important the statement in question was for the early version of the Theory itself. This, in turn, will then have its import also to the third question, for it will partially determine both our reading of the message that Plato wanted to convey by raising this problem in the *Parmenides*, and the outcome of whether the Theory can be saved and to what extent it will have to be changed in order to survive. Because all the different negative interpretations are based on the same assumption (and are to that extent similar), I will in this section focus on this assumption alone, and in the following section I will deal specifically with one of the more prominent of these interpretations, connected with the compresence of opposites, which needs to be addressed in particular.

The negative reading has a strong initial plausibility, which almost seems to make this choice of the reading obvious and self-explanatory. In the first part of the *Parmenides*, we see that Socrates reacts to Zeno's speech by telling him that the contradicting properties we encounter in “things we call ‘many’” (129a) can be explained by and solved with his Theory of Forms. Thus he draws the Theory into the discussion, and makes a distinction between sensible things and Form based on the claim that the contradictions are easily

spotted in the former group, but would be extremely hard to be shown in the latter one.⁶⁰ Then, in the section 130b–134e, traditionally called *Parmenides’ Criticisms*—the name already seems to speak for itself—, Parmenides asks Socrates to give an account of what exactly is this relation of participation, by which sensible things gain their properties from Forms. And Socrates is unable to present any satisfactory answer at all. The second part of the *Parmenides* then provides eight different hypotheses which look at the postulate “if the One is” from all possible different perspectives, and despite the fact that they yield all kinds of contradictory results, they *also* undoubtedly show that these opposing properties are in any case to be found in the Forms themselves. And when we look for the reason for these contradictions, they all seem to point back at Socrates’ challenge, implying that there is probably something wrong with it. Lastly, whatever we make of the *Parmenides* as a whole, at least that seems to be clear, that it is highly destructive, not constructive about its subject – and that subject is indisputably the Theory of Forms Socrates presented in the beginning. Formally, we may formulate the general negative reading in the following way:

Explanation A: *The statement presents an impossibility, which is nevertheless proven to be true and causes later refinement of the Theory of Forms*

Premise 1: Socrates’ statement is presented as an impossibility.

Premise 2: The current Theory of Forms is incompatible with the statement.

Premise 3: Parmenides’ hypotheses in the second part prove the statement.

Conclusion: The fact that Parmenides succeeds in showing the statement to be true, reveals contradictions in Socrates’ Theory of Forms. If the Theory should avoid them, it needs to be updated (or completely abandoned).

3.2 Countering the negative reading

Yet, however convincing this “most likely story” of the negative reading is, there are several grounds on which we might claim that the positive reading should be preferred to the negative one. Although none of them might be decisive on its own, I will try to show that, when taken all together, they render the negative reading not only implausible, but entirely unacceptable *vis-à-vis* the inherent plausibility of the positive reading.

⁶⁰ This, I take it, is an uncontroversial, “factual” description of the challenge – whether we take the challenge to be positive or negative, it is still at the very minimum *a challenge*. Thus under both readings it is equally true to say that it would be extremely hard to show the contradictions.

3.2.1 Linguistic analysis of the text

First, there is the linguistic side of the problem, the fine points of which I will only summarise here, as they have already been splendidly explained by Shorey a long time ago.⁶¹ The crux of the passage lies in properly translating and interpreting the Greek words *θαυμαστόν* (*θαυμάσομαι*, *θαυμάζειν*, *θαυμαστῶς*), and *ἀγασθείην* (*ἀγαίμην*), and their other forms, which occur repeatedly in the passage. It is possible to read *θαυμαστόν* (and its other forms) either positively as “wonderful” or “marvellous”, but it can also be interpreted with the sceptical implication as “surprising”, “astonishing” or even “shocking”. Similarly, the *ἀγασθείην* may be read as an admiration or being impressed by something, but it can also mean being “amazed” in a negative (shocked or misbelieving) way – the glaring example of this interpretation was Gilbert Ryle, who has even translated it as “gravely perturbed”.⁶² These two problematic words are accompanied by a pair of related terms: *τέρας* (marvel) and *ἄτοπον* (strange). To see the entire picture, we need to look at the whole passage 128e–130a which contains these problematic terms (emphasised and bolded below):

“I take your point,” Socrates said, “and I believe it was as you say. But tell me this: don’t you acknowledge that there is a form, **[129a]** itself by itself, of likeness, and another form, opposite to this, which is what unlike is? Don’t you and I and the other things we call ‘many’ get a share of those two entities? And don’t things that get a share of likeness come to be like in that way and to the extent that they get a share, whereas things that get a share of unlikeness come to be unlike, and things that get a share of both come to be both? And even if all things get a share of both, though they are opposites, and by partaking of them are both like and unlike themselves, **[129b]** what’s *astonishing* [*θαυμαστόν*] about that?”

If someone showed that the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like – that, I think, would be a *marvel* [*τέρας*]; but if he shows that things that partake of both of these have both properties, there seems to me nothing *strange* [*ἄτοπον*] about that, Zeno – not even if someone shows that all things are one by partaking of oneness, and that these same things are many by partaking also of multitude. But if he should demonstrate this thing itself, what one is, to be many, or, conversely, the many to be one – **[129c]** at this I’ll be *astonished* [*θαυμάσομαι*].

And it’s the same with all the others: if he could show that the kinds and forms themselves have in themselves these opposite properties, that would call for *astonishment* [*θαυμάζειν*]. But if someone should demonstrate that I am one thing and many, what’s *astonishing* [*θαυμαστόν*] about that? He will say, when he wants to show that I’m many,

⁶¹ See Shorey 1931 and Shorey 1888, especially pp. 285–286.

⁶² Ryle 1939/2009, p. 5.

that my right side is different from my left, and my front from my back, and likewise with my upper and lower parts – since I take it I do partake of multitude. But when he wants to show that I’m one, he will say I’m one person among [129d] the seven of us, because I also partake of oneness. Thus he shows that both are true.

So if – in the case of stones and sticks and such things – someone tries to show that the same thing is many and one, we’ll say that he is demonstrating *something* to be many and one, not the one to be many or the many one – and we’ll say that he is saying nothing *astonishing* [θαυμαστόν], but just what all of us would agree to. But if someone first distinguishes as separate the forms, themselves by themselves, of the things I was talking about a moment ago – for example, likeness and unlikeness, multitude and [129e] oneness, rest and motion, and everything of that sort – and then shows that in themselves they can [δυνάμενα] mix together and separate, I for my part,” he said, “would be *utterly* [θαυμαστοῶς] *amazed* [ἀγείμην], Zeno. I think these issues have been handled with great vigor in your book; but I would, as I say, be much more *impressed* [ἀγασθείην] if someone were able to display this same difficulty, which you and Parmenides went through in the case of visible things, also [130a] similarly entwined in multifarious ways in the forms themselves – in things that are grasped by reasoning.”

Pythodorus said that, while Socrates was saying all this, he himself kept from moment to moment expecting Parmenides and Zeno to get annoyed; but they both paid close attention to Socrates and often glanced at each other and smiled, as though they *admired* [ἀγαμένουσ] him. In fact, what Parmenides said when Socrates had finished confirmed this impression. “Socrates,” he said, “you are much to be [130b] *admired* [ἄγασθαι] for your keenness for argument! (trans. by Gill & Ryan 1997; bolded emphasis mine)

To a certain extent we are free to choose how to read those words—and different critics *do* read it differently, usually to accompany their own wider theory of the development of Plato’s thought. But to maintain the consistency of the passage, the reading of both words must itself be consistent: that is, if we choose to read one of them positively, we need to do the same with the other one (and vice versa). Taken on their own, *θαυμαστόν* and *θαυμάσομαι* could potentially be interpreted as Socrates’ denial of the possibility of contradicting properties in the Forms themselves. But then we would be forced to read *ἀγασθείην* and *ἀγείμην* as amazed in a negative way, “staggered” or “stunned”, for if Socrates altogether denies the possibility of opposite properties in Forms, there’s no reason why he should say he would admire or be impressed by the man that would nevertheless show that possibility.

This “negative” reading of *ἀγασθείην* and *ἀγείμην*, however, does not play well with the passage as a whole. Zeno thought that it is impossible for a physical thing to be both like and unlike; Socrates answers that it is possible because it participates in both Forms.

At the same time, Socrates commends Zeno for his good work: “I think these issues have been handled with great vigor in your book” (129e). He does this because, without Forms, what Zeno claimed to be impossible would indeed be so—and thanks to his splendid philosophical argumentation, this would already be safely proved. However, Forms are here posited, and therefore Zeno’s problem does not rise, *but still*, Zeno’s argumentation is of interest for Socrates—with a little twist that he would like to see it employed “to display this same difficulty [...] in the forms themselves – in things that are grasped by reasoning” (129e–130a).

Critics had been putting much stress on the fact that Socrates “was then quite young” (127c, repeated in 130e and 135c–d) and inexperienced in the dialogue, with the implication often being that what Socrates presents in the *Parmenides* are the features of the naïve and immature Theory of Forms, precisely those from which Plato wants to distance himself.⁶³ Thus Socrates (and later in the text Aristotle, who is also described as young – in fact, is selected for the discussion with Parmenides precisely because he is the youngest one!) is often read as fighting against Parmenides, his philosophical positions being in sharp opposition to Parmenides’ remarks. Those remarks, in turn, are usually interpreted either as presenting the features of the mature Theory of Forms, or the conclusive reasons for discarding the Theory altogether. Yet Socrates (and later Aristotle) does not seem to be playing against Zeno—he does not say Zeno’s reasoning is absurd or functionless; he just wants to move it to the next level by focusing on harder problems. This reveals that we should read *ἀγασθείην* and *ἀγαίμην* as expressing the feeling that Socrates would have towards a person that would be able to carry out the greater task of showing also in Forms what Zeno has shown in physical things – a feeling which, as Shorey puts it, should “much more nearly express admiration than skepticism”.⁶⁴

⁶³ To name just a few examples among many: Ryle referred to the theory of Substantial Forms as “the young Socrates’ simple theory” (Ryle 1939/2009, p. 20); Meinwald claimed that “the immaturity of Socrates indicates that the Platonism he offers is itself somewhat immature” (Meinwald 1991, p. 10); according to Hamlyn, “young Socrates puts forward the traditional theory of forms” (Hamlyn 1955, p. 295); and Allen claimed that Socrates’ “youth and relative inexperience will stand in contrast to the age and wisdom of Parmenides” (Allen 1997, p. 72) and even saw him as rude and offensive: “Socrates’ remarks are rude, and quite unprovoked; they stand in sharp contrast to the politeness with which Zeno corrects them. Such rudeness is the mark of a young man, impetuous in argument.” (pp. 76–77)

⁶⁴ Shorey 1931, p. 92. Shorey also argues (pp. 92–93) that “the expression (»I would admire, etc.«) is the virtual equivalent in Plato’s style of the statement in *Charmides* 169a, μεγάλου δὴ τινος, ὃ φίλε, ἀνδρὸς δεῖ, ὅστις τοῦτο κατὰ πάντων ἰκανῶς διαιρήσεται” [what we need, my friend, is some great man to give an adequate interpretation of this point in every detail]. And he adds that “it may even be compared with the remark in *Gorgias* 461b, ταῦτα οὖν ... οὐκ ὀλίγησ συνουσίας ἐστὶν ὥστε ἰκανῶς διασκέψασθαι” [it’ll take more than a short session to go through an adequate examination]. In summary, he says, “it is Plato’s way of saying not that the problem is impossible but that it is difficult.”

The need to read the passage positively is strengthened even more when we continue reading the dialogue. Critics usually take the passage containing Socrates' speech separately from what follows. However, there are two more occurrences of the word (*ἀγαμένονος, ἄγασθαι*) just below. During the speech, Parmenides and Zeno “both paid close attention to Socrates and often glanced at each other and smiled, as though they *admired* [ἀγαμένονος] him” (130a). And “in fact, what Parmenides said when Socrates had finished confirmed this impression”, since Parmenides told Socrates: “you are much to be *admired* [ἄγασθαι] for your keenness for argument!” (130a–b) What more could we expect in order to have confirmed which reading is the proper one? It is clear that these occurrences of the word must be read in the positive way, if Parmenides' and Zeno's reactions should make sense. And again, it is theoretically possible to read these words differently from the same words in a section just above (where we could render them as stunning amazement), but then, what would be the reason for Parmenides' and Zeno's approving smile? If the point was to look down on Socrates and pitifully smile on him just like one would on a naïve child (presenting his naïve world theories), the description does not fit. Thus, linguistically speaking, the only reasonable interpretation that has remained for us is the one Shorey proposed:

Not only, as we have seen, must the main emphasis of the passage be laid on the idea that what Zeno has done is trifling in comparison with the more difficult task that Socrates proposes, but it is flatly impossible to take *ἀγαίμην* and *ἀγασθείην* in the sense of amazement, denial, and doubt. Socrates says that he would admire the man who could do what Parmenides does in 143a and elsewhere, and what is done in the *Sophist* (255a, b with 256a, b, of *Parmenides* 129e). [—Shorey 1931, p. 92]

3.2.2 Similarity with other constructive accounts

But besides the linguistic analysis itself (which, when left on its own, might in some cases provide conflicting or undecidable results), there are several more reasons for rejecting the negative reading, to which we will turn our attention in this and the following sections. First, it might be observed that Plato uses the very same strategy in the *Philebus*, where Socrates initially says to Protarchus that “that the many are one and the one many are amazing statements, and can easily be disputed” (14c), but he is quick to add that this discussion is not really interesting if the object of it are merely physical things:

PROTARCHUS: Do you mean this in the sense that someone says that I, Protarchus, am one by nature but then also says that there are many ‘me’s’ and even contrary ones, when

he treats me, who am one and the same, as tall and short, heavy and light, and endless other such things?

SOCRATES: You, dear Protarchus, are speaking about those puzzles about the one and many that have become commonplace. They are agreed by everybody, so to speak, to be no longer even worth touching; they are considered childish and trivial.

(*Philebus* 14c–d; trans. by Frede 1997⁶⁵)

And just as in the section of *Parmenides* we have been analysing so far, he explains that where the discussion gets interesting is where the real difficulty lies—that is, when dealing with this problem in Forms themselves:

When, my young friend, the one is not taken from the things that come to be or perish, as we have just done in our example. For that is where the sort of one belongs that we were just discussing, which we agreed is not worthy of scrutiny. But when someone tries to posit man as one, or ox as one, or the beautiful as one, and the good as one, zealous concern with divisions of these unities and the like gives rise to controversy. [...] It is these problems of the one and many, but not those others, Protarchus, that cause all sorts of difficulties if they are not properly settled, but promise progress if they are.

(*Philebus* 15a–c)

This is an almost verbatim way of proceeding as we have seen in the *Parmenides*, with the sole exception that Plato (through Socrates) is here extremely direct in telling us that these problems, when considered in physical things, “have become commonplace” and everybody agrees they are “no longer even worth touching”, as they are “childish and trivial” and “not worthy of scrutiny”. In the *Parmenides*, Socrates only says, firstly in a form of a rhetorical question, that “even if all things get a share of both, though they are opposites, and by partaking of them are both like and unlike themselves, what’s *astonishing* [Cornford: *surprising*] about that?” And he adds that if someone “shows that things that partake of both of these have both properties, there seems to me nothing strange about that”.

But this is, in fact, only to be expected with *Philebus* being the latter dialogue which repeats what was already said in the *Parmenides*, and with *Philebus* trying only to deepen, not introduce a whole new account of the problem, as was done in the *Parmenides*. The same way of proceeding in the *Philebus* and the increased confidence that the first problem is not important nor hard actually proves the reading that what is happening in the section of the *Parmenides* is principally the same and that Socrates’ attitude is also unchanged.

⁶⁵ In what follows, I will standardly use the translation of the *Philebus* by Dorothea Frede (1997), unless noted otherwise.

So Socrates in both dialogues simply pushes the discussion forward by specifying where it gets interesting—namely, in dealing with the problem in Forms—and asking his partners (Zeno and Protarchus, respectively) to focus on that. Note how Socrates explicitly says in the passage above that those problems “promise progress” if they are treated properly: just as in the *Parmenides*, the necessity of the Forms, despite those problems, was confirmed by Parmenides – since although Socrates posited Forms and also formulated the challenge, he was nevertheless too young to solve it on his own. Here in the *Philebus* it is confirmed by Socrates himself, as he has already received that training he needed and thus can now successfully lead the investigation on his own.

3.2.3 The testimony of literary Parmenides

Another reason which speaks against the assumption that Socrates’ amazement imparts an impossibility is the testimony of literary Parmenides himself, as Plato presents him in the *Parmenides*. When Parmenides and Socrates conclude at section 135 that despite all the problems raised, the Forms are nevertheless necessary, Parmenides suggests that Socrates needs to undertake a training in dialectics, which will allow him to sift “all these difficulties thoroughly and critically for himself” and possibly even to “be able to teach someone else”, if he turned out to be “a prodigy more remarkable” (135b). Socrates is intrigued and asks what kind of training it is, to which Parmenides answers that he must do exactly what Zeno has done in his treatise: examine the matter from all sides, hypothesise all possible scenarios and look at the consequences, to find the best possible answer. However, Parmenides adds that Socrates should do one thing differently from Zeno, which is to focus on the intelligible realm instead of the sensible one—a thing which Socrates himself proposed and for which Parmenides commends him:

Except I was also *impressed* [ἠγάσθη] by something you had to say to him: you didn’t allow him to remain among visible things and observe their wandering between opposites. You asked him to observe it instead among those things that one might above all grasp by means of reason and might think to be forms. (*Parmenides* 135d–e)

What is important for our current question is the fact that Parmenides himself understands the task Socrates assigned to Zeno as a positive challenge, as an *aporia* which needs to be solved. Parmenides says that Socrates *asked* Zeno to observe the “wandering between opposites” among Forms themselves, and Socrates confirms that this is indeed what he meant: “I did that, [...] because I think that here, among visible things, it’s not at all hard to show that things are both like and unlike and anything else you please” (135e).

Having observed how Parmenides himself understood Socrates' amazement, we may now return back to our passage a bit wiser. Socrates' task is meant by him to be a positive challenge to Zeno (and Parmenides) to move from physical things to Forms themselves and to observe *their own* "wandering between opposites". This then clearly reveals how we, as readers, should interpret not only Socrates' amazement, but the whole second part of the dialogue, because it is obviously meant to be a response (if, maybe, somewhat indirect) to Socrates' task.

3.2.4 The dialogue is cooperative

Lastly, it is possible to infer the proper reading also from the way the second part of the dialogue unfolds and concludes. When we compare the dialogue of the main interlocutors in the *Parmenides* (that is, between Parmenides and Socrates or later Aristotle, respectively) with the dialogues where Plato has Socrates (or another figure conveying Plato's thoughts to the reader) fighting against some sophist—even if in good faith and with the goal of attaining knowledge for both of them—we can see quite different proceeding of the discussion. Under the pressure of Socrates' inquisitive questions, the opponent is subsequently abandoning his old positions and trying to find a new stability in new ones, only to find them deficient again. The extent to which Socrates offers his own solutions typically depends on the chronological position of the dialogue within the Platonic corpus. In the early "Socratic" dialogues, instead of giving an opponent a finishing blow, Socrates at the end of the inquiry only tends to draw a summary that the subject so far examined is a complicated one and finding answers to the questions posed is harder than the opponent initially expected. In the middle and late dialogues, Plato (through the leading literary figure) often offers his own solutions. But the mutual mark is that towards the end of the dialogue, the opponent usually submits to Socrates and admits that he didn't really know what he was talking about.

In the *Parmenides*, however, the dialogue between the main protagonists proceeds differently. The fact that here Socrates is the one being taught and not vice versa does not concern us that much. What is important is that if Socrates believed that the challenge is an impossibility, the whole second part of the dialogue would be a sort of a dialectic battle between him (through Aristotle) and Parmenides, and Socrates himself would suffer a defeat at the end of the dialogue. His main and most strongly held position that Forms cannot in any way combine and exhibit opposite properties has been contradicted from every possible perspective in every step of the second part of the dialogue. Even given

Zeno's and Parmenides' remarkable politeness, this would still be a very bitter defeat for Socrates, arrived at only after a series of attempts to recover from the previous contradiction and save his Theory. Just as in the other dialogues, we would see the person on the short end (in this case, Socrates himself) proposing new solutions, invented on the go, to patch the discovered weakness in his theory.

But there's no sign of any of these in the text. Despite the fact that, as Reginald E. Allen wrote, "perhaps no theory in the history of philosophy has been exposed to a more tight-knit and subtle series of objections"⁶⁶ as the Theory of Forms in the second part of the *Parmenides*, we do not see Aristotle proposing solutions and Parmenides demolishing them. They are obviously working together, with Parmenides leading the way—indeed, working together, but to what goal? The closest we can get to the impression that Socrates opposes Parmenides is in the transitional section, where Parmenides proposes a series of objections to the Theory of Forms, to which Socrates is trying, very unsuccessfully, to find answers. Yet it is clear that Parmenides only wants to outline the problems that await them—as soon as he sees that Socrates understands the core of the objection, he moves on to the next one, instead of finishing it to demonstrate its demolishing power. Similarly, Socrates is trying to propose some answers, as if to advance the account, but he does not act like the one wanting to strongly assert that they are true. So we have him, after the largeness regress in 132a, only conservatively and insecurely telling Parmenides: "But, Parmenides, maybe each of these forms is a thought [...] and properly occurs only in minds. In this way each of them might be one and no longer face the difficulties mentioned just now." (132b) We see no sign of over-confident assertions, as we are used to in other dialogues where the opponent is (typically) a sophist whose account needs to be proven entirely wrong.

Both of them act like partners genuinely seeking the truth, not defending their own side of the barricade. And this cooperation on its own presupposes that they are, fundamentally, doing the same thing, working on the same project—which would be impossible if Socrates' point of departure was that what Parmenides will be showing him in the second part is altogether and absolutely impossible. Young Aristotle's last answer to Parmenides, which at the same time concludes the entire *Parmenides*, is simply: "Very true" (166c). Aristotle bluntly accepts the conclusions to which they both arrived together, without any hint or trace of retracting what he has said in the beginning.

⁶⁶ Allen 1997, p. 104.

This, together with all the previous reasons, should bring us to the final conclusion that the initial assumption that Socrates' amazement imparts an impossibility is simply wrong. Thus, if we understand the second part to be at least in *some* way constructed as a response to the problems raised in the first part—that is, if we accept that it is not nonsensical and is not merely a dialectical exercise without any connection to its topic⁶⁷—we have no other option left, except to interpret Socrates' amazement as a presentation of challenge, and as a display of admiration to the one who could possibly meet it.

3.3 The compresence of opposites as the cause of the negative reading

Among today's most prominent negative explanations of Socrates' astonishment is the one which holds that Socrates would be amazed to see the opposing properties in Forms, since the explanation of this phenomenon in the sensible things was precisely the purpose of the Theory of Forms and the reason for positing it. In other words, "compresentists"—the proponents of this reading—claim that the Theory was *intended* to explain the compresence of opposites, thus it is self-evident why Socrates' amazement imparts an impossibility, and why is it necessary to read it as that.⁶⁸ This is an extension of the general negative reading, since not only is the challenge of Socrates assumed to be negative, but the statement that is being challenged is itself taken to be *the* foundational reason for positing the Theory in the first place. Thus, countering it—as Parmenides (arguably) did in the second part of the *Parmenides*—would be destructive for the Theory.

Though not every commentator draws this final conclusion, allowing Forms to have opposite properties would necessarily render the Theory completely redundant, as it was introduced by Plato *precisely* to explain and root this opposition of properties in sensible things. If it isn't able to do so, there is no reason for postulating it at all. So in case the challenge posed to Parmenides by Socrates would be met, not only will the Theory have to be dropped as contradictory, but there's no point at all in trying to save it (let's say, by refining it or rethinking some of its assumptions), as it has lost its primary purpose for

⁶⁷ These alternative readings of the second part of the *Parmenides* were proposed in the past by several critics. Though they are now mostly abandoned, I will shortly deal with them in chapter 4 *The logical analysis of the third question* below, as I see them more as possible answers to the wider question asking what was (for Plato) the purpose of bringing out the challenge in the *Parmenides*.

⁶⁸ I will sometimes in the following text refer to the proponents of this view as "compresentists", to avoid repetitive explanation of the position.

which it was invented in the first place. This specific negative reading founded on the problem of compresence of opposites can be formulated in the following way:

Explanation B: *The statement presents an impossibility, which is nevertheless proven to be true and makes the Theory of Forms redundant.*

Premise 1: Socrates' statement is presented as an impossibility.

Premise 2: The purpose of the Theory was to avoid the statement.

Premise 3: Parmenides' hypotheses in the second part prove the statement.

Conclusion: The fact that Parmenides succeeds in showing the statement to be true, reveals that the Theory fails to remove the contradiction of the compresence of opposites from sensible things, and instead introduces a new layer of the same problem in the realm of Forms. Thus, the Theory itself is shown to be redundant.

3.3.1 Two assumptions of Gill's negative reading

One of the strong contemporary advocates of the view that the Theory of Forms was invented by Plato in order to explain the opposite properties in sensible things is Mary Louise Gill.⁶⁹ She claims that Plato introduced his Theory to explain the “apparent contradiction“ that we encounter when we customarily look at things which exhibit contrary properties.⁷⁰ We need to focus our attention specifically on Gill's reading, since she is one of the most renowned contemporary scholars in terms of interpreting both the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*. Her and Ryan's translation of the *Parmenides* is one of the most recent available and generally of an excellent quality,⁷¹ and she publishes extensively on the topics of the *Parmenides* and its interrelation with the *Sophist*. However, for the purposes of our logical analysis of the second question, the most important fact is probably that the two assumptions of her reading of the *Parmenides*, which we will examine in this subchapter, remain unchanged throughout almost thirty years, dating at least from her translation of the *Parmenides* in 1996 and continued to be held up to her article in 2022.⁷²

⁶⁹ Among contemporary scholars, a similar position has been put forward also by Allen, who claimed that “at *Republic* V 479a–c, the chief ground for positing the existence of Ideas is that sensible objects are qualified by opposites” (Allen 1997, p. 90). However, he saw the ultimate problem not in the compresence itself, but in the fact that “unless things qualified by opposites are distinguished from the opposites that qualify them, the result is absurdity” (Ibid.).

⁷⁰ Gill does not draw the conclusion that the Theory has to be dropped. Yet, as we will see, she should have done so, given her reading that the Theory was invented to explain compresence of opposites in physical things, and the premises she adopted in doing this.

⁷¹ Which is the reason why I am standardly using her and Ryan's translation of the *Parmenides* throughout this dissertation.

⁷² See Gill 2022. This is currently Gill's most recent published article, as of the time of writing this dissertation. The article shortly confirms the two assumptions I will deal with below: both the general one

To understand her reading, we need to start at the beginning of the *Parmenides*, where we have Zeno reading his book written as a defence of Parmenides' claim that "the all is one". Zeno proceeded indirectly; using a proof by contradiction he showed that the opposite claim (that "the all is many") would "suffer consequences even more absurd than those suffered by the hypothesis of its being one" (128d). After the reading (which itself is not transcribed in the dialogue), Socrates summarises Zeno's argumentation thus:

If things are many, they must then be both like and unlike, but that is impossible, because unlike things can't be like or like things unlike. [...] If it's impossible for unlike things to be like and like things unlike, isn't it then also impossible for them to be many? Because, if they were many, they would have incompatible properties. Is this the point of your arguments – simply to maintain, in opposition to everything that is commonly said, that things are not many? (*Parmenides* 127e)

So according to Zeno (and Parmenides), if we allowed "the all" to be many, it would mean that things are both like and unlike. We are not given Zeno's reasoning behind this claim, but it seems reasonable to postulate that since we allowed "the all" to be parcelled into many things, each of them is like itself, but unlike (at least some of) the other things.⁷³ This creates the situation in which each thing is both like and unlike, so it has contrary properties. But since a thing cannot have contrary properties (that is Zeno's premise), "the all" can only be one (thing). As Gill puts it:

We are not told what specific arguments Zeno gave for his conclusions, but we are given the shape of the general argument: If things are many, they must be both like and unlike; this is impossible, because the same things cannot have incompatible properties. Therefore things are not many. [—Gill 1996, p. 11]

Formally, we could formulate Zeno's argument in the following way:

Zeno's argument: The impossibility of plurality

Premise 1: Things cannot have contrary properties.

Premise 2: If things are many, they would be both like and unlike.

Conclusion: Things cannot be many (since like and unlike are contrary properties).

that Socrates' statement presents an impossibility, since according to the article, Socrates "would be shocked [...] if the form of oneness itself were many, or the many one" (p. 149). The more specific "compresence" assumption is likewise confirmed, since Gill claims that Socrates proposed the Theory of Forms precisely to explain the compresence of opposites in physical things, and thus the idea of Forms displaying the same compresence "initially seemed to him monstrous" (p. 154). Gill even adds the third assumption: she takes Socrates to hold a thesis that "forms cannot partake of other forms" (p. 150) – a "mistaken assumption" which Socrates must ultimately give up in order to save the positive hypothesis that the One *is*.

⁷³ For more on Zeno's and Parmenides' own accounts, see Allen 1997, chapter "*Zeno's paradox (127d–128e)*", pp. 76–84.

The dialogue then leads us to the already-familiar key passage 129, which we have been examining since the beginning of this chapter. Socrates explains that it does not surprise him at all to see the opposite properties in sensible things and that he sees no difficulty in explaining it, since this phenomenon can be explained precisely by the fact that those things participate in Forms. However, as we already know, Socrates at the same time adds that he would be astonished to see this incompatibility in Forms themselves. Gill interprets this unfolding of the dialogue as the proof that the Theory was introduced precisely to explain this contradiction:

What mattered for Plato's own purpose was the apparent contradiction that Zeno exposed—that the same things are both *F* and *not-F* (e.g., both *like* and *unlike*). Socrates introduces his theory of forms to resolve the contradiction.

[—Gill 1996, pp. 11–12]

As we will shortly see, the impossibility of coexistence of opposite properties in Forms will in Gill's reading stand as the primary assumption, on which the second assumption of the general negative reading that Socrates' challenge imparts an impossibility will be built.

Gill's own views on the *Parmenides* are extremely hard to reconstruct from her books, as she does not clearly distinguish between (what she takes to be) Plato's own views and the views presented by Socrates and Parmenides. This would be understandable in her earlier book titled *Parmenides* (1996), where she only seldomly expresses her finite answers to the questions raised, clearly with the intention to allow the reader to work out his "own answers to these questions" (p. 109). However, as we will see, even in the *Philosophos* (2012) many specifics of her account will remain unclear, although the book is meant to expose her own reading. Gill does not identify and demarcate in the dialogue the views of Plato himself any more clearly than in her previous book:

I shall argue that Part II is an indirect argument demonstrating that to save the theory of forms and philosophy Socrates must abandon his thesis about the one and admit that it is both one and many (in different ways). [...] Socrates (or at least Plato's readers) will eventually have to reevaluate, for other examples as well, the denial that forms participate in other forms, and in some cases their own opposite.

[—Gill 2012, pp. 20–21]

What should we make of Gill's expression "Socrates (or at least Plato's readers)"? That *one of* either Plato, Socrates or us, Plato's readers (or possibly some of Plato's critics, or some *subset* of these listed options) did promote "the denial that forms participate in other forms"? We learn very little from this sentence, yet the question is an extremely

important one: *who* held that Forms cannot participate in other Forms, and *for what* reason? All we will see is Gill's later argumentation that this thesis must be dropped in order for the Theory to be saved, but the need for such argumentation is left unexplained – unless we take for granted the developmentalist thesis that Plato has seen Forms as atomic in this precise sense in his earlier dialogues. Unfortunately, this vagueness will remain the common feature of crucial formulations in Gill's account throughout the book. Despite this, what *can* be clearly identified in the latter book is the very same commitment to the assumption of the negative reading of Socrates' amazement as in the previous book:

He [Socrates] says he would be shocked, however, if someone could show him that the same difficulty infects the forms themselves—that the like itself is unlike, the unlike like, the one itself many, the many one; that change itself rests, and rest changes, and more generally that forms partake of other forms. [—Gill 2012, p. 20]

In her latest article, Gill merely rephrases this general assumption by saying that Socrates “would be shocked, however, if the form of oneness itself were many, or the many one”.⁷⁴ A bit later she adds that Socrates must ultimately “give up that thesis and recognize that the one is both one and many” – an idea “which initially seemed to him monstrous”.⁷⁵ As I have already pointed out, Gill's negative reading relies on the specific assumption that Forms were posited by Plato to explain the coexistence of opposite properties in sensible things. What is at stake in Socrates' challenge is the possible loss of the ability of Forms to stand as explanations for this phenomenon. To illustrate her point, Gill introduces the term *compresence of opposites*,⁷⁶ which she believes to be “the crucial point of Socrates' solution: his insistence that forms themselves are not subject to the compresence of opposites”.⁷⁷ She explains:

The point is vital for Socrates' position, because forms are supposed to explain such compresence in other things. If they were themselves subject to the same problem, he would have to seek a further solution to dissolve the problem for them. For Socrates that would mean positing further entities, just as he posited forms at first to solve the original problem. If the entities that are supposed to solve the problem are themselves subject to the same problem, the proposal yields an explanatory regress, not a solution. So Socrates

⁷⁴ Gill 2022, p. 149.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷⁶ The term *compresence of opposites* is extremely problematic due to its vagueness. Its history and problematic character is partially examined in the article of Timothy A. Robinson (2007), “*Compresence of Opposites in Nehamas, Irwin, and Fine*” (hereafter cited as Robinson 2007), but it is best to observe the process of its creation from the primary articles themselves. The origin of the term seems to be Owen's article “*A Proof in the ΠΕΡΙ ΙΑΕΩΝ*” (Owen 1957), which was then initially adopted by Kirwan in “*Plato and Relativity*” (Kirwan 1974), Nehamas' “*Plato on the Imperfection of the Sensible World*” (Nehamas 1975), Irwin in “*Plato's Heracliteanism*” (Irwin 1977), White's “*The Compresence of Opposites in Phaedo 102*” (White 1977), and many others.

⁷⁷ Gill 1996, p. 17.

asserts that forms are what they are by themselves and do not admit their opposites.

[—Gill 1996, pp. 17–18]

At this point, we can already see at play the two assumptions of Gill we mentioned earlier: *first*, that the Theory has been invented precisely in order to explain and resolve this contradiction in sensibles called “the compresence of opposites”. And *second*, that Socrates’ amazement is a display of his disbelief, and not a presentation of a challenge. It is clear that Gill embraces both of them, and the fact that she nowhere questions nor defends these assumptions seems to suggest that she simply takes them for granted.

And while the passage just quoted still allows the interpretation that in Gill’s view, only literary Socrates, but not Plato himself takes the Theory to be invented to resolve the compresence (“the point is vital for *Socrates’* position”, not Plato’s), we will see later that to plausibly interpret Gill’s account, we are required to read the compresence of opposites as *the* reason for positing the Theory into Plato’s own thinking. All this effectively means that Gill does not even consider the possibility that the compresence of opposites in Forms themselves would be acceptable for Socrates, although perhaps hard to explain. By closing this door Gill removes the option that the *Parmenides* is Plato’s long-awaited destined place for his account of the communion of Forms. Moreover, by doing this without any justification, she only confirms my initial observation that many critics enter the *Parmenides* with pre-determined answers to certain questions.

3.3.2 Argumentation in support of the compresence of opposites

In the *Philosophos*, Gill provides two reasons for reading Socrates’ amazement as a shock, both of which are expressed in terms of the strictly negative consequences that the compresence of opposites in Forms themselves would bring to the Theory:

There are two reasons why this would amaze him: *First, if the form of beauty partook of its own opposite, it would violate the first rule of causation* and be no more responsible for the beauty of beautiful things than bright color, which is beautiful in some contexts (the Thracian parade, a sunset), ugly in others (Helen’s cloak at a funeral). The form of beauty must be unqualifiedly beautiful to ensure that it accounts for beautiful things alone, and not ugly things as well. *Second, if a form partook of its own opposite, that compresence would itself call for explanation* (as such compresence does in the case of sensible things), and so there would have to be further opposite forms to explain the compresent opposites in it. At some level there must be opposite forms that exclude their own opposite, or else—so Socrates thinks—the explanatory role of forms would be

undermined altogether. He therefore blocks the proliferation at the start by insisting that forms exclude their opposite. [—Gill 2012, p. 27, bolded emphasis mine]

Again, Gill’s addition of “so Socrates thinks” hinders our path towards understanding *what Gill thinks* Plato held about these things in the *Parmenides*. But since Gill sets out to prove in her book that Socrates was wrong in his assumptions, it *ipso facto* means that in Gill’s view, these assumptions must (at least to some extent) also express Plato’s views – otherwise it would be pointless for Gill to dispute them at such length.

We have already encountered Gill’s first principle of causation during the analysis of the first question,⁷⁸ where I have pointed out Gill’s unwarranted logical jump from the rejection of essential opposites to the rejection of opposite causal effects. To repeat shortly the crux of the problem: the fact that Socrates in the *Parmenides* says that “if someone showed that the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like – that, I think, would be a marvel” (129b) does not necessarily mean that the Likes themselves *are* like. Similarly, many critics (including Gill) have inferred from Plato’s comment in the *Phaedo* passage that “this would be strange, namely, that someone is made bigger by something small” (101b), that since the head “is itself a small thing” and precisely *this* is one of Plato’s reasons that disqualify the head from possibly being the cause of largeness, it follows that “the cause of largeness should be large”.⁷⁹ Even if Gill and others were (accidentally) right in their conclusion, a different grounding would have to be provided to support it, as the conclusion simply does not follow from these texts, and the inference is thus clearly fallacious.

The first reason Gill supplied is therefore based on this reasoning: the compresence of opposites in Forms themselves is impossible (and *of course Socrates must be amazed and shocked in case someone showed it* – this part is implicit and presupposed), since if the Form of *F* would be both *F*-like and *not-F*-like, it would become impossible to account for Form of *F* causing *F*-ness in sensible things, while at the same time *not* causing *not-F*-ness in them. In Gill’s words already cited above, “the form of beauty must be unqualifiedly beautiful to ensure that it accounts for beautiful things alone, and not ugly things as well”. But upon closer inspection, what *actually* follows from this reasoning is that *any* property the Form of Beauty will have besides being beautiful will be problematic. Why? Because “if the form of beauty partook of its own opposite”, it would “be no more responsible for the beauty of beautiful things” than the presence of “ugly in others”. So the reason behind

⁷⁸ See section 2.1.1 *Explanation A: The rejection of essential opposites*.

⁷⁹ Gill 2012, p. 23.

the prohibition of the Form of Beauty to be ugly is “to ensure that it accounts for beautiful things alone, and not ugly things as well”. Remarkably, Gill does not seem to realise that this amounts to saying that each Form must be the cause of *all* properties it itself has. For if it is impossible to explain why the Form bearing two opposite properties is the cause of one of them in sensible things, but not the other – how would we in turn be able to explain that the Form has two non-related properties *F* and *G*, and causes things to be just *F*-like, but not *G*-like?

It does not help that Gill’s formulations of the principle disallow only opposite properties—“a cause should explain one sort of effect and not its opposite”⁸⁰ and “x causes *only* instances of *F*-ness (and perhaps effects that follow from *F*-ness) and never the opposite of *F*-ness”⁸¹—because given Gill’s reasoning behind this principle, it is obvious that both formulations actually misinterpret the principle, instead of explicating it. This is because (in Gill’s account), the Form *having the property* is the only condition (both necessary and sufficient) for the Form *causing that property* by means of participation in sensible things. Thus the only way to prevent crossing the first principle of causation—when we do not follow Gill’s *formulation* of it, but her *explanation* of the reasoning *behind* it—is to not allow the Forms to have more than one property. The logical implication of this limitation will then *in turn* be that a Form cannot have opposite properties – but it is the former that is the actual limitation at play, and the latter which is only its derivative. In effect, ***Gill’s formulation of the first principle of causation rules out not only the compresence of opposites in Forms, but any plurality of properties in Forms whatsoever.*** This necessarily flows from her reasoning behind the principle, which requires that each Form is the cause of all properties it has, and *because of this* it amounts to saying that if the Form would have any two properties, it would be impossible to explain why is it the cause of one of them in sensible things, and not the other. The compresence of opposites in Forms is then merely a specific subset of all those problematic cases raised by the mere presence of plurality of properties in Forms.

Let us now turn to the second point Gill raises: “if a Form partook of its own opposite, that compresence would itself call for explanation”. In other words, what Gill argues for is that the compresence is inexplicable in the thing itself in which it occurs – it must be explained by some *other* entity which itself is exempt from the compresence. But if *this* entity turned out to be plagued by the compresence too, we would need *yet another* level of entities. That is a reasonable proceeding and on the first sight, it is precisely what

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 22, n. 13 (quoting from note’s continuation on the following page).

Socrates argues for in the first part of *Parmenides*. Yet this proceeding itself presupposes three things which might be put in question: first, that the compresence of opposites is for Plato inexplicable in the thing itself, and therefore philosophically problematic. Second, that it is precisely the compresence of opposites (in sensible things) which is *the* problem to be solved by the Theory. And third, that it is precisely by avoiding the compresence of opposites (in the Forms) *how* the problem is solved. If this is so (or if we treat these assumptions as postulates), the rest of the account is indeed clear.

Yet it is possible to construct a reasonable alternative for the first assumption: we might argue that it is not specifically the compresence of opposite properties in sensible things which is inexplicable for Plato, but the mere *presence* of properties in them. First, the constant flux of the sensible realm makes it impossible to explain any characteristic in terms of the sensible thing itself,⁸² since no single sensible thing *owns* or *is* that property: we see that the properties come and go in the never-ceasing cycle of change. Where do they go and how could they be regained? A sensible thing is not capable of explaining *what* is beauty, nor the fact that beauty somehow *survives* when it at some point disappears from *this* sensible thing, only to appear in *that* sensible thing a while later. And second, the fact that it is the realm of becoming, not of being, means that in order to be able to know or define any of these characteristics, they need to be tied to the realm of unchanging being. Thus, the Forms are postulated (we might argue) not so much in order to explain how a sensible thing might be *both and simultaneously* small and large (that is, to explain the *compresence*), but to provide the explanatory grounding allowing us to answer what ‘small’ and ‘large’ *are*. In other words, to connect these properties we encounter in the realm of becoming with some entities from the realm of being, means to make the Socratic question “*What is it?*” (τί ἐστὶ) answerable in the first place.

⁸² The extent to which Plato actually held the doctrine of constant flux has been analysed and called into question by Irwin in his article “*Plato’s Heracliteanism*” (1977). Irwin distinguishes between two types of changes (*self-change* stands for gaining and losing of properties, including becoming and ceasing to be; while *aspect-change* explains how things can have different and opposite properties *simultaneously* when they are described from different aspects) and argues that in postulating Forms, Plato was only interested in “problematic properties” which generate the compresence of opposites. While I disagree with Irwin’s claim that Plato had no need to postulate “substantial” Forms, his limitation of the “kind” of flux in the sensible realm which is in need of being explained by Forms does not endanger my proposed reading. On the contrary, Irwin’s account supports my suggestion: “These arguments all rely on the failure of sensible properties to answer the Socratic ‘What is it?’ question for certain difficult properties; and the *Phaedo* and *Republic* infer that we must appeal to separated Forms, not described in sensible terms, to answer the Socratic question and know what these properties are.” (pp. 9–10)

3.3.3 Atomicity of Forms behind the compresence of opposites

Why did Gill take the explanatory path she presents without any doubts and without considering the alternative readings? I believe the answer lies in the fact that implicitly underpins both of the reasons she provided for reading Socrates' amazement as a shock: they both assume specific reading of the atomicity of Forms which, when adopted, leads necessarily to the conclusions that Gill herself draws.

More specifically, if Forms are not allowed to have any structure, then we have no means of distinguishing in a specific Form, which of its properties would be "accessible" to other things by means of participation – in other words, which of the properties that the Form itself *has*, would it also *cause* in other sensible things (and Forms). This then inevitably leads to the conclusion, that Forms simply *cannot* have a plurality of properties and must be "simple" understood as having only one property – which equates to reading the atomicity of Forms in terms of simplicity either as "being called by one name only", or as "non-compositeness", where Forms are "flat", atomic, structure-less entities. For if all of the properties the Form has are available for participation simply on the basis of the Form *having them*, then necessarily there can only be one such property – which is the case in Gill's account, as we have seen during the analysis of her understanding of the first rule of causation, when applied to Forms. When we adopt an understanding of Forms which does not allow them to be unitary objects, yet with a *structured* plurality of properties, both of Gill's reasons will suddenly become self-evident and necessary: the first reason tells us that if Form had several properties, it would be impossible to tell on what grounds it causes one of them in other things by means of participation, but not others which are equally held by the Form. And the second reason rejects the compresence of opposites in one entity as a logically impossible option, because the Form can figure as explanans for only one explanandum, and if it itself contains several of them *in the same way*, it suddenly becomes a composite of explananda – the Form itself will need to be explained.

To allow Forms to have multiplicity of properties (including the compresence of opposites) and to participate in each other, and at the same time maintain a logically coherent account of participation, we need to be able to speak about a structure *inside* Forms. And for this, we in turn need to distinguish between different ways in which Forms might have their properties, or different senses in which we might say that the Form is this or that property, where the former is available to be participated in, and the latter not. Such distinction is of course nothing surprising to us: it is the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction introduced in the *Sophist*, which will allow Forms to participate in each other and to have a

plurality of properties. We will focus on this distinction and its analysis in the next part of the work. What is sufficient at this point is to observe how the rejection of the compresence of opposites—just as the assumption that Socrates’ amazement imparts an impossibility—is connected with specific reading of the atomicity of Forms, and with the idea that any plurality of properties in Forms (and any distinction between the ways in which Forms might have their properties) is not only entirely absent in pre-Parmenidean dialogues, but altogether logically incompatible with what the developmentalist’s reading would call “earlier” Plato’s Theory of Forms. In such presupposed developmentalist reading, the differentiation of those senses in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* will then come as a sudden revelation, which changes everything. But till that point – the communion of Forms is impossible, *therefore* the difference of senses in which Forms might have their properties is impossible, *and therefore* the plurality of properties in Forms is impossible, too. And these impossibilities will *in turn* make impossible the compresence of opposites in Forms, which *finally* reveals why Gill (and many others) take it for granted that Socrates’ amazement imparts an impossibility.

That it is this atomic reading that drives Gill’s account can be seen from her analysis of the reasons why the compresence of opposites is troubling for Zeno or Socrates:

As interpreters we need to understand why Plato’s dramatic characters find the compresence of opposites troubling. Their puzzlement makes sense on the supposition that, whereas we moderns regard “like” and “unlike,” “one” and “many,” “large” and “small” as incomplete predicates requiring something further to complete the meaning, Plato’s dramatic characters regard such terms as complete predicates that specify monadic properties of things, even though they recognize that those predicates regularly take a further completion. If largeness and smallness are regarded as monadic properties, the statement “Simmiias is large (in relation to Socrates) and small (in relation to Phaedo)” is as paradoxical as the statement “the same thing is round and square,” because one property excludes the other. In my view Socrates introduces forms in the *Parmenides* to remove a feeling of paradox we do not share. [—Gill 2012, p. 21]

Gill explains that the reason why the compresence of opposites is troubling for Plato’s dramatic characters is the fact that they improperly regard the opposite properties as “monadic properties” – complete predicates requiring no further completion; in fact: *not allowing* one. So Simmiias is both “large *simpliciter*“ and “small *simpliciter*“. But because these two properties are opposite, he cannot be both *unqualifiedly* large and *unqualifiedly* small – these two properties cannot be present unqualifiedly in the same thing “at the same time, in the same respect and in relation to the same thing”. According to Gill, if Plato (or

Socrates and Zeno in *Parmenides*) saw that those properties are in fact incomplete—and therefore require further completion, which would qualify *in relation to which other thing* they apply—the problem wouldn't be raised at all, because their compresence would no longer break the rule of non-contradiction:

We might well ask why anyone should be bothered by Zeno's contradictions. The same thing can of course be both *F* and *not-F*, if it is *F* in one respect or relation and *not-F* in another, or *F* at one time and *not-F* at another. [...] There is a contradiction only if the same thing is *F* and *not-F* at the same time, in the same respect and in relation to the same thing. [—Gill 1996, p. 12]

Gill's solution is elegant, but it does not get us to the root of the problem. In her account, the impossibility of the compresence of opposites is explained by appealing to the fact that such compresence violates the principle of non-contradiction. Gill herself is aware of the principle and also takes Socrates and Zeno (and Plato) to be aware of it during their dialogue in the *Parmenides*. Plato explicitly formulates the principle in the *Republic* IV.436b–c, which says:

It is clear that the same thing cannot act in opposite ways or be in opposite states at the same time, in the same respect and in relation to the same thing. So if we find these opposite actions and states occurring in their case [i.e., in the case of the parts of the soul], we shall know that they are not the same thing but more than one. (*Republic* IV.436b–c)

That means both Socrates and Zeno are aware, according to Gill, that “there is a contradiction only if the same thing is *F* and *not-F* at the same time, in the same respect and in relation to the same thing”, as she puts it. So how does the compresence violate the principle? It is obvious that it must be by the same thing at the same time having the opposite properties non-relationally, completely and unqualifiedly. Thus the introduction of the Forms makes these properties relational, incomplete and qualified: both the opposite properties become present in the same thing in relation to two different Forms. That problem is solved already in the *Phaedo*, as Gill claims:

The *Phaedo* presents a metaphysical theory to resolve the apparent contradiction. Socrates says that Simmias is large by partaking of the form of largeness, small by partaking of the form of smallness. By partaking of largeness he has largeness in him, and by partaking of smallness he has smallness in him. [—Gill 1996, pp. 13–14]

However, the problem reappears in the *Parmenides* and Socrates becomes aware that it is not solved at all, because the compresence is found to be present in the Forms themselves. *That* compresence is again taken to be problematic, and on the same grounds as the compresence in the sensible things: it violates the principle of non-contradiction.

Why shouldn't the very same solution as in the first compresence—namely, appealing to Forms—work here, in the second compresence? All we need to explain the compresence of opposites in Forms seems to be already here: the differentiation of some properties as being relational, incomplete and qualified – that is, being present in a Form only by the means of a relation to a different Form. *The solution from the Phaedo fails to work in the realm of Forms only if we adopt a specific reading of the atomicity of Forms.* In terms of their simplicity, we treat them as excluding any multiplicity of properties in them – and in terms of their independence, we treat them as having to be completely isolated from other Forms. Only under those conditions can we say that the solution presented already in the *Phaedo*—the “early” or pre-Parmenidean Theory of Forms—is found in the *Parmenides* to be demonstrably insufficient and in need of a repair.

It might well be the case that Plato indeed held these positions – at the very least, it is one of the logically possible positions. But since explicit formulation of Plato's adoption of such a position is missing from the dialogues, it can in no way be presupposed as self-evident. Nor can it be understood as the “most likely story”, since a whole array of different reasons point in the very opposite direction, as we have seen. Once we find the means to distinguish different senses in which Forms themselves can have opposite or multiple properties—either by having them in different *respects* or in relation to different *things*—the apparent contradiction would no longer apply to the Forms. That is something that Gill seems to be aware of. But what she failed to notice is that it is one of the viable (and plausible) options that Plato *himself* worked out these philosophical means even before the *Parmenides*, where they are only accounted for – and then his Theory does not need any drastic refinement at all. It will be the task of the second part of this work to show and fully defend precisely that Plato *had* the necessary terminology to properly distinguish ways in which things can have their properties even before the *Parmenides*, that this distinction *also* applies to Forms, and that Plato himself *did* repeatedly apply it to them. For the purposes of our discussion here, it is enough that this has been pointed out: that the negative interpretation of Socrates' amazement based on the compresence of opposites is based on the specific understanding of the atomicity of Forms, which itself is merely presupposed (at least in Gill's case).

If Forms are not allowed to have any structure—if they need to be atomic, structure-less and possess all of their attributes in the same way—then there can be no plurality of properties in them, and with this the compresence of opposites is ruled out, too. But, as the analysis so far has shown, we do not need to read this kind of atomicity into

Plato's Theory. The Forms need to be seen as atomic in terms of simplicity only if we look at Socrates' amazement in the *Parmenides* as a negative challenge. Similarly, as we will see in the second part of the dissertation, there is a need to postulate atomicity in terms of independence only if we cannot make a difference between the way a Form is his own essential character, and between the way it is or has all the other attributes – that is, if we cannot discriminate two ways of having properties.

But if we were able to do that, this would allow us (and also Plato) to distinguish different ways of having properties and to have *structured* plurality of properties in Forms themselves. This is the only reading that has the explanatory power to allow Forms *both* to have multiplicity of properties, *and* yet also to explain how it is possible that they are causes of just one property in sensible things, namely of their essential property, and not of others. This is because while the Forms have several properties, only one of them—the essential property of each Form—can be said of a Form *kath auto*, by itself, while others are gained through Form's communion with other Forms through participation. These readings complement each other, and together they are able to account for features of Forms which would otherwise “gravely perturb” Socrates under different readings.

3.3.4 The extent of Forms and compresence of opposites

Gill finds support for her reading in the following passage of the dialogue (130b1–e4) where Socrates and Parmenides discuss the extent of Forms. Socrates undoubtedly accepts the existence of the Forms of Likeness, One and Many, followed by the same acceptance of the Forms of the Just, Beautiful, and Good. Then he begins to hesitate when the question moves to the Forms of Human being, Fire or Water, and finally he altogether denies the existence of the Forms of Hair, Mud and Dirt. Gill calls the first two groups “structural forms or kinds” and “moral and aesthetic concepts”, respectively, while the third group includes “forms of natural kinds”. She attributes Socrates' hesitation about the existence of the Forms of the third group and his rejection of the fourth group to the fact that those concepts do not have opposites:

If we recall Socrates' speech, the reason for his hesitation may not be far to seek. He introduced forms to explain the compresence of opposites. He posited forms of likeness and unlikeness to explain how the same thing can be both like and unlike. The predicate “human being” does not occasion the same uneasiness as do “beautiful,” “large,” and “like.”

[—Gill 1996, pp. 21–22]

If we think of his previous long speech, we can understand his hesitation, because in response to Zeno he introduced only forms of opposites to explain opposite features in

sensible things. [...] Given Socrates' focus on the problem of opposites, he might see no comparable need for forms of natural kinds in group three. [—Gill 2012, p. 30]

The question of the precise extent of Forms in Plato's Theory is a complicated one, and allows several different and mutually exclusive interpretations. Yet Gill, without any prior analysis, finds no problem in presenting one single interpretation as the correct one. The fact that the chosen interpretation is the one that fits her account the best wouldn't be a problem *per se*. The difficulty lies in the fact that it is not so much that Gill *finds support* for her reading in the passage, as it is that her reading *dictates* what *has to be* the meaning of the passage. In the light of her assumption that the principal reason for positing Forms is the compresence of opposites in sensible things, Gill enforces the corresponding reading to this passage, thus taking Socrates (and Plato) to believe that the extent of Forms is limited, broadly speaking, to the *adjectival* or *attributive* concepts of the first two groups which have their own opposites, and thus raise the problem of the compresence of opposites, which in turn generates the need for Forms. In contrast, no such need exists for *substantival* concepts of the latter two groups, which do not "occasion the same uneasiness".

