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## *How (not) to exempt Platonic Forms from Parmenides' Third Man*

DAVID P. HUNT

One response invited by the Third Man Argument (or "TMA") of Plato's *Parmenides* is that it simply fails against the middle-period theory of Forms, not so much because its premises radically misconstrue that theory, but because there are good reasons endemic to the theory itself (and not simply introduced *ad hoc*) for exempting the Forms from at least some of the principles which drive the argument. Call this the "Exemption Defense." Variations on the Exemption Defense have been put forward by R.S. Bluck, Benson Mates, William Prior, Gail Fine, Richard Parry, Richard Sharvy, and Paul Schweizer, among others.<sup>1</sup>

If the Exemption Defense is accepted, it can have far-reaching consequences for the resolution of other issues, such as the development of Plato's own thoughts on the Forms, his purposes in the *Parmenides*, and the relation of this dialogue to others. My focus in this paper is not on these further questions, however, but on the prior question of whether the Exemption Defense is in fact available. Following a standard formulation of the TMA, I develop what I take to be the most plausible version of the Exemption Defense. I then argue that, while the Exemption Defense is in fact successful in repelling an important attack on the theory of Forms, it's not clear that this is the attack being made in the *Parmenides*. I conclude with some thoughts on the actual attack and its legacy for the Platonic project.

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<sup>1</sup> See R.S. Bluck, "Forms as Standards," *Phronesis* 2 (1957), pp. 115-27; Benson Mates, "Identity and Predication in Plato," *Phronesis* 24 (1979), pp. 211-229; William J. Prior, "*Parmenides* 132c-133a and the Development of Plato's Thought," *Phronesis* 24 (1979), pp. 230-240; Gail Fine, "The One Over Many," *Philosophical Review* 89 (April 1980), pp. 197-240; Richard D. Parry, "The Uniqueness Proof for Forms in *Republic* 10," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (April 1985), pp. 133-150; Richard Sharvy, "Plato's Causal Logic and the Third Man Argument," *Nous* 20 (December 1986), pp. 507-530; and P. Schweizer, "Self-Predication and the Third Man," *Erkenntnis* 40 (January 1994), pp. 21-42.

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## I

The *Parmenides* begins with Socrates' response to Zeno's argument against the ontological integrity of the phenomenal world. While Zeno regards the consequences he derives from the hypothesis of a phenomenal many as "absurd" (128d5-7), Socrates judges the same consequences to be "nothing wonderful, but only what we should all accept" (129d7-8). It's the nature of phenomenal particulars to possess opposite qualities, and insofar as there is anything mystifying about this it can be adequately explained in terms of a thing's participation in opposite Forms. What *would* be absurd is if the Forms themselves possessed opposite qualities: while phenomenal things can tolerate, e.g., both unity and multiplicity, Absolute Unity cannot tolerate multiplicity. Socrates concludes his speech by throwing down the gauntlet to Zeno: "I should, as I say, be more amazed if anyone could show in the abstract ideas, which are intellectual conceptions, this same multifarious and perplexing entanglement which you described in visible objects" (129e6-130a3).

This sets Socrates up to be hoist on his own petard, and the TMA is one of three difficulties that *Parmenides* subsequently raises for Socrates' position. In determining the thesis against which the TMA is directed, then, we can look to Socrates' own statement of it in his reply to Zeno, and also to those restatements of it by *Parmenides* which win Socrates' assent. What we learn is that Forms really exist (128e6-129a1, 135a1-2) and have their own being (133c3-4); that Forms may be limited to "relative" properties like *similarity*, *unity*, and *beauty* (130b3-d9); that other things are related to the Forms by way of "participation" (129a2-3, 132c9-10); that it is by participating in the Form of F-ness that other things come to be (129a3-6) and to be called (130e1-131a3) F; that the Forms are *auta kath 'hauta* (128e6-129a1, 129d7-8, 133a8-9, 133c6), separate both from the things participating in them (130b2-3) and also from the corresponding properties as they are exhibited in those things (130b3-5); that the Form of F-ness, unlike an ordinary F-thing, cannot be not-F (129b1-d6); that each Form is one and whole (131a8-9); that they are in some sense inviolate in their unity even with respect to each other (129d6-e4); and that there is no more than one Form per property (132a1-4, 133b1-2, 135b7-8). Because this complex thesis appears to recapitulate central elements of Plato's own middle-period theory of Forms, I shall call it "Classical Platonism." The following provides a vague but useful summary of its leading ideas:

- (CP) There exists (for each suitable F) a Form of F-ness which (1) transcends sensible particulars, (2) is a paragon of unity, and (3) explains the F-ness of F-things.

The burden of Parmenides' three critiques of (CP) is to point up some of the difficulties in holding this package together coherently, and to do so by implicating the Forms in the very perplexities whose solution was supposed to mark the Forms' superiority over Zenonian particulars.

For expository purposes I simply follow the standard reading of the TMA as worked out by Gregory Vlastos.<sup>2</sup> The core of that reading, designed to ensure that the TMA comes out valid, is that two suppressed premises must be added to the one premise actually given in the text. More recent analyses have questioned this reading; but all acknowledge that the jobs performed by Vlastos's three premises must get done in one way or another, even if not all are done via independent premises.<sup>3</sup> This, along with the fact that the issues which divide these readings are irrelevant to the business of the present paper, is enough to justify beginning with the familiar Vlastos reading rather than one of its less familiar rivals.

