



Title	Some Problems of the One over Many in Plato's Parmenides
Author(s)	Karuzis, Joseph
Citation	哲学, 41, 1-24
Issue Date	2005-07-17
Doc URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2115/35036">http://hdl.handle.net/2115/35036</a>
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	41_LP1-24.pdf



[Instructions for use](#)

# Some Problems of the One over Many in Plato's *Parmenides*

Joseph Karuzis

“What is there to be said and thought must needs be; for it is there for being, but nothing is not. I bid you ponder that, for this is the first way of enquiry from which I hold you back, but then from that on which mortals wander knowing nothing, two-headed; for helplessness guides the wandering thought in their breasts, and they are carried along, deaf and blind at once, dazed, indiscriminating hordes, who believe that to be and not to be are the same and not the same; and the path taken by them all is backward-turning.” (Fr. 6, Simplicius in Phys. 86, 27-8; 117, 4-13)<sup>1</sup>

The *Parmenides* is perhaps the most intractable of all the Platonic dialogues. Reading the *Parmenides* is like entering a philosophical labyrinth that is composed of arguments connected by similarity and contradiction. There is no doubt in consensus about how Plato revered “the great” *Parmenides*. Yet, what was his intention in writing the *Parmenides*? Was it written as a criticism of the Eleatics? Could it have been written by Plato to cast doubts on his doctrine of Forms? Or was it written by Plato in order to illustrate the *aporia* the human mind encounters when attempting to contemplate the Forms? There seem to be about as many interpretations as there are commentators. It may have been written as a Platonic application of Zenonian paradoxes. Zeno's paradoxes deal with situations that arise out of the physical world. The Forms are not located in the physical world according to Plato.

What are the results of this application to Zeno's paradoxes? What happens when reason and logic are applied to ontological and metaphysical concepts such as Unity, Being, or the Forms? My purpose in writing this paper is to prove that Plato was doing just that: Illuminating the problems that he confronted with the Eleatic notion of Being, and with his own theory of Forms, before he fully developed it. I wish to prove that by writing the *Parmenides*, Plato confronts the problems he saw when developing his theory of Forms, such as self-predication, the one over many, the infinite regress problem, and the problem of infinity. Plato, however, in light of these difficulties does not abandon his Theory of Forms. Plato wrote the second part of the dialogue to answer the problems of the first part.

Since Gregory Vlastos published his famous paper in 1954 on Plato's *Parmenides* there has been quite a lot of research and logical analysis on the first part of the dialogue, while the second part of the dialogue has been ignored. Although the results of such inquiry are intriguing, I am against this approach. When the dialogue is separated into two parts and only the first part is analyzed, we miss Plato's point in writing the dialogue. The problems in the first part of the dialogue are solved by Plato in the second part, which is a philosophical exercise. It is an exercise in the application of antinomies to the Eleatic notion of Being. Another approach to the *Parmenides* has been to analyze it by comparing it to other dialogues, which is what Cherniss does. I also find this method non-exhaustive because it jumps out of the text, and does not consider solely the problems that Plato posits in the *Parmenides*. This process could be called comparative analysis, and it is better suited to those who are interested in just an overview and not a philosophical analysis. In this paper my intention is to prove that the second part of the dialogue attempts to resolve the problems of the first part. Plato is showing us in the *Parmenides* the difficulties that arise when conceptualizing the Forms that are supposed to

lie in a separate realm unreachable by human thought. The first part of the dialogue is where problems of the one over many (*hen epi pollon*) are presented. The problem of the one over many was a fundamental problem that permeated ancient Greek thought. If Forms exist, then there must be just one for each group of particulars in the visible world. Then, the Third Man Argument addresses the infinite regress that supposedly occurs when positing additional thoughts for the same idea. In accompaniment with the problems presented in the first part, Plato next analyzes the Eleatic notion of Unity, which results in contradictory conclusions. There has been a tradition in the analysis of the *Parmenides* that divides the dialogue into two sections. They can be read separately, but should be read and analyzed as a whole. In the first part of the dialogue Socrates attacks Zeno's paradoxes by applying them to the Forms. In the second part of the dialogue *Parmenides* and *Aristoteles* are engaged in an exercise that tests the hypothesis that "Unity is" by considering both the positive and negative consequences. Through a rigorous exposition of a set of antithetical antinomies *Parmenides* shows that whether the hypothesis "Unity is" is affirmed or denied, the result is a pair of contradictory statements that may either be simultaneously affirmed or simultaneously denied<sup>2</sup>. The conclusions that are drawn from the arguments are inconsistent and absurd.