A reasonable objection might be raised at this point: looking solely at the corresponding passages quoted from both books, Gill in fact does not explicitly assert that for Plato, only Forms of opposites *do* exist – she claimed only that at least in the *Parmenides*, Plato has literary Socrates convinced that the chief reason why the Forms are needed for our understanding is the compresence of opposites. Thus we are once again left to wonder what Gill takes *Plato himself* to be thinking, this time with regard to the question, whether she thinks that the compresence of the opposites is the principal reason of positing Forms *only* for Socrates, or *also* for Plato. But while Gill at this point leaves the room for the possibility of the existence of the Forms of physical objects, a page later she adds:

Parmenides attributes Socrates' difficulties to his youth and lack of training. The obviously difficult cases, such as largeness and smallness, provoke his reflection, but **he does not yet fully appreciate that sense perception on its own may not suffice even when there is no perceptual conflict**, as in the case of man, fire, and water. **The late dialogues invoke forms of natural kinds, so Plato evidently includes such forms in his later metaphysics.** [—Gill 2012, p. 31; bolded emphasis mine]

Gill's formulation is again partially indecisive, but it is unfortunately as close as we will get to the precise formulation of her position. She seems to imply (first bolded emphasised sentence) that Socrates might have made a mistake in supposing that the *only*

reason for positing Forms is the compresence of opposites in sensible things, which generates the “perceptual conflict”, as she calls it. If there is some *additional* reason why the Forms are needed on top of the compresence of opposites (or perhaps this reason altogether *replaces* the compresence of opposites), then it is possible to infer that postulating the Forms of opposites might not be enough.

There might be a *trace* of this line of thinking in Gill’s earlier book, where she wrote that “if forms perform an explanatory role, perhaps mixtures of stuffs could be explained by reference to the forms of stuffs that compose the mixture”.⁸³ This could potentially mean that Gill sees (or reads into Socrates) the second, explanatory reason for postulating Forms. Unfortunately, the sentence is written in the context of the fourth group of Forms, “forms of things that seem undignified and worthless”, and the discussion around the relation between the whole and its parts, so it is only so far that it can take us. But *if* Gill takes Plato to postulate Forms of natural kinds in his later metaphysics (second bolded emphasised sentence), *and if* this is said in contrast to Socrates failing in the *Parmenides* to acknowledge that the compresence of opposites is not the sufficient (or the only) reason for postulating Forms (first bolded emphasised sentence), *then* it seems reasonable to reconstruct Gill’s account as claiming something along the lines of this:

Plato originally postulated the Forms to explain the problem of compresence of opposites in sensible things and “moral and aesthetic values”, which “absorb the speakers’ attention in the Socratic dialogues”.⁸⁴ Plato became interested in the “structural forms or kinds” a bit later, because they “enable categorial (and other structural) forms to relate to one another”⁸⁵ – a need which appeared for the first time in the *Parmenides* and became the driving issue of the post-Parmenidean dialogues, such as *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* (which are the primary objects of Gill’s examination⁸⁶). All those concepts are similar to the extent that they “often apply to things together with their opposite”,⁸⁷ and therefore they all generate the problem of the compresence of opposites.

In the *Parmenides*, Plato has Socrates formulating his Theory and the compresence of opposites as the reason why it was postulated, because he is already aware that it is in need of refinement. Thus Socrates’ views represent early, pre-Parmenidean views of Plato – views which Plato is already abandoning under the pressure of the problems he made explicit in the *Parmenides* by having literary Parmenides express them throughout the dialogue. One of those principal problems is the view that Forms are atomic in terms of

⁸³ Gill 1996, p. 24. Similar formulation might be found in her newer book: “If forms play an explanatory role, mixtures of stuffs might be explicable in terms of the forms of stuffs that compose the mixture.” (Gill 2012, p. 31)

⁸⁴ Gill 2012, p. 30.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, *Introduction* (especially pp. 9–10).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

being completely isolated from each other and having only one single characteristic representing their essential property. Plato saw that the communion of Forms was needed in order for his Theory to be saved from contradictions, and wrote the *Parmenides* to formulate this need and to allow the reader to understand it too.

This is the most sympathetic reading and the most plausible reconstruction of Gill's account I was able to draw from her exposition in both books. We have seen that Gill presupposes that Forms were introduced by Plato to explain compresence of opposites, and she takes Socrates' reply to Zeno's paradox as a confirmation of this assumption. But doing so is an unwarranted logical leap which is almost incredibly easy to observe. Suppose, for example, that someone claims that it is impossible to get five apples from two bags containing two and three apples, respectively. We simply answer that, quite the contrary, we *can* do that—specifically, by using the operation of addition. Our answer is, of course, right, but this cannot be taken to mean that the *only* or the *main* purpose of the operation of addition is to sum apples. Neither does it mean that the operation can only be used to sum twos and threes. And, finally, in no way can we infer from the situation that we (or someone before us) introduced or posited the operation of addition specifically to allow getting five apples from two and three apples together. At most, the word 'introduced' can be used in its weak sense to mean that we *brought* the concept of addition *into* the discussion for this particular purpose, but nothing more.

But Gill could not mean the claim that Socrates "introduced forms to explain the compresence of opposites" merely in this weak sense, since that wouldn't allow her to draw the observation that "he does not yet fully appreciate that sense perception on its own may not suffice even when there is no perceptual conflict, as in the case of man, fire, and water". To draw the conclusion that the *Parmenides* serves us, readers, to recognise—using Socrates' error and its investigation by Parmenides—that the compresence of opposites on its own is not a sufficient nor necessary reason for postulating Forms, requires Gill to mean the word 'introduced' in its strong sense: as implying that the compresence of opposites is *precisely* the reason why Socrates needed, postulated and introduced Forms in the *Parmenides* (and the dialogues before it). And the fact that Gill expresses the view that "the late dialogues invoke forms of natural kinds, so Plato evidently includes such forms in his later metaphysics" *in contrast to* what Socrates holds in the *Parmenides* requires that there was, in Gill's view, a genuine shift in Plato's thinking between pre-Parmenidean and post-Parmenidean dialogues – a shift which is accounted for precisely in the *Parmenides* itself.

The dialogue clearly shows that the problem of the compresence of opposites in sensible things with regard to a certain pair of opposing characteristics (e.g. being *tall* and *short*) is neither necessary nor sufficient reason for postulating correspondent pair of Forms. It cannot ultimately be a *necessary* reason for postulating a Form, if it should be true that “the late dialogues invoke forms of natural kinds, so Plato evidently includes such forms in his later metaphysics”, since those Forms clearly do not respond to any such compresence. And neither can avoiding the compresence be a *sufficient* reason for postulating a Form, because ultimately Forms themselves will exemplify the very same problem. ***The fact that the compresence of opposites is proven in the Parmenides to be neither necessary nor the sufficient reason for postulating Forms, brings Gill to the developmentalist conclusion that the Parmenides introduces a shift in Plato’s thinking.*** However, that conclusion is not dictated by the *Parmenides* itself, but by Gill’s assumption that Plato originally introduced Forms *precisely* to deal with the compresence – an assumption which she already holds when she is approaching the *Parmenides*.

Nevertheless, exactly the opposite seems to be true of the *Parmenides* and Plato’s Theory, according to all the evidence we have gathered so far. Socrates *brings in* Forms of opposites into the discussion to counter Zeno’s particular claim that things cannot be both like and unlike, and therefore the All cannot be many. He does this because Zeno’s problem was based on the incompatibility of opposite properties, which is *also* solved by Plato’s Theory of Forms – but this does in no way mean this is the only or the most important problem the Theory is supposed to address. Zeno thought that it is impossible for a physical thing to be both like and unlike; Socrates answers that it is possible because it participates in both Forms. At the same time, Socrates commends Zeno for his good work, because without Forms, what Zeno claimed to be impossible would indeed be so – and thanks to his splendid philosophical argumentation, this would already be safely proved. Socrates then moves the discussion forward by asking Zeno to demonstrate the same philosophical vigour to show *how* the compresence of opposites would be possible in the Forms themselves, because *that* is the hard task which urgently needs to be addressed and solved.

Neither can we claim that Plato uses Socrates’ false assumption to display his own shift of thinking and to respond to the difficulties his juvenile Theory of Forms from earlier dialogues was facing without jeopardising the philosophical work that was already done in the previous dialogues. To claim that, up to this point, Plato did not think that there is a

need for Forms *besides* Forms of opposites, would contradict what was already assumed in an array of previous dialogues:

- For example, *Cratylus* 389a–c speaks about the Form of weaving shuttle and Forms for all tools, to which every craftsman needs to look in order to produce the tools proper for each type of work. This is foreshadowed in *Gorgias* 503e–504a, which asserts that craftsmen must work “with a view to something” stable, which gives “order and organization” to the thing being created.
- Later in *Cratylus* 423e, the existence of Forms of colours and sounds is indicated.
- In *Meno* 72b–c, the Form of Bee is posited when Meno and Socrates look for “the nature of bees”, that is, “what is this very thing”, by which the bees “are all the same”.
- In the *Republic* X 596a–c, Plato clearly speaks about the Form of Bed and Table, and possibly even expands the extent of Forms to postulate an individual Form for “each of the many things to which we apply the same name”.
- The *Parmenides* itself speaks of the Form of Knowledge (or of Knowledge as “a kind itself”, using Gill’s translation) in section 134c, which is also mentioned in *Cratylus* 440a as “the very form of knowledge”. Later in section 152a it is claimed that “the one partakes of time, if in fact it partakes of being”, so the extent of Time is the same as of Being – yet Time has no opposite!

How could the reason for Socrates’ hesitation about the existence of some Forms (of the third group) and its complete denial about some others (from the fourth group) be that Forms are only needed to explain opposite properties, when already in earlier dialogues many more Forms are postulated (or at the very least foreshadowed)? What point would there be for Plato in having Socrates pretend that he only posits the Forms of opposites, only to admit in the later dialogues what he already claimed in the dialogues before the *Parmenides*? ***Gill’s interpretation makes the Parmenides the one single dialogue of the whole corpus where Plato believed (or pretended to believe) that there are only Forms for opposites and that their compresence in physical things is the fundamental reason for positing Forms.***

3.3.5 The “finger passage” in *Republic* VII and the compresence of opposites

To support their thesis, compresentists almost in unison refer to one single passage from *Republic* VII, where Plato explains that some sense perceptions do, and some don’t, report to us opposite results. The ones that give us opposite or contradictory information

puzzle us, and force us to reconsider our sense-perceptions by reflecting upon them, which in turn brings understanding:

Some sense perceptions *don't* summon the understanding to look into them, because the judgment of sense perception is itself adequate, while others encourage it in every way to look into them, because sense perception seems to produce no sound result. [...] The ones that don't summon the understanding are all those that don't go off into opposite perceptions at the same time. But the ones that do go off in that way I call *summoners*—whenever sense perception doesn't declare one thing any more than its opposite. (*Republic* VII, 523a–c)

To better explain what he means by *summoners*, Socrates gives Glaucon the famous example of “three fingers—the smallest, the second, and the middle finger” (523c). When we look at them and examine them *as fingers*, we will see no difference between them, because our sight gives us the same impression that these three are all equally *fingers*, and not *non-fingers*—that is, there is no trace of the *opposite* of a finger (whatever that would be) in our perceptions:

It's apparent that each of them is equally a finger, and it makes no difference in this regard whether the finger is seen to be in the middle or at either end, whether it is dark or pale, thick or thin, or anything else of that sort, for in all these cases, an ordinary soul isn't compelled to ask the understanding what a finger is, since sight doesn't suggest to it that a finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger. (*Republic* VII, 523c–d)

However, when we examine their size and look at the same three fingers *as to their extent*, we will see them both as large *and* as small. More specifically, sight “reports to the soul that the same thing is perceived by it to be both” (524a), because the second (ring) finger will be *both* larger *and* smaller, when compared with the smallest and the middle finger, respectively. Thus our sight gives us no reasonable and adequate answer as to whether the finger is *Large* or *small*—it is both, according to our senses, but confusingly “mixed up together” (524c). And so in turn, we are puzzled about the nature of *Large(-ness)* and *small(-ness)* themselves, while at the same time we feel no such puzzlement about the nature of *finger(-ness)*.

Since it is the function of Forms to give us adequate answers to the “*What is it?*” (τί ἐστὶ) questions, compresentists usually read this passage as a confirmation of their assumption, that Forms were introduced by Plato precisely to explain the compresence of opposites in physical things, as it is only in the case of the compresence that this question is ever raised: it was only the *Large-ness* and *small-ness* of the middle finger, and not the *finger-ness* of the finger, that provoked us to ask what that specific feature, *Largeness*

and *Smallness*, is in itself. Thus, in accord with this commonly taken interpretation, Gill too infers from the passage that we need to posit Forms only for features or characters that have their own opposites, since that is where our sense perceptions fail to provide an adequate answer on their own:

This passage does not say that there is a form of largeness and not a form of finger, but it corroborates the impression, given by his long speech in the *Parmenides*, that Socrates posits forms to explain the compresence of opposites. In the case of physical objects like human beings, and stuffs like fire and water, perception does not raise an immediate problem about what they are. He therefore feels no comparable need to posit a form.

[—Gill 1996, p. 22]

Full 16 years later, Gill confirms the same view, which she almost verbatim repeats in her *Philosophos* – unfortunately, including the same vague wording “it corroborates the impression” when it comes to the question whether the compresence of opposites *indeed is* Socrates’ (and/or Plato’s) principal reason for postulating Forms:

The *Republic* passage does not say that there is a form of largeness and not a form of finger, but it corroborates the impression given by his long speech in the *Parmenides* that Socrates posits forms of opposites. Because sense perception seems to yield a satisfactory report about physical objects and stuffs, he feels no comparable need to posit a form.

[—Gill 2012, pp. 30–31]

As we can see, Gill again leaves room for uncertainty. What is her reason for doing so? The most sympathetic reading might be that perhaps Gill does not want to draw the conclusions that Plato himself did not or hesitated to draw. But that reasoning is insufficient both on the level of Plato’s own work, and on the level of Gill’s work of interpreting the former one. First: Plato wrote *Parmenides* with some intent. If we assume a negative reading of Socrates’ amazement—which Gill clearly adopted—, then there must be something Socrates denied which is then proven to have been wrong in the course of the dialogue. The contents of this shift then communicates the message Plato himself wanted to convey to his readers. Thus, ***Socrates’ shift of thinking is not an option, but a necessary corollary of the negative reading of his amazement.*** Keeping Socrates in an indecisive state where he maybe does or maybe not hold that the compresence of opposites was for him (and thus for Plato) the sufficient reason for postulating the Forms jeopardises for the reader the possibility of correctly interpreting the *Parmenides*, and thus to receive the message Plato wanted to deliver by it.

Second, on the level of the interpretative work that Gill has done in her books: all the evidence we can gather from Gill’s account seems to point to the same fact that she takes

Plato to believe that the compresence of opposites was the original reason for postulating Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues, and that this has changed in the *Parmenides*. Yet she is for some reason attentive to not strictly state her intention to read Plato in this way. But merely restricting oneself to clearly assert one's position does not help, if the whole account points in that direction. Let us look at two more related passages, which both speak in support of my reading of Gill's account:

Given Socrates' focus on the problem of opposites, he might see no comparable need for forms of natural kinds in group three. A passage in the *Republic* (Rep. VII, 523a10–524d6) supports the adoption of forms of opposite features and not of physical objects, their parts, and material stuffs. [—Gill 2012, p. 30]

In his long speech in the *Parmenides*, Socrates has given an argument for forms of opposites only. In the Scope of Forms Parmenides encourages him to consider what functions forms perform beyond explaining compresent opposites in ordinary things. [—Gill 2012, p. 31]

Similarly to the necessity of Plato having an intention when writing the *Parmenides*, Gill needed a one to bring the finger passage into her analysis of the extent of Forms. What was that intention? Given the context, all the cited passages that indicate this, and Gill's overall account, I can think of no other than to support her view, that it is precisely the denial of the compresence of opposites that is the problem being drawn into attention in the *Parmenides* – and it is a crucial one, since (Gill thinks) the Forms were postulated by Plato in the first place to explain the compresence of opposites in sensible things. So perhaps it is not entirely clear from Plato's passages Gill works with, that Plato postulated Forms of opposites only, and perhaps this is the reason why Gill is so unclear – but it is nevertheless the interpretation that Gill effectively adopts. On the other hand, Gill's initial assumption of Socrates' negative reading does not allow her to seriously entertain the opposite option, that Plato all the way along postulated also “substantial” Forms and Forms of “natural kinds”. And as I will show later, ***the fact that none of Plato's pre-Parmenidean passages clearly states that there are no Forms of natural kinds might be explained by a prosy and down-to-earth interpretation, that Plato never held such a view.***

* * * * *

Going back to the finger passage in *Republic* VII, I would like to show now that there is in fact no need to interpret it as restricting the extent of Forms to the Forms of opposites. The reason why Plato in this passage isn't interested in the *finger-ness* of the three fingers is because “an ordinary soul isn't compelled to ask the understanding what a

finger is, since sight doesn't suggest to it that a finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger" (523d), thus "it isn't likely that anything of that sort would summon or awaken the understanding" (523d-e). Up to this point, I am in agreement with Gill who wrote:

In *Republic* VII (523a-524e) Socrates says that some of our sense perceptions do, whereas others do not, provoke our thought to reflection. Perceptions that prompt our reflection are those that yield an opposite perception at the same time. [—Gill 1996, p. 22]

However, Gill fails to take into account the wider context of the passage, which is imperative for Plato's account. Gill takes the passage to consist of sections 523a-524e, whereas it actually starts already at 521d – which is why she wrongly interprets it as limiting the *existential* scope of Forms unqualifiedly, while it is in fact limiting merely the *practical* extent of Forms usable for the purposes of the passage. In short, the reason why Plato in this passage isn't interested in the *finger*-ness of the three fingers is because it isn't practically usable for the education of the guardians of the city. Plato is looking for "something that is really fitted in every way to draw one towards being" (523a), because that is how the guardians of the city need to be taught in order to become wise and competent rulers. In the opening of the section, Plato asks Glaucon: "Do you want us to consider now how such people will come to be in our city and how [...] we'll lead them up to the light?" (521b-c). After asking "what subject is it, Glaucon, that draws the soul from the realm of becoming to the realm of what is?" (521d), they find the sought after subject in teaching the guardians the art of using "number and calculation", for "every craft and science must have a share in that" (522c).

Yet Plato is still not satisfied, as although "this turns out to be one of the subjects we were looking for that naturally lead to understanding", "no one uses it correctly, namely, as something that is really fitted in every way to draw one towards being" (522e). In short, Plato wants to find not only the *subject* that will lead to understanding, but also the precise *method* of how this subject should be taught to instil understanding in the guardians. So he sets out to do what he seeks: "I'll distinguish for myself the things that do or don't lead in the direction we mentioned" (523a). Only now we arrive at the section quoted by Gill. But from the context it is becoming clear that the passage cannot be pressed to support neither the claim that the theory that Forms were introduced by Plato (or are so understood by Socrates) to explain the compresence of opposites, nor to imply that Socrates' reason for hesitation about the existence of some Forms is precisely that they do not have opposites. For the section seeks to find the best possible method to teach mathematics to the guardians of the city, so that they would be able to know the truth and rule according to it:

They [calculation and arithmetic] are compulsory for warriors because of their orderly ranks and for philosophers because they have to learn to rise up out of becoming and grasp being, if they are ever to become rational. [...] And our guardian must be both a warrior and a philosopher. (*Republic* VII, 525b)

The fact that the passage is about the training of calculation and arithmetic can get confusing for us moderns, because we tend to consider mathematics as a logical discipline. But for Plato, it was first and foremost a discipline occupied with the truth and, therefore, being itself. It allows one to remain within what is purely intelligible, entirely unmixed with anything from the sensible realm – and therefore the best subject to be taught to the guardians of the city. To become wise, one must gain understanding, which means to embrace truth—to turn one’s soul “towards truth and being”. But truth is only possible to be found in the intelligible realm, where real being is. What we want is to draw the guardian towards the stable and always-true realm of being from the ever-fluctuating realm of becoming—“we called the one the intelligible and the other the visible” (524c). This is the reason why for Plato, mathematics is “really fitted in every way to draw one towards being” (523a):

Then it would be appropriate, Glaucon, to legislate this subject for those who are going to share in the highest offices in the city and to persuade them to turn to calculation and take it up, [...] staying with it until they reach the study of the natures of the numbers by means of understanding itself [...] for the sake of war and for ease in turning the soul around, away from becoming and towards truth and being. (*Republic* VII, 525b–c)

What, however, does this passage have with Plato’s interest in the Form of Largeness and of opposites in general, and vice versa, with Plato *not* being interested in the Form of Finger and natural kinds in general – or, as Gill reads it: with Plato’s postulation of the former group of Forms, and denial of the latter one? Plato sees that in order to attain the realm of being, it is best to start with situations where the visible realm, which is perceived by the senses, puzzles us and in itself gives us only unsatisfactory or contradictory results, so that we cannot remain in the realm of becoming, but are forced to turn to the being itself, since “these are strange reports for the soul to receive, and they do demand to be looked into” (524b) by our intellect.

Such is the situation with the three fingers, where “in order to get clear about all this, understanding was compelled to see the big and the small, not as mixed up together, but as separate—the opposite way from sight” (524c). But the root of the problem does not lie in the fact that *the opposites* are mixed up together, as Gill suggested. The compresence of opposites is merely a symptom of the deeper problem of the plurality which is falsely

perceived by the senses as unity or singularity. When we follow the passage further, Plato says:

SOCRATES: But what about the bigness and smallness of fingers? Does sight perceive them adequately? [...] And do the other senses reveal such things clearly and adequately? Doesn't each of them rather do the following: The sense set over the hard is, in the first place, of necessity also set over the soft, and it reports to the soul that the same thing is perceived by it to be both hard and soft?

GLAUCON: That's right.

SOCRATES: And isn't it necessary that in such cases the soul is puzzled as to what this sense means by the hard, if it indicates that the same thing is also soft, or ***what it means by the light and the heavy, if it indicates that the heavy is light, or the light, heavy?***

(*Republic VII*, 523e–524a, bolded emphasis mine)

Plato first explains that the soul is puzzled by the fact that “the same thing is *also* soft” on top of being hard – that is, that the soul is puzzled by the compresence itself, as Gill reads the passage. But then he immediately rephrases the problem more precisely by saying that the soul will be puzzled as to what the “light” and “heavy” *themselves* mean, because the sense tells us that the light *itself* is the heavy and the heavy *itself* is light. Notice also Plato's shift from speaking about “senses” in general to “this sense”. The emphasis of the passage is clearly on the fact that the *one single* sense, which delivers *one single* perception, delivers the perception of hard-softness or light-heaviness. In other words, the sense delivers plurality *masked as* oneness. The final passage of the section (524b–d) reveals exactly this point, since Plato suggests, as the first step towards the solution of this problem, that the soul needs to “determine whether each of the things announced to it is one or two” – thus separating the *sensed* oneness into *cognised* plurality, where each of the properties will be “evidently distinct” and “separate”:

SOCRATES: Then it's likely that in such cases the soul, summoning calculation and understanding, first tries to determine whether each of the things announced to it is one or two.

GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: If it's evidently two, won't each be evidently distinct and one?

GLAUCON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then, if each is one, and both two, the soul will understand that the two are separate, for it wouldn't understand the inseparable to be two, but rather one.

GLAUCON: That's right.

SOCRATES: Sight, however, saw the big and small, not as separate, but as mixed up together. Isn't that so?

GLAUCON: Yes.

SOCRATES: And in order to get clear about all this, understanding was compelled to see the big and the small, not as mixed up together, but as separate—the opposite way from sight. (*Republic* VII, 524b–c)

As we can see, although the soul is *provoked* by the emergence of the compresence, it is “summoning calculation and understanding” not *in order to* explain the compresence itself, but to illuminate individual parts of the sensation to be able to distinguish them. Plato compares the result to which the soul arrived, with what the sense originally reported, and says that while sight saw the big and small “not as separate, but as mixed up together”, understanding cognised them “not as mixed up together, but as separate”. The opposition that he draws by this contrast does not lay stress on the compresence itself, nor any incompatibility that it causes. Instead, the opposition highlights the fact that senses on their own do not allow us to separate the intelligible multiplicity present in sensible things. They only allow us to sense pluralities of properties mixed up together *as one*. This reading of the passage was also adopted by Reginald E. Allen, who explains:

Measurement will only confirm the appearance that the third finger is both large and small—smaller than the middle finger, larger than the little finger. When this occurs, the mind is driven to question what the senses mean, and so comes to regard largeness and smallness as distinct things, confusingly mingled in the thing seen (VII 524b–c): ***unless Largeness is distinguished from Smallness, their coincidence in sensibles implies that they are not two but one.*** [—Allen 1997, pp. 98–99; bolded emphasis mine]

The fact that the plurality sensed as singularity also contains the compresence of opposites is merely a coincidence – although an important one, since it is the compresence that allows one to most easily spot the deficiency of the sensible experience, the deficiency which “puzzles soul” and which then in turn summons “calculation and understanding” to assess the situation. Thus the “educational importance” (as Allen puts it) of the passage lies in the fact that when this occurs with things that have opposite properties, we immediately recognise that “something is wrong” with our sense perception, that it is somehow lacking and fails to deliver the proper account of reality – and this realisation drives us to the realm of being, which is exactly what the education of the guardians of the city needs. As Allen puts it:

By recognizing them as distinct, the mind is led to distinguish objects of intelligence from objects of sight. This is the basis of the educational importance of mathematics, a science

that hinges on Unity (VII 524d–525a). Sight presents a contradiction: we see the same things both as one and as indefinitely many. Since this is true, reflection on unity, and thereby its distinction from plurality and number, must have the power of leading the mind toward reality. [—Allen 1997, p. 99]

The compresence of opposites is merely a specific case of the more general inconsistency that all sensible perceptions encompass: the “mixing up” of multiplicity of properties, received in one sense perception as illusory singularity. *Plato’s special interest in the properties that can cause the compresence of opposites does not lie in the fact that the Forms are needed only for those properties, but in fact that those cases can with great success be used in education to draw people towards Forms.* This is needed, first and foremost, to the guardians of the city, who need to be both warriors and philosophers (525b). Plato’s “missing interest” in the Forms of natural kinds or substantial Forms in general, which we can undoubtedly see in this passage, nevertheless shows nothing more than the fact, that the account in this passage has *practical* purpose, because it is dictated by the nature of the *Republic* as a whole – a work committed to delineating the structure and organisation of an ideal state.

* * * * *

However, I would like to read one more important point from the passage, which I can only shortly mention here. Before finishing the “finger account”, Plato takes one more step which neither Gill nor Allen recognized in their accounts (or at least they did not address it). He does not end the account with the recognition of the plurality of distinct and separate properties “confusingly mingled” in the single perception, nor with the ascend to the intelligible realm which is needed for it. Plato adds:

SOCRATES: And isn’t it from these cases that it first occurs to us to ask what the big is and what the small is?

GLAUCON: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: And, because of this, we called the one the intelligible and the other the visible.

GLAUCON: That’s right.

SOCRATES: This, then, is what I was trying to express before, when I said that some things summon thought, while others don’t. Those that strike the relevant sense at the same time as their opposites I call summoners, those that don’t do this do not awaken understanding. (*Republic* VII, 524c–d)

The fact that the intelligible is what can be known, and therefore precisely that, *about which* the question “*What is it?*” (τί ἐστὶ) can legitimately be asked, does not need to surprise us. However, the fact that Plato recalls the Socratic *ti esti?* question in the closure of the account is, I believe, emblematic. It serves to remind us that the ascent to the intelligible realm is not some abstract illumination or enlightened state of mind. Neither is the recognition of the plurality in our perceptions the goal itself. The cases of the compresence of opposites are the ones where “it first occurs to us” to seek to understand the true nature of things: “what the big is”, “what the small is”, and what all the things and properties dwelling in the intelligible realm are – in short, *to ask what Forms are*, because they reveal what it really is that the sensible experiences—mixed up together in our perceptions—deliver to us.

Thus the reason for (and the purpose of) postulating Forms cannot merely be the problem of compresence of opposites (and its solution, respectively). It is the opposite way around: the compresence of opposites *leads us* to Forms, which in turn perform a deeper role – they *explain* the properties of things which participate in them. The exact purpose which the Forms play in Plato’s Theory—not the practical one, from the standpoint of the human observer, but the ontological, metaphysical one—is one of the hardest questions that can be asked about Plato’s philosophy, and I cannot properly address it here. But at least that much should be obvious from what has already been said above, that to take Plato (or his Socrates in the *Republic* or *Parmenides*) to postulate Forms merely to address the problem of the compresence of opposites is insufficient, although it might seem legitimate and well-founded on the first sight – one of the reasons for this being the all-pervading “*What is it?*” (τί ἐστὶ) Socratic question, which appears in all of the dialogues where Forms are mentioned, and which requires positing Forms in order to be answered.

Gill’s book is written in a manner to encourage the reader to draw his own conclusions, yet because of assuming not only that Socrates’ challenge presents an impossibility, but also that the compresence of opposites is the only reason why early Plato postulated Forms, she has no other option than to depict the story that has Parmenides fighting against Socrates’ Theory, in which only Forms of opposites exist and the plurality of properties in them is impossible.

Allen, on the other hand—and in direct opposition to Gill—, did not accept the second assumption that Forms are there merely to explain compresence of opposites.⁸⁸ According to him, Zeno’s paradox “is a special case applied to opposites of a more general failure to distinguish characters from things characterized”.⁸⁹ Thus he argued that by introducing Forms, Socrates draws this distinction, which, however, “cannot be limited to relatives or opposites: it implies Ideas answering to every distinction of character”.⁹⁰ This is why Allen, after analysing the same passage in the *Parmenides* as Gill, and consulting the very same passage in the *Republic* as she, arrives to a different conclusion and generalises the need for Forms, encouraging us to read Plato as having postulated Form for “every common term of discourse”:

Without the theory of Ideas, the coincidence of opposites implies the identity of opposites—the identity, indeed, of every characteristic and what it characterizes. The theory of Ideas prevents this. The combination of opposites in sensibles leads us to recognize the existence of purely intelligible objects, characteristics that exist apart from combination. That is, it leads us to recognize the existence of Ideas. ***Once recognized, their existence may be generalized: we may assume an Idea answering to every common term of discourse.*** [—Allen 1997, p. 99; bolded emphasis mine]

3.3.6 Is discarding the Theory the necessary conclusion?

We have seen that in Gill’s account (which is only one of the many representatives of this reading), the negative reading of Socrates’ challenge is connected with the assumption, that Forms were by him (and early Plato) posited to explain the compresence of opposites in physical things, and therefore it is impossible—and in turn unacceptable for Socrates—that this same compresence should occur in Forms themselves. What is surprising is that Gill does not draw the final conclusion, that what Plato wants to say by impossibilities expounded in the *Parmenides* is that the Theory has to be dropped altogether. Yet it seems to me that this *should have been* the preferred and almost necessary-to-accept conclusion for Gill – at least if I am properly reading the assumptions accepted by her. If Plato was indeed surprised by the necessity of communion between Forms—as has been, according to her first assumption, depicted by the fact that Socrates has seen this as an impossibility—, and if Forms were invented precisely to explain the compresence of opposites found in sensible things—as claimed by her second assumption—, then to realise at the end of the dialogue that the Forms are plagued by the

⁸⁸ Still, Allen too was unable to consider the possibility that Socrates did not pose his challenge as an impossibility.

⁸⁹ Allen 1997, p. 91.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

same compresence of opposites they were supposed to explain *and root* should deal a finishing blow to the Theory of Forms, at least as we know it from the *Phaedo*, the *Republic* and other early dialogues.

The Theory has not only lost its purpose—as after the *Parmenides*, it is clear it does not succeed to explain anything—, but brings in a whole new bundle of its own problems. Since Forms no longer *root* the compresence of opposites, the problem is pushed down and thus the infinite regress arises. This is clearly shown in Hypothesis 2, where Parmenides postulated that “the All is one”. By asserting this, we claim both that the All *is*, and that it is *one*. As Plato puts it:

Let’s again say what the consequences will be, if One is. Consider whether this hypothesis must not signify that the One is such as to have parts [...]: if we state the ‘is’ of the One that is, and the ‘one’ of that which is One, and if being and oneness are not the same, but both belong to that same thing that we hypothesized, namely, the One that is, must it not itself, since it is one being, be a whole, and the parts of this whole be oneness and being? [...] Therefore whatever is one both is a whole and has a part. (Parmenides 142d)

So we came to the conclusion that *the All* is a whole that itself has parts, since it both *is* (therefore has *being*) and is *one* (therefore has *oneness*). This already reveals the compresence of opposites in the Form of One, since if it is to *be* and to be *one*, it also has to have these two parts, thus it is also *many*. But this is not all, because these two parts that we found in *the All*, namely *oneness* and *being*, in the same way both *are* and are *one*, so they *themselves* have these parts, and in this way, we may continue *ad infinitum*:

Again, each of the two parts possesses oneness and being; and the part, in its turn, is composed of at least two parts; and in this way always, for the same reason, whatever part turns up always possesses these two parts, since oneness always possesses being and being always possesses oneness. So, since it always proves to be two, it must never be one. [...] So, in this way, wouldn’t the One that is, be unlimited in multitude? (Parmenides 142e–143a)

Thus the mere fact of positing the Forms encompasses the infinite regress caused by the impossibility of rooting the compresence of opposites in them, unless some “further entities to explain the compresence in them” are introduced, which will finally be able to root the compresence itself. Gill starts her analysis of the passage by repeating her assumption that it is imperative for Socrates that the compresence is not found in the Forms themselves:

In Part I Socrates introduced a theory of forms to resolve Zeno’s contradictions about compresent opposites. [...] It was essential to Socrates’ theory that forms themselves not

be subject to the compresence of opposites. For if they were, he would need to introduce further entities to explain the compresence in them. [—Gill 1996, p. 77]

The question raised by many critics who adopted the negative reading, including both Gill and Allen, is this: “*How could, after all these issues presented so far, the Theory of Forms be saved?*” Yet there’s an even more pressing question that should be asked first, but only seldomly is: “*Why, if we read the Parmenides in this way, should we try to save the Theory in the first place?*” If the compresence of opposites was the leading issue that gave birth to the Theory, but besides Forms we need further entities in order to explain it—as Gill just assured us—, then we might as well be better off by simply discarding the intermediary element and simply postulate those “further entities”—whatever *they* would be. There’s no point in clinging to any theory which was designed as an answer to the specific question, if it has been shown that it fails to provide a solution to that precise question. The most reasonable way to proceed is simply to abandon that theory altogether⁹¹ – yet, neither Gill nor Allen enforces this conclusion.

In her earlier book on *Parmenides*, Gill’s final evaluation remains utterly unclear, probably to allow the reader to work out his “own answers to these questions” (p. 109). She confirms that “the lesson is that there must be forms, or stable objects of some sort, if there is to be any world at all” (p. 106). This statement alone allows us to accept virtually any conclusion, as long as it maintains universals of at least *some* kind. It might mean finding a new theory of universals; or keeping the Theory of Forms as it is; or drastically reforming it—it even allows the Theory to develop into Aristotelianism. According to her reading, the extreme conclusions of all the hypotheses in the second part of the *Parmenides* “relied on the same assumption, that the one cannot be both one and many” and “the only justification for this assumption was Socrates’ own commitment to it in his long speech in Part I”. Thus “the key issue in the second part of the *Parmenides* is Socrates’ assumption in Part I that the one cannot be both one and many” (p. 107). She then concludes:

Our question is how to make sense of the idea that the one is both one and many. How can the one be one, even though other things partake of it, and it partakes of other things? This question is the main challenge posed by the *Parmenides*. [—Gill 1996, p. 107]

⁹¹ This is indeed what some critics in the past did, with Ryle being one of the most striking examples, as we have seen in the subchapter [1.3.1 Independence as isolation – Ryle’s account](#). As Ryle concluded, with Plato’s abandonment of the “doctrine of Substantial Forms” in the *Parmenides*, “a road which was blocked by the fascinating but erroneous theory [...] is now cleared for the advance which was partially made in the *Sophist*, where for the first time the possibility and the need of a theory of categories or types is realised [...] and logical enquiries are at last capable of being begun.” (Ryle 1939/2009, p. 37)

In claiming this, she might of course be right, but she does not see that given the assumptions she has silently accepted, she should have *either* drawn the conclusion that the Theory must be abandoned, *or* shown that although Plato in *Parmenides* lost the original purpose of the Forms, he immediately found a completely new one, which alone suffices to account for the Theory. Gill of course notices the crucial passage 135b–c where Parmenides affirms Socrates that “there must be Forms”, as Gill puts it.⁹² But she doesn’t reflect on this long enough to realise that given her assumptions, this passage would mark (at least for Socrates, and under her reading also for Plato) the transition from one foundational purpose of the Theory to another: while up to this point, the sufficient reason for positing Forms was the compresence of opposites, from now on, it will be the possibility of thinking and dialectics. If Plato would like to introduce such a drastic change, he would certainly mark this milestone with a greater bravado. But in any case, this attempt to give some plausible explanation to Gill’s account is futile, as Gill herself did not so much as even indicate anything of this in her account.

We have seen that, in her later book, *Philosophos*, Gill advances her account by providing the constructive answer to this problem.⁹³ She argues that the compresence of opposites is troubling for Socrates and us, readers, only as long as we improperly treat the opposing properties as “monadic” and use them in sentences as “complete predicates”:

Simmiias is both large and small; and so, through partaking of the forms of largeness and smallness, he has both largeness and smallness in him. If his largeness and smallness are monadic properties, the situation remains as paradoxical as before, and forms fail to remove the problem, since largeness and smallness in Simmiias exclude each other.

[—Gill 2012, p. 26]

Recall that in Gill’s view, “Socrates introduces forms in the *Parmenides* to remove a feeling of paradox we do not share” (p. 21). However, if the problem of the compresence of opposites is caused just by Plato’s unawareness of the fact that the opposite predicates are in fact incomplete, and the solution of the paradox is therefore simply to supply them with completion, I do not see how the Theory of Forms could *ever possibly* be saved after realising that it is enough to supply the predicates with “completions”. For, *first*, Gill’s solution lies entirely in the realm of physical things: Simmiias is not large and small *unqualifiedly*, but large *in relation to* Socrates and small *in relation to* Phaedo. That is an entirely acceptable and comprehensible explanation of a commonplace observation, but it at the same time completely removes the need for Forms: the qualifications that we

⁹² Gill 1996, p. 51.

⁹³ See subchapter [3.3.3 Atomicity of Forms behind the compresence of opposites](#).

supplied are from the realm of physical things. If this is all where the trick lies, we do not need to lean on Forms, and therefore to postulate them at all! If Plato would be seeking the answers in the sensible realm or in linguistic analysis of our way of speaking about the world, the Theory of Forms *could never have been* for him the solution of the problem in the first place.

And *second*, no possible solution along these lines will work, since even if it removes the problematic character of the compresence of opposites in Forms (let us call it *F*-compresence), as long as the *F*-compresence itself—even if relieved of its “problematic character”—remains in Forms, the question will remain: why couldn’t we in the same way remove the “problematic character” from the compresence of opposites directly in sensible things (let us call it *S*-compresence) themselves? We do not have to bother explaining the *F*-compresence by supplying the properties of Forms with completions, only in turn to have *afterwards* the means to explain the *S*-compresence – we could have directly applied the solution to the compresent opposites in sensible things themselves. In other words, if Forms were the solution to the problem of *S*-compresence, but then the same compresence is found in Forms, to which the compresentist answers that this latter *F*-compresence was made unproblematic by Plato – why would we postulate another explanatory layer, the Forms, instead of directly making unproblematic the former compresence, which was the original problem? Of course, Plato would *not* be content with this solution, but that is precisely because he did not think what Gill makes him think, namely that the compresence of opposites is the driving wheel of the Theory of Forms, and that merely supplying the completions to predicates solves the paradox in Forms.

3.4 The positive reading: The statement is a constructive challenge

Yet there is still one more possible reading of Socrates’ amazement, the one that starts with the possibility that Socrates’ amazement doesn’t necessarily have to be treated as a negative denial of the presence of opposite properties in the Forms. In the logical analysis of the first question—namely, *what exactly caused Socrates’ amazement?*—we went through three possible readings and offered three different statements in the form of rejections: the rejection of essential opposites, logical opposites, and multitude. In other words, the question itself was termed negatively, asking *what underlying statement that Socrates adopted is being challenged?* Yet these statements can be seen as positive proposals each served as a challenge to Zeno (and Parmenides). Socrates’ amazement then presents an aporia in the form of one out of the three possible statements from the first

question, which we decided to accept as the proper reading of the passage. If we take into account this option (thus, if we reject to immediately accept the first assumption, that Socrates' amazement imparts an impossibility), another possible interpretative way opens up, the one I have already alluded to while describing the reasons for rejecting previous interpretations:

Explanation C: *The statement poses a positive challenge and Socrates would be amazed to see it solved.*

Premise 1: Socrates' statement is presented as an aporia, not an impossibility.

Premise 2: The statement is required for the Theory of Forms to work.

Conclusion: Socrates' statement presents a positive, challenging task that needs to be addressed in order for the Theory of Forms to maintain its coherency, and he would be amazed to see it solved.

3.4.1 Is Plato guilty of committing an important overlook?

One important advantage this explanation has in contrast to the others presented above is that it is relieved of the question, which all negative readings must face and answer: how is it possible that Plato from the beginning, *first*, positively attributed several different properties to Forms, *second*, at the same time posited their complete atomicity and absolute oneness (that is, absolute lack of multiplicity), *and yet* it did not ever occurred to him—up to the *Parmenides*—that there could be a contradiction in holding both of these views simultaneously. Many developmentalist-minded critics are ready to explain (in different ways) how is it possible that Plato before the *Parmenides* did not see the problem in not allowing Forms to be in communion with each other. Similarly, many critics are able to construe arguments able to apologetically explain why Plato was able to initially hold that each Form is absolutely one and in no way many, and why only in the *Parmenides* he realised that this doctrine must be changed. These are, after all, highly abstract and specific problems which require a great amount of philosophical work to even be recognised, let alone to be solved.

The problem with the explanations developmentalists offer us is that they are only aimed to answer these specific, fine-grained philosophical questions. Yet the most basic question is this: ***How is it possible that it didn't naturally occur to a philosopher of Plato's rank that everywhere in his dialogues he is describing Forms by using multiple various characteristics, and yet he holds that each Form is fully characterised solely by its single, unique nature?*** For example, in the *Phaedo* Plato describes the natures of the

Equal itself and the Beautiful itself. Structurally and qualitatively, these are very different Forms, and Socrates would probably have classified them into distinct groups in the *Parmenides* 130, if the Equal appeared here too. In the *Phaedo* 78, he asks:

Can the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing in itself, the real, ever be affected by any change whatever? Or does each of them that **really is**, being **uniform** by itself, remain **the same** and never in any way tolerate any change whatever?

(*Phaedo* 78d, bolded emphasis mine)

He implicitly and without hesitation ascribes to both of these Forms, and indeed to each Form whatsoever (“each thing in itself”), the natures of Being, Rest and Oneness (reading “uniform by itself” from Greek *μονοειδής* [“simple”]). The Forms of Being, Rest and Oneness are not explicitly invoked to explain these natures (if they were, the developmentalist interpretations would be impossible *simpliciter*), yet it is clear that by ascribing these properties, Plato is doing no small thing. How could the nature of the Equal itself explain everything that the passage asserts about it, and the same with the Beautiful itself—and how could Plato not in any way at the very least foresee this difficulty coming? Probably the most intuitive answer would be that he never held the second view – but that exactly is the option which developmentalists reject as impossible. Thus we have Gill admitting that already in the *Phaedo*, all the Forms are characterised by several “properties of Parmenidean being”:

To judge from the *Phaedo*, each form, though distinguished from others by its own proper character, shares with all forms what we may call the “formal” or “ideal” properties of Parmenidean being: each is ungenerated and indestructible, unchangeable, intelligible, and uniform. Each form is a stable entity with a unique nature. [—Gill 1996, p. 10]

And in a note below she sums that “these are properties”—that is, ungenerated; indestructible; unchangeable; intelligible; and uniform—“a form has as a form, rather than as the particular form that it is”.⁹⁴ Gill finds nothing peculiar about the fact that Plato already held this view in the *Phaedo*, arguably the earliest source in the whole corpus where the Forms are mentioned, and yet she finds no difficulty in believing that it never occurred to Plato that if there are *any* “properties a form has as a form, rather than as the particular form that it is”, this immediately requires that there are several of them – and even more, it means that there is *a distinction* between two kinds of properties the Form has! The problems raised in the second part of *Parmenides* are precise philosophical formulations of a very intuitive, almost *pre-philosophical* observation, that a thing cannot be *absolutely one*—one in the Parmenidean sense—, if it has several qualitatively different,

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 13.

mutually unreducible characteristics. Parmenides' exercise then leads these philosophical formulations to their philosophically unbearable conclusions, but the basic fact remains that Plato saw no trouble in vividly describing the Forms from all sides and perspectives, and he was doing so in the dialogues as early as *Phaedo*. Contrast this with Socrates' cautiousness when in the same dialogue the discussion came to the question of describing the nature of participation: "I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful" (100d).

It seems very unlikely that if Plato ever held the view that Forms are atomic, he wouldn't recognise, in the most general sense, that he could create a potential problem for himself and his Theory by speaking so freely and in such an unrestricted manner of their characteristics. Thus to successfully defend a developmentalist reading of Plato, it is not sufficient to give a plausible account of how Plato could have for so long overlooked the specific and fine-grained problems raised in the *Parmenides*. The first and most crucial problem that needs to be addressed is the immediately-obvious difficulty of that intuitive observation, from which all the philosophical difficulties are deduced when it is put under a philosophical scrutiny.

3.4.2 Formal properties and the atomicity of Forms

One important counter-argument can be raised in opposition to my reading. It might be argued that all the additional properties or characteristics Plato attributed to Forms are not "proper" attributes of the Forms, but logical or formal characteristics of them. Thus, Plato's multiple different descriptions of Forms are in no way opposed to the view that up until *Parmenides*, Plato believed that they were atomic, since only one of those descriptors really belongs to the Form: "its own proper character", using Gill's words.

As we have already seen,⁹⁵ such interpretation has been proposed by Ryle, who claimed that "the *Parmenides* is an early essay in the theory of types",⁹⁶ where Plato prepared the ground for the *Sophist* – an important step in the development of Plato's doctrine, because "the distinction between generic concepts and formal concepts is here seen or half-seen, and logical enquiries are at last capable of being begun" (p. 37). In other words, *Parmenides* marks the beginning of Plato's road towards distinguishing between *formal* and *ordinary* (also called *generic*) concepts. Ryle asks: "Why does Plato make Parmenides choose to operate upon such rarefied concepts as Unity, [...] Manifoldness,

⁹⁵ See subchapter [1.3.1 Independence as isolation](#).

⁹⁶ Ryle 1939/2009, p. 19.

And he answers:

The answer may simply be that he assumed that what is true of the more generic Forms will cover the more specific ones; the general logical properties of universals will come out most swiftly from an inspection of those which are nearest the peak of the pyramid. That is, Plato may have thought that as Figure is higher than Plane Figure, and that than Triangle, so Similarity, Plurality, Existence and the rest are higher than Figure, i.e. that they are Summa Genera. If he did think this, he was mistaken. [...] In fact, these concepts or most of them, and several others, differ from most ordinary concepts not just in level of generality but in type. They are formal concepts, not peculiar to any special subject-matter, but integral to all subject-matters. They belong, so to speak, not to this or that special vocabulary of knowledge, but to its general syntax. [—Ryle 1939/2009, p. 18]

In this regard, Gill adopts and rephrases Ryle’s reading,⁹⁷ although she gives her account a highly Aristotelian bent⁹⁸ and divides the Forms between “categorical” and “structural”. Similarly to Ryle, Gill claims that in the *Parmenides*, Plato started to become aware that besides the *proper* features of Forms, there are also *ideal* features which “are those properties a form has in virtue of being a form” (p. 151). Those properties are gained by Forms participating in structural Forms, which “are empty of categorical content but have structural content”:

I distinguished between categorical and structural forms. [...] Many forms have determinate categorical content and can be arranged in genus–species trees in the way that Aristotle arranges entities in his categories. [...] Other forms are empty of categorical content but have structural content, and cannot be so arranged. Oneness and multitude, sameness and difference, likeness and unlikeness have structural natures dictating the way they operate on other, ultimately categorical entities. [—Gill 2012, p. 151]

Abstracting from their specific terminology, the readings of both Ryle and Gill (and others) can be used as a basis for an appeal, that when Plato was speaking about Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues, the array of properties he was ascribing them were in fact those formal concepts which are “not peculiar to any special subject-matter” and therefore

⁹⁷ See Gill 2012, pp. 29–30 and 150–153, but especially n. 29 on p. 29.

⁹⁸ To be more precise, Gill’s account not only presents late Plato in Aristotelian terms, but assimilates his late Theory of Forms to Aristotle’s one to such a degree, that it is sometimes hard to track the difference between them. To name just a few examples, Gill seems to equate Plato’s structural Forms to Aristotle’s transcendentals: “Structural forms, such as oneness, sameness, and difference, have no place in the categories. Scholastic philosophers in the Middle Ages called them »transcendentals,« because they transcend Aristotle’s categories and apply to items in all these groups.” (Gill 2012, p. 29). Moreover, she commonly operates with the distinction between “accidental” and “essential” predications in Plato (p. 25), while taking *both* of them to be applicable to the sensible things (p. 152). Lastly, she seems to attribute accidental features to Plato’s Forms: “accidents are not the *only* features that belong to forms while standing outside their nature” (p. 152; emphasis mine).

no particular Form properly “has” them. Thus, in turn, the thesis of the atomicity of pre-Parmenidean Forms is not endangered. At the same time, it can be stressed that Plato could not properly formulate this or make the necessary distinctions, precisely because only in the *Parmenides* he started laying grounds for the completely new logical apparatus which would later allow him to do so. As a pioneer in the field, Plato had yet to devise the necessary terminology, the need for which was first discovered in the *Parmenides*.

However, this appeal violates chronology. If it was only in the *Parmenides* where Plato started to become aware about the distinction between *formal* and *ordinary* concepts (following Ryle), or between the *ideal* and *proper* features of Forms (following Gill), it cannot be claimed that in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues, the properties he attributed to Forms (with the sole exception of each Form’s essential property) were specifically from the former group and Plato *meant them* so. Without the distinction, Plato had in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues absolutely no means to have meant anything else, than that all the properties and characteristics he attributes to Forms, he does so in the same way: as generic, real properties of Forms, predicated of Forms in proper, ordinary way. Thus, adopting the developmentalist reading of Ryle and Gill actually strengthens my original objection, that Plato would have realised that by attributing a wide variety of properties to Forms, he is undermining or directly contradicting his thesis of atomic Forms, and therefore creating a potential problem for himself and his Theory – that is, *if* he ever held that Forms are atomic.

3.4.3 Objection: Plato’s account is presented in Parmenides’, not Socrates’ words

At this point, a possible objection could be raised against my reading of the *Parmenides* and, consecutively, my criticism of Gill’s account. It might be said that Plato’s true opinion about Forms is not expressed, in the *Parmenides*, by the person of Socrates, but by Parmenides. Thus even if literary Socrates truly believed that the compresence of opposites in Forms is impossible, this wouldn’t constitute a proof against Gill’s two above-mentioned assumptions, because it is Parmenides himself that represents Plato and it is Parmenides’ words that convey what Plato wants to tell the reader about his Theory of Forms. Gill herself notes the possibility that Plato’s own message in the *Parmenides* might not be conveyed by Socrates, but by another dramatic character – or, perhaps, by even several of them together:

In reading the *Parmenides* it is of course worth asking ourselves whether Plato is to be identified with the young Socrates who defends a theory of forms or with Parmenides who criticizes it, or whether Socrates represents his younger self, Parmenides his older self. But we should remain open to the possibility that Plato is examining forms and their functions from various perspectives without endorsing any of those perspectives himself.

[—Gill 1996, p. 5, n. 3]

Once again, Gill stays clear from providing us with her own view, so *in theory*, she seems to remain neutral with regard to this question in order to consider all possibilities. However, *practically* she builds up one specific interpretation, and that interpretation presents Socrates as being amazed and shocked in case he saw the compresence in Forms themselves. And she clearly reads this amazement as having an import on Plato's own thoughts: something that Plato himself thought needs to be addressed and re-evaluated, because the *Parmenides* proves it to be unmaintainable.

However, with regard to the objection that Plato's thoughts are conveyed by Parmenides and Socrates is there to be dismissed, just as the earlier Theory of Forms needs to be – this objection does not hold. Nowhere in the whole dialogue does Parmenides fight against Socrates (or vice versa). In Part I during Socrates' speech, Parmenides and Zeno “often glanced at each other and smiled, as though they admired him” (130a) and Parmenides commended Socrates by saying that “you are much to be admired for your keenness for argument!” (130b). In Part II, Parmenides leads the argument and Aristotle (selected because he is “still young” – just as Socrates) gladly follows him. They are both working together towards their common goal, which is to give a proper account of the Theory of Forms. That there is no attempt whatsoever to *discard* the Theory is confirmed by Parmenides who, after considering all the difficulties that await anybody attempting to give an account of the Theory, still holds that dropping it is no solution at all, since by doing this we would entirely lose the option of doing dialectic and philosophy as such:

“Yet on the other hand, Socrates,” said Parmenides, “if someone, having an eye on all the difficulties we have just brought up and others of the same sort, won't allow that there are forms for things and won't mark off a form for each one, he won't have anywhere to turn his thought, since he doesn't allow that for each thing there is a character that is always the same. In this way he will destroy the power of dialectic entirely.” (*Parmenides* 135b–c)

Socrates knows that the task at hand is an extraordinarily difficult one. He addresses the challenge to Parmenides (because who else should meet it if not him, the well-renowned philosopher of his rank?), and this act has a perfect counterpart in Parmenides himself, who not only agrees with Socrates that it is a difficult task, but asserts

that it is nevertheless absolutely necessary and therefore takes up the challenge, which then constitutes the entire second part.

* * * * *

Still, it might be objected that there *must be*, in the end, *some* conflict between Parmenides and Socrates, because, after all, Parmenides' theory clashes with Plato's own Theory. Parmenides claimed that all reality is One, unchanging Being, and that change itself is an illusion. This is the teaching of his *Way of Truth*, while the *Way of Opinion* is the way of common people believing that plurality and change is real. It is not possible for me to give a full treatise on this topic, but to respond to this objection, it should be sufficient to say that the historical Parmenides is not the literary Parmenides we have seen speaking in the *Parmenides*. This is undebatable, otherwise it wouldn't be possible for Plato's Parmenides to affirm that the reality of Forms is required in order for us to be able to philosophise at all (135a–c). Historical Parmenides denied the reality of *any* plurality whatsoever, which would include the existence of (the plurality of) Forms. As Allen puts it:

Zeno's paradox of likeness is stated with absolute generality. It is directed not against this sort of plurality or that, but against any sort of plurality at all. If it were valid, it would condemn not only the plurality of the sensible world, but also the plurality of the world of Ideas by which Socrates will undertake to vindicate the plurality of the sensible world.

[—Allen 1997, p. 82–83]

Thus Parmenides in the *Parmenides* is, just as Socrates, a literary figure serving Plato's own purpose – he is a guide towards the exposition of Plato's Theory, which is initially presented by Socrates. Those two are working in tandem, and the older and more experienced one is required to allow Plato to stress the fact that the topics with which the *Parmenides* is dealing are a philosophical Mount Olympus. As Parmenides himself tells us:

Only a very gifted man can come to know that for each thing there is some kind, a being itself by itself; but only a prodigy more remarkable still will discover that and be able to teach someone else who has sifted all these difficulties thoroughly and critically for himself.

