

The Greatest Difficulty: Can we Know the Forms?

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PLATO'S Forms seem to combine the functions of Kant's categories and Kant's things-in-themselves. Like the categories, they are essential for thought and discourse (*Parm.* 133e-135c, *Theaet.* 184bff.), and like things-in-themselves, they constitute the ultimate reality underlying the perceptible world of change and becoming. The problems highlighted by Parmenides in the first part of the *Parmenides* stem from this second role, that of things-in-themselves. Kant's prohibition on the application of categories beyond the realm of appearance gives rise to difficulties about the relationship between things-in-themselves and appearances. Plato's apparent tendency to treat Forms, in the 'middle dialogues', as *substances*, analogous to, albeit superior to, perceptible things, gives rise to similar difficulties. Kant's restriction of categories to appearance also means that things-in-themselves are unknowable. Kant is content to accept this consequence, since things-in-themselves are quite distinct from the categories needed for thought and discourse. But Plato cannot accept Parmenides' argument that the Forms are unknowable (*Parm.* 133a-134e), since this would deprive Forms of their categorial role. Kant scholars have often resisted attributing to Kant a belief in unknowable things-in-themselves with a problematic connexion to appearances and have interpreted his doctrine more modestly, reducing things-in-themselves to something more hygienic or eliminating them altogether. Similar attempts have been made to help Plato out of the difficulties his doctrine of Forms apparently faces (especially by German scholars such as Natorp), essentially by stripping the Forms of their 'metaphysical' role as things-in-themselves, while leaving their categorial function intact. But while Kant provides some support for the analogous move made on his behalf, Plato seems to resist it, especially in Parmenides' (admittedly not very cogent) arguments that Forms cannot be 'thoughts' (*Parm.* 132b-c). I therefore propose to consider what Plato's own solution might have been to the 'greatest' difficulty raised by Parmenides, namely the supposed unknowability of the Forms; I argue that a solution can be found in the *Sophist*, where, in the course of

his criticism of the ‘friends of the Forms’, the Eleatic stranger produces another difficulty for the knowability of Forms and proposes a modification of the doctrine in order to meet it.

Parmenides’ problem: Forms and particulars

At 133a-134b Parmenides presents what he calls the ‘greatest difficulty’ for Socrates’ view of the Forms. Socrates postulates two distinct realms, Forms and particulars. In some cases a Form is conceptually correlated to another Form such that neither Form can be adequately understood except in relation to the other. The Form of slavery, for example, is conceptually correlated to the Form of mastery. One cannot understand what it is to be a slave unless one also understands what it is to be a master, and vice versa. Correspondingly, the particulars that fall under such Forms are factually correlated. A master owns a slave or slaves, and conversely a slave is owned by a master. In fact it is conceptually necessary that anyone properly described as a master owns a slave, and that anyone properly described as a slave is owned by a master. No conceptual correlation can hold between a Form and a particular. The Form of mastery is conceptually correlated to the Form of slavery, not to particular slaves; the Form of slavery is correlated with the Form of mastery, not particular masters. Correspondingly, a particular human master owns particular slaves, not the Form of slavery, and particular slaves are owned by particular masters, not by the Form of mastery. But knowledge too is a relational concept and it too cannot straddle the boundary between Forms and particulars. The Form of knowledge, ‘knowledge itself... Wouldn’t what it is to be knowledge be knowledge of that which is truth itself?’¹ Correspondingly, a particular person, with his particular knowings, cannot know a Form, only another particular, and conversely a Form cannot be known by a particular person. Forms are known by the Form of knowledge, and only God can have this supremely exact knowledge, not us.² But such a God could not be related to us in any way: he cannot own us, know us, or care about us.

¹ 134A4f: οὐκοῦν καὶ ἐπιστήμη, φάναι, αὐτὴ μὲν ὄξει ἐπιστήμη τῆς ὄξει ἀλήθεια αὐτῆς ἂν ἐκείνης εἴη ἐπιστήμη; I adopt the translation of CHRYSAKOPOULOU 2010.

² In distinguishing between what God has and we do not, Parmenides says that we do not ‘participate’ (*metechomen*) in knowledge itself (134b), whereas if anything participates (*metechei*) in it, then God ‘has’ (*echein, echei*) it (134c-d). Earlier in the dialogue *metechein* and *methexis* are used for the instantiation of a Form by a particular. In this sense of *metechein*, Socrates believes that a particular knowing or knower does participate in the Form of knowing, simply in virtue of being an instance of knowing,

In the *Parmenides* Socrates seems not to reply to this argument, but there are obvious objections to it:

Parmenides is not very clear about the nature of the relations that he postulates between Forms and Forms and between particulars and particulars. When introducing the general point at 133c-d he characterises both types of relation in terms of *pros* followed by an accusative: mutually related Forms ‘have their being in relation to themselves [*autai pros hautas tēn ousian echousin*]’ and particulars ‘are in turn what they are in relation to themselves [*auta au pros hauta estin*]’. When he moves on, in 133d-134a, to the example of master and slave, he characterises both types of relation by a genitive. This is natural enough in the case of masters and slaves: a particular master is the master *of* a slave, not *of* slavery and a slave is the slave *of* a master, not *of* mastery. But Parmenides retains the genitival construction in his account of the relation of the corresponding Forms: ‘mastery itself is what it is of slavery itself, and likewise slavery itself is slavery of mastery itself’ (*autē de despoteia autēs douleias estin ho esti, kai douleia hōsautōs autē douleia autēs despoteias*),³ though he then reverts to the *pros*+accusative construction for the remainder of the sentence.⁴ The genitival construction reappears when in 134b Parmenides turns to the case of knowledge. Knowledge itself is knowledge ‘of that which is truth itself’. ‘And again each of the types of knowledge that is, is knowledge of each of the types of beings that is.’ In other words, each type of ideal knowledge is knowledge of the corresponding type of ideal being.⁵ Analogously, our sort of knowledge

however imperfect. Although this belief is disputed in Parmenides’ earlier arguments, it is not at issue here and the type of *methexis* under consideration is quite different. At 133d2 Parmenides seems to say that particulars ‘participate’ not in Forms themselves but in ‘likenesses’ of the Forms ‘amongst us’ (*ta par’ hēmin homoiōmata...hōn hēmeis metechontes...*).

³ Here I diverge from CHRYSAKOPOULOU (2010, 95), who translates the genitive as ‘in relation to’, which, though more elegant, risks concealing Parmenides’ possible confusion.

⁴ αὐτὴ δὲ δεσποτεία αὐτῆς δουλείας ἐστὶν ὃ ἐστὶ, καὶ δουλεία ὡσαύτως αὐτῆ δουλεία αὐτῆς δεσποτείας, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὰ ἐν ἡμῖν πρὸς ἐκεῖνα τὴν δύναμιν ἔχει οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνα πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἀλλ’, ὃ λέγω, αὐτὰ αὐτῶν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα τέ ἐστι, καὶ [134a] τὰ παρ’ ἡμῖν ὡσαύτως πρὸς αὐτά.

⁵ ἐκάστη δὲ αὐτῶν ἐπιστημῶν, ἣ ἔστιν, ἐκάστου τῶν ὄντων, ὃ ἔστιν, εἴη ἂν ἐπιστήμη· (134a). CHRYSAKOPOULOU (2010, 95) translates this as ‘And, in turn, each particular item of knowledge that is, would be knowledge of some particular thing that is.’ But this is more or less what Parmenides says in his next sentence (134a-b). JOWETT (2010, 75) probably has the right idea: ‘And each kind of absolute knowledge

is of our sort of truth, and each of our types of knowledge is of the corresponding type of particular beings. The ‘Kinds themselves, what each of them is, are known somehow [*ge pou*] by the Form itself of “knowledge”, but not by us.

Parmenides’ view seems to be this. The conceptual correlate of the Form of knowledge is the Form of truth, as our mundane knowledge is correlated with mundane truth. But as our mundane knowledge branches out into different knowings or sciences, each of which is correlated with a different being or type of being, so the Form of knowledge has different subspecies of knowings (*epistēmai*), each correlated with a different Form of being, which presumably instantiates the overarching Form of truth.⁶ At the mundane level there is a discrepancy between the relation of knowledge to truth and relation of masters to slaves. A master always owns a slave and a slave is always owned by a master; but although what is known is always a truth, a truth is not invariably known. This discrepancy does not occur at the ideal level, however: there knowledge and truth are invariably and changelessly correlated. But what, more specifically, is the relation between a Form and its correlate? Parmenides tends to assume that it is an analogue of the relations between the corresponding particulars, and this is facilitated by the genitive construction. When he says that the master (or slave) is ‘of’ a slave (a master), we naturally take this to mean that the master (or slave) owns (or is owned by) a slave (or a master). And this meaning is hard to exclude from the parallel claims that mastery is *of* slavery and slavery is *of* mastery. But Parmenides does not go so far as to say that mastery is the master(γ) of slavery or that slavery is the slave($\rho\upsilon$) of mastery. That step is reserved for the Form of knowledge. Or rather it takes three steps. First, he says (roughly): ‘What it is to be knowledge is knowledge of the truth itself’, or more simply: ‘Knowledge as such is

will answer to each kind of absolute being.’ Cf. CORNFORD 1939, 97: ‘And again any given branch of Knowledge in itself will be knowledge of some department of real as it is in itself...’ Alternatively, Parmenides could mean that each kind of knowledge, viz. ideal and non-ideal, is knowledge of beings on its own ontological level, but this is less relevant to the argument that follows.