Before proceeding to the arguments it is worthwhile to consider the historical setting of the dialogue. There are nine persons in the dialogue. There is Zeno and *Parmenides* who represent the Eleatics. Socrates is there, who argues against the Eleatics. There is *Adimantus*, Plato's older brother, *Glaucon*, who also is Plato's older brother. Also present is *Aristoteles*, from Athens, who later became one of the 30 tyrants. There is Plato's younger half-brother, *Antiphon*, and *Pythodorus*, who was a student of Zeno's. *Cephalus*, from *Clazomenae*, in Ionia, is the narrator. *Clazomenae*, incidentally, is the

birthplace of Anaxagoras. Cephalus and some other Clazomenians traveled to Athens to hear the great dialogue that took place among Zeno, Parmenides, and Socrates. The style of the dialogue sets it apart from most of Plato's other works. The Parmenides takes place in the third person, narrated by Cephalus. Cephalus is narrating what Antiphon recited in turn what he had memorized from hearing it from Pythodorus, who was present at the conversation. Pythodorus had described the appearance of the philosophers to Antiphon. Parmenides was about 65 years of age and "well favored." Zeno was almost 40 years old and Socrates is described as a very young man. The conversation takes place about 450 BC during the great Panathenaea.<sup>3</sup> Socrates, Zeno and Parmenides therefore had this conversation long ago. It is in the distant past from where this dialogue takes place. Plato does this in order for us to understand that what was discussed is historically philosophically significant.

Cephalus learned about the conversation from Antiphon, who was Plato's half-brother. Antiphon is the sole retainer of the dialogue, however he has lost interest in philosophy and now takes care of horses. Antiphon learned about it from Pythodorus, who was a student of Zeno. The conversation supposedly takes place when Socrates was a young man and inexperienced in logical analysis. Parmenides and Zeno of Elea are much older than Socrates.

### Part 1 of the dialogue: Zeno's Paradox and the Doctrine of Forms

In the first part of the Parmenides Zeno and Socrates are engaged in a debate. Zeno has just finished reading a book of his philosophy when Socrates asks Zeno to read the first thesis of the first argument again. After Zeno does this Socrates proceeds to comment on the argument against plurality. Socrates asks, "Do you maintain that if being is many, it must be both like and unlike, and this is impossible, for neither can the like be unlike, nor the unlike like- is that your position?" "Just so," said Zeno. "And if the unlike cannot be like,

or the like unlike, then according to you, being could not be many; for this would involve an impossibility. In all that you say have you any other purpose except to disprove the being of the many? And is not each division of your treatise intended to furnish a separate proof of this, there being in all as many proofs of the not-being of the many as you have composed arguments? Is that your meaning, or have I misunderstood you?" "No," said Zeno, "you have correctly understood my general purpose." <sup>4</sup> The logic used here is Modus Tollens, that is;

$A \supset C$

$\neg C$

Therefore,  $\neg A$

Socrates then severely criticizes Zeno. He accuses Zeno of attempting to deceive the world by saying something new and original which is actually the same as what Parmenides believes, that is, that changing reality is an illusion veiling a transcendental Unity. For Parmenides, Unity is undivided, and without limit. Limit would imply boundary, which would imply difference, which would not be one. Unity is therefore undivided and without limit, not round or shaped, nor solid because that would imply difference, outside of time because that would imply change, and also outside of space because that would imply magnitude and difference. This Unity according to Parmenides is beyond the realm of mortals. Unity is timeless, changeless, unmoving without limit. The way Socrates acts towards Zeno is interesting. Why would Socrates be rude to Zeno? Zeno responds to Socrates' questions politely and this rudeness appears to be a characteristic of the youthful Socrates. It is a method employed by Plato to show the inexperience of Socrates. This inexperience is actually Plato's inexperience in confronting logical arguments related to his theory of Forms

that result in paradox and absurdity. Zeno informs Socrates that there was no attempt at deceiving the world, and that his writings are meant to support the thought of Parmenides against those who assert the many. That is, those who say that things in the sensible world can be both like and unlike and changeable. Socrates then solves Zeno's paradox of likeness. The paradox states that if there is plurality, identical things are both like and unlike. This leads to the absurd notion that all things are alike. Socrates says that there exists an idea of likeness itself and an idea of unlikeness, which is the opposite of likeness. Everything to which the term "many" may be used participates in the ideas of likeness and unlikeness in varying degrees and manners. If this is so, then all things participate in both likeness and unlikeness, and therefore all things partake of both opposites. For Socrates this appears to be a truism, not a paradox. For it is obvious that a human body is a whole, yet it can be separated into different parts, a lower half, an upper half, a left side, a right side and so on. A person, accordingly, is both one and many. A problem arises, however, when this paradox is applied to ideas of like, unlike, one, many, rest and motion and their relations to each other. The Eleatics never confronted this problem, however. They were concerned with the problems of space, motion and matter, not the problem of the relation of those ideas and how the human mind comes to know them. Socrates says he would be amazed if anyone discovered the same puzzle in the ideas themselves as Zeno has shown to exist in sensible objects.

