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Платон и платоноведение

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The Argument of Zeno at *Parmenides* 127e1–7*

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THE ARGUMENT OF ZENO AT *PARMENIDES* 127E1–7

ABSTRACT. This essay offers an interpretation of *Parmenides* 127e1–7. There Socrates reports Zeno’s argument that attacks the thesis that beings are many. The essay’s goal is to understand Zeno’s argument as reported by Socrates. The author first considers the interpretations of J. Barnes, D. El Murr, and R.E. Allen. They propose that Zeno’s target for attack is the thesis that the number of beings is greater than one (“the numerical target”). El Murr also suggests the additional target that each being has many parts. Then the essay considers the interpretations of D. Lee and A. Nehamas. They maintain that Zeno’s target for attack is the thesis that a single being may be many by having multiple attributes (“the multi-attribute target”). This essay makes use of insights from all these interpretations. It also revives a suggestion of P. Curd that Zeno argued against both the numerical target and the multi-attribute target. The author proposes that Zeno argues against a disjunction of (i) the numerical target, (ii) the El Murr addition, and (iii) the multi-attribute target. That is, Zeno argued boldly that beings cannot be many in any imaginable way. This essay calls new attention to the important role in Zeno’s argument of the claim, “for unlikes cannot be likes.”

KEYWORDS: Socrates, Zeno, Plato, the *Parmenides*, forms.

1. *Introduction: Socrates’ Summary of Zeno’s Argument*

Plato’s *Parmenides* (127b–d) relates that Zeno read several arguments while adolescent Socrates listened. Socrates questions Zeno

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Платоновские исследования / Platonic Investigations 12.1 (2020)

DOI: 10.25985/PI.12.1.01

* An earlier version of this essay was presented at the conference of the International Plato Society, Symposium Platonicum XII: “Plato’s *Parmenides*,” that was held in Paris on 15–20 July 2019. I am grateful to the organizers for the conference and to many participants for helpful interactions. I thank Irina Protopopova for her attention.

about one argument. The *Parmenides* relates Socrates' summary of Zeno's argument. Plato does not present Zeno himself speaking his argument.

The immediate goal of this essay is to understand Zeno's argument as Socrates reports it, rather than to identify precisely any argument that the historical Zeno gave.

This is Socrates' summary, given twice:

If beings (τὰ ὄντα) are many, then they must be both like and unlike, but that is impossible; for (γάρ) unlikes (τὰ ἀνόμοια) can't be likes, nor likes (τὰ ὁμοια) unlikes? Do you not say it this way? (127e1-4)¹

And again:

If it is impossible both that unlikes (τὰ τε ἀνόμοια) are likes and that likes (τὰ ὁμοια) [are] unlikes, it is impossible that there be many? For if there were many, they would suffer impossibilities (πάσχοι ἂν τὰ ἀδύνατα, 127e6-8).

Zeno agrees that Socrates has grasped what Zeno said (127e5; 128a1-2; 128c1-2), though Socrates misunderstood Zeno's motives (128c-e). Zeno explains that his work speaks against (ἀντιλέγει, 128d2) critics who say that Parmenides' thesis that all is one leads to self-contradiction (ἐνάντια αὐτῷ, 128d2). Zeno aims to "pay back the same things and more" by showing that the thesis of the critics has more absurd results (128d3-5).

2. Socrates' Immediate and Untutored Reaction to Zeno's Argument

In order to see how Socrates understands the argument he reports I consider first Socrates' spontaneous and immediate reaction (128a-130a) to the argument. By "spontaneous and immediate reaction" I mean what Socrates says before Parmenides enters the conversation. I call attention to these remarks of Socrates.

¹I use the English translation of Gill and Ryan 1996 with my own modifications. The Greek text is that of Claudio Moreschini in Migliori, Moreschini 1994.

(1) Don't you acknowledge (οὐ νομίζεις) that there is itself by itself a form of likeness (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ εἶδος ὁμοιότητος) and again another (αὐτὸ ἄλλο τι) opposite (ἐναντίον) to such, what unlike is (ὃ ἔστιν ἀνόμοιον)? (128e6–129a2)

(2) And that you and I and the other things we call many get a share of (μεταλαμβάνειν) these two beings (τούτοιιν δε δυοῖν ὄντοιιν)? (129a2–3)

(3) And that the [things] that get a share of likeness become like in that way (τάύτη) and to the extent that they get a share, and the [things getting a share] of unlikeness (τῆς ἀνομοιότητος) [become] unlike [in the way and to the extent that they share], and those getting a share] of both [become] both [in the way and to the extent that they get a share]? (129a3–6)

(4) And even if all things get a share of both contrary beings, and by having a share (τῷ μετέχειν) of both are like and unlike themselves to themselves, what's astonishing [about that]? (129a6–129b1)

(5) If someone showed the likes themselves (αὐτὰ τὰ ὅμοια) becoming unlike[s] (ἀνόμοια) or the unlikes (τὰ ἀνόμοια) like[s] (ὅμοια), that, I think, would be a marvel. (129b1–3)

(6) If someone first divides as separate (διαιρῆται χωρὶς) themselves by themselves the forms of which I was just now speaking – likeness and unlikeness and multitude and the one and rest and motion and all such, and then shows them capable of being mixed together (συγκεράνυσθαι) in themselves and distinguished (διακρίνεσθαι), I would admire it wonderfully. (129d6–e4)

(7) I would admire it much more, as I say, if someone were able to display this same impasse (ἀπορίαν) in every way woven in the forms themselves, as you [both] went through in the case of visible things, so also in the forms themselves (αὐτοῖς τοῖς εἶδεσι), the [items] grasped in reasoning (τοῖς λογισμῷ λαμβανομένοις). (129e6–130a1)

In his spontaneous response Socrates observes at (1) and (2) that Zeno's charge that plural beings would suffer *two* opposites ("would suffer impossibilities", 127e8) – likeness and unlikeness – commits Zeno to that plurality of two opposites. Socrates expects Zeno immediately to recognize ("Don't you acknowledge?") that Zeno's practice of the sport of driving an opponent to utter contraries (ἀντιλέγει, 128d2) presupposes that there are pairs of opposites.

Socrates at (1) calls each of the opposites, likeness and unlikeness, a form (εἶδος, literally “aspect”). His phrase “likeness itself by itself” refers to the form, likeness. The words “itself by itself” narrow focus to the core notion of likeness without mention of any specific type of likeness, such as likeness in age or likeness in size.²

Socrates’ phrase “what unlike is” (129a2, ὁ ἕστιν ἀνόμοιον) indicates the form contrary to the form of likeness (129a1, ἄλλο τι ἐναντίον). I emphasize that the phrase “what unlike is” is an ordinary and familiar understandable phrase. We might say, for example, “If a dragonfly and an elephant aren’t very unlike examples of life, I don’t know what unlike is.” Or we might say, “If they aren’t unlike, I don’t know what unlikes are.” This perfectly ordinary locution — “what unlike is”³ — is equivalent to Socrates’ alternate locutions for that form, “unlikeness” (129a6) and “the unlikes” (129b1). To refer to the form likeness he also uses the phrase “the likes themselves” (129b1).

It is clear that his phrases “the unlikes” and “the likes themselves” that occur in his challenge at (5) also refer to the forms likeness and unlikeness mentioned in his objection at (1) and (2) because Socrates at (6) says, “the forms of which I was just now speaking — likeness and unlikeness.” To understand Socrates’ various phrases that indicate forms it is helpful to keep in mind that they all are alternatives, equivalents, to ordinary phrases of ours, such as “what unlike is.” The latter refers to what we understand when we know how to use the word “unlike.”⁴

² In contrast Sayre 1996: 65 says that the phrase “itself by itself” here implies that forms are separate from sensible things. I see no reason to find that implication here. Someone might object that a form of likeness cannot be “itself by itself” because likeness is a relation. That is, what is like must be like in relation to some item x in some respect r . I would reply that when we say, “what is like is like in relation to something or other in some respect or other,” we speak of likeness itself by itself because we do not mention particular *relata*. Compare largeness. To explain what it is to be large we must speak of the relation being larger than something. (See Wallace 1972.) Nevertheless, to say, “what is large is large because it is larger than items of some type with which it is being compared in respect of largeness,” shows that we grasp largeness itself by itself.

³ Kahn 1981 (esp. 127–129) discusses “what F is” as a way of referring to forms.

⁴ Kahn 1981: 109: “To know what beautiful is would be to know the full sense of the term.”

At (3) and (4) Socrates denies Zeno's premise that items both like and unlike would "suffer impossibilities." Socrates observes that the same thing can be both like in one way and unlike in another way without absurdity because it may be like in some way (or respect) and unlike in some (other) way and extent.

