Did Aristotle Understand Plato?

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J.N. Findlay, in *Plato, the Written and Unwritten Doctrines,* and later in *Plato and Platonism,* argues that what is implied, but not fully articulated in Plato's dialogues and letters, is given its explicit expression by Aristotle.[1] Findlay maintains that Aristotle's representation of Plato's 'unwritten doctrines' is consistent with the Platonic position as it is disclosed in the dialogues and must, therefore, be accepted as an accurate statement of Plato's teachings.[2] According to Findlay, Aristotle presented a simple and explicit statement of the Principles and Elements which animate the Dialogues, whose literary form prevented Plato from revealing directly what was guiding the discussions between his interlocutors.

On the occasion of Findlay's festschrift, J.A. Doull celebrated Findlay's contribution to Platonic studies. Findlay is presented in Doull's paper as providing "an account of the Platonic philosophy according to its own principles" in contrast to other scholars, who have passed over the Elements and Principles "as dry and empty abstractions."[3] Doull agrees with Findlay in rejecting Schleiermacher's widely supported view that Aristotle's representation of Plato's doctrines must be dismissed on the philological judgement that they are inadequately reflected in the Dialogues. Doull writes:

> With this fashion has always gone a more or less unconscious reading into Plato by scholars of the philosophical interests of their day. Measured by Neo-Kantian, Analytic or some other modern attitude, Aristotle's account of Platonism was philosophical nonsense, and the philological weighing and dismissing of evidence was in the end governed by alien philosophical attachments.[4]

1. See J.N. Findlay, "The Myths of Plato," *Dionysius* 2 (1978): 19–20 for a brief summary of his thesis. For full treatments see idem, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London and New York: Humanities Press, 1974) and *Plato and Platonism: An Introduction* (New York and Toronto: Times Books, 1978).

2. Findlay, *Written and Unwritten Doctrines* 455–73.

3. J.A. Doull, "Findlay and Plato," in *Studies in the Philosophy of J.N. Findlay,* ed. R.S. Cohen, R.M. Martin, and M. Westphal (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985) 250.

4. Ibid. 254–55.

Findlay's distinguishing merit is his ability to recognize the original Platonism in Aristotle's exposition of the teachings of the Academy.

At the centre of Findlay's interpretation of Platonism is a critical evaluation of Aristotle's critique of the Platonic philosophy. He sharply distinguishes between the Aristotle whom he regards as a faithful recorder of his master's teachings, and the Aristotle whom he condemns as a thoroughly misguided and incompetent Platonic commentator. Indeed, the capacity to understand Platonism according to its own assumptions, which Doull attributes to Findlay, Findlay denies Aristotle. Did Aristotle understand the Platonic philosophy? Findlay's answer is emphatically 'no.' Aristotle, according to Findlay, was burdened with assumptions which would have served him well, if he had become "the ingenious empiricist and logical analyst that many think that he was,"[5] but which had the unfortunate consequence of rendering the Platonic philosophy unintelligible to its most influential interpreter. Findlay's Aristotle is the father of an heretical understanding of his master's teaching which has won support from his own time until, in the present era, the distortion has reached its most exaggerated expression by scholars such as Cherniss. Doull joins Findlay in giving first authority to Aristotle's evidence against Cherniss and others, but maintains against Findlay that the most philosophically insightful and accurate exposition of Plato's philosophy is to be found in the works of Aristotle.

I

In an admirable discussion, Findlay characterizes what he calls "the stoicheiological dialogues" (*Cratylus, Theaetetus, Parmenides, Sophist, Philebus*) as leading the argument beyond an eidetic reflection upon the state or the soul or virtue or whatever, a reflection assuming rather than explicating the unifying principles, to a consideration of the *stoicheia* and *archai* of the *eide* and their appearances.[6] He presents the very questionable view that the argument of 'stoicheiological dialogues' is partly a response to an "older pluralistic idealism" current in the Academy at that time. Aristotle, it is suggested, may have belonged to this opposition which Plato was addressing.[7]

5. Findlay, *Plato and Platonism* 213.

6. Findlay, *Written and Unwritten Doctrines* 210. See note 46 below.

7. Doull comments: "Findlay thinks that possibly Aristotle may have belonged to a part of the opposition. That Aristotle was ever a patron of the abstract understanding as against dialectical revision and insight is a suggestion no doubt excusable to a Platonist. More seriously, one may question whether "an older pluralistic idealism," as it is nowhere unchallenged in the earlier Dialogues, was ever taught in the Academy. It therefore appears simpler to suppose that the opponents, Gods and Giants or whatever, are fictional abstractions used to bring to light logically the nature of a concrete dialectic, all the while employed, and in practice generally recognized, in the Academy." Doull, "Findlay and Plato" 257.

Aristotle's critical presence in the Academy is found in the *Parmenides* where Plato responds to the misinterpretations of his theory of Ideas. He notes with delight that "in the latter parts of the dialogue the rather miserable man who makes the responses is called 'Aristotle'."[8] Findlay also finds Aristotle present in Plato's *Sophist*. Aristotle "fits the characterization of the Giants in the *Sophist*, men who want to drag everything down from heaven to earth and who believe in nothing that they cannot touch or handle."[9] Platonism is presented as a pure systematic idealism against Aristotelianism. The latter contains a residue of empiricism which is incompatible with the eidetic insights Aristotle borrowed from Platonism: "Aristotle is a dualist, which Plato is not, and he believes in Matter as some sort of real stuff on which eidetic activity is exercised, thus constituting the realm of Nature."[10] Aristotle is an 'instantialist,' in Findlay's view, in the sense that he maintains that primary reality is the individual, the *tode ti*. Further that the *tode ti* is material, and materiality is understood as a contrary which stands opposed to ideality. Aristotle's matter, in other words, is sensible stuff and not a principle for thought.

