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# *Identity and Predication in Plato*

BENSON MATES

Among the Platonic statements that have most agitated his commentators, from Aristotle's time down to the present, are those in which he seems to be saying (and with great confidence, too, as though there were no question about it) that beauty itself is beautiful, justice itself is just, largeness is large, piety is pious, and the like. On the one hand, these statements are considered by many to involve some sort of category-mistake or serious ambiguity: beauty itself, they say, is not the sort of thing that can be beautiful, at least not in the same sense in which people, statues, paintings, or pieces of music are beautiful. And likewise with justice itself, largeness itself, and the other Ideas. On the other hand, though, there is the awkward fact that these so-called "self-predications" cannot be lightly dismissed as mere *lapsus linguae* on the part of our author, for they seem essentially related to his doctrine that each Idea is a paradigm or perfect exemplar for the particulars that fall under it; beauty itself is said not only to be beautiful, but to be the most beautiful thing of all.

In recent times this situation has been analyzed on the basis of the assumption that the verb "to be" has at least two senses, viz., the *predicative* sense, as in "Socrates is human", and the *identity* sense, as in "Socrates is the husband of Xanthippe". Plato's critics castigate him for being unaware of the distinction, while his defenders believe that he was perfectly well aware of it and that the allegedly self-predicative statements are to be understood as assertions of identity. In this paper I wish to investigate the possibility that the assumption is false, and that consequently neither the attacks nor the defenses that are based upon it are well-founded.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. *The Third Man Argument*

A convenient point of entry to the matter is the notorious Third Man argument, which, though it has been discussed in the literature over and over again, still has a few things to teach us. One version of this argument occurs at Parmenides 132A1-B2, and it is upon this that I wish to focus attention.<sup>2</sup> Parmenides addresses young Socrates:

"This, I suppose, is why you consider that each form is one: whenever a number of things seem to you to be large, some one idea no doubt seems to you, as you view them, to be the same in all of them; whence you think that the large (τὸ μέγα) is one".

“What you say is true”, he replied.

“But what about the large itself and the other large things; if in the same way you mentally view all of them, will not some one large (ἐν τι μέγα) again appear, by which (ᾧ) all these appear large?”

“Evidently”.

“Therefore another form of largeness (μεγέθους) will show up besides that largeness that was already there and the things participating in it; and on top of these yet another one, by which (ᾧ) all these will be large. And no longer will each of the forms be one for you, but infinite in number”.

Now the first thing to observe here is that the point of Parmenides’ argument is not, as has often been erroneously said, that certain assumptions lead to an ‘infinite regress’ (for there is nothing *per se* wrong with an infinite regress, anyway), but simply that Socrates’ admissions are inconsistent with the principle:

(1) Each of the forms is one.

(Let us postpone for a moment the question of what this principle means).

Indeed, Parmenides attacks (1) throughout this portion of the dialogue. Thus in the section immediately following the quoted passage Socrates seeks to escape the net by raising the possibility that each of the forms may be a thought, existing only in a mind, and in this way “each would be *one* and would no longer be subject to the consequences just now mentioned” (emphasis supplied by Plato with the particle γέ).<sup>3</sup> And in the section immediately preceding our passage it is likewise clear that denials of statements like (1) are what Parmenides is endeavoring to prove and Socrates cannot accept:

“Do you think that the whole form, being one, is in each of the many, or what?”

“Why not, Parmenides?” said Socrates.

“Well, being one and the same it will be separate from itself”.

“Not if,” he said, “just as day, which is one and the same, is simultaneously in many places and is nevertheless not separate from itself, so each of the forms were one and the same in all at once.”

“You are quite ready, O Socrates,” he replied, “to make what is one and the same to be in many places at once, as if spreading a sail over a number of people you should say that one thing as a whole was over many. Is not that the sort of thing you intend?”

“Perhaps”, he said.

“But would the whole sail be over each person, or only a part over one, another part over another?”

“Only a part.”

“Then the forms themselves would consist of parts, O Socrates, and the things participating in them would participate in parts, and in each of them there would no longer be the whole but only a part of each form.”

“So it seems.”

“Are you willing, then, Socrates, to say that our one form really has parts and still is one?”

“Not at all”, he said.

Thus the question at issue throughout is, in Platonic language, whether each idea is one. This point is important, because the Greek sentence I have translated as (1) could perhaps also be rendered as

(2) There is one form in each case,

which is how it was formerly taken by Professor Vlastos, following Cornford.<sup>4</sup> But in context surrounding the passage under discussion there are several occurrences of the same Greek phraseology that cannot be taken in the manner of (2).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, if we are to preserve the form and coherence of Plato’s argumentation it seems that we must prefer (1) to (2). Maybe it can be shown that sometimes (1) means the same as (2); if so, so much the better. But to vacillate between the two in translation, as Cornford does, is to obscure the structure of the argument.

As I interpret the passage, then, Parmenides takes Socrates to be holding (1), and he purports to prove (on the basis of other premises to which Socrates agrees) the negation of this. His argument proceeds by considering a particular instance, the form of largeness, i.e., the large, and by deducing (in effect) the negation of

(3) The large is one.

And, of course, the negation of (3) immediately implies the negation of (1), which is what is explicitly stated.

What do statements like (1) and (3), and, in general, statements of the form “*A* is one”, mean for Plato? In my opinion this is a very difficult question, which has never been satisfactorily answered and can be approached only through a careful study in which one would notice, among other things, what conclusions Plato is willing to draw from such statements and what other statements he regards as implying them. I presume, with most others who have considered the passage we are studying, that when Plato says that each form is one, he does not intend merely to express the apparent triviality that each form is one form. In particular, I presume that (3) does not mean that the form of largeness is one form. On the other hand, the best I have to offer toward an account of what these statements *do* mean is the claim that *part* of the meaning of, e.g. (3), is this:

(4) It is not the case that there are two different forms *F* and *F'*, such that something is large by virtue of *F* and something is large by virtue of *F'*.<sup>6</sup>

By refuting (4) Parmenides considers himself to have refuted (3) and hence also to have refuted (1), which is the fundamental principle under attack.