⁶ On the basis of 134a4f., Yi and BAE (1998, 273) take the conceptual correlate of the Form of knowledge to be the Form of truth. This apparently conflicts with 134b6f: *γινώσκειται δέ γέ που ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶδους τοῦ τῆς ἐπιστήμης αὐτὰ τὰ γένη ἃ ἔστιν ἕκαστα*; which implies that the Form of knowledge is correlated with the Forms as a whole. Cf. FINK 2007, 120f. But the two passages can be reconciled in the way I suggest.

knowledge of the truth.’ That might sound like a harmless statement of the conceptual relation between knowledge and truth.⁷ But it leads to the baneful second step: ‘The Kinds themselves, what each of them is, are known by the Form of knowledge.’ And this in turn leads, by way of the dubious claim that the Form of knowledge is supremely *exact* knowledge, not just knowledge unqualified,⁸ to the final step, that the Form of knowledge is God’s knowledge. Parmenides’ central mistake, however, is to present the relations between Forms as idealized versions of the relations between the corresponding particulars. The Form of mastery cannot own the Form of slavery any more than it can beat it or sell it to some other Form. Similarly it is hard to see how God’s knowledge could be the Form of knowledge, rather than a particular instance, though no doubt a very noble instance, of the Form of knowledge. A particular person may be able to know, love or think about the Form of knowledge. Conversely, however, the Form of knowledge cannot know, love, or think about us or about any other Form.

However, the first part of Parmenides’ argument can withstand this objection. His view that relations can hold only between Forms and Forms and between particulars and particulars, but not between Forms and particulars, can be detached from his assumption that relations between Forms mirror relations between particulars. The central defect of Parmenides’ argument is his failure to distinguish between intentional relations and non-intentional relations. Non-intentional relations obtain between concrete particulars: I cannot, for example, beat or punch slavery, or the Form of slavery, but only a particular slave. But intentional relations can obtain between a particular and a Form, as well as between two or more particulars. I can for example dislike or think about slavery, as well as I can dislike or think about a particular slave. (At 132b-c, Parmenides mentions one such intentional relation in his criticism of Socrates’ suggestion that a Form is a *noema*, a thought, when he says that a thought must be of something and of something that is. But here the mistake is to assume that the object of a thought must, like an object of knowledge, be real.) The distinction between intentional

⁷ Cf. RYLE 2009, 12: ‘knowledge (that of which cases of knowing are instances) is correlated not with truths but with trueness.’

⁸ As Sandra Peterson says in her chapter on ‘The *Parmenides*’: ‘Given the topic-focusing and definition-eliciting use of “knowledge itself by itself”, knowledge itself by itself is knowledge considered without any further qualifications whatsoever’ (PETERSON 2008, 400f.).

and non-intentional relations is not very sharp or clear. Ownership, for example, has some, though not all, of the characteristic features of intentional relations. I can own a particular concrete copy of a book, but I can also own the book as an abstract type, if I own the copyright. But we have to grant Parmenides that no one owns slavery—the patent expired long ago. It seems quite reasonable, however, to say that someone can know, or know about slavery as well as a particular slave. Knowing is a relation that can straddle the ontological boundary between Forms and particulars.⁹

Dualism and the roving soul

My main aim, however, is not to criticise Parmenides' argument, but to ask what Plato's answer to it might have been. Parmenides' argument highlights a general problem for dualism, the view that there are two co-ordinate kinds of thing, two realms or perhaps two worlds. If anyone knows that dualism is true, then they know about both realms or kinds of thing and not only one of them. So we already have something, the soul, or the soul of the philosopher at least, that has access to both realms and does not belong unequivocally to either. So it is with the soul in Plato. A person's body is simply one particular thing among others. It has no special relationship to the Forms, but, like other particulars, it participates in, or imitates, the Forms, and thus acquires whatever qualities it has: size, beauty and so on. The soul also participates in or imitates the Forms in this way, and this is what makes it just, wise, pious and so on. But the soul not only has this relationship to the Forms—a relationship which it shares with other particulars; it also knows the Forms, both in an ordinary unphilosophical way, and in the philosopher's way, or ways,

⁹ RYLE 2009 seems to deny this: 'a relation can only be conceived to hold between terms that are of the same type or level; and if instances and what they are instances of are not of the same type or level, no relation can hold between them' (p.13); 'The name of a quality or relation cannot significantly occur as the subject of an attributive or relational sentence. ...Socrates could say nothing of the relations between his Forms and their instances, or between his Forms and our knowings and thinkings' (p.20). Ryle extends his prohibition to thinking and knowing of or about qualities or relations when they are conceived non-Platonically, not only when they are conceived as *substantial Forms*. But surely one can think about, say, memory or parenthood, without simply thinking about instances of memory or parenthood or uses of the words 'memory' or 'parent'. One might, after all, be wondering whether thinking about memory or parenthood is simply a matter of thinking about their instances or about the relevant word-usage.

of knowing them. (On Plato's view, anyone who can apply, say, the term 'beautiful' to things must have some elementary and probably prenatally acquired knowledge of the Form of beauty. But this need not amount to philosophical knowledge.) The soul, then, has a special relationship to the Forms and is not an ordinary particular. On the other hand, the soul is not itself a Form. There are, firstly, many souls, while there is only one Form of any given type—only one Form of beauty, for example. This difficulty might be met by suggesting that at some level there is only one *nous* shared by us all—a doctrine that stretches from Alexander of Aphrodisias down to Hegel and perhaps to Paul Natorp—though it was not broached by Plato himself and it would be hard to reconcile with his eschatological doctrines. Again, if the theory of Forms is known to be true, the soul must know or know about particulars, as well as Forms, since it is essential to the theory that there are particulars, particulars which are made what they are by participating in or imitating Forms. And knowing about particulars is not something that any Form does. Forms are just imitated or participated in by particulars; they do not know them. For this reason too, then, the soul is not a Form. It has, as it were, dual nationality, a foot in both camps.