Items (2), (3), and (4), have the vocabulary "get a share" (μεταλαμβάνειν, 129a3, literally "together get") and "have a share" (μετέχειν, 129a8, 129b3, b5, b6, c8, d1, literally "have in company with"). Some interpreters take this vocabulary to belong to a theory. That is, they take these words to be unordinary and technical.⁵

I would say, in contrast, that there is no reason to think that the vocabulary here is technical. In the first place, such words have a familiar ordinary meaning that is as available to Socrates as it is to us when we say, for example, that children share athletic ability with a parent.⁶ Second, although the word "share" has not appeared previously in the *Parmenides*, it would serve very well to convey some earlier information. Cephalus and his companions shared a journey from Clazomenae. Now they share a wish to hear some arguments. Adeimantus and Antiphon share a mother. Antiphon and his grandfather share a name. They share an interest in horse-training. Parmenides and Zeno share a thesis. They share a friendship. Zeno's several arguments share a single conclusion. Had Plato given us this information via the word "shares," we would easily have understood it in our ordinary way. Parmenides later asks Socrates whether what shares in something must get the whole or a

⁵ Cornford 1939: 70 says: "It is generally agreed that the theory of Forms here put forward is... the theory as stated... in the *Phaedo*." Sayre 1996: 68 speaks of "the theory on which Socrates' attack was based", and on p. 74 speaks of Socrates as "expositor of a bold new theory." Scolnicov 2003: 48 *ad* 129a says, "This passage is a short restatement of the doctrine of forms as developed in the *Phaedo*." Allen 1997: 90 says, "The theory Socrates has outlined is substantially that of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*." Curd 1986: 126: "Socrates proposes the Theory of Forms as a solution to the problems Zeno poses."

⁶ See *Gorgias* 467d6–468a3 (Socrates is speaking): "By the neither good nor bad you mean such things as sometimes have a share (μετέχει) of the good, sometimes of the bad, and sometimes of neither, such as sitting and walking and running and sailing, and again such as stones and sticks and other such things." At *Charmides* 158e2–4 Socrates asks Charmides whether he shares in *sophrosunê* (σωφροσύνη μετέχειν) or lacks it.

part of the shared item (131a5–7) in it (131a9–c8): for our examples above we naturally give various answers without committing ourselves to the confusion that Parmenides’ later question elicits from Socrates (131a–131e). Likewise, Socrates’ ordinary use here of “shares” does not yet commit him to his later confused concessions.⁷

At (6) Socrates’ word “separate” (χωρὶς) indicates that forms are separate from one another. That is why likeness and unlikeness are two forms.⁸

3. Reasons to Distinguish the Forms Socrates Mentions in His Spontaneous Reaction to Zeno from the Forms Described in Socrates’ Concessions to Parmenides

I sharply distinguish Socrates’ spontaneous reaction to Zeno (128a–130a) and the forms that Socrates says Zeno must acknowledge from the collection of proposals about forms to which Socrates later consents under Parmenides’ questioning (130b–135b).⁹ Some reasons for the distinction are these. First, Zeno and Parmenides much admire Socrates’ spontaneous reaction (130ab). Second, even after Socrates displays confusion under Parmenides’ questioning about forms, Parmenides still commends Socrates at 135c for having perceived “even more” that διαλέγεσθαι requires forms. Parmenides’ “even more” perhaps indicates “even more than Zeno” or “even more than most people.” Third, when Parmenides recommends to Socrates an exercise that concerns

⁷ Socrates could have dealt unconfusedly with items that share likeness, largeness, justice and beauty (131a) had he thought of sharing or partaking as does Meinwald 2014: 477, who suggests that partaking is “closely related to what we might call *satisfying* an account.”

⁸ I disagree with Gill, who says (Gill, Ryan 1996: 16), “Socrates said in his speech that forms are separate from the things that partake of them (129d).” I believe 129d implies only that forms — items we distinguish as separate in discourse and reasoning — are separate from one another.

⁹ Harte 2018: 67 observes that the conversation between Socrates and Zeno is worth noticing as distinct from the two other conversations (Parmenides with Socrates; Parmenides with young Aristoteles) of the *Parmenides*. Coxon 1999: 97–99 separately titles 127e–130a as “Socrates’ Dialogue with Zeno (127e–130a),” and gives his own account of the forms Socrates mentions.

forms (135de), Parmenides clearly has in mind the forms of Socrates' spontaneous reaction. They are the forms concerning which Socrates challenged Zeno to give an argument (129d–130a). Parmenides describes forms at 135e3 as “what one might most grasp in discourse” (ἃ μάλιστα τις ἂν λόγῳ λάβοι) and “would consider to be forms” (135e3–4). Parmenides there evokes Socrates' phrasing at (7), “the forms themselves, the [items] grasped in reasoning”. Zeno's practice of deducing contraries is an example of such discourse and reasoning.

Parmenides' admiration, his commendation, and his recommendation have to do with forms as Socrates describes them in Socrates' initial untutored reaction.¹⁰ Those forms do not have the problematic accompaniments that Parmenides' questioning will elicit. I will call them minimal forms. Up to now all Socrates has told us of these minimal forms is that they are separate from other forms that we grasp when we reason about such items as what unlike is and its opposite, likeness.¹¹ Socrates implies that all reasoners must acknowledge these minimal forms as we make distinctions in speech.

4. Impediments to Interpretation of Zeno's Argument

One impediment to the interpretation of Zeno's argument is that Socrates' summary does not explain the inference from “Beings are many” to “they must be both like and unlike.” So Zeno's argument has a gap.¹² I will later discuss different ways of filling the gap.

A second impediment to interpretation is that Zeno intends his argument as a defense of Parmenides' thesis (128c–e). Zeno reports the

¹⁰ Lee 2014: 263, n. 12 makes this useful point: “If Socrates in the *Euthyphro* can ask his interlocutor to specify ‘that form itself... by which all holy things are holy’ without asking him to think of a sense-transcendent, eternally existing universal, then it seems reasonable to suppose that the same is true of the things ‘we might consider to be forms’ in the *Parmenides*.”

¹¹ See also Peterson 2019.

¹² Harte, 2018: 83: “we are given no real insight into how Zeno's argument works.” Barnes, 1982: 237: “We do not know how Zeno argued.” Gill (Gill, Ryan 1996: 11): “we are missing the arguments Zeno used to show that the same things, if many, are both like and unlike.”

thesis of Parmenides variously (128b; 128d). We may take as representative the formulation “The all is one” (128b1–2). Unfortunately, Parmenides’ thesis is unclear. To the 69-year old Socrates of Plato’s *Theaetetus* (183–184) it remains so unclear that he is unwilling to discuss it:

While I would be ashamed lest we should consider in a flimsy way Melissus and the others who say that the all is one unmoved [thing], I would be less ashamed than [before] Parmenides, being one. Parmenides seems to me ([in] Homer’s [phrases]) “reverend to me” and “terrific to me.” For when I was very young, I met the very elderly man, and he seemed to me to have an altogether noble depth. So I fear lest we not understand even what he said, and much more [lest] we leave behind what he was thinking when he said it. (183e3–184a)

If Parmenides’ thesis is not perfectly clear, it then cannot be perfectly clear what is the opposed supposition that Zeno targets for refutation.¹³

The genre that Zeno here ascribes to his argument also impedes interpretation. Zeno wrote his work in his youth in a competitive spirit (128d6–7, “through love of victory when I was young”; also 128e2).¹⁴ Zeno wanted “to thoroughly battle” (127e9) “against what is generally said” (127e9–10).¹⁵ Zeno says that his writing “speaks against” (ἀντιλέ-

¹³ Readers today are also uncertain of Parmenides’ meaning. Cf. Nehamas 1982: 348–349: “it is not clear what sort of monism Zeno and Parmenides are supposed to hold... Until we can be certain whether the Eleatics held that there is only one thing in the world (a thesis we might call ‘numerical’ or ‘harsh’ monism), or that there is only one of each kind of thing (‘kind’ monism), we cannot be certain about the nature of Socrates’ disagreement with them.”

¹⁴ For detailed study of the likely genre of Zeno’s arguments see Marion 2014. See also Palmer 1999: 102. Barnes 1982: 237–238 says, “In the *Parmenides* Zeno presents himself, or at least his juvenile self, as an eristic debater, a sophist out to impress an audience... He wanted to startle, to amaze, to disconcert.”

¹⁵ Brisson 2002: 4–6 takes “what is said” at 127e9–10 to refer not to what is generally said but to what some theoreticians of being said. Cornford 1939: 58 proposes: “Zeno is attacking a form of the original doctrine that all things are numbers. The assertion that ‘things are many’ covered the following propositions. (1) There is a plurality of concrete things, bodies in motion... (2) Each of these concrete bodies is a number, or plurality of units... (3) These units themselves are an ultimate plurality of things

γει, 128d2) people that ridiculed Parmenides' thesis that all is one.¹⁶ The ridiculers aimed to show that Parmenides' thesis yielded "contraries to itself" (ἐναντία αὐτῷ, 128d2). Zeno's treatise "gives back in opposition" (128d3–4) "these same things and more" (128d4) to Parmenides' critics. Zeno's words signal the genre of contest. He aims to force an opponent to speak contraries (128d2) or to contradict himself. Professionals of this genre appear in Plato's *Euthydemus*. The opponent that speaks contraries is silenced, at least temporarily.¹⁷ The youthful observers in Plato's *Euthydemus* applaud such arguments. We readers of today with much hindsight can diagnose their flaws, but the quick competition of Socrates' era grants no time for diagnosis. We therefore are uncertain whether to expect Zeno's argument here to withstand persistent logical scrutiny, or merely to be witty enough to silence a competitor momentarily.¹⁸

having all the reality claimed for Parmenides' One Being... Zeno's arguments become intelligible when they are taken as directed against a plurality of units having the above combination of properties."