Thus, as the argument appears to me, the little pronoun  $\text{\textcircled{B}}$  ('by virtue of which') is of crucial importance; for while it would be trivially true that *any* form by which large things were large would be one form, the Platonic view at issue, which expressed by (3), implies that there is only one such form.

Why not accept (2) as a statement of the thesis Parmenides purports to refute? We would then need to explain the sense of "in each case". I cannot go along with those who find in Plato a distinction between the forms, on one hand, and so-called "characters" or "properties", on the other, and who then explicate (2) as "there is exactly one form corresponding to each character".<sup>7</sup> For insofar as I understand these various terms, the forms *are* characters or properties; that is what Plato's idealism is all about; he believes that the properties of things have an existence apart from the things of which they are properties. There are indeed certain places in which Plato appears to be distinguishing between e.g. largeness itself ( $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\ \tau\acute{o}\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ) and "the largeness in us" ( $\tau\acute{o}\ \epsilon\upsilon\ \eta\mu\acute{\iota}\nu\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ),<sup>8</sup> but these passages, properly read, do not require us to add anything to the basic Platonic ontology of particulars and the forms in which they participate and by which they are what they are.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, the argument of Parmenides may be paraphrased as follows:

This, Socrates, is the sort of consideration that makes you think each form is one. You think that whenever a number of things are large, there is a form (to be called "the large" or "largeness") that is the same in all of them and by which they are all large; whence you think that this form, "the large", is one. But now this form itself is also large. So there will be another form that is the same in this form and the other large things, and by which *they* are all large. Hence there will be more than one form by which large things are large, and therefore the large will not be one after all.

## 2. Soundness

Is the argument, as thus stated, sound?<sup>10</sup> Some scholars have held that there *must* be a gap in it, from Plato's point of view at least, or else he would have given up his Theory of Ideas then and there.<sup>11</sup> However that may be, it is clear that there is indeed a fairly conspicuous gap, which cannot be filled by the addition, as a "suppressed premise", of any thesis for which Plato argues elsewhere. This gap is at the point where it is concluded that "then there is *another* form by which all these are large"; there is no apparent reason why the first form cannot be one of the things that are large by virtue of it, i.e., cannot be large by virtue of itself. Of course, everything here depends on the sense of "by virtue of", or, more precisely, on that of the datives we thus translate. If, to mention but one possibility, 'x

is  $\phi$  by virtue of  $\alpha$ ' is analyzed along the lines of ' $x$  is  $\phi$  and if there were no such thing as  $\alpha$  it would be impossible for  $x$  to be  $\phi$ ', Platonic doctrine would justify not only such assertions as "The Mona Lisa is beautiful by virtue of beauty itself" but also "Beauty itself is beautiful by virtue of beauty itself".<sup>12</sup>

The jump from "there is *again* a form by which . . ." to "there is *another* form by which . . ." is, in my opinion, the *only* gap in Parmenides' argument. All other aspects of it are consonant with Plato's views and should pass inspection by logicians.<sup>13</sup>

Now many influential commentators, from ancient times down to the present, have in effect located the difficulty at a different place, namely, at the point where it is assumed that largeness is large. Aristotle says that the proof that there is a "third man" distinct from Man and from individual men rests on the fallacious assumption that "Man", like the proper name "Callias", denotes an individual substance, whereas in fact every such general term denotes either a quality, or a relation, or a quantity, or something of that kind.<sup>14</sup> Applied to the argument as given in our passage, this evidently amounts to the claim that largeness is not the sort of thing (i.e., an individual substance) that can be large.

In modern times Russell has made essentially the same point, using much more drastic language:

In the first place, Plato has no understanding of philosophical syntax. I can say "Socrates is human," "Plato is human," and so on. In all these statements, it may be assumed that the word "human" has exactly the same meaning. But whatever it means, it means something which is not of the same kind as Socrates, Plato, and the rest of the individuals who compose the human race. "Human" is an adjective: it would be nonsense to say "human is human". Plato makes a mistake analogous to saying "human is human". He thinks that beauty is beautiful . . . He fails altogether to realize how great is the gap between universals and particulars . . . He himself, at a later date, began to see this difficulty, as appears in the *Parmenides*, which contains one of the most remarkable cases in history of self-criticism by a philosopher.<sup>15</sup>

And not only Plato's critics but also the more sympathetic commentators have problems with his assertions that largeness is large, beauty is beautiful, etc. Professor Cherniss argues that these are to be understood as assertions of identity and not of attribution. He says: "Plato clearly distinguishes two meanings of 'is  $x$ ', namely (1) 'has the character  $x$ ' and (2) 'is identical with  $x$ ', and states that  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\ \tau\acute{o}\ x$  and only  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\ \tau\acute{o}\ x$  'is  $x$ ' in the second sense." Thus, assertions like "Justice is just" or "Beauty is beautiful" mean, as Cherniss puts it, "that 'Justice' and 'just' or 'Beauty' and 'beautiful' are *identical*". In general, he believes, "the idea of  $x$  is  $x$ '

means ‘the idea of  $x$  and  $x$  are identical and therefore the idea of  $x$  does not “have the character  $x$ ”’.<sup>16</sup> Although Cherniss does not say so explicitly, this analysis would presumably lead to the conclusion that the Third Man argument, as formulated in our passage, is deficient in assuming that “is large” can be predicated of largeness itself in the same sense in which it can be predicated of any particular large thing.

