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APORIA AND CONVERSION: A CRITICAL DISCUSSION  
OF R. E. ALLEN'S *PLATO'S PARMENIDES*

MITCHELL MILLER

NO DIALOGUE so urgently requires comprehensive interpretive analysis as the *Parmenides*. The riddles it poses are both elementary and—especially when we come to the notorious hypotheses concerning “the one”—intractable; the way we finally address them, moreover, has decisive implications for our understanding of Plato’s central ontological teaching and, accordingly, for our understanding of the very shape of the corpus as a whole. Starting from the hypotheses, we might distinguish three levels of questions. (1) What is Plato’s intention in presenting the hypotheses? To begin with, what are they really *about*? What is “the one”? And why does Plato have Parmenides adopt the Zenonian strategy (see 135d) of pairing every thesis with its contradictory? Does Plato intend any positive insight to survive, much less be expressed by, Parmenides’ relentless negations? (2) How, in turn, do the two “halves” of the dialogue fit together to make a whole? In what way, if at all, do the hypotheses provide a response to Parmenides’ criticisms of the youthful Socrates’ theory of forms? Conversely, how is one to understand these criticisms, such that they should make something like the hypotheses an appropriate next step? (3) Finally, supposing that we somehow succeed in grasping the *Parmenides* as a whole, what does it tell us about the larger whole of the Platonic corpus? There are at least two important points of focus for this question. With regard, first, to Platonic doctrine, what is the bearing of the *Parmenides* on the theory of forms? Does Plato invite his readers to rehearse, or to rethink and revise, or to reject that teaching? With regard, second, to the very mode and spirit of Platonic philosophizing, what are we to make of Plato’s rhetoric in the *Parmenides*? Are the hypotheses still genuine dialogue, or are we witnessing that replacement of mimetic drama by systematic

exposition that, on the view of so many Plato scholars, distinguishes Plato's later work?

Faced with such large questions, students of the dialogue will be grateful for R. E. Allen's *Plato's Parmenides*.<sup>1</sup> Particularly for anyone attempting the Herculean—and, as it surely seems along the way, horizonless and aporetic—labor of interpreting the hypotheses, Allen's extensive commentary will be a valuable companion. This will be so even for those who finally disagree with his line of approach. By the very clarity of his interpretive decisions, Allen sets other paths than his own into illuminating relief.

Allen's book begins with what is, I believe, the finest English translation of the *Parmenides* now available. It is possible, of course, to dispute details here and there. Some cases in point: Allen's arguments for correcting Cornford's renderings of two important passages—132c (see Allen, 153) and 135d–e (Allen, 183–84)—are not so conclusive, I think, as he claims. Since he offers no explanation, it is not clear why he drops  $\epsilon\nu$  at 155e6. And it is unfortunate that he chooses to pre-empt the question of the meaning of  $\tau\omicron\delta\epsilon\epsilon\nu$  in the hypotheses by translating it as "Unity" rather than, more literally, "the one." Still, on balance the translation is very successful. His renderings are consistent and precise and nicely convey the nearly algebraic simplicity of much of Plato's language. On two particular counts, moreover, he eliminates important misimpressions given by the almost universally used Cornford translation. First, Cornford obscures the centrality, in the first half of the dialogue, of the theme of the unity of the form by translating the recurring  $\epsilon\nu$ —it appears twenty-two times between 131a9 and 135c9—in different ways, sometimes as "one," sometimes as "single," sometimes as "unity." By translating it in every case as "one," Allen allows this theme its proper conspicuousness; he also leaves in the reader's hands the task of determining what sense or sort of oneness is intended in each passage. Second, Cornford chooses to omit almost all of the young Aristotle's replies to Parmenides in the hypotheses. This is doubly misleading. It conceals the general fact that Plato never abandons the conventions of dia-

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<sup>1</sup> R. E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides: Translation and Analysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). Hereafter, the commentary will be cited by Allen's name followed by a page number; the dialogue will be cited by Stephanus page number.

logue form and the authorial distance it provides; by preserving Aristotle's replies and, thereby, the dialogical role of Parmenides' speeches, Allen's translation has the valuable effect of reminding the reader that he cannot simply identify what Parmenides says with what Plato thinks. More specifically, there are a number of points at which Parmenides, rather than making any assertion of his own, poses a question and then develops the consequences of Aristotle's answer. These moments, completely invisible in Cornford's translation, bring to the fore the provocative function of the hypotheses generally; as Allen points out in his analysis (pp. 196–98), “the young Aristotle . . . represents a naive understanding of the theory [of forms]. . . ,” and he “is exercised as an example to Socrates . . .” and the reader. We are meant to ask “which among the admissions that produced [the manifoldly self-contradictory general conclusion at 166c] must be rejected.” Allen's translation quite properly helps to restore this task to the reader.