Platonism, in sharp contrast, is the systematic philosophy of the One:

> Only Unity Itself, which is also Being and Goodness and Beauty Itself, is given anything like an ontological status by Plato, all else being only its specifications or instantiations, whether material or psychic, and even though Plato, like his remote disciple, the pseudo-Dionysius, prefers to think of it in terms of a *superesse* rather than an *esse*.[11]

Plato's problem is to show how there can be anything other than Unity Itself and his solution is to deny that there is, in a strict sense. Aristotle, in Findlay's view, has the opposite problem and ends up with a plurality of logical and ontological distinctions, which he can only gather together in the form of a list, since he has lost sight of Unity as the ultimate principle of thought and being.[12] Aristotle is wilfully unsystematic, indeed, anti-philosophical and

8. Findlay, *Plato and Platonism* 144.

9. Ibid. 210.

10. Findlay, *Written and Unwritten Doctrines* 361.

11. Ibid. 472.

12. After contrasting Platonic Idealism with the standpoints which encapsulate "all ideal meaning in a comprehensive Subjectivity," Findlay writes: "Platonism has, however, other rivals of a non-idealistic stamp, and of these the philosophical orientation which refuses to absolutize anything is, at first sight, the most formidable. This is the philosophical orientation which is quite willing to adopt different principles in different fields, and to adopt a plurality of principles in different fields, and to adopt a plurality of principles and methods in a single field, without attempting to reduce them all to something simple and single. It is the orientation which is quite willing to use eidetic insights in some fields, but which is crassly empirical in dealing with other questions, and which does not expect either its insights or its empirical

anti-Platonic. Any suggestion that the Aristotelian philosophy may be understood as involving a correction of the original Platonic position, and a further development of it, is dismissed.

Findlay defends Plato against what he regards as an Aristotelian inversion of Plato's 'Great Inversion.' The 'Great Inversion' is "the erection of instances into ontological appendages of Ideas rather than the other way round.[13] Aristotle is a 'quasi-instantialist' (Cherniss is a pure instantialist) who "is unable to conceive that for Plato instances are not really real at all."[14] Indeed, Aristotle treats Plato "who does not believe in instances (as entities in their own right) as if he believed in nothing else."[15] This results in "an almost total misunderstanding of the 'Great Inversion' which is Platonism."[16] Aristotle is presented, in Findlay's account, as attempting to work out the distinction between primary and derivative senses of being in his own ontology in the form of the relation of "material individuals" to the other categories. He fails to grasp that Plato attempted the same "but working it in reverse, and that he was in fact attributing being in the unqualified sense to Ideas and only derivatively to their actual or possible instantiations."[17] Aristotle fails to understand that Plato clearly distinguished between the "apartness" of instances from each other and the ontological and logical "apartness" of ideas from their cases or instantiations.[18] It is Aristotle, not Plato, Findlay argues, who conceived of the Platonic Ideas in a way which rendered them subject to 'third man arguments,' the innumerable fallacies of 'self-predication,' and in general, of criticisms consequent upon the separation of Ideas and their instances, which leaves the Ideas either on a logical and ontological plane of equality with the instances which they are intended to explain as their causes, or in another world with no relation to the realms of sensible particulars and finite human thinking.[19]

findings to be all capable of being seen as radiating from a single centre, or as making a single structure or sense. Aristotelianism in antiquity, Scotism and Ockhamism in medieval times, and certain of the best forms of modern analysis, exemplify the orientation we are trying to characterize, and all are resolutely opposed to the speculative simplification or reduction or misplaced craving for universality." *Written and Unwritten* 409–10.

13. Findlay, *Plato and Platonism* 23.
14. Ibid. 209.
15. Ibid. 233.
16. Ibid. 21.
17. Ibid. 22.
18. Ibid. 21.
19. Ibid. 232–33.

II

In a thorough treatment of Aristotle's evaluation of the Platonic philosophy it would be necessary to distinguish clearly between two very different kinds of criticism. Some criticisms are consequent upon viewing Platonic doctrines from the standpoint of the Aristotelian philosophy. Such criticisms serve to show that, for example, the Platonic relation of the *eide* to the sensible renders a science of 'sensible substance' impossible because the relation is insubstantial (i.e. what Plato means by 'participation'). The force of such a criticism depends upon a scientific demonstration of Aristotle's doctrine of substance. The important difference between Aristotle and the modern scholars, who have repeated such criticisms, is that Aristotle recognizes the philosophical demand implied in such criticism. Findlay is fully justified in defending Platonism against criticisms of this first kind. Doull offers the following very instructive comment on this matter:

> The difficulties Parmenides, from 131a–135c in the dialogue named after him, brings before Socrates about 'participation' or the relation of 'the many' to the *eide* need first to be set carefully in the argument up to that point. They are difficulties peculiar to the Platonic philosophy, and are certain to be found unintelligible if considered in the light of an Aristotelian or some modern logic. That like objections are made to the Ideas by Aristotle to show that 'participation' is only an empty word and a poetical image need not mean either that he is regarding the problems from the same standpoint or that he does not understand the Platonic standpoint. That 'participation' is an empty name and an image it would not trouble Plato greatly in the end to assent to, but the words would have another emphasis than for Aristotle: they express for Plato as the truth of the matter that the relation is not 'substantial.'[20]

In the present paper my focus will be on criticisms of another kind than those which result from viewing the Platonic philosophy from an alien perspective. Aristotle points out what he believes are ambiguities in Plato's teachings, which the Platonist must resolve if he is to maintain a consistent position, and he argues that the Platonic principles do not effect the purpose they were intended to serve. Such criticisms are intended by Aristotle to be seen as arising out of the Platonic logic and ontology.