(*Parmenides* 135a–b)

3.4.4 Does Zeno's contradiction carry over to the Theory of Forms?

The negative reading of Socrates' amazement that the compromentists put forward raises an important question, which the defender of the positive reading must nevertheless

answer just as well: does Zeno’s contradiction negatively affect the Theory of Forms? And after all that has been argued, we have a sufficient explanatory background to give a negative answer and refuse the objection. Just as the compresence of opposites in sensible things was explained by Socrates as in fact non-paradoxical, as soon as the Theory of Forms is introduced – so too can the compresence in the Forms themselves be shown to be non-paradoxical with the same Theory of Forms, if it is understood properly. As we have seen, the difficulty of Socrates’ challenge—asking Parmenides to show that the Forms themselves can have opposite and multiple properties—lies not in the challenge being *impossible*, but in it being concerned with *something new* inside the complex and difficult Theory: something, which had not yet been shown, because while in many dialogues before the *Parmenides*, Plato had been repeatedly and in multifarious ways describing how sensible things gain their multiplicity of properties by participating in Forms, he had not yet explained how the same participation works among Forms themselves, and neither had he ever looked into the nature of the participation itself.

The paradoxically-sounding compresence of opposites in Forms themselves can be shown to be not paradoxical at all with the tools already available to Plato for a long time. Plato’s own formulation of the law of non-contradiction in the *Republic* IV.436b–c can be used to avoid the contradiction by discriminating between different senses in which Forms have their different, and sometimes even opposite properties. And while the *Parmenides* leaves this issue open, the *Sophist* is dedicated exactly to explain this difference. Let us once again return to Gill’s well-formulated question from her *Parmenides*: “why anyone should be bothered by Zeno’s contradictions?”⁹⁹ In her latter book, *Philosophos*, she expands the explanation already given in the previous one:

Why should anyone be bothered by Zeno’s paradoxes, the compresence of opposites in ordinary things? The same thing can be simultaneously both *F* and *not-F* (say like and unlike), as long as it is *F* in one respect or relation and *not-F* in another. For example, Zeno is like Socrates in species but unlike him in age and size—fill out the predicates “like” and “unlike” by specifying the respects in which Zeno and Socrates are like and unlike, and the contradiction disappears. Again, Socrates is both one and many, because he is one man and many parts. Only if the same thing is *F* and *not-F* at the same time, in the same respect, and in relation to the same thing, is there a contradiction. Socrates regularly mentions the qualifiers when he speaks of the compresence of opposites, yet—like Zeno—he finds that compresence puzzling. He thinks his theory of forms enables him to solve the paradoxes. [—Gill 2012, p. 21]

⁹⁹ Gill 1996, p. 12. See previous subchapter [3.3.3 Atomicity of Forms behind the compresence of opposites](#).

Gill is of course aware of the fact that once we find the means to distinguish different senses in which Forms themselves can have the opposite properties—either by having them in different *respects* or in relation to different *things*—, the contradiction would no longer be real, but only apparent, and thus no longer vicious to the Theory of Forms. What Gill fails or refuses to properly consider is that if Plato *himself* found and explicitly formulated the law of non-contradiction already in the pre-Parmenidean *Republic*, then it is quite possible that he might have been aware of it also while speaking about Forms in other pre-Parmenidean dialogues and most importantly in the *Parmenides* itself. If Plato recognised (as we know he did) that any single thing cannot at the same time have opposite properties, unless so in different respects, parts or in relation to different things, then the question whether Forms “have” those different respects, parts or relations must have been on the table already for a long time. And if so, then it is very likely that his Theory does not need a refinement at all – it only needs to be better understood by us, commentators and readers of Plato.

Especially after noting that “Socrates regularly mentions the qualifiers when he speaks of the compresence of opposites”, Gill’s conclusion that “yet—like Zeno—he finds that compresence puzzling” sounds not only unsupported, but entirely dubious and question-begging. For why does Gill suppose that *despite* the fact that Plato *is* being aware of his own law of non-contradiction precisely *when* speaking about the compresence of opposites, he *nevertheless* finds the compresence puzzling? There seems to be no other reason than Gill’s initial assumption that Socrates’ amazement is a display of disbelief. But when we are free of the negative amazement assumption, the intuitive and most plausible reading would be this: neither Socrates nor Zeno (nor Plato) are puzzled by the compresence of opposites in Forms, *precisely because* they are aware of the law of non-contradiction, which allows them to discriminate different *respects* and *relations* in and to which Forms might have their properties—and therefore, there is no reason for assuming that Socrates means his challenge as a denial of an impossibility. And this is perfectly in line with what Socrates formulates in the final part of his challenge:

I would, as I say, be much more impressed if someone were able to display this same difficulty, which you and Parmenides went through in the case of visible things, also similarly entwined in multifarious ways in the forms themselves.

(*Parmenides* 129e–130a)

Gill has her reasoning upside down: she reads puzzlement into Socrates’ challenge, because he must have been shocked; yet he must have been shocked only if the compresence was really puzzling for him. It will be the task of the second part of this work

to show precisely that Plato *had* the necessary terminology to distinguish ways in which things can have their properties, that this distinction *also* applies to Forms, and that Plato himself *did* repeatedly apply it to them—and all of that even before the *Parmenides*. But I believe it has already been sufficiently shown that the burden of the proof is on the developmentalist's side, who wants to reject all those points and maintain that they were not only unknown, but positively denied by Plato before the *Parmenides*. To do this, it is not enough to show that these points are under-specified or insufficiently accounted-for in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues – a positive proof of them being actually refused is needed if the developmentalist thesis should hold.

4 The logical analysis of the third question

Why would Plato be challenging that statement here and now?

in other words: *What is the purpose of bringing out this challenge in the *Parmenides*?*

The purpose of the last, third question in the analysis of Socrates' amazement is to ask for the reasons of the challenge and possibly of the entire dialogue *as seen by Plato himself*. What was Plato's own motivation to write this dialogue and to write it in this way—with Socrates' amazement, Parmenides' criticisms and training constituted of eight hypotheses? It is not my aim (nor is it possible in the extent of this work) to fully answer these questions, but they will all need to be addressed at least to the extent in which they are related to the main goal of this dissertation.

As I already pointed out, the third question goes beyond the *Parmenides*—at least if we treat chronologically successive dialogues as possible responses to the problems raised in the *Parmenides* itself. With the exception of interpreting the *Parmenides* as being completely nonsensical or as merely a dialectical exercise, as some interpreters claimed in the past, we are forced to acknowledge that there *is* some important message (and possibly more of them) to be drawn from the *Parmenides*. And if this is so, then it seems very unlikely that this message wouldn't be carried over by Plato to the later dialogues. Nor can we, in an attempt to answer the third question, isolate the *Parmenides* from the dialogues that chronologically precede it, since that would put problems addressed in the dialogue out of the context of Plato's previous thinking. Most importantly, doing so would make us unable in principle to answer the question, whether Plato's Theory had undergone a development, as developmentalists claim, or whether no such development occurred, as is the thesis of unitarists.

Therefore, in order to decide which of the possible answers to this third question should be accepted as *the* correct interpretation of Plato's main motivation for writing the dialogue—and, more specifically, for writing it in the way he wrote it: as a challenge of Socrates meant to be answered by Parmenides—, both the earlier and later dialogues need to be taken into account. Because of this, it is impossible to give a full logical analysis of all possible interpretations of the meaning of the *Parmenides*, as that would require a project of its own. Instead, I will focus on my own proposed reading, which will be provided in full in the next chapter, and here I will only list the alternative interpretations provided by scholars up to this date with their brief explanations.

The former two readings already mentioned (interpreting the *Parmenides* as being completely nonsensical, or as merely a dialectical exercise) have mostly been abandoned by now, but for the sake of completeness and their significant influence they had on Plato's scholarship in the past, I will include them in the last two sections of this chapter. From the perspective of the Theory of Forms, there are two possible explanations that offer productive interpretations of the *Parmenides*: we can basically *either* claim that the *Parmenides* marks a borderline between early and late Plato, his doctrine of Forms undergoing a substantial change or possibly even a complete abandonment, *or* we may read no such threshold into the dialogue. To some extent, these answers were already examined during the analysis of the previous two questions, as they are inevitably inter-connected; the purpose of this section will be to connect these partial explanations and provide a comprehensive view on them.

4.1 Explanation A: Plato's thinking evolved and he just realised the problem

The interpretation that the *Parmenides* marks a borderline between early and late Plato—a borderline where his doctrine of Forms is undergoing a genuine criticism—is nowadays a *de facto* standard reading of Plato and the development of his Theory of Forms. As such, this family of interpretations encompasses all kinds of developmentalist views on Plato, which maintain that there were substantial changes to (or possibly even a complete abandonment of) his earlier Theory of Forms—changes which “early Plato” did not anticipate. Thus, the criticism that occurred in *Parmenides*—though not surprising for Plato himself at the moment of writing the dialogue—is nevertheless taken to be utmost surprising for his *earlier* self, the author of pre-Parmenidean treatises on Forms, such as the *Republic* or *Phaedo*. The general “developmentalist story” in its most concise form has been offered by Bambrough:

After the early group of dialogues there was a gradual development of a Platonic metaphysic, morality and religion. In the *Gorgias* the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is introduced. In the *Meno* it is combined with the conception of learning as recollection or Anamnesis. In the *Phaedo* both doctrines are accompanied by an almost fully fledged theory of Ideas, as known to us from the other dialogues of the classical middle period of Platonism: *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*. At this stage in Plato's development there occurs an important crisis. The *Parmenides* gives expression to an ἀπορία that Plato found himself in when he recognised the force and importance of the logical objections that may be brought against the theory of universals which is still, in his

honour, called Platonism. At *Parmenides* 135b5–c3 he represents himself as torn between a loyalty to his theory that would involve him in what now appeared to be intolerable paradoxes and contradictions, and the equally intolerable alternative of denying the possibility of all thought and language and knowledge, which seemed to him to be an inescapable consequence of abandoning the theory.

It is not surprising that the *Theaetetus* should represent a return to the aporetic structure of the early Socratic dialogues and a new start at the theory of knowledge. [...] The *Sophist* and the *Philebus* belong to a new phase in which criticism of Plato's own earlier theory, such as is implicit in the *Theaetetus* and explicit in the *Parmenides*, is combined with the reconstruction of a theory of knowledge and of universals which is designed to take account of the logical difficulties found by the *Parmenides* to lie in the path of the earlier theory.

[—Bambrough 1972, p. 298]

Bambrough admits that the account is “highly controversial”, but nevertheless “has one rare merit” that “it makes every Platonic dialogue mean what it says” – something which is, according to Bambrough, so unquestionable and absolutely evident, that not even “its most uncompromising critic could not deny” it.¹⁰⁰ As such, this general interpretative line covers many specific readings, but what they have in common is the negative understanding of Socrates' amazement. Whether *Parmenides* is taken to represent the views of late Plato or not, Socrates' disbelief is always taken to be presenting a genuine challenge to Plato's own Theory of Forms: something which plagues the Theory once advocated by the real Plato, and which is now put under serious scrutiny and must be reflected in the Theory itself on the pain of losing its consistency. The specific reason why the “early Theory” must be revised depends on the particular branch of the developmentalist reading, and is based on the individual critic's interpretation of what is the core problem raised in the *Parmenides*, how is it suggested to be solved there, and how (and whether) it is actually solved in the later dialogues, especially the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Philebus* (and possibly *Timaeus*). Among the various answers to these questions, the following can be found:

- It has been suggested, on various grounds and in various senses, that Plato had taken Forms to be atomic before the *Parmenides*, and changed his mind later precisely under the weight of the criticisms posed by *Parmenides*. For example, **Moravcsik** claimed that Plato in the middle period dialogues “creates a conception of the Forms as a plurality of simple independent entities”, whereas in the later

¹⁰⁰ Bambrough 1972, p. 298. It is an unfortunate sign of a fragmented and “partisan” scholarship that what one scholar sees as an undeniable bottom line which should be taken as the common ground that is beyond dispute, is seen by others as completely mistaken.

dialogues “we find Forms as either parts of several other Forms, or as the kind of entity that itself has parts”. The crisis culminates in the *Parmenides*, where Plato through Socrates represents “his own hesitation with regard to the possibility of fitting together all of his commitments and ontological speculations concerning the Forms”.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, **Nehamas** explained that Plato originally held a naïve self-predication theory, which didn’t allow him to ascribe opposite property to a Form, as he initially thought that “there is, strictly speaking, only one way of having a characteristic, namely, being that characteristic itself”.¹⁰² Another explanation given by **Curd** was that Plato’s “middle period theory maintains that Forms are both numerically and predicationally one”, and his self-predication theory needed to be extended by self-participation theory in order for Forms not only to *be* their own essential property, but also to *have* them.¹⁰³

- A different suggestion related to the self-predication theory was that Plato in earlier dialogues naïvely held that each Form has its essential property in the same sense that the things which participate in it, but outclasses all of them. **Meinwald**, for example, claimed that this “super-exemplification view assimilates the crucial self-predication sentences to everyday true predications in relation to the others”, and that it has been recognised in the *Parmenides* as being wrong and fixed in the dialogues to follow by distinguishing between the “tree” predications and “everyday” predications.¹⁰⁴
- Yet another identification of the core problem of the *Parmenides* was that of the separation of Forms. It has been suggested by **Vlastos** that this, together with the self-predication assumption, are the two most troubling assumptions of the Theory, which Plato nevertheless wasn’t able to solve, as he failed to explicitly formulate them. According to Vlastos, Plato in *Parmenides* “begins to feel that something is wrong, or at least not quite right, about his theory, and he is puzzled and anxious”, and the objections of Parmenides are “the expression of his acknowledged but unresolved puzzlement”.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, **Gill** has seen the separation of Forms as being consciously resolved in Plato’s later dialogues: “forms in our series of dialogues [*Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*] do not exist apart from things in the world around us, as they do in the first part of the *Parmenides* and probably in

¹⁰¹ See e.g. Moravcsik 1963 (second quotation is from page 160), Moravcsik 1973a (first quotation is from page 160) or Moravcsik 1973b.

¹⁰² See e.g. Nehamas 1973 or Nehamas 1979 (quotation is from page 98).

¹⁰³ See Curd 1986 (quotation is from page 127).

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. Meinwald 1991 or Meinwald 1992 (quotation is from page 385).

¹⁰⁵ See Vlastos 1954 (quotation is from pages 343–344). Vlastos has withdrawn a substantive part of his previous views on self-predication (but not so much on separation of Forms) in Vlastos 1972.

the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, but are the stable natures of things, immanent in them”.¹⁰⁶

A claim similar to Gill’s, although formulated in a different fashion, has been made already by **Ryle**, who understood *Parmenides* as Plato’s recognition that his mistake was in “treating universals as if they were particulars”.¹⁰⁷

- Yet another approach to interpret objections raised by Parmenides was offered by **Owen**, who, following Aristotle, suspected that the absurdities related to the ‘One’ emerged because Plato, by trying to postulate Forms of incomplete predicates, created “a class of non-relative instances of relatives” which was “the extreme case of Greek mistreatment of ‘relative’ terms in the attempt to assimilate them to simple adjectives”.¹⁰⁸ This interpretative line was later developed by **Kirwan**. But while Owen asserted that “the earlier accounts of Forms are dominated by a preoccupation with incomplete predicates” (p. 109), Kirwan claimed that Plato was all the way along interested in both complete and incomplete predicates, but he did not distinguish between those two kinds, as “such recognition is absent from the middle dialogues” and only in the *Parmenides* Plato is forced to realise their difference.¹⁰⁹
- Lastly, many critics have seen the source of problem for the Theory in Plato’s denial of the compresence of opposites, which the *Parmenides* was meant to address. Similarly to Gill, **Fine** takes Plato to believe that the compresence of opposites was a major reason for postulating Forms: “[sensible] things are as they are because they participate in non-sensible forms that escape compresence”. Forms themselves therefore need to escape the compresence in order to function as “causal or explanatory factors”, and that precisely constitutes the crisis in the *Parmenides*.¹¹⁰ **Allen** has taken a slightly different reading and claimed that Plato allowed the communion of Forms even before *Parmenides*, but rejected it in the cases of direct opposites: “the *Sophist* is concerned with the question whether any Ideas combine; the *Parmenides*, with the question whether Ideas of opposites combine”.¹¹¹

This list is not (and can not by definition be) complete, but it has already shown both how widely accepted is the developmentalist reading in its most general sense on the one hand, and how extremely diverse are the specific readings of why this development had to

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Gill 1996 or Gill 2012 (quotation is from page 9).

¹⁰⁷ See Ryle 1939/2009 (quotation is from page 12).

¹⁰⁸ See Owen 1957 (quotation is from page 110).

¹⁰⁹ See Kirwan 1974 (quotation is from page 115).

¹¹⁰ See Fine 1993 (quotation is from page 58).

¹¹¹ See Allen 1997 (quotation is from page 101).

occur on the other hand. Being under such a heavy and unceasing focus of Platonic scholars for so long, one would expect to see converging tendency in the specific branches of the developmentalist reading, yet the theories do not seem to have this feature of progressively becoming closer to each other. I believe one of the possible explanations for this phenomenon might be the fact that there are some incorrect assumptions behind the developmentalist readings. In building an interpretation, the assumptions we accept at the beginning of the process stand as postulates which are never disputed, but nevertheless dramatically affect the resulting direction in which the interpretation will “grow”.

We have seen and analysed two such assumptions: the assumption of the negative reading of Socrates’ amazement in the *Parmenides*, and the more specific assumption of the compresence of opposites as the reason for postulating Forms. In comparison with the general negative reading, this second possible explanation is similar to it in treating Socrates’ amazement as a display of the impossibility of the communion of Forms. However, the general negative reading does not take the compresence of opposites in the sensibles as *the* fundamental reason for positing the Theory in the first place. Thus the former explanation covers a much wider field of critics, who simply claim that early Plato had not anticipated the fact that the Forms themselves will somehow need to be allowed to have opposite properties. This correlates with the adoption of the first assumption, which claims that Socrates’ amazement was meant to express the denial of the possibility of Forms having opposite properties. Thus critics in this group read Plato’s own denial of the communion of Forms into Socrates’ amazement, and Parmenides’ criticism as destructive for Plato’s pre-Parmenidean Theory of Forms. At the same time, the fact that the general negative explanation does not subscribe to the second assumption of compresentists means that it allows the Theory to be updated to allow the communion of Forms. Developmentalists accepting this reading do not see the Theory of Forms as irredeemably flawed, but they reject—for various reasons and with various ways of redeeming the Theory, as we have seen above—the idea that Plato anticipated the communion of Forms even before the *Parmenides*.

4.2 Explanation B: Plato explains the fine points of his Theory

We might contrast the above “developmentalist story” with a similar, although much shorter summary of the general “unitarian story” offered by Shorey:

The *Parmenides* is in reality a powerful statement of the seemingly unanswerable objections to the theory of ideas with which [...] the Socrates of the *Republic* is already

familiar, followed by a demonstration by the *ex necessitate* method of the *Sophist* of the indispensableness for human speech of some assumption of ideas. In the *Sophist* the practical inference is drawn; in the *Philebus* it is assumed; in the *Parmenides* it has been left to the acumen of the reader. [—Shorey 1888, p. 285–286]

This explanation, just as the unitarian approach itself, does not claim that there was absolutely no development of Plato's thought throughout his dialogues. The core of this interpretation is that while Plato may have (and probably did) in time figured out some problems and fine points of his Theory, his thinking did not undergo any such development that would render some of his assertions about Forms—assertions which he undeniably held and *explicitly claimed* in pre-Parmenidean dialogues—strictly invalid and in urgent need of repairing or retracting in the post-Parmenidean dialogues. The things that are said regarding the Theory of Forms in the first part of the *Parmenides* do not mark a *crisis* in Plato's thinking, but a point where he explicitly *formulates* the possible objections against the Theory:

The hypothesis that the *Parmenides* contains a criticism of the ideas which leads to the abandonment or transformation of the theory in the fourth and latest group of dialogues [...] rests on the assumption that the criticism of the *Parmenides* is new, that Plato was bound either to answer it or give up the ideas, and that, as a matter of fact, the transcendental idea is not found in the later dialogues. These assumptions will not bear critical examination.

The objections brought forth against the ideas in the *Parmenides* are obvious enough, and [...] their substance is in the *Republic*, not to speak of the *Phaedo*, the *Euthydemus*, the *Timaeus*, and *Philebus*. Their presentation in the *Parmenides*, then, does not mark a crisis in Plato's thought calling for a review of his chief article of philosophic faith.

[—Shorey 1903, p. 162(36)]

Similarly, the accounts of Forms in the second part of the *Parmenides* and in the post-Parmenidean dialogues—most notably in the *Sophist* and *Philebus*—are on all accounts very new and revolutionary. But their newness is not in abandoning the previous assertions of the Theory, but in properly examining both themselves and the problems they entail, and in providing in turn a proper, deeper account of the Theory. Thus, the post-Parmenidean “story” of Plato's Theory does not need to involve a revolution at all:

The doctrine of ideas is “hard to accept and hard to reject” (*Republic* 532d), and it will require a wondrous man, wide experience, and great cleverness (*Parmenides* 129d–e, 133b–c) to reconcile their absolute unity and transcendental reality with their complex involutions in finite knowledge (*Parmenides* 133), in the undefined world of changing phenomena (*Philebus* 15b), and with *one another* (*Republic* 476a). But since the rejection

of ideas (*Parmenides* 135b–c), or the treatment of them as incommunicable entities (*Sophist* 259e), makes dialectic and even rational language impossible, we will, though we may not wholly solve the problem of being and non-being (*Sophist* 251a, 251d), arrange our own use of language with regard to them as becomingly as possible (*Sophist* 254c); and, if we cannot show definitely that such transcendental monads exist (*Philebus* 15a–b) and how they are related to each other and to the fleeting things of generation, [...] we will at least seek to free ourselves of this confusion as far as possible (*Philebus* 16b–c).

[—Shorey 1888, pp. 280–281]

Thus, the main unitarian argument against the developmentalist reading of Plato would be that unless contradicting theses are *explicitly claimed* by Plato in chronologically distant dialogues—or can at least be *unquestionably implied* from the things he said in them—, we should not read such development into his Theory. Most importantly, we should not base such a thesis on what is *missing* from this or that dialogue, as doing so ignores the obvious fact that no single dialogue can cover everything, since each has its own topic and a specific angle from which it addresses it. This would otherwise be unnecessary to stress, if it was not for the fact that several developmentalist-minded critics have inferred the abolishment of the Theory from the absence of it from some late dialogues, such as the *Theaetetus* and *Philebus*.¹¹² Thus Shorey was well-entitled to remark that “the absence of the theory [of Forms] from any given dialogue proves no more than does the virtual absence from the *Laws* of all metaphysics, including the ‘later’ theory of ideas”.¹¹³

On the other hand, neither the “unitarian” approach would be proper, if to be unitarian meant to presuppose that Plato’s thinking did not evolve and to read this *into* his dialogues. Neither developmentalist nor unitarian reading of Plato is correct insofar as they assume these positions *apriori* or *in spite of* the textual evidence. However, as far as I have seen, this attitude historically emerged mostly in the developmentalist branch of interpreting Plato, where it is still present even today. The unitarians never insisted that there was *absolutely no change* at all in Plato’s thinking. Rather, following the principle of Occam’s razor, they argued for philosophical “economy” in postulating the development of Plato’s thought, supporting as the “default” the unity of his thoughts, and asking for textual proof each time a critic would posit a disunity in some feature or other of Plato’s

¹¹² In *Theaetetus*, Socrates is asking questions rather than providing his own answers, which has been read by some critics as a return to the early “Socratic” state of Plato’s philosophising, caused by the “devastating” criticism of his Theory in the *Parmenides*. Similarly, *Philebus* has been interpreted as replacing Plato’s early Theory with the new metaphysics based on four absolutes: *limit* (πέρας), *unlimited* (ἄπειρον), *mixed* (μεικτόν) and the *cause* (αἰτία).

¹¹³ Shorey 1903, p. 156 (p. 30 of the original work).

thinking.¹¹⁴ Since, according to some scholars including Shorey, there was no such textual evidence to be found in Plato's works which would support a distinctive disunity in his thoughts, these scholars were later named "unitarians". But this flat "unitarian – developmentalist" division wrongly suggests that the only difference between these two groups of scholars is in the conclusions they draw regarding the possible development of Plato's thought, whereas the real and constitutive difference lies in the *method* by which they arrived at them. Towards the end of his career, Shorey summarised this as follows:

It is not necessary to argue that the entire literary output of fifty years was deliberately planned and foreseen in Plato's youth in order to believe that for some of the problems presented and apparently left unsolved in the minor dialogues the solutions given in the *Republic* were already present to Plato's mind. Which of these "later" ideas are thus foreseen and anticipated in the "earlier" writings is a question of fact or of reasoned probability on the evidence. The rigid deduction of all conclusions from an assumed thesis contributes nothing to our understanding of Plato. [...] The real question is how far the critical examination of Plato's writings actually supports such an assumption of a series of changes and developments in his thought. [—Shorey 1933, p. 66]

4.3 Explanation C: Plato is undergoing an exercise in logic and dialectics

Yet another approach to interpret the *Parmenides* is to understand it as an elaborate exercise in dialectics, which Socrates was meant to receive in order to become a proper philosopher. The difference of this third explanation from the two explanations above rests not in the fact that the dialogue *does contain* some method and *does exercise* it, as that is (at least nowadays) beyond question and generally accepted. As Robinson expressed it, "the second part of the *Parmenides* has an extremely symmetrical and unified character, which is perfectly obvious and obviously intentional",¹¹⁵ and this methodical symmetry cannot be ignored in any plausible interpretation. Instead, the difference from the above readings lies in the fact that according to this interpretation, the second part of the *Parmenides* does *not* contain any positive dogma, and instead serves only and solely as a material for an intellectual gymnastics – exercise in logic and dialectics for those who read it, and most importantly for Plato's own students in Academy.

¹¹⁴ In some cases (of which Gill is a good example), developmentalist scholars impose such vast development on Plato's thought, that their reading creates a greater unity *between* the philosophies of late Plato and Aristotle, than *inside* Plato's own philosophy.

¹¹⁵ Robinson 1942a, p. 70.

Historically, this reading seems to have originated from **George Grote**,¹¹⁶ who not only proposed that “the purpose of the *Parmenides* is nothing beyond γυμνασία, or exercise in the method and perplexities of philosophising”,¹¹⁷ but also argued that—since the dialogue is “intended to repress premature forwardness of affirmation, in a young philosophical aspirant” (p. 263)—if *Parmenides* indeed *had* contained a trace of positive doctrine, it would have interfered precisely with this main purpose:

If Plato had any such purpose, he makes no intimation of it, directly or indirectly. On the contrary, he announces another purpose not only different, but contrary. The veteran Parmenides, while praising the ardour of speculative research displayed by Sokrates, at the same time reproves, gently but distinctly, the confident forwardness of two such immature youths as Sokrates and Aristotle in laying down positive doctrines without the preliminary exercise indispensable for testing them. Parmenides appears from the beginning to the end of the dialogue as a propounder of doubts and objections, not as a doctrinal teacher. He seeks to restrain the haste of Sokrates—to make him ashamed of premature affirmation and the false persuasion of knowledge—to force upon him a keen sense of real difficulties which have escaped his notice. [—Grote 1865/2009, p. 294]

Thus, the sole aim of the *Parmenides* is of a deconstructive nature; “it exhibits a tangled skein of ingenious contradiction, which the novice must somehow bring into order, before he is in condition to proclaim any positive dogma”, and “if it answers this purpose, it does all that Parmenides promises” (p. 295). Moreover, “objections and misunderstandings, far from being obviated or corrected, are accumulated from the beginning to the end of these Antinomies”, and “none of these objections which Parmenides had advanced in the earlier part of the dialogue are at all noticed, much less answered, in the concluding Antinomies” (p. 293, note “h”) – to which Grote adds that at the time when Plato composed the dialogue, it is “not improbable that these difficulties and contradictions appeared even to himself unanswerable: in other words, that he did not himself see any answers and explanations of them”. Eventually, Plato might have found answers to these objections at some later point of his career, but ultimately, “no key to the *Parmenides* does he ever furnish” in writing (p. 297).

Richard Robinson later adopted Grote’s account without reservations, claiming that “Plato is not directly stating a doctrine in the second part of the *Parmenides*”, its conclusion being “utterly skeptical and absurd”.¹¹⁸ But he also developed a strong

¹¹⁶ Both Robinson (1942b, p. 177) and Ross (1951/1966, p. 99) attributed the authorship of this interpretation to him.

¹¹⁷ Grote 1865/2009, p. 293, note “h”.

¹¹⁸ Robinson 1942a, p. 70.

argumentation in favour of the unity of the whole dialogue, and proposed that the dialogue as a whole is one unified exercise of dialectic:

The second part of the *Parmenides* is an exercise or gymnastic. It does not in itself attain truth of any kind; but it sets the muscles of the mind in a better state to obtain truth hereafter. This is also the spirit in which Plato puts forward the objections to the theory of Ideas in the first part. We have seen that he thought them serious but not fatal. He offers them here as an exercise in logic. They must be invalid, for the theory of Ideas must be true; but who can *see* where they are invalid? Thus not merely the second part but the whole of the *Parmenides* is an exercise in method. The dialogue is a unity. A short central passage urges the need for training in logic. On either side of it are disposed long argumentations which are excellent material for such a training.

[—Robinson 1942b, p. 176]

Another proponent of this reading was **W. D. Ross**.¹¹⁹ After providing an overview of up-to-date interpretations of the hypotheses (pp. 94–99), he proceeded to show that “the real clue to the interpretation is Parmenides’ five-times-repeated description of the arguments as affording γυμνασία, training in argument” (p. 99). But while he agreed with Robinson and Grote that Parmenides “nowhere suggests that they will directly enlighten Socrates on the difficulties Parmenides has pointed out in the theory of Ideas, or on any other philosophical problem”, Ross also claimed that the unity of the dialogue consists in the fact that the training Parmenides gives to Socrates in the second part of the *Parmenides* is a direct response to his difficulties in the first part, and precisely this training should allow him to address and successfully solve them:

This interpretation [...] does justice to what Parmenides says about the arguments, when he describes their purpose as essentially gymnastic, not the inculcation of philosophical doctrine but the giving of an example of a training which will fit Socrates better for the ultimate grasping of philosophical truth. It makes a unity of the dialogue; for while the first part convicts Socrates of failure to see the weak points in his own view, the second part gives him an example of the sort of intellectual exercise which will make him more alive to such defects.

[—Ross 1951/1966, pp. 99–100]

But the solution of the problems is not directly contained in the second part as the positive doctrine: “what Parmenides promises Socrates from the study of the hypotheses is not direct development or emendation of his theory, but a gain in dialectical skill which may ultimately produce that result”. Thus, the second part is merely a sophistic game, “a game in which the arguer will do anything to score his point” (p.100), which is nevertheless done “in the hope that practice in the detection of implications and of

¹¹⁹ Ross 1951/1966, pp. 83ff.

ambiguities would ultimately enable Socrates to reach a more completely thought-out theory than that which in youthful enthusiasm he had embraced” (p. 101).

Among the last scholars to adopt the reading that *Parmenides* is merely a dialectical exercise without positive doctrine was **Gilbert Ryle**. However, Ryle at the same time challenged all the previous views in this category, for he strongly maintained that the *Parmenides* is in fact not a unified dialogue, but two different treatises patched together for educational and dramatic reasons:

Plato could not have designed either part to be the complement of the other. The first part had been left an unfinished fragment; the second part had been composed as an independent work; and only as a late afterthought did Plato preserve from oblivion the two pieces by tacking them together, without reweaving the dramatic fabric of either. [...] Despite the link provided by Socrates at 129, probably manufactured for the purpose, there is no real connexion of topic between Part I and Part II. Part II is not a discussion of the Theory of Forms. The issues discussed in Part II are good or at least ingenious teasers for any philosopher, whether he accepts or, like Aristotle, rejects the Theory of Forms.

[—Ryle 1966, p. 287–288]

Thus, Ryle’s argument was that while the first part dealt with the problems of the Theory of Forms (but without providing any answers), no such thing was happening in the second part, which operates solely with “»common« notions or concepts, notions, that is, that are ubiquitous and neutral between all the departments of thought and knowledge” (p. 292) – notions which pertain to the Theory no more than to any other philosophical topic. In short, as Ryle already argued in *Plato’s Parmenides*, “the *Parmenides* is a discussion of a problem of logic”, and therefore “is an exercise in the grammar and not in the prose or the poetry of philosophy”.¹²⁰ This, according to Ryle, drags Part II chronologically away from the previous part to a date when Plato and the Academy became more interested in problems of logic than in the Theory of Forms (which, Ryle argued, Plato ultimately abandoned):

Part II of the *Parmenides* is explicitly produced as a training exercise for future philosophers [...]. It is meant for the pedagogic benefit of students in the Academy who are already learning dialectic. [...] This already indicates that the second part of the *Parmenides* belongs, with the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, to a period when the Academy has learned to give special treatment to this class of ‘common’ notions. The Academy now recognizes it to be the central task of dialectic to explore the implications of theses and counter-theses about the topic-neutral concepts.

[—Ryle 1966, pp. 291–292]

¹²⁰ Ryle 1939/2009, p. 37.

4.4 Explanation D: The dialogue is meant as criticism of other philosophers

One of the oldest of the interpretative approaches to the *Parmenides*, today mostly abandoned, was to read the dialogue not as a serious treatise on the Theory of Forms, but as a parody or criticism of the positions other philosophers defended, which Plato meant to ridicule or reject by drawing the logical absurdities of the second part that would inevitably raise from adopting such positions.¹²¹

For example, **Harold Fredrik Cherniss** claimed that “the second part of the dialogue is formally an elaborate parody of the poem of Parmenides and methodically a parody of the logic-chopping of Zeno”.¹²² According to Cherniss, *Parmenides* serves the double purpose of reprimanding two enemies at once: first, the Eleatic dialectic of Zeno, for “Plato had observed how the first taste of these paradoxes intoxicated young men” (p. 130), as it can be sophistically used to arrive at any conclusion the debater wants to push. At the same time, however, Plato wanted to attack Parmenides by showing not only that his doctrine of monistic Being is philosophically untenable, but also that by strictly separating *Being* and *non-Being*, Parmenides himself created all these antinomies: “Parmenides was the father of the sophistical method” (pp. 129–130), for “as the sophist is ἀντιλογικός, Parmenides, who by his dictum of Non-Being gave rise to all these senseless antinomies, is the most ἀντιλογικός of all” (p. 125). Thus Plato wanted to ridicule Parmenides by forcing him to spend almost the whole second part of the dialogue to speak about things he was convinced do not exist:

Parmenides in the course of proving his favorite thesis, the emptiness of the *Others*, tumbles into the startling conclusion that the *One* is not *One* but *Many*. [...] Parmenides is made to do exactly what he continually claimed was impossible, examine the nature of the non-existent. As in the *Sophist* Plato makes the Stranger call special attention to his disobedience of Parmenides’ injunction by quoting the poem, he here makes the poet disobey himself at dizzy length. However Plato may have interpreted the second part of the poem, it doubtlessly amused him to see so much time spent on the detailed description of objects which the poet insisted all the while do not exist. [—Cherniss 1932, p. 133]

¹²¹ See Palmer 1999, p. 149, n. 2 for more bibliography on this branch of interpretation.

¹²² Cherniss 1932, p. 122. In the same year, a similar reading seems to have been developed independently by Guido Calogero in his *Studi sull’ Eleatismo* (1932).

Even before Cherniss, there has been an alternative reading most famously defended by **John Burnet**¹²³ and **Alfred Edward Taylor**,¹²⁴ who both claimed that the *Parmenides* was in fact an elaborate defence against the Megarian doctrine (being itself a successor of the Eleatic doctrine), which denied any reality to the sensible realm. Their views have been most harshly criticised by Gilbert Ryle, who summed up their positions in this way:

Burnet and Professor Taylor declare the dialogue, or the dialectical part of it, to be a joke. Plato's object was to ridicule certain philosophers or philosophasters by parody. None of its arguments are valid or thought by Plato to be so. And its pretended problem or set of problems is a sham one. The butts of the ridicule are either the philosophers of the Eleatic school or those of the school of Megara or both. They merited such ridicule because the logic employed by them was vexatious and fallacious. They had exercised this corrupt logic against certain doctrines which Plato accepted; consequently Plato in this dialogue is paying them back in their own coin. [—Ryle 1939/2009, pp. 1–2]

While Ryle's explanation of their views is without a doubt *factually* right, it has to be added at the same time and with the same vehemence that *tone-wise*, it is not. Ryle seems to have read his own dismissive attitude (present in his *Plato's Parmenides* just cited) into Burnet's and Taylor's accounts – they, however, do not represent Plato's *Parmenides* as being dismissive at all. **John Burnet** takes the *Parmenides* to be a completely serious dialogue. According to him, “the objections to the theory of participation contained in the first part of the dialogue are of Eleatic origin”, from which “it follows that they are not directed against the reality of the intelligible, but against that of the sensible”¹²⁵ – and this is clear from the fact that it is Parmenides who raises the objections:

It would have been absurd to make Parmenides the mouthpiece of an attack upon the One, and all we know of the Megaric doctrine goes to show that it denied all reality to the world of sense. The arguments of the *Parmenides* are not directed, then, against the doctrine of forms as such, but against the Sokratic theory that sensible things come into being and cease to be by partaking or ceasing to partake in the forms. [—Burnet 1914/1928, p. 253]

Plato shows that the Megarian doctrine, when examined by the dialectical method of their own, performs far worse than Plato's Theory. The dialogue is neither a parody nor is it dismissive, although it is sophistical – but even that is true only to the extent that the Megarian dialectical method, which Plato deliberately uses, is itself sophistical:

Plato has no idea of proving the hypothesis of his master, Sokrates, but he does propose to show that the hypothesis of the Megarics has even more absurd consequences than his if it

¹²³ Burnet 1914/1928, chapter “*The Parmenides*”, pp. 253–272. For the clearest formulations of Burnet's views, see especially pp. 263 and 272.

¹²⁴ Taylor 1926/1955, chapter XIV “*The Parmenides*”, pp. 349–370.

¹²⁵ Burnet 1914/1928, p. 253.

is adequately followed out. It is from this point of view we must judge what strikes a modern reader as the arid and repellent form of the discussion with its occasional suggestion of sophistry. It is a display of the dialectical method introduced by Zeno and assiduously cultivated by his successors at Megara. [...] It should be added that, so far as the arguments are sophistical—and one or two of them must certainly have been known by Plato to be so—that is probably quite deliberate. [—Burnet 1914/1928, p. 253]

Besides this refutation of Megarian doctrine, Burnet claimed that the *Parmenides* contains also a positive teaching: “the Sokratic theory has also been refuted in the early part of the dialogue, and that by arguments taken from the Megarics” (p. 272) in order to show at last that Forms also need to partake of opposite properties:

The second part of the dialogue has shown once for all the impossibility of maintaining the isolation of the forms from one another. [...] If we regard them abstractly, we can say nothing whatever about them; while, if we regard them as being, we are compelled to ascribe contradictory predicates to them. [...] It is clearly shown that we must now endeavour to understand in what sense the forms can participate in one another; for all the difficulties of the *Parmenides* arise from the assumption that they cannot.

[—Burnet 1914/1928, p. 272]

Later in 1926, **Alfred Edward Taylor** accepted Burnet’s reading almost without reservations, although he did not promote the view that the *Parmenides* contains a positive advancement of the Theory. Instead, he claimed that the dialogue “tells us nothing of Plato’s own thought” and that “its purpose is to ‘have some fun’ with Monists who regard the sensible as illusion, and very little more”.¹²⁶ Indeed, Taylor’s account is closer in tone to what Ryle has depicted, but it still can not be rightfully accused of saying about *Parmenides* that “none of its arguments are valid” or that the set of problems in it is merely “pretended” and “a sham one”, as Ryle did claim of him. Quite the opposite, Taylor’s interpretation is that “we are directed to regard these criticisms as coming from opponents of the theory of »participation«” (p. 350), and that is precisely why Plato took them seriously and had to respond to them as best as he could. But instead of offering a positive answer to them, “he simply sets himself to show that two can play at the game of abstract formal logic” (p. 351), which led him to use the very own weapons of his opponents against them:

So long as he is merely undertaking to show that the Eleatic logic would be even more damaging to the Eleatic “postulate” than to the Socratic postulate of μέθεξις, he is fully entitled to avail himself of the double-edged tools of his opponents. [...] The parody of Megarian dialectic probably serves a double purpose. It provides a highly enjoyable

¹²⁶ Taylor 1926/1955, p. 351.

philosophical jest, and also provokes the thoughtful mind, by the manifest impossibility of the conclusions reached, to reflections which may prompt the reader to discover the sources of the trouble for himself, without waiting to have them explained to him by Plato.

[—Taylor 1926/1955, pp. 369–370]

But this tactic, although resulting in “metaphysical jest” (p. 361), in no way diminishes the fact that Plato needed to rebut their arguments as strongly as possible. The objections are not Plato’s own, but nevertheless require solid answers, and that is why Plato decided to win the argument on his opponents’ own playground:

The one important point to keep in mind is that the conclusions to which he is led by his application of the Eleatic methods to the Eleatic “hypothesis” are not meant to be asserted as his own. They are simply what happens to the “hypothesis” if you make the Eleatic criticize himself by his own methods. If we wish to know what Plato himself thought of the Eleatic thesis, we must turn from the *Parmenides* to the *Sophistes*, where he is really criticizing it by the rules of a logic which is his own.

[—Taylor 1926/1955, pp. 366–367]

5 My proposed reading

The critical analysis in the previous chapters has uncovered logical options for both the different possible readings of the atomicity of the Forms; and for the answers to the three questions related to Socrates' amazement in the *Parmenides*. As we have seen, most of these options have been recognized and frequently taken by critics in interpreting the *Parmenides* and explaining the possible development of Plato's thought that occurred in and after the dialogue. However, some of them were recognised only scarcely, being briefly entertained by a few critics in the past, and then quickly abandoned.

I have proposed that some of those almost-abandoned options can be combined in a coherent unitarian reading of Plato's metaphysical doctrine, which does not subscribe to a commonly-taken view that Plato in early dialogues accepted atomicity of Forms in a way which would prevent the Forms to have several properties or to be in communion with each other – thus in turn allowing to read Socrates' challenge in the *Parmenides* to be read as a positive challenge. The analysis of interpretative options in previous chapters has shown that these alternative readings are not only logically possible, but also at least as plausible as the widely-adopted readings of the developmentalist scholars, which I have tried to demonstrate by pointing out the weaknesses in these preferred readings, caused both by the many hidden assumptions these critics have pre-adopted, and by the textual problems these readings raise when the wider context of the passage or the dialogue is taken into account.

The purpose of this short chapter is to introduce my positive proposal of the interrelations of Forms, of the reading of the dialogue *Parmenides*, and, consequently, of the development of Plato's thinking that takes place throughout it. My aim here is therefore to connect the options already analysed in the previous chapters and to present one coherent interpretative framework, which will also prepare the ground for the second part of the work, where I will analyse the properties of Forms and the different ways in which we may predicate the features of Forms. The task at hand is *not* to fully defend the view yet, as that will be only accomplished by the second part of the project. However, at the same time the proposal presented here is already partially accounted-for, insofar as it is building upon the results of the analyses from the previous chapters.

5.1 Reassessing the atomicity of Forms

It is probably undeniable that Plato's own way of speaking about Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues invites us to understand them as *somehow* atomic, although in an unclear sense. It is only in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* that Plato explicitly ventures into the analysis of the relations between Forms, and only in the *Phaedrus* and *Statesman* where he opens up and entertains the possibility for there being more and less generic Forms, which are ordered in something that might be called "genus-species trees" and traversed by the method of collection and division.

But as we have seen, there are two fundamentally different ways to look at the atomicity of Forms, and they are both differently motivated. Understood as the *simplicity* of Forms, this view on atomicity is motivated mainly by the conviction that allowing Forms to have several characteristics would lead to the loss of their unity, accompanied by the impossibility of other things participating in them. For then the Form would no longer be precisely (and only) *that*, which the sensible things gain when they start to participate in it, but something *more* – which problematizes the whole concept of participation. As we have seen, this led to readings which took early Plato to regard Forms either as *being called by one name only*, or as *strictly non-composite*. On the other hand, atomicity of Forms understood as their *independence* is based on the claim that Forms must be fundamentally self-sufficient, for to stand as foundations of sensible reality is precisely their ontological role – a role which would perhaps be endangered by them being dependant on some other reality, even if this reality would be other Forms. Thus, their independence in pre-Parmenidean dialogues has been interpreted either as *complete isolation*, or as *non-participation*.

The *Parmenides* definitely marks the "turning point" where Plato shifted both the *way* he spoke about Forms and the *topics* that he prioritised in his Theory. Does this necessarily imply the shift of his thinking about Forms and the change of the Theory itself? The answer is, that such change is only needed if Plato indeed adopted a specific understanding of both the *simplicity* and *independence* of Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues, which was incompatible with what he said about them in the post-Parmenidean dialogues (and the *Parmenides* itself). Turning our attention to the *Parmenides*, the developmentalist readings of atomicity of Forms we just analysed seem to be confirmed by what is happening here in this dialogue. Or, to more accurately capture their real conceptual connection, the negative reading of the challenge posed by Socrates in the

Parmenides on the one hand, and the developmentalist interpretations of the atomicity of Forms in early Plato on the other hand, seem to reciprocally strengthen and reaffirm each other.

Plato told us in the crucial passage 129, that if “the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like”, or “the kinds and forms themselves have in themselves these opposite properties”, he “would be utterly amazed” (129b-e). That *prima facie* seems to point against the possibility of opposite properties in Forms themselves. The denial of this possibility is articulated even more clearly in the previous dialogues. *Phaedo* 102ff tells us that “Tallness itself is never willing to be tall and short at the same time” and that “it is not willing to endure and admit shortness and be other than it was”, because “Tallness, being tall, cannot venture to be small”. Similarly in the *Republic*, Plato gives us a general principle claiming that “the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time” (IV.436b), and refers to it several times (X.602e, X.604b).

The two interpretations that offer themselves most naturally are that Plato is here formulating his rejection of the *essential opposites*, or perhaps of the *logical opposites*. But as we have seen in our previous analysis, both of these interpretations in fact generalise into the third explanation, *the rejection of multitude*. The goal of the first hypothesis is to accommodate Socrates’ request that Parmenides shows him whether opposites might exist in Forms themselves. While the mutual exclusion of opposites seems to be something that Plato altogether denied from the beginning, the troubling point is that after proper examination, this problem unrolls into more general exclusion of plurality of characteristics, caused by the fact that *any* kind of plurality in Form necessarily entails the opposing presence of one and many. The first hypothesis incidentally reveals that by denying any multitude of characteristics whatsoever to Form of One—and, therefore, to Forms in general—, we inevitably end up with the conclusion that in such case, the Forms cannot even have their own character or exist at all. ***If we are allowed to append nothing more to Forms than what their name signifies, we end up with a logically impossible account of being.***

As to the big picture result of this investigation, again several readings are possible – as we have seen during the analysis of the second and especially the third question. The analysis of the second question showed that the challenge might be understood in various ways, ultimately classified into *negative* and *positive* readings. Commentators almost in unison adopted the former branch of readings, which take the challenge as a denial and the

second part of the *Parmenides* as leading to destructive criticism of Plato's Theory.¹²⁷ As already mentioned, it might be argued that these intricacies posed such a problem to the Theory of Forms as to force Plato to eventually abandon it. Alternatively, scholars also read the presented difficulties as an open task that was never solved by Plato.

The positive reading, on the other hand, leads us to the conclusion that the result of the investigation in the *Parmenides* is that if opposites are not allowed to be *somehow* present in Forms, then it is neither possible for any multitude of characteristics to be in them, and this all is needed if Forms should exist and be conceivable at all. And *how* can Forms have this multiplicity of properties is precisely the question that Plato wants to focus on, for the first time, in the *Parmenides*. ***The task Socrates gives to Parmenides is a positive challenge, as the multiplicity of properties in Forms is an internal requirement of the Theory, and Plato is deliberately addressing it in the Parmenides.***

5.2 Plato's shift of focus: an alternative reading

The previous problems are usually used to prove that up until this point, Plato held that Forms are atomic, and in the *Parmenides* he is forced to reconsider his position. However, we might argue (*pace* developmentalist interpretations), that Forms were treated independently of each other in the earlier dialogues precisely because the focus of Plato's examinations was to explain physical phenomena through and by the Theory of Forms, and it is only later that he decided to move into the more subtle problems of the Theory itself. For Plato, theories follow and explain reality. A purpose of a theory—that is, any theory in general, not just his Theory of Forms—is always only to explain the reality and in this way to help understand some of its problems; it never exists for its own sake or for the sake of mere philosophising. If a theory fails to explain what it was meant to explain, it needs to be discarded, no matter how elegant or internally coherent it is. It was therefore only prudent of Plato to focus initially on the question whether the Theory of Forms helps to solve the problems it was initially created for, and that is why he occupied himself so long with the problem of participation between individuals and Forms. Only later, after reaffirming himself enough that the Theory is successful in resolving these problems, he started to move his attention to its deeper problems, namely to the Forms themselves. Plato's initial focus on particulars around us was caused precisely by the fact that it was the physical phenomena that were given and were in need of an explanation, to which the Theory was

¹²⁷ As we have seen, even those contemporary critics who agree that the criticism might not be entirely destructive to the Theory (as e.g. Fine and Gill) agree that the challenge is nevertheless a denial and do not consider a positive reading at all.

an answer. And it was Forms that were only hypothesised, simply because they were needed for his Theory.

In short, there was no point in focusing on the problems of hypothesised Forms before it was clear that the Theory of Forms is not only *an* answer—that is, one of the possible, but unproven answers—, but *the* correct answer to the problems initially posed. That moment arrived in the dialogue *Parmenides*, and yet even at that point Plato has Socrates reminded by Parmenides that he is still too young and unprepared for the task at hand. The shift of focus is indeed undeniable, but most developmentalists claim that this change did not occur intentionally by Plato as a natural step forward of his progressively maturing Theory, but as a serious and (perhaps) unforeseen stroke that finished or nearly finished off the whole Theory itself.

However, it is one thing to not address some problem because one is unaware of it, and a completely different thing to not do it because one wants to focus on some other problems first. The first is a sign of ignorance or denial, while the second shows either that the person is aware that there are still more pressing problems than the one mentioned, or that some other problems need to be solved before that one can be addressed, as it requires their solutions first. In Plato's case, it was both variants of the second option. Compared to the unitarian approach which adopts the second option, a much stronger argument is needed for developmentalism to succeed in defending the first option. For its proponents need to demonstrate three different things: *first*, that Plato was positively convinced about the atomicity of Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues; *second*, that till the *Parmenides* he was unaware of the problems that this atomicity would cause; and *third*, that the central point of the *Parmenides* is the recognition of these problems and therefore that the change of Plato's mind occurred there (or perhaps later, but was principally caused by the problems raised there). All these three points together need to be proven in order to positively demonstrate that the alleged drastic change of Plato's Theory of Forms actually occurred, and by doing so to confirm the developmentalist reading.

That there is no need to completely abandon the Theory is nowadays accepted by many critics, and the “revolutionary” readings of the *Parmenides* similar to the Ryle's one are today scarce. As Allen noted with regard to some older expositions of the *Parmenides*, “it may be said with certainty that the claim of revolution is false”.¹²⁸ Yet the view that *Parmenides* marks the threshold in Plato's metaphysics and the point of genuine development of his Theory somehow remained as one of the basic and commonly accepted

¹²⁸ Allen 1997, p. 105.

assumptions about the dialogue. That no such development occurred is still to be shown in the following chapters, but the viable possibility of reading Socrates' amazement as merely a challenge should at least open the road for considering this option. Plato anticipated long before the *Parmenides* that such an account of the Theory would be needed – and that it will require a lot of philosophical work to explain how the communion of Forms could be possible. If Socrates' amazement is merely an *aporia* (albeit a difficult one), and if Socrates asked Parmenides to help to solve it, and if he in turn accepted the task and assured us that the Theory is indeed needed, then there is no conflict between those two, and there is no need to posit the conflict between pre-Parmenidean and post-Parmenidean Theory of Forms either.

In the second part of the work, I will focus on the task of showing that Plato recognised different senses in which Forms have their properties, and that he actually dealt with all these problems precisely by looking into the ways in which opposite properties might be present in the same Form. That this recognition indeed *is* present in Plato's late Theory is rather uncontroversial. It is commonly understood and accepted among the scholars that such differentiation of ways of having properties has arrived in the *Sophist*, where Plato distinguished between *kath' auto* and *pros alla* senses. However, the interpretation I would like to put forward is that this differentiation was present in Plato's Theory already as early as during the writing of the *Charmides*. The main purpose of the second part of the work will be to argue for this position and to show relevant textual evidence in support of this claim, since demonstrating that this recognition is already present in the early Plato's works will be a crucial task in maintaining my thesis that no change in Plato's doctrine needs to be read into the *Parmenides* (or any of the post-Parmenidean works).

5.3 The communion of Forms in pre-Parmenidean dialogues

I have previously alluded¹²⁹ to the fact that already in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues, there are passages which contain—if nothing more, then at least—hints and traces of Plato's admission of the communion of Forms. In this short section, I would like to introduce some of these passages and comment on the import they have on the Theory of Forms. The first and probably the most quoted of these disputed sources of the communion of Forms is the *Republic* V.475e–476a:

SOCRATES: Since the beautiful is the opposite of the ugly, they are two.

¹²⁹ See subchapter [1.3.2 Independence as non-participation](#), note 47.

GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: And since they are two, each is one?

GLAUCON: I grant that also.

SOCRATES: And the same account is true of the just and the unjust, the good and the bad, and all the forms. ***Each of them is itself one, but because they manifest [φανταζόμενα] themselves everywhere in association [κοινωνία] with actions, bodies, and one another, each of them appears [φαίνεσθαι] to be many.***

(*Republic* V.475e–476a; trans. by Grube & Reeve 1997, bolded emphasis mine)

This single short passage—and especially the last part pronounced by Socrates—has become the central battlefield between the unitarists and developmentalists more than a century ago, and continues to raise difficulties even today. The crux of the passage lies in the bolded emphasised sentence, whose immediate (yet unproblematized) meaning would be this: Plato says that each Form is itself one and unitary, but appears as many, because there is plurality of its manifestations in things (actions, bodies and other Forms), which are like that Form – they gained the likeness of the Form by participating in it. As James Adam wrote in his commentary to the *Republic* V:

[The Form] ‘each is, in itself’ (i.e. viewed apart from its association with πράξεις etc.), ‘one, but by reason of their partnership with actions and bodies and one another, they each of them make their appearance everywhere and appear many.’ The εἶδος of Beautiful, for example, *is*, in itself, one, but by κοινωνία with e.g. an act of heroism, a sunset, a river, etc., it *appears* many. Similarly the εἶδος of Beautiful *appears* many by κοινωνία with other εἶδη, as when we say ‘the Good is beautiful,’ the ‘Useful is beautiful’ etc.

[—Adam & Rees 1902/1963, p. 336]

Most importantly, Plato explicitly says that Forms are in communion or association not only with actions and bodies, but also with “one another” – that is, *with other Forms*. ***This passage alone has the power to undeniably and irrevocably render impossible the developmentalist reading which claims that Forms were, in pre-Parmenidean dialogues, atomic in the sense of complete non-participation.*** However, its acceptance as a proof of the communion of Forms (κοινωνία ειδών) in Plato’s “early Theory” is even today very problematic. The passage itself would be clear enough, if it were not for two reasons that complicate the interpretative work.