¹⁶ Proclus gives examples of arguments against Parmenides, from perhaps later than Parmenides' era. "Those who took his works in a rather irreverent sense assailed the doctrine with witticisms such as that if Being is one, then Parmenides and Zeno do not both exist at the same time." (Morrow, Dillon 1987: 21, translating Proclus' *Commentary* 619.21–25) And again: "What the ridiculous objections are that the fun-makers have brought against Parmenides' argument is clear to anyone who has listened to the Peripatetics: dog and man are the same; heaven, earth, and all things are simply one — white, black, cold, heavy, light, mortal, immortal, rational, irrational... If it is one thing with many names, again it will be many because names are a kind of thing. In general, their crude arguments were intended to show Parmenides' discourse contradicting itself and were brought up to upset their interlocutor and reduce him to apparent contradictions. These things arouse laughter, as Zeno says, but are not worthy of the purity of Parmenides' thought." (Morrow, Dillon 1987: 88, translating Proclus' *Commentary* 716–717). Palmer 1999: 105 suggests that Plato's representation of Zeno in the *Parmenides* is "a deliberate anachronism" in that Plato presents Zeno as reacting to attacks by later sophists on Parmenides.

¹⁷ *Euthd.* 303a5: "I lay speechless"; 303e1–2: "You... completely stitch up men's mouths."

¹⁸ At *Phlb.* 14 Socrates says the alleged difficulty that Protarchus is one by nature, but many, even contraries to one another, in that he is tall and short (14d) is "childlike" and easy (14d): this and the proposal that a person is one but his parts are many are

5. Interpretations of Zeno's Argument that Present Zeno's Target as the Thesis that the Count of Beings is Greater than One

A large family of interpretations of Zeno's argument understands Zeno's target for refutation as the thesis that the count of beings is greater than one.¹⁹ I call the target so interpreted "the numerical target." Socrates summarizes Zeno's target supposition with πολλά ἔστι τὰ ὄντα (127e1–2). Zeno expresses it with πολλά ἔστιν (128d5–6).

I now consider examples of reconstructions of Zeno's argument that have a numerical target. I set out each reconstruction as a list of statements that are stages of the argument. Each reconstruction conjecturally supplies some unstated premises to fill the argument's gap. Some of my numbered stages incorporate what a more detailed reconstruction would represent as several steps. Nevertheless, I find that listing manageable stages of the argument even without all possible details clarifies its progression and facilitates comparison among different reconstructions.

The Barnes Reconstruction

I represent the reconstruction offered by J. Barnes 1982: 237 thus.

1. Suppose there are at least two distinct items, *a* and *b*. ("Beings are many", 127e2, the target for refutation)
2. Item *a* is distinct from item *b* and item *b* is distinct from item *a*, so they are unlike. (Barnes supplies)
3. Item *a* and item *b* are beings; so they are like. (Barnes supplies)

public property (14e1–5). Their childlikeness is, I take it, their suitability for adolescent verbal combat. Their being public property is their common availability.

¹⁹ Cf., for example, Proclus in Morrow, Dillon 1987 quoted above (note 16); Cornford 1939 quoted above (note 15); Sayre 1996: 62–64; Gill 2012: 19, n. 4; Turnbull 1998: 14; Moravcsik 1992: 132. Sayre 1996: 315, n. 20 gives a mild criticism of Zeno's argument against a numerical target: "Although as a defender of Eleatic ontology Zeno might not admit that anything plural exists, as a speaker of 'ordinary Greek' he should be ready to acknowledge the... states of being like, being unlike, etc." I believe Socrates alludes to Zeno's practice of eliciting contraries from his opponents as well as his ordinary speech.

4. So “they must be both like and unlike.” (Stated by Socrates, 127e2)²⁰
5. But this is impossible. (Socrates states, 127e)²¹

Barnes supplies the two premises 2 and 3 to fill the inferential gap that we have noticed in Zeno’s argument as Socrates reports it.

The El Murr Reconstruction

Dimitri El Murr 2005: 27–28 offers two reconstructions. His first is similar to Barnes’s. I represent his second thus:

1. Beings are many in that beings have multiple parts. (A possible meaning of Zeno’s target, 127e1–2)²²
2. One thing having multiple parts, and being divisible into those parts, is unlike itself. (El Murr 2005: 28 supplies)
3. Each being is one, so it is like to itself. (El Murr 2005: 28 supplies)
4. The same things are both like and unlike. (127e3)
5. Like things cannot be unlike. (Socrates states, 127e3–4)
6. So 1 is false. (127e7, “It is impossible that things are many”)

This reconstruction fills the inferential gap differently from the way Barnes’ reconstruction fills it. This supports the result “like and unlike”

²⁰ Barnes 1982: 236 holds that the historical Zeno “never makes the characteristic move of *reductio*, the inference to the falsity of the hypothesis.” Barnes holds that Plato “represents Socrates as extracting from Zeno the realization that the arguments are reductive and not as finding a reductive form in the *logoi* themselves.” So Barnes apparently does not count Zeno’s argument as a reduction to absurdity of his target but merely a demonstration of the inconsistency of the numerical theorists. Similarly Marion 2014 and Cornford 1939: 58.

²¹ Barnes 1982: 237 says: “We do not know how Zeno argued... Perhaps: ‘If *a* and *b* are distinct existents, then they are similar (*homoios*) in so far as each exists — hence they are alike; and they are dissimilar (*anhomoios*) in so far as each is different from the other — hence they are unlike.’”

²² El Murr 2005: 28 (my translation): “Indeed the paradox of Zeno can be very well understood as follows: if a thing is multiple, it has several parts and is divisible according to its parts. Consequently, it is *unlike* to itself. But in so far as it is *one* multiple thing, that thing is a whole, then *like* to itself. The same thing is then like and unlike... The problem is not here to reconstruct the argument of the historical Zeno, but at most to show how *πολλά* can designate as much a plurality of distinct things as a plurality of parts within one same thing.”

by means of the claim “one and many.” This reconstruction then usefully captures Socrates’ saying that he himself is one and many. In contrast, Socrates’ first report of Zeno’s argument at 127e did not explicitly give “both one and many” as a step toward “like and unlike.”

In the light of his two reconstructions El Murr suggests that Plato might hold “Beings are many” to include both the count of beings and the plurality of their parts.²³ According to El Murr Zeno’s target would then be the disjunctive claim that beings are many in that the number of them is many or beings are many in that each being has many parts.

Allen’s Reconstruction

I represent the reconstruction of R.E. Allen 1997: 90–91 thus:

1. Suppose there are many things – at least two, item *a* and item *b*. (Zeno’s stated target, 127e1–2)
2. There is no distinction between things qualified by opposites and the things that qualify them.²⁴
3. Item *a* and item *b* are like in that each is a being. (Allen supplies)²⁵
4. Item *a* is unlike item *b* in being distinct from item *b*; whereas item *b* is unlike item *a* in being distinct from item *a*. So items *a* and *b* are unlike. (Allen supplies)²⁶
5. Items *a* and *b* are both like and unlike. (By 3 and 4, stated by Socrates, 127e2)
6. Item *a* is likeness and item *a* is also unlikeness. (By 2 and 5).

²³ El Murr 2005: 29: “directed against the two types of plurality...?”

²⁴ See Allen 1997: 90–91: “The essence of Socrates’ reply to Zeno is that a distinction obtains between things qualified by opposites and the opposites that qualify them. There would be no point in drawing that distinction unless Socrates thought that Zeno had assumed its denial... Zeno’s paradox, then, is a special case applied to opposites of a more general failure to distinguish characters from things characterized.” Cf. below comments on this in Section 8 item C.

²⁵ Allen 1997: 90: “Assume, as the defenders of plurality must have done that the existence of a plurality implies that each of its members must be both like and unlike the others; for example, each of its members is like every other in that they all are, or have being.”

²⁶ Allen 1997: 90: “each of its members, since it is different from every other, must be different in some identifiable respect and so be unlike the things from which it differs.”