Plato does not confront this problem directly but there are several passages in which he shows some awareness of it. The first of these is the so-called affinity argument in the *Phaedo*, 78b-84b, which tends to place the soul in the realm of Forms. Forms are unchanging, invisible, in-composite and eternal. Particulars are changing, visible, composite, and transitory. The body is more similar to particulars. But the soul is more similar to the Forms: the soul is in-composite, invisible and unchanging, at least when it is contemplating the Forms and not distracted by visible phenomena. It is therefore likely that the soul is also immortal, in the way that the Forms are, and not transitory, as particulars are. Here then, Plato assimilates the soul to the Forms, tending to disregard its obvious differences from them. Such differences, for example, as that the soul may be distracted and encumbered by its association with the body and thus have to undergo reincarnation, whereas the Forms are never disturbed or defiled by their association with particulars.

One difficulty with the *Phaedo* view is that the soul or person knows about particulars as well as Forms. It therefore straddles the Form-particular divide. A possible solution to this is to suppose that the soul is itself divided into two segments. One of them, perception, is closely associated with the body and has access to particulars. The other is *nous*,

intellect or reason; it knows the Forms, and is very similar to the Forms, if not a Form itself. The two segments of the soul can then be assigned to different realms, perception to particulars and *nous* to Forms. Plato toys with such a view in *Republic* V, 476c5ff., where he compares someone who knows, or rather opines, only particulars to a dreamer, while someone who has knowledge of Forms is awake. This might suggest the idea that the soul consists of two compartments with as little communication between them as there is between our dreams and our waking life. This is unsatisfactory, however. Socrates himself, who does not regard himself as dreaming, does not speak about Forms alone. He speaks about particulars too and about the relationship between Forms and particulars. He does not only perceive particulars, he also thinks about them, both about this or that particular and about particulars in general. For this reason, he probably regards his procedure in the *Republic* as second-best, not fully fledged *noesis*. He indicates this in his account of the line in *Republic* VI. Mathematics is second-best, *dianoia* rather than *noesis*, in part because it uses diagrams derived from the perceptible world. But the line itself is a diagram and so what Socrates is doing shares one of the defects of mathematics. Still, that doesn't matter. Whatever Socrates is doing has to be accounted for by an adequate conception of the soul. The soul has to be a unity, *monoeides* and *axuntheton*, as the *Phaedo* puts it, a single centre of consciousness and not a collection of distinct faculties like men in the Trojan horse, as Socrates says in the *Theaetetus* 184-6. It must be capable of combining not only the perceptions of different senses, but perceptions of, and thoughts about, particulars with thoughts about Forms. So we can discard the suggestion that the soul, or even the intellect, is to be assigned to the realm of Forms and turn to another account of the problem—in the *Sophist*.

The Eleatic Stranger and the friends of the Forms

In this part of the *Sophist* the protagonist of the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger, is considering what he calls the battle between the giants and the gods, materialists and the “friends of the Forms”. The stranger criticises both views. We join him at 248a ff., where, having already criticised the giants he now turns to the gods. He argues as follows: According to the friends of the Forms, true being, *ousia*, is intelligible, immaterial Forms. Bodies, by contrast, are not *ousia*, but becoming, *genesis*. *Ousia* is unchanging, but *genesis* is continually changing. We ourselves consist of a body and a soul. Our body puts us in contact with *genesis* by means

of sense-perception; our soul puts us in contact with *ousia* by means of thought. But now a problem arises. In the course of his criticism of the giants, the stranger has proposed and apparently accepted the following criterion of being: ‘anything has real being, that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once.’¹⁰ It may be that the friends of the Forms would not accept this account, since the power to affect and be affected belongs to becoming: a particular axe can split a particular log, even though, on their view, the log and the axe have becoming rather than being. But they cannot ignore it entirely, because they claim that the soul knows the Forms. So whether or not they accept this account of being, they have to face the following question: When the soul knows the Forms, there are three possibilities 1. The soul affects the Forms. 2. The Forms affect the soul. 3. The soul neither affects the Forms nor is it affected by them. Which of these is the case?¹¹ The Idealists opt for 3., that neither the soul nor the Forms affect the other, since in that case the Forms would be acted on and therefore changed insofar as they were known. Neither the Idealists nor the stranger explicitly consider 2., that the Forms affect the soul but are not affected by it. But they would perhaps say that this would mean that the Forms change—if the Forms did not affect me yesterday, but do affect me today, they must have changed between yesterday and today.¹² In any case the first alternative, that the soul affects the Forms, seems the obvious answer. Knowing is active; it is the philosopher who decides whether and when to think about Forms, not the Forms themselves. So the Stranger opts for this view: that knowing is active and its object is passively affected by it.¹³ This view also seems to imply that the Forms

¹⁰ 247d-e. I adopt Cornford’s translation (CORNFORD 1935, 234).