Pythodorus noticed that while Socrates was speaking Zeno and Parmenides were not pleased with his argument, yet they paid close attention and then actually smiled approvingly of him. We can see why Zeno and Parmenides had these sundry feelings. Being Eleatics they were not accustomed to hearing this new type of criticism. No contradiction comes about when sensible things partake of the ideas of one and many. Nor is there any contradiction when the

ideas of like and unlike, and one and the many are considered separately. Yet a contradiction appears when we consider how the ideas relate to each other and how they are connected (and how the human mind can ascertain this relation) to the visible, sensible world. Even with these considerations, however, Socrates holds that the ideas do indeed exist. It is now Parmenides who continues the dialogue by questioning Socrates and criticizing the ideas. Parmenides tests the uniformity of Socrates' belief concerning the ideas. Socrates quite surely thinks that there are ideas of the beautiful, the good and the just. He seems undecided however, when Parmenides questions him if there is an idea of man apart from all other humans, or an idea of fire or of water. Then Parmenides asks if Socrates thinks there are ideas of hair or mud or dirt, or anything else that is unpleasant and worthless. This troubles Socrates, for at first he denies the existence of ideas to these things, then admits he becomes disturbed when thinking about this problem because he admits that he sometimes thinks that all things have an idea, yet he cannot truly accept this. Socrates is reluctant to say that "insignificant" objects partake in the Forms. Parmenides blames Socrates' inconsistency on his youth. When Socrates grows up he will certainly understand philosophy better, be much less likely to regard the opinions of other men, and will not make the distinction among physical objects as to whether something is meaningful or worthless. Parmenides continues his criticism of the Platonic ideas by raising the problem of individuals. Do individuals resemble the ideas or do they participate in them? Things in the visible world are great because they partake in greatness, similar because they partake in similarity. Yet how can an idea exist as a complete whole if parts of it exist separately in individuals? Socrates tries to answer this question by raising the subject of the day. A day has different times at different places, yet it is still a coherent whole. Parmenides objects to this notion with his idea of a sail being contrasted with

the idea of greatness. If a sail covered a group of men, there would both be many and one. The sail would cover different parts of different men, and therefore like the idea of greatness things which participate in it will have a part of it only and not the entire idea existing in them.

### The Third Man Argument

Parmenides then raises another problem that historically has been known as the Third Man argument. Take the idea of largeness. If you observe a number of large objects it would be correct to say that they all participate in the idea of largeness. However, if you consider the idea of largeness which makes all things large, and large things together, another idea of largeness is formed which makes large things and the idea of largeness. This process results not only in a third large, but a continuing series of the form of largeness ad infinitum. This is clearly unacceptable to Socrates. Socrates replies to this problem by stating that the ideas exist only in our minds. Parmenides again rejects Socrates' solution. Individual ideas must be thoughts of something which is, not of what is not. Individual ideas must also be a thought of a single thing that the mind recognizes in all things as corresponding to an idea. Socrates again tries to defend the Platonic ideas by positing them as patterns or paradigms in nature. Things resemble the forms by assimilation to these patterns. This is answered by Parmenides again by the argumentum ad infinitum. The forms are paradigms in nature. Things will be like them by assimilation. Therefore the individual and the idea will be like. Then there will be likeness of the like. Two things that are alike will partake of the form of likeness. If the idea is like the individual and the individual like the idea then another idea of likeness will always be arising, and this will continue infinitely. We can see now some of the problems the ancient Greek philosophers faced when attempting to connect absolute truth with human truth. If the Platonic