7. Hence likeness and unlikeness are identical. (Allen supplies this intermediate step including an inference)²⁷
8. “Likes cannot be unlikes” (i.e. 7 is impossible: stated by Socrates, 127e3–4).
9. So 5 is impossible. (“They would suffer impossibilities,” 127e8)
10. So 1 is impossible. (Allen 1997: 91: “so there can be no plurality,” 127e7)

Allen’s supplied premise 2 differs from anything in Barnes’s and El Murr’s reconstructions.²⁸

6. Interpretations that Take Zeno’s Target to Be: “Beings Are Many in the Sense that Each Being Has Many Attributes”

The Multi-Attribute Target

I now consider two reconstructions that understand Zeno’s target to be what I will call the “multi-attribute thesis.”²⁹ One is from David Lee 2014. One is from Alexander Nehamas 2016 and 2019.

²⁷ Allen 1997: 90–91: “Let *a* then be a member of that plurality and both like and unlike toward *b*. Likeness and unlikeness are no doubt here asserted in different respects; but it is true to say of *a* that it is both like and unlike. If then there is no distinction between things qualified by opposites and the opposites that qualify them, and likeness and unlikeness are opposites, it must follow that there is no distinction between being *a* and being like, and being *a* and being unlike. But if there is no distinction, then by transitivity of identity, to be like and to be unlike are the same... Opposites have been identified.”

²⁸ Evidence external to the *Parmenides* supports the view that Zeno targeted a numerical thesis as Barnes, El Murr, and Allen suppose. (1) One of the historical Zeno’s arguments against plurality includes the reasoning that if there are many things, there are infinitely many, because between any two there is another (DK 29 B 3). This reasoning seems clearly directed against a numerical target. If Plato knew of that argument, it is likely that he took Zeno’s target as the numerical thesis. (2) At *Sophist* 244 the Eleatic Visitor (at 216a6 associated with Parmenides and Zeno) draws from the thesis of the “Eleatic Tribe”, presumably including Parmenides, that all is one (242c) the absurdity (244c) that there are (εἰς αἰ) two names — ‘one’ and ‘being’ (244c8–9 while positing just one thing. The absurdity of that result is clearly its conflict with the numerical thesis that there is one being. Plato’s so presenting Parmenides suggests that Plato took Zeno’s opposed target to be the numerical thesis. (3) Note 16 above quotes Proclus citing arguments against Parmenides that suggest that Zeno would target a numerical thesis.

²⁹ Curd 1986: 126 holds that in the treatise referred to in Plato’s *Parmenides* “Zeno argues against two sorts of pluralities.” Referring to Zeno’s argument of Plato’s *Par-*

I first dwell on some of Lee's and Nehamas's reasons for the multi-attribute target. Then I set out each author's reconstruction.

Lee presents Zeno's target supposition thus:

εἰ πολλά ἔστι τὰ ὄντα... has most often been taken to express... that more than one thing exists. However, the Greek is equally compatible with a thesis of a different kind... It can also be used to assert that there are some plural beings: each such being is individually many. In fact this seems to be the way Socrates understands Zeno's premise: in his response he talks about "me, and you, and all the other things that we call many" (129a2–3, where "many" evidently qualifies each of the things Socrates mentions... Zeno's starting point is that 'there are beings that are many in the sense of having many properties... For example, Socrates in the dialogue is young, a philosopher... (Lee 2014: 264)

Lee holds that Socrates takes Zeno's target supposition "Beings are many" to imply, for example, that Socrates by himself is many, and Zeno by himself is many, is evidence that Zeno's target is the multi-attribute thesis. That target easily explains why Socrates would treat "each thing is many" as a consequence.

Nehamas presents the multi-attribute target in this way:

Zeno is not concerned with the number of things — "beings" — there are, but about the number of things — "beings" — that each of the things there are — also "beings" — is. He is not concerned with the multiplicity of the sensible world but with its manifoldness. He is rejecting the idea — as we, but not... the Greeks — would put it — that every sensi-

menides, she says, "it will succeed against... both (a) a plurality of entities (a 'numerical' many... and (b) a plurality of predicates in a single entity (a 'predicational' many)." I will make use with some modification of the suggestion of Curd 1986 in my conclusion. My treatment differs from Curd 1986 and Curd 1991 in that I will take Zeno's argument in the *Parmenides* to have a triple target. See also Scolnicov 2003: 46: "It is not necessary to assume that Zeno is arguing against the numerical plurality of what exists. He could as well be arguing against predicational plurality — that is against the assumption that a single thing has more than one characteristic." See also Harte 2002: 54 who cites Simplicius paraphrasing Eudemus thus: "Each perceptible thing may be called many both predicatively (κατηγορικῶς) and in virtue of having parts (μερισμῶ).

ble object has many features or properties. (Nehamas 2016: 10–11 and 2019: 129).³⁰

Nehamas gives several reasons to believe that Zeno here had the multi-attribute target and did not have the numerical target.³¹ I will accommodate one of his reasons below in an improved reconstruction of Zeno’s argument.

Lee’s reconstruction

1. Beings are many in that each being has many attributes. (127e1–2, Zeno’s stated target; Lee 2014: 264: Zeno’s starting point is that “there are beings that are many in the sense of having many properties or characteristics”)
2. Each being is both like and unlike. (127e2; Lee 2014: 259)³²
3. The only things that there are are the things that common sense recognizes. (Lee perhaps finds this implicit in Socrates’ claiming the argument was restricted to “things seen”, 130a1, and his speaking at 123d3 of sticks and stones)³³

³⁰Nehamas 2016: 13 and 2019: 131 cautions: “Neither Zeno nor Socrates can use expressions like ‘property’ or ‘feature.’ The distinction between subject and predicate, substance and property or feature, is... missing from the logic... of early Greek philosophy. What is missing... is the very notion of predication, the operation that allows several properties... to apply to a single object without endangering its unity.” Nehamas 2016 is an online version of Nehamas 2019. I cite both the 2016 and the 2019 versions to reflect the fact that it is the 2016 version that I studied for some years while writing this essay. I am grateful to Nehamas for taking the time to give me early access to the 2019 publication.

³¹Nehamas 2016 and 2019 gives five reasons to favor the multi-attribute target for Zeno over the numerical target. I argue in an essay unpublished, under submission, that the other four reasons are unsuccessful.

³²Lee does not speculate to fill the inferential gap between the target supposition and the intermediate result that each being is both like and unlike. Lee leaves the gap, saying: “We do not know what basis, if any, was given for the inference.” (Lee 2014: 259)

³³Lee 2014: 264: “Zeno’s starting point, according to [Socrates]... is a theory of explanation... committed only to the existence of things that common sense [recognizes]... We may explain... how Socrates got to be many things... simply by pointing to Socrates himself as the embodiment of each of these things. What he is, as an individual, accounts for the presence of all these features.”

4. Unlikes cannot be likes nor likes unlikes. (127e3–4: “Neither are unlike things such as to be (οἷον τε εἶναι) like nor are like things [such as to be] unlike”; Lee 2014: 258 calls this “the incompatibility claim”)

Lee says that the incompatibility claim “is presented as something that follows uncontroversially from the way ‘the likes’ and ‘the unlikes’ are identified.”³⁴ He takes it to mean (Lee 2014: 264–265; 269) that what explains likeness must be different from what explains unlikeness.³⁵

Lee supplies for Zeno the conclusion:

5. Proponents of the many have a puzzle.³⁶

That is, since all we have to talk about (by 3) is like things and unlike things – which are the same, (2) conflicts with (4).³⁷

Nehamas’s Reconstruction

I find this reconstruction in Nehamas 2016 and 2019.

³⁴ Lee 2014: 263.

³⁵ Lee 2014: 265: “It is difficult to understand how the same thing, or pair of things, could combine the roles of explaining both features [i.e. the opposites likeness and unlikeness]. It is this conclusion that Socrates summarizes on Zeno’s behalf as being ‘impossible.’” Compare Panagiotou 1982: 49, n. 3 on explanation. He says that Parmenides’ dilemma of participation at 131a–e “operates at the ‘explanatory’ level, i.e., how can one account for the ‘largeness’ of sensibles by using, as a principle of explanation, only part of the concept of largeness (Form of largeness)?”

³⁶ Lee 2014: 264–265 says: “When pressed for an explanation of... facts... about the likeness and unlikeness of Socrates and Zeno, the straightforward view of explanation will be unable to point to anything beyond Socrates and Zeno themselves... The puzzle does not get its force by fallaciously deriving a logical contradiction from the compresence of likeness and unlikeness in the same individual or pair of individuals. Instead, Zeno’s puzzle is an *aporia* concerning explanation... The *aporia* centers on the idea that on one... plausible... theory of explanation, it will be one and the same entity or pair of entities that must be invoked to explain the presence of both likeness and unlikeness. This seems strongly counter-intuitive.”

³⁷ Lee 2014: 269: “By replying [to Zeno] that there must be some distinct things that play the role of accounting for likeness and unlikeness, we may concede to Zeno that something further is required without thereby being committed to endorsing one particular theory as the right answer... Zeno’s puzzle... raises a difficulty for any theory of explanation that makes a single entity fill a multiplicity of explanatory roles.”