¹¹ As the stranger indicates, 1. and 2. are compatible with each other: ‘do you agree that knowing or being known is an action, or is it experiencing an effect, or both?’ (248d) (CORNFORD 1935, 240).

¹² Cf. CORNFORD 1935, 240 n.3: ‘They ignore the possibility that knowing is an affection of the soul, acted upon by the object.’ Lesley BROWN (1998) favours, and argues that Plato probably favours, alternative 2., that the Forms affect the soul but are not affected by it. She argues that if the soul affects the Forms, it changes the Forms in Plato’s view, whereas if the Forms affect the soul, the Forms can remain unchanged, while nevertheless satisfying the *dunamis* criterion of being. It is hard to see, however, that this option protects the Forms from *Cambridge* change. But of course Plato might not have noticed this.

¹³ BROWN (1998) denies, however, that the distinction between *poiein* and *paschein*

change, changed in this case by the soul. But this is the answer that the stranger argues for—in the following rather oblique way:

We must accept that life, soul and intellect, are present, *pareinai*, to what fully is, *tōi pantelōs onti*, that it lives and thinks, and is not immobile and devoid of intellect. If it has intellect, then it has life. If it has life, it has a soul. If it has a soul, it changes. Change is necessary, if there is to be any intellection. But rest is also necessary, because without rest or stability nothing could remain in the same state, and the intellect requires its object to remain in the same state. To deny the being of change or of rest is self-refuting and undermines the doctrine of Forms, since it denies the being of soul, intellect and knowledge.

My comments on this argument are as follows:

1. The claim that change, etc. are present to *to pantelōs on* is ambiguous. It might amount to any of three distinct propositions, depending on how we take *pareinai* and *to pantelōs on*:

- (a) Change, etc. belong to or have a place in *to pantelōs on*, where *to pantelōs on* is still restricted to the Forms. That is, change, etc. are involved in the Forms themselves.
- (b) Change, etc. are present to *to pantelōs on*, viz. to the Forms, though not actually involved in them. That is, the Forms themselves remain unchanging, lifeless and soulless, but our souls nevertheless have access to them.
- (c) Change, etc. belong to or have a place in *to pantelōs on*, where *to pantelōs on* is not restricted to the Forms but covers the whole of what fully is, whatever that might be. That is, we must extend the range of *to pantelōs on* to include change, etc.

Which of these is the Stranger supposed to have in mind? Alternative (a) would give an answer to the question how we can know unchanging Forms: they are no more unchanging than we are. But this is not an answer that the Stranger accepts, since he continues to insist the Forms are changeless (249b-c). Alternative (b) affirms that we have knowledge of the unchanging Forms, but does not say how this is possible. Alternative (c) tells us that we must attribute being to change, etc., and not simply becoming, though it too does not say how knowledge of changeless Forms is possible. It does, however, remove on stumbling block in the way of accepting its possibility, namely the implication of the Idealists' original theory, that what is required for such knowledge—intellects, souls, etc.—has only becoming, not being. After all, however stable the

corresponds to the distinction between the active and the passive voice.

Forms might be, they could hardly be known by us if our intellects and their contents did not exist or even if they were in constant flux. The contrast between *einai* and *gignesthai* is quite common in Plato—for example in the *Republic*, *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*, where Timaeus says that *einai* is not to be applied to particulars, but only to true being, the Forms, and is then to be used only in the present tense, not the future or past tense, since true being is eternal, *aionios*, not temporal.¹⁴ By contrast, if something undergoes change and dissolution its grip on existence is precarious. At no time will it have a determinate character, *be* anything definite at all. The stranger's response is to insist that some things that change must be granted to have being, not simply becoming, in particular the things that are required for us to know the Forms, the soul, etc., though he follows this up, in 249dff., by detaching the concept of being from those of rest and change altogether.

Why does the Stranger assume that if the Forms are known by us, they automatically transmit their fully fledged being to the souls, etc. that know them? If knowledge is not fully real, then however real the Forms may be this would be of little benefit to the friends of Forms. For their doctrine is a piece of knowledge, not itself a Form. If knowledge itself is as fleeting and unstable as they claim that particulars are, then knowledge of the Forms would be as unreliable and unsatisfactory as sense perception. If the friends of the Forms deny the reality of knowledge they cut the ground from under their own feet. The Stranger is perhaps also relying on a principle derived from the criterion of being that he provisionally accepted at 247d-e: If something *x* is, and something else *y* affects or is affected by *x*, then *y* too is. So if intellects affect the Forms and the Forms are fully real, then intellects are fully real. This is the contrapositive of Parmenides' argument. Parmenides said that no relations can obtain between Forms and particulars, roughly because particulars have a lower ontological status than Forms. The Stranger says that because relations do obtain between Forms and particulars, particulars must be upgraded to something like the status of Forms.

It may be objected that the Stranger's power-criterion of being is defective. We do attribute power of this sort, albeit fictional power, to fictional entities. Sherlock Holmes affects Dr Watson, but because Dr Watson doesn't exist, affecting him isn't enough to secure a foothold on reality. We might try to remedy this by amending the definition to:

¹⁴ For references to discussions of being and becoming in these and other dialogues, see BOLTON 1975.