5.3.1 Two reasons for rejecting the communion of Forms

The ***first and objective*** reason is the inherent ambiguity of the Greek word φαίνεσθαι, which is usually translated as “appears”. Just as in English, the word might

either mean “to manifestly be” (if followed by participle), *or* merely “to seem to be” (if followed by infinitive).¹³⁰ Only the former meaning bears the information that the manifestation is true, while the latter case leaves the question open: the manifestation might or might not itself be deceiving. Thus different versions or amendments of the text around φαίνεσθαι might completely change the meaning of the crucial sentence in 476a. This fact was well explained by Carol S. Gould, who points out:

Either the κοινωμία is real or it is apparent. If real, then the Forms are related to particulars as they are to one another. If apparent, then they may be as separate from one another as they are from sensible particulars. To adjudicate this would require a thorough interpretation of Plato’s middle theory. [...] The crux of the matter thus is whether the εἶδη appear everywhere (a) because of their association with actions, bodies, and one another, or (b) as though in association with actions, bodies, and one another.

[—Gould 1995, p. 682]

Gould notices that the sentence in question contains contrasting pairs of predicates “each of them is itself one” – “each of them appears to be many”, and she correctly recognises that the contrast is a parallel to the contrast between being and becoming, between appearance and reality:

The philosophical meaning of εἶναι may arise from a contrasting term, especially either γίνεσθαι or φαίνεσθαι. The juxtaposition of εἶναι with either of these expresses a distinction at the heart of Plato’s middle metaphysics – that between being and becoming or between appearance and reality. Recall that our sentence at 476a occurs in Plato’s portrayal of the philosopher, which rests on his distinction between appearance and reality. However one interprets Plato’s metaphysics, it undeniably begins from the distinction between appearance and reality.

[—Gould 1995, pp. 682–683]

Thus that each Form is *appearing* many must be taken as *falsely appearing* many, and needs to be contrasted with each Form *being* one, which in turn must be read as *truly being* one. Interpreted this way, “the sentence syntactically reflects the contrast between a real state of affairs and an apparent one”, and “the structure of the sentence mirrors the philosophical significance of the passage” (p. 683). And in this regard, Gould is still in line with unitarian interpreters. As Adam confirms, “the appearance of *plurality* which they [i.e. the associations of Forms with actions, bodies, and one another] give to the Idea is always fallacious”.¹³¹ However, the split between developmentalist and unitarian reading

¹³⁰ See Gould 1995 for the detailed (although biased) analysis of the term and its reading in the *Republic* 476a. Even more detailed analyses, although of an older date, are in Adam & Rees 1902/1963, Appendix VII on Book V on pp. 362–364; and Shorey 1903, pp. 162–163 (pp. 36–37 of the original work). For a similar analysis of φαίνεται in *Phaedo* 74b, cf. also Kirwan 1974, pp. 116–117.

¹³¹ Adam & Rees 1902/1963, p. 336.

occurs the moment when “one interprets Plato’s metaphysics”. For in the next step Gould jumps to the conclusion that opting for the option (a) is plainly wrong, because if the perceived plurality of each Form is false, the κοινωνία itself needs to be just as apparent:

How, then, are we to take the complex subordinate clause? Let us note that it has a μὲν/δὲ construction. [...] To opt for (a) is to overlook the parallel between the εἶναι in the straightforward μὲν clause and the φαίνεσθαι in the more puzzling δὲ, a parallel to which Plato draws our attention by his use of the μὲν/δὲ structure and the contrasting pair of infinitives [i.e. ἕκαστον εἶναι and φαίνεσθαι ἕκαστον]. [—Gould 1995, p. 682]

So according to Gould, if each single Form is *not* many—that is, it only deceitfully appears to be many—, it immediately means that it cannot manifest itself “in association with actions, bodies, and one another” either—that is, it only deceitfully appears to be in association with them. But this inference clearly does not hold, for it is not only fallacious, but also plainly impossible to be held in Plato’s metaphysics.

First, the inference is fallacious because it is an unwarranted leap to infer from the fact that the Form is not many, that it cannot manifest or present itself in association with other things. The reason why Gould makes this mistake seems to be caused by her adopting a very specific interpretation of Plato’s metaphysics, the one where Forms as wholes are *inside* the things that participate in them – a view very close to the Aristotelian understanding of forms. For in her assessment of Waterfield’s translation, she comments that “taking the κοινωνία as real, implies that the εἶδη are immanent in sensible particulars” (p. 682). Under such view, the *whole* Form *is* somehow present inside the things participating in it, so it needs in some strong sense to *be* many – and because we know that the plurality of each Form is just a deceitful appearance, we need to also reject the association of the Form with plurality of things.

But Plato doesn’t indicate anything like that in this passage, neither explicitly nor implicitly. All he says is that the Forms “manifest [φανταζόμενα] themselves everywhere”. The word “manifest” might here be slightly misleading; the Greek meaning is literally that the Forms *display* or *make themselves visible* or, in general, *present themselves to the senses* in the things that participate in them. That is why Adam rightly noted that “the expression πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα is better suited to describe Ideas allied with sensible particulars, than Ideas allied with Ideas”; but he did not forget to add that nevertheless “statements involving the κοινωνία of Ideas with Ideas ‘make their appearance everywhere’ as well as those which connect the objects of sense with Ideas”.¹³²

¹³² Adam & Rees 1902/1963, p. 336, note to αὐτὸ μὲν.

Recall that in the *Phaedo*—a dialogue chronologically considered to be very close to the *Republic*—Plato himself rejected to say anything particular on the nature of the relation of participation:¹³³ “I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful” (*Phaedo* 100d). The question of the precise nature of the relation of participation will not receive an adequate account until Parmenides’ criticisms in the *Parmenides* (130b–134e), where Plato explicitly formulates the relevant questions and also the problems connected with it, most notably in the whole-part dilemma (130e–131e). Yet we have here Gould “splitting hairs” by adopting a very specific and constrained understanding of what the relation of participation ontologically *is*, and on this basis claiming that the κοινωνία εἰδῶν is an illusion. But here in the *Republic*, the φανταζόμενα, if properly understood in this context, cannot be taken to mean anything else (or anything more precise) than merely stating that the Forms can be perceived in things that participate in them. For by participating in the Form, the thing becomes (in strictly one sense) *like* that Form – it will *display* or *exhibit* that specific property which the Form has as its essential character: “all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful” (*Phaedo* 100d).

Second, it is plainly impossible to develop the reading that Gould (and other developmentalist-minded scholars) adopts inside the framework of Plato’s metaphysics. For even if we granted that the false appearance of the plurality of each Form *ipso facto* indicated that the communion of Forms is impossible (or at least refused by Plato in the “early Theory”), this would have to be based on opting for the option (b) as presented by Gould: that “the εἶδη appear everywhere” – “*as though* in association with actions, bodies, and one another”. In other words, we would have to claim that the appearance of the εἶδη everywhere is false, *as if* they were associated “with actions, bodies, and one another”. But this reading does not only rule out the possibility of the communion of Forms, but in one single strike also the possibility of participation of “actions” and “bodies” in Forms. Thus, ***denying the communion of Forms in Republic 476a entirely denies the possibility of participation as such, for it is impossible to separate the denial of the communion of Forms with Forms from the denial of the communion of Forms with sensible things*** – at the very least if such denial should be based on this passage of the *Republic* 476a.

* * * * *

This, then, leads us to the ***second and subjective*** reason, which I believe is unfortunately also the more influential one. In the light of the facts presented above, the

¹³³ See section *Commentary* in subchapter [1.3.1 Independence as isolation](#).

question is: why would anyone try to read the passage as denying the possibility of the communion of Forms? And the answer seems to be, with all respect to developmentalist critics, this: the significance of the passage is so overarching, that it alone has the potential to force someone who (up to now) read Plato's Theory of Forms in the developmentalist manner, to completely rethink his way of understanding Plato and the Theory. The brute question which then presents itself is whether the critic will start to rebuild his own views to fit Plato's, or Plato's in this passage to fit his own. That is probably why the interpretative fight over the passage continues for so long, and why we can see almost "tribal" tendencies among commentators,¹³⁴ with some claiming that it is obvious that Forms are and always were interrelated for Plato, while others asserting that it is absolutely without doubt that Plato only realised their interrelation later (namely in the *Parmenides*), and that this caused a serious shift in his Theory.

Indeed, the reading of this passage is in a certain way "obvious" from both interpretative sides. If seen by a unitarian critic, the passage only confirms his views and there is nothing to be done with the passage. Thus, in arguing against the developmentalist critics, the unitarist will only point out "the obvious": that the passage explicitly and without doubts confirms the communion of Forms in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues. This has been well done already in 1903 by Shorey,¹³⁵ who also aptly captured the heat of the debate that was already taking place back then:

Some ignore this passage. Others wantonly emend it, as BADHAM, who reads ἄλλη ἄλλων, and BYWATER, who reads ἀλλ' ἄλλων (*Journal of Phil.*, Vol. V, p. 122). RITCHIE (*Plato*, 96) takes it in a Pickwickian sense in order to avoid "anticipating the

¹³⁴ This "antagonistic" state of the platonic scholarship between the proponents of unitarian and of developmentalist reading has been described and partially examined by Bambrough (1972). Unfortunately, Bambrough seems to be not so much interested in merely *explaining* this "war" (as he repeatedly calls it), as in personally *joining* it. He sees both sides of this "conflict" (again his term, often repeated) as producing "arguments tactically deployed in pursuit of the strategic objective" (p. 296), but his vocabulary actually seems to add to the conflict, as if approving it: "rival commentators" (p. 295) use "weapons" to win this "controversy". Bambrough wants to add to this "battle" by reminding us that "we need to keep both edges of this weapon bright and sharp" (p. 297) and providing an account of how to do it – a "weapon" being here one of the (completely peaceful and philosophically justified) arguments Shorey once used to argue against the philosophical method of some philosophers who claimed that "variation in literary machinery and expression must be assumed to imply divergence or contradiction in thought" (Shorey 1903, p. 131(5); see also 214(88) *et passim*).

The signs of "tribalism" can be seen even from the titles of some publications on the topic of development of Plato's thought. Thus we have here Shorey's *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (1903), to which Ryle's *Plato's Progress* (1966) was undoubtedly a negative reaction. Shorey later wrote a work titled *What Plato Said* (1933), and Bambrough obviously attempted to ridicule both of Shorey's works by writing his own article *The Disunity of Plato's Thought* (1972), subtitled "What Plato did not say".

¹³⁵ In addition to James Adam and Paul Shorey, this has also been observed later in 1973 by Ronald F. Hathaway. In a note to *Republic* V.476a6–7, he remarks: "Not only does this statement prove Plato's recognition of the 'communion' of Forms in the *Republic*, but also shows that he assumes that Forms 'show' themselves in spatial dispersion ('everywhere'), and thus appear *as many* (or 'appear pluralizedly')." (Hathaway 1973, pp. 99–100, note 43)

Sophist.” PFLEIDERER uses it to prove that the fifth book of the *Republic* is later than the tenth. Anything rather than admit the obvious fact that Plato always recognized the “communion” of ideas, and argued it at length in the *Sophist*, only because pedants were obstructing the way of logic by denying it. Similarly the τρίτος ἄνθρωπος is distinctly implied in *Republic* 597c, and *Tim.* 31a, as the difficulty of giving a precise meaning to παρουσία is in *Euthydemus* 301a, and *Phaedo* 100d.

[—Shorey 1903, p. 162(36), note 244 on *Republic* V.476a]

On the other hand, when the passage is examined by the developmentalist, she has no other choice than to admit that the passage must “obviously” have some problem: either the text is corrupt, or Plato is not expressing his thoughts clearly, or he is simply confused and mistaken in what he is saying. It is impossible to take the passage as it is and in its intuitive meaning, for that would in the most obvious way go against what Plato only realised in the *Parmenides*. As von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff wrote already in 1920 with regard to *Republic* 476a, Plato “had unsuspectingly talked about the idea that the combining of the Ideas creates the impression of multiplicity in the world of the senses”, but “this has nothing at all to do with the problems of the *Sophist*; he hadn’t realised them yet”.¹³⁶ Nothing more needs to be added and explained, because the passage goes so plainly against the developmentalist reading, that it cannot in any way be made to fit into this interpretative framework. And 75 years later, Gould has not that much new to say about the sentence at 476a:

On one tradition, this sentence is a key not only to Plato’s middle metaphysics, but to his philosophical development more generally. These scholars injudiciously take ἀλλήλων κοινωνία (with ἀλλήλων referring to τῶν εἰδῶν) as an allusion to the *Sophist* doctrine of the communion of Forms. While neither Grube nor Waterfield commits such interpretative excesses, Grube’s is the superior representation of the sentence. [—Gould 1995, p. 681]

To take the ἀλλήλων κοινωνία as real and as foreshadowing of the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* is simply to interpret the passage “injudiciously”, and both Grube and Waterfield are praised for avoiding “such interpretative excesses”. And why does Gould see Grube’s translation as “the superior representation of the sentence”? It is because for Waterfield, the εἶδη appear everywhere “because of their association with actions, bodies, and one another”, while for Grube the εἶδη appear everywhere “as though in association with actions, bodies, and one another”. In short, despite all the interpretative effort Gould puts into the passage and the two translations, she ends up saying that what makes Grube’s version better is that “for Waterfield, then, the κοινωνία is real, whereas for Grube it is an

¹³⁶ Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1919/1920, p. 567, n. 2. Translation from German mine; the quotation has been originally noted by Shorey 1930/1937, p. 516–517, note “f” (to *Republic* V.476a).

appearance” (p. 682). As many others, Gould is simply making the mistake of crudely fitting the passage into the interpretative framework of the developmentalist reading of Plato, which she already pre-adopted before consulting the passage.

Philosophically speaking, not much can be done when the discussion evolves into “arguments from obviousness”, and yet, these issues deserve serious treatment. I believe that the *Republic* 476a poses an ultimate dilemma, and unless it could be shown that there is some other passage which directly and explicitly contradicts the statement expressed here—namely, that Forms are in communion with each other—, then there should be no interpretative effort to prove that the passage is somehow misconstrued or its intuitive meaning is in fact a misinterpretation. Both of these attitudes would be justified if at least one such opposing passage could be found, for then the interpretative challenge would be in *choosing* which one of the passages more accurately expresses Plato’s views and *how* and *why* is the other misconstrued or misinterpreted. To my knowledge, however, there is no such passage to be found in the entire Plato’s corpus.

5.3.2 The communion of Forms in the *Republic*, *Phaedo* and *Protagoras*

However, the 476a passage is not the only reference to the communion of Forms in the *Republic*. Just a little down the text of *Republic* V (479a ff.), Socrates distinguishes between philosophers and the majority of people – that is, between the “lovers of wisdom and knowledge” and the “lovers of opinion”. While the former “study the things themselves that are always the same” (479e), “the latter saw and loved beautiful sounds and colors and the like but wouldn’t allow the beautiful itself to be anything” (480a). In defence of the Forms, Socrates addresses the “lovers of sight” in the following way:

I want to address a question to our friend who doesn’t believe in the beautiful itself or any form of the beautiful itself that remains always the same *in all respects* but who does believe in the many beautiful things—the lover of sights who *wouldn’t allow anyone to say that the beautiful itself is one or that the just is one or any of the rest.*

(*Republic* V.479a; bolded emphasis mine)

Socrates here clearly asserts that the Form of Beauty, the Form of Justice and *all the other Forms* (“any of the rest”) is each itself one, and argues against those who wouldn’t allow Forms to be called by that name. Not only is this a clear confirmation that Plato never advocated a position that Forms should be atomic in a sense of being called by one name, but it is at the same stroke also a confirmation of the communion of Forms – *at the very least* between each Form and the Form of One, since each is, on top of its own

essential character, also one. Moreover, Socrates also says—perhaps even more shockingly—that each Form always stays the same “in all respects”. While this is expressed in a form of a negation (that is, what the lover of sights does not believe), Socrates a little below positively confirms that the philosophers *are* the ones “who in each case study the things themselves that are always the same in every respect” (479e). Apparently, already in *Republic V* Plato is aware that Forms are not completely and perfectly atomic, as they have different *respects*, in which they remain “always the same” – and nothing unqualifiedly atomic can have multiplicity of respects.

In the next book, *Republic VI*, both of these points are rephrased and strengthened. Socrates says about the philosopher that he won’t involve himself in idle quarrels, since his attention is fully directed towards Forms:

No one whose thoughts are truly directed towards the things that are, Adeimantus, has the leisure to look down at human affairs or to be filled with envy and hatred by competing with people. Instead, as he looks at and studies things **that are organized** and always the same, **that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it, being all in a rational order**, he imitates them and tries to become as like them as he can.

(*Republic VI.500b–c*; bolded emphasis mine)

Socrates here makes two assertions about Forms: first, that Forms are *organised*, and second, that they are *in a rational order* – and these descriptions hardly fit things which are atomic and unrelated to anything else. Organisation necessarily implies order: either the *inner* order of a structured thing, or the *outer* order of a thing in relation to other things. The **first assertion** that Forms “are organized” seems to speak about the *inner* order of Forms, as it is listed together with the fact that they are “always the same”, which clearly refers individually to each Form itself. Theoretically, we could take the **second assertion** that Forms are “in a rational order” to be likewise meant *internally*, with regard to their own structure. That would advocate only the thesis that Forms are not completely and unqualifiedly atomic (as the first assertion), but not that they are in communion with themselves. However, the way Socrates puts the second assertion is that “being all in a rational order”, Forms “neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it”. Thus what Socrates refers to in the second assertion is the *outer* order of relations among the Forms: they cannot do or suffer injustice *to each other* precisely *because* they are “all in a rational order” *with respect to* “one another”. Clearly then, and already in *Republic VI*, Plato

assumes Forms to be both *internally structured* in an organised way, and *outwardly interrelated* to each other in a rational order.¹³⁷

* * * * *

Nor is the *Republic* the only pre-Parmenidean dialogue that speaks about the communion of Forms. In *Phaedo* 78e, Socrates contrasts individual Forms with many particulars which “bear the same name“ after them, and asserts that particulars “in total contrast“ to Forms are ever-changing “in relation to each other”:

What of the many beautiful particulars, be they men, horses, clothes, or other such things, or the many equal particulars, and all those which bear the same name as those others? Do they remain the same or, **in total contrast to those other realities**, one might say, never in any way remain the same as themselves or **in relation to each other**?

(*Phaedo* 78e; bolded emphasis mine)

Since the particulars are there rendered to be “in *total* contrast” to Forms, and particulars “never in any way remain the same” either “as themselves” or “in relation to each other”, Forms must—to stand in *total* contrast to them—*always* remain the same: *both* as themselves, *and* in relation to each other. The objects in relation to which Forms remain the same cannot be taken to be particulars, since those relations would be changing: different particulars participate in different Forms at different times. Thus the Forms must be in relation to themselves: always were and will be so, and always in the same relations. It *could* potentially be pressed that the passage contrasts particulars, which are ever-changing (“never in any way remain the same”) in relation to each other, with Forms, which are *not at all* related to each other, but that would render the passage unintelligible: what would be the point of Plato stressing that particulars never remain the same in two respects: as themselves, and in relation to each other, if Forms were not in the same two respects unchanging? And how could the contrast be the *total* contrast? Therefore, the only meaningful reading of the contrast is precisely the one which intuitively offers itself: the contrast of never-stable particulars with ever-stable Forms—both as themselves and in relation to each other—, which then in turn means that Forms are considered by Plato to be in relations with each other.

¹³⁷ The comprehensive analysis of the passage (and, in turn, the full defence of my reading of it) would most certainly welcome more effort and space, and I cannot undertake it here. Nevertheless, the interpretation which I present here seems to me the most intuitive reading which the passage offers, and I do not see any textual difficulties in the passage itself which would ask for a different reading.

A concrete example of the communion of Forms can be found in the later passage of the *Phaedo*, 103c–105b, where Socrates wants to explain to Cebes that some characters necessarily bring along with them some other characters. This is after both interlocutors have agreed that a character, whatever it is, will never endure the character opposite to it (102b–103b), with the outcome that “an opposite will never be opposite to itself” (103c). Socrates initially gives an example of “hot” and “cold” characters, which are certainly something different than “fire” and “snow” – yet the latter always brings along the former. This in turn means that “being snow it will not admit the hot” (103d), since hot is the opposite of cold which the snow necessarily brings along. And similarly, fire “will never venture to admit coldness”, since it is already hot and that is an opposite to being cold. The conclusion which Socrates draws is the following:

“The situation then,” he said, “regarding some cases like this is that not only is the form itself entitled to its name for eternity, but also something else that is not actually that form, but always has its character, whenever it exists.”

(*Phaedo* 103e; trans. by Emlyn-Jones & Preddy 2017)

So we have here the tuples “fire – hot” and “snow – cold”. And the necessary relation or “communion” between the members of those tuples is clear: fire never exists without being hot (“bringing hotness along with itself”); snow never exists without being cold (“bringing coldness along with itself”); and so on with some others “of these things”. That Plato considers the latter members in these tuples (i.e. hot and cold) to be Forms is clear from the way he formulates his “clever answer”: the former member (fire and snow) is so connected to the particular Form standing as the latter member of the tuple, that it “has its character whenever it exists”. Gail Fine calls this the “clever answer” of Socrates (CA), which generalises thus:

Fine’s generalisation of Socrates’ “clever answer”:

x is⁺ F , if it is⁺ occupied by something, G , that brings on the Form of F .¹³⁸

However, in order for this passage to turn into a proof of Plato’s acceptance of (or at least awareness of the need for) the communion of Forms, the former members of the tuples (in the “ G -slots”) must also be Forms—or, more precisely, characteristics gained by participation in Forms. This would mean, for example, that the physical fire would be “fiery” because it gains that character by participating in the Form of Fire, and it would

¹³⁸ Fine 1986, p. 75. For the sake of readability, I shortened both occurrences of “is, or comes to be” in Fine’s original text, to merely “is”, but marked them with plus sign (is⁺).

also always and necessarily be “hot”, because the Form of Fire and the Form of Hotness are so related that whenever something participates in the former Form, it also participates (or gains the essential character) of the latter one.¹³⁹ But, on the other hand, if this “something else” is not a Form, then there can be no question about the communion of Forms (or, at least it is not *prima facie* present in the text).

This dilemma becomes especially pressing in some translations, where the part of the sentence “something else that is not the Form” is rendered in such a way which seems to say that the “something else” is not *a* Form *at all* – as if to distinguish between the class of second members of the tuples (in the “*F*-slots”), *which are Forms*, and the class of first members (in the “*G*-slots”), which contrariwise *are not*. However, this reading cannot be pressed. The original Greek itself is indecisive, because the expression “οὐκ ἐκεῖνο” means “not that thing” or simply “not that”. It is clear that what is referenced here is the previously-mentioned Form – but there is no trace of generalisation that would allow us to shift the translation from “not that thing” to “not that *kind of* thing”.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, as the dialogue unfolds, it will become clear that—if not in all, then at least in *some* cases—the “something else” actually *is* a Form, so only such reading of the passage can be correct, which will allow the class of first members of tuples (the “*G*-slots”) to refer to Forms. For in the following passage, Socrates expands his array of examples by the tuple “three – odd”, and argues that whatever will be “occupied by three” will also necessarily become odd:

Is there something else than the Odd which one must nevertheless also always call odd, as well as by its own name, because it is such by nature as never to be separated from the Odd? I mean, for example, the number Three and many others. Consider Three: do you not think that it must always be called both by its own name and by that of the Odd, which

¹³⁹ Whether the sensible fire would need to participate *separately* in both the Form of Fire and the Form of Hotness (and would necessarily participate in the latter if it participates in the first Form), or participation in the former Form somehow “entails” the characteristics of the latter Form – that is another and indeed interesting question, which would nevertheless require a separate account to be fully examined. I would answer that the latter option seems to be the more plausible interpretation, given Plato’s accounts of Forms organised in something similar to “genus-species trees”, which we can find in some of the post-Parmenidean dialogues (most notably in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*). In any case, this does not affect our main question whether the communion of Forms is entailed in this passage, since both of these options in fact presuppose it. And, on the other hand, if we deny that there is such a thing as the Form of Fire, there will still be other examples where the former members of the tuples are unquestionably Forms, as we will shortly see.

¹⁴⁰ The original Greek is “ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλο τι ὃ ἔστι μὲν οὐκ ἐκεῖνο”. Fowler translates “but also something else, which is not the idea” (Fowler 1914); Grube “but there is something else that is not the Form” (Grube 1977; also in *Complete works* 1997), and both of these translations are a little misleading in this regard. Sedley and Long translate better by supplying “the same as”: “but there is also something else [...], which is not the same as the Form” (Sedley & Long 2011). Here I used the translation of Emlyn-Jones & Preddy: “but also something else that is not actually that form” (Emlyn-Jones & Preddy 2017), since it makes clear that the referent is *that* specific Form.

is not the same as Three? That is the nature of Three, and of Five, and of half of all the numbers; each of them is odd, but it is not the Odd. (Phaedo 104a–b)

And that Plato considers the number Three (and Five, and all the other numbers) to be Form is clear not only from the fact that he speaks about “the nature of Three”, but it is also confirmed a few sentences later, where Socrates tells Cebes that “you surely know that what the Form of Three [τριῶν ἰδέα] occupies must not only be three but also odd” (104d), where he explicitly uses the Greek ἰδέα to refer to the Three.¹⁴¹ This has also been spotted by Fine, who argues precisely that while some might object that fire, for example, is not a Form, it is not possible to do so in the case of numbers:

Now it may well be uncontroversial that fire and fever are in hot and ill bodies; but, it may be objected, they are not Forms but physical entities, and so do not support immanent Forms. I agree that fire and fever are not, here, Forms. But some of the entities that play the same role in the CA as fire and fever do are Forms. [...] Fire and fever occupy the *G*-slot and are not Forms; but some substituends for ‘*G*’ are Forms. Plato says, for example, that whatever the Form of Three occupies is not only three but also odd (104d4–7); here the *G*-slot is occupied by the Form of Three which is, therefore, in three.

[—Fine 1986, p. 75]

Thus, *at least in some cases* both members of the tuples (the “*G*” and the “*F*-slots”) are Forms, as Fine confirms in her later article: “three is odd, according to the CA, if the form of three is in it; for the form of three brings on the form of odd”.¹⁴²

* * * * *

Yet another clear example of the communion of Forms is in *Protagoras*. Socrates is interested in the question whether the virtues are teachable, and during the proceeding of the discussion with Protagoras, they encounter a difficult and important question: whether the particular virtues—Wisdom, Temperance, Courage, Justice, and Piety—are the same thing called virtue, or whether each is a unique thing in itself, but somehow similar to each other, as they are all parts of virtue. The question is first posed in the section 329c–e, but rephrased more concisely after a long interrupt in the discussion at 349b–c:

I believe the first question was this: Wisdom, Temperance, Courage, Justice, and Piety—are these five names for the same thing, or is there underlying each of these names a unique thing, a thing with its own power or function, each one unlike any of the others? You said that they are not names for the same thing, that each of these names refers to a

¹⁴¹ In the *Sophist* 238a–b, Visitor asserts that “we take all the numbers to be beings”, and Theaetetus gratefully confirms this by answering: “Indeed, if we take anything else to be!”

¹⁴² Fine 1987/2003, p. 377.

unique thing, and that all these are parts of Virtue, not like the parts of gold, which are similar to each other and to the whole of which they are parts, but like the parts of a face, dissimilar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other, and each one having its own unique power or function. (*Protagoras* 349b–c; trans. by Lombardo & Bell 1997¹⁴³)

That these five virtues are Forms is virtually beyond question: at least in the case of Justice and Piety, there are numerous dialogues where Plato clearly regards them as Forms and explicitly asserts this. Thus, to doubt that the virtues Socrates refers to in the *Protagoras* are in fact Forms is simply to ignore the rest of the corpus. In his splendid article from 1972, *The Unity of the Virtues in the Protagoras*, Gregory Vlastos has taken the virtues in the *Protagoras* to be so evidently and unquestionably Forms, that he was content with simply informing the reader in a footnote at the beginning of the article that “I capitalize the names of the virtues and »Virtue« wherever each of these terms functions as the proper name of an *eidos* or *idea*”.¹⁴⁴ After that, in the whole article he almost solely used the capitalised versions in names of virtues without any further justification for doing so.¹⁴⁵

Whether the answer to the question about unity of individual virtues in one single virtue ultimately gets its approval or is rejected, the mere fact that Socrates and Protagoras consider at such length both the belonging of particular virtues as parts to a greater whole, and their possible mutual inter-relation, clearly shows that Plato must have been at least aware of the problem (or possibility) of the communion of Forms. For if all these particular virtues are Forms, and they are part of the greater whole, called simply Virtue, then this Virtue is a Form too. And he nowhere rejects the idea – instead, we can see Socrates actually admitting (although obviously staying open to corrections), that both claims are true:

Protagoras, what are we going to say if he [someone] asks next, ‘Isn’t Piety the sort of thing that is just, and isn’t Justice the sort of thing that is pious? Or is it the sort of thing which is not pious? Is Piety the sort of thing to be not just, and therefore unjust, and Justice impious?’ What are we going to say to him? Personally, I would answer both **that Justice is pious and Piety is just**, and I would give the same answer on your behalf (if you would let me), **that Justice is the same thing as Piety, or very similar**, and, **most emphatically, that Justice is the same kind of thing as Piety, and Piety as Justice**.

(*Protagoras* 331a–b; bolded emphasis mine)

¹⁴³ In what follows, I will standardly use the translation of the *Protagoras* by Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell (1997), unless noted otherwise.

¹⁴⁴ Vlastos 1972, p. 415, n. 1.

¹⁴⁵ For example, the article contains exactly 153 occurrences of capitalised “Justice”, whereas only 2 of lowercased “justice”.

What Socrates wants to claim “most emphatically” is that Justice, Piety and all the other virtues are of “the same kind of thing”. Since nowhere in the dialogue Socrates disagrees with Protagoras’ claim that all virtues are “parts” of Virtue, it seems that he agrees with him on this point. In fact, the crux of the dispute is the *teachability* of virtues, not their belonging to the Virtue, which is silently accepted by Socrates both times the question is raised.¹⁴⁶ But here, although he is not sure about all the details his assertion would entail, Socrates wants to group all virtues under one class as parts of the whole, which (it is reasonable to think) is the Virtue itself. Even more striking is Socrates’ claim that “Justice is pious and Piety is just”. Identifying the precise meaning of this sentence is troubling for scholars and different interpretations vary extremely.¹⁴⁷ But at least that much is clear, that what the sentence implies is *some kind of* necessary connection between the Form of Justice and the Form of Piety, for only things participating in the Form of Justice (and Piety) could be just (and pious, respectively). The commitment to a view that “Justice is pious” and “Piety is just” thus clearly entails the communion of these Forms.

¹⁴⁶ That is, at 329c–e and at 349b–c.

¹⁴⁷ Troubling, because the sentence is preceded with the passage where Socrates claims that “Justice is just” and “Piety is pious” (330c–e). This has long been taken by many critics to be “the star instance of Self-Predication in Plato”, as Vlastos put the view for which he argued in his 1954 article (p. 338), and which he completely retracted later in the above-mentioned 1972 article – see especially pp. 450ff. I agree with Vlastos’ later view that “so far from being »the star instance of self-predication«, [...] they are not an instance of self-predication at all” (1972, p. 453), since he takes them to be Pauline predications which need to be understood as claiming something about the instantiations of the Forms of Justice and Piety in particulars – namely, that those particulars are just and pious, respectively.

But whether we take this preceding passage to contain self-predication or not, the result for the communion of Forms is the same: if we read it as self-predicating, then the communion is virtually unavoidable in the present sentence. If, on the other hand, we read it with Vlastos as containing Pauline predications, their meaning would be that the virtues are coextensive, since everyone who is just will be also pious and vice versa – therefore the claim “Justice is pious” and “Piety is just”. But such strict coextensiveness of virtues in individuals entails that it is not merely contingent, but necessary – therefore, it needs to have an ontological basis. If this is so, then it means that *those Forms themselves* must have such connection or relation among them, that causes them to be always present together in particulars. Thus, both stances entail Plato’s commitment to the communion of Forms.

Part II:
The relations of Forms

6 Two ways of speaking of beings in Plato

In Part I of the work, dedicated to the examination of the atomicity of Forms, I have shown that one of the standard interpretations of the development of Plato's Theory of Forms with regard to the atomicity of Forms is that before the *Parmenides*, Forms were treated by Plato as independent of each other. Although I disagreed with this view, if any of the questionable readings of Plato deserves to be a standardly-adopted interpretation, it is this one.

One of the key reasons for the initial (if naïve) plausibility of this reading,¹⁴⁸ and the one we will be mostly interested in this chapter, lies in the fact that when Plato in pre-Parmenidean dialogues speaks about any Form *in particular*, he always does so only in the context of its connection with physical things – thus emphasising its own unique character each Form has, which it provides to its participants. On the other hand, when Plato in these dialogues speaks about Forms *in general*, he attributed to them several other characteristics on top of their single, unique character each of them provides through participation – yet it remains a fact that before the *Parmenides*, Plato never specified how exactly do Forms have these other characteristics. It follows naturally that we might be inclined to read this as an indirect proof (or, at least a hint) that this was not a question at all, because for earlier Plato each Form simply had these characteristics *simpliciter* and did not need any cooperation at all with other Forms in order to gain them. This is indeed what most developmentalists assume, and even though they are wrong in doing so, their error is understandable.

I have already outlined the possibility of an alternative reading of Plato's silence on the topic of communion of Forms before the *Parmenides*.¹⁴⁹ This silence is usually taken to prove that up until this point, Plato held that Forms are atomic and only in the *Parmenides* he is forced to reconsider his position. However, I argued that we might in the same manner (and more plausibly) claim that Forms were treated independently of each other in the earlier dialogues precisely because the focus of Plato's examinations was to explain physical phenomena through and by the Theory of Forms, and it is only later that he decided to move into more subtle problems of the Theory itself. There was no point in focusing on the problems of hypothesised Forms before it was clear that the Theory of

¹⁴⁸ I have shown more reasons for this reading in subchapter [1.3.2 Independence as non-participation](#).

¹⁴⁹ See subchapter [5.2 Plato's shift of focus: an alternative reading](#).

Forms is the correct answer to the problems initially posed – and that moment arrived in the dialogue *Parmenides*. Hence the fact that Plato in pre-Parmenidean dialogues speaks about Forms *in general* as if they had several properties, yet when it comes to each *particular* Form he only mentions its one single, essential quality.

In the similar way, we might inquire about the possible development of Plato's thinking with regard to the precise way Forms *have* (or *are*) their properties. Two fundamentally different readings are again possible:

- ***Developmentalist reading:*** Up to the *Parmenides*, Plato really thinks that Forms have all these properties *simpliciter*, and is unaware of the problems that this stance brings along – problems which (1) he will, for the first time, discover in the *Parmenides*; (2) he will face from this dialogue on; and (3) will later lead either to a substantial philosophical refinement of his Theory of Forms, or to its complete abandonment.¹⁵⁰
- ***Unitarian reading:*** Plato is aware all along that there will be qualitative and structural differences in the way or manner in which Forms have these additional properties, on the one hand, and their own essential property, on the other, but he only gets to give an account on these differences in the *Parmenides* and some later dialogues (mainly the *Sophist*), where he explains the nature of the communion of Forms.

Note that this distinction is more than a mere rephrasing of the question of Plato's silence on the communion of Forms, with which we dealt in the first part of the work. The fact that Forms need to have several properties poses a *problem* for the Theory of Forms – a problem which might or might not have been foreseen by Plato, depending on the interpretation of the development of Plato's thought with regard to the atomicity of Forms. But it is certainly presented in full for the very first time in the *Parmenides*, and the communion of Forms is the *solution* to this problem. The differentiation of the ways in which Forms have their properties, on the other hand, is the *prerequisite* for such communion; at the same time it is also a closer *specification* of how the communion of Forms seeks to address the problem of multiplicity of properties in Forms. And whether

¹⁵⁰ Alternatively, we might also defend the position that before the *Parmenides*, Plato really thought that Forms were atomic in a sense of being “simple” and in a strict sense each having only its essential characteristic. This would amount to reading simplicity either as “being called by one name only”, or as “non-compositeness” – see the first two options in chapter [1.2 Atomicity as simplicity](#). I do not list this reading on its own, not only because I do not see these options as plausible (as I have already shown in the chapter just cited), but moreover, from the perspective of possible development of Plato's doctrine, it effectively amounts to the *developmentalist reading* in its corollaries.

Plato planned to utilise this particular solution all the way along is another question different from the first one – a question which is closely associated with whether or not we believe that Plato had anticipated this solution in the first place.

The first part of this dissertation was dedicated to the analysis of the *problem* itself: the Forms were examined from the perspective of their atomicity seen both as simplicity and as independence, and after that the question of multiplicity of their properties was analysed on the basis of the *Parmenides*, where such multiplicity is suggested as being necessary on pain of the fact that to claim otherwise leads to plain contradictions, as Parmenides has shown in his hypotheses. As we have seen, whether this question was discovered by Plato only in the *Parmenides* is disputed, but at least that much is clear that the *Parmenides* is the first dialogue where Plato decided to give a systematic account of Forms and the multiplicity of their properties.

I have tried to offer and defend an interpretation under which Plato did know for a long time that Forms need to have multiplicity of properties in order to exist (that is, to be ontologically possible for them to exist). Additionally, I also argued that Plato never claimed that Forms were atomic in the sense of their complete mutual separation, thus opening the way for the possibility of the communion of Forms as such. In other words, the aim of the first part was, first and foremost, to defend the possibility that Plato foresaw the problem of multiplicity in Forms themselves even before the *Parmenides*—and hence there was no need for dramatic change in his thinking after Parmenides’ criticisms—and to show the preferability of such interpretations over other developmentalist readings adopted by different critics so far.

The purpose of this second part is to analyse the communion of Forms as the *solution* to the problem of multiplicity of properties in Forms themselves. My aim is to show that not only the problem, but also this specific solution to it was foreseen by Plato. In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary for me, most importantly, to show that Plato envisaged that there are different senses in which things—whether sensible ones or Forms themselves—might have their properties even before the *Sophist*, where such a distinction has, according to the vast majority of critics, supposedly taken place for the very first time. The distinction in question are the famous *kath auto* (καθ’ αὐτό) – *pros alla* (πρὸς ἄλλα) opposites, discriminating between a thing being something *by itself*, and being something *in relation to other things*, as formulated in the *Sophist* 255c.

Although the distinction itself has been recognised and thoroughly analysed by many scholars, it is commonly thought to be introduced by Plato only in the *Sophist* as part of Plato's new and refined Theory, which seeks to answer the problems raised in the *Parmenides*. The unitarian reading which I will put forward as part of my positive proposal is, however, that this understanding of Forms was always a part of Plato's understanding of Forms. Thus, no development is implied by the mere fact that in the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, the specific problems related to the communion of Forms and them having multiple properties are for the first time directly articulated and dealt with by Plato.

The usual interpretative story goes like this: in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues, Plato didn't allow the Forms to contain opposition of properties in them, and in the *Parmenides* he has Socrates testifying to this by manifestly and repeatedly proclaiming that he "would be utterly amazed" (129e) "if someone showed that the likes themselves come to be unlike or the unlikes like" (129b). This ultimately leads to all kinds of difficulties and contradictions raised by Parmenides in the second part of the dialogue, eventually ending with the extreme conclusion of the first hypothesis that "the one neither is one nor is, if we are obliged to trust this argument" (141e), and this problematic conclusion extends generally to any and all the Forms, as the fourth hypothesis clearly shows: "as it is, things other than the one are neither one nor many nor a whole nor parts, since they in no way partake of the one" (159d).

The complex difficulties raised against Socrates' Theory of Forms are usually taken to mean that Plato eventually recognized the logical requirements of his Theory, the consequences of which was the necessity of allowing Forms to contain both opposite properties and their multiplicity in them. In turn, he saw that it is a logical requirement of Forms to mix and blend together—and in the *Sophist* he has, for the very first time, not only acknowledged this requirement, but also given an account on the specifics of this blending and mixing together. Thus the *Parmenides* is seen as the prologue to Plato's later works, where he deliberately—to a greater or lesser extent, but undoubtedly so—removes himself from his early Theory of Forms to come up with a later, mature Theory. As we have seen during the logical analysis of the third question in the previous part of the work, this mature Theory might or might not treat Forms as they were treated in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues: they have been seen by some critics to maintain their nature as real particulars, pre-eminent separated beings existing in their own realm, but others claim that Plato abandoned his two-worlds theory and recognized that Forms are merely universals dwelling in sensible things, without the separate existence apart of them.

In the previous part, I have shown that it is not necessary nor most plausible to read Socrates' amazement in the *Parmenides* as a shock or denial of either the multiplicity or the opposition of properties in Forms. But to show that it wasn't the denial of the communion of Forms either (which is only very subtly hinted at in the *Parmenides* itself), and quite the opposite, to demonstrate that Plato had this solution at hand for the whole time—and even before the *Parmenides*—it is necessary for me to show that Plato had the means to deal with Forms having different properties *differently*, and that there was a plan on Plato's side to give an account of this at some point after the *Parmenides*. So before the different readings of the third question can be assessed, the logical analysis of the ways in which things might, in Plato's thinking, have their properties is needed. This analysis will eventually allow us also to answer the question whether Plato's apprehension of the *nature* of Forms had to or has ever changed.

The plan of the chapters to follow is this: in this *sixth chapter*, I will focus on the two ways of speaking of beings, as formulated by Plato himself in the *Sophist*. I will first analyse the text itself and then, in *chapter 7*, I will provide three different interpretations of it, together with their assessment. One of them, the interpretation by Michael Frede, will be the one which I will promote by showing that his interpretation is the most consistent one from these three. *Chapter 8* will be dedicated to problems and criticisms of Frede's account, as put forward by two scholars: first, by Fiona Leigh, who was directly inspired by and built upon Frede's account when she was creating her own interpretation. The other is the criticism from Lesley Brown, who in her important and highly influential article also formulated a criticism of Frede's reading of the distinction. In this chapter, it will also be my aim to show that the origin of the *kath'auto – pros alla* distinction, which Plato fully articulates for the first time in the *Sophist*, is actually much earlier, as it appeared already in the *Charmides*. Thus, the emergence of the distinction in the *Sophist* can not in itself be considered as a proof of the development in Plato's metaphysical doctrine. Lastly, *chapter 9* will be dedicated to the problem of the self-predication of Forms. I will show that this problem never plagued Plato's Theory of Forms in the way that is usually claimed by the scholars, and that therefore, Plato had no reason to change his Theory in order to counter it. Quite the opposite, he gave a preliminary account on the possibility of self-predication already in the *Charmides*, and this same account at the same time shows that Plato never accepted the idea of atomicity of Forms, as is usually presented in developmentalist accounts.

Had Plato been, similarly to Aristotle, consistently introducing technical terminology as he progressed through and dealt with different philosophical problems in his dialogues, we would have been spared of many interpretation issues. However, he did not, which is why splitting the textual contents of his dialogues into common jargon and technical terms is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible. Plato's terminology is fluid; with a few exceptions it is simply a terminology of commonly spoken Greek of his time. He used colourful examples, metaphors and mythology to introduce and explain his thoughts, and to defend them against other interlocutors.¹⁵¹ And if what he was saying to his partners was still unclear, he simply added more parallels and examples. That is why in order to reproduce Plato's thinking, we cannot rely solely on the precise words and phrases he used, simply because these were all changing not only between two different dialogues, but sometimes even throughout a single one. On the other hand, knowing the context of the dialogue, identifying the key questions that were posed, and most importantly the goal that Plato pursued within the dialogue, might tell us much more than any attempts of identifying words which bear a significant terminological meaning different from their common usage.

This methodological note becomes particularly relevant in the following discussion, since there is at least one important terminological distinction that Plato seems to recognise ever since his early dialogues, and that is the distinction between phrases “(αὐτὸ) πρὸς ἑαυτὸ”, alternatively phrased as “(αὐτὰ) καθ’ αὐτά” – and “(ἀλλὰ) πρὸς ἄλλο”. While this twin phrase is notoriously known and is commonly acknowledged to appear in and throughout the *Sophist* (most noticeably in 255c, where it is usually taken to be introduced for the first time), I will argue that its origin in Plato's works can be traced back at least to the *Charmides*.¹⁵² However, this “backtracking” is complicated by the fact that Plato was using this pair of phrases in very different contexts, and that even the exact terming of the phrases has been changing from dialogue to dialogue. Thus, it is held by most critics that

¹⁵¹ It should be noted, against the negative understanding of this fact, that this might also be the reason why even today, the non-philosophical public occasionally picks up Plato's dialogues to read, which is hardly the case with Aristotle's works.

¹⁵² This was first spotted by Michael Frede back in 1967, and much later rediscovered by Vasilis Politis in 2021. Frede in his *Prädikation und Existenzaussage* (1967) says that the *kath' auto – pros alla* distinction “by no means appears in the *Sophist* for the first time in Plato” and is already present in *Charmides* 169a: “Diese beiden Formen ... tauchen übrigens im *Sophistes* keineswegs zum erstenmal bei Platon auf. Im *Charmides* nämlich heißt es (169a1–5) ...” (p. 18). “If only Frede had followed up on this remarkable statement!” – to borrow the words from Politis, who commended Frede for this significant, but completely overlooked discovery in his own work *Plato's Essentialism* (2021, “Conclusion”, p. 230, note 2).

the distinction is new either to the *Sophist* or perhaps at the very earliest to the *Parmenides*—but definitely not any earlier than that.

The purpose of this and the following chapters is to show that in his philosophy, Plato had distinguished two ways in which things can have their properties. I will argue that not only had Plato the necessary terminology to formulate this distinction, but he had been aware of it and using it since his very early dialogues. However, because it was articulated in different ways, this has usually escaped the attention of critics and therefore led to a common belief that this distinction was only introduced in the *Sophist*.

6.1 *Pros alla – kath auto* distinction in the *Sophist*

In my analysis of the problem of atomicity of Forms introduced in the *Parmenides*, and most clearly articulated in the section 129b, the goal was to uncover all logically possible alternative readings of Socrates' amazement, analysed in three different questions. I have offered an interpretation that understood Socrates' statement as a constructive challenge posed to Parmenides, and I have argued that Plato might have allowed the communion of Forms since the very beginning of formulating his Theory. But while the *Parmenides* opens and articulates the problem of communion of Forms, and it is therefore possible to give logical analysis of that problem and its possible readings, it is not possible to give a definite answer to this problem, since the dialogue itself leaves it ultimately unsolved. Therefore, we must now turn our attention to the dialogue *Sophist*, which is commonly taken to be the one where some of the most troublesome problems introduced in the *Parmenides* are treated and answered. It is there that the plausibility of my positive proposal will have to be proven, *vis-à-vis* Plato's own way of articulating his answer.

Similarly to the *Parmenides* 129 section, the *Sophist* 255 section raises several interpretative difficulties, all of which have significant import to the reading of the (possible) development of Plato's Theory of Forms. Critics do not agree on how this distinction should be understood: how it is to be used; between which kinds of things does it discriminate; and whether it was the only distinction Plato had and used. Not even that is clear, whether the distinction applies only to Forms or to both Forms and sensible things. It has even been proposed that it is not a distinction between ways of attributing properties to beings at all (that is, ways in which real things have their properties), but only a semantic distinction between two kinds of predicates.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Some authors have suggested interpretations which read the *Sophist* as not speaking of Forms at all; the usual reasoning is that the dialogue is about logical or linguistic concepts. In what follows, I will not

Since it is not possible to cover and respond to all these extremely variant interpretations one by one, I will proceed from analysing Plato’s text itself, and then address three most important branches of its interpretations. The whole discussion about the problem of interrelation of Forms starts at 251a with Visitor’s very modestly looking call to investigate how we call the very same thing, whatever it may be, by several names:

VISITOR: So let’s discuss how exactly it is that we keep calling this very same thing by many names.

THEAETETUS: Such as what? Give an example.

VISITOR: We refer to an individual human being, surely, by calling him all sorts of things, applying colours to him, shapes, sizes, and different varieties of badness and goodness; in all of which cases, and tens of thousands of others, we are not only claiming him to be a human being, but also good and an unlimited number of other things. By the same account we treat everything else similarly – positing each thing as one, then proceeding to use many names of it and thus treating it as many.

(*Sophist* 251a–b; trans. by Rowe 2015¹⁵⁴)

This appeal is the result of the previous discussion between Theaetetus and Visitor about the Being and Non-Being. Starting with Non-Being (236–242) and going over to Being (242–250), they realise that not only have all their attempts to uncover their true nature failed, but also that “*what is* and *what is not* have turned out to be equally puzzling” (250e). Being turns out to be just as problematic as Non-Being – both of them are full of aporias. Following Visitor’s appeal we just quoted, the discussion goes on till section 254b, where both interlocutors came to an agreement that “some kinds are ready to combine with each other, others not, some a little, others a lot, and that some, even, are perfectly capable of being in combination with all and through all” (254b–c).

Accepting this agreement as their common ground, they set out to investigate, one by one, the “greatest kinds” or *megista gene* (μέγιστα γένη) and their capacity to combine with each other. They initially identify three of them: “Being itself, and Rest and Change”

consider this family of interpretations, since they all rely on the developmentalist reading of the *Parmenides*, which I have already shown to be not plausible in the first part of the work. Moreover, all such readings have the inevitable corollary that the existence of the *megista gene* [μέγιστα γένη] Plato speaks of becomes contingent – either insofar as they are understood as concepts only existing in human (or other reasoning agents’) minds which create and work with them, or insofar as they are treated as universals only residing in physical things – in both cases, they are existentially dependent on other beings.

The full and systematic rejection of this family of interpretations would be welcome, but unfortunately it is not possible to give such analysis in the extent of my work. Nevertheless, I believe all such interpretations entirely lose their plausibility as long as it can be shown that no significant change of the Theory of Forms needs to (or indeed *can*) be read into Plato’s thinking – which is precisely what I have already shown in the first part with regard to the *Parmenides*, and what I will continue to strengthen with regard to the *Sophist* during the course of this part of my work.

¹⁵⁴ In what follows, I will standardly use the translation of the *Sophist* by Christopher Rowe (2015), unless noted otherwise.

(254d), to which they later add the Same (255c) and the Different (255d). The central passage of 255c–e serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it presents Visitor’s argument differentiating the Different and Being, and thus discriminating the Different as the fifth kind. At the same time, it is also widely known as being the passage where Plato finally articulates his answer to the problem of the communion of kinds:

VISITOR: But I think you agree that of the things that are, some are spoken of in and by themselves, while others are always spoken of in relation to others.

THEAETETUS: Why would I not?

VISITOR: And that difference is one of the latter – right?

THEAETETUS: Just so.

VISITOR: It would not be, if being and difference were not very much distinct. If difference shared in both classes¹⁵⁵ in the way that being does, then among the differents, too, there would be a different that was not in relation to something else, whereas as things are we find that whatever is different simply cannot fail to be what it is, namely different, in relation to something else.

THEAETETUS: Yes, as you say.

VISITOR: The nature of the different, then, we’re to treat as being fifth among the Forms we’re singling out.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

VISITOR: And moreover we’re going to say that it is a nature that pervades them all; for each one of them is different from the rest not through its own nature, but rather through its sharing in this other Form, Difference. (*Sophist* 255c–e)

Critics tend to agree on the fact *that* Plato’s answer lies in this specific passage just as much as they disagree on *how* precisely to interpret it—and, ultimately, what exactly *is* Plato’s answer. Similar to the problem of Socrates’ amazement in the *Parmenides*, the interpretation of this passage by a particular critic often depends heavily on her chosen attitude towards the developmentalist theory. My aim will be to show that it is possible to read this passage without introducing any drastic shift in Plato’s thinking between the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, and consequently, between pre-Parmenidean and post-Parmenidean dialogues in general.

¹⁵⁵ Rowe originally translated “εἰδοῖν” as “forms”, which is grammatically absolutely correct and unproblematic. Nevertheless, I chose to emend his translation by supplying “classes” instead, since it is clear that this is the meaning Plato had in mind, and choosing “forms” is misleading in the context where the talk is about two Forms, Being and Difference. Cf. also the translation of White (1997), who uses “kinds”.

6.1.1 *Sophist* 255c12–13: Two contexts of the sentence

The crucial role in the interpretation of the entire passage is played by its opening sentence on lines 255c12–13, pronounced by the Visitor himself: “ἀλλ’ οἶμαί σε συγχωρεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά, τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄλλα ἀεὶ λέγεσθαι”. As Frede fittingly pointed out, “only the most unimportant thing is really completely clear at first, (namely) the translation of »ἀλλ’ οἶμαί σε συγχωρεῖν«”,¹⁵⁶ which we could render as “But I think you agree...” or similarly. This short sentence has been translated by various critics in the most different ways:

Rowe (2015): But I think you agree that of the things that are, some are spoken of in and by themselves, while others are always spoken of in relation to others.

Leigh (2012): ... of the beings, some are said themselves by themselves, while others are always said relative to others.

White (1997): But I think you’ll admit that some of those which are are said by themselves, but some are always said in relation to other things.

Taylor (1961): Still I conceive you will grant that some entities are spoken of as absolutes, others always as relative to others.

Cornford (1935): But I suppose you admit that, among things that exist, some are always spoken of as being what they are just in themselves, others as being what they are with reference to other things.

Fowler (1921): But I fancy you admit that among the entities some are always conceived as absolute, and some as relative.

Jowett (1871/1892): But you would agree, if I am not mistaken, that existences are relative as well as absolute?

What we should always bear in mind when interpreting the sentence is that it is wrapped in two contextual layers. *The inner layer is the immediate context of the sentence, the purpose of which is to distinguish between the Form of Being and the Form of Difference.* We can see this from the sentences immediately following the one we are analysing. For in our sentence, the Visitor says that there are two groups of τὰ ὄντα – the “things that are” or simply “beings”. He explains that “difference is one of the latter” (255d1), and establishes that it is “very much distinct” from being (255d4), which would not be the case precisely “if difference shared in both classes in the way that being does”

¹⁵⁶ Frede 1967, p. 19. This Frede’s article (actually his dissertation), which I will cite frequently in the text to follow, was written in German and unfortunately never officially translated into English. When citing it, I will use my own translation of the text, which I made for my personal use for the purpose of better understanding Frede’s text. In problematic or questionable terms or sentences, I will always provide in brackets the German original.

(255d5). Thus, the distinguishing mark between the two is articulated on the basis of the fact that “as things are we find that whatever is different simply cannot fail to be what it is, namely different, *in relation to something else*” (255d6–7). Taking this all together, the outline of the argument is this:

- (1) Being appears in both classes (or groups);
- (2) Difference appears in the latter one; and
- (3) if Difference appeared in the first class, it would not be at all different from Being.

Finally, from this it follows that:

- (4) The distinction between Being and Difference is established in this passage by the very fact that Difference does not appear in the former class.