While Findlay's account of Platonism is fresh and instructive, the basic content of his treatment of Aristotelianism, and Aristotle's critique of Platonism, is important because he articulates clearly views which dominate scholarship in this area. The contrast between Plato: the winged idealist, the absolutist, the theoretical mathematician, the systematic philosopher, and Aristotle: the earth-bound empiricist, the biologist, the unsystematic pragmatist is a characterization familiar to anyone who would be inclined to read Findlay's works. Even Hans-Georg Gadamer, who more than most contem-

20. J.A. Doull, "The Problems of Participation in Plato's *Parmenides*" (unpublished ms.).

porary scholars sees a continuity and development in Aristotelianism from Platonism, writes:

> our first task must be to establish the perspective from which Plato's doctrine of ideas and Aristotle's critique of it may be understood: whereas in Plato it is obviously the insight into the nature of number which supports and directs his thinking and conceptualization, in Aristotle it is the insight into the nature of what lives.[21]

But these categories, however much they may be suggestive of the difference between the two philosophers, are more misleading than they are instructive. Doull offers an alternative to regarding Platonism and Aristotelianism as each rooted in a different set of assumptions, leaving the two philosophies as parallel constructions which have, in the most extreme account, no common ground, or, in a more moderate account, particular points of convergence in what are otherwise fundamentally divergent orientations of thought. Aristotelianism can be seen, in his view, as arising out of the original Platonic position and as involving a revision and correction of its principles.

Rather than attempt to lay down what is essential to the very substance of the original Platonism and what is revisable in the position, I shall form the problem in a more limited way. If it can be shown that the very charges which Findlay brings against Aristotle—that Aristotle is unsystematic and so unPlatonic, that there is a residue of empiricism in Aristotelianism which is equally unPlatonic, and that Aristotle's matter is not a principle for thought—are in fact at the very heart of the criticisms which Aristotle brings against Plato, then, by Findlay's own account, the direction of Aristotle's critique of Platonism will have been shown to be thoroughly Platonic.

The direction of Aristotle's objections to Platonic philosophy is that Platonism retains a residue of empiricism, granting to the external and given a primacy and independence, which a more complete and thorough idealism, such as Aristotle himself developed, does not concede to the natural and particular. Aristotle, I propose, may be thought of as more Platonic than Plato, in that he attributed to the pantheon of *eide* greater power and sovereignty in the universe than even Plato imagined possible. The question which Aristotle raises is whether Plato *sufficiently* separated *logos* from *muthos*, participated from participant, the Idea from its appearance, form from matter, the One from the Dyadic principle, rather than too much. Was Plato able to maintain the Good and the *eide* as actual and effective causes or was he condemned to regard them as merely potential? Do the *eide* lose their substantiality and break down into the elements which they are supposed to unite? Can the Platonic Good only be regarded as a cause in the problem-

21. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980) 200.

riddled form where it is treated as a one which stands relative to a two? These are questions which occur internally to the logical and ontological structure of Platonism.

III

Findlay's Plato is "systematically systematic." Findlay, as noted above, dismisses the duality of principles in Platonism. The Indefinite Dyad, he argues, is merely the extrinsic side of absolute Unity, which has the consequence that the One is really responsible for everything.[22] He argues against Heidegger's pluralism that "if one is going to be systematic, one might as well be systematically systematic, as in Platonism or some other absolutist system."[23] Doull does not disagree with Findlay's view that the Indefinite Dyad is what the One needs to be itself, but observes that this argument brings to light that the extrinsic side is as necessary to the One as what it is in and for itself. To say that "the negative or empty Principle which, in the eidetic sphere, specifies, in the instantial sphere, instantiates, is merely the extrinsic side of absolute Unity," as Findlay says, leaves the specified and instantiated in an ambiguous relation to the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of their Principle as the One. There is not, in this view, one way of looking at the specific forms or the instantiated. One may choose to be systematic and consider phenomena as ordered and limited in their relation to their *eide* which, in turn, may be regarded from the perspective of Unity itself. But equally one may choose to be unsystematic and regard the same as indeterminate and lawless. Doull comments that "in the end Heidegger's pluralism and Findlay's system are complementary rather than exclusive attitudes to Plato."[24]

An ambiguity of another but related kind runs through Plato's teachings. The ultimate principle in the *Phaedo* is spoken of as both the Good and *Nous*. Reason is seen as fundamentally and essentially teleological. It is an activity which orders the conditional, the discursive, to an unconditional end, which is at once an object of intuition and the effective principle of discursive thought. The Good as *Nous* is thought of as ordering the divided and finite realm of nature and ideas in accordance with itself or what is best, or good, or rational. Scientific inquiry is seen as possible, if the objects of sense perception stretch out, grasp at and desire to be their *eide* (to use Plato's image), and if the *eide* in turn refer themselves out of their own nature to their ultimate principle. Objective dialectic is understood to depend upon

22. Findlay, *Written and Unwritten* 324–25.
23. Findlay, *Written and Unwritten* 410.
24. Doull, "Findlay and Plato" 253.

the intrinsic teleological activity of nature and the *eide*. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates rejects the formal mathematical logic of Cebes and Simmias, which understands soul, for example, as being a *ratio* or harmony, rather than an *ousia*, which may be predicated of harmony, and indeed, of contraries. He also rejects the mechanical explanations of the *physikoi*. It is not an insight into number which is guiding Plato in this argument but the nature of an intrinsic teleological activity.