What is Allen's own interpretation? To begin with, he makes a fresh and important break with both sides of the long-standing dispute over the validity of Parmenides' criticisms of Socrates' theory of forms. The question, he argues, should be not “whether the criticisms are valid or invalid” but rather “what must be assumed if they are to be valid or invalid” (Allen, 96). They “are put as *aporiai*, perplexities, which must be faced and thought through if philosophy is to be pursued” (ibid.). This is so because the theory of forms, in itself essential to philosophy, is fatally flawed in the version in which the young Socrates, “not yet the Socrates who speaks for the *Phaedo*” (Allen, 100), holds it. On the one hand, Socrates' distinction of forms, as not qualified by their opposites, from their participants, as qualified by opposites alike, does defuse Zeno's paradoxes. On the other hand, Socrates makes the mistake, in declaring forms to exist “separately” (*χωρὶς*) from their participants (130b), of treating these latter—or, at least, the “worthless sensibles” among them—as existing separately from their forms.

On Allen's interpretation, the central and unifying point of Parmenides' criticisms is to expose the disastrous consequences of this mistake. Parmenides shows Socrates that he is faced with an impossible choice. If sensibles exist independently, then the participation of sensibles in forms must be a real relation, a relation, that is, between distinct real things. The natural terms for understanding such a relation are whole and part. Hence Parmenides

has no trouble ensnaring Socrates in the “dilemma of participation” (131a–c) and the devastating aporia that, thought through, it implies as a consequence. According to the “dilemma of participation,” the form must be present in its participant either as a whole or in part; but the first possibility yields the absurdity that the form, if it has several participants, must be separate from itself; hence it follows that a part of the form must be present in each of its participants. If this is so, however, then, as the paradoxes of divisibility (131c–e) and the largeness regress (131e–132b) show, at least some forms will be qualified by their opposites (for instance, when taken as a whole and compared with each of its parts, smallness will be large) and, so, will not be distinct from their participants after all. This is, of course, an unacceptable consequence. To block it, however, Socrates must deny participation, and as Parmenides, on Allen’s reading, goes on to show at 133a–134e, this yields an equally unacceptable result: as transcendent with respect to sensibles, forms will be both unknowable themselves and, with regard to the knowledge that we do have of sensibles, irrelevant.

Faced with this impossible choice between “the immanence of the indistinct” and “the transcendence of the irrelevant” (Allen, 142, cf. 179), the youthful Socrates needs to uncover and rethink the assumption that leads to it, namely, the independent existence of sensibles. Since, moreover, the same difficulty threatens the participation of forms in one another, if this too is conceived as a real relation, it too must be rethought. This work, however, lies “outside the *Parmenides*” (Allen, 180), which is wholly aporematic. Allen looks instead to the *Timaeus*, where sensibles are conceived as entirely relational entities (Allen, 180, 290), and, in a speculative aside, to the never-written *Philosopher*, where we might have hoped to find an adequate treatment of the interrelatedness of forms (Allen, 290).

The point of Parmenides’ hypotheses, accordingly, is not to resolve but, rather, to generalize and focus the aporia posed by his criticisms. Allen holds that Parmenides accomplishes this, first, by taking as his subject “an Idea of the utmost generality, namely Unity” (Allen, 179). Secondly, in his first five deductions (namely, as Allen numbers them, I.1 at 137c–142a, I.2 at 142b–155e, I.3 at 155e–157b, II.1 at 157b–159b, and II.2 at 159b–160b) Parmenides reinvokes the dilemma of participation (note especially Allen, 179, 184, 274–275, 290) in order to reproduce with regard to Unity the