‘anything that possesses any sort of power to affect, or be affected by, something that really is, itself really is.’ This won’t do as a definition of being, because it is circular; nor is it serviceable as a criterion of being unless we already know that something exists independently of the application of the criterion. Nevertheless it might be enough to sustain the Stranger’s view that intellects, etc. are real, because what intellects affect, the Forms, are already assumed to be real. There is, however, another difficulty. It is quite natural to say that Sherlock Holmes affects us. He entertains us, surprises us, and so on. We in turn can think about him and admire him. And we certainly exist, but that isn’t enough to confer reality on Sherlock Holmes. Here again the distinction between intentional and non-intentional comes into play. It looks as if only intentional relations can obtain between ourselves and Sherlock Holmes: he can surprise us and we can admire him, but he cannot shoot us and we cannot shoot him. (That these intentional relations can obtain between an existent entity and a non-existent entity implies that Socrates’ suggestion that a Form is a *noema*, a thought, is not so easily refuted as Parmenides thinks it is.) It might be objected that this line of argument rests on a mistake about Plato’s conception of being. He does not have in mind any such contrast between real entities and fictional entities. That is Frege and Russell, not Plato. Plato is contrasting being with becoming. But, as I’ve already said, the Stranger’s criterion of being is obviously ill-suited for distinguishing being from becoming in the way the friends of the Forms mean it. Particulars such as axes affect particulars such as logs more obviously than Forms affect, or are affected, by other things.

Still, however defective the Stranger’s definition of being may be, we can grant him that he has shown that our intellects are real. In knowing the Forms, we affect the Forms and the Forms are real. We surely have more reality than Sherlock Holmes does, and although we undergo change and becoming, we and our knowledge have enough rest or stability for it to count as worthwhile knowledge. So the Stranger has bridged the gulf between Forms and particulars to the extent of showing that at least some things that are not Forms, namely souls, must have the being that was previously monopolised by Forms.

Does Cambridge provide the solution?

2. The Stranger raises the same general problem as Parmenides did, namely ‘Can we know the Forms?’ But the Stranger approaches it in a different way. Parmenides does not mention change or one thing

affecting another. He is concerned with logical correlatives, master/slave, knower/object known, but he does not ask whether one affects or changes the other. What worries him is the pairing of items in distinct categories: master and slavery, or knower and a Form. But this is not raised as a problem by the Eleatic Stranger. When the Stranger speaks of the soul as affecting or changing Forms, what sort of change does he have in mind? In one sense of 'change' something changes if a proposition that is true of it at one time is not true of it at another time. If, say, I do not know the Form of beauty on Sunday, but come to know it on Wednesday, then the Form of beauty has changed, since on Sunday it was not true of the Form that it was known by me, while on Wednesday it is true of the Form that it is known by me. This sort of change is often known as 'Cambridge change', since Cambridge philosophers such as Russell defined change in this way. But obviously not all Cambridge changes are what we regard as real changes. If I kick a person and if I think about a person, in both cases the person changes in a Cambridge way: something is true of him that was not true of him earlier. But while kicking a person produces a real change in him, thinking about him need not.¹⁵ Thus coming to know a Form need not produce a real change in the Form. Every real change is also a Cambridge change, but not every Cambridge change is a real change. I argued earlier that Parmenides should have distinguished between different types of relation, non-intentional relations such as kicking which we cannot have to the Forms, and intentional relations such as knowing which we can have to the Forms. And here we have relations to an object that really change that object in contrast to relations to an object that may not really change it, but only change it in a Cambridge way. However, the two distinctions do not coincide. Not every non-intentional relation to an object really changes that object. If I kick someone, I change him. But if I move nearer to someone, I need not change him; he may stay where he is and so not change at all in the relevant way. He has changed in a Cambridge way, but not in a real way, whereas I have changed in a real way. I can change everything in the world in this Pickwickian sense simply by moving my finger. Conversely, intentional relations need never

¹⁵ A given entity *x* changes in a Cambridge way if some predicate *f* applies to *x* at some time and does not apply to *x* at some other time. To ensure that the change of *x* is a real change we need to add something like: 'A change in *x* is a real change if it is logically possible for *x* to undergo the change independently of its relations to things other than *x*.' Cf. McPHERRAN 1986, 250.

give rise to real changes, only Cambridge changes. If I love someone, know someone, think about someone, I may of course bring about a real change in them, but I need not. If I do really change them, there must be some other factor in play—for example that they become aware of my love, knowledge or thought. Now the question is: Does the Stranger think that knowing a Form changes the Form only in the degenerate Cambridge sense of ‘change’? Or does he think that it produces a real change in the Form? If it is only a Cambridge change that is at issue, then it makes no difference whether we decide that the soul affects the Forms or that the Forms affect the soul. Either way, a Cambridge change occurs both to the Forms and to the soul: the soul knows the Form when it did not know it before, and the Form is known by the soul when it was not known by it before.