M. Sayre has shown that the following five theses which Aristotle presented in Book *Alpha*, Chapter 6 of the *Metaphysics*, provide the essential insight into the interpretation of Plato's *Philebus*: (1) that numbers come from participation of 'the Great and Small' in Unity; (2) that sensible things are constituted by the *eide* and 'the Great and Small'; (3) that the *eide* are composed of 'the Great and Small' and Unity; (4) that eide are numbers, and (5) that the Good is Unity.[25] In this account of Platonism the *eide* are composite, derived from the more primary elements of Unity and 'the Great and Small,' which according to Sayre are called *peras* and *apeiron* in the *Philebus*. Unity is, at once, viewed as an independent primary principle and as a constitutive element in the *eide*, and through the *eide*, as an element in sensible particulars. Unity as against 'the Great and Small' is identified with the Good but not as a teleological principle. The Unlimited is constituted of opposites in which each member taken by itself is altogether indefinite and fluid, while the opposites defined through their relation to each other define a range between dyads such as long and short, or cold and hot. The *eide* are numbers as a *ratio* which harmonizes, for example, the unlimited dyad of high and low as the *ratio* of one to two generating the octave. A fourth factor is introduced in addition to limit and the unlimited and a mixing in accordance with mathematical *ratio*. Because limit and the unlimited neither name nor imply one another, a cause for their mixing must be given: truth, or beauty, or symmetry. But these causes are, to use Aristotle's language, formal causes and not final causes.

Commentators on the *Philebus* have been puzzled because the only 'mixtures' Plato mentions in the dialogue are perfect. It should be noted that the mixtures are perfect as mathematical forms are perfect. Perhaps this is because objects which involve an activity in relation to a *telos*, objects which have the character of *eros*, which is understood in the *Symposium* to be constituted out of *poros* and *penia*, do not fall within the purview of the logic of *peras* and *apeiron*. In the relation of poverty and plenty, Plato hoped to discern the nature of an activity in relation to an end as the cyclical movement of rising out of poverty and falling back into it. Aristotle's complaint is that

25. Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

what Plato intends the relation of *poros* and *penia* to yield, namely, purposeful activity, it will not yield if it is not shown that the plenty is somehow in the poverty or, in other words, how the negative principle or poverty at once both involves privation and also possesses its end, namely, plenty, as *eros*. In the middle dialogues this problem does not become evident because it is possible to view the relation imaginatively in terms of the participation of the sensible in the intelligible, thus producing the realm which falls between poverty and plenty, between complete ignorance and knowledge, between not-being and being.

In the last section of this paper Aristotle's revision to this formulation will be considered. In his view, when Plato attempted to express his principles in a perfectly universal form, the problem inherent in the original formulation became clear. The mixtures which result from bringing the Unlimited, inert mathematical matter, the dyads designating a range of quantitative difference, i.e. short and long, wet and dry etc., under the Limit, number or *ratio* or measure, are in the most abstract relation to their principle, i.e. the Good as Unity. There is no place for *eros*, or the sensible particulars understood as 'grasping at' their *eide*, or the *eide* as stepping stones to the Good. Rather there is the relation of One and Two and the recognition that a cause or reason for the mixing cannot come out of number, so ideas, truth, beauty, symmetry are called in. Dialectic becomes the art of division and mixing rather than the logic by which the movement from the hypothetical to an unhypothetical principle is disclosed.

I will argue in the next section of this paper that Plato never abandons his original intention to maintain the *eide* as causes of Becoming and the Good as their principle. How the philosophy of the One and Two, as Gadamer calls it, and the philosophy of the Good are to be drawn together into one systematic view, presents real difficulties of which Aristotle was deeply aware. Doull writes:

> For Aristotle, the source of Plato's logical difficulties is an ambiguity between his Socratic and Eleatic affiliations. The *eide* are primarily of Socratic origin, or their principle is the Good. The principle of the Numbers is, rather, the One. The teleological generation of nature for the Animal Itself is, for example, of Socratic inspiration. It comes from revised Eleaticism that the Animal Itself is thought to be a very complex relation of numbers. The Platonist need not give in to such objections. But perhaps he has to make a choice as to whether the Socratic, teleological perspective is primary and the mathematical instrumental.[26]

The original Platonism, according to this account, must be seen as developing two distinct directions. While at the same time, Plato's intention, in

26. Doull, "Findlay and Plato" 261–62.

contrast to Speusippus and Zenocrates, was to maintain a philosophy of the Good, the Beautiful as well as the One. The problem of drawing a Socratic and a revised Eleatic orientation together into one consistent view may not be the problem providence called upon Plato to solve, but his was rather the problem of formulating the problem. "The extreme importance of this first Platonism," Doull writes, "and why it should be kept firmly apart from all later Platonic accretions, however excellent, is that it permits a simple but adequate insight, not into *episteme* or science, but into its elements, or into the logic of the first formation and separation of the sciences."[27]