unacceptable alternatives of indistinctness and irrelevance. To sum up this movement: suppose, on the one hand, that we insist that Unity, as a form, exclude plurality; then, as I.1 shows, we will have secured its distinctness from its participants at the cost of denying it itself any characters at all. Moreover, as II.2 shows, since participation requires of the participated form that it have parts and this, in turn, implies that it is many, Unity as conceived in I.1 could not be participated, and this will have the consequence that “the others” than it also have no characters at all. Suppose, on the other hand, that we insist on participation. As I.2 and I.3 show, not only does this require that Unity, both as a participant in Being and as participated by “the others,” have parts and, so, be qualified by plurality; it will also have the consequence that Unity have, in addition to the characters proper to it as a form, all the characters proper to sensibles as well (indeed, the very characters, as II.1 points out, that sensibles derive from participating in Unity). If I.1 and II.2, then, establish irrelevance as the cost of distinctness, I.2, I.3, and II.1 establish indistinctness as the cost of relevance. Faced with this, one might be tempted to try to dissolve the whole problem by denying the existence of the form Unity. The main function of the final four deductions (III.1 at 160b–163b, III.2 at 163b–164b, IV.1 at 164b–165c, and IV.2 at 165e–166c), Allen argues, is to show that this is no escape. Whether qualified (III.1, IV.1) or unqualified (III.2, IV.2), the denial of Unity generates as many contradictions as its affirmation has in I and II. The real source of difficulty is thus brought into focus as the dilemma of participation and the premise—the separate existence of the participant—that occasions it.

This is an impressive reading. Every student of the *Parmenides* will be struck by the substantive richness and close orchestration Allen reveals in Parmenides’ criticisms of Socrates’ theory of forms and by the sheer elegance of the plan he finds in the hypotheses. In addition, there are a number of gifts along the way, most notably several illuminating discussions of Greek mathematics and the concept of the infinite, a sustained comparison of Platonic and Aristotelian ontology by way of numerous, surprisingly apt quotations from the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, and a compelling excursus on existence and quantificational logic; all of this expands the context of the hypotheses and allows the specificity and implications of many particular arguments to become evident. In spite of these great merits, however, there are also important limitations to

Allen's reading. In part because he does not fully exploit several of his own insights, in part because the remarkable internal coherence of the Platonic plan he sees sometimes distracts him from actualities and possibilities of the text, he stops short of recognizing a still deeper reading that the *Parmenides* invites.

To begin to make this out, consider three points—all located on the first of the three levels of questions which I distinguished at the outset—on which Allen's reading is particularly problematic.

(i) *The dilemma of participation.* That the argument in the hypotheses be governed throughout by the dilemma of participation is crucial to Allen's interpretation of the *Parmenides* as exclusively aporematic. On Allen's reconstruction, it is only on the basis of the "assumption" that "participation is to be construed as a part/whole relation" (Allen, 184) that Parmenides can produce his second version of the unacceptable choice between indistinctness and irrelevance. For this reason, a careful examination of II.1, which shows that the dilemma of participation is *not* in force there, serves to call into question Allen's reading of the plan and the point of the hypotheses as a whole.<sup>2</sup> At 157b–c Parmenides establishes that "the others" neither *are* "the one" nor are "utterly deprived" of it but, rather, "participate" in it. And he establishes that "the others" are "other" both by virtue of "having parts" (157c) and by virtue of being "many" (158b); but if these are the ways in which "the others" differ from "the one," then "the one" must be both not a whole of parts (as, curiously, Allen himself notes in an aside, on p. 238, while discussing a different passage) and not many—that is, it must be simple and unique. This, however, yields just the conjunction of conditions that, as Allen correctly insists (see especially Allen, 273), the dilemma of participation rules out: "the one," though it does not have parts and does exclude plurality, nonetheless is participated. Evidently, Parmenides is not proceeding on the basis of the assumption of the dilemma of participation.

(ii) *The manifold contradictions.* Also crucial to Allen's view of the *Parmenides* as aporematic is his insistence on the insuperability, within the context of the dialogue, of "the multiplicity of contradictions" (Allen, 187); a major thrust of his commentary is to

<sup>2</sup> For Allen's understanding that the dilemma of participation governs not only the hypotheses generally but also, in particular, the account of participation offered in II.1, see Allen, 268.

show that the contradictions are not “merely ostensible” (Allen, 186) or the results of fallacy. Insofar as this forces us to attend to the particulars of Parmenides’ reasoning, it is to the good. Just to stay with the argument in its unremitting abstractness and its nests of contradictions is to begin to develop the capacities for conceptual thinking and for systematic reflection in face of aporia that Plato surely hoped to encourage in his readers of “first intention,” the members of the Academy (Allen, 197).