Mark McPherran considers the possible solution that knowledge is an exception to Parmenides’ principle that Forms and particulars cannot be related to each other, but only to entities on their own ontological level, and he believes that Plato was abreast of the distinction between real change and mere Cambridge change.¹⁶ He insists, however that we should not, without more ado, exempt knowledge from the principle, given its ‘common sense generality and the many similarities between being a master and being a knower’,¹⁷ or take knowledge to be a ‘*sui generis* relation.’¹⁸ The reason why knowledge is an exception, he argues, is this. The conceptual correlate of the Form of knowledge is the Form of the known. Other Forms, such as the Form of beauty, participate in the Form of the known, so that they have the ‘immanent character’ of being known. But a Form is imperfect and variable in respect of this immanent character: it may known at one time, but not at another, and by one person but not by another.¹⁹ But this does not impair the intrinsic perfection and unchangeability of the Forms.

There are several objections to McPherran’s ingenious and complex account: (a) Parmenides does not mention the Form of the known. If he postulates any single correlate of knowledge, it is truth (*Parm.* 134A3-4). (b) Parmenides’ argument, and that of the Stranger, would not imply that knowledge is *sui generis*, a unique exception to the principle of on-

¹⁶ MCPHERRAN 1986, 246, 250, citing Simmias’ becoming taller than Socrates, in *Phaedo* 102b-d, and the account of space and its occupants in *Timaeus* 50b-c.

¹⁷ MCPHERRAN 1986, 237 n.14.

¹⁸ MCPHERRAN 1986, 247f., n.35, 251.

¹⁹ MCPHERRAN 1986, 248.

tological separation. There are many other relations that can, on the face of it, obtain between Forms and ourselves: we can think about Forms, remember them, (dis)believe in them, forget them, ignore them, misunderstand them, and so on. A Form will thus have many other transient immanent characters, and participate in many other higher-order Forms, if McPherran is right. (c) The participation of a Form in the Form of the known, and thereby acquiring the immanent character of being known, need not imply that it is known by one of us. It could be known by the Form of knowledge, as Parmenides says. (d) There are many other immanent characters that we have but Forms do not. A Form cannot be enslaved, for example. How are we to explain the difference between those immanent characters that a Form can have and those that it cannot? That looks no easier than explaining what makes knowing different from enslaving. McPherran explains it informally and commonsensically: ‘The fact that...I may still not master Slavery itself (etc.) derives from more fundamental principles concerning the nature of Forms and particulars: Forms are not the kind of thing that can clean my office or that can be purchased, and a person is not the kind of thing that could order them about. So despite its similarity to mastery-slavery, there is nothing about knowledge-known and the nature of Forms...and particulars which would forbid a Form from coming to possess known-in-it (so that it would be known by someone).’²⁰ There is little significant difference between discussing the peculiarities of knowledge and discussing the peculiarities of being known. In either case we need to distinguish what can be said about Forms from what cannot. And in either case the change effected in the Forms is no more than Cambridge change.

Which way round does the change go? Does the knower change the Form or does the Form change the knower? Cambridge change is parasitic on real change; if something undergoes a Cambridge change, then something else undergoes a real change.²¹ In the case of sense-perception, the real change takes place in the perceiver. The object affects, does something to, the perceiver by transmitting light-rays or, as Plato would have said, material particles into the perceiver’s body.²² The object itself

²⁰ MCPHERRAN 1986, 247 n.37.

²¹ Cf. MCPHERRAN 1986, 250. But McPherran restricts this claim to ‘relational’ Cambridge change, perhaps to allow for doubtful cases, such as the logically possible case of something’s becoming older without changing in any other respect.

²² Cf. *Meno*, 76c-d; *Theaet.* 153Dff.

is not necessarily affected or changed by the perceiver: it emits light rays or particles whether it is perceived or not. It need undergo only a Cambridge change, from not being perceived by *x* to being perceived by *x*. Nevertheless, we typically apply active verb-forms to the perceiver, and passive forms to the object perceived, whether the verb implies intentional activity, especially focusing or attention, on the perceiver's part ('look (at)', 'listen (to)', 'sniff (at)') or not ('see', 'hear', 'smell').²³ When I see e.g. a rock, the rock is seen by me. I therefore do something to the rock, but nevertheless, it is the rock that is causally dominant, affecting me, rather than my affecting it. I do something to the rock only in the Cambridge sense of 'doing something to'. Moreover, the rock does not undergo any relevant real change in the course of its causal effect on me; it reflects light waves regardless of whether I see it or not. How is it when I know something or think about it, a Form perhaps or simply circularity or the number 2? As in the case of sense-perception we are more inclined to apply active verbs to the knower or thinker and passive verbs to the object known or thought about. Again, I do something to the object, if I think about it or get to know it, but I do so only in the Cambridge sense. In the ordinary sense, if I think about the number 2, I do something, but I do not do anything *to* the number 2. In this case, however, we cannot reasonably assign any causal efficacy to the object of my thought or knowledge as we did to the object of sense-perception. Forms and numbers do not emit any rays or particles. They may 'grip' me or arouse my interest, but, like Sherlock Holmes, they exert no causal influence on me, not at least without the mediation of words written or uttered by human beings. When I see or hear something that I did not see or hear earlier, it may be because the object of perception has moved closer to me or because I have moved closer to it. But I cannot move closer to the number 2 nor it to me. All I can do is open my mind to it, analogously to the way in which I open my eyes to a visible object, and this is an event in which the object of thought plays no causal role. Therefore, when someone thinks about or gets to know a Form or the number 2, it is more plausible to assign the active part to the thinker or knower than to the Form or the number. The thinker or knower does something, though not something *to* the Form or number except in the Cambridge sense. This implies that whereas the thinker's *poiēma* is real, the object's *pathēma* is merely Cantabrigian. The thinker really acts, but the object does not really suffer.

