THE ANTINOMIES OF PLATO'S *PARMENIDES*

INTRODUCTION

It is arguable that the student of the deductions which make up the second part of Plato's *Parmenides* is today better placed than any of his predecessors, save Aristotle, Speusippus, and other immediate associates of Plato, to understand and evaluate those forbidding pages. Ways of looking at and handling the matter of the text are available to him which were not open to those who lived before the rise of critical philological scholarship in Europe in the last century, and of analytical philosophy in the English-speaking world in this. He has to hand, too, some pioneering work on the dialogue of recent date. In 1939, an *annus mirabilis* for *Parmenides* studies, there appeared Cornford's commentary on the dialogue[1] and Ryle's article,[2] together with the bonus of Ryle's thoughts on Cornford.[3] Since then he has had the benefit of further exploratory studies, notably from the pens of Robinson (1942),[4] Crombie (1963),[5] and Owen (1970).[6]

But despite his many advantages, the contemporary reader of the dialogue may still find himself baffled to know what Plato is trying to do in the deductions. The authors I have mentioned certainly cast a flood of illumination on the text, but it may be doubted whether it is yet exposed to the full light of day. In this paper, therefore, I attempt to advance discussion on an absolutely fundamental question concerning the logical character of Part II of the dialogue. It is a question on which Cornford and Ryle were in radical disagreement. Ryle took the four antinomies which constitute the second part of the *Parmenides* both to be and to be intended to be genuinely compelling antinomies, designed to show that propositions such as 'unity exists' and 'unity does not exist' are ill-formed, and that if we assert them, we are bound to fall into contradicting ourselves.[7] Cornford, on the other hand, held that these antinomies are sham antinomies; and that Plato's intention in constructing them was to stimulate the student to detect ambiguities in words like 'one' and 'is' which figure in the premisses from which supposedly contradictory conclusions are derived, and which, once detected, allow us to see opposed trains of argument as not opposed but merely different.[8] Ryle saw these trains of argument as true deductive chains of inference throughout; Cornford thought that Plato sometimes presents as an inference what is no more than a suggestion as to how some particular construction of the

[1] F.M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1939).

[2] G. Ryle, 'Plato's *Parmenides*', *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), 129–51, 303–25 (reprinted with an Afterword in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. R.E. Allen (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), and without it in G. Ryle, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1971)).

[3] G. Ryle, Critical Notice of Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, in *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), 536–43.

[4] R. Robinson, 'Plato's *Parmenides*', *CPh* 37 (1942), 51–76, 159–86 (reprinted in his *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*[2] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953)).

[5] I.M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 325–53.

[6] G.E.L. Owen, 'Notes on Ryle's Plato', in *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. O.P. Wood and G. Pitcher (London: Macmillan, 1971).

[7] See in particular *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), 312–14, 542–3.

[8] See especially *Plato and Parmenides*, pp. 109–15.

'one' might without inconsistency be developed,[9] while sometimes an entirely fresh set of ideas is launched under the formal cover of an inference.[10]

I side with Ryle in believing the antinomies to be, at least in Plato's intention, genuine antinomies. But there is an evident complexity in Plato's treatment of 'one', and a hardly less obvious variety in his manner of argument, which Cornford's account accommodates much more successfully than Ryle's simple picture. I take as my task the construction of a more sophisticated conception of Platonic antinomy than either Ryle or Cornford envisaged, which will embody both Ryle's central insight and Cornford's sensitivity to the shifting focus and status of Plato's arguments. Perhaps I should speak of application rather than construction. For the idea of antinomy I shall be using is in essence that worked out by Professor Owen in his article on the *Parmenides*. He himself has used it mainly to diagnose and describe the conflict of specific arguments within a single chain of deductions or in two different chains. I shall employ it and elaborate it with respect to the large-scale structure of antinomies.

PLATO'S INTENTIONS

First I present some general and *a priori* considerations which suggest that Plato seriously intended the antinomies to be genuinely compelling. My argument here falls into three parts: (a) I start by putting the case in favour of this thesis; (b) I then state what I take to be the nub of the sceptical case against it; (c) finally, I point out the chief difficulties in the sceptical standpoint.

(a) *The case for Plato's seriousness*

At the end of the first part of the *Parmenides* Socrates is exhorted to train himself for philosophy by applying himself to the construction of antinomies in the manner of Zeno (135 d–136 c). Parmenides is prevailed upon to provide a sample exercise (136 c–137 c) and this demonstration of the method occupies the rest of the work (137 c–166 c). The aim of such gymnastics is said to be to put one in a position 'to see the truth clearly and steadily' (136 c 5; cf. 135 d 6, 136 e 2–3). And if Plato had not thought that employment of Zeno's method (suitably revised in the way he has Parmenides indicate) could confer considerable intellectual benefit upon the philosopher or the intending philosopher, it is hard to understand why he should have penned either exhortation or demonstration, especially when the latter is such a protracted affair, making very considerable demands on its author's inventiveness and ingenuity; and it is difficult to comprehend why else he should have deliberately stressed, here and in the *Theaetetus* (183 e–184 a) and *Sophist* (217 c) as well, the gravity and authority of Parmenides in this performance.

Now the general structure of the scheme of antinomies makes it highly likely that the serious benefit to be derived from practice of the method was thought by Plato to be largely conditional upon the fact that the antinomies have just that structure.

For in the first place, this general structure is represented by Parmenides as being the important thing about the method. And given that Part II has the serious aim just suggested, we should expect to be able to rely on Plato's hints about where its value lies.

[9] As in the second movement (op. cit., pp. 135–6, 146, 150–4, etc.).

[10] As in the fifth movement, at 162 b (op. cit., pp. 227–8).

Secondly, it is made pretty plain by Plato *why* the general structure of the deductions is so important. Zeno, we are told, had considered only what followed from supposing that there are many things (135 d–136 a; cf. 127 d–128 e). In this he was at fault: his derivation of antinomies from that premiss could too easily suggest that we are justified in moving immediately to assertion of the contrary thesis. At any rate, Plato makes him refer regretfully to his book of paradoxes as partisan (128 d–e); and the expansion of the method he puts in Parmenides' mouth is presented as an *improvement* upon Zeno's original (135 e 8–136 a 2), intelligibly enough if we view it as designed to stop that easy sort of inference which Zeno had left open as a possibility. For what Parmenides recommends and supports with demonstration is that the budding philosopher should derive antinomies not only from the supposition that something is so, but from the supposition that it is not so, and that he should show too that everything else is also involved in contradiction, both in the case when something is asserted to be so (e.g. 'the one exists') and when it is asserted *not* to be so (e.g. 'the one does not exist') (136 a–c). This operation is exhaustive; and to carry it through is to guard against unexamined assertion of any given philosophical thesis *or* its contrary.

So if we take Part II of the *Parmenides* seriously at all, we are pretty well obliged to take the structure of the antinomies at its face value, as something offered by Plato as a methodology in all seriousness. Comparison with at least one other late dialogue should encourage us in this policy. In the *Sophist*, as Professor Owen has recently stressed so strongly, the Eleatic Stranger says (250 e 5–251 a 1): 'Now that both being and not-being have turned out equally puzzling, this in itself offers the hope that if one of them can be made out to a greater or less degree of clarity, the other can be made out to the same degree.' As Owen notes, this assumption, that any illumination we shall come by will fall on both, 'has obvious affinities with the recommendation at *Parmenides* 135 e 8–136 a 2'.[11] This similarity between the two dialogues on a fundamental point of method should not be exaggerated. In particular, it is no part of the programme of the *Parmenides* to suggest that if one wrestles successfully with the problem of what is involved in something's being so, one will at the same time get clearer on what is involved in its not being so, or vice versa. But the two dialogues are evidently at one with each other and at odds with (say) the *Phaedo* in assuming that it would be a basic error to concentrate philosophical attention on an assertion or on a concept without subjecting the negation to equally strenuous scrutiny. I take it that in this both exhibit that same desire for a synoptic view as is evident in so many of the later dialogues.