But was this all that Plato hoped for? If we go one step further with Allen’s own reconstruction of the reader’s situation, we must doubt it. As we have already indicated, Allen points out how Plato, by replacing the reflective young Socrates with the naive and excessively tractable Aristotle, effectively challenges the reader to take over Socrates’ “point of view” (Allen, 197); thus Plato invites the reader to identify and object to “the admissions that produced the [manifoldly contradictory conclusion of the hypotheses]” (Allen, 198). To this we should add two further comments. First, the reader’s situation in listening to Parmenides is analogous to Socrates’ situation earlier, in listening to Zeno. Each is offered a massive set of contradictions. In the latter case, Plato portrays Socrates as provoked to try to undercut them. Surely he anticipates—indeed, intends—that Parmenides’ contradictions will provoke the same response from the reader. Second, just insofar as he does take over Socrates’ “point of view,” the reader will try, in the course of this response and indeed by means of it, to save Socrates’ distinction of forms and sensibles from Parmenides’ criticisms. If he can do so, he will have fulfilled the basic purpose for which Parmenides claims to offer the “exercise” (135d ff.)—a “host of remote and laborious arguments” (133b), to be sure—in the first place. Is there in fact such a response to be made? Note, for the moment, that if there is, Allen’s view of the hypotheses as aporetic will turn out to be true only at one level; he will have explored only the surface of the hypotheses, leaving unexcavated the deeper level at which, by provoking the reader, Plato points the way through the “multiplicity of contradictions” to a substantive ontological insight.

(iii) *The subject of the hypotheses.* Whether such a deeper level *can* first present itself for excavation depends in large measure on the third point, the identity of the subject of the hypotheses. Allen blocks any dissolution of the contradictions by insisting that by  $\tau\omicron$



ἐν (“the one”), Parmenides always refers to the form Unity. His argument is in part positive, focusing on 137b3–4 (Allen, 182–83), and in part negative, proceeding by a refutation of the particular versions of “the ambiguity theory” offered by Proclus and by Cornford (Allen, 184–87). On neither count, however, is his reasoning sufficient.

With regard, first, to 137b3–4, when Parmenides declares that he will speak *περὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς αὐτοῦ ὑποθέμενος εἴτε ἐν ἔστιν εἴτε μὴ ἐν* (“concerning the one itself, hypothesizing either that one is or that one is not”), it is an open question, not addressed by Allen, whether by the ἐν (“one”) which is the subject of ἔστιν, (“is”), Parmenides refers directly back to “the one itself” or, instead, intends “a one.” In the former case, Parmenides would be naming the form Unity as his subject, as Allen holds; but in the latter case, he would be shifting attention from Unity to what instantiates it—that is, to whatever entities there are that have unity, and so are, in each case, a “one.” In fact, there is compelling evidence to support the second reading. Since the usual Platonic formula for the form Unity would be *αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν* (“the one *itself*”), it is striking that almost everywhere in the hypotheses Parmenides speaks only of *τὸ ἐν* (“the one”). The one major exception to this, moreover, actually strengthens the point. In I.2, at 143a, Parmenides redirects the argument by asking Aristotle to shift his attention by an act of *διάνοια* (143a6) from *τὸ ἐν ὄν* (“the existent one”), which has been the subject of the preceding, opening phase of I.2, to *αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν* (“the one itself”); and when, at 144e5–7, he comes to summarize the results of the whole of the argument of I.2 up to that point, he brings the distinction between these back to the fore by pairing them in the disjunctive formulation: *Οὐ μόνον . . . τὸ ὄν ἐν . . . ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν . . .* (“not only the existent one . . . , but also the one itself . . .”). Given this language, it is natural to assume that Parmenides means to make a distinction. And given his appeal to *διάνοια* (“reflection,” in Allen’s own translation, “conceive,” in Cornford’s), it is natural to take him to distinguish “the existent one” from the *Oneness of it*, the Unity that it has as an aspect or character. But in this case, when both here and elsewhere in the hypotheses Parmenides says *not αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν* but, rather, *τὸ ἐν* (“the one”), he is referring not to Unity but to that which has or partakes of Unity, that is, to a “one” of some sort.