²³ See note 13 above.

This may be the truth of the matter, but is it what Plato believed? There are two hints in the text that Plato envisaged something like Cambridge change. The first is that on the two occasions when the Stranger formulates the power-criterion of being, he stresses that what is sufficient (and, implicitly, necessary) for something to be, is its power to affect or be affected ‘in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent’ (*kai smikrotaton, hupo tou phaulotatou* 247e) or ‘in relation to however insignificant a thing’ (*kai pros to smikrotaton* 248c).²⁴ The second is the Stranger’s careful qualification of the change at 248e: when reality is known, it is changed by knowledge, ‘in so far as it is known’ (*kath’ hoson gignōsketai, kata tosouton kineisthai*). If it is changed *only* in so far as it is known, then it is Cambridge-changed. And what could be smaller than a Cambridge change? It is therefore plausible that Plato held that such a change, while sufficient to assure the Forms of a place among beings, leaves unimpaired their capacity to serve as stable objects of knowledge.

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²⁴ Both translations are from CORNFORD 1935, 234, 240. But H.N. Fowler’s Loeb translation of 248c, ‘in even the slightest degree’ (FOWLER 1921, 381) is perhaps preferable, since in 247e *smikrotaton* concerns the insignificance of the affection rather than that of the agent.

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“ὄση ἡ ἀπορία” (Πλάτ. *Παρμ.* 133a): Μπορούμε
να οδηγηθούμε στη γνώση των Ιδεών;

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Περίληψη

ΣΤΟΝ *Παρμενίδη* του Πλάτωνα ο Παρμενίδης υποστηρίζει πως δεν μπορούμε να γνωρίσουμε τις Ιδέες. Οι Ιδέες βρίσκονται σε σχέση εννοιολογικά μόνο με άλλες Ιδέες, οι οποίες βρίσκονται οντολογικά στο ίδιο επίπεδο με τον εαυτό τους και δεν έχουν σχέση με επιμέρους ανθρώπους ή γνώσεις. Ο Σωκράτης αφήνει αναπάντητο αυτό το επιχείρημα, αν και ο Πλάτωνας παρέχει γλωσσικές ενδείξεις οι οποίες θέτουν εν αμφιβόλω τόσο το αδιαπέραστο του ορίου μεταξύ ιδεών και καθεκάστων, όσο και τον παραλληλισμό του Παρμενίδη μεταξύ σχέσεων ανάμεσα σε Ιδέες και σχέσεων ανάμεσα σε καθέκαστα. Η λύση στο πρόβλημα θα ήταν να διακρίνουμε μη-σκόπιμες σχέσεις (οι οποίες δεν μπορούν να καλύψουν το οντολογικό χάσμα μεταξύ Ιδεών και καθεκάστων) και σκόπιμες σχέσεις (οι οποίες μπορούν). Οι σκόπιμες σχέσεις είναι περίπτωση αμφίσημη με θετικά κι αρνητικά, ικανοποιώντας πολλαπλά κριτήρια για τη συμπερίληψή τους, αλλά υπ’ αυτήν την έννοια η γνώση χαρακτηρίζεται ως σκόπιμη. Στον *Σοφιστή* (248a-249d) ο Ελεάτης Ξένος θέτει επίσης υπό αμφισβήτηση τη δυνατότητα γνώσης των Ιδεών κυρίως λόγω της απαίτησης να μην υποστούν καμία αλλαγή οι Ιδέες με το να γίνουν γνωστές, εμμέσως όμως και λόγω του χαμηλού επιπέδου πραγματικότητας (*γένεσις* & όχι *ουσία*) των επιμέρους ατόμων (που μπορούν να γίνουν γνώστες) και των γνώσεών τους.

Η λύση σε αυτό το πρόβλημα θα συμπεριελάμβανε μία σειρά από θεωρήσεις, όπως την αδυναμία περιορισμού της ψυχής στη μία μόνο πλευρά του διαχωριστικού ανάμεσα σε Ιδέες και καθέκαστα, τη διάκριση μεταξύ σκόπιμων και μη-σκόπιμων σχέσεων, καθώς και τη διάκριση ανάμεσα σε πραγματική αλλαγή και απλή αλλαγή τύπου Cambridge.

Σε ποιο βαθμό ο Πλάτωνας είχε επίγνωση όλων αυτών είναι κάτι για το οποίο μόνον υποθέσεις μπορούμε να κάνουμε.

