## A NEGLECTED REGRESS ARGUMENT IN THE PARMENIDES

In recent years a great deal of scholarly and philosophical discussion has been devoted to the interpretation and evaluation of the regress arguments which Parmenides is made to deploy against the theory of Ideas in the first part of the dialogue which takes its name from him. By contrast, scarcely anything has been written about the infinite regress argument which Parmenides presents at the start of the second of the deductions which make up the dialogue's second part. Yet while it may contain less to reward the philosopher than the earlier regresses, it can hardly fail to perplex the scholar. In this paper I aim to expound and resolve some of the difficulties attaching to the passage in which the argument occurs (142 c 7–143 a 3); and in particular to examine the interpretation of the argument offered by Professor Owen, and provide an alternative account of my own.

The passage in question can reasonably be divided into two parts: one, running from 142 c 7-d 9, contains the preliminary argument that the one that is is a whole consisting of the parts one and being; the other, running from 142 d 9-143 a 3, contains the regress argument built on this foundation, which ends in the conclusion that the one that is is made up of a limitless number of parts identified either as one or as being. I examine each part of the passage in turn.

I

Πάλιν δὴ λέγωμεν, εν εἰ ἔστιν, τί συμβήσεται. σκόπει οὖν εἰ οὐκ ἀνάγκη ταύτην τὴν ὑπόθεσιν τοιοῦτον ον τὸ εν σημαίνειν, οιον μέρη ἔχειν;—Πῶς;— Ἦδε εἰ τὸ ἔστι τοῦ ένὸς ὅντος λέγεται καὶ τὸ εν τοῦ ὅντος ἐνός, ἔστι δὲ οὐ τὸ αὐτὸ ἢ τε οὐσία καὶ τὸ ἔν, τοῦ αὐτοῦ δὲ ἐκείνου οῦ ὑπεθέμεθα, τοῦ ένὸς ὅντος, ἄρα οὐκ ἀνάγκη τὸ μὲν ὅλον εν ον εἶναι αὐτό, τούτου δὲ γίγνεσθαι μόρια τό τε εν καὶ τὸ εἶναι;— Ἀνάγκη. —Πότερον οὖν ἔκάτερον τῶν μορίων τούτων μόριον μόνον προσεροῦμεν, ἢ τοῦ ὅλου μόριον τό γε μόριον προσρητέον;—Τοῦ ὅλου.—Καὶ ὅλον ἄρα ἐστί, δ αν εν ἢ, καὶ μόριον ἔχει.—Πάνυ γε.

d

5

I have printed the text in Burnet's edition. There is one place where it should certainly be repunctuated: with Moreschini, the most recent editor, we should write a full stop, instead of a question mark, after  $\xi\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$  at d 1. I am going to urge that emendation is called for at two other points: at d 4 we should add  $\tau \circ \circ \tau$  after  $\alpha \circ \tau \circ \tau$ ; and at d 8-9 we should remove the comma after  $\eta$  to bring what follows within the scope of the  $\delta$ -clause, and emend  $\kappa\alpha \circ \iota$   $\mu \circ \rho \circ \iota \circ \iota$  accordingly—I favour the simple correction:  $\kappa\alpha \circ \iota$   $\mu \circ \rho \circ \iota \circ \iota$ . The translation I now offer renders Burnet's text so emended:

Let us again, then, try to say what will follow if one is. Consider, therefore, whether this hypothesis does not necessarily indicate the one to be such as to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See C. Moreschini (ed.), Platonis Parmenides Phaedrus (Rome, 1966).

have parts. — How so? — Like this. If the 'is' of the one that is is said and the 'one' of the one that is, and if being and one are not the same thing, but are of the same thing, viz. the thing which we hypothesized, the one that is, is it not necessary that the whole one that is should be this very thing, but that belonging to it there should turn out to be parts, one and being? — It is necessary. — Shall we, therefore, call each of these parts just 'part', or must the part be called 'part of the whole'? — 'Of the whole'. — So whatever is one and has a part is a whole. — Certainly.

Our difficulties begin with the first clause of the long sentence with which Parmenides launches his argument: 'If the "is" of the one that is is said and the "one" of the one that is . . .'. Taylor translated the Greek differently: 'Since is predicated of an existent one, and one of a one that is existent . . .', i.e. taking λέγεται+genitive to mean 'is predicated of'. But Cornford objected that λέγεται could not be construed thus with the genitive unless a parallel could be found.<sup>2</sup> That is surely right. Taylor treats λέγεται as though it worked just like the English 'is said of', when plainly it does not: one would have expected it to have been followed by  $\epsilon \pi i$  or  $\pi \epsilon \rho i$  or  $\kappa \alpha \tau \alpha + \text{genitive}$  if Plato had intended Parmenides to say what Taylor makes him say, Cornford, evidently, was unable to find a parallel flouting this expectation, and a fairly careful inspection of L.S. J., Ast, and Bonitz s.v. λέγω bears out pro tanto his suspicion that one would be unlikely to come across one anywhere. It has been suggested to me that had a fourth-century Greek come upon not exactly what we have in our present text, but a case in which the temptation to construe  $\tau \circ \hat{v} \circ \hat$ a possessive genitive dependent on τὸ ἔστι was less attractive (e.g. if we had τὸ ἔστι λέγεται τοῦ ένὸς ὄντος), he must surely have understood the words as Taylor understands our present text. To this I reply that—if one is to rely here on one's intuitions about what would be the interpretation adopted by a native speaker—I should think this use of  $\tau \circ \hat{v} \circ \hat{v} \circ \hat{v} \circ \hat{v} \circ \hat{v} \circ \hat{v}$ , too, would probably be taken as a possessive genitive; and that it would be taken in Taylor's way only if our native speaker divined that the words were the pidgin Greek of a barbarian trying to say: τὸ ἔστι λέγεται κατὰ τοῦ ένὸς ὄντος (or something like it). It may be allowed that in his late dialogues Plato wrote strange and idiosyncratic Greek; but, so far as I can discover, he did not abandon essential prepositions.