This brings us to the second, negative part of Allen’s argu-



ment. Is there a possible ambiguity in the expression, τὸ εἶν, that neither Proclus nor Cornford sees—and that, consequently, Allen fails to refute? In fact, the passage already cited in (i) above—the opening argumentation of II.1—shows that there is. What is more, for the reader who recognizes this ambiguity, the contradictions will dissolve and the hypotheses will present, instead, a systematic account of the distinction and relation between forms and sensibles. To glimpse this subsurface content, recall, first, how at 157b–c and 158b of II.1 Parmenides distinguishes a simple and unique “one” from “others” that, participating in it, have only the defective unity of being wholes-of-parts and of being subject to plurality. On the one hand, this “one” is just the same, in the purity of its unity, as “the one” that is described in I.1, where it is also said to prescind from all spatial characters and—as the reader who is alert to the naivete of young Aristotle should be provoked at 141e to recognize—from specifically temporal being.<sup>3</sup> In short, I.1

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<sup>3</sup> Allen finds 141e “unusual” (Allen, 215). Τὸ εἶν is denied being because “it cannot be in time . . . and . . . to be is to be in time” (ibid.). The latter proposition, however, is “wholly unacceptable to Platonism” (Allen, 215). “Why then,” Allen asks, “does Parmenides assume [it], and assume [it] without argument . . . ?” (Allen, 214). His answer is to invoke the dilemma of participation, but this is unwarranted for at least three reasons. Firstly, we have just seen that he is wrong to assume, as he does, that the dilemma governs the hypotheses generally. Secondly, on the particular occasion when Parmenides clearly does want to invoke the dilemma, the passage a bit later at 144c–d, Parmenides pauses to formulate it explicitly and step-by-step to ask the youthful Aristotle to “reflect upon this” (144d1); had the latter so fully grasped the dilemma and its implications that, as Allen must presume, he could work out, quite by himself and without instruction, the (in fact quite elegant and extended) reasoning that Allen reconstructs for him at 141e, Parmenides’ cautious and pointed manner at 144c–d would be quite unnecessary and uncalled-for. There is, then, a serious dramatic implausibility to Allen’s reading. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Allen is not justified in his presumption that the conflation of being with being-in-time is *Parmenides*’ assumption. In fact, Parmenides asks Aristotle whether anything can partake of being except in an explicitly temporal mode; when he goes on to deny being—and, as well, unity itself (141e) and any mode of presence-to-consciousness (142a)—to τὸ εἶν, he is explicitly (cf. ἄρα, 141e9 and 10) developing the consequences of Aristotle’s answer, not any thesis he has himself advanced. Given Allen’s own insights, noted above, into the youthful Aristotle’s dramatic function and its provocative value for the reader, it is surprising that Allen does not himself make this observation. In any case it opens the way for some surprising reflections. If the reader, taking up not Aristotle’s but Socrates’ “point of view” (recalling Allen, 197), distinguishes between timeless being and being-in-time, he will restrict the

and, reiterating it, II.1 describe precisely the sort of “one” that each form must be. On the other hand, “the others” of II.1 are just the same as “the existent one” that I.2 describes. In their kind of unity, each is a whole of parts and a one among many others; and each is subject to all the characters of spatial and temporal determinateness. Thus, I.2, as II.1 serves to make clear, presents just the sort of “one” that each sensible participant must be.<sup>4</sup> Paired

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force of Parmenides’ denial of being to τὸ εἶναι at 141e to being-in-time; thus he will be ready, when he comes to Parmenides’ argument at 158a–b that the partless εἶναι is participated, to recognize there the timelessly being form. When, moreover, Parmenides at 160c–e grants to “the one which is not” the status of being present-to-consciousness as an object of discourse and knowledge, the reader will recognize that Parmenides is only making explicit what was already implicit at 142a, namely, that it is only being present-to-consciousness *in time*—hence, being present as an object of sense-perception and of sense-bound opinion (δόξα)—that is properly denied to the form. And, finally, when he comes to Parmenides’ argument at 161e that “the one which is not” nonetheless “somehow shares in being,” he will recognize that Parmenides is making explicit what was implicit at 141e—namely, that not to be-in-time does not preclude being timelessly—and is granting to the form the mode of being that is proper to it in its status as object of discourse and knowledge. (This last point is also the key to dissolving the paradoxical assertions and denials of motion and rest, alteration in character, and becoming at 162b–163b. But to explicate all of this would require a separate occasion.)