I return to the *Parmenides*, to make one last inference. If we are to accept that the *Parmenides* is as serious as it seems to be, and that in particular the methodology of Part II, as I have interpreted it, is seriously intended by Plato, then it seems to follow that we should suppose Plato to have believed the antinomies he has Parmenides work out to be genuinely compelling. For if the antinomies derived from 'one is' or 'one is not' were not thought by Plato to be highly plausible, the business of testing the premiss would be shown up as a pretence of one sort or another, and the claims he appears to wish to make for the value of the methodology demonstrated in Part II rendered commensurately implausible.[12]

[11] G.E.L. Owen, 'Plato on Not-Being', in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Vol. 1, ed. G. Vlastos (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 223–67, at 230.

[12] Cf. Ryle, *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), 538.

Someone might object that Plato cannot have thought all the antinomies genuinely compelling, because anyone who did would be a total sceptic; for to find compelling reasons for believing that both the proposition 'one is' and the proposition 'one is not' entail contradictions, and that contradictions follow when we consider what is true of things other than *the one*, is to be such a sceptic. We can only meet the objection, I think.[13] by giving a minimal interpretation of what it need mean to say that Plato thought the antinomies 'genuinely compelling'. We need not assume that he considered them all valid. It is enough if he meant them all to be highly plausible. For that is all he requires in order to make good his claim that the method will supply a good philosophical training. There may be nothing logically amiss with such propositions as 'one is' or 'one is not'. But so long as we can succeed in working out from such premisses sets of contrary consequences which seem convincing enough *to us,* we must surely become more circumspect philosophers than Zeno or the Socrates of the first part of the *Parmenides.* And when Plato holds up before us the prize of 'seeing the truth', he evidently envisages more positive benefits: perhaps, for example, that the attempt to see just why each train of thought appears so compelling may lead us to detect some fundamental error in our apprehension of the meaning of the premiss from which it is derived, or in our grasp of what it entails.

(b) *The case for scepticism*

The sceptical case against believing Plato to have thought the antinomies highly plausible is quickly stated. All or most of the deductions worked out by Parmenides in Part II (it is alleged) contain fallacies, often fallacies so blatant and trivial that Plato could not have felt them to represent convincing trains of thought himself, and could hardly have expected many of his readers to do so. It is further objected that the subjects of Parmenides' discourse, 'one' and 'the others', are so unspecific and ambiguous as to constitute a virtual guarantee of highly abstract manoeuvres of a doubtful kind—which is exactly what happens.[14] These strictures on the second part of the *Parmenides* have certainly been resisted by some scholars.[15] But when they have attempted to save the true

[13] Ryle would disagree, holding as he does that Plato's operation is designed to show only that formal concepts like unity cannot be the subject of existential propositions. I shall dispute this interpretation below. Nor can it be maintained, consistently with an interpretation which takes the structure of antinomies seriously, that 'one' is ambiguous from one antinomy to the next (even though taken in the same sense in a given antinomy), and that in this way the charge of total scepticism can be rebutted. Although 'one' does shift its use in the second part of the dialogue, it will become evident that in the crucial ἀπορίαι at the heart of each antinomy Plato does not significantly exploit any potential ambiguity, neither within one antinomy nor from one to the next.

[14] See in particular Robinson, *Plato's Early Dialectic*[2], pp. 248–64; A.L. Peck, 'Plato's *Parmenides*: Some Suggestions for its Interpretation', *CQ* N.S. 3 (1953), 142–50, 4 (1954), 31–45. Peck's subtle discussion of the second part of the dialogue is very close to Robinson's in its general estimate of Plato's intentions. But Peck couples recognition of a gymnastic purpose with the suggestion that this primer of fallacies is meant to be an illustration of the perils of verbal sophistry, and yet also (his detailed proposals here were timely, although superceded by more recent scholarship) 'to start trains of thought in the mind of Socrates and of the attentive reader which may lead them to sound and valuable results' (op. cit., p. 150).

[15] The most notable and successful attempt is by Owen, in *Ryle*, pp. 341–72. His whole enterprise is designed to show that the second part of the *Parmenides* 'is the first systematic exercise in the logic of aporematic and not demonstrative argument' (p. 348); and it is an immediate

seriousness of Plato's enterprise from such criticisms, they have not as a rule tried to defend the thesis that the antinomies are genuinely compelling. Crombie is something of an exception; but unfortunately his exposition is not detailed or specific enough to satisfy one that the objections have been squarely met.

(c) *Problems of scepticism*

But scepticism is beset by problems of its own. In the first place, the sceptic is bound to give some answer to the question: what, then, *is* the reason for Plato's apparent endorsement and consequent exposition of the Zenonian method, if not to urge and illustrate the development of systematic and plausible antinomies? Plenty of answers can be found in the literature on the dialogue. But it is a question how far they convince. Thus Robinson stresses the gymnastic material which the exercise that Parmenides actually performs may be held to provide in its multitude of *local* fallacies, even if we cannot take it seriously as a method on its own terms;[16] Owen points us to numerous oppositions, not signalled as such by the formal layout of the antinomies, between plausible theses and arguments thrown up in the course of the deductions, and he suggests that these are what really proclaim a Zenonian ancestry.[17] But neither Robinson nor Owen accounts for the grand architecture of the deductions: we are told how to get the most out of the pages which make up the second part of the dialogue, but not why they were put together in just the way they were, nor why the plan of their construction is implied to be so important. Cornford, of course, is one sceptic about the genuineness of the antinomies who did attempt to explain why Parmenides is made to house his manoeuvres in the rigid scheme of formal antinomies. For him, Plato's first lesson in the first antinomy (for example) was a lesson which the structure of antinomy was eminently suited to suggest,[18] viz. that the 'one' common to the seemingly identical premisses of its two deductions was ambiguous; his second that each deduction constituted a powerful analysis of what was entailed by or consistent with its conception of the 'one'. But in presenting each deduction as a consistent intellectual construction, Cornford had to overlook or excuse, by one unconvincing device or another, what he himself recognized to be fallacies and ambiguities, as his critics have shown.[19]

The failure of individual sceptics to combine disbelief in the genuineness of the antinomies with an explanation of why Plato appears so committed to the systematic working out of such antinomies illustrates a second and more fundamental problem which confronts them. Once the straightforward reading of the dialogue is abandoned, once the interpreter finds himself saying 'Plato's message, the real methodological lesson he intends in Part II, is other than what Parmenides is made to represent it as being', it is difficult to summon up confidence in the interpretation that is then offered, simply because the criteria for the success or failure of any such interpretation become more and more uncertain the bolder the interpretation. A negative interpretation like Robinson's is perhaps better off than other alternatives. But Cornford and Owen, who rightly want to extract something more from the deductions, have to reorganize them in order to find it there.

corollary that fallacies are very much to be expected, and by no means a cause for alarm, in ἀπορίαι, although not in proofs.

[16] *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*[2], pp. 264–8.

[17] *Ryle*, pp. 348–66, and especially pp. 366–8.

[18] See *Plato and Parmenides*, p. 107.

[19] See above all Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*[2], pp. 268–74.