1. Sensible³⁸ beings are many. (127e1–2: that is, they are each many in that they each have many attributes; e.g., Charmides is beautiful, for a human being, and Charmides is ugly, for a god. Zeno’s target for refutation)
2. The only way for any item to be *F* is to be exactly what it is to be *F*. (Premise supplied by Nehamas as implicit in Zeno’s argument reported by Socrates)³⁹
3. Since Charmides is beautiful and ugly, Charmides is both what it is to be beautiful and what it is to be ugly. (From 1 and 2)⁴⁰
4. Charmides is like himself. (Nehamas draws this statement from Socrates’ objections to Zeno at 129a8–b1, “like and unlike to themselves”: ὁμοία τε και ἀνόμοια αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς)
5. Charmides is unlike himself. (Again from “like and unlike to themselves” at 129a8–b1)⁴¹

Nehamas I believe would explain the inference to 5 by the following reasoning. Opposites are obviously different from (and hence unlike) each other. Charmides’ being identical with opposites (step 3 above)

³⁸ “Sensible” reflects Nehamas 2016: 7 and 2019: 125: “Socrates... counters that this argument... applies only to those things that ‘in fact we call many’... (129a3): Zeno has shown... merely that if such things – sensible objects – are many, then they must be both like and unlike.”

³⁹ Nehamas 2016: 19 and 2019: 135: “Early and classical Greek thought... took every sentence of the form ‘*X* is *F*’ to be equivalent to ‘*X* is what it is to be *F*’, to assert, that is, that *F* is the very nature of *X*.”

⁴⁰ Nehamas 2016: 19 and 2019: 135: “Early and classical Greek thought operated with an extraordinarily restrictive notion of what it is to be something. Lacking... the notion of predication, it had serious trouble understanding a sentence like ‘Charmides is beautiful’... ‘Charmides is beautiful’ could not assert that Charmides is characterized by beauty (that would be its predicative understanding) but rather that Charmides is *what it is to be beautiful*.” Nehamas 2016: 18 and 2019: 134 proposes that Plato’s “middle theory of Forms” maintained, “participation is an alternative to, a second-best way, of being. Only... virtue itself is virtuous and never its opposite or anything else.”

⁴¹ Nehamas 2016: 9 and 2019: 128: “Socrates... says that... nothing prevents sensible objects from being ‘both like and unlike’ (129a6–9)... But he does not claim that these objects are like and unlike other distinct and independent objects. Rather, he makes it clear that sensible objects... are like and unlike themselves (129a8–b1)... and being both like and unlike oneself is not at all the same as being like one thing and unlike another.”

therefore makes him unlike himself.⁴² That reasoning would give a role in the argument to the “Early Greek” notion of being.⁴³

6. Charmides is like and unlike himself. (129ab; from 4 and 5)
7. It is impossible that Charmides is like and unlike himself. (Nehamas 2016: 10 and 2019: 128: “an inference that really does lead to a contradiction”)
8. So 1 is impossible.

These are some comments on Nehamas’ reconstruction.

A. *The phrase “to themselves.”* Nehamas uniquely concerns himself to explain the phrase “like and unlike to themselves” (αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς, 129a8–b1, most literally, “themselves to themselves”) in Socrates’ objection and challenge. Socrates says:

And even if all things get a share of both contrary beings and are by having a share of both like and unlike themselves to themselves (αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς) what is wonderful [about that]? (129a6–b1).

This phrase “themselves to themselves” is not within Socrates’ initial two summaries of Zeno’s argument (127e1–8), but since it is part of his spontaneous reaction, it is relevant to consider it to understand how Socrates sees Zeno’s argument. It is a merit of Nehamas’s interpretation to consider the phrase.

⁴² See Nehamas 2016: 16 and 2019: 133: “Being a beautiful woman is... for Plato both beautiful and ugly — and, to connect this discussion with the *Parmenides*, since it is both beautiful and ugly it is therefore like and unlike itself.” Nehamas 2016: 19 and 2019: 135: “Plato would argue [that] Charmides, who is a beautiful man, is also ugly when compared to a god... Given this understanding of ‘is’, ‘Charmides is ugly’ seems to assert that Charmides is what it is to be ugly. Charmides, therefore... would be both what it is to be beautiful and what it is to be ugly... It follows that what it is to be beautiful is what it is to be ugly, that Beauty is Ugliness. And that is impossible.” This argument resembles the main thread of Allen’s argument. But Nehamas’s reconstruction of Zeno’s argument as represented above, uses this thread as a step toward the conclusion “unlike itself” rather than taking it to present the final absurdity that impales Zeno’s target.

⁴³ It would be an interesting project, different from my task here, to compare Nehamas’s premise 2 to Allen’s premise 2 that likeness is not distinct from each like thing. Both use their premise to yield the result that likeness and unlikeness are identical.

Nehamas describes step 6 as a contradiction:

[Socrates] says that any sensible object can participate in two opposite Forms at the same time: nothing prevents sensible objects from being “both like and unlike”... But he does not claim that these objects are like and unlike other distinct and independent objects... Rather, he makes it clear that sensible objects that participate in both likeness and unlikeness are like and unlike *themselves* (αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς)... and being both like and unlike oneself is not at all the same as being like one thing and unlike another. If Socrates takes Zeno to think that plurality somehow makes things both like and unlike themselves, he is attributing to him an inference that really does lead to a contradiction,⁴⁴ not the considerably more innocuous claim we usually attribute to [him]. (Nehamas 2016: 10 and 2019: 128)

B. A “*real contradiction*”? Nehamas’s phrasing, “really does lead to a contradiction,” implies, I gather, that we cannot resolve the apparent impossibility in the common-sense way by qualifying with “like in respect *R1* and unlike in respect *R2*.” I gather that Nehamas implies that there is no respect in which something can be unlike itself.

C. *The implications of the plural, “to themselves.”* The phrase “unlike to themselves” at 128a8–b1 is plural. Nehamas (2016: 10; 2019: 128) takes it to mean that each item of the plurality is unlike to itself. That meaning is possible. But it is not necessary. Often when you say that a collection of items stands in some relation “to themselves,” you do not mean that each member stands in that relation to itself. For example, if I say of a political group, “They are fighting with themselves”, I usually do not mean that each person in the group is fighting with himself. Rather I mean that some members of the group are fighting with others. Similarly, when Socrates suggests that Zeno has argued to the result that sensibles are “unlike themselves” he might not mean,

⁴⁴I would not use the word “contradiction,” for the statement, “they are like and unlike themselves.” I would reserve “contradiction” for statements exhibiting the pattern: “*P* and not-*P*.” I will say instead that 6 is an impossibility of some other form than contradictory. (Nehamas apparently locates the impossibility in “Charmides is unlike himself,” so I will dwell on that.)

as Nehamas believes, “each is unlike to itself.” Rather, Socrates might mean: “Some members of the group are unlike some other members of the group”. Thus Cornford 1939 translates “at once like and unlike one another”.⁴⁵

If we give this natural interpretation of “unlike to themselves” Nehamas’s point that it is impossible for a single item to be unlike to itself does not arise.

D. How does the proponent of a numerical target explain “unlike to themselves”? If, nevertheless, we accept Nehamas’s view that “unlike to themselves” intends to imply “each is unlike to itself”, then there is an advantage to Nehamas’s reconstruction of Zeno’s argument. The advantage is that it is immediately clear how “each is unlike itself” would follow from the multi-attribute supposition plus Nehamas’s supplied premise 2 — the “early and classical Greek” failure to make the distinction between the predicative *is* and the stronger *is* that signals what it is to be something. The argument (proposed at step 5 above) would be that if Charmides is both beautiful and ugly, he is what-it-is-to-be beautiful (i.e., beauty), and he is what-it-is-to-be ugly (ugliness). But beauty and ugliness are opposites that are not identical. So Charmides is unlike himself in being not self-identical.

In comparison, for a proponent of a numerical target for Zeno, the question arises: how, from the numerical target, “There are two or more things” does there follow: “each being is unlike itself”? The proponent of the numerical target then owes us an answer to the new question: what would be the *argument* by which the assumption that the count of beings is greater than one would lead to the conclusion that each being is unlike itself?

⁴⁵ Morrow and Dillon 1987 translate Proclus’ citation of 129a3–b1 at Proclus 748 with “unlike one another.” Brisson 1994 has “toutes sont à la fois mutuellement semblables et dissemblables”. Coxon 1999: 39: “like and unlike one another”. Lee 2014: 267: “they are like and unlike each other”. Gill and Ryan 1996 translate with “themselves.” Diès 1956 similarly with “à elles mêmes”. The translation of Jowett 1937 (“both like and unlike”) apparently omits anything corresponding to ἀὐτὰ αὐτοῖς: “May not all things partake of both opposites and be both like and unlike, by reason of this participation? — Where is the wonder?”