IV

The task which Plato set himself in the *Phaedo* continued to be his focus throughout in his later dialogues. His criticism of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo* is that, rather than explaining objects which become in terms of the operation of Intelligence, he introduced ancillary causes. In Anaxagoras' position, according to Socrates, there was, at once, the insight that everything must be referred to an ultimate principle as its source and end, and alongside of that, the appearance of a separate 'science,' which considered phenomena as explained in terms of a plurality of causes, which were either unrelated to his rational principle or merely empirically derived. What was required was to draw the totality of nature and thought together into one view in a way which leaves not even a particle of being or not-being as something merely taken empirically in its givenness or facticity. Plato rejects both abstract subjective idealism, such as he finds with the Sophists, which leaves the realm of appearances as an unexplained presupposition for a measuring subject,[28] and an abstract objective idealism, such as he finds with the Eleatics,[29] which presupposes the divided realm of becoming in order that through its negation the One or Being itself may be laid down as all that is. The Eleatic and Sophistic dialectics are rejected, then, because they are dependent upon an assumed finitude which leaves the sensible in its givenness both as unexplained and as an inexplicable but necessary presupposition to their logic.

In the later dialogues Plato has before him the conclusion of the Eleatic dialectic that there is no true finitude, but only the One itself, and the conclusion of the Sophistic dialectic that there is only being for another or appearances, and nothing determinate in itself. Both dialectics have in common that they render impossible, from opposed sides, meaningful discourse or purposeful activity in relation to a limited but objective good. Against

27. Doull, "Findlay and Plato" 254.

28. For a precise and thorough consideration of this matter see J.A. Doull, "A Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Dionysius* 1 (1977): 5–4

29. *Sophist* 258d ff.

this background the Platonic dialectic is intended to show how there can be stable limited determinations which would save discourse, and disclose both how the soul in its relation to the sensuous and the intelligible has a relation to the Good, and also how the limited determinations out of themselves are causes of change and externality.[30] Doull writes:

> In the *Sophist* he has shown how there can be a definite otherness or finitude for a theoretic thought, namely by a limitation of indeterminate difference in relation to an absolute identity. In this way is constituted both an unchanging ideal world of *genera* and their species and a changing sensible participation of this order.[31]

In the *Statesman* Plato asks how there can be an alternative to the theocratic ideal which does not allow for a participation in the divine freedom which is its principle. His intention is to show how the desire for natural well-being is to be viewed in relation to the absolute divine Good.[32] In the *Philebus* Plato attempts to show how the ideas and sensible can be brought together practically in relation to the Good as effectively present in finite determinations; 'the mixed life' is presented as a higher determination of the Good than are the life of thought or pleasure taken in isolation.[33] In the *Timaeus* Plato looks at the coming into being of the manifold world of change as a kind of showing of the Good in which image and the imaged are both sustained in their relativity to the Good.[34]

A central focus of Plato's thought in the later dialogues is to define the region between the poles of pure Becoming and the standpoint of the One itself. Becoming or what is absolutely indeterminate, he interprets to be the position of the Sophists. The standpoint of the One itself, or what is absolutely determinate, as simply other than, and not greater than, the finite, he takes to be the Eleatic position. He introduced a new dialectic to solve this problem. Somehow it was necessary to maintain the relativity, or being-for-another, which the Sophists had grasped, while, at the same time, referring everything back to a principle such as the Eleatic One, which in this new light, will be seen as sustaining what is other than itself in a relation of absolute dependence upon the One itself. Plato's dialectic was intended to integrate division and contrariety into an objective unity.

30. See particularly the introduction and conclusion of *Parmenides* and also *Sophist* 260a ff., *Philebus* 14d ff.

31. J.A. Doull, "The Christian Origins of Contemporary Institutions," *Dionysius* 6 (1982): 122; see *Sophist* 266a ff.

32. *Statesman* 271c–275a

33. *Philebus* 61a ff.

34. *Timaeus* 27d ff.

V

In *Parmenides* Plato recognizes the problems inherent in the notion of 'participation' by considering what is consequent upon the hypothesis that the *eide* are separate from 'the many.'[35] Socrates proposes this hypothesis in response to what he interprets to be Zeno's argument: 'If things are many, the many will be both like and unlike, since this is impossible, there are not many.'[36] Socrates' problem is to show how there can be many. The difficulty Zeno presents is that contraries do not combine: the notion of 'many' is taken by Zeno to be contradictory because 'many ones' involves combining the like with the unlike. Socrates' solution is to say that, while contraries do not combine, one thing may participate in contrary forms such as unity and plurality, sameness and difference, being and not-being. A knowing subject can view Socrates as many in one relation (right side, left side, upper and lower parts) and in another relation as one (one person among the seven present).[37] Both oneness and plurality are present for a viewing subject but not objectively. Socrates' concern is to save the finite sensible realm and discourse against the Eleatic One by explaining 'the many' as participants in self-identical *eide*. This reflection is unsatisfactory because it may be understood as leading to the sort of conclusion reached by the Socratic dialectic (that one cannot know whether Socrates is objectively one or many) or by the Sophistic dialectic (that one can prove whichever one wishes). What underlies both the Socratic and Sophistic dialectics is an assumed division between *eidos* and 'participant' such that it falls to an external subject to connect the two. Parmenides' criticisms, in the dialogue named after him, force Socrates to give up the assumed separation of *eidos* and 'participant' and to regard them as relative to each other and sustained in their relativity by the One itself.[38] Aristotle repeats these objections because they belong in any comprehensive criticism of Platonism, and because, to anticipate the conclusion of my argument here, Plato is never altogether free of them.

The elements or principles, undivided unity and dividedness, which constitute the 'participants,' come to light through the criticisms of 'participation' by the Platonic Parmenides. A contradiction hidden in the poetic language of 'participation' becomes the focus of Plato's thought in the *Parmenides*.