There is a strong *a priori* case, therefore, for holding that if Part II of the *Parmenides* is more than a joke, it must be what it purports to be, the exposition of a set of antinomies that are intended to be plausible.

THE ANTINOMIES

I now turn from these general considerations to the central task which they enjoin: to demonstration from the text of the second part of the dialogue that its four antinomies are naturally read as intended by Plato to strike the reader as plausible and indeed compelling. I shall try to show that at the heart of each antinomy is one meaty, genuinely puzzling ἀπορία. I shall consider each antinomy in turn (although not in Plato's order). The treatment given to them will range beyond the strict requirements of the demonstration, as it becomes desirable to debate interconnections, elucidate obscurities, acknowledge subordinate (if related) intentions, and in general to come to terms with the indubitable complexity of tactic and strategy which the gymnastic exercise exhibits as a whole. I begin with the antinomies about *the one*.

(a) *The third antinomy* (160 b–164 b)

Ryle was inclined to think that in the second part of the *Parmenides* Plato was aiming to show that if we treat formal concepts like *unity* and *existence* as if they were non-formal concepts, we are committing a breach of 'logical syntax'.

> But what shows us that we are doing this? The deductive derivation of absurdities and contradictions shows it, and nothing else can. Russell's proof that, in his code-symbolism, ϕ cannot be a value of x in the propositional function ϕx is only another exercise in the same genre as Plato's proof that 'Unity' cannot go into the gap in the sentence-frame '. . . exists' or '. . . does not exist.'[20]

This diagnosis of what Plato was about has its attractions. But Professor Owen has already pointed to some ways in which the actual character of the arguments developed about *the one* casts doubts on the appropriateness of the notion of 'proof' introduced by Ryle, and on his idea that Plato is here engaged with problems attaching specifically to formal concepts.[21] I want to show how the third antinomy (160 b–164 b) fails to satisfy Ryle's description of what is going on in just these two respects—and yet, for all that, is a powerful antinomy.

The third antinomy is derived from the premiss 'one is not'. Its first arm (the fifth movement) is positive. Here Plato concentrates on 'one', arguing that since we understand the difference between saying 'one is not', 'largeness is not', 'smallness is not', etc., we evidently recognize a difference between the subjects of these propositions; and that we are capable of this recognition because in some sense we know *the one* (*largeness* etc.) and know it as different from other things (160 b–d). Some plausible inferences are then drawn from 'it' and 'different' (160 d–161 a), before more substantial and dubious properties of *the one* are deduced (161 a ff.). The second arm (the sixth movement) is negative. This time Plato concentrates on 'is not'. Construing 'is not' as 'is in no way at all', he takes it that the denial of being to *the one* entails the denial of all properties whatsoever to it—no conceivable complement of the copula is allowed, for that would mean reimporting the forbidden 'is' itself (163 b ff.). In particular, he holds that *the one* had no relations with anything (163 e 6–164 a 1); so there can be no knowledge or thought or speech about it (164 a 7–b 3).

[20] *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), 313. [21] *Ryle*, pp. 344–8.

It would be inaccurate to call this antinomy a puzzle about negations of existence. For my account of the sixth movement will have shown how crucial to it is exploitation of 'is' as copula; and an intriguing argument of the fifth (161 e–162 b) turns on further manoeuvres with the predicative use of the verb. Even so, Plato's antinomy bears a very strong resemblance to a well-known ἀπορία about negative existential statements such as 'Mr. Pickwick does not exist', viz. that on the one hand we seem in making such a statement to achieve a successful reference to its subject, Mr. Pickwick, but on the other hand the very fact of our statement's being a negative existential statement seems to entail that, if it is true, there is no subject available for reference.[22] For the Platonic antinomy has exactly the same structure: on the one hand, 'one is not' seems to be about a subject which we recognize as distinct from other subjects; on the other hand, 'is not', if truly said of *the one*, seems to preclude its being in any relation, whether of difference or not, with anything else, so that it cannot even be something to which 'its' can refer, or an object of knowledge, thought, or talk. This identity of structure is quite self-evident in the case of the first limbs of each antinomy, and only a little less so in the case of their second limbs. In the modern paradox, the truth of the negative existential is construed as entailing that a strong extensional condition of successful reference, viz. that what is referred to must exist, is not satisfied. In Plato's paradox, the truth of 'one *is not*' is construed as entailing that a strong ontological condition of relations (which are here taken to include reference, thought, knowing, etc.) fails to obtain—viz. that what is related to something *eo ipso is* something: if *the one* were different from *smallness* or *largeness,* if it were referred to and thought about and known, it would *be* something. (I need hardly add that Plato's 'one is not' expresses what we would more naturally express as 'one—[whatever *that* may be]—does not exist'.)

I cite the modern puzzle because nobody will deny that it strikes many philosophers as a meaty one, which forces us to question our understanding of such basic notions as reference and existence, and indeed of the whole character of the relation between language and reality. There is equal reason to suppose that Plato took his third antinomy to pose a serious problem. The basic train of thought in the fifth movement is obviously extremely attractive. As for that of the sixth, we know that in the *Sophist* Plato is prepared to devote immense care to the rebuttal of the Parmenidean idea, which he sees as a great challenge to true philosophy, that if something is not, it is not anything in any way at all. And there, too, as Professor Owen remarks, in developing the Parmenidean position Plato 'sets strong conditions for reference'.[23]

Notice that I have spoken throughout of a puzzle, a paradox, an ἀπορία, in sharp contrast to Ryle's talk of 'proof'. For I find the philosophical core of the third antinomy in the clash between two plausible but opposed lines of argument represented in the two movements, not in the fact that the two lines of argument each culminate in a reduction to absurdity of the idea that *the one* is not—whether because it proves to be contradictory in character (the upshot of the later stages of the fifth movement, especially 161 e ff.) or unknowable and unmentionable (the sixth). To attend primarily to this latter fact is to leave unexplained what is evidently of fundamental importance, the structure of antinomy. To suppose,

[22] Cf. J. Barnes, *The Ontological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1972), Ch. 3, to which I am much indebted in this section.

[23] *Plato,* Vol. 1 (op. cit., note 11), p. 247.

further, that Plato took both movements of the antinomy as first and foremost *valid* reductive arguments would be to neglect a number of significant circumstances: that the crucial equation of the sixth deduction, according to which not being is not being in any way at all, is precisely what Plato attacks as a basic error in the *Sophist*; that if none the less he believed in the truth of the equation then he wrote the *Parmenides*, he would be committed to believing not merely (as Ryle seems to think) that formal concepts cannot be the subject of negative existentials, but that we cannot coherently deny existence or being to any determinate subject whatever; that the cogent argument of the opening paragraph of the fifth movement (160 b–161 a), which concludes that *the one*, even if it is not, must be known as distinct from other things, has no tendency (unless buttressed with further premisses) to show the conception of such a subject to be contradictory—contradictions are actually derived only by more questionable inferences in later pages. I shall have to say something about the problem which the existence of such doubtful inferences poses for an interpretation which holds that each pair of movements constitutes a serious and plausible antinomy. But their presence is no mere problem but an objection which promises to be fatal to the idea that Plato thought such deductions as the fifth straightforwardly valid, unless he is a duller Plato than Ryle's.