Forms exist, how can we have knowledge of them? Not through individuals because that would make them perishable and not absolute. Not in things that change. Not things in the visible world. Socrates affirms his difficulty in saying that Forms are absolute. Parmenides continues on further stating that Socrates only understands a small part of the difficulty that arises when you posit individuals as ideas. If you posit each different thing as a single idea, you separate that from all other things. If someone says that the Forms exist, no one can completely deny that he is not correct. Only a man who denies the existence of the Forms with great knowledge and ability and only through a long difficult explanation will keep a man from being convinced that they do indeed exist. Those who believe in the Forms believe that they are absolute. If they are absolute, then they do not exist in us. They exist in relation to each other, that is, Form to Form. They do not exist because of participation in the sensible world. Nor do things in the sensible world partake in the Forms or the world of the Forms. Things in the sensible world exist in relation to one another not in relation to the Forms. Parmenides illustrates it with the following example. A master has a slave. This is only a relation between two people and there is nothing absolute in it. Take, however, abstractly, the idea of mastership. It is relative to the abstract idea of slavery. Mastership and slavery are abstract ideas independent and distinguished from the individual master and slave in the sensible world. If we have absolute knowledge, we will have absolute truth. If we have absolute knowledge of each kind we will have all answers to each kind of absolute being. Truth comes from our knowledge that is an understanding of each kind of our own being. Yet we do not have the idea of knowledge because Socrates admitted that we cannot have the ideas themselves in us therefore we do not have absolute knowledge nor knowledge of the Forms. If we do not have knowledge of the Forms because they are not in us then consequently we do not know the truth. If, however, there is

absolute knowledge it would most likely be God who possessed it. If God has absolute knowledge, however, he would not have knowledge of human beings because the Forms and humans are not related, only to themselves. They are limited to their own sphere or world. Therefore God doesn't have any knowledge of humans, just as humans have no knowledge of the gods or anything to do with divinity. Parmenides used the preceding examples to show the young Socrates the difficulties that will be confronted by someone who posits the existence of the Forms. Socrates acknowledges that he too now sees the difficulties in positing the Forms. Parmenides cautioned Socrates that if a man heard these objections to the doctrine of Forms he will ultimately deny that they exist. However, even if they do exist, by necessity man cannot know them, and his judgment will seem reasonable. It takes a remarkable man that comes to know essences, according to Parmenides. It is important to note here that Parmenides does not say that the Forms do not exist, only that there is great difficulty in proving their existence. This problem is troubling for Socrates and Parmenides. It was quite troubling too, for Plato, as we see. For if we cannot have knowledge of the Forms how are we to have knowledge of anything? Then Plato presents us with a solid argument for the Forms:

And yet, Socrates, said Parmenides, if a man, fixing his attention on these and the like difficulties, does away with ideas of things and will not admit that every individual thing has its own determinate idea which is always one and the same, he will have nothing on which his mind can rest; and so he will utterly destroy the power of reasoning, as you seem to me to have particularly noted. (Parmenides, 135b-c)

For Plato, without the theory of Forms there can be no reasoning and therefore no philosophy. For if there were no Forms, there would be no

consensus on what a thing was. Take the idea of philosophy, for example. There may be differences among philosophers as to what philosophy is, and its methods, yet, most will agree that the study of philosophy in its various ways is the search for truth. Truth is understood to be what is right, and not false, and what is agreed upon by a group. There may be different truths about different things, but our idea of truth is the same. Now, let's use an example of a shape, such as a triangle. Sensibles are only transitory and changeable. We may observe countless triangles in our everyday world, but these perceptions alone do not constitute true understanding. For Plato there must be an ideal triangle, one that is eternal, and above and beyond all observable triangles. When two people are looking at a set of triangles their understanding of all those triangles lies in the single idea of triangularity. It was obvious to Plato that perception alone does not constitute the idea of a triangle. There must be a universal idea of a triangle in order for individuals to agree on what it is. By agreeing on something, people agree on the idea of something, not the perception of it. When I say "That is a triangle," and I point to a particular triangle, my reference point is the perception of the transitory triangle, but my understanding of it comes from the idea of triangularity. When we say what something is, we are remarking on what we perceive it to be, what we think something's essence is. This can be done only if there is a Form of a triangle, an ideal reference point if you will, which distinguishes sensibles and allows us to agree on what things are. If, however, perception alone does create true understanding, the Theory of Forms is redundant and must be abandoned. The idea of a triangle allows the human mind to grasp and make sense of all triangles that we see encounter in the sensible world. The human mind is the epistemological link between the world of the Forms and the world of the sensibles. Therefore, ancient metaphysics leads us directly to epistemology.