What Vlastos identifies as the TMA's one explicit premise, positing the Form as a "one-over-many," is contained in Parmenides' opening remark: "when it seems to you that a number of things are large, there seems, I suppose, to be a certain single character which is the same when you look at them all; hence you think that Largeness is a single thing" (132a2-4). This can be generalized to

- (OM) For any group of things possessing a common property (of the right sort), there is a unique Form which accounts for the possession of that property by each of the things in that group.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Vlastos, "The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*," *Philosophical Review* 63 (July 1954), pp. 319-349. The analysis was refined in subsequent articles.

<sup>3</sup> S. Marc Cohen, for example, could note in 1971 that "all of the authors I have read have followed Vlastos at least this far" in attributing suppressed premises to the TMA. Cohen began a trend toward rethinking the argument's structure, though Vlastos's three premises have remained the touchstones with respect to which others have defined their own readings. See Cohen's "The Logic of the Third Man," *Philosophical Review* 80 (October 1971), pp. 448-475.

<sup>4</sup> While "possessing a common property" may be a somewhat tendentious rendering of what is actually to be found in the text, it is employed here simply in contrast to the purely nominal "sharing a common name," which is much too weak to capture Plato's one-over-many principle and makes the argument rather too blatantly susceptible to the fallacy of equivocation when (SP) is similarly rendered.

(OM) appears little more than an application of (CP), and Socrates allows as much by giving Parmenides' opening gambit his explicit assent (132a5). But if Parmenides is to derive from (OM) the intolerable consequences that are supposed to follow for (CP), it must be assumed that Forms are never identical to any of the things participating in them, so that

(NI) No Form which accounts for the possession of a common property by a group of things is itself a part of that group.

Without (NI) (or something like it), Parmenides could hardly get away with the inference that "*another* form of largeness will present itself, *over and above* largeness itself" (132a11-12). Finally, it must be assumed that Forms are self-predicative, i.e.,

(SP) Any Form which accounts for the possession of a common property by a group of things is itself in possession of that property.

This premise licenses Parmenides' reference to "largeness itself and *the other things which are large*" (132a6) and the claim that the subsequent Forms of largeness generated by the TMA make all of these things – the original largeness along with large particulars – both "appear" (132a8-9) and "be" (132b1-2) large.

Is Parmenides entitled to these last two premises? While Socrates can hardly be expected to bestow on them his explicit sanction in the course of an argument in which they are supposed to be no more than implicit, (NI) at least might be regarded as an integral part of the "separation" (*chôris-mos*) doctrine whose acceptance by Socrates elsewhere in the *Parmenides* is reflected in clause (1) of (CP) and whose prominence in Parmenides' initial summary of Socrates' position (*chôris* appears five times in 130a9-d2) signals its availability as a premise for the duration of the discussion. As for (SP), it does not receive Socrates' clear *imprimatur* anywhere in the *Parmenides* – for that one has to look elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> But it is arguably at work in Socrates' original proposal to Zeno (129b1-e4),<sup>6</sup> is approached (if not entailed) by the position Socrates adopts at the beginning of the second TMA (132c12-d4),<sup>7</sup> and is implicit in those passages which sup-

<sup>5</sup> The most important "proof-text" is probably *Protagoras* 330c-d, with *Phaedo* 100c a close second.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Socrates would be amazed "if anyone showed that the absolute like becomes unlike, or the unlike like" (129b1-3). The unexceptional cases with which this is to be contrasted would presumably include, not just phenomenal things being both like and unlike, but also the absolute like being like.

<sup>7</sup> While 132d9-e1 may be more than implicit, it cannot be cited as evidence of

port clause (3) of (CP) – assuming that Plato holds (not unnaturally for a 4th-century Greek) that a Form cannot explain the F-ness of an F-thing if it is not itself F.<sup>8</sup> So there is at least a *prima facie* case to be made for Parmenides' right to rely on (SP) as well as (NI), beyond Socrates' mere acquiescence in the TMA.

With these premises in place, the TMA can proceed as follows. Consider a set  $S_1$  of things each of which is F. According to (OM), there is a unique Form which accounts for the F-ness of the members of  $S_1$ . Call this Form " $\Phi_1$ ." By (NI),  $\Phi_1$  is not a member of  $S_1$ . Consider then the new set  $S_2$  which is formed by adding  $\Phi_1$  to  $S_1$ . Since, by (SP),  $\Phi_1$  is F,  $S_2$  is a set of things each of which is F. So according to (OM) there will be a unique Form which accounts for the F-ness of the members of  $S_2$ . Call this Form " $\Phi_2$ ." By (NI),  $\Phi_2$  is not a member of  $S_2$ ; and since  $\Phi_1$  is a member of  $S_2$ , it follows that  $\Phi_1 \neq \Phi_2$ . So it is not the case that only one Form accounts for the F-ness of F-things. What's more, in accounting for the F-ness of the members of  $S_2$ ,  $\Phi_2$  also accounts for the F-ness of the members of  $S_1$ , since  $S_1$  is a subset of  $S_2$ . That means that two distinct Forms ( $\Phi_1$  and  $\Phi_2$ ) account for the F-ness of the *same* group of things ( $S_1$ ). "So each of your Forms will no longer be one," Parmenides concludes, drawing out the contradiction with (OM); worse, repeated applications of the argument show each Form to be not only plural, "but an indefinite number" (132b1-2).