Cornford recognized that 'the genitive in  $\tau \delta \tilde{\epsilon} \sigma \tau \iota \tau \sigma \tilde{v} \tilde{\epsilon} \nu \delta s \tilde{\sigma} \nu \tau \sigma s \lambda \tilde{\epsilon} \gamma \epsilon \tau \alpha \iota \ldots$  must . . . be possessive', like  $\tau \sigma \tilde{v} a \tilde{v} \tau \sigma \tilde{v} \delta \tilde{\epsilon} \kappa \tau \lambda$ . ('of the same thing, etc.') in the next clause of the sentence, but his translation was implausible:

Since 'is' is asserted to belong to this *One* which is, and 'one' is asserted to belong to this *Being* which is one, . . .

The expression 'to belong to' corresponds to nothing in the Greek; and if Plato had meant to have Parmenides say what he is here represented as saying, he would surely have included an εἶναι: e.g. τὸ ἔστι λέγεται εἶναι τοῦ ένὸς ὅντος κτλ.<sup>3</sup>

Greek to have the same effect as Taylor's: he understood his 'is asserted to belong to' as equivalent to 'is predicatively attributed to' (loc. cit.).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> A. E. Taylor, The Parmenides of Plato (Oxford, 1934), 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London, 1939), 137, n. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Cornford took his construction of the

The version I offer seems the least awkward rendering of the Greek. All the same, it requires defence and explanation. I begin with some explanation of what Parmenides must, I think, be meaning to say if this translation of the first clause of his sentence is correct.

Parmenides has prefaced his train of argument in the present passage with an injunction to consider again what will follow if one is—the supposition to which he refers as 'this hypothesis'. I take it that when in the clause which concerns us he goes on immediately to speak of 'the 'is'' and 'the "one"', he means to refer to just those expressions which are employed in voicing the supposition that one is; that he wishes us to direct our attention to that supposition by concentrating specifically on the linguistic items involved in its formulation. It is easy enough to see why Parmenides proceeds in this way. For in the prolegomenon to the whole deduction, which comes just before our present passage (142 b 1–c 7), he has been at pains to stress the way in which its premiss is formulated: it is expressed as 'one is', and not 'one one'. Here he is taking up the distinction there recognized between 'one' and 'is' as a point already granted.

His immediate reason in the earlier passage for making this point was to elicit agreement from Aristoteles that 'is' signifies something—being—different from what 'one' signifies—the one. Otherwise, he argued, the distinction we naturally recognize between 'one one' and 'one is' would vanish.² Parmenides evidently means to recall that argument from language to reality in the present argument when, in the second clause of the sentence we are examining, he restates its conclusion: 'being and one are not the same thing', after rehearsing its starting-point, that both 'one' and 'is' are said when the hypothesis of this deduction is stated.

It is not a bit surprising to find Parmenides retracing his steps in this way. When he says at the beginning of our extract: 'Let us again, then, try to say what will follow if one is', we should expect him to begin this fresh attempt at deduction with the upshot of the prolegomenon at least in mind. And when he then gives notice of his intention to prove that the hypothesis indicates that the one has parts, it would be odd if he did not remind us of the argument he has already given to show that 'one is' is made up of two linguistic items which signify or indicate (again  $\sigma\eta\mu\alpha\dot{\nu}\epsilon\nu$  is used: 142 c 4) different things. Having reminded us of what has already been shown, he need only make the further point that the being and the one linked in the hypothesis are linked by being of one and the same thing, and he can go on to exploit the implications of 'of' to draw his conclusions about parts.

I For what it is worth, I note that  $\lambda \acute{\epsilon} \gamma \epsilon \tau a \iota$  is often used in the second part of the Parmenides without any 'about . . .'-clause following to mean just 'is said'. An example near by is 142 a 5; a particularly pleasing instance occurs at 160 e 2–7 (where Parmenides seems prepared to use  $\phi \theta \acute{\epsilon} \gamma \gamma \epsilon \sigma \theta a \iota$  as a synonym: 161 a 3). The sentence in Plato of which I am most strongly reminded by this clause containing  $\lambda \acute{\epsilon} \gamma \epsilon \tau a \iota$  is at Crat. 385 c 10: Kal τοῦτο [ὄνομα] ἄρα τὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς λόγου λέγεται.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The New Theory of Forms', The Monist 1 (1966), 409,

whose analysis of this argument is keener than that suggested by Cornford's translation or by Taylor's.

Taylor's translation of the clause which directly concerns us makes the connection between our passage and the prolegomenon to the deduction much looser. His version, it will be remembered, ran:

Since is is predicated of an existent one, and one of a one that is existent . . .

All that this takes from the prolegomenon is the idea that the hypothesis of the deduction speaks of the one as existing ('an existent one', 'a one that is existent') and the notion that 'is' and 'one' signify different things. The 'is' and the 'one' mentioned in his version are not the 'is' and 'one' which occur in the original hypothesis: for 'one' does not function in that hypothesis as predicate, but as subject term—as Parmenides seems well aware, when he ends the prolegomenon with the remark that if someone says compendiously 'one is', what is meant is that the one partakes in being (142 c 5-7). Parmenides must, with Taylor's version, be making a quite new point, viz. that it is meaningful or true to say: 'an existent one is', and: 'a one that is existent is one'. Now, of course, it is certainly conceivable that in this clause Parmenides should have wanted to make a move he had not fully anticipated in the prolegomenon. But the sequel casts doubt on the likelihood of this possibility. For the next clause—'and if being and one are not the same thing'—makes it clear that the clause it succeeds is inserted for the sake of persuading us that being and the one are not the same thing; and the rest of the argument to 143 a 3 makes it plain that it is inserted only for that purpose—no further reference is made to the expressions 'one' and 'is'. But if that is the point of our clause, Parmenides does not need to voice a new thought in it. The thought elaborated in the prolegomenon, that the 'is' and the 'one' in the hypothesis of the deduction are different linguistic items, will do the job as well, and indeed, better, inasmuch as its significance has been spelt out there at some length, whereas one just has to guess what the point of Taylor's clause about predication is likely to be from the context. This adds to the unattractiveness of Taylor's translation.