Professor Vlastos joins Cherniss in thinking that “is” has two senses — the so-called attributive and identity senses mentioned above — and he agrees that Plato was aware of the difference between the two. But he finds that Platonic sentences of the form ‘ $A$  is  $B$ ’, where  $A$  is the name of a form and  $B$  is an adjective, are ambiguous in still another way, which was not evident to Plato.<sup>17</sup> In such cases, he says ‘ $A$  is  $B$ ’ can be read either as meaning that the universal denoted by the subject term has the attribute denoted by the predicate, or as meaning that whatever is an *instance* of the subject universal will *eo ipso* have the attribute denoted by the predicate. E.g., “Justice is pious” could mean that the universal, Justice, has the attribute of piety, or it could mean that whatever is just is *eo ipso* pious. Interpreted in the first of these ways, it is what Vlastos calls an “ordinary predication”; in the second, it is a case of “Pauline predication” (after St. Paul’s “Charity suffereth long and is kind”). In terms of this distinction, one could say that if “Largeness is large”, in the Third Man argument, is taken as a Pauline predication it is plausible but renders the argument unsound (because largeness will not be predicated in the same sense of both itself and the other large things), whereas if it is taken as an ordinary predication it becomes false or even “sheer nonsense”.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. *The Senses of “Is”*

All of these noted commentators, with any one of whom it is risky to differ, seem to me to base their analyses on two inter-related but highly doubtful assumptions:

- (a) That there are, in English or in Greek, at least two distinct senses of “is” (ἔστι), viz., the “is” of identity and that of predication; and
- (b) That if sentences like “Beauty is beautiful” are to be meaningful, let alone true, the word “is”, as it occurs in them, cannot have the same sense it has when it occurs in sentences like “The Mona Lisa is beautiful”.<sup>19</sup>

Of course Plato nowhere explicitly asserts any such principles as (a) or (b). Consequently, some of his critics have felt that he has indeed “no under-

standing of philosophical syntax” and that “he fails to realize how great is the gap between universals and particulars”; while his defenders strive to protect him by showing that he is after all aware of the point of (a) and that he does not mean that beauty is beautiful in the same sense of “is” in which a particular painting is beautiful. But critics and defenders alike seem to agree that to fly in the face of (a) and (b) is to risk making dreadful mistakes.

So let us first consider (a). Needless to say, the doctrine that there are several senses of “is”, including an identity sense and a predicative sense, was not invented by Professors Cherniss and Vlastos; it has a long history and by now is received in many quarters as philosophical gospel.<sup>20</sup> As evidence for the distinction, one is likely to be given examples like “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” and “Scott is human”, and one is assured that the first of these means that Scott is identical with the author of *Waverley* (and not that he has the author of *Waverley* as an attribute — since presumably the author of *Waverley* is a human being, not an attribute), while the second means that Scott has the attribute Humanity, with which he is obviously not identical.

Do such considerations as these, together with corresponding ones for Greek, suffice to show that “is” and ἐστὶ are not used in the same sense in both kinds of case? They do not. The following analogy will help establish this point. Suppose that I have a number of straight sticks, which I am comparing directly with one another as to length. I report my observations by using the phrase “is no longer than”, making statements that have either the basic form ‘*A* is no longer than *B*’ or are obtained from elements of this form by (possibly repeated) application of negation, conjunction, and quantification. Further, I employ ‘*A* is the same length as *B*’ or ‘*A* matches *B*’ as short for ‘*A* is no longer than *B* and *B* is no longer than *A*’; and ‘*A* is shorter than *B*’ abbreviates the statement ‘*A* is no longer than *B*, and it is not the case that *B* is no longer than *A*’.

Now it is clear that whenever ‘*A* is no longer than *B*’ is true of a couple of sticks, either ‘*A* matches *B*’ or ‘*A* is shorter than *B*’, but not both, will be true of those sticks; and whenever either of the latter is true, the former will be true. But obviously this does not suffice to show that “is no longer than” is here ambiguous, having sometimes the sense of “matches” and sometimes that of “is shorter than”. When I say ‘*A* is no longer than *B*’ of a couple of sticks that happen to be equal, I am using the phrase “is no longer than” in *exactly* the same sense as when I apply it to a couple of which the first is shorter than the second. Note further that to say ‘*A* matches *B*’ amounts to saying ‘*A* is no longer than *B*’ and *something more*; and likewise for ‘*A* is



shorter than *B*'. If this 'something more' were obvious from the context, I could communicate the fact that two sticks match by simply stating the first component of the conjunction. Thus, if the context makes '*B* is no longer than *A*' obviously true, I can, as a practical matter, employ simply '*A* is no longer than *B*' to convey the information that the two sticks match. But, again, this would not show that "no longer than" sometimes means "matches" and the rest of the time means "is shorter than".

To spell out the intended analogy between "is no longer than" and "is" is probably unnecessary, but I hope that the reader will forgive my doing it anyway. The point is that perhaps the "is" of identity and the predicative "is", so-called, can both be defined in terms of a more primitive "is", in a manner similar to that in which "matches" and "shorter than" were defined above in terms of "no longer than". In fact Leibniz<sup>21</sup> and, if I am not mistaken, certain Polish philosophers beginning with Leśniewski,<sup>22</sup> have done just that. Leibniz defines '*A* is the same as *B*' as '*A* is *B* and *B* is *A*', and '*A* is (a) *B*' as '*A* is *B* but *B* is not *A*'. Analogously to the situation with the sticks, we have the result that whenever '*A* is *B*' is true either '*A* is the same as *B*' or '*A* is (a) *B*', but not both, will be true, and each of the latter implies the former. Thus, the fact that in "Scott is the author of *Waverley*" we can replace "is" by "is the same as" and get a true sentence, while if we replace "is" by "has as a property" we get a sentence that is false or nonsensical, in no way shows that in this sentence "is" means "is the same as". We can also carry over the point about what happens when the truth of one of the conjuncts is part of the background information or is in some other way too plain to need stating.