Whether understood primarily as a *reductio ad absurdum* or an infinite regress, it is clear that the argument is valid, that its conclusion is unacceptable, and that one or more of its premises must therefore be rejected. While it may be that all are in fact false (as would be the case if, e.g., nominalism were true), in practice commentators have tended to single out just one of the TMA's premises as the main culprit, critics contending that the designated premise is particularly revelatory of what is wrong with Platonism, defenders maintaining that it is instead the point at which

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Socrates' explicit commitments prior to Parmenides' examination because it is an admission wrested from him in the course of the second TMA.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Sharvy, *op. cit.*, distinguishes this from the claim that it is the F-ness of the Form of F-ness which explains the F-ness of an F-thing. Constance C. Meinwald, in "Good-bye to the Third Man," *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 365-96, brings out the Anaxagorean origins of this principle, while Theodore Scaltsas, in "A Necessary Falseness in the Third Man Argument," *Phronesis* 37 (1992), pp. 216-232, argues for the importance of Plato's commitment to this principle and cites Aristotle's endorsement at *Physics* 257b10: "that which produces the form possesses it."

the TMA distorts (CP) (or the latter distorts Plato's real position). In reviewing the options here, it is useful to step back and consider the role these premises play within the overall argument.

The context for the argument, as noted earlier, is Parmenides' elenctic project of bringing Socrates to an appropriate state of "Socratic ignorance" with regard to the operation of the Forms, a project undertaken in response to Socrates' boast to Zeno that the Forms can "save the phenomena" without themselves inheriting the very frailties which marked the phenomena as requiring salvation in the first place (129e5-130a2). The TMA's specific assignment in support of this larger project is to show how each Form's vaunted uniqueness must collapse into multiplicity. What gives the TMA its identity as an argument is the strategy it follows in pursuit of this goal, which is to locate the Form of F-ness *within* a set of things which requires for its intelligibility a Form of F-ness above and beyond the members of that set, and to do so in a way that the "friends of the Forms" would have trouble disavowing. Because it entails a Form of F-ness distinct from its members, such a set will be called an "F-Form Generator." (A set which stands in a similar relationship to the Form of G-ness would then be a "G-Form Generator," and so on.) Now clearly if the TMA can show that some F-Form Generator also contains a Form of F-ness as a member, there will be more than one Form of F-ness and the TMA will have achieved what it set out to do.

To implement this strategy, the TMA must do two things: it must propose (plausible) membership requirements for an F-Form Generator, and it must affirm that the Form of F-ness satisfies those requirements. These two jobs get divided up among Vlastos's three premises in the following way. First, (OM) and (NI) jointly posit a Form-generating set, defining its sole entrance requirement as possession of a property also possessed by all the other members of the set. For an F-Form Generator, in particular, the necessary and sufficient condition for membership is simply *being F*. Since this condition is completely indiscriminating as to the kinds of entities which may qualify as members of an F-Form Generator, the fact that a prospective candidate is a Form rather than an ordinary particular is irrelevant: being F is all that matters. So much for the first job; the second is then accomplished by (SP), which certifies that the Form of F-ness satisfies this condition (and the Form of G-ness satisfies the corresponding condition, etc.). If both these steps are granted (and the Platonist, at least, should have some strong *prima facie* inclination to grant them, if the TMA is to serve Parmenides' polemical purposes), then the Form of F-ness is guaranteed access to an F-Form Generator and the TMA is entitled to its proliferation of "unique" Forms. To prevent this absurd result, one or

the other of the steps on which this access depends must be rejected.

It is fair to say that most efforts in the literature have been directed against (SP). On this view, a significant part of what marks the difference between Forms and particulars and renders it illegitimate for the TMA to treat them as though they are on a par is precisely that the Form of F-ness *cannot* be regarded as F – at any rate, in the same way that an ordinary particular might be F. So whether or not the conjunction of (OM) and (NI) (call this combined premise “(OMNI)”) accurately defines the entrance requirements for an F-Form Generator, the Form of F-ness does not in fact satisfy those requirements. (SP) may be acceptable in some sense (and developing this sense is often the main focus of those who take this line); but it cannot be true in any sense in which the Form of F-ness would qualify for membership in an F-Form Generator, i.e., univocally with the sense in which “being F” is to be understood for purposes of (OMNI). Since the essential point of denying (SP) is to disqualify the Form of F-ness under the membership conditions set forth in (OMNI), let us call this the “Disqualification Strategy.”<sup>9</sup>

The other response in the literature is to maintain that, regardless of the status of (SP), the TMA fails to place the Form of F-ness within an F-Form Generator for the simple reason that (OMNI) gets the entrance conditions wrong. Again, this response need not involve a wholesale rejection of the stage in question: it can allow, in particular, that there are F-Form Generators, that they comprise items each of which is F, and that (OMNI) tells the right story about Form-generation for a broad class of cases. What it cannot allow is that (OMNI) tells the right story when applied to sets containing the Form of F-ness. Even if the Form of F-ness is F, and F in the very sense that ordinarily qualifies things for membership in a Form-generating group under (OMNI), the Form of F-ness is exempt from this principle and no further Forms are generated. Because the essential point is to exempt the Forms from conditions requiring their

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<sup>9</sup> That Forms could not possibly be (univocally) self-predicative, and so must be disqualified from membership in sets generating further Forms of the same type, was the predominant reaction during the early phase of the debate. See Gregory Vlastos, *op. cit.*; Anders Wedberg, *Plato's Philosophy of Mathematics* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1955), ch. 3; Wilfrid Sellars, “Vlastos and the Third Man,” *Philosophical Review* 64 (July 1955), pp. 405-37; R.E. Allen, “Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues,” *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960), pp. 147-64; Colin Strang, “Plato and the Third Man,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume No. 37 (1963), pp. 147-64. Of this group, only Sellars and Allen count as “Disqualification Defenders,” in that they believe univocal (SP) misrepresents Plato's position.



membership in an F-Form Generator, whether or not those conditions are retained for other classes of things, let us call this the “Exemption Strategy.”<sup>10</sup>