So far I have said nothing about the expressions 'of the one that is' and 'of the one that is' in my translation. Here I must provide not only explanation but defence. For it might be objected that if what I have said up to now were correct, then instead of these expressions we ought rather to have been given 'of "one is" 'and 'of "one is" '. Indeed, it might be argued, the point I find in the clause might perfectly well be conveyed by something as simple as: εὶ τό τε ἔστι τοῦ εν ἔστι λέγεται καὶ τὸ εν. Το this I reply that Parmenides could certainly have been made to content himself with so much. But Plato evidently wished to insert at the very outset of his argument a reference to the thing which the hypothesis 'one is' introduces. The idea that the words 'one' and 'is' might belong to a thing as much as to a sentence may strike oddly on our ears. But we should compare the passage in the Sophist (262 e-263 c) where the Eleatic Stranger persuades Theaetetus that the sentences 'Theaetetus is sitting' and 'Theaetetus is flying' are not merely about him but belongings of his: the notion is there expressed, as here, by the simple use of the genitive.2 It might seem that while this sort of thing could be said of a sentence, it could not be

There is general agreement that Parmenides is made to say first τοῦ ἐνὸς ὄντος, then τοῦ ὄντος ἐνός, only to give emphasis to a different word in the former expression from that which one would naturally express in using that expression.

Each expression, that is to say, is taken to have the same reference. But I differ from Taylor and Cornford in supposing that it is  $\dot{\epsilon}\nu\dot{\delta}s$  which Plato wants to take the stress in the second expression,  $\delta\nu\tau\deltas$  in the first.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Together with the possessive adjective.

said of individual words. But, of course, what Parmenides means is not that 'one' and 'is' as isolated lexical units belong to the one that is, but that 'one' and 'is' in the sentence 'one is' belong to it (in virtue of its belonging to it).

It should be added that the parallelism between our clause and the doctrine of the Sophist passage holds only in respect of the notion that sentences (or rather, statements) belong to things. There is an important difference between the two dialogues with respect to the interpretation of the notion. For while the Sophist passage embodies the insights that both true and false statements are about what they refer to, and that what they refer to has to be identifiable independently of their truth and falsity, in our present passage the thing to which the statement 'one is' belongs is taken to be the thing introduced by 'one is' under just that description which holds true of the one if that statement is true: not the one, but the one that is. This difference between the dialogues explains why here it is natural enough for Parmenides to treat the individual components of the sentence as belonging to the one that is, whereas the Eleatic Stranger would no doubt be loath to say that 'is flying' or 'is sitting' belongs to Theaetetus. One might be tempted to see the doctrine of the Sophist as constituting a clearer view of the relations between reference and truth-value than Plato had achieved when he wrote the Parmenides. But although this evaluation of the different treatment of the matter in the two dialogues may well be correct, it must remain a biographical hypothesis not directly supported by comparison of these two bits of text. For in the Parmenides Plato is not expressing his own opinions, but simply developing lines of argument. And in the present passage he may well be deliberately pressing a Parmenidean train of thought in suggesting that 'one' and 'is' belong not to the one but to the one that is. For in the Sophist the sophistic thesis that one cannot say that which is not is rightly taken by Plato to be a central thesis of Parmenides' poem, and the way in which this thesis is demolished suggests that Plato took Parmenides' mistake to be in part the product of a running together of the truth and the reference of a statement. 'Falsehood', says Professor Owen, in explaining Plato's diagnosis of the mistake, 'had appeared an abortive attempt to mention something . . . ; and this confused the conditions for naming with the conditions for truth.' In the present context we see the reverse of the same coin. Here Plato's Parmenides specifies what the statement 'one is' refers to and belongs to in terms which presuppose the truth of that statement.

These reflections assist us when we come to consider Parmenides' first new move in the argument we are studying. After beginning his argument with a reminder of his observation in the prolegomenon that there are two distinct linguistic items in the hypothesis 'one is' signifying two different non-linguistic items, being and one (or the one), Parmenides explains that being and one are none the less 'of the same thing, viz. the thing which we hypothesized, the one that is'.² This claim about the connection of being and one might well surprise the careful reader of the prolegomenon. For in arguing that the one and the being connected in the sentence 'one is' are different items, Parmenides had remarked (142 b 8-c I):

the subject of the postulate, the existent one, is self-identical'; but Cornford pointed out that the genitive must be possessive, as in the first clause of the protasis (op. cit. 137, n. 1).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on Not-Being', in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, i. ed. G. Vlastos (New York, 1970), 265.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Taylor took this clause as a genitive absolute (albeit lacking a verb): 'whereas

For otherwise that [sc. the being of the one] would not be its being, nor would it, the one, partake in that.

Being was said to belong to the one—not to the one that is—and the one was not said nor implied to belong to anything, nor would it have been reasonable to hold that it was, given that 'one is' means 'the one partakes in being'. Yet now both are said to belong to the one that is.

But once the idea that the hypothesis 'one is' belongs to the one that is has crept into the argument, it is pretty well inevitable that what 'one' and 'is' signify should be taken as belonging to the one that is, too. And despite the dubiousness of that idea about 'one is', it seems pretty innocuous to hold that the one and being belong to the one described as being—the one that is—although the sort of belonging in question is obviously quite different from that involved when being is spoken of as belonging to the one. For in that case being is treated as a property of the one, as Parmenides' talk of partaking ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$ ) shows, whereas in the present case the one and being are the component entities of the complex entity the one that is. This is what makes it natural for Parmenides to conclude in the apodosis of the sentence we are examining that the one and being are parts of the one that is. We may note that this conclusion would not be nearly so irresistible an inference from the premiss that the one and being are of the one that is if, as Taylor's translation implies, one and being were properties of the one that is.

I have nothing more to say about the substance of Parmenides' conclusion:

is it not necessary that the whole one that is should be this very thing [sc. the thing which we hypothesized], but that belonging to it [sc. this very thing] there should turn out to be parts, one and being.