<sup>4</sup> But is it reasonable to hold that I.2 lays out the kind of unity proper to sensibles? Specifically, is it reasonable to hold, as I propose, that Parmenides, when he argues at 142c–e that “the existent one” is a whole of parts, has sensible things in mind? Striking evidence that he does comes at 144e–145b, where Parmenides characterizes “the existent one” as having shape. At 144e–145a Parmenides derives the limitedness of the one from its being a whole, and at 145a–b he specifies its parts as beginning, middle, and end; then at 145b he cites the equidistance of the middle from the extremes as the ground for characterizing the one as having shape. Clearly, Parmenides has a spatial sense of “whole” and “part” in mind in making this argument. And since he makes no qualifications or restrictions in introducing the argument, it is natural to assume that this is the sense of “whole” and “part” he has had in mind *from the beginning* of I.2. Indeed, his reasoning fails to follow without this assumption. It is puzzling that Allen is not bothered by this. “There is nothing in 142b–145a,” he writes, “directly to justify the claim [that the one has shape]. . . . The fact is that Parmenides is here [i.e., at 145a–b] assuming a proposition that will later be made explicit: that to be is to be somewhere (145e), that is, in a place” (Allen, 239). But this interpretation seems *ad hoc*. If Parmenides is assuming this spatialization of being without any explicit comment at 145a–b, why not also at 142b–145a? Or again, if Parmenides wants to invoke a spatial sense of “whole” and “part” for the first time at 145a–b, why does he wait until 145e to introduce the proposition upon which it is

together, I.1 and I.2 are therefore not contradictory; rather, by taking different kinds of participant in Unity as their respective subjects, they function together to reformulate, in a comprehensive, conceptual description, Socrates' distinction between forms and things.

Once we see this, moreover, each of the succeeding pairs of hypotheses will also cease to present itself as contradictory; instead, in each case the first member of the pair introduces some key feature of Socrates' distinction and the second member shows, by a *reductio*, that we cannot do without it. Thus, to characterize each pair in a titular way, in terms of its central point: II.1 and II.2 show how—in correction, significantly, of Socrates' mistaken acceptance of the dilemma of participation (131a–c)—sensibles derive from participation in partless forms the specific “limit” (or “structure,” *πέρας*, 158c, d) essential to each as a separate whole-of-parts. III.1 and III.2 bring out how each form, as a “one” which—as I.1 first shows—“is not” in any place or time, nonetheless must be a subject of discourse and knowledge and must be capable of “sharing in” (*μετέχειν*) other forms,<sup>5</sup> including “being” in the sense that is ex-

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based? It seems much more plausible to hold (as, surprisingly, Allen himself elsewhere does, in an aside made in the course of a discussion of 131a–c) that in I.2 “being a whole of parts and having shape are taken as equivalent” (Allen, 126).

<sup>5</sup> Parmenides uses other expressions as well, notably *ἔστι* with the dative and *μετέσθι* with the dative and genitive. He is not, however, invoking the distinction, important in other contexts (as Allen, following Cherniss, argues on pp. 90–91, 142–44), between “being” and “having” that sets the form apart from its participants. If he were, then his argument in III.1 (which is founded at several key points—note 161c6–7, 8; 162b9–10, d8–e1—on assertions of Aristotle’s) would show that “the one which is not,” as a participant in the forms of size and in motion and rest, would be a spatial thing subject to determinate size and location. Parmenides, however, resists saying this, insisting, instead, that this “one” is “different in kind” (*ἑτεροῖος*) from “the others” (161a) and “is nowhere among things which are” (162c). Thus Plato forces the reader to discover a different sort of “having” or “sharing in”—the sort, namely, that relates not spatiotemporally determinate things to forms but, rather, forms to one another. (In the *Sophist*, of course, he will have the Eleatic stranger call this “blending,” *σύγκρασις*, and “communion,” *κοινωνία*, etc.) Because Allen misses the deeper level significance of the hypotheses, he has occasion neither to acknowledge this distinction nor to recognize the timeliness, in terms of the psychagogic rhythm of the hypotheses, of the treatment of “having” in III.1; note, for instance, p. 289.

pressed by veridical assertions. IV.1 and IV.2, finally, re-examine sensible participants and show how, in implicit contrast with forms, their limitless divisibility and relativity to viewpoint causes them to have their characters only “apparently,” not “truly.”

Needless to say, to establish such an underlying significance for the hypotheses requires sustained exegesis and argument of a sort impossible here.<sup>6</sup> For the present, let me just note several ways in which, with respect to the second and the third of the three levels of questions I introduced at the outset, such a reading should be an attractive alternative to Allen’s.