Leibniz was defining "same" in terms of "is" for a sort of regimented Latin, where (because of the lack of a definite article and because of certain features of the regimentation) the indicated types of transformation work better than they do in English. I do not wish to claim that in Plato's Greek *ἔστι* behaves in relation to *ταὐτόν* in exactly the way Leibniz suggests for *est* and *idem*. Nevertheless the relation may well be similar enough to justify suspicion that the sort of evidence usually adduced in support of the multiple sense hypothesis for *ἔστι* does not at all rule out the possibility that that verb may be used in a single sense everywhere. We shall return to this matter in connection with (i)-(vii) below.

In determining whether a word or other expression has more than one sense, the unwary may be tempted to make still other fallacious inferences. In modern introductions to logic, for example, one often finds it said that there are two senses of the connective "or"; the "exclusive" and the "inclusive" senses. Sometimes, we are told, "or" is used in a sense that ex-

cludes the possibility that both disjuncts are true, while in other occurrences it has a sense that allows such a possibility. (Then one is usually informed that for reasons of simplicity, etc., logicians have decided to use the word, or a corresponding symbol, in the inclusive sense only: a disjunction counts as true if and only if at least one of the disjuncts is true.)

Now it turns out that finding indisputable cases of the exclusive sense of “or” in the natural language is not quite so easy as might be thought. If I tell you that I shall either go to the concert or stay home and read a good book, it is clear enough that I am not allowing the possibility that I might both go to the concert and stay at home; but it is also clear that we do not need to postulate an exclusive sense of “or” to account for the exclusion, for the content of the disjuncts suffices to eliminate the possibility that both might be true. (Note that even after the logician has given his “inclusive” sense to the symbol “ $\vee$ ”, he uses it, without change of sense, in disjunctions like “ $P \vee \neg P$ ”, where it is impossible that both disjuncts be true). So, in order to have critical cases before us we must look for disjunctions which are such that (a) the whole disjunction will be considered false if both disjuncts are true, and (b) it is at least possible that both disjuncts be true. But even in these cases we must beware of such contribution as the context or background information may make to the inferences the hearer will draw from the disjunction. For example, if my daughter has been expressing a wish to go to the concert and also to buy a recording of the symphony that will be performed there, and I have responded that it’s certain we cannot afford both of these, and even doubtful whether we can afford either, then, when I finally say, “All right, you may go to the concert *or* buy the record”, it will be obvious to her that the possibility of both is excluded. But again the responsibility for the exclusion need not be pinned on the “or”; rather, it seems more properly attributable to the background information. In short, the fact that a given disjunction is taken in such a way as to exclude the possibility of both disjuncts being true may often (and perhaps always) be accounted for without supposing that the word “or” is being used in an exclusive sense.

Analogously, it may be the case that whenever a certain type of substantive, such as e.g. a proper name, occupies the predicate position in a Leibnizian sentence ‘ $A$  is  $B$ ’, then ‘ $B$  is  $A$ ’ follows from ‘ $A$  is  $B$ ’. On this basis, if ‘ $A$  is Socrates’ is true, then ‘Socrates is  $A$ ’ is also true; hence ‘ $A$  is Socrates’ will be true if and only if ‘ $A$  is identical with Socrates’ is true; and *still* there will be no ground in this for saying that “is” is used in one sense in, e.g., “the teacher of Plato is Socrates” and in another in “the teacher of Plato is wise”.

Now, if the kinds of evidence indicated above are not sufficient to show

that Plato sometimes uses “is” in the sense of “is identical with” and sometimes uses it in a “predicative” sense, what sort of evidence *would* justify that conclusion? The following might seem to be what we need. On the one hand, we note that Plato holds principle (1) mentioned at the outset, together with its consequence, (3). On the other hand, at *Parmenides* 158A5-6 we find

(5) It is impossible for anything but the one itself to be one.<sup>23</sup>

In the context of Plato’s philosophy, (3) and (5) look incompatible. Thus, if he seriously means to assert both, and if the large itself and the one itself are not identical for him, and if he is in full possession of his logical powers when he writes each of these two sentences and has not changed his mind between times, it would seem justifiable to conclude that one or more components common to the two are ambiguous. From here it is but a short step to the conclusion that “is one” is ambiguous, and from there to the further conclusion that “is”, or “one”, or both are the culprits.

But this whole argument collapses because it is not clear that Plato seriously meant to assert (5). After all, (5) occurs in a dialogue, in the mouth of a character representing a philosopher with whom Plato does not agree on the very matters under discussion.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, this philosopher, above all others in the history of philosophy, is notorious for playing fast and loose with “is”. If anyone is to be charged with taking “to be” in (5) as synonymous with “to be identical with”, it had better be Parmenides, and not Plato. Consequently, although we have here the right *kind* of evidence, in this particular case the proof fails because it is not certain that the inconsistent statements are really asserted by a single author.

Summing up, then, I find no conclusive evidence that there are any such senses of “is” as the so-called “is” of identity, the “is” of predication, or the “is” of Pauline predication; *a fortiori* I see no reason to suppose that Plato, knowingly or unknowingly, used the word equivocally in these various purported senses.

#### 4. “Beauty is beautiful”, and the like

Let us next consider assumption (b), that there is something wrong with Platonic sentences like “Beauty is beautiful”. Why are so many philosophers and other scholars ready to tell us that such sentences, if taken literally, are “sheer nonsense”? It seems that the principal reason – and this is surely paradoxical – is that the Platonic metaphysics has been swallowed, hook, line, and sinker, and has then been interpreted in such a way as to rule out part of itself. That is, one first agrees that beauty (or, let us say,

Beauty) is an abstract entity, eternal, changeless, existing or subsisting in a world apart, while particular beautiful things all belong to the world of sights and sounds, and, indeed, are beautiful precisely because of how they look, sound, or in other ways affect the senses. Then one infers that things so utterly different as these, belonging even to different categories (whatever *that* means), cannot have attributes in common; e.g., that neither “is beautiful”, “is good”, nor any other predicate can be true of the abstract entity Beauty if taken in the same sense in which it is true of particular concrete objects.