35. *Parmenides* 128e–135c.

36. *Parmenides* 127e.

37. *Parmenides* 129c.

38. *Phaedo* 101d: Platonic Socrates explains Sophistic reasoning by saying that 'the many,' which participate in an *eidos*, at once are images of what they participate in and are like their eidos but they are also not their *eidos* and both differ from their *eidos* and from each other. Sophistic reason takes the participants, which are the appearance of the self-identical as divided against itself, for their object and brings image against image. The Socratic dialectic differs from the Sophistic only in how it interprets the result. See *Metaphysics* 1004b21–26.

The new Platonic dialectic introduced there is intended to be the objective dialectic of the One itself. In this new dialectic hypotheses are laid down as merely "stepping-stones and points of departure" to the Good.[39] The correction of Socrates' position by the Platonic Parmenides is that the hypotheses of 'the many,' the *eide*, and the Good must be treated strictly as hypothetical starting points and not as fixed and determinate logical and ontological divisions. The Parmenidean One must be maintained as a principle which is other than the plurality of ideas and which makes discursive thought possible. Equally, 'the many' which constitute the sensible world must be maintained. Also, as a further development, the One must be seen as a productive principle and not merely an abstraction beyond its product. By negating their posited independence the new dialectic is intended to show the One as the origin and end of 'the many' and the *eide*.[40] The task is to carry out the programme proposed in the *Republic*: to proceed dialectically in a way which "without relying on anything sensible uses only ideas in order to proceed from ideas to other ideas, and to end in ideas."[41] The problems of participation do not disappear. The *eide* take into themselves the relation of participated and participant, and the question of how they are sustained in that relation emerges. The need to go back from the *eide* to the principles which sustain them in their relativity becomes demanding.

It is this step which leads Plato in the direction of a mathematized Eleatic philosophy. In the *Parmenides* Plato looks to a principle which he hopes will not fall into the division of content and logical form, being and self-identity. Plato's earlier formulations of the ultimate principle (the Good or the Beautiful or *Nous*) are not considered as possible candidates. To supply a reason, one might conjecture as follows: once the logical demand was present to distinguish clearly between the *eide* and their Principles or Elements, the terms Good, Beautiful, and *Nous* were thought to have the character of qualified being like the *eide*. So the solution appeared to be to look to Unity Itself or the One and to disclose what it yields. This led Plato in the direction of Eleaticism. It also led Plato into the mathematical because whatever differences the One can yield are quantitative. What is not the One itself is many, what is not Unity Itself is unlimited, indeterminate. The Elements out of which everything had to be generated are, therefore, contraries: Unity and Plurality, and contraries which follow from these as starting points.

The particular criticism with which I conclude concerns Aristotle's rejection of the Platonic doctrine that everything finite is composed of contra-

39. *Republic* 511b.
40. *Parmenides* 135d ff.
41. *Republic* 511b.

ries. This teaching, at which we have just arrived in considering the *Parmenides* is, in fact, consistently maintained by Plato throughout his dialogues.

VI

Would Plato be forced by his own logic to assert that the cause of becoming and plurality does not belong to the operation of Intelligence or the Good but rather to an ancillary cause, not-being or a dyadic principle? This conclusion Aristotle accurately understands to be precisely what Plato hoped to avoid. Does Aristotle's correction of Plato's position result in a view more satisfactory to Plato's own intention than Plato himself was able to achieve?

Aristotle says that Plato recognized the problem which Parmenides and Anaxagoras or Democritus left unaddressed.[42] Plato sought to find a compromise between 'one' and 'infinitely many' principles.[43] More specifically, the question had taken the definite form for Plato of how contraries and what connects them are to be integrated. Aristotle says that Plato fell prey to numerous difficulties because of the way in which he formed the problem. Namely, Plato makes every principle an element, makes contraries his principles, and the One or Unity a principle.[44] Aristotle allows that this logical structure is an advance beyond Plato's predecessors but argues that, while Plato was able to formulate the dilemma, he was not able to solve it in terms of his own logic.

42. In the first book of *Physics* Aristotle treats the Platonists last because he views them as having seen clearly the problem uniting *Parmenides*' Being with becoming and change. Plato's predecessors accepted the absolute separation of being and not-being which had the consequence that 'becoming' must be shown to somehow come out of the character of not-being itself. A.M. Johnston writes, "If on the one hand one affirms the absolute distinction of *Parmenides* and on the other that becoming comes out of opposites, one is condemned, in Aristotle's view, to asserting two distinct principles, the connection between which is left unclarified." "A Commentary on the First Two Books of Aristotle's *Physics*" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Dalhousie University, 1985) 140. In the *Sophist* Plato proposes a way by which being and not-being can be connected in the determination of not-being as 'otherness' or *heteron*. The *megista gene*, and the *eide* generally, are intended to provide the connection between not-being or pure indeterminacy and absolute identity or pure being both at the *eidetic* level as representing an unchanging and stable but limited order of genera and species, and at the sensible level as the sharing and not-sharing of sensible particulars in their *eide*. Aristotle's criticism is that in Plato the relation of the *eide* to 'the many,' the *eide* to each other, and an *eidos* in its identity and difference in relation to the Good or One ultimately comes down to the relation of the One and an indeterminate dyad which simply remain apart.

43. At *Sophist* 254b–256c Plato's proposed *megista gene* are intended to be determinations of stable limited distinctions which are at once the most primary forms and the causes of externality and change.