At this point, we do not need to consider yet what these two groups are, and neither what exactly is meant by “the things that are”. To understand the role of the immediate context of the sentence, it is sufficient to apprehend the *structure* of Plato’s argument, and to see how it allows us to distinguish between the Form of Being and the Form of Difference, thus leading to the conclusion that “the nature of the different, then, we’re to treat as being fifth among the Forms we’re singling out” (255d9–e1).¹⁵⁷

Let us now move to the second context of the passage. As I have already pointed out, the whole discussion actually starts several Stephanus pages earlier, when the Visitor at 251a opens the problem of interrelation of Forms. Thus, ***the outer contextual layer is the wider purpose of the passage, which aims to explain how can we call the very same thing by several names.*** As Frede later summarised the task:

We have to see how each thing can be said to be lots of things, not just what it is by, or in, itself (if it is the kind of thing that is something by itself), but also other things that it is not by itself, but by standing in the appropriate relation to something else. Thus Being, of itself, is just whatever it is that it is to be. But this does not prevent it from being at rest, or from being in motion, by standing in the appropriate relation to rest, or to motion.

[—Frede 1992, p. 400]

Any interpretation of the sentence must therefore not only serve its immediate context—to establish the difference between the Form of Being and the Form of

¹⁵⁷ This is how the distinction between Being and Difference is established in this passage; it of course does not follow that this is actually the *definitional* difference between Being and Difference. It functions merely as a *descriptive* difference: a distinguishing mark by which Plato proved that those two (Being and Difference) must be essentially different, and thus be two, not one.

Difference—, but it should also properly fit into the remote context: that is, the wider setting of the passage, which sets out to examine our habit of predicating different names—and thus assigning different beings—to the same thing or object. As we will see, not every interpretation of the sentence at 255c12–13 offered by contemporary critics adheres to these requirements.

6.1.2 *Sophist* 255c12–13: Two divisions in the sentence

The second fundamental thing to note is that the sentence actually creates two different divisions on different layers, not only one. As we have already seen, the purpose of section 255c–e (*the immediate context* of the sentence) is to distinguish between the Form of Being and the Form of Difference. And Plato does this in two steps. First, at 255c12–13, he has the Visitor splitting the “things that are” into two groups: those which are “spoken of in and by themselves”, and those which are “always spoken of in relation to others”. Then, in the second step (255d1–e1), the distinction between being and difference is established by the observation that difference does not appear in the former group.

But this first step of the argument, which splits the “things that are” into two groups, itself presupposes that the division created by the text is twofold. First, the Visitor tells us that there are two ways in which we *speak about* the “things that are”: namely, “in and by themselves” (αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά), and “in relation to others” (πρὸς ἄλλα). And second, there are those two groups into which those “things that are” *themselves* are categorised, namely those which are “spoken of in and by themselves”, and those which are “always spoken of in relation to others”. We can see that the two divisions are interconnected in such a way that the second presupposes (and would not be possible without) the first one. Let us try to formalise the divisions:

The *Division of predicates*, *P*, creates two subsets:

P1: Predicates predicating things “in and by themselves” (αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά);

P2: Predicates predicating things “in relation to others” (πρὸς ἄλλα).

The *Division of beings*, *B*, creates two subsets:

B1: Beings spoken of by predicates of both *P1* and *P2* subsets;

B2: Beings spoken of by *P2* predicates only.

Thus, our sentence creates two different divisions at once: the first is *the division of predicates*, because there are two ways in which we can speak of beings—namely “in and by themselves” and “in relation to others”. And the second is *the division of beings*, because while some of them can sometimes be spoken of “in and by themselves” and

sometimes “in relation to others”, others are limited in such a way that they must only be “*always* spoken of in relation to others”. Therefore, while the predicates about beings are separated into two groups, the beings themselves are divided differently, creating *additional* two groups. ***Both pairs of groups are exhaustive and exclusive, but each separates a different set of objects—the first one predicates, the second beings—and each separates them differently.*** Thus, when dealing with any interpretation of the 255c12–13 sentence and the whole 255c–d passage, we should always bear in mind this two-layered division present in the sentence, and the complementarity of the reading at hand with it.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Historically, not every scholar recognised and accepted this double-layered division. To the extent that this division might be seen as controversial or questionable, I will deal with it during the exposition of the third interpretation in the subchapter *7.3 Interpretation C: A distinction between beings referenced to themselves and beings referenced to other things*. At the same time, it should be added that if any interpretation denies the presence of this double division in the text, it should be able to explain on what grounds it does so.

7 Three interpretations of the passage

Historically, at least three very different and widely recognised interpretative families have been developed to explain the precise nature of the distinction made by Plato in the *Sophist* 255. Two of them are developmentalist in their nature, while the third one is essentially unitarian. In what follows, I will present these three interpretations in detail, as analysing them will uncover some more subtle errors which we need to avoid when trying to interpret the passage. On top of analysing their own inner consistency, I will try to assess them in the light of two perspectives: first, whether (and to what extent) they acknowledge the two contexts of the 255c12–13 sentence which we just analysed, and how plausibly they respond to the questions raised by them. And second, since the *Sophist* is generally acknowledged as a dialogue which aims to address (or at least to *react to*) the issues raised in the *Parmenides*—and since all three interpretations we will analyse accept such a continuity between these two dialogues and build upon it—, I will look into the question of how well do they fit into the context of Plato’s metaphysics, as presented and scrutinised in the *Parmenides* (and earlier dialogues). This way, I will connect these interpretations of the *Sophist* with our analysis of the *Parmenides* from the first part of the work, and more specifically, with an attempt to answer the third logical question which, as we acknowledged, goes beyond the *Parmenides* – namely, what was the purpose of bringing out Socrates’ challenge in the *Parmenides*?

In my exposition, I will focus on the last, unitarian reading, which was developed by Michael Frede. My aim will be to show that among the three most prominent interpretative traditions which we will analyse, Frede’s one is the most consistent one both in itself, and with regard to two contexts of the division at 255c12–13. Moreover, it allows interpreting Socrates’ challenge in the *Parmenides* in a way that will not force us to postulate a change in Plato’s thinking about the Theory of Forms and thus, ultimately, to maintain consistency between the pre-Parmenidean and post-Parmenidean dialogues of Plato. Since Frede did not merely propose his own interpretation, but also exposed in detail the vulnerabilities of the other two interpretations, I will interleave my own explanation of them with Frede’s criticisms of these interpretations. One of the goals of my doing so will be to provide a better exposition of them than Frede himself did, since Frede’s argumentation is at times very condensed and hard to apprehend.

Afterwards, in the chapter to follow, I will present some of the most important problems and criticisms of Frede's interpretation, to which I will try to respond. First, I will address the objections raised by Fiona Leigh, since her account claims to be a development of Frede's one, with which I disagree on two grounds: first, I am convinced Leigh misinterprets several key points of Frede's account. And second, I believe Leigh's own account is flawed and can be directly rejected with arguments which Frede already raised against the interpretations of previous authors – it is therefore quite striking that while Leigh claims to build upon Frede (although in an incompatible way), she ignores his criticisms that apply to her own account.

The criticism of Frede's account from Lesley Brown, on which I will focus afterwards, is important for two reasons: first, because the reasons Brown offered to reject Frede's view are common also among other scholars, thus responding to Brown's criticism in fact covers a wider range of critics. And second, Brown's linguistic insight had a significant impact on interpreting the *Sophist* throughout different interpretative families. It is therefore important for my project to show that accepting Brown's account does not necessarily mean rejecting Frede's one – on the contrary, I will try to show that the two accounts are compatible, despite what Brown claimed.

7.1 *Interpretation A*: A distinction between single- and multi-place predicates

One of the most dominant interpretations is the one claiming that Plato in the sentence distinguished between single-place and multi-place predicates: that is, between predicates that are said absolutely, and the ones predicated relatively to some other thing. Thus, “rose is red” would be an example of absolute predication which uses a unary predicate $\text{Red}(\text{rose})$, whereas “Socrates is taller than Simmias” would be a usage of a binary predicate $\text{TallerThan}(\text{Socrates}, \text{Simmias})$, as it is said relatively to Simmias. A prominent and much-discussed case would be the Being itself, which, according to this interpretation, has two uses for Plato: the complete and incomplete “is”, standing for the existential and copulative predications, respectively. This can then be contrasted with the case of the Difference, which only has an incomplete use and, thus, always requiring a completion.

This would correspond to our contemporary understanding of the difference between unary and binary (n -ary) predicates, where the former are usually understood simply as

properties of objects, while the latter ones are taken to be relations between pairs (n -tuples) of objects. However, this is patently *not* Plato’s understanding of the “things that are” (τὰ ὄντα), since no such formal distinction between properties and relations appears in the dialogues preceding the *Sophist*, and, as we will see, neither can it be claimed to be introduced here in this passage.

7.1.1 Contrasting the absolute – relative division with the two divisions in the text

Our previous analysis has shown that the sentence at 255c12–13 creates two different divisions at once: *the division of predicates* and *the division of beings*, and that these two do not correspond. We have also seen how is the proof of the distinction between the Form of Being and the Form of Difference, which is the purpose of section 255c–e (*the immediate context* of the sentence), carried out by Plato within these two divisions. And while the first *division of predicates* is required and thus instrumentally important for the second *division of beings*, it is the latter that ultimately achieves the distinction between the two Forms. Thus, we can now see that the first division, *the division of predicates*, is not the important one for Plato here – at least not from the aspect of the immediate context, since the proof of the difference between the two Forms uses and is completely dependent on the latter division, *the division of beings*. We should therefore be suspicious of any interpretation that claims the division is primarily about predicates—as the *Interpretation A* does—, for as we have seen, that is not what Plato is prioritising.

But most importantly, ***the interpretation that the sentence divides between absolute and relative (or single- and multi-place) predicates can not be paired with either of the divisions that are actually present in the text.*** That the absolute – relative distinction is not aligned with *the division of beings* is immediately clear. For the beings are divided between (1) those that can be spoken of in both ways, and (2) those that can only be spoken of in one way, namely, “in relation to others”. The natural candidate for aligning the “absolute – relative distinction” allegedly present in the text is *the division of predicates*; after all, the subjects of both divisions are the *predicates* about beings, not beings themselves. Let us therefore examine these two divisions and see whether they divide their objects evenly. If not, then the *Interpretation A* with its “absolute – relative distinction” must clearly be wrong, for we have seen that the only two distinctions actually present in the text are *the division of predicates* and *the division of beings*, and if neither of them translates to the

distinction claimed by the interpretation at hand, then this interpretation is clearly fallacious.

The best way to assess the plausibility of the absolute – relative distinction would be to examine some particular predicates and the way they would be construed under this division. Under single-place (absolute) predicates, we would have the following examples:

- “Rose is red” \Rightarrow Red(rose)
- “Socrates is man” \Rightarrow Man(Socrates)
- “Socrates is tall” \Rightarrow Tall(Socrates)
- “Socrates is” \Rightarrow Is(Socrates)

There seems to be nothing problematic yet – the last example *does* sound a bit different than all of the former ones, since the sentence in natural language is composed of only two words as opposed to three in other examples, but when we convert it into a proper formalised predicate, the difference conveniently disappears. Let us, however, look at some examples of the multi-place (relative) predicates:

- “Rose is different from daisy” \Rightarrow Different(rose, daisy)
- “Socrates is a father of Lamprocles” \Rightarrow Father(Socrates, Lamprocles)
- “Socrates is taller than Simmias” \Rightarrow TallerThan(Socrates, Simmias)
- “Socrates is ____” \Rightarrow Is(Socrates, ____)

Here complications begin to arise. The first case demonstrates the correct usage of the predicate “different”, confirming that the “difference is one of the latter” kind of beings, which must always be said “relatively”. The second is an example of a standard relation. The third predicate is a “stock example” of a comparative adjective relation, and when we contrast it with its “absolute” counterpart (“Socrates is tall”), we seem to have in *tallness* a nice example of a property which can be predicated in both ways, similar to being itself. But when we come to the last example, we stumble. The last example should stand for the second use of *being* and present a relative counterpart to its absolute version formulated in words “Socrates is” and expressed by predicate Is(Socrates). How should the predicate be finished? How can we express *being* in a relative predicate – as the Visitor told us it should and indeed *must* be possible, in order for the proof distinguishing the Forms of Being and Difference to be valid?

It turns out we have nothing left to supply to these predicates, since under this interpretation, all the “things that are” can be expressed on their own either in

“relative”-only way (as with *difference*) or in both ways (as with *tallness*), and the only thing that remains unexpressed is the “absolute” meaning of *being*: that is, the “existential” is. As a result, there is nothing that stands for “the relative use of *being*” in reality – to paraphrase Kant, it is an empty thought without content. Not only, then, is the absolute – relative distinction not compatible with *the division of predicates* in the text; it is not even a sufficient and coherent division in itself, since it is impossible to express with it the two uses of *being*, which Plato requested through the character of the Visitor.

7.1.2 Interpretation A*: A distinction between existential and predicative “is”

We might try to overcome this problem by “patching” the interpretation and claiming that it simply presents the distinction between existential “is” on the one hand, and predicative “is” of the copula on the other. That is, instead of interpreting the sentence as creating a *general* distinction between the absolute and relative predicates that universalises and applies to all predicates, we could say that the only thing Visitor wanted to do was merely to create a distinction between the two uses of a verb “to be”. That is equivalent to limiting the absolute – relative distinction to one single predicate “is”. For “is” can be predicated absolutely when the existential claim is made, as in “Socrates is” (that is: exists). But it can also be used relatively, when we say, for example, that “Socrates is tall” or “Socrates is man”. These would translate into the following predicates:

- Absolute use of “is”:
 - “Socrates is” \Rightarrow Is(Socrates)
- Relative use of “is”:
 - “Socrates is man” \Rightarrow Is(Socrates, man)
 - “Socrates is tall” \Rightarrow Is(Socrates, tall)

This attempt, however, creates more problems than it solves. It is true that we have been able to finish the predicate Is(Socrates, ___) in previously-problematic “relative” use of *being*. But at the same time, this comes at the cost that all the previous cases of “absolute” predications must now be understood as “relative”. In fact, there remains now only one case of “absolute” predication, and that is the existential “is”. This is the result of the fact, that we have effectively limited the extent of “absolute” predicates, about which the sentence at 255c12–13 speaks, to the *being* itself. Only *being* can be predicated absolutely – by using existential “is”, with which we simply say that something exists. All the other “things that are” can only be predicated relatively by using the predicative “is” as a copula in a given predicate.

It is highly questionable what would be the point of Plato making this observation. For, first, the distinction between existential and predicative “is” does not help to address the problem, how can we call the same thing by several names (that is, *the remote context* of the sentence), in any way. In order to do so, it would need to help us understand how can something be some other thing (and *many* other things), and yet not be that other thing in every way or absolutely. But as things stand now, the existential “is” only allows us to claim the pure existence of a thing, and everything else is claimed about that thing only by the predicative “is”. Such distinction is close to being pointless, since it means that, according to this interpretation, everything is predicated of things in the very same way – namely, with the predicative “is”. Not only does it not help in solving the remote context of the sentence – under this reading, the whole distinction would be reduced to a purely linguistic observation with no metaphysical import. But that flatly contradicts what Plato is doing in the passage around: even if we adopted the developmentalist reading and accepted that Plato already abandoned Forms, distinguishing the *megista gene* [μέγιστα γένη] is not a semantically crucial question, *unless* it has some important metaphysical implications.

But an even greater problem for this interpretation arises when we consider *the immediate context* of the sentence and Plato’s proof of the difference between Being and Difference. For since the distinction under our actual reading only differentiates between absolute (existential) and relative (predicative) “is”, predicating difference cannot be expressed in the previous form `Different(Socrates, Simmias)`, but instead must be a case of the use of a relative “is”. Thus, the difference between the two Forms must be formulated in the following way:

- “Socrates is” \Rightarrow `Is(Socrates)`
- vs—
- “Socrates is different from Simmias” \Rightarrow `Is(Socrates, different, Simmias)`

For this moment, we can ignore the curious fact that suddenly, a ternary predicate appeared among the predicates we are working with, for that could probably be explained and it is not the core problem we are facing. More important is the fact that we are once again unable to formulate the difference between Being and Difference, because in Plato’s terms, this difference is created by the fact that Being belongs to two groups, while the Difference to only one of them. But under our reading, they cannot be compared in such a way, since they play an altogether different role in the sentences we pronounce – which can be seen from the different position of the words `Is` and `different` in the predicates above. Difference is *what is predicated*, whereas Being (if it is to be found in these predicates at

all) is the *predicate itself*, that is, its language form – the “is” we utter either absolutely, or relatively to connect the subject and object of a predicate. Thus they are fundamentally incomparable, just as the *colour* red is incomparable with the *word* “seldom”. But the way Visitor speaks about the two Forms clearly requires that they be comparable in kinds, just different in their extent or in ways of speaking about them. To conclude, once again we see that this interpretation, even after an attempt to refine it, cannot explain the immediate context of the sentence.

7.2 *Interpretation B: A distinction between self-subsisting (substantial) and dependent (accidental) beings*

Another very popular interpretation of the sentence is that Plato is here making an advance towards Aristotelianism, and separates between self-subsisting beings which are said “in and by themselves” on the one hand, and between dependent beings which can only be spoken of “in relation to others” – precisely because of their dependence on some being of the first group. As Frede presents this position:

Beauty, for example, only exists in relation to beautiful objects, the beautiful is ἕτερόν τι ὄν beautiful, and so beauty is always predicated of something distinct from it. Human beings, on the other hand, exist in and for themselves, because human beings are αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ human beings. With that we have almost arrived at Aristotle.

[—Frede 1967, p. 20]

The reading has its straight-away attractivity, since adopting it helps to more smoothly connect Aristotle’s theory of immanent forms with Plato’s theory of self-subsisting Forms through this “late stage” of Plato, which at least recognised the difference between substantial and accidental Forms, although still required their independent existence. And on the first sight, the interpretation also seems to fit with the text: in the opening of the wider context of the passage at 251a, Plato has Visitor illustrating the problem of calling one thing by many names to Theaetetus by showing him that while we call an individual human being “a man”, we at the same time refer to him by many more names:

We refer to an individual human being, surely, by calling him all sorts of things, applying colours to him, shapes, sizes, and different varieties of badness and goodness; in all of which cases, and tens of thousands of others, we are not only [οὐ μόνον] claiming him to be a human being, but also [ἀλλὰ καὶ] good and an unlimited number of other things. By the same account we treat everything else similarly – positing each thing as one, then proceeding to use many names of it and thus treating it as many. (*Sophist* 251a–b)

Here, “all sorts of things” are always applied to the single “individual human being”. And of this man, “we are *not only* claiming him to be a human being”—that is, being this self-subsisting thing which is human being—, “*but also* good and an unlimited number of other things”—that is, additionally also having all these properties (emphasis mine). By using the Greek form “not only ..., but also ...” [οὐ μόνον ..., ἀλλὰ καὶ ...], the text seems to discriminate between two groups of “things which are”: ones which we could call “self-subsisting” or “substantial” beings, and others which are “dependent” or “accidental” beings. When we now jump back to the sentence we are analysing, it seems reasonable to read into it a precise formulation of this very distinction, as an answer to a problem which is in here only stated and exemplified by the case of an individual human being called by many different names.

Despite the initial plausibility of this reading, there are several caveats to this interpretation, which, I believe, render it unacceptable. The first thing to note is that ***this interpretation presupposes that Plato altogether abandoned separate, self-subsisting Forms.***¹⁵⁹ For substantial beings would not need them, as they are precisely what Forms were supposed to be – self-subsisting beings, which can exist on their own. Opposed to them would be dependent beings which, however, do not need Forms either, as they are dependent on substances, not Forms. Thus both groups would become independent of Forms, for self-subsisting beings exist through themselves, and accidental beings through the former substantial beings.

This, of course, is not a proof *per se* that such reading is incorrect – it is in itself only a formulation of a necessary consequence that needs to be taken into account when attempting to accept this reading or assess its plausibility. Plato might indeed have abandoned his Theory of Forms, and his formulation of this distinction might have been meant precisely as one of the means of communicating such abandonment. What would be gravely suspicious, however, is that he never formulated this abandonment directly, and here in this section, it would follow just as an indirect and not at all proximate (although necessary) implication of a distinction formulated between Being and Difference. Moreover, Plato still called both Being and Difference “kinds” [εἶδη], and it is hard to explain how could the Difference still remain an εἶδος under Aristotelian reading. Thus, adopting this interpretation would not mean just a “slight move” towards Aristotle – quite the opposite, as Frede noted above, “with that we have almost arrived at Aristotle”.

¹⁵⁹ This has already been noted by Frede (1967, p. 21), who however gave no rationale for the conclusion, and only saw as necessary the abandonment of Forms for accidentals. He writes: “Any interpretation of this kind has all odds against it, since it presupposes the abandonment of Platonic Forms, at least for accidentals, if not the abandonment of Forms altogether”.

However, the vital and decisive reasons for rejecting this interpretative line can be discovered when we look again at the immediate context of the sentence and try with this reading to discriminate between the Form of Being and the Form of Difference, allowing the former to be predicated both substantially and dependently, while the latter only dependently. For according to this reading, in “Simmias is human”, *human* is a substantial predicate that is made with reference to the same thing, because *human* (definitionally) is what Simmias is – in other words, it is precisely an existence *as human* (or: existence of human being) that Simmias instantiates. On the other hand, “Simmias is beautiful” is an example of a predicate with reference to some other thing, because *beauty* (or: being beautiful) is (definitionally) *not* what Simmias is – in other words, it is an accident predicated “on top” of Simmias’ being, attributing an additional and non-necessary property to him. Under such a reading, we need to address the question, what would predicating Being look like – and on the topmost level, we have only two variant interpretations, which are unfortunately both equally problematic, although in a different way.

7.2.1 Variant #1: Everything is a predication of Being

One way to understand the distinction is that both “Simmias is human” and “Simmias is beautiful” are predications of Being, first in substantial, second in attributive, dependent mode. But then simply stating “Simmias is” would be entirely impossible to fit into this distinction, since if anything at all, *that* statement should really be a case of predicating Being by itself. But we have already said that the cases of predications of Being by itself are the substantial predicates like “Simmias is human”. Thus, either we have no way of saying that something simply exists under this reading—a feature of an account which is obviously making it unacceptable—, or we need to fit into the same box these two very different kinds of predications.

We might attempt to answer this objection by saying that sentences like “Simmias is” must always be completed by saying “Simmias is [being]” – or, that such completion must always be at least implied, even if not actually added to the sentence. However, this only makes things even more complicated. For then both “Simmias is [being]” and “Simmias is human” are predications of Being in the first sense – but those two sentences claim very different things. If Simmias *is*₁ human because Simmias exemplifies *what it is to be* a human, then by the same token Simmias *is*₁ [being] must exemplify *what it is to be* a being; or even more precisely: *what it is to be* – full stop. That clearly generalises to each

and every substantial being, so every one of them is *what it is to be X*—with *X* standing for a particular kind of substance-being—, and at the same time *what it is to be*, full stop. This creates a multiplicity of different accounts of Being, since each substance provides its own answer to the question *what it is to be* Being (τί ἐστι ὄν), thus creating a particular notion of Being. But that is clearly impossible for Plato, since it was precisely the requirement that there is only one account for each predicate, which allowed the Visitor to separate the Form of Being as a third entity among the Forms of Change and Rest in 250a–b.¹⁶⁰

Another attempt to solve the problem might be to say that when existential “is” is predicated, it must always be completed, but not by Being in general, but always by a specific kind of being which that particular substantial being exemplifies. So “Simmias is” means in fact “Simmias is [(a) human]”, whereas “Rose is” expands to “Rose is [(a) rose]”. But this leads to a situation, where Being is predicated all over the place, yet always only as *Being something*, and never as *Being itself* or *Being simpliciter*. So we end up with a paradoxical account of predicating Being by itself, in which doing so actually requires supplying Being with something which is patently *not* Being itself – namely, some particular *kind of* Being.

All these points clearly contradict not only what the Visitor says on account of Being, but also the purpose of saying that Being can be predicated in itself in the first place. Moreover, not only does such an account of Being clearly obscure what it means to predicate that something (existentially) *is*; depending on the point of view, it actually makes predicating Being either irrelevant (because “Simmias is” and “Simmias is human” both have the same meaning), or altogether impossible (because Being can never be predicated *simpliciter*, always only as a specific *kind of* being).

Lastly, no matter in which way we attempt to solve the problem with predicating existential “is”, it is entirely impossible under this reading to distinguish predicating Being in its dependent mode from predicating Difference. For if the entire range of “things that are” (as tallness or beauty) predicated in a second, dependent way, are all counted as predications of Being, it is questionable why in the same way predicating difference

¹⁶⁰ In this section, both Change and Rest are said “to be” – but since “to be” does not mean either “to be at rest” nor “to be in motion”, “to be” must mean something yet additional: thus, there is a separate, third entity, Being, which is predicated in both cases. If it was allowed that, in the two cases when we say of Change and of Rest that each one “is”, the meaning of “is” in them was actually different, then in the case of Change “is” could mean “is moving” and in the case of Rest it could mean “is at rest” – and thus this proof of the existence of Being would fail.

This has also been noted by Frede: “From the way in which, for example, 250a to b the difference between the Form of Being and the Forms of Movement and Rest is shown, it follows that for Plato in the *Sophist* predicates with different meanings are also assigned different Forms.” (Frede 1967, p. 15).

should not in fact be yet another case of predicating Being in this second way. If the distinctive mark should be that predicating difference requires supplying one more parameter than tallness or beauty, then by the same token we would need to make such a distinction also between the cases of predicating “... is tall” and “... is beautiful” on the one hand, and “... is taller than ...”, and “... is more beautiful than ...” on the other. Thus, we would end up with a following formal division:

Predicating Being in a second, dependent way:

- “Socrates is tall” \Rightarrow Is(Socrates, tall)
- “Socrates is beautiful” \Rightarrow Is(Socrates, beautiful)

Predicating other “things that are” in a second, dependent way:

- “Socrates is different from Simmias” \Rightarrow Different(Socrates, Simmias)
- “Socrates is taller than Simmias” \Rightarrow Taller(Socrates, Simmias)
- “Socrates is more beautiful than Simmias” \Rightarrow MoreBeautiful(Socrates, Simmias)

But this must clearly be rejected, since not only does it create another distinction inside the second kind of predicates, of which there is no trace in Plato’s text, but most importantly, it artificially parcels the role of each “thing that is” and submits part of their ontological responsibility under the role of Being, while keeping other part intact. In other words, it makes part of predicates involving the tallness of some thing to be caused by Being, while other part to be caused by Tallness – and all this without *any* account or reasoning why such an important split is introduced into Plato’s Theory.

Variant #1 in Gill’s reading

Paradoxically as it may sound, we need to ponder over this variant a bit longer, because this is exactly a way in which Gill proposes to understand Being in her *Philosophos*:

The parts of being will be definite beings, such as largeness, beauty, man, ox—indeed any definite thing (categorical or structural, particular or general) there is. [...] Any part of being (particular or general) has a feature of some definite sort, and that is its nature. The statement, “change is, because it partakes of being” (256a1), states of change something quite definite, spelled out by the phrase *auto kath’ hauto* (literally, “itself by itself”): Change is *itself* (changing) *by itself* (in virtue of change). That is what it is for change to be *auto kath’ hauto*, and also what it means to say “change is” (full stop) or “change partakes of being.” [—Gill 2012, p. 165]

Gill proposes to understand every definite being, among which she counts both “substances” as man or ox, and “attributes” as largeness or beauty, as having its own nature: that is, its specific feature by which it was given its name. Under this framework, it would make perfect sense if Gill said that to predicate about each particular being its specific feature counts as a *kath auto* predication. To use Gill’s example, “Change is changing” is that kind of predication, since Change is *itself by itself* changing – whereas predicating the same *change* about any other being would be a case of *pros alla* predication, since no other being has *change* as its nature. What is surprising is that this is *not* how Gill sees it: instead, she tells us in the passage quoted above that predicating *Being* about “any part of being” actually asserts its specific nature about it. Thus, using Gill’s example again, “to say »Change is« (full stop)” in fact asserts something unexpected: namely, that “Change is changing”.

Not only is it unclear what would *pros alla* predication of Being mean under such an account (and whether it is possible at all). But in *kath auto* predications, it is not clear what is the difference between stating that “Change is” and “Change is changing” – that is, what is the difference between predicating Being and predicating Change (and, again, whether the latter is even possible). Thus, in the final analysis, ***Gill’s account makes it impossible to tell from our assertions what are we even predicating, since we seem to assert the specific »nature« of a particular being precisely by predicating its mere »being«.***

But such a framework can be achieved only when we strip Being of its meaning: both of the intuitive one, and the specifically Platonic one. The intuitive meaning is denied because in order to accept Gill’s reading, we need to give up the meaning which, looking at a horse before us, we intuitively confer to the sentence “this horse is” – namely, that it *exists*. This is because by uttering it we actually address (in Gill’s account) its *horse-ness*, instead of its mere *being*. And secondly, Gill’s reading also removes the specifically Platonic meaning from Being, since in Plato’s framework, we are allowed to assert the existence of a specific being *precisely* on the basis of its participating in the Form of Being. But Gill’s account makes it impossible, since to say “this horse is” no longer carries that specific meaning, but instead it simply asserts its *horse-ness*. At the very most, asserting it could perhaps mean that this horse participates in the Form of Horse, but definitely not in the Form of Being as such.

Thus, not only are the meanings of predicating “... is” and “... is being” conflated (which, in itself, does not have to be problematic – as we have seen, Frede did the same thing by requiring that each “complete” predicate is actually at least implicitly completed),

but both of them are additionally mixed with all the other predicates. This is because “any part of being [...] has a feature of some definite sort, and that is its nature” – and in case of that nature, predicating it explicitly (as in “Change is changing”) is the same as saying that this part of being “... is” (as in “Change is”) or that it “... is being” (as in “Change is being”). Furthermore, these predicates no longer carry the meaning which we intuitively want to deliver by those sentences, or which Plato wants to deliver, since they either do not bring in the Form of Being at all, or they necessarily bring it only as accompanying another Form of the specific nature.

Given how drastic this revision of Plato’s metaphysics is, it is striking to me that Gill nevertheless claims it to be happening very silently throughout the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* – without any great fanfare on the side of Plato and without any explicit affirmation from him. She turns thing’s participation in Being into simply being what it is for that thing to be, that is, being its nature – and *by being this nature* it participates in its own way in Being. This is understandable in her project where Gill differentiates “between categorial and structural kinds”, in which Being belongs between structural ones which “have exclusively structural content and lack categorial content”.¹⁶¹ But this is *not* a way Plato conceived participation in Being, firstly because there is suddenly no single *εἶδος* responsible for each thing’s being, and secondly because the way Gill’s beings participate in being is in fact not a *participation in* the Form of Being, but *being part of* the abstract totality of being. That very well might be a better way to understand being (and it is roughly a way which Aristotle decided to take), but nevertheless it is a completely different account from that which Plato offers us.¹⁶²

7.2.2 Variant #2: Nothing is a predication of Being

Alternatively, we can mean by this interpretation that neither “Simmius is human” nor “Simmius is beautiful” are predications of Being. Quite the opposite, Being is not predicated here at all, since the first is a predication of Humanity in the first, substantial sense, while the second is a predication of Beauty in the second, attributive sense. Then the question arises, what *would* be a case of predicating Being? The answer which instantly

¹⁶¹ Gill 2012, p. 151. Note that the difference is between *kinds*, not *Forms*. Gill makes Plato shift from Forms to kinds in the *Parmenides*, *Sophist* and *Theaetetus*; makes him introduce the difference between categorial and structural kinds; makes him introduce the difference between self-subsisting “substantial” and dependent “accidental” kinds; and finally makes him give up the separation of Forms – all of this is done, in my view, without any clear indication in Plato’s texts themselves.

¹⁶² Moreover, it is completely unclear what should be done with other Forms. What is, in Gill’s account, the purpose of the Form of Man, or the Form of Beauty, when already asserting Being itself means asserting specific natures the things have?

offers itself for predications of the first sense might be the existential uses of “is”, where we simply assert the mere existence itself of some substance, as when we say that “Simmias is”. This is obviously problematic, since it is not at all clear why should such a usage of “is” be understood as a substantial predication in the first place. But the second sense of predicating Being—which must be possible, according to Visitor—is even more problematic. Similarly to the *Interpretation A*, there is nothing left to supply to these predicates, since all the “things that are” are already expressed on their own either in dependent way (as with beauty) or in substantial way (as with humanity).

Thus, there is only one meaningful way to predicate Being, and that is in its substantial usage, expressed by existential “is”, and we are at loss in identifying a dependent use of Being. But in contrast to *Interpretation A*, the problem with finding a second, dependent way of predicating a “thing that is”, generalises to predicates other than being: *in every case where a “thing that is” can be predicated in the first way, it is impossible to find a way to predicate it in the second way*. And that only makes sense, because if we definitionally understand the first way as predicating something substantively, *as what a thing is*, we would have to convert that feature into a mere property to use it in the second, dependent way. Thus, there would have to be two ways of predicating humanity: one in a substantial sense, claiming about a thing that *it is* (a) human, and the other in an attributive sense, claiming about a thing which is patently *not* a human, that *it has* humanity – that it somehow is human-like without *being* human. But that clearly defeats the purpose of the distinction between self-subsisting (substantial) and dependent (accidental) beings. And it violates the immediate context of the sentence, since the Visitor clearly marked Being as one of those “things that are”, which can be predicated in both ways – but, since we are unable to find *any* dependent way of predicating being, and a substantial one only with great difficulties, this variant clearly shows itself as not viable.

7.2.3 An underlying problem with both variants of *Interpretation B*

Besides their specific problems which we saw above, both alternatives also have one common interpretative issue: *predicating Being in its existential sense requires that Being itself is a substance*, since that, by definition of this interpretation, is the meaning of predicating a “thing that is” in its first sense. That would present no problem in an interpretation where the first use is reserved for Forms, since Forms *are* self-subsisting beings and it is possible to think of an interpretation of Plato’s Theory of Forms where

there is both a Form of Being and also (arguably) a Form of Human (and, in general, a Form for each “substantial” predicate). But our interpretation requires that these substantial beings are sensible particulars, since “Simmias is a human” is a case of predication in its first, substantial sense – either predicating Humanity (second alternative) or Being (first alternative). But the existential “is”—if it is to be allowed at all and if it should remain meaningful to predicate it—must somehow differ from “specific” substantial predications as “Simmias is (a) human” or “White is (a) colour”, which substantializes the Being itself.

Now, Being itself clearly exists for Plato – the Visitor distinguishes it as one of the great kinds (*megista gene*) in 250a–c, as we have already seen. But the problem arises from our interpretation, which claims that predications of the first kind are all those which assign a substantial predicate to their subject. In itself, such reading does not directly *reject* self-subsisting Forms, but it makes them highly irrelevant and perhaps redundant (as we have already seen), since per this reading, each particular can have its own substance predicated *in and by itself* alone. Thus, “Simmias is (a) human”, “Bucephalus is (a) horse”, and “(this) hammer is (a) hammer” – each one of them being what it is *in and by itself*, meaning in turn that Humanity, Horse-ness and Hammer-ness exist in them, respectively, and it is not immediately clear why should they also exist *independently of them*.

But if it should be allowed that Being *as such* can be predicated – that is, not only *as some specific kind of being*, but merely *as being simpliciter*, then it is required that there is such a self-subsisting being which (definitionally) is simply being. For if Being can be predicated in some cases (= at least in one single case) *in and by itself*, then this cannot be predicated of nothing else than simply the substantial Being itself. Simmias (nor any other substance) will do, because each of these substances (definitionally) is that specific kind of being (Simmias is a man, this hammer is a hammer), but not being *simpliciter*. Thus, while this interpretative line seems to put an end to self-subsisting Forms by making all substantial predicates simply refer to self-subsisting particulars, it at the same time either needs to postulate a particular which will merely be a “Being *simpliciter*”, or it needs to keep at the very least the substantial Form of Being.¹⁶³ But if at least one substantial Form is kept, it is questionable why other Forms shouldn’t remain likewise – as we noticed, there is nothing *inherently* opposed to the existence of self-subsisting Forms in this reading itself.

¹⁶³ This collides even more directly with Gill’s variant of the interpretation, since in Gill’s reading, the mistake of “early Plato” was precisely in separating Forms: “To judge from the second part of the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, Plato [...] gives up both components of the Separation Assumption and treats forms as immanent in their participants.” (Gill 2012, p. 38 – for additional confirmations of this, see also pages 9–10, 90, 217 and 233–235).

However, an account where there are both self-subsisting Forms existing *in and by themselves*, and also self-subsisting particulars equally existing *in and by themselves*, defeats the purpose of postulating the Forms in the first place. If Forms explain nothing and are needed for nothing, then they should not be postulated at all and the Theory of Forms must be dropped as superfluous. With this, we have come close to the Separation argument of the dialogue *Parmenides*, where at 133a–134e Parmenides as part of his criticisms puts forward an idea that Forms have absolutely no relation to our world, and thus are unknowable to us. However, as we are aware, the need for Forms was already confirmed in the *Parmenides* just a few lines later, and that by Parmenides himself and under pain of entirely destroying “the power and significance of thought and discourse” (135b–c). And just as Forms were at the end of the day proclaimed necessary in the *Parmenides*, so too they must be postulated here in the *Sophist*, since otherwise no coherent meaning can be found for the difference which the Visitor has formulated in the sentence, and consequently for the passage constituting its immediate context.

7.3 *Interpretation C: A distinction between beings referenced to themselves and beings referenced to other things*

After reviewing two standard developmentalist interpretations of the sentence and analysing their weaknesses, I would like to propose the third interpretation as a more plausible unitarian alternative to both of them. As I already outlined, this is an interpretation of Michael Frede, put forward mainly in his 1967 dissertation *Prädikation und Existenzaussage*. Frede’s account both was and was not successful in convincing other Platonic scholars about his own interpretation. It was successful to the extent that it helped to correct some of the then-standard errors in translating the critical *Sophist* passage 255c–e. The qualitative difference can clearly be seen between the pre-Fredean translations of the sentence 255c12–13 of Taylor, Fowler and Jowett; and between those written after his treatise, as White’s, Leigh’s and Rowe’s. Even Cornford’s translation, although superior to other translations chronologically close to it, clearly still belongs to pre-Fredean group and shares some of their problems, such as the problematic position of “ἄει” (always) in the sentence, or arbitrary insertion of a predicate “being what they are” into the sentence. After publication of Frede’s analysis, it was simply impossible to read the sentence, or the whole passage, in the same way as before – in this sense, Frede’s account was highly influential and its important impact stretches to this day.

On the other hand, Frede's interpretation as a whole was more often misread than understood correctly, and to this extent it was unsuccessful in convincing the critics of the true nature of the division Plato wanted to establish in the passage we are currently analysing. No doubt this was caused to a high degree by Frede's extremely dense and sometimes almost unintelligible way of argumentation, occasionally combined with an inexcusable brevity of his own positive proposals, or even an entire lack, at some points, of drawing the consequences of his reading (and perhaps even the fact that it was only written in German and never translated).¹⁶⁴

My exposition of Frede's account will therefore have three aspects: *first* and most importantly, I will simply follow Frede's reading, while at the same time trying to better explain what he meant by it – this will be the main aim of the current subchapter. *Second*, I will show some of the consequences of his reading which Frede did not explicitly draw (and perhaps did not see), but which should nevertheless be fully compatible with his own account (as opposed to, for example, Fiona Leigh's account, which I will comment and disagree with *in passim*). And *third*, I will try to respond to the most important criticisms raised against his account. This will be the main aim of the following chapter, whereas the second aspect will be present both in this subchapter, and the following chapter.

7.3.1 The division of predicates in Frede's interpretation

As we have already discussed,¹⁶⁵ the passage 255c12–13 contains two different divisions: *the division of predicates* and *the division of beings*. Contrary to some common interpretations, Frede argued that the former division is merely instrumental for Plato's purposes, since it is the latter division that Plato aims to introduce, and the division of predicates is simply and only a means to formulate it. The division, Frede stressed, is

¹⁶⁴ As was well noted by Fiona Leigh in her 2012 article. On pages 4–7, she attempted to reconstruct Frede's account as genuinely as possible, yet she notes (p. 5, note 11): "What follows is my interpretation of Frede's account of the argument of the distinctness of Being and Difference at *Sph.* 255c–e, since as far as I can make out he does not anywhere in his rather terse and at times difficult *Prädikation und Existenzaussage* confine himself to setting out a straightforward positive reading of the argument. I have tried as far as possible to stick to a fair and reasonable representation of his reading."

Leigh was right to note that Frede's account is "rather terse and at times difficult". Frede analyses and refutes other interpretations with great scrutiny, and displays the same rigour when building his own account, yet he is very ungenerous when it comes to "connecting the dots" and providing the reader with a concise summary of the argument and, most importantly, its implications. (Still, if only every dissertation carried so important observations that it would earn itself so many readings as Frede's one!)

Despite all this, some of Leigh's observations of Frede's account are in direct contradiction even with things Frede formulates explicitly – with her claim that Frede understands the distinction at 255c12–13 as an "absolute / relative distinction" or as "distinguishing irreflexive relative terms from absolute terms" being two of those most important errors.

¹⁶⁵ See subchapter 7.1.1 *Contrasting the absolute – relative division with the two divisions in the text*.

ultimately not about predicates themselves, but about the underlying ontological difference between the two kinds of beings:

It also would be a mistake to think, [...] that the distinction of the two uses is supposed to be a grammatical or logical distinction, if by this we mean a distinction that can be made independently of the metaphysics we rely on. [—Frede 1992, p. 402]

In order to properly interpret Frede's reading, it is imperative to first correctly understand the essence of the former division. *The basic difference between the two kinds of statements that the division introduces, lies in the numerical identity and difference, respectively, of their subjects and objects with reference to which the predicates are stated.* In other words, we can construct the predicate P said of a subject a with reference to object b as a pair $P(a, b)$. Then the difference between *kath auto* and *pros alla* predications might be fittingly expressed with the condition “ a is numerically different from b ”, which the *kath auto* statements about the things “spoken of in and by themselves” do not (and must not) meet, while the *pros alla* statements about the things “spoken of in relation to others” do (and must) meet.

Frede's argument is strenuous, at times confusing, and spans over 8 pages of difficult-to-read text.¹⁶⁶ But in a nutshell, it is construed as a proof by contradiction: let us pretend that the condition is actually irrelevant to the argument in the passage. Then, Frede claims, Plato's aim to isolate the Being and the Difference as separate Forms, which is the immediate context of the sentence, will ultimately fail. Let us retrace the steps of Frede's argument: we know that the Being can be predicated in both ways, while the Difference only in the second, *pros alla* way – this constitutes the proof of their difference for Plato. How can the difference between these two ways be formulated in terms of the formalised pair $P(a, b)$? Applied to Being, the difference in two ways of predicating it is this:¹⁶⁷

- (III) If an object a is truthfully said to be, then in some cases the following condition *is not* satisfied: there is an object b such that, with respect to b , a is said to be, and b is an object different from a . [= Being predicated *kath auto*]
- (II) If an object a is truthfully said to be, then in some cases the following condition *is* satisfied: there is an object b such that, with respect to b , a is said to be, and b is an object different from a . [= Being predicated *pros alla*]

¹⁶⁶ One needs to consult pages 12–19 and mentally connect *all* the specific subarguments into one united argument to actually apprehend the proof that Frede is construing.

¹⁶⁷ I directly quote the (translated) conditions as Frede formulated them on pp. 13–14. For the sake of clarity, I am listing them in different order, but I kept the original numbering Frede assigned to each condition, so that it can be compared with the original in his paper.

In the case of the Difference, however, a parallel to (III) can not be construed, because it does not exist – Difference can not be predicated *kath auto*. Thus, all we are left with is a second way of predicating it, which is parallel to (II), but since it is the only option of predicating the Difference, we may change its qualifier from “some cases” to “all cases”:

(I) If an object *a* is truthfully said to be different, then in all cases the following condition is satisfied: there is an object *b* such that, with respect to *b*, *a* is said to be different, and *b* is an object different from *a*. [= Difference predicated *pros alla*]

With this, the distinction between the Being and the Difference is clearly established. Moreover, the reading has an intuitive meaning: being can be predicated of something either with reference to itself, or to (numerically) other thing, while difference only of a thing with reference to other, (numerically) different thing.

When we now take the condition (“and *b* is an object different from *a*”) away and rephrase these formulations accordingly—following Frede, let us call them (III A) and (II A)—, the only possible remaining difference between the two ways of predicating Being is that while in one case the object *b* (with respect to which *a* is said to be) does not exist, while in the other it does. In other words, in *kath auto* predications the object *b* is not relevant in the formulation of the condition, since the object *a* is not related to it in any way, while *pros alla* predications still require this object *b*, with reference to which they are made. Formally, the *kath auto* predications can now be stated simply as $P(a)$, while the *pros alla* retain the original form $P(a, b)$ – with a remark for object *b*, that although it *might be* numerically different from *a*, it *does not have* to be. So we may update the conditions accordingly one last time:

(III A*) If an object *a* is truthfully said to be, then in some cases the following condition is satisfied: there is no object with respect to which *a* is said to be.
[= Being predicated *kath auto*]

(II A*) If an object *a* is truthfully said to be, then in some cases the following condition is satisfied: there is an object *b* such that, with respect to *b*, *a* is said to be.
[= Being predicated *pros alla*]

This has basically led us straight to *Interpretation A*, and it is now clear why for so many scholars it was tempting to call *kath auto* predications “absolute”, and contrast them with *pros alla* predications which they would label “relative”. However, on top of those reasons already discussed in our analysis of *Interpretation A*, one more point against this

reading can now be observed.¹⁶⁸ For if we read the distinction in this way, we are forced to allow *pros alla* predications of Difference relating it to the subject itself. For if we retain for the *pros alla* predications the original form $P(a, b)$, but at the same time remove the condition of numerical distinctness between the objects a and b —which Frede required and, as I am convinced, Plato undoubtedly wanted to deliver with the sentence—then we allow that of any possible object a , its difference can be stated with reference to the very same object a . Formally, we would express such predicates as $P(a, a)$ – or even more precisely $\text{Different}(a, a)$. And unless one is convinced that Plato is here merely playing a linguistic game, such reading which leads to a conclusion that an object can be truthfully said to be different from itself, should be seen as altogether unacceptable. Thus, the conclusion is this: ***If we do not base the division of predicates on the numerical sameness and difference of their respective subjects and objects, there is no way to maintain the validity of Plato’s argument in the immediate context of the passage for the distinction between the Form of Being and the Form of Difference.*** As Frede concluded,

(II A) and (III A) do not seem to suffice to explain the difference between the Form of Being and the Form of the Different; consequently, when interpreting the paragraph, one will have to start with (II) and (III) instead of (II A) and (III A). Moreover, the failure of (II A) and (III A) suggests that the second part of the condition not only cannot be deleted, but is essential to the argument. [—Frede 1967, pp. 16–17]

The fact that the difference between *kath auto* and *pros alla* predications might be fittingly captured by them (not) satisfying the condition “ a is numerically different from b ”, led Frede to slightly alter the translation of the *kath auto* qualifier. Instead of the usual translations among the lines of “in itself” (Cornford); “in and by itself” (Rowe); “itself by itself” (Leigh) or “by itself” (White), he chose “with reference to itself” as better representing the contrast with the *pros alla* qualifier and the fact that the complement of the predicate is still needed even in *kath auto* predications:

But if this must be what is meant, then instead of “in and for itself” two other translations for “ $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$ καθ’ $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}$ ” suggest themselves: “on the basis of its own” [*auf Grund seiner selbst*] or better “with reference to itself” [*mit Bezug auf es selbst*]. [—Frede 1967, p. 27]

This then projects into Frede’s provisional translation of the *kath auto* – *pros alla* distinction in the passage 255c12–13, which he (a page later) applies to the Being in the following way:

¹⁶⁸ Frede formulates additional reasons for rejecting this reading on pages 15–16, based on the necessity of understanding the “... is ...” used in predicates as referring to the same Being.

Von dem Seienden wird
das eine mit Bezug auf sich selbst,¹⁶⁹
das andere mit Bezug auf etwas anderes seiend genannt.

Of that which is,
one is called being with reference to itself,
the other with reference to something else.

[—Frede 1967, p. 28]

7.3.2 The division of beings in Frede’s interpretation

We can now turn our attention to the second and more important division introduced with the sentence at 255c12–13: *the division of beings*. According to Frede, the division of τὰ ὄντα or the “things that are” builds upon the proper reading of the division of predicates which we just analysed, but we yet need to see exactly how. Let us recall the sentence in Greek:

[ἀλλ’ οἶμαι σε συγχωρεῖν] τῶν ὄντων
τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά,
τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄλλα ἀεὶ **λέγεσθαι**.

The sentence itself claims that some predicate is said [λέγεσθαι] about some subject, and the “τὰ μὲν ... τὰ δὲ ...” division introduces a complete disjunction between two groups:

“τὰ μὲν ... τὰ δὲ ...” assumes some class *A* that has two element-unrelated subclasses *A1* and *A2*, such that each element of *A* must be an element of *A1* or *A2*, but cannot be an element of *A1* and *A2* at the same time. [...] The only problem is what the sets *A*, *A1* and *A2* are.

[—Frede 1967, p. 19]

Ultimately, these groups might either divide that *what* is being predicated, or that *of which* something is predicated. In other words, either the two groups are created of *the predicates themselves*, or of *the subjects of these predicates*. Adopting the first option would lead us again close to the *Interpretation A*, since then the whole point of the division would be of a linguistic nature: to discern between two ways in which we state our predicates. Under this reading, how things really are might still be relevant, but is not ultimately what Plato wants to express with the division. However, Frede noticed that such reading, where the focus of the division is not at all on the subject, is in sharp contrast with the fact that the Visitor brings “that which is” into explicit focus by starting the whole

¹⁶⁹ The other alternative which Frede proposed (on p. 27) instead of “mit Bezug auf sich selbst” (but which he nevertheless considered inferior) was “auf Grund seiner selbst” [“on the basis of its own”].

sentence with “τῶν ὄντων”, and does so in a context where grammatically, the sentence would do even without it:

All interpretations of this kind have one weakness in common: it is true that for Plato the things that can be predicated of something must be; in this context, however, according to this interpretation, the “τῶν ὄντων” in 255c12 is completely superfluous, because it could also be called: “... συγχωρεῖν τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄλλα ἀεὶ λέγεσθαι”. But nothing is more natural than to assume that here, where the difference between being and different is to be shown, the “τῶν ὄντων” cannot be without meaning.

[—Frede 1967, p. 23]

Therefore, instead of trying to map the division onto predicates themselves,¹⁷⁰ we should adopt the second option by “relating »τῶν ὄντων τὰ μὲν ... τὰ δὲ ...« to the totality of objects in general, about which something is then said” (p. 23). Frede observes how this totality of objects is divided on the examples of the Forms of Being and Difference. We have already seen that *being* belongs to both groups, because while some of the things that are said to “be” can be said so (i.e., to be) *kath auto*, others can be said to “be” *pros alla*. On the other hand, 255d1 tells us that the situation is different with the Different, since “the different is always said in relation to another” [τὸ δὲ γ’ ἕτερον ἀεὶ πρὸς ἕτερον]. The meaning of this is then immediately explained by Visitor in 255d3–7:

It would not be [= always said in relation to another], if being and difference were not very much distinct. If difference shared in both classes in the way that being does, then among the differents, too, there would be a different that was not in relation to something else, whereas as things are we find that whatever is different simply cannot fail to be what it is, namely different, in relation to something else.

(*Sophist* 255d)

Thus, *different* belongs only to the latter group, because the things that are said to “be different” can only be said so (i.e., to be different) *pros alla*. But this also expressly reveals what *pros alla* must mean: that it must be taken “strictly”, in Frede’s words, as a relation to something numerically different, since otherwise the meaning itself of what it is to be *different* from something is put at danger. Now, since both Being and Difference pervade all things (259a), the examples of attributing *being* and *difference* to the totality of objects are enough for us to observe that they create two mutually exclusive classes of objects:

Objects of **Class F** are called:

being with reference to themselves,
different with reference to others.

¹⁷⁰ Frede provides more detailed analysis of the first option under the options (A) and (B) on pages 20–23.

Objects of **Class P** are called:

being with reference to others,
different with reference to others.

With respect to the sets *A1* and *A2* which Frede linked to the respective parts of the “τὰ μὲν ... τὰ δὲ ...” division, we might rephrase the description of both classes of objects by saying that objects of *class F* are those sometimes called with reference to themselves, sometimes with reference to others – that is, speaking of them includes predicates from both sets *A1* and *A2*. On the other hand, objects of *class P* are those always called with reference to others, so speaking of them includes only predicates from the set *A2*.

Thus, we have at last arrived at *the division of beings*, to which so many commentators pay so little attention. Only objects of *class F* can *ever* be called something with reference to themselves, but even of those we cannot predicate everything they are *only* with reference to themselves. On the other hand, there is a vast plurality of objects belonging to the *class P*, which are called everything they are always with reference to *other* things. Frede sees in the division of beings the distinction between Forms and sensible particulars, where only Forms are the kind of things that can be said to be some things by themselves, while everything that can be predicated of particulars must be said so only with reference to some Form. Having made this important observation, Frede dedicated a separate subchapter of his dissertation to comment on this.¹⁷¹ He notes that *the division of predicates* would not be sufficient for Plato, for what he was ultimately after is *the division of beings*, which would allow him to differentiate between how Forms can have *some* of their properties on the one hand, and between how particulars have *all* their properties on the other:

We do not obtain a complete disjunction of ὄντα—Forms on the one hand and particulars on the other—if we form two classes of objects, of which the elements of the first class are called being with reference to themselves, the elements of the second class with reference to something else. [...] Such a complete division of objects into Forms on the one hand and particulars on the other can easily be achieved, however, if one restricts membership of the second class to things that are always called being only with reference to others. This eliminates Forms as elements of the second class, and particulars remain.

[—Frede 1967, p. 35]

¹⁷¹ Frede 1967, subchapter “III.5. *The distinction between Forms and particulars by means of the two uses of »... is ...«*” [Eine Unterscheidung von Formen und Einzeldingen mit Hilfe der beiden Verwendungen von “... ist ...”], pp. 35–37.

And he adds that “it is obviously precisely this complete division that Plato has in mind in 255c12–13”.¹⁷² However, only a few commentators have recognised the importance of Frede’s reading of the distinction, and even in those rare cases it had more often than not been misunderstood.

7.3.3 The importance of the division

The importance of this division—if the plausibility of Frede’s reading can be maintained—is far-reaching. The division of beings is Plato’s solution to the puzzles of *Parmenides*, where the interlocutors have realised that the Form of One, in order to *be* at all, had to be somehow allowed to be attributed—on top of simply being *one*, also—many other different things, which it is not by itself. At the same time, the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction serves as a means allowing Plato to answer the question, how can we maintain the fundamental difference of Forms from particular things, even though we allow them to participate in each other in the very same way as particulars do, and by this we allowed Forms to gain many different properties, some of which are opposite and contradictory. Forms still keep their ontological primacy, because only they have essences which are responsible for the fact that all of the τὰ ὄντα—Forms and particulars likewise—which participate in them gain the characteristic of that particular essence.

If we recall our logical analysis of the second question of the *Parmenides*—that is, why was the challenge of the statement at 129b troubling for Socrates—, it is now clear why for so many developmentalist-minded scholars the negative reading was the only solution. We have seen that, behind the impossibility of the compresence of opposites in Forms, commonly held by these scholars, even more basic impossibility of the multiplicity of characteristics lurks. If we start from the premise that Plato held, in his naïve Theory, some variant of the doctrine of atomicity of Forms, we inevitably end with the need to introduce *some* kind of development into Plato’s Theory, since otherwise no single coherent reading can be found for it. The *Sophist* does not display a preoccupation with the problem of the compresence of opposites in Forms, yet those critics who read Socrates’ amazement in the *Parmenides* negatively, will find in the introduction of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction of the *Sophist* a development of Plato’s doctrine, since if Socrates’ amazement was meant as an impossibility, then the main distinction of the *Sophist* claims otherwise and is simply in contradiction with the *Parmenides*.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 36.