These notions are occasionally reinforced by the mistaken idea that unless we subscribe to some sort of theory of types, which would declare it nonsensical to attribute a property to itself, we shall inevitably fall into Russell’s Antinomy and related contradictions. But, as is well known, type theory is not the only device, nor even the preferred one, for avoiding the fundamental antinomies; so that if Plato wishes to make statements like “Beauty is beautiful” he is thus far in no particular danger from the side of logic.

Plato formulates his puzzling reflexive assertions in various ways. The most common of these is of special interest. Instead of using a standard abstract noun in the subject position, he employs the adjective with the article, thus producing what appear to be literal counterparts of the English sentences “the large is large”, “the beautiful is beautiful”, “the just is just”, “the holy is holy”, etc. What do these statements mean?

We are told by the grammarians that such an expression as τὸ καλόν (“the beautiful”) is ambiguous in Greek; *inter alia* it can refer to the abstract entity, Beauty, or to a typically beautiful object, or to the beautiful object that is under discussion in the given context.<sup>25</sup> According to this, “the beautiful is beautiful” is dreadfully ambiguous, meaning perhaps “beauty is beautiful”, or “whatever is beautiful is (perhaps *eo ipso*) beautiful”, or “the beautiful object (we’ve been talking about) is beautiful”.

But the advice from our grammarians is less than satisfactory, for it is formulated in such a way as to presuppose the Platonic distinction between abstract entities and particulars, whereas, presumably, we should not have to accept Plato’s metaphysics in order to understand the workings of the Greek language. One is also left with the uneasy feeling that the only evidence these experts have for the ambiguity of the Greek expressions is the lack, in each case, of a single corresponding English or German expression by which the Greek term may be translated at all of its occurrences. But does this show that there is something wrong with the *Greek*?

It is striking that in the dialogues no interlocutor ever hesitates a moment before agreeing to τὸ καλὸν καλὸν ἐστὶ (“the beautiful is beautiful”), τὸ δίκαιον δίκαιόν ἐστὶ (“the just is just”), and the like; nobody ever says “Wait a minute; that doesn’t make sense” or even “I don’t quite follow you, Socrates”. The reason, I think, is that for any Greek such a sentence would be a logical truth, in the Quinean sense that (a) it is true, and (b) every result of substituting another adjective for its only non-logical constant is equally true. In short, such a sentence would be felt as obviously and trivially true.<sup>26</sup> The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for statements like ὃ ἐστὶ κλίνη κλίνη ἐστὶ (“what (a) bed is, is (a) bed”); they too satisfy the Quinean criterion for logical truth. Thus, the various reflexive assertions, when formulated in these fundamental ways, seem not only true but even trivially true.

But Plato goes much further. In the relevant contexts he clearly uses regular Greek abstract terms interchangeably with the corresponding adjective-plus-article expressions just described. His readiness to do this, I believe, is based on a logical or linguistic error of monumental import for the subsequent history of philosophy. The sentences τὸ καλὸν καλὸν ἐστὶ (“the beautiful is beautiful”) and ὁ Παρθενῶν καλὸς ἐστὶ (“the Parthenon is beautiful”) are apparently of similar structure, and, as the latter informs us that the object denoted by ὁ Παρθενῶν is beautiful, it is tempting to interpret the former similarly, i.e., to take τὸ καλὸν as the name of something now asserted to be beautiful. But clearly this is a mistake, analogous to the well-known error of treating words like “nothing” and “something” as though they were names.<sup>27</sup> For what we have here is in effect a device for universal quantification; the article τὸ operates on the entire sentence and not just on the adjective immediately following. This becomes even more obvious when Plato strengthens the assertion to αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν καλὸν ἐστὶ (“the beautiful itself is beautiful” or “the beautiful as such is beautiful”), which is plausible (and trivial) if understood as “whatever is beautiful is *eo ipso* beautiful” but which is now taken as though it predicated beauty of something named αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν. In the plausible interpretation the word αὐτό is treated properly as a modal operator governing the entire following sentence; read the other way it appears to function only to specify further what is purportedly denoted by τὸ καλὸν.

Once it is assumed that expressions like τὸ καλὸν (“the beautiful”) or αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν (“the beautiful as such”) name something, it is natural to identify that something with beauty, i.e., to use these expressions interchangeably with τὸ κάλλος (“beauty”). This is exactly what Plato does. In discussions where τὸ καλὸν (“the beautiful”) is used to express

generality he is willing to substitute τὸ κάλλος (“beauty”) for it; similarly for τὸ δίκαιον (“the just”) and ἡ δικαιοσύνη (“justice”), τὸ ὅσιον (“the pious”) and ἡ ὁσιότης (“piety”), and so on. This by itself would cause little difficulty, for if, e.g., the abstract term ἡ δικαιοσύνη (“justice”) were merely in effect an abbreviation of τὸ δίκαιον (“the just”), we could read a puzzler like ἡ δικαιοσύνη ὅσια ἐστί (“justice is pious”) as merely an alternative way of saying τὸ δίκαιον ὀσιόν ἐστι (“the just is pious”).

But unfortunately each abstract term also occurs in other contexts with other kinds of predicates, and when in those contexts it is interchanged with the corresponding adjective-plus-article phrase, the results may be statements that can no longer be understood as modalized generalizations about particulars. Thus, e.g., αὐτὸ τὸ δίκαιον εἶδος ἐστί (“the just itself is a form”) cannot be taken as meaning “whatever is just is *eo ipso* a form”.<sup>28</sup>

We see, therefore, that Platonic statements purporting to be about a given universal, e.g. justice, fall into two categories: (1) those (relatively harmless ones) that can be “translated down” into modalized generalizations about the individuals falling under the universal, and (2) those others that cannot. The latter, e.g. “Justice is eternal”, constitute the distinctive essentials of Plato’s metaphysics.