44. *Metaphysics* 1092a5–9.

Aristotle says of the Platonists in Book *Nu* of the *Metaphysics* that

> they thought that all things that are would be one (viz. Being itself), if one did not join issue with and refute the saying of Parmenides: "For never will this be proved, that things that are not are." They thought it necessary to prove that that which is not is; for only thus—of that which is and something else—could the things that are be composed, if they are many.

He introduces this comment by saying that the Platonist framed the problem in an "obsolete form."[45]

What is "obsolete" about the form in which Plato framed the problem in Aristotle's view? However developed Plato's principles may be, they retain the character of being the elements of things rather than causes proper, and are open to the fundamental objections which Plato himself raised against the Pre-Socratics: Plato's principles at the highest level are the One and the Indeterminate Dyad; the *eide* and 'the many' are intended to be known as derivative from these principles.[46] Gadamer writes:

> The doctrine of the One and the Two is not a step beyond the doctrine of ideas which would negate the latter but a step behind it which expresses its actual basis.[47]

Aristotle would revise Gadamer's statement to say that although Plato intended the One and the Two to provide the basis of the doctrine of ideas, his theory of ideas is rendered impossible if one accepts his Principles. If there is

45. *Metaphysics* 1088b35–1089a6; see *Parmenides* 52 sq. and for Plato's discussion of this passage *Sophist* 258c.

46. Findlay's division of the Platonic dialogues into 'Socratic,' 'Ideological,' and 'Stoicheiological' provides the most philosophically reasonable and instructive arrangement of Plato's writings. Aristotle similarly distinguishes between Platonism as it assumes the hypotheses of the Good itself, the *eide*, and 'the many' and considers what follows from them, and Platonism which treats the hypotheses as merely hypothetical and investigates their principles or elements. Findlay writes: "From the Dialogues of Plato's 'middle period,' which we have called 'ideological' since the Ideas, the *Eide*, furnish the main pivot upon which the argument turns, we proceed to another set of Dialogues, presumed to be later in date, which we may call the 'stoicheiological' or 'principal' Dialogues, since their emphasis is not so much on the *Eide* as on the Elements (*stoicheia*) or Principles (*archai*) of the same *Eide*. The Elements or Principles of the *Eide* are said by Aristotle to have been the One, the Principle of *ousia*, substantial reality, on the one hand, and the Great and Small, or Principle of the Indefinite or Infinite on the other, the former being both a good and an active Principle, and the latter a bad and passive one, and the second being operative in the instantial as well as in the ideal realm (*Physics* 203a)." Findlay, *Written and Unwritten* 210. The treatment of the Good as a One and what is other than the One as a Two is already present in the *Parmenides* where a mathematized Eleatic Platonism is developed which is intended to show the derivation the eide and 'the many' from their Elements or Principles.

47. Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic* 119.

an actual concretion of self-identity and 'otherness' in the *eidethen*, the *eide* are what is primary and the One and the dyadic Principle are posterior abstractions. But if the Principles are truly principles, what is other than them must be constituted out of absolute identity and pure indeterminacy. This, however, is impossible, because contraries do not combine. What is lacking is a context within which the indeterminate could 'become,' and be, potentially, the determinate. While the determination of not-being as otherness or *heteron* marks a profound advance from the Eleatic separation of Being and not-being, the connection of being to what is other than being can only be made by a thinking which is external to what is to be connected.[48] The difference between the Platonic and Sophistic dialectics is a matter of the relation each has to the end it serves.[49] The *eide* appear only to disappear again either in the service of the individual or of the Good. If the *eide* were to be stable, then the dialectical principles of identity and difference, or the One and the Dyad, would have to lose their independence within a context which preserves them in their difference from each other.

Rather than saying that something is unified, Plato regards Unity as a constitutive element or principle which is somehow present along with another element or the dyadic principle. The dyad has two senses: indeterminacy, before it is contained within the limits of contrariety, and the indeterminate, as it is limited by contraries: the great and small, many and few, long and short, and so forth. In other words the dyad can either be viewed as itself constituted out of contraries or as a contrary which stands opposed to the One or Unity. In either view the dyad denotes precisely that of which the One is not and cannot be the source.[50] At a lower level Plato speaks of the highest *genera* (same-other, motion-rest, and being). The *megista gene* stand in the primary relation of being and not-being.[51] At a still lower level the *eide* are understood in terms of the contraries being and otherness or relative

48. Aristotle's criticism is that Plato's determination of not-being as *heteron* is really 'otherness' as it belongs to a dialectical thinking of beings which distinguishes between being and not-being as the affirmative and negative which is the true and false. Dialectic separates out what is unessential or false in a determination in order to come to the definition of the pure *eidos*. From the start all there really is is 'a one' and the dialectical movement is only for a thinking which would return back to 'the one' having shown all the determinations which lead to it to be false pretenders. Aristotle writes: "What sort of being and non-being, then, by their union pluralize the things that are? This thinker [Plato, *Sophist* 327a] means by the non-being, the union of which with being pluralizes the things that are, the false and the character of falsity. This is also why it used to be said that we must assume something that is false, as geometers assume the line which is not a foot long to be a foot long." *Metaphysics* (1089a18–22).

49. *Metaphysics* 1004b21–26.

50. See Findlay, *Plato and Platonism* 42–47 and 155–58 for a discussion of the function and nature of the Great and the Small or the Indefinite Dyad.