The upshot is that once we accept the premise that the Theory of Forms is inconsistent between pre-Parmenidean and post-Parmenidean dialogues, we open up for the possibility of crossing out, within reasonable limits, *any* specific feature of Plato's Theory as no longer valid after the *Parmenides*. Then building up our own interpretation of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction and the development of the doctrine it encompassed is only a matter of connecting the remaining dots. Naturally, such an approach allows many different concurrent readings of what the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction was meant to do, each one of them crossing one feature out of the Theory, and each equally coherent with the rest of it. Unsurprisingly, that is precisely what happened in Plato's scholarship. We have many interpretations, because all of them allow themselves to cross out some or other feature of the Theory. Some scholars, with Gill on the lead, crossed the separation of the Forms out of the Theory. Others have claimed that Plato was not able, before the *Sophist*, to properly distinguish between absolute and relative statements, which caused all the confusions of the *Parmenides*. Leigh offered a twist of this reading by introducing into the Theory a distinction between absolute properties and relative properties, which she claims was always present in Plato, but which itself in fact heavily relies on the notions of property-bearers and property-attributes, a distinction which is nowhere to be found in Plato's works.

Development sometimes occurs in philosophical doctrines, but I maintain that if a consistent reading of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction—explaining the problems of the *Parmenides* without having to discard some old feature of the Theory of Forms or introduce a new one—can be found, then no such development should be read into Plato. I have shown, in explaining the fine points of Frede's account, how his reading of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction offers precisely this kind of coherent interpretation of Plato's Theory of Forms. It has been misinterpreted and criticised, partially justly because of the extremely hard style of its author, partially unjustly because it is still the best attempt to offer a coherent reading of Plato's Theory of Forms. Insofar as these criticisms are valid (or seem to be valid according to the best of my understanding of Frede's account), I will deal with them in the following chapter.

8 Criticisms and problems of Frede's account

In the previous chapter, I have offered three families of interpretations for the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction in the *Sophist* 255c passage – two of them developmentalist in their substance, the other unitarian. In my analysis insofar, I have tried to show that the *Interpretation A* and *Interpretation B* are insufficient, most importantly because of their common feature that they breach the requirements of both the immediate and the wider context of the sentence, although in different ways. Instead, I have presented Frede's approach as *Interpretation C*, which has an immediate plausibility in that it honours both contexts of the sentence 255c12–13, and does not require postulating a significant change in Plato's thinking since pre-Parmenidean dialogues.

However, Frede's account has its own problems and this chapter will focus on some of the most important criticisms aimed at his reading. According to my reading of Frede, most of these objections are simply wrong either by misconstruing his account, or by holding assumptions about Plato's Theory of Forms which Frede did not hold and which are in my understanding erroneous. To counter these criticisms, I will offer in this chapter my own answers, which nevertheless I believe Frede himself would provide if he was tasked with these problems. Thus, in doing so, I will stay within his own account, but I will try to explain some of the problematic points better or in more detail than Frede did, since I believe most of the criticisms are caused not so much by the *substance* of Frede's account, but by the (at times very imperfect) *formulation* of it.

In answering these objections, it will not be my aim to prove that Frede's account is unproblematic or without drawbacks – merely to show that there is a consistent unitarian reading of the central passage of the *Sophist*, the importance of which was underrated due to misinterpretations—although it was certainly not overlooked—, and which, to my knowledge, has not been refuted to this day.

8.1 Leigh's criticism of Frede's account

In her article, Leigh raises “two serious obstacles”¹⁷³ to accepting Frede's interpretation, which his account faces together with the traditional interpretation. The first

¹⁷³ Leigh 2012, p. 9.

one concerns the self-predication theory of Forms, the latter the questionable importance of the verb ‘to be’ in Frede’s account.

8.1.1 Difference cannot be different, thus self-predication is denied to it

The first objection is that Frede’s account disallows self-predicating “difference” to the Form of Difference itself. This follows from the fact that “difference” can only be said *pros alla*, as Stranger tells us at 255d5–7. But since Frede’s “strict” understanding of the *pros alla* predications requires the predicate in them to be numerically distinct from the subject, this rules out the possibility of saying that the Form of Difference is different:

[In Frede’s interpretation] The Stranger concludes at d5–7 that of necessity anything that is different is so relative to a numerically distinct thing. [...] But this simply does not square with a central and pervasive feature of Form theory in the dialogues: self-predication as expressive of a Form’s nature, in the case of the Form, Difference. It is different by Plato’s lights, in the sense that it is what it is to be different – this is the Form’s nature.

[—Leigh 2012, pp. 9–10]

It is important to notice that Leigh’s formulation of the objection reveals that she is pointing at two different problems at once: *first*, the question whether each Form can be self-predicated, and *second*, whether sentences “expressive of a Form’s nature” can be categorised as self-predications. In my view, neither of these points is self-evident, but Leigh apparently assumes both of them to be true – which is perhaps the reason why she mixes them together and expresses them as conflated in a single objection. I will not deal with the latter, finer point of the objection, since properly addressing that point would require a separate account. Still, I would like to add that treating sentences of the form “the Form of *F* is what is it to be *F*-like” as *prima facie* self-predications is a dubious enterprise, and it is questionable (or, at least not at all self-evident) whether we can flatly assert that a simple sentence of the form “the Form of *F* is *F*-like” bears exactly the same meaning.

However, it is in fact not necessary to address this latter point in order to reject Leigh’s objection as a whole, since her entire objection hangs on the former assumption: that is, on the general self-predication theory, according to which it is true of each Form of *F*, that it is *F*-like. If this assumption of Leigh would show itself to be incorrect, the entire objection would be invalidated with it. With regard to this former assumption that self-predication is “a central and pervasive feature of Form theory”, as Leigh formulated it, later in the work I will dedicate a whole chapter to address this question.¹⁷⁴ I will show in it

¹⁷⁴ See chapter 9 *Self-predication and Forms*.

that this assumption—however widespread in platonic scholarship—must simply be wrong, because it is incompatible with the content of earlier dialogues. Thus, in the course of that chapter it will become clear that Leigh’s objection is invalid, since one of its assumptions does not hold.

8.1.2 The doubtful importance of the verb ‘to be’

The second objection is more serious and is directly connected with Frede’s translation of Plato’s text itself. Before we let Leigh state her objection, let us return to the sentence at 255c12–13 first and compare the Greek original with Frede’s translation (my rendering of the sentence in English is somewhat unnatural and clumsy – this is deliberate, since I wanted it to closely mirror the structure of the sentence in both the Greek original and Frede’s German translation of the sentence):

[ἀλλ’ οἱμαί σε συγχορεῖν] τῶν ὄντων	Of that which is,
τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά,	one with reference to itself,
τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄλλα ἀεὶ λέγεσθαι.	the other with reference to something else
	<i>is called being.</i>

As we can see, there are two striking differences between the original Greek and Frede’s translation (highlighted with bolded emphasis in the text above). The first one is the missing translation of “ἀεὶ” [*always*]. This dissimilarity is unproblematic given that it is a part of Frede’s plan of argument: he presents the translation as “provisional” precisely on the basis of the fact that he was at this point deliberately disregarding the “ἀεὶ” (p. 27), since he wanted to address its translation later in the text (p. 36 ff.). The second difference is that there is nothing in the original Greek that corresponds to “is being” or “is existing” [*seiend*] in Frede’s rendering of the text – and it is this discrepancy that will be the crux of Leigh’s objection.

Some scholars have avoided the problem of the “missing predicate” by translating λέγεσθαι as “said” or “spoken of” instead of Frede’s “called” [*genannt*], thus requiring no completion by a further predicate. Naturally, by doing so they all assigned a different meaning to Plato’s sentence than Frede. According to their rendering, the αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά and πρὸς ἄλλα qualifiers refer directly to τὰ ὄντα, as we can see, for example, from the translations of Leigh, White or Taylor:

Leigh (2012): ... of the beings, some are said themselves by themselves, while others are always said relative to others.
--

White (1997): ... some of those which are said by themselves, but some are always said in relation to other things.

Taylor (1961): Still I conceive you will grant that some entities are spoken of as absolutes, others always as relative to others.

The problem with this understanding of the sentence, as Frede already argued,¹⁷⁵ is that it treats *αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά* and *πρὸς ἄλλα* qualifiers as predicates, by which we assign a peculiar kind of properties to τὰ ὄντα: namely that some of them are “καθ' αὐτό”, while others are “πρὸς ἄλλο”:

The main flaw in such a view seems to me to be that *πρὸς ἄλλα* and *αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά*, if the translations are taken literally, are treated as properties of things. [...] It is completely unclear what these properties are supposed to be, and no other examples of such use of “πρὸς ἄλλα” or “αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά” can be given. [—Frede 1967, p. 24]

Reading “καθ' αὐτό” and “πρὸς ἄλλο” as predicates brings us directly to the *Interpretation B* (or in any case very close to it). For then we can say that the *being* of Socrates is said “καθ' αὐτό”, since it is said absolutely, while his other characteristics would be said only “πρὸς ἄλλο”, since they are said relatively to him. This is because only Socrates exists absolutely as a *man*, a self-subsisting being, while his other properties exist only relatively, since they are dependent on his being: for example his property of being *different* from Simmias. This line of reasoning shares all the problems of the *Interpretation B*, the most critical of them probably being that “in it, the being does not differ at all from the different”, as explained by Frede:

With such an interpretation, the Form of Being is obviously assigned only one use of “... is”, namely “... is” in the sense of “exists”; at any rate, that seems to be what is meant when it is said of Being in contrast to the Different that it is absolute. For as a Form, the Different is just as self-existent as the Being. But how is one to understand the remark that the Being, as opposed to the Different, partakes in both forms referred to in 255d4–5? [—Frede 1967, p. 24]

Rejecting this line of reasoning, however, leads us to the situation where we are missing a predicate in Visitor’s sentence, as Frede noticed:

Now, if it is factually impossible to understand “πρὸς ἄλλα” and “αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά” as predicates, which would also be very difficult linguistically, then we seem to get into the somewhat unfortunate position of having to add some predicates. [—Frede 1967, p. 25]

¹⁷⁵ See Frede’s analysis of the option (C) on pages 23–25.

He resolved the situation by supplying “being” into the sentence, which resulted in the provisional translation we have already seen above. And not only did Frede introduce into his translation something that simply isn’t there in the original, but he also seems to lay a special importance on the verb “to be”, since he called the following third chapter of his thesis “The two uses of »... is ...«”, and one of his main aims in the chapter is to show that “Plato attaches special importance to this distinction between the two uses of »... is ...«” (p. 29). It is this artificially looking supplementation of *being* and the accompanying emphasis on the verb “to be” that seems to be the point against which Leigh objects:

It is not at all obvious that uses or senses of the verb ‘to be’ play any role whatsoever in the argument. If the argument did turn on uses of this verb, in such a way that Plato was availing himself of some familiar distinction but applying it to the case of being, then we would expect to see these uses highlighted, or at least clearly demonstrated or explicitly mentioned in the course of the argument. But we do not. Indeed, all we are told is contained in the Stranger’s opening remark, which does not contain a verbal form of ‘to be’, that ‘of the beings, some are said themselves by themselves, while others are always said relative to others’.

[—Leigh 2012, pp. 10–11]

And in the footnote immediately appended to this text, she further adds:

To be sure, the verb ‘to be’ could be supplied at c13–14, since λέγεσθαι is open to being read there as λέγεσθαι εἶναι. However, if this was Plato’s main point in the argument (and, according to some commentators, in the whole dialogue) it is mysterious, to say the least, why he chose to elide the verb ‘to be’.

[—Leigh 2012, p. 11, n. 22]

Indeed, there are several problems in Frede’s exposition of his argument in this section, and Leigh is rightly pointing at them. First, while his argument concerning the fact that we must add *some* predicate into the sentence is intelligible, it is not at all clear on what grounds did Frede choose to supply specifically *being*. Second, the problem with Frede’s translation of the 255c12–13 sentence is that he nowhere provides us with a “final” version of the translation – thus, we are left to wonder to what extent the provisional version adequately represents Frede’s final thoughts on the translation of the sentence itself, and on his entire account. And third, while Frede carefully explains in the third chapter how are the two uses of “is” distinct and why are these distinct uses important for Plato, he is somewhat careless in explaining whether the core of the distinction is linguistic or ontological, and if this distinction is new or well-known. Thus, the exposition in the third chapter is misleading insofar as it leads to the conclusion that the ordinary speaker would be aware of two very different ways in which “is” can be linguistically used. This is

what Leigh seems to doubt when she notes that “we would expect to see these uses highlighted” (p. 10) – a point which she also raised previously by arguing that “there is none of the fanfare we would expect if Plato is at this point introducing *the* central distinction” (p. 7).¹⁷⁶

To the extent that these deficiencies of Frede’s exposition complicate the proper understanding of his account and hinder our acceptance of it, I agree with Leigh’s objection. At the same time, however, I disagree with her view that these shortcomings constitute a proper reason for rejecting Frede’s reading, as I also think they can be explained without altering Frede’s account. Thus, I believe Leigh’s objection is a valid criticism against Frede’s (very imperfect) *formulation* of his account, but it does not affect its validity *in substance*.

* * * * *

The main problem with Frede’s translation of the sentence at 255c12–13 is that it is not immediately clear whether his translation should stand “as is” for Plato’s text—that is, whether it is a *verbatim* translation—, or whether it is meant as its translation *already applied to* the case of Being. I believe it is the latter option, which also means that the translation, when applied to the case of Difference, would be different – and, in turn, these both would differ from the *verbatim* translation of the sentence at 255c12–13, had Frede provided it.

The only translation which Frede directly addresses and analyses before offering his own proposal is the one from Cornford: “[But I suppose you admit that] among things that exist, some are always spoken of as being what they are just in themselves, others as being what they are with reference to other things”.¹⁷⁷ As we can see, Cornford too saw the need to supply a predicate into the sentence, as Frede noticed:

In order to achieve the contrast between the being and the different, Cornford, referring to 255d6–7 (p. 281 n. 1), introduces into the translation of 255c12–13 something, to which nothing in the text corresponds, namely “being what they are”. [—Frede 1967, p. 26]

Why was such addition necessary? Because without it, we would again get “one of the interpretations according to which καθ’ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλο are properties of objects, which would be insufficient”.¹⁷⁸ The point is that the sentence at 255c12–13 must be

¹⁷⁶ More on this objection in the next subchapter, [8.3 Tracing the origin of the kath auto – pros alla distinction](#).

¹⁷⁷ Cornford 1935, p. 281 (cited by Frede 1967 on p. 25).

¹⁷⁸ Frede 1967, p. 25.

applicable both to the things which *are*, and things which are *different*. But “since Being and Different are coextensive” (p. 25)—that is, it is true to assert of each part of *what is* that it *is*, but also that it is *different* from something—the sentence itself must somehow allow us to distinguish between the things which *are*, and things which are *different*. But the rendering which assigns the καθ’ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλο directly to these things as their “property” would be unable to help us in making such distinction, for such rendering would look the same in the case of predicating *being* and *difference* of the thing:

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| (2) “a part of what is, is καθ’ αὐτό”; and | |
| (3) “a part of what is, is πρὸς ἄλλο”. | [—Frede 1967, p. 25] |

The consequence of such rendering would be that each thing is *both* καθ’ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλο, since each *is*, but each also is *different* from something – thus, we are again in a situation where “the being does not differ at all from the different” (p. 24). But moreover also the difference between καθ’ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλο disappears, as it becomes impossible to tell apart (1) the καθ’ αὐτό *being* of the thing from (2) a πρὸς ἄλλο *being* of the same thing, and again these two from (3) πρὸς ἄλλο *difference* of the very same thing – since each thing is *either* both (1) and (3), *or* both (2) and (3), *and thus* has both καθ’ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλο properties.

Therefore, by supplying “being what they are”, Cornford translates the sentence in such a way as to allow the sentence to reveal the difference between *being* and *difference* precisely by making it also *look differently* when predicating *being*, as when predicating *difference*. Thus, what we have seen above is Cornford’s *verbatim* translation of the 255c12–13 sentence, which, however, must in its *application* always be supplied by a particular predicate which is said of the thing. This way the καθ’ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλο are no longer treated as properties of the things – instead, as Frede puts it, they “denote the way in which a predicate is predicated of an object, or in which a property belongs to an object” (p. 24).

Now, Being applies to all beings (parts of *what is*), as “we call them beings” precisely “because they have a share in Being” (256e). Thus, Cornford’s understanding of the distinction allow us to exhaustively divide parts of *what is* between those of which we predicate Being καθ’ αὐτό, and those of which we predicate it πρὸς ἄλλα, since it is true that:

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| (2’) “a part of what is, is what it is, αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό”; and | |
| (3’) “a part of what is, is what it is, πρὸς ἄλλο”. | [—Frede 1967, p. 25] |

Similarly, Difference, too, applies to all beings, since “it is a nature that pervades them all; for each one of them is different from the others” (255e). Thus, the division between those beings of which we predicate Difference καθ’ αὐτό, and those of which we predicate it πρὸς ἄλλα, also exhaustively covers all beings, but since Difference can only be predicated πρὸς ἄλλα, the καθ’ αὐτό set of predicates will remain empty and the corresponding division of *what is* would be the following:

- (4) “everything that is different is what it is, πρὸς ἄλλο”; and consequently
 (5) [it is not true that] “a part of what is different, is what it is, αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό”.

[—Frede 1967, p. 26]

Despite the minor differences in translations, so far the reasoning behind the accounts of Frede and Cornford are very much in accord. The only remaining question is, how should the addition “is what it is” be understood, and at this point we arrive at the crux of Frede’s criticism of Cornford. For on the one hand, Cornford takes this to mean “is what it is, namely different” in the case of predicating Difference, with which Frede agrees. But in the case of Being, Cornford suddenly changes his interpretation and assigns to “is what it is” a substantial nouns instead of *being* – for example “human being” in the case of predicating Being καθ’ αὐτό, and “slave” in the case of predicating it πρὸς ἄλλα. Here, Frede confronts Cornford’s translation and observes that he misapplied his own principle:

Correspondingly, “... is what it is ...” in (2’) and (3’) would have to be understood as “... is what it is, namely being ...”. Here, however, Cornford suddenly understands it quite differently, namely something like this:

“a part of what is, is what it is, e.g. human being, αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό”; and

“a part of what is, is what it is, e.g. slave, πρὸς ἄλλο”.

[—Frede 1967, p. 26]

Thus, following Cornford’s *verbatim* translation of the sentence at 255c12–13, Frede offers his own rendering of its application to the case of Being, *vis-à-vis* Cornford’s one:

(2’’) “a part of what is, is what it is, namely being, αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό”; and

(3’’) “a part of what is, is what it is, namely being, πρὸς ἄλλο”.

[—Frede 1967, p. 26]

This is, Frede argues, how Cornford *should have* applied the distinction to Being, given his own understanding of the division at 255c12–13 and how it relates to blending of Forms. I agree with Frede’s understanding and exposition of Cornford’s account, but it is in fact not imperative whether his rendering of Cornford is entirely accurate – what is important is that this is the way Frede himself understood Cornford. His exposition of Cornford can help us in properly understanding Frede’s own account, since there is a large overlap in their reasoning behind the interpretation of the distinction at 255c12–13. Frede’s

interpretation is of course built independently from Cornford's one, but it is neither *opposed to*, nor entirely *different from* it when it comes to this particular problem – as we can see from the fact that there is no strict dividing line between Frede's exposition of Cornford's account, and what we would consider to be Frede's own, independent account leading to the translation of the sentence.

After carefully explaining Cornford's reading—which, incidentally, is the *only* reading Frede takes the trouble to analyse in-depth—, and having corrected him in his application of the distinction at 255c12–13 to the Being, there is no sign of Frede's rejection of Cornford's account as a whole. Instead, Frede uninterruptedly continues in the exposition of his own interpretation. Thus, Frede's interpretation of Cornford tells us that just as Cornford's *verbatim* translation of the 255c12–13 sentence has to be always completed according to the predicate we would like to assert about a particular part of *what is*, so too we have to see Frede's provisional translation with *being* already supplied not as his *verbatim* translation of Plato's text, but as its translation *already applied to* the case of predicating Being. Thus, *being* [*seiend*] in Frede's translation is not an integral part of the translation of the 255c12–13 sentence, but an addition which must be supplied to the sentence when we would like to use the sentence to predicate Being.

* * * * *

After a long detour, this brings us back to the original question, posed by Leigh's objection: is Frede's account preoccupied with the verb “to be”? What kind of role does the verb play in Frede's account – and how can it play any role whatsoever, given that the verb is not mentioned in the original sentence at all? Let us once more repeat what Leigh said on the possibility of adding the verb in her footnote:

To be sure, the verb ‘to be’ could be supplied at c13–14, since λέγεσθαι is open to being read there as λέγεσθαι εἶναι. However, if this was Plato's main point in the argument (and, according to some commentators, in the whole dialogue) it is mysterious, to say the least, why he chose to elide the verb ‘to be’. [—Leigh 2012, p. 11, n. 22]

I believe Frede's answer to the question why Plato “chose to elide the verb »to be«” in his formulation of the distinction at 255c12–13 would be the following: Plato did not supply the verb “to be”—nor any other verb—to the sentence, because doing so would result in already applying the sentence (and the underlying division of beings) to the case of predicating something in particular – in our case, *being*. At 255c12–13, Plato wanted to provide the most general formulation of the distinction – which can properly be done only by *omitting* the predicate in the formulation, for that is the part of the sentence which is

dependent on the particular application, and thus needs to be supplied according to the predicate for which we want to use the distinction.

If Plato had already supplied some particular predicate into the sentence, there would be no variable in the sentence, and it would thus lose its general applicability: the καθ' αὐτό – πρὸς ἄλλα distinction itself would become a division applicable merely within that particular predicate which was already appended to the sentence, be it *being* or *different*. Thus, the predicate *has to be* missing from the original sentence. On the other hand, by allowing no predicate to be supplied *at all*—that is, by taking the καθ' αὐτό – πρὸς ἄλλα qualifiers to refer directly to beings as their properties—, the distinction would become useless and contradictory, as we have already seen above. Useless, because it wouldn't allow us to distinguish between Being and Difference, which is the main goal of the immediate context of the sentence. And contradictory, since each part of *what is*, by being both *being* and *different*, is thus itself both καθ' αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλο.

The upshot of all these observations is that what Frede did provide in his provisional translation is the translation of the division *already applied* to predicating Being – that is, as intertwined with the Form of Being, for that is what gives other things their *being*:

Of that which is [being],
one is called 'being' with reference to itself,
the other with reference to something else.

It remains a fact that Frede did not leave any *verbatim* translation of the 255c12–13 sentence in his entire dissertation. But that the above translation can not be a *verbatim* one is clear from the fact that when it comes to the 255d1 sentence, Frede translates: “the different is always called different with reference to something else” (p. 27). And he states that one of the things which “must be ensured” is that this translation is done correspondingly to the translation of 255c12–13, which leads to the following, more precise formulation:

Of that which is different,
each is always called 'different' with reference to something else.

So when it comes to predicating *difference*, Frede's translation is different from the one where the predicate to which the distinction was applied was *being*. In the same manner, the translations of the sentence applied to all other predicates would be analogous,

but always different. With predicating *beauty*, for example, the resulting translation would be something like the following:¹⁷⁹

Of that which is beautiful,
one is called ‘beautiful’ with reference to itself,
the other with reference to something else.

The question is, whether there are any clear signs that this is how Frede meant his translation, besides the compatibility of his with Cornford’s account we have just observed. I believe there are at least two of these signs (not mentioning that there is no plausible alternative to read Frede, if we want to grant him consistency within his own interpretation). *First*, after analysing Cornford’s interpretation (on pp. 25–26), the only remaining thing Frede goes on to clarify before presenting his provisional translation, is the meaning of “... is called αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό being”. After all that has already been said, Frede summarises:

“... is called in and of itself ‘being’”, on the other hand, is a correct rendering if it means that one does not refer to another object *b* with respect to which one says of an object *a* that it is, but that one says with reference to *a* itself of *a* that it is. [...] But that this must be meant when “being” or “is” is the predicate to be supplemented, follows from the fact that (a) “πρὸς ἄλλα” must be understood strictly and (b) “αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά” must be interpreted correspondingly to “πρὸς ἄλλα” in such a way as to get a complete disjunction.

[—Frede 1967, p. 27]

What is important for our purposes now, is Frede’s confirming that “... is called in and of itself ‘being’” [...] is a correct rendering” of the relevant part of the division – however, not unconditionally so: instead, “this must be meant when ‘being’ or ‘is’ is the predicate to be supplemented” only. That qualifying note is important, because it shows Frede’s awareness of supplying the verb “being” [*seiend*] only as corresponding to the predicate “being” or “is”, and not because it would have to be always supplied, as if it was an integral part of the translation. Thus, it is clear that this is not how Frede would translate the sentence at 255c12–13 *verbatim* and in itself, but only when applied to the Being. The translations of the sentence applied to other predicates, as we have seen above, would be analogous, but different.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Granted that we allow the Form of Beauty to have *beauty* predicated of itself: that is, to be itself *beautiful*. I do not see any difficulty in claiming that something immaterial as the Form of Beauty can be beautiful, but in case someone would deny that (a discussion which I cannot open here in the extent of this dissertation), the resulting formulation would be analogous to predicating *difference*, where only πρὸς ἄλλα predications would be allowed.

¹⁸⁰ And in some cases, these translations wouldn’t contain the verb “to be” at all – we will get to this point a little below.

Second, that Frede is very well aware of the precise role the verb “to be” plays in his account might be noticed from the almost cryptic naming of the chapters in his dissertation. Its second chapter (pp. 12–29) is called “Two uses of »... is«” [*II. Zwei Verwendungen von “... ist”*] and bears the subtitle “The Interpretation of 255c12–13” [*Die Interpretation von 255c12–13*], while the third chapter (pp. 29–37) is titled “The two uses of »... is ...«” [*III. Die beiden Verwendungen von “... ist ...”*]. With “zwei” and “die beiden” being synonyms, the only significant difference between these two is in the terminal ellipsis added to the title of the latter chapter. How to read this elusive difference and, correspondingly, the goals of these chapters?

I believe the answer is the same as what we have already been observing all along: that, in the second chapter, Frede concentrates on analysing and explaining the distinction at 255c12–13, but this explanation is mainly done by operating *within* its application to the Being. Thus, the repeated usage of the verb “to be” is not a sign of a special philosophical concern with the verb itself, but of its practical, linguistic need in the application of the distinction to predicating *being*. And this focus is not arbitrary, for we know that in its immediate context, Plato uses the distinction to differentiate between the Forms of Being and Difference. This perfectly fits Frede’s account in the second chapter, for we have seen that predicating *difference* is the only other application of the distinction which Frede translates (p. 27) throughout the chapter. That there is far less emphasis on analysing the latter application than the former is logical, given that the Difference can only ever be predicated $\pi\rho\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$ – thus, to give proper account of the full distinction, Frede needed to focus on predicating Being, which covers both its sides.

The third chapter, on the other hand, builds upon the second, which already explained the distinction on the particular example of its application to Being. Thus, the purpose of the third chapter is to apply the distinction to various other predicates, not just *being*. Correspondingly to this fact, Frede named the chapter “the two uses of »... is ...«”, since asserting other predicates *usually*—usually, although not necessarily, as we will soon examine—requires (in English, but also in German) supplying the verb “to be” before the predicate to connect it with the subject of the sentence. Thus, the “two uses of »... is ...«” are in Frede’s account the two ways in which the predicates are said of the beings, since “ $\pi\rho\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha$ and $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\ \kappa\alpha\theta’\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}$ denote the way in which a predicate is predicated of an object, or in which a property belongs to an object” (p. 24), as we already noted. Leigh objects against this, saying that there is on Plato’s side no sign of any linguistic differentiation of the verb “to be” in the text:

There is no obvious reason why he [i.e., Plato] would hold that these basic metaphysical facts are mirrored in the syntax or semantics of the verb ‘to be’ in the natural language – and there is, I suggest, little textual evidence of this in the *Sophist*. Nor is there solid textual evidence in our dialogue that he introduced distinct uses of ‘is’, as technical or semi-technical terms, to mark off or represent discrete metaphysical facts or states of affairs. [—Leigh 2012, p. 19]

But this is a misconstruction of Frede’s account, which, moreover, Frede already refuted in his later article, where he explicitly stated that it “would be a mistake to think, [...] that the distinction of the two uses is supposed to be a grammatical or logical distinction, if by this we mean a distinction that can be made independently of the metaphysics we rely on.”¹⁸¹ Frede’s claim that there are two different uses of “... is ...” is not meant to say that there are any differences in grammatical representation of the verb or of the whole sentence, nor that the verb itself bears different linguistic meanings. ***In Frede’s view, there are two different uses of “... is ...”, because the same predicate ascribed to two different subjects by the same verb “is” with the same meaning in both cases, might nevertheless be valid on two different metaphysical grounds.***

Metaphysically, the is_1 or $\kappa\alpha\theta' \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}$ predicate holds true on the basis of the ontological fact, that some subject necessarily entails some feature or characteristic which is predicated of it, since it is that subject’s essence to be what it is, namely that predicate. On the other hand, the is_2 or $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\omicron$ predicate describes the reality of a subject having a property or characteristic by bringing about different object in a relation of participation in order to be what it is, namely that predicate. For example, the sentences “The Form of Beauty is beautiful” and “Simmias is beautiful” are both valid and both involve the same Form of Beauty implicitly referenced by the use of the predicate *beautiful*, the former subject “ is_1 what it is, namely *beautiful*” with reference to itself, while the latter subject “ is_2 what it is, namely *beautiful*”, with reference to something else, namely the Form of Beauty. And this all is merely a reformulation of what Frede had already splendidly summarised in the third chapter of his dissertation:

Although there are two different usages of “... is ...”, when one says of the Form X and the particular X s that they are x , “... is” has the same meaning in both cases. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that “... is x ” has a different meaning depending on whether it is said of the Form or of the particular X s. For the same Form X is assigned to the “ x ” in both cases. Only in one case it is predicated of itself, while in the other case of something else. In this respect it was also correct that at the beginning we emphasized the numerical

¹⁸¹ Frede 1992, p. 402.

difference between *a* and *b* in the second use of “... is ...” in “*a* is *b*”; for insofar as *a* is *b*, it does not differ at all from *b*; this does not mean, of course, that the Form *b* is merely another *b* next to *a*.

“... is *x*” can be used, without speaking of different meanings, in two ways:

1. to indicate the essence of the Form;
2. to indicate the property of a particular *X*.

[—Frede 1967, pp. 32–33]

* * * * *

However, it is not *always* the case that the predicate is connected with its subject by the verb “to be”. In some cases, as when we say, for example, “Socrates sits”, the verb is simply missing from the sentence – and yet we undoubtedly *did* predicate something of Socrates, namely that he *sits*. Leigh is aware of this feature of language and objects on this basis against Frede:

Nor, in my view, do we have credible textual evidence that the modes of being a property are expressed by distinct uses of the verb ‘to be’. For in Greek, as in English, there are a variety of ways of asserting that a subject is some property or other, and these ways need not, and frequently do not, involve a use of the verb ‘to be’.

[—Leigh 2012, p. 19]

How, then, can Frede claim that the distinction laid down by Plato at 255c12–13 allows us to distinguish between two uses of “... is ...”, when in some predicative sentences the verb “to be” is not present at all? Notice, moreover, that Frede takes the distinction to be both exclusive *and* exhaustive, so *each* case of predication must, in a final analysis, turn out to be an instantiation of one of the two uses of “... is ...”. Here we are at the core of Leigh’s objection against Frede’s account, formulated in various ways by numerous other commentators. I believe that, although it might sound counterintuitive, the objection does not constitute a problem for Frede’s account, since Frede in fact does not lay any special importance on the verb “to be” itself.

The verb “is” [*ist*] is significant for Frede’s account only insofar as it plays the linguistic role of copula (e.g. “is beautiful”) or auxiliary verb (e.g. “is standing”),¹⁸² because in those cases, ***the verb “to be” represents the linguistic equivalent of the ontological relation between the subject and its characteristic, which the predicate asserts.*** There are exactly two fundamental kinds of this ontological relation in Plato’s metaphysics: *either* the predicate *y* properly belongs to the subject *X*, and then it is an *αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό* relation, since the subject *X* is₁ the predicate *y* *with reference to itself* – or,

¹⁸² Except the very special case where it plays the function of “existential is” – that is, where it is used as asserting *being* of a subject. We have seen this function of the verb “to be” analysed in the second chapter of Frede’s dissertation, and I will say more of it below.

alternatively, the predicate y is tied to the subject X with the relation of participation, and then it is a $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ἄλλο relation, since the subject X is₂ the predicate y *with reference to other thing*, namely the Form of Y . In Frede’s framework, the two uses of “... is ...” are mapped to these two fundamental kinds of ontological relations, and that is how the verb “to be” gains its apparent significance in his account. But the linguistic frequency cannot simply be equated with philosophical importance, and moreover, any stress Frede laid on the verb “to be”, is in fact not an emphasis on it *as a verb*, but on its *function* of assigning the predicate to the subject of the sentence – that is, on it being the linguistic counterpart of the ontological tie.

Yet, it remains true that it is *not* a linguistic or grammatical division – at least not “if by this we mean a distinction that can be made independently of the metaphysics we rely on”, as Frede emphasised. ***The division is essentially an ontological division, which Frede linguistically locates in the verb “to be”, and thus examines it through two usages of that verb.*** And the fact that the division is essentially an ontological one is the reason why it is entirely possible to apply Frede’s account even to predicative sentences which do not contain the verb “to be” at all. For whenever it is grammatically possible for the predicative sentence to be construed by simply and directly joining the subject and predicate, the predicate itself takes over also of the linguistic function of assigning itself to the subject. Thus, just as there were two uses of the verb “to be” when it serves as this linguistic counterpart of the ontological tie, so too are there two uses of *any* such predicate which, on top of being the *object* of predication—that is, carrying the information *what* is predicated—serves (also) as a grammatical auxiliary connecting this predicate to its subject – that is, to that *of which* it is predicated. And this is both necessary and logical in Frede’s account, since these predicates *too* can be said in two ways, just as other predicates which require to be connected with their subject by the verb “to be”.

Therefore, what Frede means by saying that there are “two uses of »... is ...«” applies without reservations to other predicates (verbs, adjectives or other parts of speech), if they on their own also serve the same linguistic function as is usually obtained precisely by supplying the verb “to be”. For example, if we accepted “shines” as a synonym to “is beautiful”—or even introduced a new verb “to beaute” instead—, we would entirely avoid using the verb “to be” in saying that “Simmias shines” or “Socrates beautes”. Both of these verbs would have two uses—καθ’ αὐτό and πρὸς ἄλλα, namely—and in these particular sentences, both of them would be said in the latter use, as neither Simmias nor Socrates are beautiful with reference to themselves, but with reference to the Form of Beauty. And this

in no way collides with Frede’s account, since the predicates *shine* and *beaute* in sentences “Simmiias shines” and “Socrates beautes” both carry the double function of predicates *and* of their assignment to the subjects of the sentences, Simmiias and Socrates, respectively. Thus, grammatically, we have avoided *any* use of the verb “to be” in these sentences, but its linguistic function has been absorbed by the predicates themselves, together with its two uses corresponding to two ways in which the characteristic might belong to its subject: either with reference to itself, and then the subject of the predicate is always a Form, or with reference to something else.

The situation is quite different when *being* itself is predicated of a thing, since usually there is no additional predicate supplied after the verb “to be” itself – we say simply that “Socrates is”, and that is already a grammatically correct statement of Socrates’ *being* or *existence*. As we have already noticed, in the second chapter Frede examines the 255c12–13 distinction as applied to *being*, which is exactly why he has called it “Two uses of »... is«” – without terminal ellipsis. This peculiarity of predicating *being* might linguistically be explained either by saying that the verb “to be” in these cases plays a different role (it is an *existential* “is”, not a *copulative* “is”), or else by saying that the existential predicate is simply elided (and thus the full predicative sentence would be “Socrates is being” or “Socrates is existing”). But whichever *linguistic* explanation we adopt, it would be based in both cases on the same underlying *ontological* fact, that it is a Form of Being which causes the *being* of a thing. Thus, whether the reference to the Form is *linguistically* expressed or not, it must always be implied in the *philosophical* meaning of the sentence, as Frede immediately observed:

Attention should already be drawn here to an important implication of this interpretation. “x is” must be supplemented by “y” in every use in which “is” refers to the Form of Being. Even in cases where this is not linguistically necessary, “y” must at least be implied.

[—Frede 1967, p. 35]

The “y” which we must supplement “in every use in which »is« refers to the Form of Being” is the predicate *being* or *existing*. And the relevant cases where we need to do this, are exactly those in which the predicative sentence is linguistically stated in a form “x is” as opposed to “x is y” – which is exactly the difference between “... is” and “... is ...”, which the titles of the second and third chapters capture. Therefore, in sentences “Being is” and “Simmiias is” we might observe the same predicate *being* asserted by two different uses of “... is” – the first being said of a subject *with reference to itself* (καθ’ αὐτό), since

“Being is₁ being”, the latter *with reference to other thing* (πρὸς ἄλλα), namely the Form of Being, since “Simmias is₂ being”.

To summarise, although the verb “to be” is *linguistically connected* with most of our predicates, in most cases (namely, all except those where the *being* itself is predicated of a thing) it bears no special *philosophical meaning* in Frede’s account.¹⁸³ Thus, ***whenever the verb “to be” is not linguistically needed as an auxiliary to connect subject with predicate, it is not needed at all.*** There indeed *are* “two uses” for each predicate, and these are normally assigned by the twofold use of the verb “... is ...” – but that in no way implies that in Frede’s account, the verb “to be” plays any special *philosophical* role, as Leigh objected. It is quite possible that it is these repeated references to the verb “is” and its two uses—not only in the titles of Frede’s chapters, but also in their contents—which misled Leigh into thinking that Frede’s account is *based upon* the special importance of the verb. And while it is also true that Frede did not state any of this explicitly (or in any case not explicitly enough) and that the way he lays down his account is certainly not very friendly towards the reader of his dissertation, it needs to be added at the same time, that Leigh in her reading of Frede overlooked all these signs we have just analysed and which, I think, are on their own sufficient to correctly reconstruct Frede’s account, if one reads them carefully.

8.2 Brown’s contribution to the interpretation of the *Sophist*

Regarding the distinction at 255c12–13, an important contribution to the discussion has been made by Lesley Brown in 1986. In her article *Being in the Sophist: A Syntactical Enquiry*, Brown has challenged a then-standard characterisation of a *complete use* of the verb “to be” and argued that it does not in fact fit with the Greek grammar. Besides the general importance of Brown’s contribution, her account is also directly relevant in assessing the plausibility of the three different interpretations of the 255c–d distinction, which we have analysed above. For on the basis of her linguistic observation, Brown has also formulated a criticism of Frede’s reading of the distinction, especially in the latter, revised version of her article from 1999.

¹⁸³ Of course, each word bears *some* philosophical meaning insofar as philosophy of language is involved, but we are here concerned with that *special* philosophical meaning which some words play in Plato’s ontology, when they bring about with themselves references to the eternal Forms.

8.2.1 Exposition of Brown's account

Before Brown has issued her article, the *complete use* of the verb “to be” (*εἶναι*) was commonly understood by scholars as “a use which neither has nor allows a complement” (called *C1* in her account). Instead, Brown proposed her own definition of the *complete use* (called *C2*) as “a use where there is no complement (explicit or elided) but which allows a complement”.¹⁸⁴ To illustrate the difference between the two definitions, *C1* and *C2*, she offered two pairs of sentences:

1a Jane is growing tomatoes.

1b Jane is growing.

2a Jane is teaching French.

2b Jane is teaching.

[—Brown 1986, p. 54]

Brown argued that, since the meaning of the first two sentences is completely different, it makes sense to sharply distinguish between them by saying that they contain two distinct uses of the verb “is growing”. However, no such sharp distinction can be observed between the sentences in the latter pair, where the meanings of the verb are the same:

It would be natural to say that *1a* contains an incomplete, *1b* a complete use of ‘is growing’, between which there is a sharp syntactic and semantic distinction. Pair 2 is clearly rather different, in the following ways (*inter alia*):

- (i) while *1a* neither entails nor is entailed by *1b*, *2a* does entail *2b*;
- (ii) while *2b* entails ‘Jane is teaching something’, *1b* does not entail ‘Jane is growing something’;
- (iii) one who heard *1b* and asked ‘growing what?’ would reveal misunderstanding of *1b*, while the follow-up question to *2b*, ‘teaching what?’, is perfectly proper.

[—Brown 1986, p. 54]

The difference between *C1*- and *C2*-complete predicates can be observed on the difference between sentences *1b* and *2b*. And while, before the publication of Brown's article, the commentators have mostly assumed *C1*-understanding of *complete predicates*, Brown argues (developing the ideas of Anthony Kenny on verbs of variable polyadicity¹⁸⁵) that the Greek usage of *ἐστὶ* is more closely matched by *C2* characterisation:

An incomplete and a *C2* complete *esti* would bear a closeness analogous to that between the uses of ‘is teaching’ in pair 2. Many other verbs have complete and incomplete uses

¹⁸⁴ Brown 1986, p. 53.

¹⁸⁵ The source cited by Brown is Kenny, A. (1963). *Action, Emotion and Will*, chapter VII. Humanities Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

like those in pair 2: *fight, eat, breathe*. As Kenny has shown, verbs, unlike relations, can exhibit variable polyadicity; it is therefore misleading to assimilate verbs to relations and characterize their uses as one-place, two-place, etc. If we compare the Greek verb *to be* with verbs of variable polyadicity, we shall avoid the pitfalls that arise from this practice. My suggestion, then, is that the complete *esti* should be characterized as *C2* rather than *C1*, that is, as complete but allowing further completion. [—Brown 1986, pp. 54–55]

Brown's recognition of the fact that in the Greek usage of verbs "the distinction between the incomplete and complete uses is far less striking and clear-cut" (p. 56) as was generally acknowledged by critics, was of vast importance for Plato's scholarship. Most notably, it had major implications in the case of the verb *esti* itself, for Brown has shown that "the continuity between the complete and the incomplete *esti* is as strong as that between complete and incomplete uses of the variably polyadic verbs" (p. 58). The paradoxes of Being (236e–241c) and non-Being (241d–249d) in the *Sophist*, complicated as they already are, were at that time made even more problematic by the fact that the majority of the scholars was convinced about the sharp, "striking and clear-cut" distinction between the *complete* and *incomplete is*. This naturally led the distinction to be equated with the distinction between *existential* and *predicative is*, since the complete *is* was simply understood as a *one-place is*-predicate, while the incomplete as its *two-place* use. This, in turn, led to the following "commonplace" interpretation of the *Sophist*, as summed up by Brown:

The commonplace about the *Sophist* is that here Plato marks off the first use of *esti*—complete, existential—from its other, incomplete uses, and similarly for the negative construction represented by *to mē on*; for (the commonplace runs) the problems which dominate the central arguments of the *Sophist* are existence problems, so that disentangling the different functions of the verb *to be* is a proper step to identifying and resolving them. [—Brown 1986, p. 51]

But Brown has shown that the distinction between the *complete* and *incomplete is* is in fact not so sharp as was generally assumed.¹⁸⁶ And if this is so, then it is immediately clear that the pair *complete is* – *incomplete is* cannot be unproblematically, without further justification and qualification, equated with the distinction between *existential* and *predicative is* – at least not while the latter is considered to be a sharp and important division which Plato introduces as part of a solution to the philosophical problems raised in the *Sophist*:

¹⁸⁶ This observation of Brown challenged not only the "commonplace" interpretations of the *Sophist*, but also those which argued against them – as, for example, G. E. L. Owen's one (see Owen 1971). Brown's own argumentation is done *vis-à-vis* Owen's article, with which she disagrees on the basis of her observation.

Provided that we recognize the continuity between the complete and the incomplete (predicative) uses, there will be no harm in regarding the complete use as weakly existential in force. But it is a consequence of the continuity between the two that distinguishing one from the other is not and could not be part of Plato's answer to the problems he inherited from Parmenides. [—Brown 1986, p. 50]

* * * * *

For our current purposes of interpreting the *Sophist* and its 255c12–13 distinction, this has a direct consequence of flatly ruling out the *Interpretation A*, which claims that the distinction is between complete and incomplete predicates in general, or between existential and predicative use of the verb *to be* in particular. This is because, in order for the distinction to fulfil its role which the *Interpretation A* ascribes to it, the distinction needs to be both *strict* and *novel*.

It needs to be *strict*, because otherwise it would not do justice to the wider context of the passage. In order to address the question of how can we call the “very same thing by many names”, we need a way of unambiguously and reliably determining whether the “name” or characteristic we assign to a thing is proper to it, or whether it has it only *in a way*. This is exactly what, during the investigation of the Being, Visitor asks the second group of philosophers, “those who say that everything is one” at 244b–245d. Since they claim that “one” is all there is—thus assigning the name *one* to Being—, it is then unclear “what exactly they say *being* is” (244b), since it would seem it is a second name they would have to use in their account of the Being. But two names signify two different things, since “it’s presumably absurd to allow that there are two names when you have posited just one thing”, or that “there is a name if there is no account to be given of it” (244c). Thus, “if *what is* has the attribute of oneness only in a way, it will clearly not be the same as *the one*, and the sum of things will be more than one” (245b). Thus, the Visitor distinguishes between what is “*truly one*” (245a) and what “has the attribute of oneness *only in a way*” (245b). And our task is precisely to identify how is this “having an attribute *only in a way*” possible, and how to reliably discern it from a thing having an attribute *properly and unqualifiedly*.

According to the *Interpretation A*, this is achieved by a distinction on a level of predicates – that is, a linguistic difference between complete and incomplete *is*. But if a linguistic difference on its own should lead us to these two different senses, then the complete and incomplete predications cannot possibly overlap in a way that would allow them to have linguistically indistinguishable forms – in short, in a way that Brown

describes. Otherwise, the linguistic difference would disappear in these cases, and with it also a means to differentiate between two senses of attributing characteristics to things. For example, if we want to explain how can we call the One by its proper name, and at the same time ascribe to it also *being* and many other characteristics, then (under the reading of *Interpretation A*) the first must be ascribed to it as a complete predicate, and all the latter characteristics as incomplete predicates said with some further qualifications. But these two kinds of ascriptions must be clearly and sharply linguistically differentiated, as the difference itself depends on it. And, as we have seen from Brown's account, this is exactly *not* the case in ancient Greek, since complete predicates could be further completed, so they become linguistically indistinguishable from incomplete predications.

And second, the distinction needs to be *novel*, because it is an essential part of the interpretation that the distinction is introduced by Plato in the *Sophist* in order to solve the problems which he was unable to solve previously. The critics advocating it claim that the distinction marks a genuine development on the side of Plato – development which was needed to address the paradoxes of Being and not-Being laid out just before the distinction. But in doing so, Plato also addresses the problems of One from the *Parmenides* – which, as we have seen, are revisited as part of the problem of Being, since both the paradoxes of the *Sophist* and the hypotheses of the *Parmenides* are connected with the need to somehow allow the same *one* thing to be *many*, and thus to be called by many names. But this would be altogether impossible if Brown is right in observing that a continuity between complete and incomplete uses of verbs was a common feature of ancient Greek, which we, the contemporary scholars, simply overlooked. In that case, her observation might perhaps be new for us, but not for literate Greeks, and certainly not for philosophers of Plato's age. If the key to problems of Being and not-Being, and calling one thing by many names, was in properly differentiating these two linguistic senses, then not only is the distinction not novel, but the problems would not be raised by Plato in the first place, since they would not appear to him, nor his fellow philosophers or critics—all of them being masters of their own language—, as problems at all.

* * * * *

Yet, although this all is directly consequent from her account, Brown did not draw the conclusions so far in her article and, in fact, she took a very different route in her interpretation of the 255c–d passage. Brown immediately recognised that the distinction between complete and incomplete predicates cannot be an important contribution of Plato's overall account in the *Sophist*, but she nevertheless claimed that the distinction at

255c12–13 *indeed* is a distinction between a complete and incomplete use of the verb *to be*. This, however, is used by Plato only as “an occasional tactic”, which brings nothing new in terms of a possible philosophical refinement of his Theory:

We can agree with those who deny that distinguishing the complete from the incomplete use was an important part of Plato’s strategy. [...] But though it is not part of his overall strategy to draw a distinction between the complete and the incomplete use, he does, I believe, employ it as an occasional tactic, to wit, in his proof of the non-identity of the kinds *being* and *different*. [—Brown 1986, pp. 67–68]

Thus, Brown chose a very peculiar way to look at the distinction: on the one hand, and in line with most platonic scholars advocating the *Interpretation A*, she claimed that the distinction at 255c12–13 marks the difference between the complete and the incomplete predicates. But, on the other hand, she did so precisely (and could do so *only*) on the grounds which virtually almost every other platonic scholar would deny: namely, that the distinction has no heavy philosophical importance for Plato’s overall project, since it carries no information that a philosopher—or, indeed, any literate Greek—would not already be familiar with.

And it is easy to see why Brown could arrive at this widely accepted conclusion only by starting with this equally unpopular assumption, that the distinction is not *novel* nor *important* for Plato. For if it were not just “an occasional tactic”, a linguistic game “exploiting precisely this equivocation on the two distinct *estis*” (p. 57) to use it against paradox-mongers, it would have to signify an important contribution of Plato. That, exactly, is impossible, if the distinction is in a nutshell of a linguistic nature and marks a commonly-known difference between the complete and incomplete uses of the verbs – of which the first category could nevertheless be expanded so that, from a purely linguistic point of view, complete predicates sometimes share the very same form with incomplete predicates. Thus, in the section V(d), where Brown addresses the interpretation of the 255c–d section of the *Sophist* (which, it should be noted, only occupies one single full page in the original 1986 version of her article), she concludes that the distinction is merely Plato’s rephrasing of a commonly-known fact, that *being*, unlike *difference*, has both complete and incomplete uses:

I believe that this proof does invoke a distinction between a C2 complete and an incomplete use of *esti*. But there is no inconsistency in maintaining both of the following: (i) in this passage, 255cd, to achieve a proof of the non-identity of the kinds *being* and *different*, Plato points out that *esti*, unlike *heteron*, has a complete (C2) and an incomplete use; and (ii) the relation between the complete (C2) and the incomplete use is such that the

distinction between them cannot form part of his overall strategy in solving the problems of not-being. [—Brown 1986, p. 69]

The upshot of our analysis of Brown’s account so far is this: as long as we presuppose a variant of *Interpretation A*, that the distinction at 255c12–13 marks the difference between complete and incomplete predicates, acknowledging Brown’s contribution to the reading of complete predicates as C2-complete—that is, “as complete but allowing further completion” (p. 55)—at the same time inevitably leads us to the conclusion, that the distinction cannot be important and carry heavy philosophical significance, since it is neither sharp nor novel. Moreover, this reading leads us with the same necessity to the conclusion, that the section 255c–d is disconnected from Plato’s overall project in the *Sophist*, since while the distinction at 255c12–13 helps us in distinguishing between the *Being* and the *Difference* (which is the immediate context of the sentence), it does not in any way advance the wider context of the passage: neither the question how can we call the same things by many names, nor Visitor’s proposed problems of *Being* and *non-Being*.

8.2.2 Brown’s account as a criticism of Frede’s interpretation

Though her account does not require it, in the latter, revised version of the article, Brown has also explicitly rejected Frede’s reading.¹⁸⁷ She did it on the grounds that *pros alla* is better read as “in relation to something”, than “in relation to something different”, since on this interpretation, “Plato uses a familiar contrast (between non-relative and relative) to designate complete and incomplete uses of ‘is’ respectively”.¹⁸⁸ Thus, only hers, but not Frede’s interpretation “makes a clear and correct point, using fairly familiar terminology”:

The clear and correct point is this: that ‘is’ can be said of something on its own (as when one says, for instance: *change is*), and also in relation to something else, as when one says, for instance, *change is the opposite of rest* or *Socrates is wise*. But any use of *X is different* must be completed, with a reference to what *X* is different from. [—Brown 1999, p. 475]

¹⁸⁷ In the original article, the rejection of Frede’s reading was merely implicit: on p. 68, Brown shortly outlined the interpretative lines of the 255c–d section and, including Frede in the interpretative line *A(i)* among those who interpret the distinction as being “between distinct incomplete uses which these labels pick out”, she simply concluded: “Assuming that interpretation *A(i)* is correct, we may ask: is the complete (*auto kath’ hauto*) use to be understood as *C1* or as *C2*?” (p. 68). However, in the revised version of her article from 1999, Brown expanded sections V(c) and V(d) and in the latter of these two, she explicitly argued against Frede’s reading (see especially pp. 475–476).

¹⁸⁸ Brown 1999, p. 475.

We have already seen this reasoning in our analysis of the *Interpretation A*, and Brown’s exposition of the distinction shares all its problems, so reiterating them here would be pointless. Probably the most important point of criticism is that if the predicate “Socrates is wise” counts as an example of an incomplete use of *is*, it is entirely unclear why *any* predicate of the form “*X* is different” should not count as the same incomplete use of *is*. And, *vice versa*, if it does not (and counts as an incomplete use of *is different* instead), it is unexplainable why “*X* is wise” does not analogically count as an incomplete use of the predicate *is wise*. Under this reading, the distinction between predicating *being* (which entails predicating *being wise*) and *difference* (which translates to *being different*) is made by Plato completely arbitrarily.

How, then, does Brown argue in favour of her interpretation to reject Frede’s reading? Unfortunately, her reasoning is so short and inadequate as to become dangerously reminiscent of a sheer unjustified assertion. She claims that Frede’s objection—that *pros alla* must be taken in a strict sense as referring to a numerically different thing, and not in a wider sense as something being said *in relation to* something (numerically different or not)—“can easily be answered”, since “elsewhere Plato uses the two expressions interchangeably” (p. 476). And in the accompanying footnote, she explains:

At *Philebus* 51 Plato draws the contrast between non-relative and relative, when discussing the beauty of shapes, pictures, and sounds. He uses both phrases, ‘in relation to something’ (*pros ti*)—at 51c6—and ‘in relation to something different’—at 51d7—evidently to make one and the same contrast, between things beautiful relative to something, and things which are beautiful *auta kath’ hauta*, just in themselves.

[—Brown 1999, p. 476, note 36]

This is the only textual evidence Brown provides in support of her thesis against Frede, and there are two weak points in it. First, this observation relies entirely on the assumption of Plato’s terminological exactness and absolute consistency throughout his dialogues. This, of course, is not a bad assumption; it is something we would nowadays normally expect from a philosopher worthy of his name. But Plato is only seldom introducing new terminology, and even in those rare cases he did so, it could not be properly considered “technical” in the strict sense of the word. As I have noted at the beginning of this part of the work, many interpretative difficulties stem from the mere fact that Plato’s thoughts, although philosophical in the fullest sense of the word, remain nevertheless expressed in the common language of a literate Greek of his time. With this comes the necessary inexactness of the formulations of his ideas, which Plato overcomes not by inventing new words and precise terminological distinctions, but by explaining the

problem in other terms or using different examples and colourful metaphors to make his point better understandable to his partner in discussion. We have seen this many times in his literate Socrates being asked “what exactly do you mean?” And that is exactly what happened in our section in the *Philebus*, where Socrates says:

These things are not, as other things are, beautiful in a relative way [οὐκ εἶναι πρὸς τι καλὰ], but are always beautiful in themselves [ἀεὶ καλὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ].