But I must say something in defence of my addition of τοῦτο after αὐτό at d 4 in the first limb of the conclusion, which in Burnet's text reads: ἀρα οὐκ ἀνάγκη τὸ μ ἐν ὅλον ε̂ν ὄν εἶναι αὐτό . . . W. Waddell wrote an uncomfortable note aboutwhat this could be supposed to mean. But later editors and translators seem unperturbed. Cornford, for example, wrote: 'it follows that it is "One Being" as a whole . . . ', which is presumably a free version of the following: 'is it not necessary that the whole one that is [i.e. the one that is as a whole]2 should be it . . .'. That, I think, is what the Greek would have to mean, but it is plain enough why it can hardly do so. For instead of αὐτό a much stronger demonstrative pronoun is required both to give an adequate complement to elvat and to refer back to  $\tau \circ \hat{v}$  αὐτο $\hat{v} \cdot ...$  ἐκείνου οδ ὑπεθέμεθα (d 3). Inspired by Damascius, who evidently read the text Burnet printed (II. 47. 22-3 Ruelle), but later misremembered it as δρα οὐκ ἀνάγκη τὸ μὲν ὅλον εν είναι αὐτὸ τοῦτο (II. 50. 9-10: Ruelle adds  $\langle \mathring{v}_{\nu} \rangle$  after  $\mathring{e}_{\nu}$ ), I propose that we read  $a\mathring{v} \tau \mathring{v}$   $\tau o \hat{v} \tau o$ . Since the second limb of the conclusion begins τούτου δέ, the corruption is readily explained as a simple haplography.

The chief problem which besets us in the last two exchanges of our extract is again a textual one. The first sentence presents no difficulty:

Shall we, therefore, call each of these parts just 'part', or must the part be called 'part of the whole'?

<sup>1</sup> The Parmenides of Plato (Glasgow, 1894), 125.

whole one that is' seems to be a possible, if unusual, expression, in English and in the Greek original; it can be treated as parallel to such phrases as τὸ ὅλον πρόσωπον (Prot. 329 e 1-2), 'the whole face' or 'the face as a whole'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Inasmuch as 'the one that is' is a definite description, and so bears logical and grammatical resemblance to a substantive, 'the

Parmenides is asking Aristoteles to reflect on the implications of what he has just agreed ('therefore')—namely that 'belonging to it [sc. the thing which we hypothesized] there... turn out to be parts, one and being'. And Aristoteles is able to see that his assent to 'parts of this', especially when 'this' has been identified with 'the one that is as a whole', commits him to answering '"Of the whole"'. According to Burnet's text, Parmenides then offers him the inference:

So whatever is one is a whole and has a part.

A minor problem is raised by 'has a part'. What has just preceded and what is immediately to follow alike cause us to expect 'has parts'—which seems to have been what Simplicius read; as also does comparison with 137 c 7-9, 157 d 7-e 5, etc. But the more substantial difficulty raised by Burnet's text is that the claim it makes Parmenides put forward is irrelevantly and illegitimately inferred.

All that Parmenides is entitled to conclude is that the one that is is a whole and has parts. He might perhaps have wanted to generalize this as the thesis that whatever is correctly designated as the one that is is a whole and has parts. But what he is made to say in Burnet's text is much more general than that—his subject is 'whatever is one'. His only obvious motive for wanting to advance this very general claim about whatever is one would be to secure himself a premiss for the regress argument he is about to develop. But he does not appear to make any appeal, tacit or explicit, to such a claim in that argument. As we shall see, the regress can be satisfactorily explained without reference to any principle of that sort. So even if Parmenides' claim were validly inferred, we would be puzzled to know why it had been inferred. That it is illegitimately inferred is clear enough. What Parmenides has attempted to show is that the complex entity the one that is is composed of one and being. He has done nothing to prove that a concept like justice, which is certainly a single concept, must in virtue of being single be a whole composed of parts—a pretty unattractive thesis, in any event.

We must again resort to emendation. If we remove the comma after  $\hat{\eta}$  and read  $\tilde{\epsilon}\chi\eta$  in place of  $\tilde{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota$  (an easy corruption), we rid ourselves of both the difficulties we have considered. What is restored is a more happily constructed sentence and a more appropriate sense:

So whatever is one and has a part is a whole.

Parmenides simply draws Aristoteles' attention to the presupposition underlying his immediately preceding answer: "Of the whole". For Aristoteles passed from 'parts of this [sc. the one that is]' to 'part of the whole'. Parmenides points out to him now that behind his inference lay the assumption that any single thing containing a part ('a part' now easily takes up 'part' in the previous question) is a whole. It might be felt that to attribute such a point to Parmenides at this stage in his argument is to make him a more niggling sort of reasoner

This is what Taylor and Cornford, who accept Burnet's text, try to maintain he is saying. The former writes: 'Ergo, any existing one is a whole, and also has a part'; the latter: 'Therefore, any 'One that is' is a whole and also has parts'. But this strains the Greek. And in any case, Parmenides makes no appeal to the idea that 'the one

that is' has that sort of generality in the regress which immediately follows, although that argument entails the correctness of the idea

<sup>2</sup> Especially if the erring scribe, after writing  $\mu \delta \rho \iota o \nu$ , expected to find the verb indicative, balancing  $\epsilon \sigma \tau i$  (as, e.g., at 137 d 1-2).

than is plausible. But we have only to recall the long argument at 157 c 4-e 5, where Parmenides attempts to *prove* that parts must be parts of a whole, to see that it is not out of character for him to be extremely interested in the niceties of the manner in which the relation between whole and parts is conceived.

To conclude: Parmenides' argument in the present extract is very simple. He begins by reminding us of his argument in the prolegomenon that the two distinct linguistic items, 'one' and 'is', in the hypothesis 'one is' are distinct, and signify two different non-linguistic items, one (or the one) and being. His basic new move is to suggest that as 'one' and 'is' belong to the complex entity, the one that is, so do the items they signify, one and being. From this he draws the natural conclusion that one and being are parts of the one that is, and that this is therefore a whole.