Dividing responses to the TMA into either Disqualification or Exemption strategies requires some further comment. In the first place, it might occur to Disqualification Strategists who recognize a sense in which (SP) is true that a third rubric is more appropriate: “Equivocation Strategy.” On this analysis of the argument, there are senses in which each of the TMA’s premises is true, but the conclusion relies on equivocating among these senses. Specifically, it has been commonly maintained that “ $x$  is F” does not mean the same thing when  $x$  is the Form of F-ness and when  $x$  is a phenomenal F-particular. For purposes of this paper, however, I am assuming that nothing essential will be lost if we preserve the TMA’s validity by disequivocating the predicate throughout. In doing so, we can take either sense of the predicate as normative. Which shall it be? Given the theory of Forms, of course, the primary sense of the predicate is to be found in its application to Forms, while phenomenal particulars are merely “called after” the corresponding Forms; but the TMA is supposed to recapitulate a reason for subscribing to the Forms in the first place, and so can hardly take eidetic F-ness as the primary sense. The logic of the TMA clearly requires that the predicate, if equivocal, be disequivocated in favor of its phenomenal sense. This makes (SP) false and (OMNI) true, and the “Equivocation Strategy” collapses into the Disqualification Strategy.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the difference between disqualification and exemption ultimately depends on how the entrance requirements for the relevant Form-Generator get formulated: an exemption can always be turned into a disqualification by reformulating (OMNI) to include the exemption. Since I am following Vlastos in formulating the argument so that (OMNI) is fixed by the text of the TMA, with the latter interpreted in such a way that the argument comes out valid, the difference between exemption and disqualification is likewise fixed; nevertheless, it must be admitted that there is a certain arbitrariness at the heart of this distinction.

<sup>10</sup> Those who adopt the Exemption Strategy almost invariably tend to be “Exemption Defenders” (see note 1 for some members of this group).

<sup>11</sup> “ $x$  is F” can be equivocal in one of two ways: when “F” is equivocal, and when “F” is univocal but “is” is equivocal. R.E. Allen, *op. cit.*, appears to take the former route. For examples of the latter, see Thomas Wheaton Bestor, “Plato’s Semantics and Plato’s *Parmenides*,” *Phronesis* 25 (1980), pp. 38-75, and Constance C. Meinwald, *Plato’s Parmenides* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Thirdly, it must not be forgotten that either strategy can be deployed for purposes of critique *or* defense: a critique when the objectionable premise is regarded as a genuine part of the middle-period theory of Forms and the TMA as succeeding in its attack on that theory; a defense when the objectionable premise is regarded as misrepresenting middle-period Platonism and the TMA's attack as misfiring. My interest in what follows lies with what I earlier dubbed the "Exemption *Defense*": the position of those Exemption Strategists who see unrestricted (OMNI) as a misrepresentation of (CP) rather than a flaw in (CP) itself.

## II

Why should Forms be entitled to an exemption from (OMNI)? To see how one might make a principled case for the Exemption Defense, it may be useful to observe how the situation which gives rise to this defense in the case of Forms parallels other cases in which an "exemption defense" seems well-motivated.

Consider a theist who regards her belief in God as groundable in some version of the Cosmological Argument, in which God is conceived as First Cause, Prime Mover, Sufficient Reason, or the like. Such a theist might encounter the following objection. To get from the world to God on this account, one has to rely on some sort of causal or explanatory principle which legitimates the inference; but once this principle is in place, what is to prevent its application to God Himself? And then the same reason we were led from world to God will lead us from God<sub>1</sub> to God<sub>2</sub> to . . . to God<sub>n</sub>. In short, if everything requires a cause, then God will have a cause; but if not everything requires a cause, why suppose that the world needs one?

The dialectic seems quite close to that of the TMA. The extent of the similarity can be brought out as follows. Let "Classical Theism" designate (at a minimum) the thesis that

(CT) There exists a divine being who (1) transcends the world, (2) is unique, and (3) constitutes the ultimate explanation for the world's existence.

Now the skeptic's objection (call it the "Third God Argument," or "TGA") can be understood to rest on the following premises:

- (OM)\* For any group of existing beings, there is a unique (divine) being which accounts for the existence of each of the beings in that group.
- (NI)\* No existing being accounts for its own existence.
- (SP)\* Any being which accounts for something's existence is itself an existing being.

The skeptic is claiming that these premises are ones to which the classical theist, insofar as she hopes to derive aid and comfort from the Cosmological Argument, is committed. But from these premises it can easily be shown, in a manner very much like that of the TMA, that there is no unique divine being, and that the position represented by these premises is therefore self-contradictory.

In reaching this conclusion, the TGA deploys the same strategy as the TMA. (OM)\* and (NI)\* jointly define a condition (call it “(OMNI)\*”) under which a collection of beings requires explanation in terms of another (divine) being, i.e., under which a set of things constitutes what we might call a “Deity Generator.” The condition is simply that the beings in question *exist*. (SP)\* then asserts that this divine being also satisfies the condition. Since the consequence of a deity’s membership in a Deity Generator is that there are many “unique” deities (or none), the theist is compelled to resist the one move or the other. In comparison with the TMA, however, the options here are much simplified. Short of including nonexistent beings in one’s ontology, (SP)\* must be regarded as a tautology; so far from (SP)\* being incoherent, as its TMA analogue is held to be by some critics, it is its denial that is incoherent. To pursue a Disqualification Strategy here is tantamount to atheism. So the theist has no choice but to attack (OMNI)\*. Now clearly the latter doesn’t completely botch the job of representing the theist’s position – it does support an inference from world to God of the sort the theist wants. What the theist will want to say, however, is that God is *exempt* from this principle; that is, she will want to deploy an Exemption Defense.