I suggest that the proponent of the numerical target for Zeno might offer these answers to the new question.

i. El Murr's reconstruction (El Murr 2005: 28) offers plausibly that something is unlike itself if some part of it is unlike another part of it.

ii. When there are beings in number greater than one, say beings *a* and *b*, *a* is the same as *a*, but *a* is different from *b*, *a* is then both the same and different. Being the same is opposite to and hence unlike being different. So *a* considered as different is unlike itself considered as the same. That is, item *a* insofar as it is different is unlike itself insofar as it is the same.⁴⁶

These two arguments reasonably draw from the numerical supposition the result that each being would be like and unlike itself.

⁴⁶ See also Curd 1986: 127, apparently taking “unlike to themselves” to imply “each is unlike to itself”: “Zeno’s arguments also rule out a further ‘predicational’ plurality: a plurality of predicates... attaching to a single entity. Consider Simmias alone... We may say that he is like insofar as he is self-identical; but he is also unlike insofar as he is beautiful as well as just.” The argument that Curd proposes is similar to the argument at (ii) above in making use of the adverbial phrase “insofar as.” But Curd’s argument differs in not proceeding from the premise that there is more than one being. A close relative of the pattern of argument at (ii) above occurs at *Parmenides* 148a4–c2: “Insofar as the one has the property of being different from the others (ἢ δὴ τὸ ἐν ἕτερον τῶν ἄλλων πέπονθεν εἶναι)... owing to that property it would be altogether like them all... Yet, on the other hand, the like is opposite to the unlike... Isn’t the different also opposite to the same? ...But this was shown as well, that the one is the same as the others... And being the same as the others is the property opposite to being different from the others... Insofar as the one is different, it was shown to be like... So insofar as it is the same, it will be unlike, owing to the property opposite to that which makes it like... Therefore the one will be like and unlike the others, insofar as it is different, like, and insofar as it is the same, unlike.” Some commentators (Gill, Ryan 1996: 83; Cornford 1939: 165) consider the argument at 148a4–c2 questionable. Others do not: see Sayre 1996: 195–198; Rickless 2007: 159–160; and Peterson 2000: 48–49. Here I note only in 148a4–c2 the final inference from “insofar as it is the same [as the others]” to “unlike the others.” Parmenides comments shortly thereafter at 148d1 (“in the same way to itself”) that a similar argument can show that because the one is the same as itself, it is unlike itself. That would be a closer parallel to the argument I suggest at (ii) above. I stress the role of “insofar as” (ἢ) in this passage, as Scolnicov 2007: 117 does.

8. *Remarks Preliminary to the Presentation
of My Improved Reconstruction*⁴⁷

A. The place of “Unlikes are not such as to be likes” (or “the unlikes cannot be likes”, 127e3–4) in the sequence of Zeno’s reasoning. I will follow Lee 2014: 258 in giving the label “the incompatibility claim,” to the statement in Zeno’s argument, “Unlikes are not such as to be likes.” It occurs in Socrates’ first summary of the argument.

Are you saying this? If beings are many, then it must be that they are both like and unlike, but this is impossible; *for* (γὰρ) neither are the unlikes (τὰ ἀνόμοια) such as to be (οἷόν τε εἶναι) likes (ὅμοια) nor the likes (τὰ ὅμοια) unlikes (ἀνόμοια)? Are you not saying it this way? (127e1–4)

All the interpretations so far considered have as a step in their reconstruction of Zeno’s argument something corresponding to Socrates’ / Zeno’s statement, “This is impossible” (127e3). “This” refers back to the statement that ordinary things are both like and unlike at 127e2.

I call new attention to the sequence of reasoning. The clause consisting of the statement, “This is impossible,” is followed by a clause with Socrates’ question, “*for* neither are the unlikes such as to be likes nor the likes [such as to be] unlikes?” (οὔτε γὰρ τὰ ἀνόμοια ὅμοια οὔτε τε

⁴⁷ Allen 1997: 83–84 says that Zeno’s argument was entirely general, effective against any plurality: “Socrates in the *Parmenides* treats Zeno as attacking not merely the position of some distinct philosophical school... but the ordinary common-sense belief in the reality of the physical world and its attendant pluralism (see 129cd, 130a). So far as the *Parmenides* is concerned, even this is too narrow. Zeno’s paradox of likeness is stated with absolute generality. It is directed not against this sort of plurality or that, but against any sort of plurality at all. If it were valid, it would condemn not only the plurality of the sensible world, but also the plurality of the world of Ideas by which Socrates will undertake to vindicate the plurality of the sensible world.” I agree with Allen that the argument, if effective, is effective against any plurality. But I disagree if Allen means that Zeno, as Socrates reports him, intended the wider argument. Socrates implies that Zeno raised difficulties only for visibles; Socrates’ only examples of items from among the posited plurality are Socrates (129e4) and “stones and sticks and such things” (129d3–4). See also 130a and 135de.

τὰ ὅμοια ἀμόμοια οἷόν εἶναι, 127e3–4). I emphasize the connective “for” (γάρ, 127e3) that governs the clause that contains it in Socrates’ question.

The connective “for” of the crucial questioning clause indicates that “Unlikes are not such as to be (i.e., cannot be) likes nor the likes unlikes” is a *reason* that explains the preceding statement “This is impossible.” The impossibility is that the many are both like and unlike.⁴⁸ Zeno, in assenting to Socrates’ question, agrees that the incompatibility claim is the reason he gave for that impossibility.

I stress that Zeno gave the incompatibility claim, “Unlikes cannot be likes” as a *reason or explanation* why it is impossible that the many (visible ordinary objects of our experience) are both like and unlike. To offer a reason or explanation is to intend the reason or explanation as something distinct from and prior to that for which it is a reason. Zeno intends the incompatibility claim as more convincing than, more credible than, and more obvious than the result that “it is impossible” that ordinary objects be both like and unlike.⁴⁹

If, instead, Zeno did not offer the incompatibility claim as a prior and distinct reason, then the incompatibility claim simply reiterates what precedes it.⁵⁰ Zeno’s reasoning would be: “This (that ordinary things are both like and unlike) is impossible. *For* ordinary unlike things cannot be

⁴⁸ See Denniston 1991: 58–98 on the complexities of γάρ. Pp. 58–68 most suggest the explanatory role here. Gill, Ryan 1996 confirm my understanding of the logical sequence by translating γάρ as “because.” Similarly Diès with “vu que”.

⁴⁹ Lee 2014: 259 observes that it is “crucial for any successful interpretation” to explain why Socrates says it is impossible for beings to be both like and unlike. I agree. I will give an explanation different from Lee’s.

⁵⁰ Gill and Ryan perhaps understand Zeno to be repeating himself. They translate the sequence of reasoning at 127e1–34 as: “if things are many, they must be both like and unlike, but that is impossible, because unlike things can’t be like or like things unlike?” Their phrases “Unlike things” and “like things” clearly refer to the ordinary objects of the plurality of beings that Zeno is arguing against. Similarly, Cornford 1939: 66: “unlike things cannot be like, nor like things unlike.” Fowler in the Loeb does not supply “things”. Lee 2014: 256 does supply “things”: “for neither are unlike things such as to be like nor like things [such as to be] unlike”. To me that makes the presumably explanatory clause seem a mere repetition of its *explanandum*.

like and vice versa.” I find it improbable that Plato would represent Zeno (as reported by Socrates) as having offered such clumsy repetition.

Because this point is important, I repeat it: I emphasize that unless Zeno as reported is simply repeating himself, he gives “the unlikes cannot be like(s)” as a *distinct and prior explanation* of his preceding claim that it is impossible that the many are both like and unlike. I now ask what that explanation means.⁵¹

B. The meaning of the incompatibility claim, “Unlikes are not such as to be likes.” The incompatibility claim says:

neither are the unlikes such as to be likes nor the likes unlikes (οὔτε γὰρ τὰ ἀνόμοια ὅμοια οὔτε τὰ ὅμοια ἀνόμοια οἷόν τε εἶναι, 127e3–4).⁵²

⁵¹I note that Socrates in his next question reiterates in different phrasing the sequence of reasoning. Socrates asks for confirmation of Zeno’s argument in a second summary of the argument. This time he speaks the incompatibility claim first: “Then if it is impossible both for the unlikes to be likes and the likes unlikes, it is indeed impossible that the many are? For if many were, they would suffer impossibilities.” (127e 6–8) Here the sequence of reasoning is: It is impossible for the unlikes to be like and the likes unlikes. — Suppose there were many. — Then the many are like and unlike. — So the many would suffer impossibilities. The incompatibility of the two opposite forms is given as a prior reason why the many instances cannot suffer (πάσχει, have as attributes) both of them. The “impossibilities” that they would suffer are the two opposite forms.