(b) *The first antinomy* (137 c–155 e)

In the third antinomy, then, Plato offers the would-be philosopher reason to think that the subject of an '. . . is not' statement both must and cannot be an identifiable object of knowledge. The puzzle is not specific to '*one* is not'. The first antinomy (137 c–155 e) turns (I shall argue) on considerations which are peculiarly problematic for *the one*, not for subjects of '. . . is' statements in general, nor (*pace* Ryle again) for formal concepts in general. None the less, the structure of the ἀπορία which lies at the heart of the first antinomy is very similar to the structure of the third. In the first movement, which is negative, Plato argues that *the one* must be absolutely unitary, excluding all complexity of whatever sort; here he concentrates, as in the fifth movement, on 'one' (137 c ff.). At the beginning of the second movement (which is positive), as in the sixth, Plato turns his attention to the predicate—'is'. He argues cogently that 'is' signifies something—*being*—different from what 'one' signifies—*the one*. For otherwise, he points out, the distinction we naturally recognize between 'one one' and 'one is' would vanish. So in asserting 'one is' we ascribe *being* to *the one*. And *the one* must consequently be taken to be complex in character, containing *one* and *being* as components—or 'parts', as Plato puts it (142 b–d).

I take it that this result is intended by Plato to constitute a serious conceptual problem. For I suppose that he took the arguments which lead to it to be powerfully persuasive. Inasmuch as these arguments arise from very distinctively Eleatic and Platonic preoccupations, however, they require a little more exegesis than the arguments of the third antinomy. What is 'the one'? Why does Plato in the first movement make the supposition that unity excludes all plurality? What are we to make of the idea of the second movement that *one* and *being* are the parts of *the one*?

The first movement begins with the exchange (137 c 4–5): 'If one is, surely the one would not be many?—How could it be?' As in the other deductions about *the one*, the subject is first introduced barely as 'one', only afterwards to be referred to as '*the* one' (or as we might almost translate in the sentence quoted, 'that one'). 'One' is apparently used as a name, with the force of a definite

description, uniquely identifying that to which it applies. It is not hard to see why it should be overwhelmingly plausible to imagine that such a subject cannot be plural. For if it is uniquely identified as one, then to allow it plurality might well seem to be a threat to its identity. And a plurality of the sort Plato immediately mentions, viz. a plurality of parts (137 c 5–d 3), would indeed be incompatible with its being uniquely identified as one. It could as well be described as many, and its parts as well described as one. Later in the deduction *the one* is denied even such a formal attribute as being characterized by sameness, on the ground that it would thereby be pluralized (139 e 7–140 a 4). This application of the principle that *the one* cannot be many is evidently more questionable. Even if it is granted that purely formal attributes should be regarded as pluralizing a subject introduced in the way Plato introduces *the one,* it is not at all obvious that *this* pluralization threatens its identity as one. For to say that *the one* is (for example) different from other things is not to offer information about the nature of *the one.* It is simply to remind one's audience that a truth which applies to all things applies to *the one.*

It is the questionable application of the principle, according to which possession of more than one attribute would necessarily but impossibly pluralize *the one,* which the argument at the beginning of the second movement (142 b–d) both attacks and exploits. It attacks the principle, because it insists that *the one* is by hypothesis held to possess the attribute of *being.* It exploits it, because it insists that being and the identifying attribute *one* or *unity* pluralize *the one,* a thesis expressed in the strong form: *one* and *being* are parts of *the one.* In adopting this strong version of the notion of pluralization Plato effectively elucidates its use in the first movement. Only if attributes would pluralize *the one* in the way that the possession of parts would pluralize it can *the one* be safely denied attributes other than unity on the ground that it would then be many; only on this assumption could one justify applying the principle that *the one* cannot be many in such a way as to exclude its possession of attributes. One may find the idea that *one* and *being* are parts of *the one* odd, an unnatural inference from the premisses of the second movement. But this idea simply encapsulates a starker version of the assumption tacitly (and correspondingly more insidiously and persuasively) made in the first movement.

Cornford held that 'one', as it appears in the premiss 'one is' of the first two deductions, is simply ambiguous; and that in the first paragraph of the first movement (137 c 5–d 3) *the one* is *defined* on the assumption that '"one" is to be taken as excluding plurality altogether',[24] whereas at the outset of the second movement (142 b 1–c 7) *the one* is *defined* not as just 'one', but as ' "a One which is", or something which has the two attributes of unity and being'.[25] And he explains the radical difference in the consequences drawn from the initial premiss in the two movements as what you would expect given that 'the one' is defined in these distinct ways.[26] It will, I hope, be already apparent that, if my analysis of the antinomy constituted by the two movements is on the right lines, Cornford's reductive talk of 'ambiguity' and 'definition' trivializes a serious conceptual puzzle. Plato does not insist on the 'is' of 'one is' at the beginning of the second movement solely because the first movement, in exploiting only the supposed consequences of 'one', eventually results in conclusions which are agreed to be impossible (141 e 9–142 a 8), so that a new start has to be made.

[24] *Plato and Parmenides,* p. 115.
[25] Ibid., p. 135.
[26] Ibid., pp. 203–4 etc.

The point is rather that in attending to 'is' Plato adverts to something wrongly ignored in the consideration of what follows from 'one is' developed in the first movement; and he very quickly extracts a consequence of the presence of 'is' in the premiss which directly contradicts what had seemed to follow from 'one' in the first arm of the antinomy. This is not a matter of *defining* 'the one' differently, of exploiting an ambiguity in *its* meaning. The difficulty is one which arises because Plato is concerned with the implications of *attributing* being to something uniquely identified as one, i.e. to just the same unambiguously designated subject as is introduced initially in the first movement. Admittedly Parmenides does not say explicitly that he means 'the one' in the same way as in the first movement. But he gives not the slightest hint that he is about to redefine what he is talking about.

I said earlier that the arguments which articulate the difficulty 'arise from very distinctively Eleatic and Platonic preoccupations'. What I had in mind was, first, Plato's exploration of the conception of a thing uniquely identified by 'one'; and second, his associated puzzling over the nature of predication, particularly the predication of formal attributes. It needs little argument to show that these are characteristic concerns of Plato's. There is pretty general agreement that at least one important reason for his interest in investigating a 'one' so conceived is that the Forms of his middle-period theory were supposed to be eternal objects each similarly uniquely identified by some single predicate. Plato had already shown himself ready to scrutinize the relation of Forms to particulars in the first part of the *Parmenides*; it is not surprising, therefore, that he should in effect extend his scrutiny to the character of the Forms themselves (fulfilling earlier hints at 129 d 2–130 a 2, 135 d 8–e 4), particularly when he has in *the one* a topic which also makes a natural focus for his new-found interest in Eleatic argumentation. He himself stresses the connection between his own and Eleatic concerns with 'one' by having his fictional Parmenides propose to 'begin from myself and my own hypothesis' about *the one*, immediately prior to launching into the first deduction (137 b 1–4). Plato is apparently thinking here not so much of the monistic thesis of Parmenides' poem (to which reference was made at 128 a–e) as of the internal unity and homogeneity of Parmenides' 'one being' (D.-K. 28 B 8.5–6, 22–5)—and no doubt of Melissus' single unitary entity, too (D.-K. 30 B 3–9). His exploration in the first deduction of what being one entails employs largely Eleatic categories in order to press home conclusions at odds with what he took Parmenides and Melissus to have maintained: thus, *contra* Parmenides, *the one* is not a whole, is without limit, has no shape (137 c 4–e 6; cf. *Soph.* 244 d 14–e 8); *contra* both him and Melissus, it is not 'at rest, itself within itself' (138 a 7–b 6, 139 a 3–b 2; cf. *Theaet.* 180 e 3–4).[27]