While this may look like nothing more than special pleading, there is a principled reason why few sophisticated theists will find the TGA a crushing objection to the Cosmological Argument. All the TGA warrants us in attributing to God in common with other things is bare existence. If this were what the theist appealed to (CT) in order to explain, her position would indeed be untenable, for she would be implicated in the circle of explaining existence by existence. But a savvy theist will not appeal to God to explain bare existence; she will appeal to God to explain *contingent* existence. Since God Himself does not exist contingently, the theist’s reason for postulating an initial deity cannot be used to generate further deities. This clarification of the theist’s rationale in terms of contingent rather than generic existence cannot just be dismissed as an *ad hoc* effort to escape the TGA, for there is something about contingent existence that raises questions not raised by noncontingent (necessary) existence. The nature of contingent beings is such that they can either exist or not exist.

The existence of such a being poses a problem: what accounts for its existence, given that it also had the potential not to exist? (CT) has an answer to this question. Since a contingent being does not account for its own existence, its existence must be explained by appeal to some other being. If this further being is also contingent, the chain of explanation will continue. The final account is not given until the chain terminates in a non-contingent being, and the reason it terminates at this point is that the original question simply does not arise for a being who lacks all potential for nonexistence.

There is of course a related question that might arise, namely, What is it that explains the existence of a necessary being? If God were not exempted from (OMNI)\* the answer to this *further* question would have to be given in terms of some further necessary being and the TGA would remain in business. But there is no reason why the theist must answer this new question in the same way she answered the original question about contingent existents. Two answers remain available, namely, "Nothing" and "Itself." A theist offering the first answer is thereby asserting that the existence of a necessary being is just a brute fact – the ultimate brute fact – and so does not require an explanation. Here it is specifically (OM)\* that is being denied while (NI)\* is retained. The second answer, favored by theists like Anselm, Aquinas, and Leibniz, is that there is in fact a sufficient reason for a necessary being's existence and this reason is to be found in the being's own nature – the necessity of its existence is itself the explanation for its existence. This second answer, which understands God as a "self-existent" being, involves both a denial of (NI)\* and a reaffirmation of (OM)\*.

In sum, the theist will respond to the TGA by pointing out that (OMNI)\* goes beyond what she is actually committed to in setting forth the rational basis for her belief in God, which requires a further explanation only for the existence of ordinary nontranscendent things. This point is critical since the TGA is not (or at least should not be) offered as a direct refutation of (CT); it can at most serve to refute a particular *reason* for subscribing to (CT), the sort of reason set forth in the Cosmological Argument. Call this reason "R\*." The TGA fails if it misconstrues R\*. And this is just what the knowledgeable theist ought to claim. The atheistic objector, for purposes of the TGA, needs to understand R\* in such a way that it supports (OMNI)\*. But this presupposes that the theist's reason for accepting (CT) arises from a quest to explain existence *per se*. For the cosmological arguer, however, the problematic datum which requires explanation in terms of (CT) is *contingent* existence. (OMNI)\* must therefore be rejected

as an unrestricted principle applying to God as well as to contingent beings.<sup>12</sup>

Returning to the TMA, it is not hard to find the resources for constructing a principled Exemption Defense which parallels the one just offered against the TGA. The Platonist is primarily concerned to generate Forms corresponding to certain classes of sensible particulars. The refusal to generate Forms from Forms need not constitute an *ad hoc* maneuver trumped up to thwart the TMA, but instead marks a relevant difference between sensibles and intelligibles such that the former do while the latter do not require the sort of explanation provided by separate Forms. Plato of course draws attention in many places to the distinctive features of sensible particulars which require such explanation. Particulars “partake of both being and not-being” (*Rep.* 478e1-2); they “equivocate” (*epamphoterizein*) so that “it is impossible to conceive firmly any one of them to be or not to be or both or neither” (*Rep.* 479c3-5). They are “never free from variation” (*Phd.* 78e5) and belong with “that which is human, mortal, multi-form, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent” (*Phd.* 80b3-4). They “fall short” of unproblematic being, constituting only a “poor imitation” (*Phd.* 74d9) and an “imperfect copy” (*Phd.* 75b6). In contrast, the Forms exist “entirely” (*Rep.* 477a3), “absolutely” (*Rep.* 477a7, 478d6, 479d5), and “in the fullest possible sense” (*Phd.* 77a4-5), with each Form “subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness” (*Sym.* 211b1). They are “constant and invariable, never admitting any alteration in any respect or in any sense” (*Phd.* 78d4-6), “the same on every hand, the same then as now, here as there, this way as that way, the same to every worshiper as to every other” (*Sym.* 211a1-4), belonging to “the eternal and unchanging order” (*Rep.* 500c3), “the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless” (*Phd.* 79d). The Forms are “divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable” (*Phd.* 80b1-2), serving as “a standard of comparison” (*Phd.* 75b5) by which other things may be judged. In sum, it is the ontological and epistemological deficiencies of phenomenal particulars which pose the problem for which the Forms are supposed to be the solution, and the Forms can provide this solution only insofar as they are unproblematic in just the ways that particulars are problematic.