The upshot of all this is as follows. There is no reason to doubt that “is large” is used by Plato in the same sense in “The large is large” or “The large as such is large” as it is in “The Parthenon is large”. Furthermore, “The large is large” is, for Plato and any other Greek, selfevidently true. Things only begin to go awry when “the large” and “the large as such” are taken as names, interchangeable with “largeness”. A first result of such interchange is that “Largeness is large” acquires the status of an obvious truth; another is that “The large as such is an idea, changeless, eternal, etc.”, which is false if properly understood as a modalized generalization, now appears to be true. Many other problems arise, including the crucial one that if any predicate  $\varphi$  is denied of the Ideas, we shall have both ‘No Idea is  $\varphi$ ’ and ‘The  $\varphi$  is  $\varphi$ ’ as true.<sup>29</sup>

Despite all of these confusing complexities, however, I believe it possible to maintain that Plato uses the verb “to be” in a single sense throughout – a single sense in terms of which some of the other senses that have been proposed can be defined. Of course, he is not writing in a formalized language, and we know better than to look for exact definitions and rules to cover even a philosopher’s use of a natural language. But, very roughly speaking, his usage seems to be in accord with some such scheme as the following: For any terms  $A$ ,  $B$ ,  $C$ ,

- (i) ‘ $A$  is the same as  $B$ ’ ( $A = B$ ) is true if and only if ‘ $A$  is  $B$ ’ and ‘ $B$  is  $A$ ’ are true;<sup>30</sup>

- (ii) ' $A$  is<sub>p</sub>  $B$ ' ("Pauline predication") is true if and only if (a) for all terms  $D$ , ' $D$  is  $B$ ' follows from ' $D$  is  $A$ ' and (b) for some terms  $D, E$ , ' $D = E$ ' does not follow from ' $D$  is  $A$  and  $E$  is  $A$ ';<sup>31</sup>
- (iii) ' $A$  is (a)  $B$ ' ("ordinary predication") is true if and only if ' $A$  is  $B$ ' is true but ' $A = B$ ' and ' $A$  is<sub>p</sub>  $B$ ' are not.

While we are at it, we may add:

- (iv) ' $A$  is' is true if and only if, for some term  $D$ , ' $A$  is  $D$ ' is true;<sup>32</sup>
- (v) ' $A$  is similar to  $B$  in respect to  $C$ ' is true if and only if ' $A$  is  $C$ ' and ' $B$  is  $C$ ' are true;
- (vi) ' $A$  is similar to  $B$ ' is true if and only if, for some term  $D$ , ' $A$  is similar to  $B$  in respect to  $D$ ' is true;
- (vii) ' $A$  is  $A$ ' is necessarily true.

If Plato's usage is more or less along these lines, then we can expect that, for him, whenever ' $A$  is  $B$ ' is asserted, then ' $A$  is the same as  $B$ ' or ' $A$  is<sub>p</sub>  $B$ ' or ' $A$  is (a)  $B$ ' could also be asserted. Of these three, the last is inconsistent with each of the first two, though the first two are consistent with each other. As examples of sentences that come out true according to the above scheme, we have "Socrates is identical with the teacher of Plato", "Socrates is a man", "The just is<sub>p</sub> good", "The just is eternal" (but not "Justice is<sub>p</sub> eternal"). In each case, the corresponding sentence with the primitive "is" will be true; i.e., "Socrates is the teacher of Plato", "Socrates is a man", "The just is good", and "The just is eternal" are all true in the same sense of "is". We shall also have such results as that if "The statue is large" is true, then "The statue is similar to the large" and "The large is similar to the statue" will also be true.

I hasten to acknowledge, however, that the matter is very much more complex than these suggestions might indicate. A more satisfactory account would at least replace (i)-(vii) above by corresponding principles for Plato's Greek, and difficult problems of word order and the placement of the article would have to be dealt with. Still further complications will result from Plato's use of the abstract noun and other expressions as apparently synonymous with the corresponding adjective-plus-article. So the most that can be claimed for the above scheme is that it shows one way in which the copula *could* be used univocally everywhere and yet give rise to the kinds of texts that have made scholars consider it ambiguous.<sup>33</sup>

Returning in conclusion to the Third Man Argument, we may note that it is fortunate for Plato that there is another way out besides that of declaring that "is large" is ambiguous. For, as has often been noted, that sort of ambiguity would render almost unintelligible his important doc-

trine that the particulars are likenesses of their corresponding ideas. The text most clearly illustrating this is in the *Symposium*,<sup>34</sup> where Socrates describes a hierarchy of beautiful things; there are beautiful bodies, but more beautiful than these are the beautiful souls, and the beauty of the laws and of the various branches of knowledge ranks still higher. Most beautiful of all, he says, is beauty itself. Then he goes on to explain in detail exactly why beauty itself is more beautiful than anything else.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the other beautiful things, it is eternal, neither coming to be nor passing away; unlike them, it is not beautiful in one respect and ugly in another; nor beautiful from one point of view and ugly from another; and so on. If the predicate “is beautiful” were not used in a single sense throughout this comparison, the passage would be very dark indeed; for to say that beauty itself is more beautiful than a beautiful soul, but in a different sense of “is beautiful”, would be like saying that light travels faster than sound, but in a different sense of “fast”.<sup>36</sup>

Thus Plato cannot very well join those who would save him from the Third Man argument by finding an ambiguity in the “is” or the “large” of “is large”. His various assertions not only do not require us to postulate such ambiguity, they actually forbid it. Therefore, the other way out, namely, that of allowing the large to be large by virtue of itself, would seem to be his only real alternative.