## II

Τί οὖν; τῶν μορίων ἑκάτερον ε τούτων τοῦ ἐνὸς ὅντος, τό τε ἐν καὶ τὸ ὅν, ἄρα ἀπολείπεσθον ἢ τὸ ἐν τοῦ εἰναι μορίου ἢ τὸ ὄν τοῦ ἐνὸς μορίου;—Οὐκ ἄν εἴη.—Πάλιν ἄρα καὶ τῶν μορίων ἐκάτερον τό τε ἐν ἴσχει καὶ τὸ ὄν, καὶ γίγνεται τὸ ἐλάχιστον ἐκ δυοῖν αὖ μορίοιν τὸ μόριον, καὶ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον οὕτως ἀεί, ὅτιπερ ἄν μόριον γένηται, τούτω τὼ μορίω ἀεὶ ἴσχει τό τε γὰρ ἕν τὸ ὄν ἀεὶ ἴσχει καὶ τὸ ὄν τὸ ἔν· ὥστε ἀνάγκη δύ' ἀεὶ γιγνόμενον μηδέποτε ἕν εἶναι.—Παντάπασι μὲν οὖν.—Οὐκοῦν ἄπειρον ἂν τὸ πλῆθος οὕτω τὸ ἔν ὄν εἴη;—
"Εοικεν.

Burnet's text (here printed) should be emended, I think, at two points. At 143 a 3 it seems better to follow Moreschini in reading ἔοικέ γε (TW Simplicius) than to accept ἔοικεν (BCD). More speculatively, I suggest that we follow Schleiermacher in excising the two occurrences of μορίου at 142 e 2. If we leave them in, we have on our hands one most eccentric Greek expression τοῦ εἶναι μορίου—and one which, though in itself a tolerable collocation of words, has to take on a pretty strained sense in the context, viz. 'the part constituted by one'—τοῦ ένὸς μορίου. Το cut them out makes no very substantial difference to the argument and gives us a perfectly normal Greek sentence, and, indeed, a sentence very closely echoed in this purified form by one in a later argument (at 144 e 1-2). We can suppose that at an early stage in the transmission some scribe included glosses supra lineam originally made by someone who noticed that for the regress argument to seem to work, the question at 142 e 1-2 has to be taken as saying: 'any part of a whole identified as being is always accompanied by one, and any part identified as one by being'-i.e., as suggesting that the one which accompanies a part identified as being should not initially itself be treated as a part of the same whole to which the being in question belongs (or else one will never get any being or one other than those one has to begin with). We might guess further that the glosses themselves were in the nominative μόριον—and that our early scribe included the word in his text in that form on each occasion. For that is at any rate one hypothesis by which the facts that D (Venet. 185) and Par. 1808 give μόριον on each occasion, and that BCW

ι οὖτε γὰρ τὸ ὂν τοῦ ένὸς ἀπολείπεται οὖτε τὸ εν τοῦ ὄντος . . .

Simplicius Damascius have  $\mu \acute{o}\rho \iota o \nu$  on the first occasion, can be explained. The following is a translation of Burnet's text thus emended:

Well then, take each of these parts of the one that is, one and being: is one lacking to being or being to one?—No. — So each of the parts, too, in its turn possesses both one and being, and the part turns out to consist once more of two parts at least. And in this way always, by the same reasoning, whatever part turns up always possesses these two parts: for one always possesses being and being one. So necessarily, since it always turns out to be two, it is never one. — Absolutely so. — Therefore in this way the one that is will be limitless in plurality? — It seems so.

This concluding part of Parmenides' argument is as simple as the preceding part which we have examined. Writing 'A' for 'one' and 'B' for 'being' and 'AB' for 'the one that is' (to achieve clarity about the form of the reasoning), we can paraphrase the argument thus:

Consider each of the two parts of AB, viz. A and B.

- (1) A is not lacking to B, nor B to A.
- (2) So each part has two parts, A and B.
- (3) So each of these further parts has two parts, A and B.
- (4) And so ad infinitum.

The principal questions which any account of this regress argument must seek to settle are two: (a) Why does Parmenides hold (1)? (b) Why does he think (2) follows from (1) (and equally (3) from (2), etc.)? I offer first my own answers.

- (a) Parmenides does not offer any reason for accepting proposition (1). The natural inference to draw from this is that he takes (1) to be an entirely obvious consequence of what has gone before. And it is not hard to see what thesis of the preceding bit of argument he is presumably exploiting here. If parts are necessarily parts of some whole, then the parts of any given whole will clearly always, qua parts, be together: which is one thing that (1) could be taken to be saying of A and B. To put the inference another way, the part's lack of independence of the whole, qua part, entails its lack of isolability, qua part, from other parts of the whole in question. So construed, (1) will be a remark about the logic of 'part' as it applies to the case of A and B.
- (b) Given that Parmenides' adherence to (1) is to be so accounted for, the difficulty is to explain how he can suppose that (2) follows from (1). At first sight it looks like not just a non sequitur, but a quite inexplicable non sequitur. How from (1), which (construed as we have construed it) holds that the parts A and B of the whole AB must be together in that whole, could one conceivably infer (2), which holds that A has to be analysed as possessing two parts—A (itself, one supposes)<sup>2</sup> and B (not the original B, but another B)?

The explanation is not far to seek. The non sequitur which the regress argument certainly does contain seems to arise from a mistake Parmenides commits when he considers each of the parts of the whole AB separately ('So each of the

<sup>1</sup> Here and above I use the symbols for MSS. adopted by Moreschini. On Venet. 185, see his preface, especially pp. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation of the identity of the sub-part A (as really just the original A)

receives support from the explanation of why (2), (3), and (4) are supposed to follow later in the argument: 'for one always possesses being and being one' i.e., any A always has with it a B, any B an A.

parts...'). He appears (i) to consider each part as if it were separated from the whole; and then (ii) to suppose that proposition (1) would still be true of it—with the result that A could be accompanied by a B, and B by an A, although since (by silent hypothesis) A and B have both been separated from the whole and in consequence from each other, the A which accompanies the original B cannot be the original A, and the B which accompanies the original A cannot be the original B.