## 2nd Part of the Dialogue: The Hypothesis about Unity. <sup>5</sup>

At this point we encounter the transitional passage (135c8-137c3) from the first part to the second part of the dialogue. Parmenides remarks on Socrates' lack of dialectical skill. He observed Socrates in a debate with Aristoteles and became aware of Socrates' poor verbal ability. Socrates does not lack in spirit or love of philosophy, but his youth and inexperience make him unqualified as an explicator of the Forms. Plato may have cast Socrates as youthful and inexperienced in order to show his own lack of development of the theory of Forms during his middle-period.<sup>6</sup> Parmenides, however, advises Socrates that there is a mental exercise which will help Socrates develop this important and necessary skill. Socrates needs to develop his reasoning skills, and this is accomplished by contemplating not only all positive consequences from any given hypothesis but also all the consequences that result from denying the hypothesis. Socrates asked Parmenides to show him an example of this mental process. At first Parmenides was reluctant at the thought of demonstrating this process. Zeno, however, petitioned Parmenides to do it and finally agreed to it. "I cannot refuse," said Parmenides; "and yet I feel rather like Ibycus, who, when in his old age, against his will, he fell in love, compared himself to an old racehorse, who was about to run in a chariot race, shaking with fear at the course he knew so well- this was his simile of himself. And I also experience a trembling when I remember through what an ocean of words I have to wade at my time of life. But I must indulge you, as Zeno says that I ought, and we are alone. Where shall I begin? And what shall be our first hypothesis, if I am to attempt this laborious pastime? Shall I begin with myself, and take my own hypothesis of the one? And consider the consequences which follow on the supposition either of the being or of the not-being of one?" Aristoteles, being the youngest offered to answer any of Parmenides' questions. And so with

reluctance and trepidation at the road ahead Parmenides commences the deductions of the Hypothesis of Unity. Here is a summation of the results from that dialogue.

### The Hypothesis about Unity

The argument is twofold, in that:

1. Unity is
2. Unity is not

Is and is not can be understood in different ways. In one sense it can be said that Unity is one, or that Unity has being. Opposite consequences result:

1a If Unity is, it is nothing. (137c-142a)

1b If Unity has being it is all things. (142b-157c)

from which we get two more results:

1aa If Unity has being, all other things are. (157b-159b)

1bb If Unity is one, all other things are not. (159b-160b)

Then, there is the negative hypothesis:

2a If Unity is not one, it is all things (160b-163b)

2b If Unity has not being, it is nothing. (163b-164b)

With Two analogous consequences:

2aa If Unity is not one, other things are. (164b-165e)

2bb. If Unity has not being, other things are not. (165e-166c)

The results of the analysis of Unity are contradictory and absurd. This is

because an analysis of an Idea, and in this case the abstract Idea of Being as Unity, exposes misunderstandings concerning predication. For Constance Meinwald, the second part of the Parmenides is helpful for solving the problems presented in the first, especially the Third Man Argument. The difficulty takes its starting point from the conjunction of the claim that since Forms are *kath'heauta* (literally, “by or in relation to themselves”) they cannot be in us, with the observation that Forms associated with relations have their being in relation to other Forms, and not in relation to other things around us, while the things around us are related to other things around us, and not to the Forms.<sup>7</sup> In this dialogue, Plato states the distinction through the phrases *pros heauto* and *pros ta alla*. There are predications of the type “x is F *pros heauto*” (in relation to itself) and predications of the type “x is F *pros ta alla*” (in relation to others.) Through an analysis of Unity by antithetical antinomies, these two different forms of predication are shown. Let’s consider some examples of both. The following are cases are “*pros heauto*” :

Unity is one

Bravery is brave

Beauty is beautiful

The Just is just

Those forms of predication aren’t so common to posit these days. Here are some more concrete examples, this time the cases are “*pros ta alla*” :

Parmenides is a man

The courts are just

Persephone is beautiful

By analyzing Unity and showing his indebtedness to the Eleatics, Plato illuminates two senses of predication. If there are two forms of predication then the Third Man Argument is not destructive to his theory of Forms. Plato shows

us that the Forms relate to themselves, and to the others in different ways. When we observe a myriad of large things we see them in relation to themselves, not the Forms. When we think of the Form of Large, however, we are thinking about it in relation to itself. It isn't necessary to posit an additional idea of Largeness above it. There is then no infinite regress. Large things in the observable world participate in Largeness, and their variety is infinite. It is only necessary to have one Idea of Largeness however, because Largeness as a Form exists as a unity unto itself. Plato analyzed Unity to show these contradictory results, and this exposes the two levels of predication that exist between things in relation to themselves and things in relation to others. Surely Plato seriously considered the Third Man Argument to be a strong argument against his theory of Forms. However, through an analysis of the second part of the dialogue we can now see that he worked on the solutions, exposed different types of predication, and never abandoned his theory of Forms.