The Exemption Defense against the TMA, like the one against the

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<sup>12</sup> One place an intelligent undergraduate theist might learn the moves of the last few paragraphs is in the chapter on “God” in Richard Taylor’s *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

TGA, comes in two versions, depending on whether the exemption enters *via* (OM) or (NI). For the former, the Form of F-ness does not require a one-over-many to account for its F-ness, and so is unaffected by (NI), which can therefore be retained in its unrestricted form; for the latter, the Forms do require something to account for their F-ness ((OM) is unrestricted), but because they are exempt from (NI) they may account for their own F-ness. There are indications in the middle-period dialogues that there may still be some explanatory work to be done with respect to non-deficient being (e.g., by appeal to the Good), but this is a different matter whose solution points beyond being (*Rep.* 509b8-10) and is certainly not to be assimilated to the kind of explanation that Forms provide for particulars.<sup>13</sup>

Just as the TGA is not directly aimed at God but at a particular reason R\* for believing in God, so the TMA is directed against a reason for believing in the Forms rather than against the Forms themselves. "I imagine your ground for believing in a single Form in each case is this" (132a1), Parmenides says as he sets up the TMA. What is at issue in the TMA is a problematic datum which, by the Platonist's lights, can only (or best) be explained by (CP). We have seen that one datum of this sort is the ontological and epistemological deficiencies of phenomenal particulars. Socrates himself introduces this datum into the argument when, at the beginning of the dialogue, he appeals to (CP) to make sense of the contradictory qualities Zeno had adduced in the phenomenal world. Just as God is supposed to explain the deficient existence of contingent beings, so the Forms are supposed to explain the deficient property-instances displayed by sensible particulars. Call this reason for postulating Forms "R." In order for the TMA to succeed against this position, it is important that R be a reason that supports (OMNI). As we have seen, however, this is clearly not the case. Deficient being is ultimately to be understood in terms of nondeficient being, but there is no corresponding necessity to explain nondeficient being. Of course it is Parmenides' project to show that Socrates can't get away with such insouciance by demonstrating that the Forms are fraught with the same problems as particulars; but for him to do so by relying on (OMNI), which departs from the middle-period theory in failing to distinguish things that require an eidetic explanation (particulars) from things that do not (Forms), is simply to beg the question against (CP).

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<sup>13</sup> Colin Strang, *op. cit.*, also distinguishes these two ways of exempting Forms from the TMA, and subjects both to criticism.

R is a reason which Plato actually looks to when justifying (CP), but which does not warrant (OMNI) – indeed, modifying (OMNI) in such a way that it *is* warranted by R is sufficient to stop the TMA in its tracks. Is the Exemption Defense then successful? That remains to be determined. For Plato had a number of reasons for endorsing (CP), and we have not yet addressed the question whether R is the reason at issue in the TMA. If it's not, then Parmenides might be entitled to (OMNI) after all (depending, of course, on what the reason actually is).

### III

It is unfortunate, given the Exemption Defense's success against R, that there are good grounds for doubting that R is the intended target of the TMA. I will mention four such grounds.

(1) The essence of R is the ontological and epistemological deficiencies of particulars and the contrast with the ontological and epistemological nondeficiency of the Forms. While this contrast is not altogether absent from the *Parmenides* – it is implicit, for example, in the Forms' immunity to the compresence of opposites afflicting phenomenal particulars, cited by Socrates in his response to Zeno's treatise at the beginning of the dialogue – it is nevertheless a theme that lies well in the background (in comparison, say, with the foreground placement of such doctrines as separation and participation). Indeed, the one thing typical of the middle-period theory of Forms that is missing in the *Parmenides* is a stress on self-sufficiency and the use of superlatives in connection with the Forms. The theory is here more austere – not at all the sort of textual environment in which one would expect R to be the point at issue.

(2) To anyone at all familiar with the middle-period theory of Forms, the Exemption Defense would appear to be the obvious response to a TMA directed against R. So why doesn't Plato offer this defense? It can't be because he's constrained by his choice of a youthful Socrates as the mouthpiece for his middle-period self, since Socrates is portrayed as well-versed in (CP) and thus amply equipped to mount an Exemption Defense. Plato may of course have had good reasons in this dialogue for omitting to untangle an *aporia* whose solution he could not fail to have known; but all other things being equal an interpretation that needs to posit such a reason is clearly taking on extra baggage. The more straightforward inference to draw is that Plato refrained from putting forward an Exemption Defense because it would have been useless against the TMA's real target.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The same point is made by S. Marc Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 472-73.



(3) Not only would R be surprising, given what Plato doesn't say in the *Parmenides*, but it would also be surprising given what he *does* say. After allowing Parmenides to mount three powerful attacks on his own theory, Plato has Parmenides aver that the Forms are nevertheless indispensable to philosophy and to language itself (134e10-135c7); moreover, he has him suggest that a cogent defense of the Forms would be possible for someone equipped with the sorts of logical skills which the training regime outlined in the remainder of the dialogue is designed to foster. This implies that the solution to the difficulties raised by Parmenides, if it exists at all, is to be found in *Parmenides II*. But *Parmenides II* contains nothing at all likely to aid in the defense of R against the TMA; indeed, it marks a complete departure from the middle-period dialogues with their resources for a perfectly adequate defense of R. This indicates pretty clearly that R cannot be the point at issue in the TMA.<sup>15</sup>

(4) The main reason for doubting that R is what's at issue, however, is that the text of the TMA provides the real reason, and it does not appear to be R. While much effort has been devoted to discerning the lineaments of the argument Parmenides is made to deliver *against* the Forms, the same cannot be said for the initial argument in *favor* of Forms which Socrates allows Parmenides to formulate on his behalf. This is unfortunate, for the TMA is explicitly presented as an argument which, in its treatment of (CP), takes advantage of a particular *reason* one might have for subscribing to (CP).

It is worth re quoting Parmenides' opening move in the argument:

How do you feel about this? I imagine your ground for believing in a single Form in each case is this: when it seems to you that a number of things are large, there seems, I suppose, to be a certain single character which is the same when you look at them all; hence you think that Largeness is a single thing.