But Parmenides' supposition (ii) is erroneous. Proposition (1), construed as I have argued it must originally have been meant to be, applies to A and B only qua parts of the whole AB. Accordingly, it does not hold true of them when they are conceived of as if they did not stand in that part-to-whole relation. Yet one can see readily enough why Parmenides should have been led into thinking that it did. For it is by no means clear from the actual wording of the question I have paraphrased as proposition (1) that it applies to the parts A and B of the whole AB only considered as parts of it: 'is one lacking to being or being to one?' These words could be taken to mean that wherever we get an A, we get a B, and vice versa; and indeed, the very similar words at 144 e 1-2 have to be taken in this sense. We need suppose only that Parmenides forgets his original ground for asserting (1), and thereby the context which originally restricted the scope of (1), to account for his taking its words in the quite unrestricted way which would validate his questionable supposition. Having thus reached (2), and two sets of parts each having the form AB, he can go on to consider each of these parts as isolated items, and by the application of (1) (taken in the unrestricted way) to each of them achieve (3). This same operation can be repeated ad infinitum (4).

Not only is the supposition (ii) erroneous. Taken in conjunction with the operation of mental separation (i) it leads to absurd consequences. For the whole regress really adds up to no more than the promise: if you find an A, there will be a B with it; but now pretend there isn't a B with it, and you will find a further, hitherto unsuspected B with it—just because there will always be a B with an A.

According to this analysis, then, Parmenides' argument is invalid, and its plausibility depends on a concealed ambiguity in proposition (1), exploited with the aid of a bogus operation of separation. Both Cornford<sup>1</sup> and Professor Owen<sup>2</sup> think his argument more successful than I am allowing. Owen, at any rate, construes the whole of the reasoning in a quite different way from that just presented. And he does so in a way which, if it proved acceptable, would allow us to acquit Parmenides on both the ambiguity charge and the bogus separation charge. For he appears to understand proposition (1) in an unrestricted way from the outset; and to interpret it as holding of As and Bs not in virtue of their being treated as isolated As and Bs, but because of their formal character as parts.<sup>3</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Plato and Parmenides, 139.
- <sup>2</sup> See 'Notes on Ryle's Plato', in Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. O. P. Wood and G. Pitcher (New York, 1970), 352-3, 369-70.
- <sup>3</sup> I must here add some words of qualification. In using Owen's paper on the *Parmenides* I have asked questions of his interpretation which he does not set out to answer

there; and consequently I have had to try to construct answers out of things that he does say. I may very well have got hold of the wrong end of the stick, and if so, I gladly apologize. My only defence is that his interpretation of the regress seemed to present a challenge to my own which had to be met. And without pressing that interpretation quite hard the issues between us would have

Our first need is to grasp Owen's understanding of proposition (2) (an interpretation he takes over from Cornford). He writes that in the regress argument:

Plato argues that if unity is a part or property of something (in this case, the One) it is *one* of the thing's parts and there *is* such a part; and the same is true of the thing's being. . . . Plato is ready to argue that any component is *one* part and there *is* such a part.

There already emerge two connected differences between Owen's account of the argument and mine. In the first place, my view is that when Parmenides claims in proposition (2) that each part of the whole the one that is has two parts, one and being, then the one which is a part of the original one and the being which is part of the original being are really just those aspects of the original one and the original being which entitle these original parts to the identities they are given. But for Owen the one which is a part of the original one is not its identifying character, but a property quite distinct from its identifying character. This brings us to the second and fundamental difference between the two accounts. According to Owen, the original one and the original being are each held to have a one and a being as parts in virtue of their being parts: any component or part, he says, is one part and there is such a part; and he clearly implies that it is only because one (or unity) and being are treated as parts that the regress gets going. My contention, by contrast, has been that the regress depends on neglect of the way one and being function as parts of the one that is.

If Owen holds that Parmenides argues to proposition (2) (interpreted as saying that any part is one part and there is such a part), where does he think the argument is given? One would obviously expect him to treat proposition (1) ('is one lacking to being or being to one?') as furnishing Parmenides' chief reason for (2). In that case it looks as though he will have to read (1) in what seems a strange sense: any part or any thing that is single must also exist; and any part that exists must be one part. And in fact there is some reason to think that he does read (1) in this way. At any rate, the following sentence from his account of the argument sounds more like a commentary on 'is one lacking to being or being to one?' than on any other sentence in the text:<sup>2</sup>

In ascribing unity to each part, the argument seems to anticipate premiss (10) [sc. the thesis that if a part were not one part it would be nothing, found by Owen at 144 c 2-6]; and in ascribing existence to whatever is unitary it seems to rely on (8) [sc. the thesis that if the one is one, the one is, 141 e 10-11].

Supposing that we have Owen's view correctly,<sup>3</sup> then there are three questions we must ask: (a) Does it provide a plausible reading of proposition

remained unclear. My reasons for not examining Cornford's account of the argument are two: first, it is not very clear; second, I am inclined to think that in his commentary he meant to adopt the sort of interpretation given by Owen, while his translation implies the sort of view I have been urging (except that his rendering of 142 e 1-2 opts unambiguously for an 'unrestricted' interpretation: 'unity can never be lacking to the part "being", nor being to

the part "unity" ')—so I am not sure that further discussion of his views would add much.

- <sup>1</sup> Op. cit. 369-70.
- <sup>2</sup> Op. cit. 353.
- <sup>3</sup> But I am uncertain on this point. All that now follows should be regarded as directed at what someone tempted by Owen's account of the regress might say, rather than at Owen's own position.

- (1)? (b) If it does, is the inference from (1) to (2) (as interpreted by Owen) valid? (c) Supposing the answers to (a) and (b) to be affirmative, do the references to 141 e and 144 c supply an adequate explanation of why Parmenides feels able to assert proposition (1), so interpreted, here? I am going to argue that to each question we must reply: 'No'.

If 'is' is predicated of the one that is, and if 'one' is predicated of the one that is

For only if being and one are first introduced as items that are predicated of the one that is—as being existent and being one—will it be natural to take proposition (1) in this way: as saying in effect that 'is one' entails 'exists' and vice versa. But unless a linguistic argument can be found for construing d 1-2 in Taylor's manner, it seems very doubtful whether translations like the one I have just given afford us a working possibility.