The first part and the second part of the dialogue are also related in several other ways. First, and most obviously, the main speaker in both parts of the dialogue is the same person, namely, Parmenides. The methodology Parmenides uses in both parts of the dialogue is also the same, that is, a critique of opinions. The theory of the Forms is examined by the interrogative method of Socrates in the first part of the dialogue. In the second part of the dialogue the Eleatic notion of Unity is examined by the tougher method of antithetic antinomies, both affirmative and negative. The first part of the dialogue is a critique of the theory of Forms and the second part of the dialogue is a critique of the Eleatic notion of Unity. Plato stresses the importance of the difficulties within the theory of Forms and then in the second part of the dialogue repeats that emphasis by criticizing the Eleatic notion of being upon which the Forms are based. The Parmenides shows some of the problems

encountered by Plato when he posited the Forms. It is important to state that Plato is not denying that the Forms exist, but that by positing their existence the human mind encounters great difficulties in proving their existence. By writing the *Parmenides* Plato raises many aporia that arise with the doctrine of Forms and the Eleatic notion of Being. He had great insight and forethought in regards to the internal conflicts with his doctrine and the intrinsic problems that arise when you posit a theory of Forms with no apparent connection to the sensible world. These metaphysical problems greatly troubled Plato throughout his life and it is safe to say that he never completely resolved them. The *Parmenides* is aporetic in nature, and not dogmatic, and being so, does not present a systematic exposition of the theory of the Forms. The aporetic nature of this dialogue encourages us to philosophize about the problems presented here. Plato and the ancients set out to consider and analyze the concept of being. Being was more of an immediate problem for them than it is for us today. Today modern man lives in a politicized world of science and religious belief. So too did the ancients, but the ancients lived much closer to what we call the “primitive” than we do. Our religions are steeped in the authority of history. As we are the recipients of the consequences of historical events so too are we who are part of a world that has a structured, religious, historically embedded concept of the transcendental nature of being. Our traditional metaphysical framework was set up centuries ago, and being that way, there seems to be no urgency in proving that Unity, God, or the Forms exist. Being has been discovered, was forgotten, or covered up (according to some, i.e. Heidegger onward) and then rediscovered again. Yes, the Greeks had their religious and mythical beliefs, and even more so than modern man because they were the only explanations for the world in which they lived up to that point. Science and logic and technology were in the process of development and had not yet fully developed into paradigms. Myth was the

farthest extreme the ancient mind could go in the way of explaining the transcendent and metaphysical nature of mind until the preSocratics and Plato and Aristotle gradually and successively moved onward from myth to reason. Reason explains through deductions and shows in the analysis or explanation of ontological complexities and paradoxes that arise in the human mind. The Great Parmenides, being the first of the ancients to take the idea of ultimate reality and applying it to the rigors of logical analysis has become regarded as one of the founders of metaphysics and logic. The progression is from mythos to philosophia. For the ancients mythos was a necessary passageway to logos. Being was a concept that hitherto had only been formulated and explained in mythos. It was this point that Plato had in mind when writing the Parmenides. If the Eleatic notion that “all is one” is to be considered seriously, it must withstand the test to which Parmenides applies it in the second part of the dialogue. The discovery of logic in the 4th century B.C. and its application to the transcendent nature of reality undeniably became the tool the mind uses when dealing with the apparent, immediate, and seemingly paradoxical aporia that arise when contemplating the metaphysical and the ontological. This being the case it was the new responsibility and became the nature of reason to contemplate and attempt to resolve such problems. Mythos explains but does not show. Philosophia does both. As Plato shows us in the Parmenides, however, if the Forms are to be posited, and then analyzed by reason and logic the results will have their own intrinsic consequences and problems. The discovery of logos, of Philosophia, was a new way of seeing the world. Reason became the new paradigm for understanding the world.

Plato’s Parmenides raises many issues and problems that are still being worked on in philosophy departments all over the world. What are the connections among our sensible world, the world we see before us now, thought, which allows us access to the world, and the generalizing categorical

element in us which allows us to make sense of all the phenomena? Another problem is that of the connection between human knowledge and divine knowledge. If God exists, how can we have knowledge of him? If God is absolute, is he uncreated? How can something that is uncreated make something out of creation? If God is perfect, can He have imperfect knowledge, that is, knowledge of us mortals? As mere mortals can we ever have true knowledge of a perfect God? In some ways Plato developed the theory of the Forms to attempt to account for the things in the world and their ability to sustain their structure and likeness to others. The Forms are what things strive for. Some of modern biology's theories and results would have sparked much interest among the ancients. Two relevant examples to Plato's Parmenides are Charles Darwin's theory of evolution presented in his 1859 publication of "Origin of Species" and James Watson and Francis Crick's cracking of the genetic code in 1953. Centuries ago they would have been known as natural philosophers. Their discoveries attempted to account for the problems of generation, copying, destruction, likeness and unlikeness, participation, and patterns in nature found in the sensible world. Darwin explained how things come to be and gradually change through natural selection. Watson and Crick used their model of the helical structure of DNA to explain how things come to be and are copied. The genetic code is represented by four markers, or bases, A, T, C, and G. Each combination of bases results in a different structure or functioning principle within the DNA. This discovery showed the copying mechanism for genetic material. This genetic code and its embedded copying mechanism is responsible for our structure. It seems as if our human form is encoded in our DNA and passed down through thousands of years. Biologists believe that our form is encoded in our genetic imprint. The form is in each of us, albeit a little different, absolute with the possibility of procreation, yet perishable with the individual. So much for the physical