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<sup>1</sup> A Swedish translation of an earlier version of this paper is included in a privately published memorial volume for the late Professor Anders Wedberg (*En filosofibok*, Stockholm, Bonniers, 1978, pp. 66-84). I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Wedberg's chapter on Plato's Theory of Ideas, in *Plato's Philosophy of Mathematics*, which was one of the earliest systematic and lucid expositions of the matters here considered. Even after a flood of further literature by other authors it still must be ranked as one of the best accounts available.

<sup>2</sup> My treatment of the second formulation of the Third Man, at *Parmenides* 132D-133A, would be exactly analogous to what I have to say here about the first formulation. Cf. Note 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Parmenides* 132B5-6. Why would it “no longer be subject to the consequences just now mentioned”? Because, I suppose, the *thought* of the large, unlike the large itself, would not necessarily be large.

<sup>4</sup> Vlastos (1973), p. 344n8; Cornford (1939), *ad loc.*

<sup>5</sup> Thus, εἶναι must be construed predicatively at 131C10, 132B5, 132B7.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. Wedberg (1955), p. 30 (3b).

<sup>7</sup> Of course “character” might in this connection be used metalinguistically, as it were, to refer to those Greek adjectives and nouns for which we notice that Plato postulates



corresponding forms. Thus, we observe that corresponding to the adjective καλός he postulates one form, and similarly for various other nouns and adjectives. But when he says (3) he cannot mean “corresponding to the adjective μέγας there is exactly one form”, for, whatever he may have in mind, he is clearly not talking about *words*.

<sup>8</sup> *Phaedo* 102D6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Of course this assertion requires detailed argument, for which I do not have space here; I include this paragraph only to indicate why I do not follow the common practice of formulating the issue in terms of “characters” and “corresponding forms”.

<sup>10</sup> I am talking about the argument *as thus stated*, and not about one or another possible formalization of it by means of the notation of modern logic.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Ross (1951), p. 87.

<sup>12</sup> Here and in many other places throughout this paper I use single quotes as quasi-quotes. Cf. Quine (1947), pp. 33-7.

<sup>13</sup> Note how, in lines 132A6-10, Parmenides eases into the claim that there is *another* form of largeness: at 132A7 he says that “some one large will *again* appear”, which strongly suggests but does not strictly imply that it is a different form; and then this conclusion is ostensibly re-stated at 132A10 as “*another* form will show up . . .” (my italics). But only if “some one large will again appear” is taken in the sense of “again, some one large will appear”, does it follow from the general principle that Socrates has admitted; “again” here is metalogical, meaning “by another application of the principle”.

In the second formulation of the Third Man I locate the one and only fallacy at the corresponding point, i.e., at 132E7, where it is concluded that “besides that form, *another* form will always appear . . .” (my italics).

<sup>14</sup> *De Soph. El.* 178b36-9.

<sup>15</sup> Russell (1945), p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Cherniss (1957), pp. 258-9.

<sup>17</sup> Vlastos (1973), p. 307.

<sup>18</sup> Vlastos (1973), p. 252 ff. Cp. also Vlastos (1973), pp. 234-6, 270 ff., and 318 ff.

<sup>19</sup> For reasons of style I have not always stated explicitly that my remarks are intended to apply not only to the English expressions specifically quoted but also to the Greek expressions that correspond to them. Since part of the problem before us is in effect that of determining what corresponds to what, I recognize that this policy introduces a certain amount of confusion, for which I apologize.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. e.g. Russell (1903), p. 64n; Wittgenstein (1921), 3.323.

<sup>21</sup> Couturat (1903), p. 382; Schmidt (1960), pp. 475, 479.

<sup>22</sup> See Luschei (1962), p. 144 ff.

<sup>23</sup> νῦν δὲ ἐνὶ μὲν εἶναι πλὴν αὐτῷ τῷ ἐνὶ ἀδύνατόν που.

<sup>24</sup> It is immediately preceded and followed by a group of arguments so obviously fallacious that we should insult Plato’s intelligence if we supposed that he accepted them. E.g., (157C-D): “If something were a part of a multiplicity, among which it was itself included, it would be a part of itself, which is impossible . . .”; and ultimately the absurd conclusion (166C): “it seems that, whether there is or is not a one, both that one and the others alike are and are not, and appear and do not appear to be, all manner of things in all manner of ways with respect to themselves and to one another” – to which poor Socrates has to reply, “Most true”!

<sup>25</sup> Brugman-Schwyzler (1961), vol II, p. 175; Kühner (1898), Part II, vl. I, p. 266 ff; Smyth (1920), pp. 272-4; Goodwin (1894), p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> Vlastos’ claim (Vlastos (1973), p. 249n77), that “justice is just” at Protagoras 330C is

not taken as self-evident but is inferred, is puzzling. Note that ἀρα in 330C7 need not be read as strict logical “therefore” but only as “so then”.

<sup>27</sup> Cp. such fallacies as “Nothing is colder than ice; I have nothing up my sleeve; therefore, what I have up my sleeve is colder than ice”, or “Something just bit me; you gave me something for Christmas; therefore, what you gave me for Christmas just bit me”. Further, although any German is a German and any German can tell you where Goethe was born, that does not mean that there is some German whose name is “any German” and who can tell you where Goethe was born.

<sup>28</sup> When a binary predicate, such as “equal to” or “similar to” is under consideration, the mistake leads to even more painful consequences. On the same basis as before we now have as obvious truths ἀτὰρ τὰ ἴσα ἴσα ἔστι (“equals as such are equal”) and ἀτὰρ τὰ ὅμοια ὅμοια ἔστι (“similar as such are similar”); if these are interpreted as saying, respectively, that what is denoted by “equals as such” is equal, and what is denoted by “similar as such” is similar, and if the phrase “equals as such” is interchangeable with “equality”, and likewise for “similar as such” and “similarity”, we arrive at a pseudo-problem as to whether equality and similarity are singular or plural. For if equality consists of the equals as such, does it not consist, as Geach ((1956), p. 76) suggests, of at least two absolutely equal things? In short, the very same mistake that takes Plato from “the beautiful is beautiful” to “beauty is beautiful” will also take him from “equals are equal” to “equality is? are? equal”.