Even if we could accept Taylor's understanding of the Greek, there would remain a difficulty. On any plausible account of d 1-2 taken in Taylor's way, 'one' and 'is' must be predicated of the one that is not in virtue of the fact that the one that is is a whole, but at least partly because of the specific identity of the one that is. The idea that the one that is is a whole is not introduced until a later point in the argument. And it is surely most probably because 'the one that is' is an expression already identifying the one that is as one that Parmenides (if Taylor is right) predicates 'one' of it; and for a parallel reason that 'is' is predicated of it. Taylor himself seems to have supposed that 'one' was predicated because the one that is includes in its description the word 'is' (and vice versa), thus accepting that Parmenides wants to make a point about the mutual entailment of 'one' and 'is'. But even according to his interpretation, it is in the end because the one that is is identified by the description 'the one that is' that 'one' and 'is' are predicated of it. In any event, 'one' and 'is' are not predicated of the one that is because it is a whole. It is correspondingly unlikely that Parmenides will predicate 'one' and 'is' of its parts, one and being, simply in virtue of their being parts. One would have expected him to uphold such a view about parts because of their being just those parts which are identified as one and being.

(b) A closely connected objection presents itself when we consider whether proposition (2), on Owen's view of it, is validly inferred from proposition (1), so construed. Proposition (1), it seems, is to read:

Any part that is single must exist; any part that exists must be one part. Proposition (2) is to read:

Any part is one part, and there is such a part.

It is evident that we cannot pass validly from (1) to (2). (1) is hypothetical in form, (2) categorical. To make the argument work we need a categorical premiss—e.g.:

Every part is either a part that is single or a part that exists.

Now one might think that a categorical premiss something like that could be supplied easily enough. After all, the parts actually in question in this context

are one and being, so that it will be no more than a truism to say that one is one, being being, a truism Plato could expect the reader to furnish for himself. And in accepting such a premiss we could fend off the objection that this construction of the argument makes no use of an idea which one might have expected Parmenides to employ, namely that 'one' and 'is' are predicated of one and being in virtue of their being just those items identified as one and being. But while one could improve the present account of the argument in these ways by introducing the categorical premiss, one could do so only at the cost of abandoning the validity of the regress—of the inference of propositions (3) and so (4) from (2). For the merit of Owen's account of (2), as true of all parts, whatever their identity, just inasmuch as they are parts, is that the singleness or unity and the being which are ascribed to parts are properties, and therefore parts, genuinely distinct in identity from the parts which possess them—since this distinction of identity is what is required if the argument is to be valid. Yet in the truisms 'one is one', 'being is being', what we have affirmed is in each case an identity; there is no question of the 'one' or the 'being' after 'is' introducing entities distinct from those signified by the same expressions when they occur before the verb.

If we return to the text, we discover that it cannot be interpreted as accommodating even an invalid inference from (1) to (2) (again, of course, construed in the above manner). According to Owen, (2) says that any part is one part and there is such a part. This interpretation of (2) requires that there be a distinction between occurrences of the expressions 'one', 'being', 'part' as subjects, and occurrences of them as predicates or as having a predicative role. Thus we have to read the first clause of the sentence beginning at e3 in this fashion:

So each of the parts [subject], too, in its turn possesses both one and being [predicate] . . .

And then, by applying proposition (1) (as presently understood) to the parts introduced by the predicate expressions, we are supposed to get the regress—i.e. (3) and then (4). Now clearly, if we are to find such a distinction in proposition (2), proposition (1) ought to prepare us to find it there. For (2) is no more than an inference drawn from (1), although as we have seen, it cannot follow from (1) alone. (1), then, ought to say something like this:

Any part (or perhaps, anything) [subject] which is one [predicate] must also exist [predicate]; any part (or, anything) [subject] that exists [predicate] must be one [predicate].

But Parmenides' actual words make it plain that if (1) is taken as saying something like that, (2) cannot say what Owen wants it to. This can be brought out by inserting those subject and predicate markers into the text which seem natural once the account of (1) we are assuming is accepted:

Well then, take each of these parts [predicate] of the one that is, one and being [predicate]: is one lacking to being or being to one? — No. — So each of the parts [predicate], too, in its turn possesses both one and being [? same-order predicates; ? higher-order predicates]...

The referring expression 'the parts' in Parmenides' second sentence has to pick up the supposed use of 'these parts' as *predicate* in the first sentence. The root of the trouble is that Parmenides' first sentence can be read as saying something like

the thesis expressed in the sentence 'Any part . . . [predicate]' above, but it differs from it in a crucial respect. It introduces 'part' only in a predicative use, whereas that thesis introduced it only in a subject use (or at least failed to employ it predicatively, if we take the option 'anything').

(c) For the idea that if a part exists, it must be one, Owen directs our attention to the passage 144 c 2-6:

Well then, is there any of them [sc. the parts of being] which is part of being, but is no part? — How could such a thing happen? — I suppose that, on the contrary, if it is, then so long as it is, it must always be some one thing, and cannot be nothing. — It must.

From this Parmenides concludes that the one attaches to every part of being, and speaks more than once of its not being lacking to being, on the second occasion (144 e 1-2) in words which echo pretty well exactly the words in which proposition (1) is expressed. It might seem, then, that it is right to suppose that Parmenides would rely on the sort of reasoning he goes through at 144 c 2-6 if invited to explain why he gives his assent to (1). But one cannot be very happy with the thought that in the crucial opening argument of the second deduction Parmenides would be content to introduce as a basic premiss a thesis which he evidently took to be in need of argument, and yet for which he offers no argument until a page or two later, and then only in a digression (the whole section 143 a 4-144 e 7 constitutes a digression in which Parmenides argues (144 e 5-7): 'Not only, then, is the one that is many [shown in our present argument], but it is necessary that the one itself, too, should have been distributed by being as many.'). In no other deduction, so far as I can judge, does such a thing happen. Nor is the consideration that, as a consequence of the argument at 144 c 2-6, Parmenides can say: 'neither is being lacking to one, nor one to being' (144 e 1-2), decisively in favour of the sort of account of (1) we have been considering. For in the first place, it is just my argument that in the regress we are examining Parmenides illegitimately comes to treat proposition (1) as though it said the same thing as 144 e 1-2, viz.: wherever you get one, you get being, and vice versa. And secondly, even this amount of agreement cannot be pressed very hard to yield up a similarity in the arguments at the formal level: Parmenides' repeated dictum is solidly in the material mode, and even taken in a single sense ('wherever, etc.') is susceptible of different formal interpretations.