The first antinomy rests at bottom on an assumption about predication, viz. that the possession of more than one attribute pluralizes a subject. The assumption generates a contradiction when it is conjoined with the principle that *the one* cannot be many and the hypothesis that *the one* possesses the attribute *being*. There is no reason to think that this assumption has an Eleatic provenance, although the strong notion of division into parts which Plato introduces in connection with the pluralizing of attributes at 142 c 7–d 5, and which (as we have seen) helpfully sharpens the logic of the antinomy, may owe something to his

[27] With the argument of this paragraph cf. my article 'Plato on Unity and Sameness', *CQ* N.S. 24 (1974), 40–1.

engagement with Eleatic preoccupations with the idea of pluralizing—certainly the regress of parts which follows at 142 d 9—143 a 3 is reminiscent of Zeno. The assumption does, however, have affinities with a number of other crude models of predication with which Plato toyed in his later dialogues. One thinks of the idea put forward in 'Socrates' dream' that the weaving together of names is what a λόγος or account of something is (*Theaet.* 202 b 2—5). I imagine that Plato was attracted by the simplicity of the *Parmenides* assumption as he evidently was by the dream theory of the *Theaetetus*, but sensed or saw it to be no less inadequate than the dream theory. At any rate, it has disappeared by the time of the *Sophist*. And it is perhaps significant that another crudely attractive assumption employed in the first movement of the *Parmenides* to deny formal attributes (specifically, difference from anything else, and—less certainly—sameness with itself) to *the one*, viz. that a subject cannot possess any attribute not entailed by its defining characteristic (139 c 6—d 1), is, of course, explicitly rebutted in the *Sophist* (251—3; and cf. 255 e 3—6).[28] Notice that if Plato did have doubts about these crude treatments of predication, we cannot suppose that he thought the antinomy decisive against the conception of *the one* as just one. He might rather have taken it as pointing to the difficulties of determining what restriction 'just' imports or should import.[29]

(c) *The problem of irrelevance*

I have argued that the first and second movements, like the fifth and sixth, present us with an antinomy which Plato must surely have wished his reader to find a persuasive one. But while the absolute unity of *the one* is in one way or another virtually the sole focus of the first movement, its complexity is sufficiently established early in the second movement, which is then effectively devoted to different topics (for example, contact and time) whose examination contributes nothing whatever to the antinomy. What are we to say of the many pages of the second movement that are irrelevant to the antinomy?[30]

Philosophy had always been for Plato a matter of exploring the interconnections of ideas (although never only that). Certainly every student of the hypothetical method of the *Phaedo* or of the conception of dialectic in the central books of the *Republic* would agree that by his middle period Plato was already attempting to state in general terms the form such exploration should take. In the later dialogues not only do his methodological recommendations become more sophisticated, founded as they are on a surer grasp of logical relationships between concepts. His explorations of those relationships also become immeasurably more sure-footed and penetrating. Let me instance, as sufficient examples, the discussion of the 'greatest kinds' and the solution of the problem of non-being in the *Sophist*, and above all the magnificent first section of the *Theaetetus*, where some terse theses about knowledge and perception are developed by Plato into large ramified theories, which draw out the consequences and elaborate the affinities of the original theses not only in epistemology but in philosophy of language, ontology, and ethics too.[31]

[28] I have discussed the assumption at some length in *CQ* N.S. 24 (1974), 33—45.

[29] Much of the argument of this section relies heavily on Owen's analyses in *Ryle*, pp. 349—53; I am also indebted to discussion in a class on the *Parmenides* given by Professor Owen in Cambridge in 1974—5.

[30] This was recognized as a problem for advocates of the genuineness of the antinomies by Ryle, *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), 543.

[31] For the idea of conceptual exploration upon which I rely in this section I

The two movements of the first antinomy of the *Parmenides* should, I suggest, be read as further essays in the same genre. Their very length and complexity set them apart from the Zenonian antinomies which Plato professedly took as his model in this dialogue. That alone is strong evidence that Plato cannot have wanted *merely* to construct in the Zenonian manner puzzles of the sort we have diagnosed in the first and third antinomies. The fact that the first occupies about twenty Stephanus pages is obviously an important datum to which any interpretation must accord a fundamental place in its explanatory scheme. I therefore proceed to develop my suggestion.

The first movement is not content to assert that something uniquely identified by 'one' cannot be many, nor even to deduce in a rigorously mechanical manner the consequences of that assertion. Plato does indeed investigate the consequences which might plausibly be held to follow from assuming a 'one' of this sort, drawing out the implications for spatial location, movement, and change. But the length, subtlety, and sheer originality of his explorations[32] (contrast the perfunctory character of comparable arguments in Gorgias) irresistibly suggest a deep interest in the logical relationships between these notions and unity or indivisibility. And as we have noted, when he turns to the topic of sameness and difference he is happy to add extra premisses or reinterpret old ones, when he thinks he needs them, to ensure that *the one* remains as purely and absolutely unitary as the account he has begun to develop seems to suggest it ought to be. This is no longer deduction in the strict sense at all, but philosophical invention of an altogether higher order. Nor is that a betrayal of the method as Parmenides sketched it at the outset: Parmenides' word for 'consequences'—*τὰ συμβαίνοντα*, 'what results' (136 a–c)—hardly promises rigorous deductive reasoning and nothing more. What *is* forecast is *διέξοδός τε καὶ πλάνη*, 'journeying through [all paths] and wandering astray' (136 e 2; cf. 135 e 2).[33]

In the first movement, then, Plato elaborates the notion of unity far more than he needed to do for the purposes of the antinomy. The elaboration is not irrelevant to the antinomy. On the contrary, it deepens one's sense of what is involved in asserting that *the one* cannot be many. But it has a fascination of its own; and at least in the section near the end of the movement on ageing (140 e–141 d) the focus plainly shifts—to the concept of ageing itself, without reference to its relation with the notion of unity (see 141 a 5–d 3).

It is characteristic of Plato's genius that the conceptual exploration of the second movement, despite its formal similarity to that of the first, should proceed in a quite different logical style: looser and more paradoxical. This is obviously to be explained in part by the technical challenge of supplying contradictions, in Zenonian style, of the corresponding chain of arguments in the first movement, section by section. But there is more here than sheer bravura.

The fundamental difference from the first movement is that Plato makes no attempt to draw out patiently the consequences of the complexity of *the one* briefly but sufficiently argued at 142 b–d. What does he offer instead?

must refer to Ryle's work: see *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), 150–1, 312–25; also 'Letters and Syllables in Plato', *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960), 431–51 (reprinted in his *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1).

[32] Cf. G.E.L. Owen, 'Tithenai ta Phainomena', in *Articles on Aristotle*, Vol. 1, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, and R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 118–21 (reprinted from *Aristote et les problèmes de méthode* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, and Paris: Éditions Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1961)).

[33] Note the connections of *πλάνη* in Parmenides' poem with the inconsistencies of mortal thought (D.-K. 28 B 6.6, 16.1).