True, he replied.

Expanding a bit, Parmenides' reasoning (on behalf of the Platonist) seems to go like this. Given a number of things which have a common property, there is in addition to the diversity of instances of that property a unity of character which these instances share. If there were only the many large things, everything would be different from everything else, and it would be unaccountable how they could all be the same in being large. This unity can only be explained by positing some single thing, apart from the

<sup>15</sup> For a similar argument against the Exemption Defense, see Sarah Waterlow, "The Third Man's Contribution to Plato's Paradigmatism," *Mind* 91 (July 1982), pp. 339-357.



diversity of instances, which grounds that unity. “Hence you think that Largeness is a single thing.”

What drives this brief on behalf of the Forms is not so much a problem with the metaphysical/epistemological deficiencies of particulars as it is a problem with the logical analysis of common characters. (This is underscored by Parmenides’ beginning with a *number* of things being large rather than *something* being large: the former is necessary for the logical problem, while the latter would be sufficient for raising the metaphysical/epistemological problem.) These are closely connected problems, of course: it is only insofar as characters are repeated or at least repeatable (the logical problem) that the sensible world becomes half-way intelligible (the metaphysical/epistemological problem). But the TMA appears to be addressed specifically to the kind of reason that the logical problem makes available for positing Forms. Call this reason “R’.” R – the reason presupposed by the Exemption Defense – responds to such questions as: “What accounts for its being the case that a sensible particular *a* is F?” “Given the ontological and epistemological liabilities suffered by sensible phenomena, what assumptions make it nevertheless possible for *a* to be F?” In contrast, R’ asks: “What is it for something to be F – what are we saying when we say that something is F?” “What analysis is to be made of the logical structure of ‘*a* is F?’”

The difference between these two sorts of questions, and the difference this difference makes, can be brought out with the help of the Platonic analogy of the mirror-image and its original. Consider the questions, “What accounts for *x*’s being F?” and “What is it for *x* to be F?” The first question will receive different answers depending on whether *x* is an image or the original. This is because an image and its original differ in ways that are relevant to the question. The special features of images that make them problematic and lead one to ask the question in their case may be entirely absent from the original; if the question is even pressed regarding the original, it will point toward a very different answer than the one that was appropriate with regard to its images. But the answer to the second question will not vary with the identity of *x*. If we can truly say of both image and original that each *is F*, there must be some unitary account of what this means. In like manner Parmenides’ question about the “single character” which is the same when “a number of things are large” applies as well to the case where one of these large things is the Form of Largeness.

This means that the TMA succeeds in its attack on R’. R’, like R, is one of the reasons Plato offers on behalf of (CP). Suppose *a* is F, *b* is F,

$c$  is  $F$ , and so on. These predications are to be analyzed as  $a$ ,  $b$ ,  $c$ , etc., participating in a Form  $\Phi$  which is  $F$ . But then what of the latter predication? If what it is for  $\Phi$  to be  $F$  is the same as what it is for a phenomenal  $F$ -thing to be  $F$ , then what it is for  $\Phi$  to be  $F$  is for  $\Phi$  to participate in a Form that is  $F$ . Whether or not this latter Form is  $\Phi$  itself or some further Form of  $F$ -ness, the analysis is patently circular, presupposing the very notion it was supposed to be analyzing. Nor is it open to the Exemption Defender to break the circle by dispensing with the appeal to  $\Phi$ 's being  $F$ . Weighing against this move are all the reasons that appear to support (SP): the textual evidence; the idea that, since a thing can cause in others only what it already possesses itself, it is only because  $\Phi$  is  $F$  that it is able to account for  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  being  $F$ ; and the fact that being  $F$  is at the heart of how  $\Phi$  differs from other Forms, what makes it the Form of  $F$ -ness rather than of some other property. But the main reason the Exemption Defender cannot jettison (SP) is that in so doing he would be abandoning the Exemption Strategy in favor of the Disqualification Strategy.<sup>16</sup>

The upshot is this. The Forms play more than one role, and while the Exemption Defense does succeed against a critique of one of these roles, it does not work against a critique of the role actually being highlighted in the TMA. The Many requires a One to be "over" it; but then (1) the One joins the Many to constitute a new Many, and (2) the new Many requires a One to be "over" it. If the TMA is really driven by a plurality of  $F$ -things, as this summary suggests, then the way to block it is to underscore the sense in which the Form of  $F$ -ness is a One – *sui generis*. But it can be *sui generis* in the relevant sense only if it is not  $F$  in the same way that sensible particulars are  $F$ . Given that its target is  $R'$  rather than  $R$ , escape from the TMA must come *via* Disqualification rather than Exemption.

#### IV

Socrates' ineptness in replying to Parmenides, his failure to bring to bear all the resources available through Plato's middle-period theory of Forms,

<sup>16</sup> See Richard Sharvy, *op. cit.*, for an extended analysis congenial to the conclusions of this paragraph. In the end, however, Sharvy opts for the Exemption Defense: "the Forms themselves just have to be exceptions," he writes (p. 523). But this, in effect, grants the TMA its victory against  $R'$ . I think that Plato has a better response available to him.

is often attributed by Exemption Defenders to his being *very young* in the dialogue. But Plato clearly makes very selective use of Socrates' youth in the dialogue. In particular, it doesn't disqualify Socrates from knowing all about the middle-period theory of Forms, which the real Socrates would not have known about even as an old man (let alone as a youth); but if such knowledge is attributed to the character "Socrates" despite his youth, one can't simply appeal to his youth to account for his ignorance of a key reason for holding the middle-period theory.