⁵²Lee 2014: 261 usefully asks what τὰ ὅμοια and τὰ ἀνόμοια refer to in the incompatibility claim. Lee summarizes “a standard account” that answers this question. The standard account has two parts: (a) such expressions are ambiguous between “individuals that have certain characters and... the characters themselves”; (b) the context here makes clear that “the likes” and “the unlikes” in Socrates’ answer [i.e. his challenge at 129b3] are “meant in some completely different way” from their occurrences in Zeno’s argument (127e3–4). In contrast to this “standard account” Lee offers an improved account of the meaning of τὰ ὅμοια and τὰ ἀνόμοια. Lee 2014: 272 proposes that the expression τὰ ὅμοια is not ambiguous. Rather, it is more like an indexical such as “I”. “I” always has the same role of picking out the speaker in its context. Similarly, an expression such as ‘the likes’ “is meant to pick out whatever it is that plays the role of explaining likeness in a given context.” Lee 2014: 268 says: “Socrates introduces the ‘forms’ (εἶδη) as a way of responding to the difficulty Zeno has raised... Yet Socrates clearly regards the ‘form’ analysis of sharing in one and many as compatible with, rather than competing with, a straightforward analysis of multitude in terms of having many parts and of oneness in terms of being one man in a group of men.

I have previously observed that Socrates uses the key phrases τὰ ὅμοια and τὰ ἀνόμοια to refer to the minimal – and so far unproblematic – forms likeness and unlikeness. Likeness = what like is. Unlikeness = what unlike is. Socrates infers Zeno’s commitment to those opposite forms when Zeno says that unlikes cannot be likes. As Socrates reports the incompatibility claim (127e3–4), he speaks of what unlike is, and what like is. He speaks of what we grasp in reasoning (130a) when we understand what like is and what unlike is. It is what we grasp when we assert that they are opposites.⁵³

I have argued that the connective “for” signals that the incompatibility claim – “The unlikes cannot be likes” – is Zeno’s *reason for* the result, “It is impossible that the many like things (i.e., ordinary things that are many) are unlike.” That is, the incompatibility claim is *more primitive and more believable* than the result it supports.

I explain further: Zeno’s incompatibility claim reflects how speakers understand the words “unlike” and “like.” That is to say: we do not first notice that objects that are like (in some respect) cannot be unlike (in that respect) and then infer that likeness cannot be the same as unlikeness. To understand the words “like” and “unlike” is to grasp that the εἶδος likeness itself is the opposite of and hence incompatible with the εἶδος unlikeness itself.⁵⁴ We get an understanding of the words “like”

We are in search of a middle ground between the minimally and maximally theoretical interpretations currently put forward in the literature.” By “minimally theoretical” Lee apparently indicates the account of the one / many problem that does not mention forms but only parts. “Maximally theoretical” indicates the account that invokes the Theory of Forms of the secondary literature. My view is rather that the expressions τὰ ὅμοια and τὰ ἀνόμοια whether in Socrates’ report of Zeno’s argument (at 127e) or in Socrates’ challenge (at 129b) refer to the same items, what I call minimal forms.

⁵³I refer again as in note 4 above to Kahn 1981: 109: “To know what beautiful is would be to know the full sense of the term.”

⁵⁴Lee draws this point from the incompatibility claim. “An alternative theory of reference for those expressions, not appealing to ambiguity, would provide some unitary account of meaning for ‘the likes’ and ‘the unlikes’ that allows them to vary across contexts in the same way as [expressions such as ‘I’ and ‘this’]. We can find a clue for this new theory in the fact that in both cases, the entities referred to are identified... by means of their connection with likeness and unlikeness. That unlike things are not “such as to be... like and vice versa is important here, since it is presented as something

and “unlike” as we learn a language. (To speak of likeness by itself or unlikeness by itself is not to forget that like or unlike things must be like in some respect or other. Rather, it is to say that we grasp a nucleus of meaning of “like” and of “unlike.”⁵⁵)

Consider a different example to illustrate the direction of thought. Squareness and circularity are incompatible. When we understand what a square is and what a circle is, then we have the reason for our conviction that squares cannot be circles. The account of what a square is excludes circles from falling under it. We do not *first* notice that no squares are circles and vice versa and *then* decide that what a square is (the εἶδος square, square itself) is incompatible with what a circle is (circularity itself).

C. Our expectations about the quality of Zeno’s argument. Allen 1997 maintains that if Zeno’s argument were subject to the objection that his allegedly impossible result (“They will be both like and unlike”) is easily rendered harmless by adding the qualifications “like in respect *R1* and unlike in respect *R2*,” then the argument would be too weak to elicit Socrates’ response that mentions forms. Allen 1997: 85 says:

To deny that the same things cannot be like and unlike, one and many... one need only appeal to the facts of daily life. Had Plato supposed that common-sense examples could refute the paradox, he would surely have used them.

that follows uncontroversially from the way in which ‘the likes’ and ‘the unlikes’ are identified.” (Lee 2014: 263) I am not entirely certain what Lee’s “follows uncontroversially from the way in which ‘the likes’ and ‘the unlikes’ are identified” means. Lee’s previous statement that “in both cases the entities referred to are identified... by means of their connection with likeness and unlikeness” suggests to me that Lee thinks it follows from the meaning of “like” and “unlike” that unlikes are not such as to be like, and vice versa: that is, anyone who understands those bits of language understands that what it is to be unlike is different from what it is to be like. If that is what Lee intends to say, I agree.

⁵⁵ See also note 2 above. Evans 1994: 248 makes a related point, if I understand him: “Plato supposes that even where a predicate normally requires complementation from the surrounding context in order to have meaning, this does not entail that the predicate’s meaning is... in all cases relative... Moreover the meaning of the word in non-absolute contexts is partly derived from its absolute meaning.”

And also:

It is to be remembered that Socrates will reply to it [Zeno's argument] with the theory of Ideas, and no man trundles in artillery to shoot fleas. The paradox that initiates the dialectic of the *Parmenides* is of considerable importance to its interpretation. (Allen 1997: 76)

Socrates in reply to Zeno will claim that the same things can be like and unlike, one and many. But he will claim this only on a condition, and the condition is metaphysical: if Ideas of Likeness and Unlikeness, Unity and Plurality... exist, then the same things may be both like and unlike, one and many. (Allen 1997: 85)

I disagree on both counts. First, Socrates does in fact make the common-sense correction or diagnosis when he says that things may be like and unlike “in this way and to this extent” (129a). Second, Socrates does not bring in a “metaphysical” theory of Ideas. (The word “metaphysical” I find unhelpful in Allen’s admirable commentary. The word is not in Plato’s vocabulary. I find similarly unhelpful the capitalization of the word “Ideas.”) Socrates brings in only minimal and ordinary forms quite relevantly when he poses his question, “Do you not acknowledge that there is a form itself by itself of likeness?” (128e6–129a1).⁵⁶ Socrates’ question is a good move in the dialectical game because he expects Zeno’s ready assent to such minimal forms.⁵⁷ His

⁵⁶ Allen, 1997: 90 says: “The essence of Socrates’ reply... is that a distinction obtains between things qualified by opposites and the opposites that qualify them. There would have been no point in drawing that distinction unless Socrates thought Zeno had assumed its denial.” Contrary to Allen I believe that Socrates asks his question, not to draw a distinction that Zeno denies, but rather, as a move in the dialectical game, to point out what Zeno obviously assumes.

⁵⁷ Harte 2002: 57, like Allen, believes Socrates’ objection speaks of forms of a technical theory of forms. She says: “Socrates responds to Zeno’s argument by bringing in a metaphysical hypothesis about forms: that they exist and that they stand in certain relations to the things around us... Socrates finds the (apparent) contradiction of his being one (in one respect) and many (in a different respect) sufficiently philosophically worrying to require the involvement of forms... Socrates is one because he has a share of the form One and he is many because he has a share of the form Many.” I would object on two counts. First, Socrates does not think that his being one and many is a contradiction. He thinks it is a plain fact. And second, he does not mention forms to solve a worry. He does not have that worry. He mentions forms to point out a pre-

question would be a bad move if he were attempting to impose a novel technical Theory of Forms on Zeno.

Barnes locates the argument's flaw in its claim that it is impossible that things are like and unlike. Once we acknowledge that some qualifications are implicit, Zeno's results "do not together amount to anything of the damning form ' Q and not- Q '".⁵⁸ Barnes, in contrast to Allen, does not think an adequate interpretation must avoid ascribing to Zeno a weak argument.⁵⁹ Barnes would apparently call the failure to acknowledge the qualifications "a trifling fallacy." I disagree. The fallacy is extremely important because it provokes the diagnosis that uncompleted apparently incompatible expressions, when properly completed, can be rendered understandable and true. That sort of diagnosis is one

supposition of Zeno's. Lee 2014: 268 says: "Socrates introduces the 'forms' as a way of responding to the difficulty Zeno has raised. This prevents us from understanding him as simply denying that Zeno's puzzle is a puzzle at all. Moreover, the conversation subsequently takes a strongly theoretical turn in which Socrates' own notions of separation, forms, and sharing come in for detailed scrutiny." Again I would object for the same two reasons. Socrates does "simply deny" Zeno's alleged puzzle by pointing out how relational expressions behave. Second, Socrates mentions two forms that Zeno must acknowledge to convey that Zeno is incoherent in attacking plurality. Moreover, the "strongly theoretical turn" that the conversation subsequently takes is what Parmenides, a veteran of *dialegesthai*, elicits from the competitive adolescent Socrates by questioning. The difficulties in which Socrates gets ensnared are new temporary commitments that his spontaneous reaction to Zeno's argument did not imply. Lee 2014: 258 comments in his note 5: "Peterson 2008, 384... argues that Socrates' response rests on a simple appeal to common sense, rather than any philosophical position." I would not sharply contrast common sense and "any philosophical position."