One thing he offers for good measure is a train of argument, quite distinct from that first presented (at 142 b–d), for the conclusion that *the one* must be divided into many bits. This, too, derives from the observation that in asserting 'one is' we ascribe *being* to *the one*, as something different from it. In what is perhaps the most brilliant passage of the whole dialogue,[34] Plato argues that *one*, *being*, and *difference* are three distinct concepts; that if (as this implies) the numbers two and three exist, every number must exist; that each number is *one* number; and that *the one* must accordingly be divided out among them (143 a–144e). Although the proof of number is the most interesting and impressive part of this argument, the thesis that if *one* is predicated of many things, it must itself be divided into many among them, merits attention. It encapsulates essentially the same crude notion of predication as the conception of participation in Forms offered by Parmenides to Socrates early in the first part of the dialogue (131 a–e). But it forms an elegant contrast to the assumption about predication which we saw at work in the argument at 142 b–d. There it was assumed that if x is both F and G, x is many—the subject is pluralized by its attributes; here it is more explicitly suggested that if both x and y are F, F is many—the attribute is pluralized by its subjects. So in the new argument Plato not only suggests a further antinomy about *the one*: taken by itself, as in the first movement, it is absolutely unitary; but considered in relation to things that possess it as an attribute, it is divided into infinitely many parts. He also enriches the idea that predication imports complexity.[35]

Another thing Plato contrives to suggest is that the notion of the complexity of *the one*, no less than its unitariness, requires further scrutiny. He does so by offering a proof, obscure in phraseology and logic,[36] that if *the one* has *being* and *one* as parts, then it must contain an infinite set of such parts (142 d 9–143 a 3); and by drawing contradictory consequences from the part-whole relationship (145 b 1–e 6), which in turn serve to initiate further puzzles about the connection between the notions of place and of rest and motion, mooted in blatantly fallacious arguments (145 e 7–146 a 8). The very fact that these latter sections (145 b–146 a) are themselves given the form of antinomies should be enough to signal that Plato's intention is to set puzzles, not to prove anything.

There is a parallel here with the later stretches of the fifth movement. Having argued that *the one*, even if it is not, must be different from other subjects, Plato goes on to consider what further relations with other things and with itself must follow from difference (161 b–e). The arguments of this section do not really enrich our understanding of the notion of a non-existent subject, but rather set puzzles of another sort about negation: does dissimilarity from other things imply similarity to oneself (161 b 4–c 2)? must what is not equal be unequal (161 c 3–8)? And this leads to puzzles about the notion of inequality (161 c 8–e 2). An argument more pertinent to the theme of the non-existent subject follows (161 e 3–162 b 8). It concludes that since 'one is not' is taken to be a truth, something which *is* so, *the one* must *be* a thing which is not, and so partake in being as well as not being. But again, this conclusion is allowed to introduce the topic, apparently quite unrelated, of the character of the change between non-

[34] Discussed by R.E. Allen, 'The Generation of Numbers in Plato's *Parmenides*', *CPh* 65 (1970), 30–4.

[35] See further on this section of the second movement R.E. Allen, 'Unity and Infinity: *Parmenides* 142b–145a', *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1973–4), 697–725.

[36] See my article 'A Neglected Regress Argument in the *Parmenides*', *CQ* N.S. 23 (1973), 29–44.

existence and existence (162 b 9 ff.). The point of contact is provided by the sudden (but fallacious) thought that if something both is and is not, it must have *changed* from the one condition to the other (162 b 9–c 4).

In both the second and the fifth movements, then, we fail to find the rigorous development of ideas directly contributing to the basic antinomy which is characteristic of the first and sixth movements. Instead Plato offers a looser fabric woven into puzzles which bear indirectly on the coherence of the chief idea of the movement—or at least on the clarity of the reader's grasp of that idea and its implications. The philosophical importance of this must surely be evident. If one is attracted by the thesis that *being* and *one* must be parts of *the one*, given that it is, then one had better be clear as to whether such parts do or do not generate a regress, and one ought to have pondered what one wishes to say about the part-whole relationship involved. Or if one is inclined to agree that the notion of a non-existent subject is in order, it is as well to have considered what further relations are entailed by the relations it must evidently stand in, and what one should say about the change from non-existence to existence.

Not all the arguments of these deductions have even this much relevance to the fundamental antinomies constituted by the pairs of movements in question. The puzzles about motion and rest at 145 e 7–146 a 8 in the second movement are a case in point. And in the latter part of that movement, from 146 a to 155 e, there is no pretence that the paradoxes about sameness and difference, similarity and dissimilarity, contact, equality and inequality, and getting older and younger, have anything to do with the notion that *the one* must be a complex of *one* and *being*. These are in fact a set of independent puzzles, which have the form of relatively brief antinomies (very much more in Zeno's original manner than the pairs of large-scale deductions): thus, for example, it is argued that *the one* both is and is not in contact with itself and with other things (148 d–149 d). But they are not entirely self-contained. We noticed above Plato's eagerness in the first movement to explore the relations of unity with a variety of other concepts. Most of these puzzles in the second movement take up in a dialectical fashion ideas already introduced in the first movement about similarity, inequality, ageing, and so on.

I have admitted that in the later stretches of the second and fifth movements there are fallacies, sometimes blatant ones (as distinct from mistaken or conceivably mistaken philosophical assumptions of the kind which underlie the basic puzzles of the first and third antinomies—and which can exercise a powerful metaphysical appeal). I cannot think the presence of such fallacies worrying in the context of such loosely knit collections of puzzles as these stretches of argument contain. Plato is evidently teasing the reader into a fascination with the logical relationships between concepts; and it is not surprising to find him throwing some elementary problems in with weightier difficulties. After all, the evident implausibility of the inference 'x is self-contained, therefore in the same, therefore at rest' (145 e 8–146 a 3) does force one to recognize that relational predicates like 'the same' have to be completed; and to diagnose in this case an equivocation from 'the same [thing as itself]' to 'the same [? place ?thing as it was previously]' is to begin to puzzle about senses of 'in' and the differences between containers and places—in short, to grasp the problems to which Aristotle's treatise on place (*Physics* IV.1–5) is in good part devoted.[37]

[37] For discussion of this argument see Owen in *Ryle*, pp. 354–5; *Articles on Aristotle*, pp. 119–20.

Again, when Parmenides argues that if *the one* is different from *the others* and *the others* are different from *the one*, then they both have the same attribute—difference—and so are alike (147 e 3—148 a 6), many interpreters would have no qualms about declaring the inference fallacious, probably consciously fallacious.[38] But it is not at all a straightforward task to say exactly what the fallacy consists in. For even here the fallacy is not just a slip: it embodies a philosophical error.[39] Of course, if it could be shown that there were flagrant fallacies in those stretches of the antinomies in which Plato is plainly (as I think) intent on deducing the consequences of a crucial premiss of one of the main antinomies (not on setting fresh puzzles), then my interpretation would be in trouble. But the obvious fallacies are very much concentrated in the later parts of the second and fifth movements, and in relatively independent sections of others (notably the section on ageing in the first (141 a—d)).

(d) *The second antinomy* (157 b—160 b)

On the basis of hints in the first part of the dialogue one might have supposed that it would be 'the many', not 'the others', which Plato would examine besides *the one* (136 a 4—b 1; but cf. 136 b 6—c 5). After reading the movements about things other than *the one* it is not difficult to guess why Plato should have preferred the vaguer formulation. Evidently he did not wish to rule out as immediate nonsense the notion of a plurality which, although not conceived of as a plurality of units, as constituting a 'many', is still in some sense plural.

This is not to say, as Crombie does, that for Plato *the others 'ex hypothesi* are not units'.[40] Crombie holds the view that *the others* are to be understood as 'non-units', i.e. as things which are not units or ones in any sense, yet are somehow plural—'indefinite aggregations or something of the kind', he hazards.[41] He then construes the two arms of the second antinomy (which considers *the others* on the supposition that *the one* is) as alternative ways of reducing the conception of non-units to absurdity. The third movement supposedly does this 'by making non-units partake in unity, on the principle roughly that if they are things in the plural each of them must be *a* thing'. The fourth is taken, albeit tentatively, to rule that 'non-units cannot partake in unity, and [hence] . . . that there cannot be such a thing as a non-unit'.[42] Crombie's neat Rylean schema will not work. He himself allows that the fourth movement, which denies that *the others* participate in *the one*, has nothing very obvious to do with the notion of non-units.[43] And he misrepresents that of the third movement, giving in the extract quoted above a not unfair paraphrase of 157 e 5—158 a 3, but ignoring the context supplied by the opening section of the movement (157 b 8—158 b 1).