51. *Sophist* 256e–257b.

negation.[52] Finally 'the many' are explained in terms of taking and not-taking part in their *eidos* and as sustained in their relativity to the eide by the One.[53] Plato hoped to connect the 'indeterminate many' with an absolutely determinate One through the *eide*, but the *eide* do not provide such a bridge. Rather, they seek somewhere beyond themselves the link between their own self-identity and relation to what is other.

Plato's criticism of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo* was that when he tried to explain why something is the way it is, he did not show that it is the way it is because it is best that it should be that way. Rather he introduced ancillary causes which did not belong to the operation of intelligence or the Good. Aristotle's criticism of Plato is of a similar nature. In order to explain how there can be plurality or becoming, Plato, he said, introduced a principle which is not a principle for thought. Aristotle argues that many of the problems in the Platonic philosophy arise because Plato's negative principle (whether matter or space or time or the dyadic principle)[54] retains the character of a separate principle, indeed an element. This element stands opposed to the eidetic side of the One or the ideas, with the result that how the two sides are connected cannot be grasped by thought, but only imagined as a sort of synthesis of hostile elements. Plato, in this account, has failed to allow the negative side to fall apart in its separation from its relation to the eidetic in such a way that the material might be seen as wholly determined by the ideal. Understood in this light, Aristotle's criticism that 'participation' is merely a poetical image, is not as external to the intention of the Platonic philosophy as it might at first seem.

What does Plato present as the cause of becoming and plurality? He takes the elements which constitute the object which becomes to be the contraries of being and not-being. These differ from Aristotelian elements of matter and form which are not contraries in any ordinary sense, but rather have the relation of potency to actuality. Matter in Aristotle's view can only be taken separately for a thinking which is external to its object; instead, properly, matter is a principle of thought. Plato's matter and not-being (and indeed, many, for example, Findlay and Aristotle, argue also his space and time) are the dyadic principle of indeterminacy which stands opposed to the One, in the way that being stands to not-being and form stands to matter. When the problem is posed in terms of starting with the principles as elements and as contraries and with the One as a principle, we are forced to the following

52. *Sophist* 258d–260a.

53. See *Phaedo* 95e ff. and Plato's examination of hypotheses which underlie 'second best method' in *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, and *Philebus*.

54. For a very instructive account of the manifold forms Plato gives to his negative principle see Findlay's convincing refutation of Cherniss' arguments on the matter: Findlay, *Written and Unwritten Doctrines* 463 ff.

conclusion. Being cannot be the cause of becoming since being simply is and is one and not many, at rest; it is not changing or becoming. Plato therefore regards becoming as a determinate part of not-being, but not as not-being taken by itself which would have an absolute determination in itself for thought. Not-being *qua* not-being is nothing in itself. It has no legs of its own on which to stand in order to be in the relation of opposition to another. But Plato had the problem that if there is to be plurality or becoming, its cause must somehow be found in not-being or matter or space or time or in the indeterminate dyad. Once Unity is allowed to be a separate principle, what is other than it must be something different from it and even opposed to it. In this way the plurality of the *eide* is opposed to the oneness of the One, or the manyness of 'the many' is opposed to their self-identity in their *eidos*, or the negativity of becoming is opposed to the positivity of being.

Plato could not achieve the relation he sought: namely, that finite things be caused by the 'Good' as the object of their desire because he could not show how the Good could be present in some way in 'not-being.' This is in part because he did not conceive of not-being both as what underlies, or the context within which change occurs, and also as *steresis*, which in its own nature is not-being rather than relative negation. In Aristotle's account, what is other than form, is at once the privation or not-being of the form and also the desire for it in matter. What unites matter with its form is the end or the Good. This explanation of becoming answers to the requirement Plato set for himself in the *Phaedo*: namely, that things must be explained in terms of the operation of Intelligence or the Good and not by the introduction of additional causes. Aristotle is able to say that the *eide* are effective causes both in their presence and in their absence and he does not require a separate cause of division and change apart from what, in Plato's terms, the *eide* themselves yield.[55]

The Platonic dialectic of *methexis* and *chorismos*, of idea and appearance, of one and the dyad is able to define the *aporiai*, as Aristotle recognized in Book *Beta* of the *Metaphysics*, but it is not able to show how the terms which

55. A.M. Johnston makes the following comment on *Physics* 192a6–12: "The results of 'overlooking' *hyle* and its ability to mediate between opposites are twofold. First there is no connection brought out, in spite of what Plato intends, between what 'is' absolutely, the good, the first principle, and 'becoming.' In other words the problem which *Parmenides* poses has not been overcome. Secondly and as a result of the first, 'not-being' is not recognized *qua* 'not-being': it has no absolute determination in itself but, because becoming must come solely from this negative side of the opposition, 'not-being' must be understood as simply relative negation—'otherness'—relative to what is given in the finite and not a principle of thought simply. So as Aristotle puts it, 'not-being' breaks down 'desiring its own destruction'." Ibid. 143–44.

constitute the *aporiai* are able to be connected in a way that preserves their essential distinctions. Professor Doull writes:

> The impediment which divided the [Platonic] good from creative divine activity Aristotle saw to be the common assumption that everything finite was composed of contraries. No further advance was possible unless what thinking knew as other than itself was comprehensive of contraries.[56]

Aristotle, in Professor Doull's account, understood his teacher well and contributed greatly to the further development of Platonism.[57]

56. Doull, "The Christian Origin of Contemporary Institutions" 142.

57. An earlier but substantially identical version of this paper was published in *Animus* 1 (1996), an electronic journal at www.mun.ca/animus/1996vol1/1996vol1.htm. I am grateful to the editors of *Animus* for permssion to republish the article.