First, with respect to the second level, this new reading promises to reveal an even deeper, more positive unity to the *Parmenides* as a whole. Allen sees the hypotheses as a second, more general presentation of Parmenides’ aporematic challenge to Socrates; hence he discovers the same tight integrity in each half of the dialogue. Since our reading recognizes in the hypotheses a positive response to Parmenides’ challenge, we can go a step further, recognizing a non-repetitive integrity for the two halves together. The key to seeing this is a refocusing of Allen’s account of the thrust of Parmenides’ criticisms. It is true, as Allen argues, that Socrates mistakes the separation of forms and things for a symmetrical relation and, again, that he mistakes the participation of things in forms for a real relation. But the ground of this is not so much that Socrates grants independent existence to sensibles as it is what this granting itself partly reflects: having not yet fully grasped the radical implications of his own new “theory,” Socrates is still under the sway of the pre-philosophical presumption of the primacy of sensibles; hence he unwittingly thinks of the forms on the model of sensible things. This is why he is helpless before the dilemma of participation (131a–c) and the two regress arguments (131e–132b, 132d–133a); since he thinks of the forms as having the same whole-part structure that sensibles do (see 131b7–c4) and as being, in each case, a singular amongst others (see 132a6–9, 132d5–8), he cannot resist Parmenides’ premises. Given this, the hypotheses provide precisely what Socrates—or more to the point, the young Academician who finds himself in Socrates’ predicament—needs. On their

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<sup>6</sup> I have, however, attempted such exegesis and argument in my *Plato’s Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986).

surface, as we noted earlier, they serve as an extensive introduction to abstract thinking; by forcing one to shift attention from concrete particular qualities to abstract concepts (note 135c9–d1), they set the stage for the “conversion” that is central to Platonic psychagogy, the “turn” from sensibles to forms. Beneath the surface, by providing occasion for the reversal of Socrates’ errors, the hypotheses actually enable this “turn.” The reader who retrieves the form-thing distinction in order to break through the contradictions will find, in the disambiguated content of the hypotheses, a conceptual account of the difference in kind of forms from things. In its negative aspect, by freeing him from the presumption that forms are a second set of composite singulars, this account will free him from vulnerability to the dilemma of participation and the regresses; in its positive aspect, it will free him for the revolutionary realization that participation, far from being a real relation between forms and sensibles, is, rather, itself first constitutive of the existence of sensibles.



This brings us, in turn, to the third level of questions. Our reading agrees with Allen’s in holding that Plato does not put the theory of forms *as such* at risk in the *Parmenides*. Whereas Allen, however, must adopt the long-embattled strategy of looking to the *Timaeus* for the needed rearticulation of the theory,<sup>7</sup> we find this within the *Parmenides* itself. Especially on the issues of the unity of the forms, the nature of participation, and the distinction in the senses or kinds of being, the subsurface content of the hypotheses offers a critical and innovative rethinking of the nature and causal status of the forms. Hence, it should be noted, our reading provides a new text and point of departure for reflecting on the so-called “late ontology” of, for example, the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Philebus*. Finally, this reading also suggests an original perspective on the question of the development of Plato’s rhetoric in his later work. Allen does not go far enough when he stresses, against Cornford, that the hypotheses constitute

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<sup>7</sup> The major original combatants were G. E. L. Owen, “The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato’s Dialogues,” and Harold Cherniss, “The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato’s Later Dialogues,” both published in Allen’s own *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965). In a general sense, Allen renews Cherniss’s position—and makes an interesting contrast, therefore, with K. M. Sayre’s renewal of Owen’s position in his *Plato’s Late Ontology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

“not a treatise, but dialectic” (Allen, 197). One might better say that Plato, even as he presents what is, on its surface, much more like a treatise than anything he has offered in earlier dialogues, actually deepens and intensifies dialogue form. After all, the real point of dialogue form is not the explicit drama it presents but, rather, the way in which this serves as a means for indirect communication with the reader. Parmenides’ Zenonian contradictions, the displacement of Socrates, and the youthful Aristotle’s naivete and tractability all serve a specific purpose: they work to provoke the potentially philosophical reader to step in and challenge the riddling surface of the text, objecting in Socrates’ behalf and reappropriating for himself, in the conceptual terms the hypotheses provide, Socrates’ seminal insight.

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