Plato's first aim in the opening section is to prove (with some pains) that the others, containing parts, must make up a single whole, and *so* participate in *the one* (157 c 4—e 5). In the course of this proof he frequently employs expressions like 'each of the parts', 'each one of the others'; and so it is very natural for him to add, when it is concluded, that the fact that one can refer to each of the parts as such shows that the parts are severally one (as had been taken for granted all along, of course)—which means that in another way, too, *the others* partake in

[38] Cf. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*[2], p. 249; but not Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, pp. 164—5.

[39] For one diagnosis see Owen in *Ryle*, p. 356.

[40] *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, Vol. 2, p. 342.

[41] Ibid., p. 340.

[42] Ibid., p. 343.

[43] Ibid., p. 344.

the one (157 e 5–158 a 3). The chief purpose of the opening section, then, or at any rate the purpose which governs the structure and balance of the section, is quite different from the one Crombie sees as primary. And the way Plato in pursuing that chief aim slips naturally and unemphatically into speaking of each of the parts which *the others* possess as 'one' counts decisively against taking him to be at all concerned to accomplish the strenuous task of showing that any non-unit must be one in some sense. It need not be denied that he comes to treat *the others* as though they were in essence non-units in the course of the movement. But it is easy enough to put one's finger on the precise passage where this happens, viz. in a suspect argument at 158 b 1–d 8.

The principal idea of the positive third movement is, as I have said, that *the others,* if they contain parts, must make up a single whole, and therefore participate in *the one.* It is natural to infer that Plato is in essence just repeating a piece of middle-period theorizing, according to which participation in a Form is the safe and simple metaphysical explanation of a thing's having the character to which the Form corresponds. And it will accordingly come as no surprise to find this old theory of participation challenged in the negative fourth movement by a treatment of *the one* again very similar to the treatment of the Forms found in the first part of the dialogue at 131 a–e. Plato here, as there (and as at 144 c 4–e 5 in the second movement), treats Forms in a determinedly concrete way. If everything there is has been mentioned when we speak of *the one* and *the others,* there is no third thing in which they could cohabit; hence they are separate from one another (159 b 6–c 4). From this thesis and the contention that *the one* has no parts (cf. 137 c 4–d 3) it is concluded that *the one* cannot be in *the others,* whether as a whole or distributed in parts–although 'being separate' entails 'not being in' only on an extremely strong spatial criterion of separation (and, of course, a spatial sense of 'in'). It is further concluded that *the others* cannot participate in *the one*–although 'not having parts' entails 'not capable of being participated in' only on a strongly physical conception of participation (159 c 5–d 3).

So the third and fourth movements make up another antinomy which seems seriously meant, designed as it is on the one hand to make the participation account of predication seem an entirely obvious, almost uncontroversial, piece of philosophical description, and on the other to bring out the difficulties (of which we know Plato was conscious) inherent in the inappropriate but perhaps indispensable physical and spatial connotations of its basic conceptual apparatus. The puzzle so constituted lacks something of the interest of the antinomies of *the one* which we have examined in earlier sections. This is partly due to the fact that the argument of the fourth movement is so reminiscent of one of the less subtle objections, developed in the first part of the dialogue, to the notion of participation in Forms. But it is also due in part to Plato's concentrating much of his attention in the relevant stretch of the third movement (157 b–158 b) not on the argument for participation, but on the preliminary argument that parts are necessarily parts of a single whole.

None the less we cannot conclude that Plato was no longer vitally concerned with problems about participation. Such an inference could not survive scrutiny of the next stretch of the movement (158 b–d). In this passage Plato sharpens the antinomy, but not (as I think) by further *developing* the idea that *the others* partake in *the one.* It is better to read him as characteristically *probing* the idea, once introduced. He pretends that if *the others* participate in *the one,* they must

at some time come to participate. And he then suggests some of the features *the others,* before they came to participate in *the one*, must have had. As Owen[44] and Crombie[45] have pointed out, Plato thereby broaches some fascinating questions about participation: is participating in *the one* logically analogous to getting a fresh coat of paint or being turned into a nursery? if x is said to be F by partaking in F-ness, is it always, for every F, a fair question to ask what x is like in itself, apart from its participation in F-ness? The first and fundamental argument of the movement had already reasoned that anything could be said to participate in *the one* so long as it was counted as an individual or as helping to constitute an individual; the present argument forces the reader to ponder the difference between being an individual and being something of a particular quality, and the consequent difference between partaking in *the one* and partaking in qualities.

This suggests that the third deduction is at bottom concerned with the notion of what we might call *ordinary* units—with the sorts of individuals which constitute and are constituted by wholes and parts. And that in turn suggests a somewhat more profound description of the second antinomy: if the third movement seeks to defend (if also to probe) the concept of ordinary units, the fourth movement questions whether 'the truly one', i.e. the absolutely unitary, can possibly be related to them, as it was assumed it could be and indeed must be, in the third. That strikes me as the hint of a powerful puzzle about the relation of the world to the ideal.

It is worth noticing at this point that Plato is apparently not at all concerned to explore here, still less to make fundamental to the antinomy, the notion of *otherness* employed in the identification of his subject as 'other than *the one*'. It is not that Plato did not think the notion worth investigation, for his treatment of it elsewhere in the second part of the dialogue suggests that he recognized interestingly conflicting possibilities in its interpretation.[46] But here his focus is different. This is made particularly apparent by the arbitrariness of the assumption at the very beginning of the third movement that *the others,* if they are not to be absolutely unitary, must have parts—as though having parts were the *only* way of not being absolutely unitary. The assumption is not further defended; and it is, of course, tacitly abandoned in the section of the movement where Plato supposes that *the others* at some point of time come to acquire the unity attaching to parts and wholes. Evidently he wished to raise a problem about ordinary units; so in order to raise it here he simply adopted one *possibility* with respect to the others, viz. that they might consist of parts.

(e) *The fourth antinomy* (164 b–166 c)

A very similar diagnosis is appropriate for the fourth antinomy, made up of the seventh and eighth movements. In this pair of movements Plato is considering what must be true of *the others* if *the one* is not. And he begins the seventh movement with a joke about the nature of the otherness involved. *The others* must be other *than something.* What, then, are they different from? Not *the one,* which does not exist. The only alternative is: each other (164 b 5–c 6). It is as though, having mentioned Jones's bicycle and then learning that Jones is dead, one were to remark that since every bicycle belongs to somebody or other, it must now belong to Smith or Brown or some other person. The serious business

[44] *Ryle,* pp. 359–60, 368–9.
[45] Op. cit., p. 341.
[46] Cf. e.g. 146 d 1–5, 147 a 3–4, 152 e 10–153 a 5.

of the antinomy starts only when this elementary puzzle about 'other' is supposedly resolved. It then becomes apparent that what Plato is interested in is the notion of a plurality of non-units (to use Crombie's terminology), of aggregates which bear some appearance of unity but are not genuinely one. This notion, which is the subject of the antinomy, plainly has nothing much to do with the idea of otherness. It is simply another obvious alternative for what a plurality might be besides the plurality of ordinary units, considered in the second antinomy. And it is an alternative naturally enough pursued when the supposition is made that *the one* is not. That supposition is here construed to mean, or at any rate to entail, that there is no real unit, whether what I have been calling the *absolutely* unitary or what I have been calling an *ordinary* unit. The antinomy turns on the question whether the non-existence of *the one,* so construed, does or does not preclude there being a plurality of apparently unitary masses.