What is *not* already available in the arsenal of (CP) is an answer to the predicational circle which the TMA teases out of R'. So this problem might genuinely baffle a Socrates equipped only with (CP), and announce a new line of inquiry for Plato. If this reading of the TMA is correct, it should be possible to predict the general direction this inquiry would go. It will focus on the logical structure of *being F*. The Forms will continue to play the central role in explaining what it is for a sensible particular to be F, and they will continue to do so by being themselves F. But owing to the TMA, the Forms will be F in a different way than sensible particulars are F.

This prediction is borne out by Plato's later development. Indeed, I think we can find it anticipated in one of Plato's most important arguments for the Forms in the middle dialogues. This is the passage at *Republic* 523b-524e where Plato gives the example of three fingers, noting "that some reports of our perceptions do not provoke thought to reconsideration because the judgment of them by sensation seems adequate, while others always invite the intellect to reflection because the sensation yields nothing that can be trusted." *Finger* belongs among the unproblematic cases, "since the faculty of sight never signifies to it at the same time that the finger is the opposite of a finger." But other cases are problematic: the sense of touch "reports to the soul that the same thing is both hard and soft to its perception," and

sight too saw the great and the small, we say, not separated but confounded. . . . And for the clarification of this, the intelligence is compelled to contemplate the great and small, not thus confounded but as distinct entities, in the opposite way from sensation. . . . And this is the origin of the designation, *intelligible* for the one, and *visible* for the other.

The problem with "great and small" is the same problem we find in Socrates' summary of Zeno's treatise at the beginning of the *Parmenides*, where it also leads to the postulation of Forms: they are "contradictory" (*Rep.* 524e1) and "impinge upon the senses together with their opposites" (524d4).

Plato's interest here is clearly epistemological; but if we look at this

discussion from the standpoint of the TMA and its concern with the logic of predication, it is impossible to miss the fact that the unproblematic "finger" is a sortal term which *identifies* the subject of which it is predicated, while the problematic terms like "great" and "small" are relational predicates which are coupled but not identified with their subjects. It is true that Plato later demotes "finger" from this exalted status: in the *Timaeus* he assimilates identifying predicates to nonidentifying predicates when talking about the phenomenal world, arguing (at 48e-52c) that mass-terms like "earth," "air," "fire," and "water" correspond to phenomena which display the same problematic traits as the great and the small do in the *Republic*. What is noteworthy, however, is the idea that thought will no longer be provoked to postulate further absolutes once it comes upon characters that are identified with their subjects rather than merely predicated of them. There is no reason to suppose that Plato abandons this idea just because he despairs of finding such identities in the phenomenal world; indeed, this should simply have clarified for him where such identities are properly to be found. If the Form of F-ness is F by way of identity rather than predication, the regress arising from R' can be halted on the same grounds as the regress arising from R and R\*: the postulated entity does not share those features of its explanandum for which it is functioning as the explanans.

By the time Plato comes to write the *Parmenides* he realizes that there are some lacunae in his middle-period theory. Because the deficient theory is his own, he has it represented by its usual literary spokesman, Socrates; but since his purpose in the dialogue is to point up its deficiencies, he makes his own mouthpiece Parmenides. These deficiencies are not enough to sink the theory, as Parmenides notes at 135b5-c2 when declaring the Forms to be necessary for thought: the metaphysical side of the theory largely escapes the critiques of *Parmenides I*, while its logical/semantical side merely requires more work (*difficult* work, to be sure, given what we learn about it from *Parmenides II*.)<sup>17</sup> That the heart of (CP) escapes these

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<sup>17</sup> That the direction set in *Parmenides II* is essentially the one suggested in this section of the paper is supported by Constance Meinwald's analysis of predications *pros ta alla* and predications *pros heauto* in her *Plato's Parmenides*, *op. cit.* The former are garden-variety predications while the latter "are not concerned with saying that individuals exhibit features. They have a role Plato regarded as more fundamental – namely, one of presenting the internal structures of the real natures." (p. 71) An earlier study, which also finds the "confusion between the identifying and predicative uses of 'S is P'" to be one of the most prominent issues addressed in *Parmenides II*,

critiques while some aspects of the theory need reexamination explains much about Plato's later development. It explains, at least so far as the TMA is concerned, how Plato could retain (CP) in the *Timaeus* and even augment it through the introduction of the Demiurge, since his focus in this dialogue is on the kind of metaphysical explanation which is unchallenged by the TMA. It also explains why Plato would turn to the predicational aspect of (CP) in his analysis of being (and not-being) in the *Sophist*, since this *is* challenged by the TMA.<sup>18</sup>

The last paragraph offers nothing more than a sketch – detailed substantiation is the work of another day. But the general picture it presents fits well with the analysis of the TMA given in the paper. Looked at in this way, the *Parmenides* is a major turning point in Plato's development, as it gives every indication of being, rather than the airing of difficulties readily answerable in terms of the middle-period theory, as it would be if the Exemption Defense were an adequate response to the TMA.

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is that of G.E.L. Owen in "Notes on Ryle's Plato," in Ryle, ed. O.P. Wood and G. Pitcher (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 223-67.

<sup>18</sup> The traditional view has been that Plato is taking a "linguistic turn" in the *Sophist*, disambiguating different senses of the verb "to be." See, e.g., J.L. Ackrill, "Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251-59," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77, Part I (1957), pp. 1-6, who makes an interesting comparison between Plato's analysis and the one advanced by Gottlob Frege in "Über Begriff und Gegenstand." For a rejection of this tradition, see William J. Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1985), ch. 4.

Insofar as the *Sophist* supports the Disqualification Strategy, it will have to be the Equivocation Version, since (SP) is reaffirmed at 258c.