attributes, but what of Beauty and Justice? Are these Forms not also within us? What is beautiful may vary from culture to culture, however, there is an idea in all of us of what makes something beautiful. For it is irrelevant where you come from in order to agree that Van Gogh's "The Starry Night" is an exceptional work of art. Just as anyone from anywhere is struck with a sense of awe when seeing a Japanese temple garden. Most people these days attempt to replace metaphysics with fact. The understanding of the metaphysical jump we make (our a priori assumptions) in ordinary experience is taken for granted by most people because the process takes place instantly and is only comprehended in recollection, the not so immediate future, that is. Yet this recollection takes place within the always recurring immediate. We can come to know Beauty and Justice not by participation in the Forms, but by participating in the world. Only through an immediate dialogue with the world can we come to know whether something is Good, or Just, or Beautiful. Plato's Forms may exist, yes, but with an Aristotelian element. The Forms are within us, and through our participation in the organic, sensible world can we come to understand them. We live in a world that can be categorized because of patterns encoded in Nature that are recognizable in us. This recognition is an ordered, patterned process that occurs through our immediate presented awareness. Therefore we need a "metaphysics of the immediate" which can account for the ability of the Forms to be within the always recurring present yet elusively out of our grasp. An idea in Nature is actually an idea in us and that idea is only available to us in our immediate lived experience. The Forms are Platonic and absolute in a sense by being fixed patterns that are universally constant. Yet they are also Aristotelian by being in individuals, being observable and by being in the sensible world. By our participation in the world we can become knowledgeable of the things around us and we can understand how we recognize them as patterns of Nature, and realize their particular, yet

eternal Forms. The Forms are in us and through us we participate in the world, and the world in us.

Another problem Plato raises in the *Parmenides* is that of infinity. Infinity implies an unending series of sets or numbers or an unlimited expansion. Infinity was a great problem for the ancients and it is still a problem in modern philosophy. From Aristotle's critique of Zeno's paradoxes to Kant's work on cosmological antinomies, to set theory and Cantor's continuum problem in his theory of infinite cardinal numbers the problem of infinity we see has been treated thoroughly, yet not exhaustively, and not with the same results throughout the tradition. It is clear that the human mind has knowledge of the idea of infinity or what it means to call something infinite. We live within the infinite. Philosophers know this and attempt to articulate it through doctrines. Although not all philosophers share the same doctrines by participating in philosophy we are attempting to connect our world with the infinite, the whole, the eternal. Our immediate present awareness, composed of an unending series of moments is what we "move through" when we are engaged in the sensible world. We are a presence through which the immediate is experienced and that being so we can have knowledge of it. If there is an unlimited number of individuals there are then therefore an unlimited amount of possible "nows" or "instants" experienced as so, particularly. We live within the infinite immediate moment. The past, present and future are contingent on this set of possibly infinite "instants." Infinity has expressed itself as endless combinations of things that show themselves through mathematics, astronomy, music, diversity in nature, language, and the unlimited possibilities potentially in the next moment. There exists potentially an infinite set of individuals in an infinite set of possible worlds each experiencing their unique sense of the immediate instants that we call the present. It is an infinite, and unifying present in the sense that all who are must participate in it. Being that way, the

infinite immediacy of our sense perception in our spacio-temporal experience is self-evidently contained within ourselves as a hidden given. This hidden given makes possible a coherent and inherent foundation upon which we build. Therefore, any metaphysics of the immediate must take into account not only for the phenomena that present themselves to us, and for the noumena which makes things intelligible, but also for the less evasive foundations and structures which exist in and through time and make us not only able to see and understand the world, but to be able conceptualize and theorize about its possible limits or non limits. It is the job of philosophy, then, to participate in this activity. This activity of philosophy, as Plato shows us in this dialogue, is an open-ended process, and is a way one can choose to live his life, through actions and thoughts that contemplate the whole. It is what Plato is hinting at what we should do with his use of the aporetic dialogue: to utter and make clear what is un-said, assumed or presenced, to philosophize and to conceptualize the results of such thought, and to show what is given, yet hidden.