The seventh movement, which is positive, sketches in its central section, a characterization of such a plurality beginning with this intriguing statement (164 c 8–d 5):

> Each mass or heap (ὄγκος) among them, as it seems, is unlimited in multitude; and if someone takes what seems to be the smallest, then, just as when one is asleep and dreaming, instead of what seemed to be one thing, there suddenly appear many, and instead of a very small thing one that is enormous in comparison with those chopped up out of it.—Absolutely correct.

In what follows, the several items of this description are justified, apparently on the basis of two assumptions: first, that a member of a plurality of non-unitary things must *appear* to be one (no doubt in order to be apprehended as a distinct item at all); secondly, that this appearance of unity is *only* an appearance, with the consequence that the individuation of non-unitary things is radically unstable, so unstable that talk of individuals (ἕκαστα) does not properly gain a purchase.

Two points in Plato's characterization of *the others* and the assumptions on which it is founded may puzzle the reader. Why does he take the appearance of which he speaks to be unstable? And why are they held to shift as he says they do? In the sentence quoted above he simply says *that* they shift like dreams. No answer to the first question in causal terms suggests itself as one reads on. I conclude that the required explanation is a metaphysical one of a Strawsonian flavour. The appearances shift because they *are* appearances. If they did not, they would not be appearances, but the way real individuals really are. There is a passage near the end of the section which helps us to answer the second question. Plato sums up the preceding bits of argument in these words (165 b 4–c 3):

> So in my view everything which is, if someone takes it in thought, must be broken in pieces by being chopped up. For surely without a unit a mass will always be taken.—Absolutely so.—Such a thing, therefore, must appear one to someone seeing it blurred from a distance, but to someone looking at it sharply at close quarters each one must appear unlimited in multitude—since it is deprived of the unit, as that does not exist.—It absolutely must.

If we are guided by the metaphor from shifting visual perspective, Plato's position seems to be that even if there are no real units, nothing that is presented to the mind—by the senses or whatever means—could initially be experienced by it otherwise than as an individual, i.e. as a unitary item. But if the mind then engaged in reflection upon such presentations, their unitariness would disintegrate. Appearances shift, in other words, according as we exert or fail to exert a reflective scrutiny of them.

Why disintegration? Because of the particular character of the scrutiny, as the passage which immediately precedes our last extract makes clear (165 a 5–b 4):

> [Each mass] therefore, will also be judged to have a limit with respect to some other mass, although in relation to itself it will be judged to have neither beginning, nor limit, nor middle?—How so?—Because always when someone takes one of them [sc. beginning, limit, or middle] in thought *as* one of these, another beginning always appears before the beginning, and after the end there always appears another end left over, and in the middle other [parts] more middle than the middle, but smaller, through one's being unable to grasp a unit in the case of each of them, seeing as the unit does not exist.—Very true.

From this we may infer that the apparently unitary thing disintegrates because, just as the passive experience of presentations must, if it is to be experience of anything, be experience of what at least appear to be units, so active scrutiny of them is inevitably a search for *real* units, a search which naturally turns into the pursuit of real first, last, and middle parts *ad infinitum.*

I take it that the extraordinary philosophical interest of this *Gedankenexperiment* needs no stressing. It is evidently inspired by Zeno's Fr. 1,[47] and has affinities with some of Plato's remarks about imagined pleasures in the *Philebus* (41 b 11–42 c 3; cf. 31 a 8–10). But it is best read as an early essay on the logic of mass terms—for what Plato in effect envisages is a world inhabited only by masses, in which there are no countable individuals.[48]

The eighth movement, which is negative, simply attacks two ideas fundamental to the conception of non-units elaborated in the seventh. (i) The seventh movement, while denying that there was such a thing as a unit, had spoken confidently of a *plurality* of masses, a *plurality* of appearances (e.g. 164 d 7, e 1, 165 a 1). Now it is argued that any many would have to include a one, on the ground that if none of them is one, all of them are nothing, and so *a fortiori* not many (165 e 5–8). The contention is in itself highly plausible. It is true that the reasoning turns on a feature peculiar to the Greek οὐδέν, 'nothing', which Plato enjoys exploiting in destructive dialectical arguments in his later dialogues,[49] viz. the fact that its root meaning is: 'not even one'. But exploitation of this linguistic circumstance serves only to emphasize the persuasiveness of the assumption, denied by the seventh movement, that to be something is to be one thing. (ii) Central to the reasoning of the seventh movement had been the idea that, if there is no unit, there can yet be individuals which are *apparently* unitary. This idea, too, is denied by the eighth movement. It is argued that if there is no such thing as 'the one', *the others* cannot participate in any part of *the one* (or the unit). Yet the appearance of *the one* (the unit) would be a part of *the one.* Therefore they cannot even appear unitary (165 e 8–166 b 3). Here, again, the basic thought in the argument has well-known attractions: that the appearance of unity is parasitic on there being actual units available to experience. Plato's use of the concept of part to express this dependence seems crude. But one recalls the treatment of attributes as parts at 142 c–d, in the opening paragraph of the second movement, and the association of participation with parts at 144 c–e in the second and again at 159 c–d in the fourth. And an inference suggests itself: that one idea which engages Plato in the *Parmenides* is the possibility of exploiting

[47] So e.g. Owen, in *Articles on Aristotle,* p. 125 n.33.

[48] On mass terms see e.g. H. Cartwright, 'Quantities', *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970), 25–42; H. Laycock, 'Some Questions of Ontology', ibid. 81 (1972), 3–42.

[49] Cf. e.g. Owen, in *Plato,* Vol. 1 (op. cit., note 11 above), 226 n.8.

the part-whole relation to capture a whole range of metaphysical and logical relationships of dependence. Nor need this be surprising: there is abundant evidence of his intense interest in the nature of the part-whole relation itself in the dialogue (see most importantly 144 e–145 e, 153 a–e, 157 c–e). And no doubt he would have been attracted by the thought that a relation apparently so definite and so amenable to analysis might itself furnish a powerful tool of dialectical analysis. It bulks large, of course, in the descriptions of dialectical activity offered in the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*. At the same time, one would expect Plato to have sensed that its usefulness as a tool must have limits. Perhaps the present passage of the eighth deduction shows him experimenting precisely to see where the limits lie.

We may conclude that the fourth antinomy resembles the second in its consideration of the relation of a type of plurality with *the one*. As the second arm of the second antinomy questioned whether the absolutely unitary can be related to ordinary units, so the second arm of the fourth asks whether non-units can have any relations with the unitary, given that there are no real units.

CONCLUSION

I do not pretend that the deductions of the *Parmenides* inevitably yield up the story I have told. But I hope to have shown that they are naturally read as fulfilling in this way the promise which the first part of the dialogue seems to hold out, that Plato considered the method of antinomies, seriously pursued, a fruitful method; I have offered a hypothesis to save the phenomena. It seems to me a simple hypothesis, built as it is on just two ideas: the idea of antinomy itself, and the idea of conceptual exploration. I have tried to show how in the *Parmenides* the first idea already contains the germ of the second; not surprisingly, for evidently antinomy is itself just one form of conceptual exploration. It is for others to judge the persuasiveness of the account. For my part, I believe it gives us a Plato of truly Platonic stature, still grappling with logical problems, particularly of predication, like those which are raised with respect to the Forms in the first part of the dialogue, but also launching his investigations into more Eleatic questions, some of which were to preoccupy him in the *Sophist*.[50]

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