(*Philebus* 51c; trans. by Gosling 1975)

Afterwards he asks Protagoras: “Have you got my point, or not?” But Protagoras is not entirely sure he understands Socrates, so he requests a clarification: “I am trying to understand it, Socrates. Could you try to put it a little more clearly still?” To which Socrates explains his point not only in another way, but also with different terminology:

Well, with sounds, it is the smooth clear ones I am thinking of, ones that produce a single pure tune, and are beautiful not just in a certain context [οὐ πρὸς ἕτερον καλὰς] but in themselves [ἀλλ’ αὐτὰς καθ’ αὐτὰς]—these and their attendant pleasures.

(*Philebus* 51d; trans. by Gosling 1975)

This brings me to my second point. As we just saw, Socrates initially explains the distinction using the opposite pair πρὸς τι – καθ’ αὐτὰ, while in the latter explanation he uses the pair πρὸς ἕτερον – αὐτὰς καθ’ αὐτὰς. In the *Sophist* 255c12–13, the pair used was αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ – πρὸς ἄλλα, and in a line below Visitor used πρὸς ἕτερον to explain the point on the *difference*. Brown takes this to mean that, since πρὸς ἕτερον is in both cases used to better explain the initial point, both situations are essentially the same and the pairs of phrases express the same division. Thus, Brown thinks, πρὸς τι and πρὸς ἄλλα must have the same meaning for Plato, and πρὸς ἕτερον must be read according to them. From this, she draws the conclusion that πρὸς ἄλλα does not mean *being related to something different*, but merely *being related*, since that is what πρὸς τι means.

But this is an example of bad reasoning on all levels. First, we may notice that, strictly speaking, Brown is not right in observing that “elsewhere Plato uses the two expressions interchangeably”, since we do *not* have the same expressions in the two dialogues: the *Philebus* uses πρὸς τι, while the *Sophist* has πρὸς ἄλλα. We may discuss that the two expressions are close enough and perhaps might be taken to be synonymous, but such a point is clearly not self-evident – in fact, it has been directly denied by some interpreters, as we have seen in Frede’s interpretation.

Secondly, we may by the same token arrive at the very opposite conclusion as Brown did, namely that since both distinctions are the same, πρὸς τι must be understood as

meaning what πρὸς ἄλλα means, which is naturally read as *in relation to (an)other*. And since both expressions are later explained by πρὸς ἕτερον—*in relation to the other than* or *in relation to different one*—, this further strengthens the argument to read it in this way, since we would naturally expect Plato to be *more*, not *less* precise in his second attempt to explain what he means. Thus, in these two specific contexts, it is more appropriate to read πρὸς ἄλλα and πρὸς τι in terms of πρὸς ἕτερον, than vice versa.

Third, the situations in the passages are not the same, for their contexts and purposes are clearly very different. Interpretation-wise, the *Philebus* 51c–d is not at all straight and unequivocal. Gosling, whose translation I used above, dedicated a whole page in the notes to this section,¹⁸⁹ and yet he only allows himself to cautiously *suggest* an interpretation that *perhaps* the contrast Plato is making in the passage is between “objects that give pleasure in themselves and in simple form, and those (not necessarily an exclusive set) that are beautiful as part of an arrangement”.¹⁹⁰ Similar interpretation is offered by Fiona Leigh, who takes the former objects to be those which “produce a single pure note”.¹⁹¹ But if this is so, then the contrast at *Philebus* 51c–d is completely different from the one being made in the *Sophist* 255c–d. If this interpretation is correct, then in the *Philebus* Plato tells us that some things bring *beauty* with themselves, while others create the perception of *beauty* by being appropriately connected with other things, perhaps by adhering to the norms of harmony, symmetry and proportionality. Thus, they are in fact not beautiful, for the apprehension of *beauty* is brought about by the *relation* created between them, and thus, properly speaking, belongs to this arrangement. On the other hand, in the *Sophist* the *being*—whether said “absolutely” or “relatively”—is always nevertheless said of that thing of which we are speaking. The *difference* of a thing (subject) is always said “relatively” to other thing (object), but it is still *this* thing (the subject of a predicate) which is genuinely different, although relatively from *that* thing (the object of the same predicate), thus requiring a completion of the predicate.

Thus, we can see that the “absolute – relative” distinction in the *Philebus* is different from the one in the *Sophist*, and made for a different purpose. And whether this line of interpretation is correct or not, this all casts a genuine doubt on Brown’s attempt to straightforwardly connect these two passages and read one on the basis of another, together with the distinctions used in them. Again, it would perhaps be possible with some

¹⁸⁹ Gosling 1975,. See translation of the passage on pp. 51–52 and accompanying note on pp. 121–122.

¹⁹⁰ Gosling 1975, p. 121, note to section 51c6.

¹⁹¹ Leigh 2012, p. 13.

philosopher strictly maintaining his technical terminology throughout his works, but doing so in Plato is risky – and, I think, plainly wrong in this case, where adhering to the principle of terminological consistency actually requires us to go against the meanings of the two sections themselves, and to ignore the factual difference in terms used in them.

* * * * *

All these reasons lead us to the conclusion that Brown’s reading of *pros alla* in a wider sense as meaning “in relation to something”—instead of “in relation to something different”, as Frede suggested—is simply inadequate, since her grounds for doing so are in fact not valid. But, going back to Frede’s account, I would like to stress one additional point. If one thing was thoroughly done in Frede’s dissertation, it is his detailed answer to the question, why cannot the *pros alla* predications be used in the cases involving numerically same subject and predicate.¹⁹² It is this analysis, which inevitably led Frede to the conclusion that no other reading of the distinction is logically tenable.

I do not think further defence of his point is needed – at least not until some opponent directly engages with Frede’s argumentation and shows that it is in fact incorrect – either by pointing out logical problems within his account, or by exposing inconsistencies between his account and what Plato actually wrote. Leigh, Brown and Gill all explicitly referred to Frede’s article and built their own accounts with his article in mind, yet none of them in any way responded to his in-depth logical analysis of the possible options of reading the *pros alla* – *kath auto* distinction. One would reasonably expect that, given the close connection they themselves draw between their respective accounts and Frede’s one, they would engage with it and try to refute his *argumentation*, not only his *conclusions*. But they all merely flatly rejected his conclusions as if the argumentation for them was never written, and instead offered their own interpretations, without any attempt to react to his analysis, of which they knew and to which they referred – which begs the question, whether Frede’s account was ever seriously refuted by any of them.

8.2.3 Brown’s account as a complement of Frede’s interpretation

Nevertheless, Brown did not have to and should not have rejected Frede’s reading – in fact, I would like to show that the main points of her argument are entirely compatible with Frede’s account, and thus their accounts can be read as complementing each other.

¹⁹² See his interpretation of passage 255d1–7 at pp. 13–19, and then applied to passage 255c12–13 at pp. 27–29.

Brown's account is *linguistic* in its nature: it tells us that in Greek language use, verbs do not have sharply distinguished complete and incomplete uses and, in turn, the fact that the same verb is predicated in a complete and an incomplete way does not necessarily imply different senses and (linguistic) meanings of the verb itself – contrary to Brown's example cases of *1a* ("Jane is growing tomatoes") and *1b* ("Jane is growing"), where the fact that the first "is growing" is incomplete and the second complete indicates by itself that the verb bears different meaning in each case – or, more precisely, they are two entirely different, although homonymous verbs. If Brown's account is right, however, then we need not postulate different verbs—and, in turn, different meanings—where the same verb-word is used once in complete, then in incomplete form. Just as in example cases of *2a* ("Jane is teaching French") and *2b* ("Jane is teaching"), the meaning of the predicate "is teaching" remains exactly the same in both sentences, though in *2a* it is supplemented by an additional detail, that the subject being taught is French.

The interpretation of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction at 255c12–13, however, is a *philosophical* task. Properly understanding Greek linguistics is without doubt necessary for proper reading of the distinction, and in this respect, Brown's contribution is invaluable – but it is not *by itself* sufficient to provide a conclusive interpretation. Her observation that complete and incomplete uses of the verbs are "blended" in both having completions—first group by allowing it in some cases, the second in requiring it in all—does not tell us if this is *the* distinction Plato wants to communicate by the *kath auto – pros alla* pair phrase. Brown jumps from linguistic observation to philosophical conclusion too quickly.

For what it's worth, Brown's account can help us in two respects. First, in a negative way by helping to reject some interpretations of the division. As we have seen above, this involves the *Interpretation A* and all its variants, unless we are ready to accept with Brown that the distinction at 255c12–13 is not philosophically important nor directly relevant to the rest of the dialogue.¹⁹³ Second, Brown's account is helpful in a positive, constructive way. Given the fact that verbs in Greek are not sharply divisible between complete and incomplete ones, it allows us to see that ***Plato in the distinction might very well allow the predicates on both sides of the distinction to be further completed.*** This is *not* to make Brown's account irrelevant for interpreting the distinction at hand – quite the opposite, while it is relevant primarily on the linguistic level, it is also important on the philosophical level precisely in pointing out to the fact that the philosophical distinction at 255c–d would probably communicate something beyond mere linguistic observation, since that is

¹⁹³ It is, of course, *indirectly* relevant, since it helps Plato to differentiate between the Forms of Being and Difference.

something Plato would already presuppose. Thus, as soon as we drop the assumption of the *Interpretation A* (which Brown embraced) that the distinction communicates the linguistic difference between complete and incomplete predicates, we are free, thanks to Brown's contribution, to see both *kath auto* and *pros alla* predicates as potentially complete or incomplete.

This way, if we read Brown's article as linguistic in nature, it becomes entirely compatible with Frede's interpretation of the *kath auto* – *pros alla* distinction at 255c12–13. For the distinction, according to Frede's reading, defines a philosophical division between predicates which are said of beings with reference to themselves, and those which are said of beings with reference to other things. Thus, *all* predicates, according to Frede, are actually said with reference to something, and this is based on metaphysical fact stemming from Plato's Theory of Forms, where everything gets its characteristics either by participating on some Form, or by directly being that Form which has or is that property essentially. How this *philosophical* division divides the totality of predicates is inconsequent to the fact of how the predicates are *linguistically* divided between complete and incomplete – whether such division is sharp or blurred, as in Brown's account. Yet, the fact that Brown has shown the latter to be blurred further strengthens the impression that the two divisions are simply different.

For example, we can assert of the Form of Being that it *is* (that is, *exists*) in two linguistically different ways: either by saying that (1*a*) "Being is", or by saying (1*b*) "Being is existing". Linguistically speaking, the latter form is (in comparison with the first one) evidently "further completed". But that does not change the fact that both sentences are, in Frede's interpretation, cases of *kath auto* predications, since whether the reference to the Form is linguistically expressed or not, it must always be implied in the meaning of the sentence, as Frede immediately observed:

"x is" must be supplemented by "y" in every use in which "is" refers to the Form of Being. Even in cases where this is not linguistically necessary, "y" must at least be implied.

[—Frede 1967, p. 35]

And vice versa, when we use the very same pair of predicates, but in cases where the subject of the predication is not the Form of Being, but either any other Form or particular, both predications would be of a *pros alla* kind: (2*a*) "Beauty is" and (2*b*) "Beauty is existing" (or "Beauty is being") are both, from the point of the 255c12–13 distinction, different from previous pair 1*a* and 1*b*. From the linguistic point drawn by Brown's account, however, these four sentences are divided differently into pairs 1*a* and 2*a* on the

one hand, and *1b* and *2b* on the other. The important point is that while these two divisions are different, they are not opposed to each other, since the accounts of Frede and Brown are essentially of a different nature.

Moreover, it is also worth noting that the same compatibility cannot be established between Brown's account and either the *Interpretation A* or the *Interpretation B*. We have already seen that, in the case of *Interpretation A*, the possibility of connecting it with Brown's reading is conditioned by accepting the premise that the distinction at 255c12–13 is neither novel, nor philosophically important. Under the *Interpretation B*, sentences "Socrates is man" and "Socrates is white" would be cases of different predications (*kath auto* and *pros alla*, respectively), since it is the basic claim of this interpretation that the distinction at 255c12–13 is formulated to differentiate between substantial (self-subsisting) and accidental (dependent) predicates. Such a distinction must clearly be sharp and clear-cut – there cannot be a "smooth" transition between substantial and attributive predicate. Thus, we cannot equate it with the distinction between complete and incomplete predicates, as this has been proven by Brown to be continuous. The only option left is therefore to try to allow both substantial and attributive predicates to be linguistically complete or incomplete, similarly as I have argued to be the case with Frede's interpretation. But inside the framework of *Interpretation B*, this is unintelligible. While the attributive, *pros alla* predicates could perhaps be construed both in complete and incomplete form, this is altogether impossible to be done with substantial, *kath auto* predicates: how should we conceive of an incomplete use of a substantial predicate like "Socrates is man"?

Thus, contrary to how Brown has seen it, we have come to the conclusion that the best way to do justice to the linguistic observation that Brown has made, and at the same time respect the requirements of both the immediate and the wider context of the 255c–d passage, is to accept *both* Brown's and Frede's account together: one as being *linguistic* in nature, the other as a *philosophical* one, for there is no real opposition between them.

8.3 Tracing the origin of the *kath auto* – *pros alla* distinction

It is often thought by platonic scholars that the *kath auto* – *pros alla* distinction is first introduced by Plato in the *Sophist*, and therefore constitutes a novel terminological device to be used in Plato's Theory. However, as I have already mentioned in the introduction to this part, its origin in Plato's works can be traced back at least to the *Charmides*, and the aim of this subchapter will be to demonstrate it.

This is important for two reasons. First, if the distinction is already present in Plato’s thinking in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues, then it cannot be taken to constitute the point of Plato’s departure from his early Theory. As we have seen, the interpretations of what the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction is a distinction *of*—and therefore also what *problem* it is meant to solve—are many. But if it can be shown (as I am bound to do) that the distinction itself is not new and that it has been put to use by Plato before the *Sophist*, then this would constitute yet another proof against the whole families of *Interpretation A* and *Interpretation B*, because they are both based on the premise that there was a sudden discovery in Plato’s thinking. Moreover, we will see that the distinction in the *Charmides* is used by Plato in the very same way as in the *Sophist*, thus implying a continuity, and not a development of Plato’s Theory.

Second, the point that the distinction is new in the *Sophist* has been raised by Leigh as an objection against Frede’s own reading. She notes that the distinction is introduced by Visitor too unobtrusively to really be new, and moreover Theaetetus seems to be already familiar with it:

One might doubt whether the two lines at c13-14 announce Frede’s novel distinction, and introduce it into the dialogue between Theaetetus and the Stranger. There is none of the fanfare we would expect if Plato is at this point introducing *the* central distinction about being for the very first time in the dialogue. And Theaetetus’ familiarity with the distinction prior to its being announced – indicated by the present tense, ‘I think you agree (συγχωρεῖν), that of the beings...’ – is not easily explained on this reading.

[—Leigh 2012, pp. 7–8]

And in the note below she also adds: “One might also add that if Plato did mean to introduce Frede’s distinction in these lines, he is guilty of being so terse as to be unforgivably obscure” (p. 8, n. 16). Thus, either Plato *does* introduce something very new with the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction, but in a very bad and almost unintelligible way, or Frede is wrong in claiming that the distinction is novel – at least that is how Leigh presents the situation. The problem with this dichotomy is that Frede actually claimed the very opposite of what Leigh is making him say. For he explicitly stated:

Incidentally, these two forms [i.e., *kath auto – pros alla*], which correspond to the use of “... is” in (II) and (III), do not appear for the first time in Plato’s *Sophist*. For in *Charmides* it is said (169a1–5):

»What we need, my friend, is some great man who will be up to the task of determining fully whether nothing has its own power in relation to itself rather than to something else, or whether some things do but not others.«

[—Frede 1967, p. 18; with the original Greek text of the *Charmides* quoted by Frede replaced with translation by Moore & Raymond 2019]

Either Leigh has accidentally overlooked this passage—which would be most unfortunate, as her article directly builds upon Frede’s account—, or she unfairly objects against Frede’s reading on the basis of something which he explicitly denies. It is one thing to note that *Frede’s interpretation* of the distinction is novel (and perhaps even calling for an amazement similar to the one Socrates displayed in the *Parmenides*), and it is quite a different thing to say that Frede understands the *distinction itself* to be novel. Leigh’s comment is clearly meant to be of the latter kind, and by making it she simply disregards what Frede is saying. On the other hand, however, it is true that Frede did not develop this idea any further, and thus his note remains just as it is in his account. That is why, in the following section, we will look on the *Charmides* passage quoted by Frede to examine how is the *pros alla – kath auto* distinction used there, and whether it can be connected with the *Sophist* in the way that would actually support the thesis that it maintained the same meaning for Plato between those chronologically distant dialogues.

8.3.1 *Pros alla – pros heauto* distinction in the *Charmides*

In *Charmides*, one of Plato’s earliest dialogues, Socrates is pursuing a goal of finding the proper definition of σωφροσύνη, generally translated as “temperance”, “self-moderation” or simply “discipline”.¹⁹⁴ After a few unsuccessful attempts to discover what it is together with Charmides, Socrates turns to his mentor Critias (162d) who takes over the argument after Charmides (162e ff.). Critias claims that to be disciplined simply means “knowing oneself” (164d). When Socrates pushes Critias to answer what is the object of this kind of knowledge, he answers that “every other kind of knowledge is of something else and not of itself; discipline alone, however, is the knowledge of all those other kinds of knowledge and also of itself” (166c). Socrates then summarises Critias’ point as thus:

Then the disciplined person alone will know himself and will be able to examine what he knows and what he doesn’t; and likewise, he’ll be able to assess others—what a person knows and thinks he knows, when that person knows it, and also what a person thinks he

¹⁹⁴ The best translation would probably be “soundness of mind”, but I will use “discipline” following Moore and Raymond (2019), whose translation I will use throughout the chapter.

knows when he doesn't actually know it. There's nobody else who can do this. And this is just what being disciplined or discipline itself for someone knowing himself is: knowing what one knows and what one doesn't know.

(*Charmides* 167a; trans. by Moore & Raymond 2019¹⁹⁵)

Each kind of knowledge is a knowledge *of* something, and Plato understands this “being *of* something” as a capacity, a power or a faculty (δύναμις), that a particular kind of knowledge has over its object: “Knowledge as such is the knowledge of something—it has some sort of power that makes it be *of* something, right?” (168b) What in fact troubles Plato is that if discipline would be a knowledge of itself, it would mean that it has this faculty (of being of something) aimed at itself. In 169a, Plato at last fully articulates his concern, and it is there where the distinction between *pros alla* and *pros heauto* in its complete form has been spotted by Frede:

What we need, my friend, is some great man who will be up to the task of determining fully whether nothing has its own power [δύναμιν] in relation to itself [αὐτὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ] rather than to something else [ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἄλλο], or whether some things do but not others. And if there are some things that have their powers in relation to themselves [αὐτὰ πρὸς αὐτὰ], is knowledge one of them? That is, after all, what we're claiming discipline to be.

(*Charmides* 169a)

However, this is actually not the first time Plato used the distinction in the *Charmides*. Speaking of other kinds of sciences, Socrates in 166a describes the science of arithmetic as the knowledge of “how quantities of each kind relate to their own kind and to the other” using the Greek “πλήθους ὅπως ἔχει πρὸς αὐτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα”. Then in 166c, Critias (already slightly angry at Socrates) describes the difference of discipline from other sciences by saying that discipline alone “is the knowledge of all those other kinds of knowledge and also of itself” with Greek “μόνη τῶν τε ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶ καὶ αὐτῇ ἑαυτῆς”. Finally, in 166e Critias rephrases his account in the different order and says of the discipline that “it alone is the knowledge both of itself and of the other kinds of knowledge” using the Greek “μόνη τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν αὐτῇ τε αὐτῆς ἐστὶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιστήμη”.

It is worth noting both the similarities and the differences in the wording of these phrases. Some scholars tend to overemphasise the importance of the exact terminological uniformity (which was never Plato's *forte*), while at the same time they understate the significance of the similarities of topic and context between passages or the whole

¹⁹⁵ In what follows, I will standardly use the translation of the *Charmides* by Christopher Moore and Christopher C. Raymond (2019), unless noted otherwise.

dialogues.¹⁹⁶ Though Plato’s exact phrasing has changed a bit in every instance above, from the context it is clear that what Plato means in all these cases is essentially the same. Let us now, one last time, recall the corresponding passage of *Sophist*, with which we want to compare those of the *Charmides* we have just seen:

But I think you agree that of the things that are, some are spoken of [λέγεσθαι] in and by themselves [αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτά], while others are always spoken of in relation to others [πρὸς ἄλλα].
(*Sophist* 255c)

The important observation which I would like to raise now, is that ***it is evident that these two passages have more in common than a mere accidental selection of the two very similar pairs of phrases on Plato’s side***. For the distinction is essentially used in the same way: to distinguish between a thing being related to itself, and it being related to another different thing. In the *Charmides*, a fact that a certain thing has its power related to itself or to another thing necessarily implies that the object of that power has some character or property.¹⁹⁷ And in the *Sophist*, we can speak of a certain thing as having some character or property either by itself, or by being related to another thing.

It might be immediately objected that these two cases are not related at all, for in the case of the *Charmides*, the question is whether τὰ ὄντα have their *power* [δύναμις] related to themselves, while in the *Sophist* the talk is about τὰ ὄντα being *spoken of* [λέγεσθαι] as being this or that. But the connection between them is actually much closer, since the possibility of truthfully “speaking of” τὰ ὄντα in the *Sophist* is directly connected with the notion of δύναμις – and we can cast light upon this connection when we recall the “battle between giants and gods” in the *Sophist* (245e–249d). There, Theaetetus and Visitor are trying to examine what both groups define as “being”. The Giants or “physicalists” are “treating body and being as the same thing” (246b), thus ignoring anything bodiless – not even admitting that there is such a thing at all. On the other hand, the Gods or “friends of Forms” believe that “true being consists of some sort of intelligible and bodiless Forms” (246b). They strictly separate being from becoming, claiming that the former never changes, while the latter is always in a process of change – thus never really *being* anything, only *coming-to-be* first this, then again that (246b–c). The protagonists of the first kind “try to jam everything forcibly into body” (246d), while the second group “locates being among forms” (246c). After some discussion, the Visitor asks Theaetetus to get back to physicalists and he proposes “actually to make them better people”, or at least

¹⁹⁶ On these grounds, for example, Gill has built her argument in her *Philosophos* (p. 53) that the phrases *kath’ hauto* and *pros heauto* must have altogether different meanings.

¹⁹⁷ I will offer a proper analysis of this relation of a subject through its power to a certain object, together with my own interpretation of it in the light of the Theory of Forms, in the following chapter.

“imagine they are better than they are” (246d) – in order to be able to find at least *some* common ground between the claims of both groups:

So let’s go back to questioning them; because if they are willing to admit that among the things that are there is even a little bit of a thing that is without body, that will suffice. What they need to tell us is what common feature is to be found equally among these things that lack body and those that have it, and allows them to say that both sets of things are. (Sophist 247c–d)

He wants to “see whether they’d be ready to accept an offer from us” (247d) and proposes his own definition of being – on a strict premise that they would be “willing to admit that among the things that are there is even a little bit of a thing that is without body, that will suffice”:

I say, then, that a thing genuinely is if it has some capacity [δύναμιν], of whatever sort, either to act on another thing, of whatever nature, or to be acted on, even to the slightest degree and by the most trivial of things, and even if it is just the once. That is, what marks off the things that are as being, I propose, is nothing other than capacity [δύναμις]. (Sophist 247d–e)

Of course, this “capacity” or “power” Visitor speaks of is nothing other than the δύναμις of *Charmides*. Now, since “it is true that for Plato the things that can be predicated of something must be”, as Frede neatly noted,¹⁹⁸ us veridically speaking of beings requires that they actually exist. Thus, the “beings” in the *Sophist* of which we speak as *being something* either with reference to themselves, or with reference to other things, are the things that have some power to act or be acted upon. Therefore, the notion of δύναμις connects the beings of *Charmides* and of *Sophist*, by which the continuity of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction from the former to the latter dialogue is once more confirmed.

Moreover, we now have a reason more for saying that it does not make sense to treat the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction in the *Sophist* as a distinction between “absolute” and “relative” ways of predicating something of beings. The *pros alla* side of the distinctions we have seen in the *Charmides* only make sense if it is understood “strictly” as meaning a relation to a *numerically different* thing, not merely a relation to some, *possibly numerically the same*, thing. For if we try to state the question of the *Charmides* 169a in terms of some things having the δύναμις *absolutely* and some *relatively*, the actual question that would be asked, given the text around the distinction, would become this:

¹⁹⁸ Frede 1967, p. 23.

Whether nothing has its own power *absolutely* [αὐτὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ] rather than *in relation to something* [ἄλλα πρὸς ἄλλο], or whether some things do but not others.

Under such reading, the question becomes nonsensical and the answer trivial, since to consider that “*nothing* has its own power absolutely” as a viable option equals to regard as possible that there is no being at all which “has by itself” or “owns” its own power, which it could then relate to and target at other things. Not only is, under such dichotomy, the latter option the only logically possible alternative, so the question seems to be needless – but, moreover, it does not make sense in the context of finding out whether discipline can be the knowledge of itself. This is similarly shown in other sections we have analysed: the description of the arithmetic at 166a would become the knowledge of “how quantities of each kind are *absolutely* and *in relation to something* [meaning both the other kind, and itself]”. And lastly, the definition of discipline according to Critias at 166e (and analogically at 166c), would have to be read as “the knowledge both *absolute* and *relative to the kinds* [meaning both its same kind, and other kinds] of knowledge”. We might note that here the opposite to *pros alla* is *pros auto* or *autê heautê*, not *kath auto* as in the *Sophist*. But that does not in any way change the problem, as the issue is created by the mere fact of reading *pros alla* “loosely”. In other words, it is enough to read *pros alla* “loosely” to make the entire distinction unintelligible, independent of the precise understanding of the opposing *pros auto* part of the distinction.

Thus, the *Charmides* confirms what Frede has argued for on the basis of the *Sophist* alone: namely, that *pros alla* part of the distinction must be read strictly as involving numerically *distinct* subject and predicate. But if this is so, then in turn we need to read the contrasting term of the distinction precisely as Frede read it: namely, as involving numerically the *same* subject and predicate. For if the distinction should remain exhaustive—which is a clear requirement, given the way it is formulated—, then we need to read the *pros alla* counterpart accordingly. And since in *Charmides* this counterpart is *pros auto* or *autê heautê*, and in the *Sophist* it is *kath auto*, this leads to the conclusion that these terms actually mean the same for Plato, since they must be read in the same way in the distinction he himself made in the *Charmides* and in the *Sophist*. This is because the only possible alternative to this reading would be to treat the *pros alla* term differently in both dialogues – an interpretation which is simply less plausible. *Either* Plato meant the same thing by using different expressions, *or* he meant different things when using the very same expression. But while the latter option clearly accuses Plato of contradicting himself, the former option is quite possible and—in contrast to terminologically much stricter Aristotle—very common for Plato.

To conclude, what the *Charmides* has shown us and what we can at the very least propose as a plausible alternative against some developmentalist readings, is that Plato had the terminological distinction of *kath auto – pros alla* at hand even in earlier dialogues, and was fully aware of it. He knows that—at least theoretically—things can relate to other things and to themselves, and that these relations are somehow qualitatively very different, otherwise he would not assume the fact that not all things can relate to themselves, to be clear right from the start. There is no account of this difference yet, but the question can already be sensed. And the fact that Plato in the *Charmides* closed this question for now and put it aside for later examination by saying that they need “some great man who will be up to the task” tells us clearly that not only is Plato aware of this question in such an early dialogue as *Charmides*, but he already knows that it is no small task and will require a great philosopher to deal with it. That time, I maintain, arrived only at the writing of the *Sophist*, where the problem is revisited once more and solved.

9 Self-predication and Forms

I have been, up until this point, deliberately avoiding the questions related to the so-called self-predication theory of Forms – that is, the view that Forms themselves can be predicated as exhibiting the characters they provide to their participants through the relation of participation. In this chapter, I will continue with the examination of the *Charmides*, but I will turn my attention from the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction to the analysis of the possibility of self-predication as presented in this dialogue. I believe it can be shown that *Charmides* speaks against various developmentalist readings that take Plato’s commitment to general self-predication theory either as implicitly assumed, or explicitly claimed in earlier dialogues. Moreover, I will argue that *Charmides* is much more closely related to the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* than is usually recognised, and that Plato’s analysis of the self-predication supports my thesis that the communion of Forms was foreseen by Plato long before the problems caused by its denial were demonstrated in the *Parmenides* and their solution proposed in the *Sophist*.

There are many problems and challenges which this theory poses to Plato’s own Theory of Forms – that is, *if* Plato actually accepted it. Among the others, the prominent ones are the largeness regress and the likeness regress in the *Parmenides* 132a–b (and 132c–133a, resp.), which Aristotle later in his works conjointly titled the “third man” argument. But I dare to say that the biggest problem remains the self-predication theory of Forms itself, for due to its vagueness with which it is introduced and used by critics, it is difficult to even tell whether there is any single *coherent* and *well-defined* theory bearing this name at all. This inherent ambiguity has been noted and thoroughly analysed by Alan Code in his article *Aristotle: Essence and Accident*. While mostly interested with Aristotle’s theory and the Plato of Aristotle (that is, Plato as read and understood by Aristotle), Code’s remarks are nevertheless to a high degree applicable to Plato’s scholarship as well:

The question as to whether Plato or Aristotle are committed to some form of ‘self-predication’ is ambiguous, and the ambiguity is not resolved by carefully distinguishing various set-theoretical readings of the copula. There are two basic predication relations, and so there are two forms of *self-predication*. It is a fundamental truth [of Aristotle’s ontology] that each item is *I*-predicable of itself. Since a predicable cannot belong essentially and accidentally to the same subject, it is also a basic truth that no item is *H*-predicable of itself. Everything *Is* essentially itself, and nothing accidentally

Has itself. Most discussions of self-predication seem to be concerned with *H*-predicability, but some writers have treated *I*-predications like ‘man is (a) man’ as instances of self-predication. It is quite important to avoid confusing these two very different ways in which an item might be said to be predicable of itself. [—Code 1986, pp. 419–420]

Commentators operating within the terminology of self-predication usually claim that Plato in his earlier dialogues held (what I would term) a *naïve general theory of self-predication* claiming that each Form exhibits its own essential character. Their accounts differ in their explanations of *how* the predicate “*F* is *f*” applies to each Form *F*, but *that* it applies to each one of them – at least for the pre-Parmenidean Plato – seems to be uncontroversial. It was a *naïve* theory, because Plato never gave an account of it – and sometimes it is also additionally assumed that he never gave it a thought before the crisis came in the *Parmenides*. And it was *general*, simply because it is claimed that—at least for the early Plato—, *each single* Form is self-predicational. The main aim of this chapter is to argue that Plato never held a naïve theory of self-predication by showing that Plato actually considered the possibility of self-predication and gave an account on its limits long before the *Parmenides*.

9.1 The origins of the naïve general theory of self-predication

In modern scholarship, the self-predication theory seems to have been first explicitly formulated by Gregory Vlastos. Its origin traces back to his famous 1954 article *The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides*, where he also seems to have coined the term itself. In the article, Vlastos analysed the applicability of the third man regress to Plato’s own Theory of Forms. He claimed that two assumptions were needed in order for the regress to be damaging to Plato’s Theory: the latter being the *Nonidentity Assumption*, according to which no thing *having* (displaying) the character can at the same time be the metaphysical *source* of that character – in short, “if *x* is *F*, *x* cannot be identical with *F*-ness” (p. 325). The first was the *Self-Predication Assumption* itself, which Vlastos formulated in the following way:

We need, first of all, what I propose to call the Self-Predication Assumption:

(A3) Any Form can be predicated of itself. Largeness is itself large. *F*-ness is itself *F*.

[—Vlastos 1954, p. 324]

Vlastos claimed that these two assumptions remained “tacit” in Plato’s philosophy, and remained to be so throughout his entire philosophical career:

Had Plato recognized that all of his Forms are self-predicational, what would he have done with Forms like Change, Becoming and Perishing, which he did recognize as *bona fide* Forms? Clearly none of these could be self-predicational, for if they were, they would not be changeless, and would thus forfeit *being*. [...] That Plato is never aware of any such difficulty shows that he was not aware of any Assumption which would have made the difficulty as obvious to him as it is to us. [—Vlastos 1954, p. 339]

In his later writings, and most notably in the *Parmenides*, Plato “begins to feel that something is wrong, or at least not quite right, about his theory, and he is puzzled and anxious” about it (p. 343). But nevertheless, since Plato never explicitly realised his two tacit assumptions, he was unable to properly formulate the core of the problem, and that is precisely what led him into the state of “honest perplexity” in the *Parmenides*:

We can now see why Plato could neither convince himself that the Third Man Argument was valid, nor refute it convincingly. He could do neither without stating explicitly its two implicit assumptions. This he never did; he never looked at either of them in the clear light of explicit assertion, for, had he done so, he would have had compelling reason to repudiate both, since their logical consequences are intolerable to a rational mind. But their repudiation would have been fatal to the Separation Theory and the Degrees-of-Reality Theory, which are central to his explicit metaphysics. He was thus holding consciously a metaphysical Theory whose disastrous implications were hidden from his conscious mind. [—Vlastos 1954, pp. 342–343]

Here, then, is the origin of the modern notion of self-predication of Forms in Plato’s Theory. Many commentators have since then reacted to Vlastos’ article, either in a positive or negative way. Among those, one of the earlier and certainly more important reactions was that of Reginald E. Allen, who in his 1960 article *Participation and Predication in Plato’s Middle Dialogues* disagreed with Vlastos. Allen claimed that the fact that some (or perhaps all) Forms might be called after their essential characteristic, “does not, by itself, imply self-predication; for that, an auxiliary premise is required” (p. 148):

This premise is that a function of the type “... is *F*” may be applied univocally to *F* particulars and to the *F* Itself, so that when (for example) we say that a given act is just, and that Justice is just, we are asserting that both have identically the same character. But this premise would be false if the function were systematically equivocal, according as the subject of the sentence was a Form or a particular. In that case, to say that Justice is just and that any given act is just would be to say two quite different (though perhaps related) things, and the difficulties inherent in self-predication could not possibly arise.

[—Allen 1960, p. 148]

In other words, Allen wanted to save the Theory of Forms from the third man regress by claiming that when Plato says that “the Form of Beautiful is beautiful” and that “this girl is beautiful”, these two assertions of the predicate “... is beautiful” are of completely different kinds, since their functions are “systematically equivocal”. In the former case, “... is beautiful” is used in its *primary designation* (as Allen termed it) – “it is a synonym of »the *F* Itself« and »*F*-ness«; therefore, to say that *F*-ness is *F* is to state an identity” (p. 150). On the other hand, the latter case is an example of *derivative designation*, in which “to say of something that it is *F* is to say that it is causally dependent upon the *F*” (p. 150):

Plato’s self-predicative language is both intelligible and logically innocuous. Grammatical predicates are names which exhibit a systematic ambiguity according as they designate Forms or particulars; Forms themselves are proper nameables; what appear to be self-predicative statements are identity statements; and what appear to be attributive statements are relational statements. [—Allen 1960, p. 150]

In a way, this solved the problem Vlastos raised – but I do not want to focus on assessing Allen’s solution in itself, for I think the real importance of his contribution to the discussion about self-predication actually lies elsewhere. As a by-product of his analysis, we can observe a significant turn in the development of the self-predication theory, which Allen has caused. This development is twofold – or, rather, there are two sides to it.

First, it introduced an inherent ambiguity to the term *self-predication* itself, since its meaning in Vlastos’ account is radically different from its meaning in Allen’s reinterpretation. Under Vlastos’ reading, the general self-predication theory which Plato (allegedly) tacitly held assumed that each Form is predicable of itself in the same way as particulars which participate in it. In Code’s terminology, we might express this by saying that each Form is *H-predicable* of itself in the same way as particulars are *H-predicable* – though, of course, for different reasons, since particulars are *H-predicable* only because of their participation in Forms; moreover, they are probably also *H-predicable* to a lesser degree than Forms themselves. But *categorially speaking*, the predicates (and their meanings) which the predications about Forms and about particulars involve, are always the same.

On the other hand, Allen’s account avoids the third man regress by mixing *two different* ways of self-predication: *I-predicability* in the case of Forms, and *H-predicability* in the case of particulars. Thus, the predicate “... is beautiful” is “systematically equivocal”: it has equivocal meanings, but *systematically* so: when used in connection with a Form, it is always a case of *I-predication*, whereas when connected with a particular, it is

always an example of *H-predication*. Therefore, what Vlastos understood under the term self-predication is that the Form *exhibits* its essential character, while for Allen, self-predication of Forms received the meaning of merely asserting a statement of identity. Allen argued that when the difference between a Form and a particular having some character is understood by the latter “possessing in merely approximate or comparative degree a character that the Form, which *is* the character, *has* fully”, this “assimilates the Form categorially to the class of things it defines” (p. 156). This is why, on the basis of the difference in the degrees of reality between Forms and particulars, he argued against Vlastos’ reading, and urged that the deficiency of particulars must be understood to be of a *type*, and not merely of a *degree*:

If this interpretation is accepted, it is quite fatal. But it turns on construing the deficiency of particulars as one of quality, rather than of type; they are deficiently something else of *the same sort*, as a blind eye is deficiently an eye, or as one shuttle, modeled on another, may be a defective copy. Yet surely the force of the metaphor of imitation, and of the *χωρισμός*, is to indicate that the deficiency in question is that of one *type* of thing with respect to something of another type: “deficiency” is here a category distinction, not a distinction within categories. Particulars are deficient not because they have the characters they have but because they are the kind of things they are. [—Allen 1960, p. 156]

While widely influential, Allen’s reading was nevertheless not accepted unanimously, so the platonic scholars supporting the theory of self-predication split into two groups. Yet, the same term remained in use by the commentators of both branches of the theory of self-predication, without anyone’s explicit attention turned to this point, that they are in fact no longer speaking about two very different things. Thus, ***the whole discussion of self-predication became inherently ambiguous very soon after it even emerged***. This is what the Code’s article much later (26 years after Allen’s article) aimed to articulate by saying that there are two kinds of self-predications, and that “the ambiguity is not resolved by carefully distinguishing various set-theoretical readings of the copula”,¹⁹⁹ since the core of the problem lies in using the same name for two different accounts without being aware of the fact.

Second, one important corollary of Allen’s claim that the self-predicating statements are “systematically equivocal” was that ***Allen’s account made it impossible for Forms to have their characters predicated as exhibiting it***. While avoiding the negative conclusions of Vlastos’ reading, Allen’s systematic criterion at the same time made *H-predicability* impossible for Forms themselves, since to say that “the Form of Beautiful is beautiful”

¹⁹⁹ Code 1986, p. 419.

always and unambiguously means to express the statement of identity – and this is the *only* meaning that can be assigned to it in cases where a Form is the subject of the predicate. Naturally, this later led to yet another developments of the doctrine of self-predication, since it seems unavoidable to have a means to assert at least *some* of the Form’s properties to be *H-predicable* of it.

This had many implications for the later scholarship, especially in interpreting the *Sophist*. Of these implications, I can at this point only mention two, and even that only by shortly outlining them. *First*, we can see an indirect effect of Allen’s interpretation in developmentalist accounts trying to claim that *kath auto* predications are predications of identity, while when we want to say of a Form that it exhibits its own character, we need to use *pros alla* predication, because it is a case of *H-predication* – precisely in the same way as with particulars. This then necessitates the “wider” reading of *pros alla* as allowing relations both to numerically the same and distinct subject and predicate, since the uniting principle of *pros alla* predications is precisely the fact that they are *H-predications* and thus relational. *Second* implication of Allen’s reading I would like to mention, though not necessarily connected with the previous reading, nevertheless often came hand in hand and was developed alongside the previous one. It was the claim that in order for a Form to exhibit its own character, it needs to be *relationally* connected with itself. This stemmed precisely from the observation that proper predicates about Forms are statements of identity, so *directly (non-relationally)* speaking, each Form only *is* that character, but to *have* it in terms of displaying it, some additional “binding” of the Form to itself is needed, and this binding is achieved by a Form being *pros alla* related to itself. Thus, in order for the Form to exhibit its own proper character, it needed to participate in itself.

Without attempting to go into more details and analyse the situation further, I would like to emphasise the general observation, that the assumption of the general self-predication theory had far-reaching impact on platonic scholarship, and in many ways helped the developmentalist reading of Plato, since if the self-predication assumption was true, then it was once again necessary to postulate *some* development into Plato’s thinking in order for Plato to overcome the difficulties that scholars themselves recognised as necessarily flowing from the assumption itself. Whether we accept Vlastos’ or Allen’s understanding of the term *self-predication*, if we assume that Plato himself adopted either of them, it is easy to read the introduction of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction in the *Sophist* precisely as Plato’s way to overcome the difficulty posed by it. If it is Vlastos who properly interpreted Plato, then the distinction was needed in order to distinguish Forms

from each other in the first place, for if both the Form of One and the Form of Being are in the same way both one and being *by exhibiting these characters*, then it is unclear how are they distinct and why couldn't any of them provide their participants with both characteristics. If, on the other hand, Plato embraced Allen's interpretation, then no Form can exhibit any character whatsoever, and the distinction in the *Sophist* can be read to serve precisely the need to allow Forms not only to *be* their essences, but also to *have* some characteristics.

It is not my aim here to fully analyse the different theories of self-predication scholars proposed up to this date as such. Instead, I would like to look at it only from the perspective of possible development of Plato's thinking *vis-à-vis* my unitarian interpretation of Plato. For if early in his career, Plato ever held the general self-predication theory as correct, then it seems we have several different reasons for postulating a development in Plato's thinking about Forms. As we have already seen in the the logical analysis of the third question of *Parmenides*—namely, what was Plato's wider purpose of raising the challenge—, a variety of reasons connected with Plato's "early adoption" of self-predication theory has been proposed by critics and formulated mainly in terms of *Explanation A*, which claimed that Plato's thinking simply evolved and he just realised the problem.²⁰⁰

For example, it has been proposed by developmentalist critics, that the regresses in the *Parmenides* were caused precisely by Plato not recognising that Forms cannot "display" their own essences in the same way as particulars participating in them. Alternatively, when connected with the atomicity assumption, the self-predication theory becomes a problem, because Forms will *be* and also *have* their essential properties, which leads them to become non-atomic. Gregory Vlastos, who first used the notion of self-predication, originally claimed that Plato simply did not realise, up to the *Parmenides*, that he tacitly held this assumption, and in the *Parmenides* he tried to formulate his state of genuine perplexity about his Theory. Yet another explanation was that the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction had to be introduced by Plato in the *Sophist* precisely because without it, the general self-predication theory would destroy his own Theory of Forms. Of course, the underlying assumption of all these readings is the commitment to the view that Plato at some point or another held the general self-predication theory.

²⁰⁰ See subchapter *4.1 Explanation A: Plato's thinking evolved and he just realised the problem*.

I will not directly engage with the (few and scarce) instances of the so-called self-predicational sentences found in Plato’s corpus,²⁰¹ which are the sources of (unproportionally more) claims in the scholarly literature of Plato’s alleged commitment to a general self-predication theory of Forms which is “a central and pervasive feature of Form theory in the dialogues” – as Leigh splendidly summarised the position of majority of commentators, herself including.²⁰² The reason for this is not that I consider *none* of these instances to be examples of self-predication. The proper and in-depth examination of these passages is long overdue in Plato’s scholarship, and I believe some of them will turn out to be the cases of Plato’s genuine claims of Forms displaying the same character, of which they themselves are the essence. However, ***if my reading of the Charmides is correct, then all of these (apparent or real) claims of self-predication of Forms must be reexamined and interpreted again in the light of this dialogue.*** This is because, if *Charmides* was really meant to have relevance to Plato’s Theory of Forms—as I want to argue in this chapter—, then the examination of the discipline and the conditions of a thing having its power directed by itself, must be brought directly into the Theory as Plato’s

²⁰¹ I divide the passages which might be considered to be the sources of Plato’s commitment to the self-predication theory into two groups.

The first group consists of what I would call “***legitimate sources***” of self-predication: the passages which can be legitimately read as containing an *explicit* claim that a Form (or several of them) exhibits its own character. This does not *necessarily* mean that such a claim is the main purpose of the passage, nor that it is the *only* legitimate reading, but it should be reasonably safe to assert that a self-predicational reading is at least among the plausible interpretations of what the passage *explicitly and directly* says. I consider only four passages in the whole Platonic corpus to be included in this group of “legitimate sources”: *Protagoras* 330c–e; *Phaedo* 102d–103a; *Sophist* 258b–c; and *Greater Hippias* 292d–e.

The interpretation of neither of these passages is clear and straightforward, and they have all been read in various ways, of which the self-predicative reading is only one of the possible options. But at the same time, it is also true that they *prima facie* contain explicit claims about some Form of *F* being *F*-like, so their literal reading leads to a confirmation of self-predication. Nevertheless, it is also important to notice that neither of these passages contains an explicit generalisation claim – they all only speak about *certain specific* Forms which exhibit their own essential character, but not a single one of the passages aims to generalise that claim to *all* the Forms there are. The closest we can get to a generalisation claim is in the *Sophist* passage, where we seem to get a *possible hint* of a generalisation by Plato naming several Forms – but even there it is not explicit at all, nor something we can reasonably infer from what is being directly said. Thus, to read a generalisation claim into the passage would require a substantial contextual support to make such reading at least plausible.

The second group consists of passages which might be categorised as “***spurious sources***” of self-predication. They do not contain any explicit or in any way direct claim about self-predication, but some critics have inferred the claim from their context or from the fact that, when combined with some other assumptions (which might or might not be reasonable to assume), they lead to the conclusion that the self-predicative reading is the most plausible one.

One of the most common of these additional assumptions is that when it is said by Plato in various passages that the Form of *X* cannot be *opposite-of-X*-like, it might be inferred that it is so on the basis of Plato’s rejection of the compresence of opposites in Forms, since the Form of *X* is already *X*-like, and thus cannot at the same time be *opposite-of-X*-like. (We have already looked into this assumption during the logical analysis of the first question of the *Parmenides*, under the subchapter [2.1.1 Explanation A: The rejection of essential opposites](#).) In these cases, the assumption of self-predication is combined with the assumption of the rejection of the compresence of opposites in Forms to further postulate a necessary development in Plato’s Theory of Forms. Among these “spurious sources” we might include *Phaedo* 100c, *Symposium* 211a–d, *Euthyphro* 5c–d or *Lysis* 217e (and probably some others).

²⁰² Leigh 2012, p. 9.

early examination of the conditions for self-predication of Forms. No such attempt had, to the best of my knowledge, been done by any scholar up to this date.

9.2 An account of the limits of self-predication in the *Charmides*

We have already glimpsed the trace of limiting the extent of self-predication during the analysis of the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction in the *Charmides* 169a passage. Recall the passage in question:

What we need, my friend, is some great man who will be up to the task of determining fully **whether nothing has its own power in relation to itself rather than to something else, or whether some things do but not others**. And if there are some things that have their powers in relation to themselves, is knowledge one of them? That is, after all, what we're claiming discipline to be. (*Charmides* 169a; bolded emphasis mine)

Focusing only at the relevant part of sentence (highlighted above), the original Greek has “πότερον οὐδὲν τῶν ὄντων τὴν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν αὐτὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πέφυκεν ἔχειν πλὴν ἐπιστήμης, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἄλλο, ἢ τὰ μὲν, τὰ δ' οὐ”. In this case, the translation of Rosamond Kent Sprague—though slightly older than that of Moore and Raymond—is even more precise: the question is “whether no existing thing can by nature apply its own faculty to itself but only towards something else, or whether some can, but others cannot”. Socrates and Critias are there examining whether knowledge can be *of itself* on the basis of Critias’ last definition of the discipline (which he already changed several times before). As we have already seen, Critias claimed that discipline is a special kind of knowledge, which does not have its own special object (over which it applies and *of which* it is a knowledge), but is a kind of meta-knowledge which is about knowing other “knowledges”:

Every other kind of knowledge is of something else and not of itself; discipline alone, however, is the knowledge of all those other kinds of knowledge and also of itself.

(*Charmides* 166c)

The ultimate goal for Socrates and Critias is, of course, to find out “what is discipline the knowledge of” (166b) and to decide whether the definition of discipline offered by Critias is the correct one. But before doing so, they need to inquire first whether this is even possible—for discipline to know itself and other kinds of knowledge, that is, for knowledge to know knowledge. Because the discipline is undeniably *a knowledge* of something, if then it is a knowledge of other kinds of knowledge, it is a *knowledge of knowledge(s)*. That is why Socrates asks the question whether it is possible that some things “have their powers in relation to themselves” – and if yes, “is knowledge one of

them”? We should immediately notice the general approach that Plato takes. He does not merely ask *specifically* whether discipline *in particular* could know itself and other knowledges, nor is he content with determining whether knowledge *in general* could know something that itself is a knowledge. He proposes “the task of determining fully whether *nothing* has its own power in relation to itself rather than to something else, or whether some things do but not others”.

At the same time, however, we seem to get no answers for these questions from Plato: first, the question is posed near the end of the dialogue, moreover, Socrates immediately recognises that “what we need, my friend, is some great man who will be up to the task”—thus giving us a hint that this problem is not going to be solved trivially—and finally, the dialogue itself ultimately concludes with both interlocutors admitting that they not only haven’t been able to find out what the discipline is, but they have arrived at the conclusion that discipline is not beneficial in any way for someone who possess it. Thus Plato admits that his inquiry must be flawed: “Had I been at all helpful in making our search go well, I really doubt that what is agreed to be the most admirable thing of all would appear to us to have no benefit” (175a–b). However, he is also convinced that “I really don’t believe that any of this is the case, but instead that I’m a bad inquirer: since discipline is a great good, and if you really do have it, you are blessed“ (175e–176a), and just before doing so, he specifically points to assumptions they made with Critias without properly examining them (175b–c). This gives hope that the whole dialogue wasn’t a waste of time, after all, as the inquiry at least uncovered the points that need to be analysed further.

9.2.1 Knowledge knowing itself

In terms of the question we are now interested in, however, the dialogue *does* reveal important points during their argumentation just after accepting the first task at 167b, namely to uncover “whether it’s even possible, this knowing that one knows and doesn’t know what one knows and doesn’t know”. He is puzzled by the fact that if such a kind of knowledge exists, it is of no particular object outside of the realm of knowledge. Whereas the objects of all other kinds of knowledge (that is, what these knowledges are *of*) lie outside of the realm of knowledge itself, the discipline would “constitute a single knowledge—the knowledge of nothing except itself and the other kinds of knowledge” (167c). Socrates points out that there is something strange about this account, and he proposes to “look for a parallel in other cases”. Following this proposal, he asks Critias:

Do you think there's a case of seeing that's not of what the other cases of seeing are of, but is a seeing of itself and of the other cases of seeing and not-seeing—that is, although it's a case of seeing, it doesn't see any color but rather itself and the other cases of seeing? Do you think there is such a thing?
(*Charmides* 167c–d)

And in order for Critias (and the reader) to fully understand this suspicious paradox, Plato has Socrates raising several other parallels. Having such a kind of knowledge would, according to him, equal to:

- there being “a case of hearing that hears no sound but hears itself and the other cases of hearing and not-hearing” (167d);
- or, to generalise this to all senses taken together, there being any of them that “is a perception of the cases of that perception and of itself, which perceives none of the things that the other cases of that perception perceive” (167d);
- or that “there's some desire that's a desire not for any pleasure but for itself and the other desires” (167e);
- or “some wish that wishes for nothing good but rather for itself and the other wishes” (167e);
- or “some love that is a love not of anything beautiful but rather of itself and the other loves” (167e);
- or “some fear that fears itself and the other fears but fears nothing frightening” (168a);
- or, finally, “a belief about beliefs and itself that is not a belief about the things other beliefs are about” (168a).

Astonishingly enough, Plato gives us a full eight parallel examples to make sure that we understand what paradox he has in mind. And despite all these (at least seemingly) impossible cases, he adds, that *still* “we seem to be claiming that there's a kind of knowledge that *is* of this sort, that isn't a knowledge of any subject, but is the knowledge of itself and of the other kinds of knowledge” (168a). Each kind of knowledge is a knowledge *of* something, and Plato understands this “to be of something” as a capacity, a power or a faculty (δύναμις), that a particular kind of knowledge has over its object: “Knowledge as such is the knowledge of something—it has some sort of power [δύναμις] that makes it be of something, right?” (168b)

What in fact troubles Plato is that if discipline would be a knowledge of itself (it itself being a knowledge) and of other knowledges, it would mean that there is something suspiciously dissimilar about the power of discipline when compared to the powers of

other knowledges. The power of no other knowledge is aimed at knowledge itself, instead, they are aimed at their proper objects—that is, the objects *of which* they are knowledges. So the power of the knowledge of arithmetic is aimed at arithmetic itself, and the science of architecture has its faculty aimed at the architecture itself. To master the science of arithmetic means to possess a specific knowledge which has a *power over* its specific object, so that when I need to calculate something, my mastery of this science “kicks in”, and its power takes hold of the particular equations I need to solve – precisely because these equations are the proper object of that power of the science of arithmetic.

So each particular science has its power aimed at some object which is *of a different kind* than that science itself, which is a knowledge. (That is, the answer to the question: “What is the kind or species of Arithmetic?” is simply: Science.) This, according to the *Charmides*, seems to be the case with every single kind of science—with the sole exception of discipline. Thus there is something highly peculiar about the power of discipline, and twice so: first, it is aimed at discipline itself, of which it is a power, so the power of discipline seems to be reflexive, as it is aimed towards itself. Second, it is aimed at other knowledges and the discipline, which itself is a kind of knowledge. On the first sight, only the first point seems to be recognized by Socrates—the task, as articulated by him, lies in “determining fully whether *nothing* has its own power in relation to itself”. But in the proceeding of the examination of this task, the focus turns to the second point. In 168a, after accepting that it would be “strange if there really is such a thing”, Socrates and Critias decide to “look further into the matter”.

Socrates proceeds by applying the agreed fact that each knowledge “is the knowledge of something” by having “some sort of power that makes it be *of something*” (168b) to the parallels he has raised before. So similarly to knowledge, in the case of largeness “we say that what’s larger has a power that makes it be larger than something”. This is clearly unintuitive for us, since it is in no way immediately obvious that these cases should have anything in common—but is it true?

So if we should find something larger, which is larger than the larger things and itself, but isn’t larger than anything the other larger things are larger than, then surely, I suppose, it would have to be in the following condition: If it were in fact larger than itself, it would also be smaller than itself—no? (*Charmides* 168b–c)

On the first sight, the difficulty, as formulated by Socrates, seems to be the presence of the smaller and the larger in the very same thing. Because *if* to be larger means to have power over something else—this something else being something smaller—, and *if* there is

this special case (kind) of larger thing L_s that should have its power over other larger things and itself, *then* it means that these larger things and also this special kind of larger L_s would all be effectively rendered smaller—precisely because the *being larger* is a power that makes the thing possessing it “be larger than something”, and “if it’s going to be larger, it’ll be larger than something smaller” (168b). The same problem arises in the following examples introduced by Socrates – with being “twice as”, “more than”, “heavier than” and “older than” something, and “with everything else”:

“And if something is double the other doubles and itself, presumably it would also be a half, being the double of itself and the others—since a double, I take it, is of nothing other than a half.”