⁵⁸ Similarly Evans 1994: 245.

⁵⁹ Barnes 1982: 236 says: "Many men had mocked Parmenides: Zeno mocked the mockers. His *logoi* were designed to reveal the inanities and ineptitudes inherent in the ordinary belief in a plural world... He did not have the serious... purpose of supporting an Eleatic monism; and he did not adopt a ponderous logical precision in his method. That conclusion has some slight importance. Many modern interpreters of Zeno have argued that such and such an account of a paradox is wrong because it attributes a silly fallacy to a profound mind. Zeno was not profound: he was clever. Some profundities did fall from his pen; but so too did some trifling fallacies. And that is what we should expect from an eristic disputant. If we meet a deep argument, we may rejoice; if we are dazzled by a superficial glitter, we are not bound to search for a nugget of philosophical gold."

of the minor glories of logical analysis.⁶⁰ Such diagnosis can very usefully clarify – though not necessarily settle – disputes. The youthful Socrates makes that diagnosis here.

D. Again, Zeno’s target supposition. Both Lee 2014: 264 and Nehamas 2016: 9–13 (2019: 128–130) observe that Socrates’ explanation that he is unproblematically many in having many parts indicates that Zeno’s target supposition implies that the individual Socrates is many. However, Socrates’ statement that his having many parts implies his being many fits ill the view that Zeno’s target supposition is the Lee / Nehamas multi-attribute supposition. To defuse the multi-attribute supposition we should rather expect Socrates to explain how he unproblematically has many attributes. The fact that Socrates mentions that it is unproblematic that he has many parts suggests rather, as El Murr 2005: 28 proposes, that Zeno’s target is or includes as a disjunct the proposal that beings have many parts.

Once we have El Murr’s two disjuncts – either (i) beings are many in number or (ii) beings have many parts – there naturally occurs the thought that we might also include the Lee / Nehamas multi-attribute target as a third disjunct: (iii) beings are many in that beings have many attributes. Including the third disjunct would accommodate the fact that “Beings are many” is ambiguous enough to mean “Beings have many attributes.”⁶¹

We would then take Zeno’s target as:

Suppose that beings are many in that
either (i) there is more than one being;
or (ii) beings have many parts;
or (iii) beings have many attributes.

⁶⁰ My phrase “one of the minor glories of logical analysis” echoes Wallace 1972: 773, who takes notice of “one of the glories of quantification theory – minor perhaps.”

⁶¹ As noted above (note 29), Curd 1986: 126–127 takes Zeno’s target to include both numerical plurality and predicational plurality (our “multi-attribute” target). She observes that Zeno’s argument “will succeed” against both. I assume she means “will succeed equally,” which allows that the argument will fail against both, given the flaw of its false premise. See my note 46 above for Curd’s sketch of Zeno’s argument and see Section 10 below for assessment of Zeno’s argument.

Zeno would then have the newly ambitious goal of proving that of the many available ways in which someone might think that beings could be many, beings cannot be many in any of them. Such a maximally bold target for Zeno would fit well with the spirit of youthful combativeness that Zeno claims for his argument.

The skeleton of Zeno's reasoning from the bolder disjunctive target would then be this:

Suppose beings are many in that either (i) or (ii) or (iii).
Now if (i), beings *a* and *b* are both like and unlike;
and if (ii), beings are like and unlike;
and if (iii) beings are like and unlike.
But unlikes cannot be likes.
So this — i.e., either (i) or (ii) or (iii) — is impossible.

9. *The Improved Reconstruction*

The skeleton fleshed out is my improved reconstruction of Zeno's argument as Socrates understands it.

1. Suppose beings are many (127e1–2), that is:
 - (i) either there are at least two beings, say *x* and *y*;
 - (ii) or some being has many parts;
 - (iii) or some being has many attributes, that is, there is some being *x* such that *x* is *F* and *x* is *G*, and what *F* is is distinct from what *G* is.
2. Suppose case (i). There are at least two beings, *x* and *y*. Then *x* and *y* would be alike in being both beings, but unlike in that *x* is distinct from *y* while *y* is distinct from *x*. Hence *x* and *y* would be like and unlike. (127e2: “they must be both like and unlike”) Hence, moreover, each would be “unlike itself” in that e.g. when *y* exists along with *x*, *x* is then unlike *x*-entirely-by-itself. (128ab: “unlike themselves to themselves”)
3. Suppose case (ii). Some being *x* has many parts. But then one part of *x* is different from some other part of *x*, so *x* is both like itself and unlike itself. (127e2, 128ab)
4. Suppose case (iii). Then some being *x* is such that *x* is *F* and *x* is *G* and what *F* is is different from what *G* is; *x* insofar as it is *F* is like itself insofar as it is *F*; *x* insofar as it is *F* is unlike itself insofar as it is *G*.⁶²

⁶²I note that my reasoning and the similar reasoning of Curd 1986: 127 for case

5. Unlikeness cannot be likeness. (This comes from “*For unlikes cannot be like(s)*”, 127e3–4, as explained above)
6. Hence it is impossible for like things to be unlike. (“This is impossible”, 127e3; the word “this” refers back to 127e2: “They [the many beings] must be both like and unlike”) That is, the results of case (i), case (ii), and case (iii) are impossible.
7. So case (i), case (ii), and case (iii) are impossible.
8. So 1 is impossible. (127e7: ἀδύνατον δὴ καὶ πολλὰ εἶναι)

10. *Assessment of the Improved Reconstruction*

The improved reconstruction has the advantage that it accommodates the fact that “Beings are many” could mean any of the disjuncts (i), (ii), and (iii) above, as Curd, El Murr, Scolnicov, Lee and Nehamas have variously observed.

The improved reconstruction takes notice of Nehamas’s suggested (and possible) interpretation of the phrase, “unlike themselves” to which Nehamas calls attention.

The improved reconstruction has the advantage that it does not supply the premises unstated in the text that Allen and Nehamas supply. (Allen supplies the mistaken identification of e.g. likeness with like things in order that Zeno’s argument merits the Theory of Forms as a response. Nehamas supplies the “Classical Greek” assumption that a being can be only that one thing which is exactly what it is for it to be.) The improved reconstruction is thus closer to the text in not supplying one unstated premise. And it absolves Zeno of the error the supplied premise contains.

The improved reconstruction shares with the other reconstructions that I have considered a familiar defect: it contains the falsehood (step 6 in the improved reconstruction) that an item x cannot be both like and

(iii) is simpler than the reasoning that Nehamas 2016 and 2019 supplies to generate the result “like and unlike” from his multi-attribute supposition. Nehamas uses as a premise of his reconstruction the “Classical Greek” assumption that the only way to be F is to be exactly what F is. The reasoning for the improved reconstruction’s treatment of case (iii) is similar to some reasoning in the gymnastic portion of the *Parmenides* in making the same use of “insofar as.” (See note 46 above.)

unlike.⁶³ However, the improved reconstruction supplies a basis for that false premise in the incompatibility claim (its premise 5). The improved reconstruction has Zeno giving explicit — though inadequate — support for a false step instead of just repeating himself.

A defect of the improved reconstruction, as an interpretation of Zeno, that troubles me at least as much as its dubious inferential transition from step 5 to step 6 is that the detailed reconstruction seems rather ugly. The explicit disjunctive target supposition gives it too many threads. I would expect any argument that Plato would assign to Zeno to be rather elegant. Perhaps even someone that considers Zeno to be merely clever, but not profound, would expect that Zeno's argument would not be ugly.

The inelegance of the argument exposed in the greater detail of the reconstruction I propose might explain why Zeno (as reported by Socrates) gave the severely abbreviated argument to his audience.

I conclude that the improved reconstruction, despite its ugliness, is a more likely interpretation of Zeno's argument in the *Parmenides* than the other reconstructions.

⁶³ This is the flaw that Socrates points out at 129a. According to Vlastos 1975: 149, the historical Zeno would not have been aware of it, though the Socrates depicted here is aware of it. Vlastos says, "Zeno and his public *would* undoubtedly have reckoned [it]... a contradiction... and Plato is not here concerned to challenge that assumption: in this context he is willing to indulge it."

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