<sup>29</sup> Thus, e.g., both “no idea is plural” and “plurality is plural” will be true, and there are many other such examples. Vlastos (1973), pp. 259 ff., tries to protect Plato from these contradictions by interpreting “plurality is plural” as a Pauline predication. On the other hand, he recognizes (pp. 262-3) that “beauty is beautiful”, in Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*, has to be taken as an ordinary predication. Hence he is forced to hold that Platonic statements of the form ‘the φ is φ’ are sometimes Pauline, sometimes ordinary. But it seems to me that whenever ‘the φ is φ’ is asserted in the dialogues it is put forward on the same basis. To suppose with Vlastos (p. 265) that “justice is just” in the *Protagoras* is Pauline, while “beauty is beautiful” in the *Symposium* is not (pp. 262-3), should be a last resort; far better to suppose that Plato uses “is” univocally but has not thought out what to do about the difficult cases.

<sup>30</sup> This condition for identity may be too weak. In the *Protagoras*, in a discussion initiated by the question “whether virtue is one, and justice, temperance, and piety are parts of it, or whether these things that I have just now mentioned are all of them names of the same one thing” (329C-D), it is concluded from “justice is pious” and “piety is just” that “justice is either the same as piety or maximally similar to it” (331B, cp. 333B); and from considerations indirectly establishing that every temperate act is wise and every wise act is temperate it is concluded that temperance and wisdom are one (333B). (Cp. Vlastos (1973), pp. 243-6). Following this, Socrates begins what is plainly an attempt to show that temperance and justice are one; and it looks as though his argument, never completed, was going to involve establishing that every temperate act is just and every just act is temperate. Thus, he seems to be trying to show, perhaps only to discomfit Protagoras, that “wisdom”, “temperance”, “justice”, and “piety” all name the same thing. Whether he or Plato actually believed this, is irrelevant; the crux of the matter is whether the course of the argument shows what he thinks *would* have to be the case if the various identity statements *were* true. However, the references to similarity suggest that perhaps the truth of ‘A is the same as B’ requires something more than that of ‘A is B’ and ‘B is A’ at least when A and B are names of ideas.

<sup>31</sup> Clause (b) is designed to eliminate the possibility that *A* is a name or description of a particular. Otherwise, since e.g. “If anything is Socrates, then it is *eo ipso* a man” is true, we should have “Socrates is a man” as a Pauline predication.

<sup>32</sup> Thus two possibilities suggest themselves for ‘*A* is not’: (1) for no term *B* is ‘*A* is *B*’ true, or (2) for some term *B*, ‘*A* is not *B*’ is true.

<sup>33</sup> As emphasized in the text, there is in general no hope of finding simple, exact rules to cover the usage of a given author writing in a natural language. The following may help to indicate at least a significant subset of the Greek examples I seek to catch with clauses (i)-(vii). In forming substitution-instances of a given clause:

1) Any adjective, count noun, or proper name, prefixed by the definite article, may be substituted for a variable in subject position.

2) Any adjective or noun, with or without the article, may be substituted for a variable in predicate position;

3) Where, in the given clause, the same variable occurs both in subject and in predicate positions, it is to be replaced in subject positions by an expression with the article if and only if it is replaced in predicate positions by the same expression without the article;

4) An abstract term (e.g., ἡ δικαιοσύνη) is interchangeable with the corresponding adjectival phrase (τὸ δίκαιον) or ὄ ἔστι phrase (ὄ ἔστι δίκαιον).

Cases involving complex terms may, it is hoped, be treated by analogy with the foregoing principles.

Some examples:

*Of (i)*: τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ὄσιον ταῦτόν ἐστι is true iff τὸ δίκαιον ὄσιόν ἐστι and τὸ ὄσιον δίκαιόν ἐστι are true. ὁ Σωκράτης καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος Πλάτωνος ταῦτόν ἐστι is true iff ὁ Σωκράτης διδάσκαλος Πλάτωνός ἐστι and ὁ διδάσκαλος Πλάτωνος Σωκράτης ἐστι are true.

*Of (ii)*: τὸ δίκαιον ἀγαθόν ἐστι (as a Pauline predication) is true iff (a) for all terms *D*, ‘*D* ἀγαθόν ἐστι’ follows from ‘*D* δίκαιόν ἐστι’ and (b) for some terms, *D*, *E*, ‘*D* = *E*’ does not follow from ‘*D* δίκαιόν ἐστι καὶ *E* δίκαιόν ἐστι’.

*Of (iii)*: τὸ δίκαιον ἀκίνητόν ἐστι (or ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἀκίνητόν ἐστι), as an ordinary predication, is true iff τὸ δίκαιον ἀκίνητόν ἐστι is true but not as a Pauline predication, and τὸ δίκαιον καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀκίνητον ταῦτόν ἐστι is not true.

<sup>34</sup> *Symposium*, 210 ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. cit.*, 211A-B.

<sup>36</sup> Perhaps I should state explicitly that, according to the interpretation I am advancing, the sentences “Beauty is beautiful” and “The soul is beautiful” are both true for Plato when the “is” is taken in what I am calling its “primitive” sense. When it is taken in the identity sense, only the first sentence is true, and when it is taken in the sense of “ordinary” (to us) predication, only the second sentence is true. As I have indicated in (v) and (vi), “The soul resembles Beauty” will be true on the basis of the two sentences mentioned, with “is” understood in the primitive sense in both cases.

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