“That’s true.”

“Won’t something that is more than itself also be less than itself, and what is heavier also lighter, and what is older also younger, and so on with everything else?”

(*Charmides* 168c–d)

All these examples look like they present clear contradictions: we have now all larger things being at the same time also smaller, doubles being halves, heavier things lighter than themselves, older things at the same time younger—and the worst thing is that *this problem generalises*, according to Socrates. This again looks like another formulation of Socrates’ denial of the compresence of opposites; it reminds us of all the numerous cases where Plato allegedly rejected the possibility of contrary properties in the same thing. But as we will shortly see (and as will be confirmed by Socrates himself), the passage in fact contains no trace of denial of the compresence of opposites, as the core of the difficulty lies elsewhere. To see this, let’s consider the original formulation of the parallel case of hearing: “What about a case of hearing that hears no sound but hears itself and the other cases of hearing and not-hearing?” (167d) – is it possible for that kind of hearing to exist?

Let’s suppose that there are numerous different cases (kinds) of hearing ($H_1 \dots H_n$) and numerous different cases (kinds) of sounds ($S_1 \dots S_n$). Each of the kinds of hearing is targeted at hearing one specific kind of sound, so that kinds of hearings are “mapped” onto the kinds of sounds ($H_1 \rightarrow S_1, H_2 \rightarrow S_2, \dots H_n \rightarrow S_n$). Let’s grant further that no hearing can hear any of the other kinds of sounds except its own²⁰³ and that these are all the kinds of hearings and sounds there are ($H_1 \dots H_n$ and $S_1 \dots S_n$). Now, Socrates’ question is, if there is additionally a special kind of hearing—let’s call it H_s —which, instead of hearing any of the

²⁰³ This additional premise is not essentially needed for the argument itself to work, I postulate it here only for the sake of simplicity of the proceeding explanation.

sounds $S_1 \dots S_n$, hears only itself and other kinds of hearing $H_1 \dots H_n$. The complication should now be obvious, and given the conditions we have only two options left:

1. *Either* H_s is not in fact a kind of hearing after all, because it hears none of the sounds $S_1 \dots S_n$, making it effectively deaf – that is, a case of absolute non-hearing. If it therefore has a kind of power over itself and other kinds of hearing, it cannot be directed at them on the basis of hearing, since it in fact hears nothing. If it *has* this power, it would have to be directed at some other aspect that all the cases of hearing and itself have in common, not the aspect of sound – but then it can no longer be properly called *a kind of hearing*.
2. Alternatively, we maintain that H_s *really is* a kind of hearing – but since it hears itself and other kinds of hearing, in order to be so, we must allow that the set of existing sounds will be extended by all kinds of hearing ($H_1 \dots H_n$), together with this special case of hearing H_s itself. In other words, if H_s is genuinely a kind of hearing, then the things it hears must be genuine sounds. (Additionally—though the fact is not imperative for the present argument—, it also seems necessary that it hears other “proper” sounds too, since there appears to be no distinguishing mark allowing us to explain why it hears hearings which just also became sounds, but not the “original” sounds.)

As we can clearly see, we have now two before us mutually exclusive ways to proceed: we can *either* claim that the special kind of hearing H_s has *some* kind of power—this power being, however, *something else* than hearing—over itself and other kinds of hearing; *or* we can maintain that it *is* a kind of hearing after all, but with the consequences for hearings themselves. In the first case, we turn this special kind of hearing into non-hearing, in the latter we turn every existing kind of hearing into a sound—but we cannot have it *both*. However, the first option is not really viable, as it breaks the premise with which we began, that we speak about a special kind of hearing that hears itself and other kinds of hearing. Dropping the premise that it is actually a kind of hearing would remove the problem, but would also make the whole discussion lose its purpose, since the goal was to examine, using these parallels, how could discipline be *a knowledge* – both of itself and other kinds of knowledge.

Thus the only remaining option is to grant that all kinds of hearing are *also sounds* – including the special kind of hearing H_s . What would be the consequences for different kinds of hearing, if they should be *heard*? Socrates immediately draws the necessary conclusion: “Then if hearing is going to hear itself, it will have to make a sound; otherwise,

it would have nothing to hear” (166d), and “the same goes for seeing”: “if it’s going to see itself, it will have to have some color; for seeing could never see anything colorless” (166d–e). The observation makes perfect sense: if there is a kind of hearing that actually hears itself and other kinds of hearing, it means that all these kinds make sounds, so that they could be heard. Generalising this observation, Plato gives us an important principle at 168d:

ὅτιπερ ἂν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἔχη, οὐ καὶ ἐκείνην ἔξει τὴν οὐσίαν, πρὸς ἣν ἡ δύναμις αὐτοῦ ἦν; (Charmides 168d)

The very thing which has its own faculty applied to itself will have to have that nature towards which the faculty was directed, won’t it? [trans. by Sprague 1997]

So that whatever has its own power in relation to itself will also have the very essence that its power relates to. [trans. by Moore & Raymond 2019]

As far as I am aware, this critically-important point has been up to now almost completely overlooked by contemporary critics, and I will argue in the following sections that we can here learn three important things of Plato’s philosophical thinking about self-predication.

9.2.2 The condition of self-predication

First, *we have here been given an actual account on self-predication in a dialogue which is by all existing chronological sortings of Plato’s corpus regarded as early or very early*. It is true that Plato *does not* give us here a pre-made procedure allowing us to decide, for each particular thing *X*, whether it could have its own power directed at itself. As we now know, the discussion ends abruptly by Socrates confirming just a few lines below that “some great man who will be up to the task” (169a) will be needed to clear these difficulties, and Socrates then asks Critias to “concede for the moment that there could be a knowledge of knowledge”, and “assuming that this is perfectly possible” (169d), they continue in their task of examining the nature of discipline.

But Plato *does* provide us with an account of prerequisites to which the examined thing itself must comply in order for such self-predication to become even theoretically possible for that thing. The requirement is namely that the thing in question will need to “also have the very essence that its power relates to”. On the first sight, this might look like a mere statement of a tautology: in order for hearing to hear itself, it will have to be a sound – to which we might reply: well, *of course* that in order for something to be heard, it must make a sound! However, I would like to show that it is actually a major advancement

in the task of finding whether the discipline, defined as a knowledge of itself and other kinds of knowledge, is possible. For by offering this principle, Plato uncovers the question underlying the whole problem: does that thing have a character appropriate for the power in question? In other words, is it conceivable for this thing to have that character present in itself? Only if the answer is “yes” would this particular case of “self-predication” be possible (although not automatically granted). Thus having the character that is the proper object of the power constitutes a necessary condition for this power to be directed towards that very thing—although it is left open whether this is also a sufficient condition.

What is this “nature towards which the faculty was directed”, this “very essence that its power relates to”? It seems that it is simply the exact property to which the name of the power itself refers, so that things which are “larger than” something or “double as” some other thing are related to “*smaller-than*”- and “*half-as*”-things, respectively – as Socrates seems to confirm by telling us that “what’s larger has a power that makes it be larger than something”, and “if it’s going to be larger, it’ll be larger than something smaller” (168b). Yet it is inconceivable that Plato would refer to a mere property or characteristic that a thing might or might not have as “the very essence” [οὐσίαν]. Let’s consider the cases of hearing: suppose that there is a flute-hearing which hears only sounds of flute, and voice-hearing which hears only human voices. If all that Plato wanted to say was that the things having the powers of flute-hearing and voice-hearing can only relate to sounds of flutes and voices, respectively, this wouldn’t even be worthy of being explicitly pronounced, for it reveals nothing new, interesting or in any way controversial. Neither the reverse formulation—that the things to which flute-hearing and voice-hearing relate must produce sounds of flutes and voices—says anything substantial or at least not immediately evident.

Yet Socrates took a great deal of trouble to arrive at this principle, which assures us that we shouldn’t read this only as a trivial formulation of a tautology. It doesn’t really make philosophical sense to emphasise that hearing hears sounds. But it makes sense to say, instead, that the hearing will simply hear *sound-making* things, and seeing will see *coloured things* – so that “if hearing is going to hear itself, it will have to make a sound”, and “the same goes for seeing”: “if it’s going to see itself, it will have to have some color” (166d). The cases of seeing and hearing tell us that what the powers are related to are not specific qualities, but the *natures* of those qualities.²⁰⁴ Read in this way, the observation that “whatever has its own power in relation to itself will also have the very essence that its

²⁰⁴ Here I use the word “nature” in its intuitive, pre-philosophical meaning.

power relates to” immediately loses the feeling of a self-evident tautology. Seeing can see everything which is *coloured*, hearing everything that is *sounding* (or *sound-making*). The expression does not focus on the sound that is being made, but on the fact that it is the *sounding-kind-of-thing* that can be the target of the power of hearing. It must only be a kind of thing that is *capable of* making sounds, yet it doesn’t mean that it must make a sound all the time. The fact that it is capable of doing so makes it a *proper object* of the power of hearing, while actually making sound would make it an object that is *actually related* through this power to another thing possessing that power. It is of course clear that if the thing doesn’t *actually* make a sound at the moment, it cannot be heard at that very moment – but as long as that sound-making nature stays in the thing, it remains the *kind of* thing capable of making sounds, and thus also susceptible to be heard by the power of hearing.

Applied to the Theory of Forms, the important point is that there is a difference in saying that “I don’t hear Socrates, therefore he is silent”, and saying that “I don’t hear the Form of Beauty, therefore it is silent”. The first implication is true in virtue of the fact that Socrates is a *sound-making* kind of thing – which exactly is not true about the Form of Beauty, because the Form is not a kind of object that has a sound-making nature towards which the power of hearing could be related. Neither of the predicates “the Form of Beauty is silent” and “the Form of Beauty is noisy” does make sense, because the Form of Beauty is not a sound-making kind of thing: the properties “silent” and “noisy” are equally non-attachable to it.

We may now generalise this observation. Let’s describe the fact that a certain power p is targeted at a feature or character f proper to this power by writing $p(f)$, and the fact that a thing T_1 has its power p related towards the thing T_2 by writing $T_1(p \rightarrow T_2)$. The condition of self-predication can then be formulated in the following way:

The Condition of Self-Predication (CSP):

For each thing T with power p , which is related to itself $T(p \rightarrow T)$ it holds:

T must be f -like, where f is a kind of character proper to the power p .

Socrates actually says himself everything what we have observed here in a lengthy account, although he does so in an extremely-dense form: he later refers to the cases of “larger than” or “double as” simply as “the cases of size and quantity” (168e)—in other words, what these things must have in order to be proper objects of the powers of “larger than” and “double as” is not, specifically, being “smaller-than” and “half-as”, but being

spatial and *quantitative* kinds of things, respectively. And by doing so, he abstracts from the *specifications* of these qualities (larger or smaller, double or half) to the *nature* of those qualities: size and quantity. Thus the proper object of the power of being “larger than” is any object which has any size whatsoever.

Whether two particular things will be *actually* so related—with one of them having this power directed towards another one—is a completely separate question and depends on the actual sizes of both objects. Similarly, the proper objects of the power of hearing will be all those which are capable of making sounds, since sounds are what hearing is able to hear. Whether this power of hearing in one thing is *actually* related to another thing of sound-making kind then depends on the latter actually making sound here and now. But for the purposes of our analysis of the self-predication, this lengthy discussion which we just observed between Socrates and Critias has the following important corollary: it clearly rules out Vlastos’ account which we discussed above, claiming that Plato in the *Parmenides* is in a state of genuine perplexity, because he had always assumed the general theory of self-predication. For Plato clearly could not hold self-predication as a tacit assumption of his Theory of Forms up until the *Parmenides*, if he deliberately and explicitly considered the conditions of self-predication already in the *Charmides*.

9.2.3 The limit of self-predication

Second, ***Plato clearly holds the view that self-predication is not common*** and deliberately limits its extent. This is unambiguously shown in the passage that directly follows the enunciation of the principle of self-predication:

“Do you see then, Critias, now that we’ve gone through so many cases, that some of them strike us as completely impossible, while others raise serious doubts as to whether they could ever have their own power in relation to themselves? In the cases of size and quantity and so forth, it’s completely impossible, no?”

“It certainly is.”

“But when it comes to hearing and seeing and—to add some more cases—motion moving itself, and heat burning itself, and everything else like that, they’d raise doubts in some people but maybe not in others.”

(*Charmides* 168e–169a)

Socrates clearly rules out some cases where self-predication is “completely impossible”—“the cases of size and quantity and so forth”—, while many others would “raise doubts in some people but maybe not in others”, such as the cases of “hearing and seeing”, “motion moving itself, and heat burning itself”. Notice the cautious, wary

approach Plato adopts in delineating the extent of self-predication. According to what we normally read in developmentalist accounts of Plato's thinking, we would expect him to eagerly declare self-predication as an absolutely common attribute of each thing, at the *very most* accepting that—maybe, possibly—there are some cases where this might be impossible. How else could he be so surprised when he found out later in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* that self-predication is not so unproblematic after all, if he did not embrace it without qualification in such an early dialogue as the *Charmides*?

Yet here we find Plato who has a completely different attitude towards self-predication, seeing it more as an *exception to*—and not an *example of*—the general rule. This is confirmed by the final formulation of the task that appears just after the above-quoted passage: “whether *nothing* has its own power in relation to itself rather than to something else, or whether *some things* do but *not others*” (169a). Notice the specific phrasing of his question: “nothing” here stands in opposition to “some things – but definitely not all”. The question Socrates poses here is this: Is it even possible *for any single thing* to apply its own faculty to itself? Can powers *ever* be reflexive? Plato clearly does not for a moment consider such quality to be common or “normal” – quite the opposite, he presupposes non-reflexivity to be normal, and the only question he is dealing with is whether there are *any* exceptions to this rule at all.

As I have already pointed out, Plato does not offer us a complete account of self-predication: we cannot, on the basis of the *Charmides*, decide for each single thing whether it has its own power related to itself. But nevertheless he is content with ruling out some specific cases, like “the cases of size and quantity and so forth”. But nowhere in the *Charmides* does Plato formulate the reason behind the crossing out of these specific cases. How is this possible and on what basis does Plato rule them out? Here again, I am convinced, Plato simply follows reality. He does not yet have a complete theory to offer, but some cases are already evident. Reality builds theory, and not vice versa; and the philosopher is not a builder of theories, but an observer of reality. Things do not become true when the theory concerning them is invented—they are true in virtue of simply being so in reality, of which the theory merely gives an account, *post rem*. Thus the fact that Plato does not yet have a completely-finished theory of self-predication does not constrain him from making assertions about some basic aspects of reality, which are simply and evidently observable.

For Plato, such evidently observable aspects are the “completely impossible” cases of “size and quantity and so forth” – and, at least from the intuitive point of view, we can

easily see why: if they had their own power (being “larger than” or “twice as” or “more than”, etc.) related to themselves, they would also be the very opposite with regard to themselves. But how exactly should we understand the denial of those cases? They obviously satisfy the condition of self-predication: things which are “larger than” obviously have some size, thus they are spatial objects, and as such they are the proper objects of the power of “larger than”. The same goes for things which are “twice as”: they must have some quantity, so have the nature of being quantitative, which allows the very power they have to be related towards themselves.

We cannot, I believe, take this as a sign of denial of the compresence of opposites, since such denial—if it was ever part of Plato’s project, as some commentators claim—pertains to Forms, not many large things. The compresence of opposites, if it was ever a problem, would be a problem only if it appeared in Forms, but Plato never had any doubts in admitting that this compresence is present in common, everyday things. Quite the opposite, he was so clear in stating that the Theory of Forms *explains* this compresence in sensible things—by rooting the ever-changing, contrary properties mixed in sensible things in Forms themselves, where they are unmixed and separated, one particular character explained by one Form—that some commentators, as we have already seen, take the compresence to be *the* reason for positing the Theory of Forms in the first place. And although the original task was finding the definition of discipline, the parallels raised by Plato, with which we are dealing now—hearing, seeing, being larger or smaller, half as or double as—are without a doubt related to the realm of sensible things. Thus there can be no question of finding here the source of the doctrine of “non-compresence of opposites”.

The only valid and sufficient explanation for Plato’s confident rejection of some cases as being “completely impossible” is, I believe, the humble but paramount fact that they would be ontologically impossible. And at least in some cases this impossibility might intuitively be recognized, even before a theory explaining it is offered – otherwise Plato wouldn’t be able to name any of them. The specific examples “of size and quantity”, which Plato selected for his inquiry, present one of the possible ways in which this fundamental impossibility might manifest itself: they would all undoubtedly violate the principle of non-contradiction. As we have seen, there is nothing strange for many large sensible things to also be small – the problem does not lie in the compresence of opposites itself. But in the “cases of size and quantity”, the double character of being both “larger” and “smaller” *than themselves* is simply ontologically incompatible. And in their specific case, Plato had already found the theory which can explain this ontological impossibility in the *Republic*

IV, where he stated that “it is clear that the same thing cannot [...] be in opposite states at the same time, in the same respect and in relation to the same thing” (436b). For this exactly would happen if the thing were to be both “larger” and “smaller” than itself, or both “twice” and “half” as itself – and that is why Plato ruled out these specific cases as not conceivable.²⁰⁵

The general conclusion, therefore, is this: the extent of self-predication must be limited to cases where this additional character is conceivable to be present in the thing (together with other characters the thing has). Such a claim might sound somewhat naïve, as it relies on the underlying “self-evident” fact that something must be seen as conceivable (or not) *simpliciter*. But as we have seen, despite the intuitive nature of this conclusion, Plato was—solely on its basis—able to rule out some specific cases altogether, while at the same time foreseeing many others to “raise serious doubts as to whether they could ever have their own power in relation to themselves” (168e).

Taking all these points together, already in the dialogue as early as *Charmides*, Plato had considered *in general* the applicability of any power a thing might have to itself, and has also demonstrated *in particular* cases where this would be impossible and why. And despite the fact that the account on self-predication is unfinished (as can be seen from the fact that the ultimate problem of finding the definition of discipline is left unresolved), his wary approach towards the possibility of self-applicability of powers suggests that he has already considered the problem in a much greater depth than is directly written in the text. In conclusion, we can clearly see that while many aspects of the self-predication remain unaccounted for, there can be no question of Plato ever holding a naïve, unlimited theory of unqualified self-predication. This limit of self-predication clearly rules out the interpretations of many contemporary scholars—of which Gill and Leigh are the most prominent examples—, claiming together with Leigh that the self-predication is “a central and pervasive feature of Form theory” in the pre-Parmenidean dialogues.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ The interpretation I offered here is based on my reading of what Plato meant by the “cases of size and quantity” – in the preceding lines, he was working specifically with *comparative* sizes and quantities of being “larger than” or “smaller than” (168b–c) and “double as” and “half as” (168c).

If Plato instead meant by those “cases of size and quantity” merely being “large” or “small” *simpliciter*, then my interpretation would be that he disallowed these cases simply because Forms are not the proper *kinds* of things to have these qualities in the first place – that is, they are not *spatial* nor *quantitative* objects. In that case, the connection of the account of *Charmides* with the question of self-predication in the Theory of Forms would be even more direct.

²⁰⁶ Leigh 2012, p. 9. Leigh’s formulation aptly expresses the central assumption of not only her own account, but also the account of Gill (2012, *passim*, but esp. pp. 23–25, 36–38).

9.2.4 The composite nature of self-predicated things

Third and last important thing that the passage tells us, is that *Plato allows the kinds to have several properties as part of their nature*. As we have seen, Plato does *not* turn the kinds of hearing *into* sounds; he makes them so that they remain hearings *and also* become sounds. They retain their character of being the kinds of hearing, but each of them “will *also* have the very essence that its power relates to”—namely, the essence of sound.

This feature of having the “additional nature”—although Socrates does not elaborate on it—is nevertheless extremely important: it is a sketch, a foreshadowing of the mixing of characters from the later dialogues, most notably of the *Sophist*. Socrates, of course, speaks here of two different things: there we have *a power* of hearing, on the one hand, and *a nature* of sound on the other. But this power of hearing means precisely that the thing has a nature, a *being of* a hearing—otherwise it wouldn’t have that very power. Thus if the hearing has a power to hear, and yet also can hear itself, it means that it is *genuinely both*—both a hearing and a sound *by nature*.

There is no account on what *precisely* Socrates means by these οὐσίαι, nor how should we understand their combining: nothing further specifies whether the fact that a thing is both a hearing and a sound means that the nature of this thing will be a composite, thus there will be several properties in a single nature, or whether we should read it as it having several natures, somehow connected and contained in the same thing. Neither are we given a finite conclusion whether combining these features in this specific case of hearing is actually possible. Socrates later mentions several other cases which will be of interest to his future self: for example “motion moving itself” and “heat burning itself”, since “they’d raise doubts in some people but maybe not in others” (169a), and arguably these doubts will be caused by the same reason: it is unclear whether such things would be possible. Can motion be moved by itself, and therefore become a movable thing?²⁰⁷ Can heat also be burned, thus be a burnable thing? These questions are left unresolved, but they are picked by Socrates as the example cases for future elaboration.

²⁰⁷ Incidentally, with regard to the possibility of “motion moving itself”, Plato seems to have later returned to the question and found an answer to it at least in this specific case. For in *Laws* X.894d, Clinias says that “we can’t resist the conclusion that the motion which can generate itself is infinitely superior, and all the others are inferior to it”.

This has been noted by Frede, too, who claims that the fact that Plato opted for the possibility that some things can have their own power in relation to itself, but others cannot, “is shown by a passage like *Laws* X.894d2, where there is a talk of a movement that can move itself, i.e. a movement that is what it is, namely a movement, in relation to itself. Movement therefore belongs, like Being, to the Forms that participate in both classes discussed in 255d4: they can be predicated of an object *a* in relation to *a*, but also in relation to an object *b* that is different from *a*.” (Frede 1967, p. 18)

What, then, can we positively infer from the text? At the very least, it seems to me, we have here an observable and undeniable fact that Plato is here pondering about the possibility of a single thing having multiple οὐσίαι: natural properties, natures, or the very essences. The exact translation very much depends on the commentator's own interpretation of the text and what *he* takes to be its wider meaning. But the outcome is in any case the same: despite what many commentators claim, blending of Forms cannot be a completely new idea for Plato in the *Parmenides*, since he is raising the same or extremely similar question here in the *Charmides*. Even if we adopted the most down-to-earth interpretation that *Charmides* has nothing to do with Forms (with which, however, I strongly disagree, and I will provide reasons for rejecting it in the following section), we would be forced to acknowledge that, abstractly speaking, the question of the *Charmides* and the *Parmenides* is essentially the same, although applied to entirely different objects: sensible things and Forms, respectively.

Thus, if Plato ever explicitly held a naïve theory of self-predication, it is simply impossible to maintain at the same time that up until the *Parmenides*, he haven't at all considered the possibility of Forms having several properties (and perhaps tacitly assumed them to be atomic), since that requirement is already implied by his account of self-predication here in the *Charmides*. By the same token, the developmentalist accounts claiming that Plato in his early period asserted that Forms are atomic and only after the criticisms in the *Parmenides* allowed their communion with each other, are similarly implausible if we at the same time want him to have (tacitly or not) assumed at least *some* of the Forms to be in any way self-predicative, since that would require him not to realise before writing the *Parmenides*, that he had actually dealt with a similar question already in the *Charmides*.

9.3 The relevance to the Theory of Forms

My previous analysis of the *Charmides* passage 167b–169a has shown us that it contains important conclusions to the self-predication theory. Yet it is not normally read this way, which raises legitimate doubts about the correctness of my own reading of the passage. I think the reason why we haven't seen this passage picked up by any critic and used in the discussion of self-predication of Forms is probably that it is not at all clear whether and how this passage applies to Forms. The dialogue itself does not directly mention them even a single time – what, then, could be the relevance of the conclusions and arguments it contains to the Theory of Forms?

This relevance—and a fundamental one—might be revealed, I believe, when we look at the relation between sciences and Forms. For while the conversation topic of the *Charmides* is finding the definition of discipline, the philosophical inquiry is preoccupied with the examination of *epistēmē* [ἐπιστήμη]. This term might, in its most general sense, simply mean “knowledge”, but from its specific usage in the *Charmides* it is evident that the discussion is about specific *branches* of knowledge (discipline being one of them)—thus the translation of *epistēmē* as “sciences” by Rosamond Kent Sprague or as “kinds of knowledge” by Christopher Moore and Christopher C. Raymond. Now, the fact of crucial importance is that in Plato’s metaphysics, the only source of knowledge are Forms: they *are* what can be known; both the proper and sole objects of knowledge. In other words, if there is any solid knowledge, it can be based only on Forms, because they are the foundations of what is stable in our world. And since knowledge is *only* of things which can be definitely and unshakably known once and for all, it cannot be of anything else than Forms themselves. This has been explained in great detail in Vlastos’ well-known article *Degrees of Reality in Plato*. Compare, Vlastos argued, two sentences which are both true: first, S_1 : “Simmius is taller than Socrates”; and second, S_2 : “Three is odd”. While they are both true (supposing that Simmius really is taller than Socrates), they are not *equally* true, or true *in the same way*:

S_2 takes us out of the domain of contingent truth, which is all we can get out of S_1 , into that of logical necessity. While S_1 and S_2 are both true, S_1 can only be a true belief, while S_2 constitutes knowledge – “knowledge” in his [Plato’s] own ultra-strong sense of the word. [...] A true belief becomes knowledge when it has been “bound” or “tied” by “calculation of the reason”. [...] When a belief gets this kind of “binding” it is no longer *fallible* in the importantly relevant sense, i.e. capable of being proved false by refinements and extensions of the very process which gave us reason to think it true in the first place. It has now become “infallible”, or “unshakeable”.
 [—Vlastos 1965/2013, p. 12]

So “to have the requisite internal binding, a statement of the form $\gg F$ is $H\ll$ would have to be about the Forms” (p. 13) – in other words, “statements expressing knowledge” can only be those which are related “to properties of objects known”, namely Forms. This is so because for any Form F , statements about it “follow from the logical analysis of this character (and/or the analysis of characters to which F is logically related)”, and thus “would be necessary statements”. On the other hand, “any statements we make about a sensible instance of F would be fallible precisely because the sensible instance does not admit of such necessary connection with its predicates” (p. 13).

To sum this all up, knowledge is only possible to be had about Forms, since only they have both the necessary stability of their characters by being immutable, and thus also the necessary binding of their characters to themselves, which is required by the “calculation of the reason”. But if this is all so, then the whole discussion about discipline as a science of sciences (or knowledge of knowledges)—and whether there can be such a thing—might and indeed *should* be taken as having a much wider scope: it is not merely about temperance, but about all sciences. And since sciences are related to Forms, the dialogue transitively speaks about and analyses the Forms themselves and the branches of knowledge they can provide to the ones looking at them with an eye of the mind.

Thus the three conclusions we arrived at with regard to self-predication—its condition, limit of extent and the composite nature of self-predicated things—need all be applied to self-predication of Forms. And this only makes sense, since not doing so, what would we be left with? Unless we take the conclusions we uncovered in the *Charmides* to be about Forms, they would be completely isolated in Plato’s project. The lengthy discussion, stemming from the examination of the discipline as the science of sciences, about the power being applied to the very thing which possesses it, makes sense in Plato’s project only if considered in the framework of his Theory of Forms. If we take the sole purpose of that discussion to be aimed strictly at learning something about discipline alone, the thoroughly generalising attitude of Socrates does not make sense – even more so when we take into account that the task of finding the definition of discipline is ultimately left unfinished. Strictly speaking, the interlocutors do not get to advance that task at all, and instead make progress in examining ways and conditions for how things might apply their own faculty to themselves – an achievement which has only limited and conditional import to the examination of discipline. *Limited*, since it would help to explain only one aspect of it—namely, how could it be a knowledge of knowledge—, and *conditional*, since it would do so only *if* and *after* both interlocutors accepted this particular formulation of the definition. But this is nowhere asserted; the formulation is postulated only as a working draft of the definition, and the achievement itself does not help in finding or improving the definition at all. This is explicitly confirmed by Plato, who has Socrates saying that “even if it is perfectly possible, I can’t accept that this is discipline until I’ve considered whether such a thing would benefit us in any way or not” (169b). This point alone should be sufficient to draw our attention to the fact that finding that definition cannot be the sole purpose of the dialogue—if it is *a* purpose at all.

Moreover, the inquiry of the *Charmides* bears a strong resemblance to the one we can find in the *Parmenides* and in the *Sophist*, which are undoubtedly dedicated to the examination of the Forms. In the Separation argument of *Parmenides* (133a–134e), Parmenides explains to Socrates that the realm of Forms is completely separated from our own, and things in both realms can only relate to the ones in the same realm. And to express this relation that Forms only have to Forms and things in our realm only have to themselves, he uses the same word power [δύναμιν] as in the *Charmides*:

Things in us do not have their power [δύναμιν] in relation to forms, nor do they have theirs in relation to us; but, I repeat, forms are what they are *of* themselves and in relation to themselves, and things that belong to us are, in the same way, what they are in relation to themselves. (*Parmenides* 133e–134a)

Parmenides repeats this once more in the following section (134d), where he asserts that “Forms do not have their power [δύναμιν] in relation to things in our world” and vice versa, but instead, “things in each group have their power in relation to themselves” only. The argument Parmenides presents here is a *reductio ad absurdum*, as it leads to the extreme consequence that not even god would be able to know anything about our world—this is confirmed by Socrates when he replies to Parmenides that “if god is to be stripped of knowing, our argument may be getting too bizarre” (134e). But what remains valid is the fact that participation is seen by Plato as a relation of a Form to a thing (or to another Form), and this relation of participation is explained in terms of the Form *having a power* over the participating thing—the very same power, δύναμις, of which the *Charmides* speaks. Therefore, δύναμις is the power responsible for participation: it is possessed by Forms and directed towards things participating in them.

And this same meaning further continues to carry over to the *Sophist*. Here the Eleatic visitor works with the same concept—δύναμις—when examining the problem “of how we call the very same thing, whatever it may be, by several names” (251a). He there considers two extreme options: that nothing has any capacity to mix with other things, and then that everything is able to do so—and this “capacity” is nothing else than the already-known “power” of *Charmides* or “faculty” of the *Parmenides*:

“First, if you like, let’s take them to say that nothing has any capacity [δύναμιν] at all for association with anything.” (*Sophist* 251e; trans. by White 1997)

“Well then, what if we admit that everything has the capacity [δύναμιν] to associate with everything else?” (*Sophist* 252d)

And in the discussion that precedes that account, the Visitor defines *things that are* as nothing else than what has (or is) a capacity:

I'm saying that a thing really is if it has any capacity [δύναμιν] at all, either by nature to do something to something else or to have even the smallest thing done to it by even the most trivial thing, even if it only happens once. I'll take it as a definition that *those which are* amount to nothing other than *capacity* [δύναμις].
(*Sophist* 247e)

Furthermore, the resemblance of the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* with *Charmides* has yet another aspect: when Parmenides introduces the Separation argument, he tells Socrates that he does not yet “have an inkling of how great the difficulty is” (133a–b). The explanation of “the greatest difficulty of all”, as Gill puts it (1996, p. 20), is concluded at 134e, directly followed by Parmenides’ remarkable observation:

Only a very gifted man can come to know that for each thing there is some kind, a being itself by itself; but only a prodigy more remarkable still will discover that and be able to teach someone else who has sifted all these difficulties thoroughly and critically for himself“
(*Parmenides* 135a–b).

And this search for “a very gifted man” of the *Parmenides* is the exact parallel to the conclusion of the main task of the *Charmides*, which we have already seen:

What we need, my friend, is some great man who will be up to the task of determining fully whether *nothing* has its own power in relation to itself rather than to something else, or whether some things do but not others.
(*Charmides* 169a)

The same call out for a great man, although slightly less openly said, happens in the *Sophist*. At the end of the account about the extent of blending of Forms, Visitor and Theaetetus agree that some kinds will mix together, while some won't, and conclude that to be able to properly classify them will need someone with the greatest, most important knowledge:

So if someone's going to show us correctly which kinds harmonize with which and which kinds exclude each other, doesn't he have to have some kind of knowledge as he proceeds through the discussion? [...] Of course that requires knowledge—probably just about the most important kind.
(*Sophist* 253b–c)

Visitor then confirms that what the task really requires is a philosopher: “For heaven's sake, without noticing have we stumbled on the knowledge that free people have? Maybe we've found the philosopher!” (253c), because this knowledge is only available “to someone who has a pure and just love of wisdom” (253e), as “the eyes of the soul, in the case of ordinary people, are unable to endure looking towards the divine” (254a–b). Thus

understanding how and which of the Forms mix together is claimed to be the greatest knowledge, and the greatest knowledge is assigned to the philosopher – it is therefore precisely this “great man” who needs to accomplish the task, the same conclusion as with the parallel cases we found in the *Charmides* and the *Parmenides*. At the same time it is notable that such expressions do not occur anywhere else in Plato’s corpus. Thus we cannot merely say that this “calling out for great man” is just Plato’s standard rhetoric to express a difficulty – there must be something more that connects the three dialogues at hand.

The dialogues of Charmides, Parmenides and Sophist are linked together by this particular, greatest difficulty they embark on: determining whether, how and which Forms do blend together, thus having their powers directed towards themselves and other Forms. As we can see, the three dialogues use the same terminology and even the same phrases to express the difficulty of their tasks; thus to disconnect them is a crude mistake: it is simply impossible to see the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* as both being *dedicated to* the examination of Plato’s Theory of Forms, while claiming at the same time that the inquiry of the *Charmides* has nothing to do with them.

9.3.1 Objections against my reading

There are two objections that it is possible to anticipate against my reading, to which I would like to respond. The ***first*** objection one might raise is that it sounds as if my reading goes against the text, for there is a difference between the effect of the power which Forms have over things participating in them, and the effect of the powers Socrates speaks about in the *Charmides*. Things participating in Forms *gain* their characters through and *because of* their relation of participation; *Charmides* seems to speak about sensible things, and to speak about them as *already having* their characters *before* the power directed towards this character can be related to them. Something having the power of hearing hears something else thanks to the fact that this latter thing makes sound—it produces sound, *consequently* and *thanks to* this hearing can relate to it. On the other hand, the Form of Largeness *causes* the thing participating in it to become large, while it wasn’t so *prior to* the establishment of this relation. However, even if we allowed sensible things to also have power over other sensible things, in the final analysis, we would be allowed to speak about sensible things as having power over other things only “virtually” and thanks to their participation in Forms: if Simmias is taller than Socrates, and so has “power” over him, then this is so solely because of and on the basis of them participating in the Forms of

Tallness and Shortness, respectively. Even *if* sensible things had powers according to Plato—a point which I need to leave open for further investigation—, then they would nevertheless have no powers except those gained transitively by participating in Forms.

The *second* difficulty is with comparative powers. Socrates analyses the possibility of a thing having its power directed towards some other things, and notices that some powers—for example the comparative ones, as the “larger than” or “double as”—immediately imply some other quality, opposite to the one the thing having the power has, to be present in the targeted thing. It is clear that such comparisons can be made between sensible things: Simmias might be taller than Socrates and therefore has a power of being “taller than” directed towards Socrates. But how should we make sense of this in terms of the Theory of Forms and participation? After all, there is no Form of “taller than”-ness, nor of “double as”-ness, so how could we say that there are such powers? I believe that the answer is this: we customarily speak about ordinary things as being larger or smaller than something else. But this is so on the basis of the fact that there is largeness and smallness present in the two things. So the comparative predicates of “larger than” and “smaller than” are not really, *ontologically present* in the things as characters, they can only be predicated in virtue of the things having largeness and smallness present in themselves and being so compared on the basis of these two characters. Now, with ordinary things these characteristics are “trivially” explained by them participating in the Forms of Largeness and Smallness. This is confirmed by Plato himself, who has Socrates in the *Phaedo* 102b telling us that “when you then say that Simmias is taller than Socrates but shorter than Phaedo, do you not mean that there is in Simmias both tallness and shortness?” And the answer is clear: Simmias is taller than Socrates “because Socrates has smallness compared with the tallness of the other”, and vice versa, he is shorter than Phaedo “because Phaedo has tallness compared with the shortness of Simmias” (102c).

How, then, should we understand the conclusion of Socrates that “in the cases of size and quantity and so forth, it’s completely impossible”? If by this claim Plato only meant that comparative terms like “larger than” or “double as” cannot be reflexively directed at the very same thing, the conclusion would be absolutely trivial. And not only trivial, but also wrong in Plato’s own framework, since we know from Plato himself that he regarded comparative characteristics between two things to be caused by basic, non-comparative characters they gain through participation in Forms. Taking Plato’s refusal of the example cases of “size and quantity and so forth” as only meaning this—that comparative powers cannot be directed at things having them—would mean that Plato considered it necessary

to prove to us in a lengthy account that a thing cannot be larger than itself. And finally, it also ignores the generalisation step Socrates makes by calling them the “cases of size and quantity” instead of by their specific names. Thus, we need to understand the conclusion as being relevant in the sense in which he himself understood the comparative properties: that is, as applied to the “basic” properties which the particulars gain by participating in Forms. That “it’s completely impossible” for things to have their powers directed at themselves “in the cases of size and quantity and so forth”, must therefore mean, that the things which have the power to make other things small or large, must not themselves be such – and in Plato’s Theory, these are precisely the Forms of Smallness and Largeness.

9.3.2 Drawing the conclusions of the *Charmides* to the Theory of Forms

On the other hand, as soon as we draw the conclusions of the *Charmides* to the Theory of Forms, they immediately gain importance, since their positive contribution to the overall project becomes evident. Forms are related to other things through the relation of participation: other things participate in Form, thus gaining the property which the Form provides as its essential character. This power or faculty of which Socrates speaks in the *Charmides* and which the thing has over another thing, *δύναμις*, is precisely this relation of participation. And we can see that what Plato is ultimately after is the examination of this power being applied to the very thing possessing that power. In other words, he is inquiring into the nature, conditions and extent of self-predication – that is, the situation of a Form having or displaying the very character it provides to its participants.

Socrates analyses the possibility of a thing having its power directed towards itself, and realises that this relation lays some requirements on that thing: it needs to have that nature or character, “the very essence that its power relates to”. As we have seen, this nature is not merely a property, as if we said that the yellow-seeing thing, when it is related to itself, must be yellow. That would be a trivial formulation of a tautology not worthy of the lengthy account Plato took the trouble to provide. And this constitutes another hint that Plato’s analysis here should be read in terms of the Theory of Forms. To see this, let us step back and consider once more, whether we should apply it to sensibles or Forms, and whether this οὐσία Socrates speaks of is merely a property, or a nature or “very essence”.

Sensible things, whatever combination of characters they might display, do not, in Plato’s account, have any nature or “very essence” of their own. They gain all their properties only by virtue of their participation in Forms. Since there is no nature or essence in sensibles, the only way to read οὐσία in the principle, if we apply it to sensibles, is to

interpret it merely as “property”. But then the *Condition of Self-Predication* (CSP), as formulated by Socrates, becomes trivially true: any large thing, if it should participate in the Form of largeness, must be large. But it is large precisely *insofar* as it participates in the Form—the very moment it starts participating in it, it also becomes large. So in the cases of sensibles, the principle expresses precisely what is self-evident: a large thing will be large as long as it is large. This is because for any sensible thing “to be *x*-like” means simply “to participate in the Form of *X*”, so it is *x*-like as long as it participates, and isn’t *x*-like as long as it does not participate; end of story.

On the other hand, if we apply the principle to Forms participating in Forms, the principle starts to say something substantial. Forms *do* have natures, and to say that in order for a Form *X* to participate in another Form *Y*, the former needs to have a nature adequate to the power which the latter has, constitutes a significant condition. It means that what the Forms provide to their sensible participants through their “power” or “relation of participation” can not indiscriminately be applied to all Forms – and in some cases can not be applied to any Forms whatsoever. Such are precisely “the cases of size and quantity”, the participation in which—while allowed to any and all cases of sensible individuals—is not possible for Forms at all. And this is on the basis of the fact that Forms lack the appropriate nature of being spatial and quantitative objects. They cannot properly be said either to be “larger than” nor “smaller than” *anything*, or to be “double as” or “half as” *anything*—because they don’t have any size or material quantity at all.

As we have seen, this limitation of which Forms might combine with each other, and how exactly they do so, is a foreshadowing of the account on the blending of Forms, which Plato much later in his philosophical career decided to investigate in the *Sophist*. I am not arguing at this point that the text of *Charmides* on its own constitutes a standalone proof that Plato allowed the blending of Forms long before the *Parmenides*. But nevertheless it is important to notice that the Eleatic visitor already uses the same concept—δύναμις—here in the *Charmides*. And from this a weaker claim can, I believe, be successfully proven: namely, that Plato was already pondering about this question during the writing of the *Charmides* – and that he was doing so with the application to the realm of Forms, not merely to sensible things. For the discipline is here defined as knowledge about itself and other branches of knowledge, and Forms are the foundations of every knowledge, from which the necessary result flows that there must be a power which is capable of being directed towards all the Forms, and thus blending them all together.

In other words, if the discipline would be a knowledge of other kinds of knowledge and of itself—the question which, throughout the dialogue, does not get its answer—it would mean that Forms are in communion with themselves. This is because at least discipline would require, in order to be what it is, the relation between itself and other sources of knowledge, namely other Forms. And the important aspect of this observation is that this definition does not have to be ultimately true – even if Plato eventually rejected the idea that discipline is “knowledge of itself and of the other kinds of knowledge” in the *Charmides* itself or any other dialogue, it does not change the fact that he was genuinely considering it here as a viable option. This is another argument against the developmentalist’s thesis, that Plato introduced communion of Forms only after the *Parmenides*, and that in the *Parmenides* itself he was shocked by the realisation that it should be needed for his Theory to work. He simply couldn’t be taken by surprise at that point of his career, if he considered a topic so close to it as early as in the *Charmides*.

There is yet another important aspect in which the *Charmides* is relevant to the Theory of Forms, which I would like to mention, but which I unfortunately cannot expand at this point, as it would require a further substantial analysis on which I cannot focus in here. It is that under my reading, the account of the *Charmides* seems to help in ruling out pseudo-problems like the “Largeness regress” or the “Third man argument”. Plato in *Charmides* clearly rejects the possibility that the Form of Largeness could itself be large – as is evident from Socrates’ words that “in the cases of size and quantity”, self-predication is altogether impossible. By the same token, it seems to me there is no reason why would Plato allow the Form of Human to look “human-like” and thus open the possibility of any regress in the first place. He has provided the philosophical tools to recognise the requirements of these cases: what makes other things large would itself have to be a spatial thing with a certain size, and what makes them human would itself need to be a spatial thing with human features. In both cases these requirements are clearly implausible. Moreover, the former case of Largeness regress is also rejected on a purely logical basis, that if such an object would have its power related to itself, it would also need to become small, which is a clear logical fallacy. Of course, *Charmides* does not rule out the *nature* of the problem of these regresses – since the problem can in principle be solved only by properly understanding the *kath auto – pros alla* distinction in the *Sophist*, as presented in Frede’s account, where Forms and particulars have their features in the same way (although only a Form can have some of its features with reference to itself). But it shows that at the very least *these two specific regresses* cannot be taken as valid arguments against Plato’s Theory of Forms in the *Parmenides* (or at any point later), since they can

already be rejected solely on the basis of what philosophical tools Plato has in the *Charmides* itself. And that is why Frede (in a particularly rough way) called any such strategy to argue against Plato as “exactly the same gambit that Aristotle uses to avoid separate Forms altogether”.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Frede 1967, p. 32.

References

- Adam, J., & Rees, D. A. (1963). *The Republic of Plato. Introduction & Books I–V* (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1902)
- Allen, R. E. (1960). 'Participation and predication in Plato's middle dialogues.' *The Philosophical Review*, 69(2), 147–164.
- (1997). *Plato's Parmenides* (Revised ed.). Yale University Press.
- Bambrough, R. (1972). 'The disunity of Plato's thought, or: What Plato did not say.' *Philosophy*, 47(182), 295–307.
- Benson, H. H. (2015). *Clitophon's challenge: Dialectic in Plato's Meno, Phaedo, and Republic*. Oxford University Press.
- Brown, L. (1986). 'Being in the *Sophist*: A syntactical enquiry.' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 4, 49–70.
- (1999). 'Being in the *Sophist*: A syntactical enquiry.' In G. Fine (Ed.), *Plato I: Metaphysics and epistemology* (pp. 455–478). Oxford University Press.
- Burnet, J. (1928). *Greek Philosophy. Part I: Thales to Plato*. Macmillan and Co. Ltd. (Original work published 1914)
- Cherniss, H. F. (1932). 'Parmenides and the *Parmenides* of Plato.' *The American Journal of Philology*, 53(2), 122–138.
- Code, A. (1986). 'Aristotle: Essence and Accident.' In R. Warner, & R. E. Grandy (Eds.), *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality* (pp. 411–439). Oxford University Press.
- Cooper, J. M. (Ed.). (1997). *Plato: Complete works*. Hackett Publishing Company.
- Cornford, F. M. (1935). *Plato's theory of knowledge: The Theaetetus and the Sophist*. Dover Publications, Inc.
- (1939). *Plato and Parmenides*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd.
- Curd, P. K. (1986). '*Parmenides* 131c–132b: Unity and Participation.' *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 3(2), 125–136.

- Emlyn-Jones, C., & Preddy, W. (2017). *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*. Loeb Classical Library 36. Harvard University Press.
- Fine, G. (1986). 'Immanence.' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 4, 71–97. Oxford University Press. [later reprinted (2003) in G. Fine (Ed.), *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected essays* (pp. 301–325). Oxford University Press.]
- (2003). 'Forms as Causes: Plato and Aristotle.' In G. Fine (Ed.), *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected essays* (pp. 350–396). Oxford University Press. (Reprinted from *Mathematik und Metaphysik bei Aristoteles* [Mathematics and metaphysics in Aristotle], pp. 69–112, by A. Graeser, Ed., 1987, Verlag Paul Haupt)
- (1993). *On ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*. Oxford University Press.
- Fowler, H. N. (1914). *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*. Loeb Classical Library 36. Harvard University Press.
- (1921). *Plato: Theaetetus, Sophist*. Loeb Classical Library 123. Harvard University Press.
- Frede, D. (1997). 'Plato: *Philebus*.' In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete works* (pp. 398–456). Hackett Publishing Company. [originally published separately as Frede, D. (1993). *Plato: Philebus*. Hackett Publishing Company.]
- Frede, M. (1967). *Prädikation und Existenzaussage* [Predication and existential statement]. Hypomnemata 18. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- (1992). 'Plato's *Sophist* on false statements.' In R. Kraut (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (pp. 397–424). Cambridge University Press.
- Gill, M. L. (1996). *Parmenides*. Hackett Publishing Company. [The translation of the dialogue itself is done with Ryan, P., the 'Introduction' part cited is written solely by Gill.]
- (2012). *Philosophos: Plato's missing dialogue*. Oxford University Press.
- (2022). 'Exercise on Being: The ἀγών of Heraclitus and Parmenides.' In L. Brisson, A. Macé, & O. Renaut (Eds.), *Plato's Parmenides: Selected Papers of the Twelfth Symposium Platonicum* (pp. 149–162). Academia.
- Gill, M. L., & Ryan, P. (1997). 'Plato: *Parmenides*.' In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete works* (pp. 359–397). Hackett Publishing Company. [originally published

- separately as Gill, M. L., & Ryan, P. (1996). *Parmenides*. Hackett Publishing Company.]
- Gonzalez, F. J. (Ed.). (1995). *The third way: New directions in Platonic studies*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Gosling, J. C. B. (1975). *Plato: Philebus*. Oxford University Press.
- Gould, C. S. (1995). 'Grube's translation of *Republic* 476a: A response to Waterfield.' *Ancient Philosophy*, 15(2), 681–683.
- Grote, G. (2009). *Plato and the other companions of Socrates* (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1865)
- Grube, G. M. A. (1997). 'Plato: *Phaedo*' (2nd ed.). In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete works* (pp. 49–100). Hackett Publishing Company. [originally published separately as Grube, G. M. A. (1977). *Plato: Phaedo* (2nd ed.). Hackett Publishing Company.]
- Grube, G. M. A., & Reeve, C. D. C. (1997). 'Plato: *Republic*' (2nd ed.). In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete works* (pp. 971–1223). Hackett Publishing Company. [originally published separately as Grube, G. M. A., & Reeve, C. D. C. (1992). *Plato: Republic* (2nd ed.). Hackett Publishing Company.]
- Hamlyn, D. W. (1955). 'The communion of Forms and the development of Plato's logic.' *Philosophical Quarterly*, 5(21), 289–302.
- Harte, V. (2008). 'Plato's metaphysics.' In G. Fine (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Plato* (Chapter 8, pp. 191–216). Oxford University Press.
- Hathaway, R. F. (1973). 'The second ›Third Man‹.' In J. M. E. Moravcsik (Ed.), *Patterns in Plato's Thought* (pp. 78–100). D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Irwin, T. H. (1977). 'Plato's Heracleiteanism.' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 27(106), 1–13.
- Jowett, B. (1892). *The dialogues of Plato translated into English with analyses and introductions by B. Jowett, M.A. in five volumes* (3rd ed., Vol. 4). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1871)
- Kirwan, C. (1974). 'Plato and Relativity.' *Phronesis*, 19(2), 112–129.
- Leigh, F. (2012). 'Modes of Being at *Sophist* 255c–e.' *Phronesis*, 57(1), 1–28.

- Lombardo, S., & Bell, K. (1997). 'Plato: *Protagoras*.' In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete works* (pp. 746–790). Hackett Publishing Company. [originally published separately as Lombardo, S., Bell, K., & Frede, M. (1992). *Plato: Protagoras*. Hackett Publishing Company.]
- McCabe, M. M. (2015). *Platonic Conversations*. Oxford University Press.
- Meinwald, C. C. (1991). *Plato's Parmenides*. Oxford University Press.
- (1992). 'Good-bye to the Third man.' In R. Kraut (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (pp. 365–396). Cambridge University Press.
- Moore, C., & Raymond, C. C. (2019). *Plato: Charmides*. Hackett Publishing Company.
- Moravcsik, J. M. E. (1963). 'The ›Third man‹ argument and Plato's Theory of Forms.' *Phronesis*, 8(1), 50–62.
- (1973a). 'Plato's method of division.' In J. M. E. Moravcsik (Ed.), *Patterns in Plato's thought* (pp. 158–180). D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- (1973b). 'The anatomy of Plato's divisions.' In E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, & R. M. Rorty (Eds.), *Exegesis and argument: Studies in Greek philosophy presented to Gregory Vlastos* (pp. 324–348). Van Gorcum.
- Nehamas, A. (1973). 'Predication and Forms of opposites in the *Phaedo*.' *Review of Metaphysics*, 26(3), 461–491.
- (1975). 'Plato on the imperfection of the sensible world.' *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 12(2), 105–117.
- (1979). 'Self-predication and Plato's Theory of Forms.' *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16(2), 93–103.
- Owen, G. E. L. (1957). 'A proof in the Περὶ Ἰδεῶν.' *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 77(1), 103–111. [later reprinted (1986) in M. Nussbaum (Ed.), *Logic, science, and dialectic: Collected papers in Greek philosophy* (pp. 165–179). Cornell University Press.]
- (1970). 'Notes on Ryle's Plato.' In O. P. Wood, & G. Pitcher (Eds.), *Ryle: Modern Studies in Philosophy* (pp. 341–372). Macmillan and Co. Ltd. [later reprinted (1986) in M. Nussbaum (Ed.), *Logic, science, and dialectic: Collected papers in Greek philosophy* (pp. 85–103). Cornell University Press. Also reprinted (1999) in G. Fine (Ed.), *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (pp. 298–319). Oxford University Press.]

- (1971). ‘Plato on Not-Being.’ In G. Vlastos (Ed.), *Plato: A collection of critical essays. I: Metaphysics and epistemology* (pp. 223–267). The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Palmer, J. A. (1999). *Plato’s Reception of Parmenides*. Oxford University Press.
- Politis, V. (2021). *Plato’s essentialism: Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Press, G. A. (1996). ‘The state of the question in the study of Plato.’ *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 34(4), 507–532.
- (2018). ‘The state of the question in the study of Plato: Twenty year update.’ *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 56(1), 9–35.
- Robinson, R. (1942a). ‘Plato’s Parmenides (Part I).’ *Classical Philology*, 37(1), 51–76.
- (1942b). ‘Plato’s Parmenides (Part II).’ *Classical Philology*, 37(2), 159–186.
- Robinson, T. A. (2007). ‘Compresence of opposites in Nehamas, Irwin, and Fine.’ *Philosophy Faculty Publications*, (5). College of Saint Benedict/Saint John’s University.
- Ross, W. D. (1966). *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*. Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1951)
- Rowe, C. (2015). *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ryle, G. (2009). ‘Plato’s ›Parmenides‹.’ In G. Ryle (Ed.), *Collected papers. Volume I: Critical essays* (Vol 1., pp. 1–23; 23–46). Routledge. [originally published in two parts in *Mind*, 48(190/191), 129–151/302–325, 1939.]
- (1966). *Plato’s Progress*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sedley, D., & Long, A. (2011). *Plato: Meno and Phaedo*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shorey, P. (1888). ‘Recent Platonism in England.’ *The American Journal of Philology*, 9(3), 274–309.
- (1903). ‘The unity of Plato’s thought.’ *Decennial publications*, 6, 129–214. University of Chicago Press. [numbers cited in parentheses are the pages of the original work]
- (1931). ‘Note on Plato *Parmenides* 129–30.’ *Classical Philology*, 26(1), 91–93.
- (1933). *What Plato said*. University of Chicago Press.

- (1937). *Plato: The Republic, books I–V* (Revised ed., Vol. 1). Loeb Classical Library 237. Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1930)
- Silverman, A. (2002). *The Dialectic of Essence*. Princeton University Press.
- Sprague, R. K. (1997). ‘Plato: *Charmides*.’ In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete works* (pp. 639–663). Hackett Publishing Company. [originally published separately as Sprague, R. K. (1992). *Plato: Laches and Charmides*. Hackett Publishing Company.]
- Taylor, A. E. (1955). *Plato: The man and his work* (6th ed., reprinted). Methuen & Co. Ltd. (Original work published 1926)
- (1961). *Plato: The Sophist and the Statesman*. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.
- Vlastos, G. (1954). ‘The Third man argument in the *Parmenides*.’ *The Philosophical Review*, 63(3), 319–349.
- (2013). ‘Degrees of reality in Plato.’ In R. Bambrough (Ed.), *New essays on Plato and Aristotle* (2nd ed., pp. 1–19). Routledge and Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1965) [also reprinted (1981) in G. Vlastos (Ed.), *Platonic studies* (2nd ed., pp. 58–75). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1973)]
- (1972). ‘The unity of the virtues in the *Protagoras*.’ *The Review of Metaphysics*, 25(3), 415–458. [later reprinted (1981) in G. Vlastos (Ed.), *Platonic studies* (2nd ed., pp. 221–265). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1973)]
- Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. (1920). *Platon: Leben und Werke* [Plato: Life and Works] (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Weidmann. (Original work published 1919)
- White, F. C. (1977). ‘The compresence of opposites in *Phaedo* 102.’ *The Classical Quarterly*, 27(2), 303–311.
- White, N. P. (1997). ‘Plato: *Sophist*.’ In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete works* (pp. 235–293). Hackett Publishing Company. [originally published separately as White, N. P. (1993). *Plato: Sophist*. Hackett Publishing Company.]
- Wolfsdorf, D. (2008). *Trials of reason: Plato and the crafting of philosophy*. Oxford University Press.