### Bibliography

- Allen, R.E. *Plato's Parmenides*. University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Allen, R.E., ed. *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965.
- Cherniss, Harold F. *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1944.
- Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Greek Philosophy. Volume V: The later Plato and the Academy*. Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Jowett, B. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Oxford University Press, 1920.
- Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E., and Schofield, M. *The Presocratic Philosophers. 2nd*

Edition. Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Meinwald, Constance C. *Good-bye to the Third Man*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Kraut, Richard, ed. Cambridge University Press, 1992

Morrow, Glenn R. and John M. Dillon, trans. *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*. Princeton University Press, 1987.

Prior, William J. *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*. Croom Helm, 1985.

Taylor, A.E. Plato, *The Man and His Work*. Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1929.

Taylor, C.C.W. *Routledge History of Philosophy, Volume 1: From the Beginning to Plato*. Routledge, 1997.

Vlastos, Gregory. *Platonic Studies* (Second Edition) Princeton University Press, 1973.

- 1 This is a fragment from Parmenides' proem in which he criticizes mortals for not making a distinction or analysis between "to be" and "not to be." By not discriminating between the two the hordes take the path that is "backward-turning," or inconsistent and paradoxical. Translated by Kirk, Raven and Schofield in *The Presocratic Philosophers*, page 247.
- 2 A.E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work*, pages 349-350.
- 3 The Great Panathenaea was a festival in Athens which took place every four years.
- 4 Translated by Jowett, pages 127-128.
- 5 See Allen, pg. 181 onward.
- 6 Meinwald, *Good-bye to the Third Man*, page 372.
- 7 Meinwald, *Good-by to the Third Man*, page 376.

# Some Problems of the One over Many in Plato's *Parmenides*

Joseph Karuzis

## Abstract

Western philosophy erupted in Greece in the 4th century BC. The most influential of all the Greek philosophers was Plato, (427 BC- 347 BC) who was a student of Socrates, the teacher of Aristotle and a prolific writer who started the Academy. The style of Plato's writings is that of dialogues. In Plato's early dialogues, Socrates plays a lively role and participates in an exchange of questions and answers with other characters in the dialogue. The earlier dialogues present Socrates' views on ethical matters such as justice and virtue. In the middle dialogues, Plato expresses his own philosophy through the character of Socrates. In the latter dialogues Socrates doesn't speak very much, he may be present, but he remains silent.

The *Parmenides*, one of the last of the middle dialogues, has challenged scholars as to its meaning for over 2000 years. There are nine characters in the dialogue. Among them, there is the young Socrates, and he engages in a philosophical discussion with two other philosophers, Zeno and Parmenides, who are from Elea. Eleatic philosophy started with Parmenides in the 6th century BC, and is distinguished by its doctrine of an unchanging, indivisible reality. "All is one" is what the Eleatics professed.

At the beginning of the dialogue, Zeno reads his treatise, which is a defense of Parmenides' monism. This defense is aimed at those who believe in plurality and say that Parmenides' one results in absurdity and contradiction. Zeno states that if there is a plurality, then things that are like will be unlike, which is impossible because opposites cannot be the same. Socrates does well in his

reply to Zeno by positing the Forms. There are sensibles that we perceive to be a multiplicity, and there is also a separate realm of the Forms. The Forms are what all things participate in, that is, an act is just because it has a certain relationship to the unchanging and incorporeal Form of Justice. Because of the Forms, a man can be both a plurality and a unity. He may have many parts, but these parts make up a complete whole. This is due to participating in the Forms of Unity, Plurality, Likeness and Unlikeness.

In the remainder of the dialogue, Parmenides continues as the interlocutor. The Form of Unity is analyzed by Parmenides in a barrage of arguments. Throughout these arguments several points are raised that show Plato's Theory of Forms to be problematic. There is no clear conclusion at the end of the dialogue, and we left wondering what Plato thought about the problems posited in the dialogue.

In this paper I propose that Plato took these problems seriously, yet they were not damaging to his Theory of Forms. Surely, Plato would not have published this dialogue if he believed the objections in it destroyed his Theory of Forms. The Forms are central to Plato's philosophy and metaphysics. By analyzing Unity, I believe that Plato wanted to show that there are two different types of predication. One type of predication is things in relation to themselves. The other type of predication is things in relation to others. Unity is analyzed, and by doing so, Plato answers the problems that were raised in the early part of the dialogue, such as the Third Man Argument. By using the dialogue and presenting his philosophy in a dramatic act, Plato compels the reader to draw his own conclusions. The dialogue must be seen as a unity because only then can we see Plato's intention in writing it. The Forms for Plato did exist, yet he was aware of the problems that arise with his theory. By writing the Parmenides, Plato wanted to show us that the objections to the Forms were not insurmountable.