The suggestion that, in order to validate the idea that what is unitary exists, Parmenides must be relying on a move in the previous deduction, is even less attractive. Towards the end of that deduction Parmenides argues (141 e 10-11):

Nor even, then, is it in such a way as to be one. For it would thereby be being and partaking in being.

Certainly there is no reason to think this specific thesis of an entailment from 'is one' to 'is' is abandoned when the first deduction as a whole is written off (142 a 6-b 3)—it is one of the reasons Parmenides has for despairing of his first attempt at deduction from 'one is'. But there is reason to doubt that Plato would want to have Parmenides rely, at least in the first stages of the second deduction, on a thesis stated in the preceding deduction, at any rate without an

<sup>1</sup> At 144 c 4 I follow Moreschini in accepting Hermann's conjecture τὸ τοιοῦτο.

explicit avowal to this effect. For Parmenides is made to represent himself as making a wholly fresh start in this deduction, going back to the very beginning and looking again at the meaning of 'one is' (142 b 1-c 8). Owen, it is true, contends that even in the bit of argument antecedent to the regress Parmenides' reasoning 'inherits' two premisses from the first deduction.<sup>2</sup> But examination of the two premisses he produces shows that the most one can allow is that there are interesting comparisons to be made between certain bits of the first deduction and Parmenides' reasoning here. Thus according to Owen, Parmenides proves that the being of the one is not the same as the one by tacit appeal to a modified version of a principle which can be extracted from an argument at 139 d 3-e 1: that the one does not have the same nature as that which is the same, since if it had, then whenever something became the same as anything, it would become one, and vice versa. Yet plainly all Parmenides does and all he needs to do at 142 b 7-c 5 is to get Aristoteles' agreement to the obvious point, that if the one and its being were identical, 'one is' and 'one one' would say the same. Again, Owen finds the argument that one and being are parts of the one that is drawing on the thesis put forward at 140 a 1-3, that if the one had any other character than being one, it would be many. The motive for appealing to this thesis disappears, however, if the Taylor translation of 142 d 1-2 is abandoned.

If it is difficult to see a way of squaring Owen's account of the regress with the detail of the text, it yet retains a feature of some attractiveness. His interpretation of the argument makes it a valid one with a perceptible bite. For he points out that, on his reading of it, it can be taken as a reductio ad absurdum of the idea that, supposing properties are treated as ingredients or parts of things, one (or unity) and being can be reckoned as properties along with the rest (colour, size, etc.). He writes:<sup>3</sup>

[The argument] seems designed to show the recalcitrant behaviour of such putative properties as unity and being.... Plato argues that if unity is a part or property of something (in this case, the One) it is one of the thing's parts and there is such a part; and the same is true of the thing's being. So both unity and being have the parts or properties of unity and being, which in turn have both parts, and so ad infinitum. But suppose Plato to have recognized the point of his first regress [sc. the Third Man, 132 a-b], namely that the common run of a thing's properties are not to be assigned to themselves; then here is a dilemma. Either he must say that unity and being cannot be component properties of anything on the same terms as its colour and size, or he must rule that unity cannot be said to be unitary or being to be.

And he suggests that, always supposing that properties are thought of as components or parts, Plato would have to take the first option and deny that unity or being is a property. He guesses that Plato is here developing an argument to show that there are some concepts, explored more fully in the Sophist, 'which must be reintroduced in describing their own behaviour as in talking about anything else'.

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<sup>1</sup> Parmenides' favourite device for indicating that he is drawing on a previous argument is to use expressions like \phi a\mu \epsilon \nu: e.g. 149 c 5 (cf. 146 d 1-5, 147 a 3-b 3);
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<sup>159</sup> c 5 (cf. 157 c 1-4);  $\epsilon \phi \acute{\alpha} \nu \eta$ : e.g. 148 a 8 (cf. 146 d 5-147 b 6).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Op. cit. 352-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Op. cit. 369–70.

The philosophical pleasingness of Owen's construction of the argument might be thought to bestow upon it an appeal lacking to the invalid, and even rather silly, piece of reasoning to be found in the text according to the present author's interpretation of it. But it does, I think, have a point, and indeed a point much more appropriate in the context than that found by Owen in the argument which he discerns. For this context can be argued to be an Eleatic context, first and foremost, and Parmenides' reasoning (construed as I advocate) can be seen as fitting into such a context very snugly.

## III

In the first two deductions of the second part of the Parmenides Parmenides claims to be considering his own hypothesis, 'one is' (137 b 1-4). One may well doubt how closely these words, as taken in either deduction, correspond to any thesis of Parmenides' poem. But it is clear enough that Parmenides begins the first deduction with a demonstration that, if one presses the implications of 'one' to the limit, one must deny to the one not just those predicates denied to the subject of Parmenides' poem, but also precisely those predicates which were there affirmed of it—'whole', 'limited', etc. Moreover, the basic move in this demonstration is itself Eleatic in inspiration—the notion that unity excludes all plurality and divisibility. I suggest that in this first piece of reasoning from the premiss 'one is' in the second deduction which we have been scrutinizing, Parmenides is again made to employ Eleatic weapons to win another set of conclusions embarrassing to an Eleatic from the same Parmenidean hypothesis. Thus in the preliminary part of the argument (142 c 7-d 9), examined in the first part of the paper, Parmenides, through confounding the truth and the reference of the statement 'one is' in Parmenidean fashion, treats 'one' and 'is' as belonging to the one that is, and so by an easy step takes one and being to be its parts. Then in the regress itself (142 d 9-143 a 3), he is made to do what any Eleatic would feel in duty bound to do when confronted with parts—multiply them ad infinitum. So far from entailing the existence of a single, partless, and limited whole, then, 'one is' is held to entail an infinite plurality of parts, just as much as does the contrary premiss, 'many are'. That the purported entailment requires an invalid inference need not disturb Plato if his purposes are ad hominem in the way I have maintained.

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