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PLATO'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST CONCEPTUALISM.  
*PARMENIDES* 132 B 3-C 11 RECONSIDERED\*

Plato's *Parmenides* confronts us with a curious, unusual situation: The Socrates that we know only all too well as the white bearded sagacious old man appears as a young student. Indeed, a student defending his innovative theory of the Forms against the severe, though not eristic criticism of the old Eleatic Parmenides. In the course of pleading his case before the old man, he advances the thesis that Forms could only be thoughts that originate nowhere else but in souls or minds<sup>1</sup>. This is commonly identified with a conceptualist interpretation of the Forms, namely that Forms or universals exist only within the mind and have no external or substantial reality<sup>2</sup>.

\* Two earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Centre for the Study of the Platonic Tradition (Dublin) and at the conference "Plato Transformed. An International Workshop on Plato's Ancient Commentators" (Leuven, 18-19 May 2005). I am especially indebted to Carlos Steel (Leuven) for his remarks and criticism, which led me to rethink and improve many points that are suggested in what follows. Moreover, I would like to thank John Dillon (Dublin) and Russell Friedman (Leuven) whose incisive observations helped to clarify several important issues. Prof. Friedman was so kind to also provide help with the English. The final version profited also from comments offered by David Sedley (Cambridge).

<sup>1</sup> *Parm.* 132 B 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> That the suggestion of Socrates is identical with a conceptualist position is, for instance, held by F. VON KUTSCHERA, *Platons 'Parmenides'*, Berlin-New York 1995, pp. 35-6; R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, Translated with comment ("The Dialogues of Plato", IV), rev. ed. New Haven-London 1997 (first published in 1983), p. 175; A. GRAESER, *Platons 'Parmenides'* ("Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse", III), Stuttgart 2003,

From the viewpoint of the later dialogues, one might ask what has led Socrates to this rather surprising suggestion? To understand the origin of Socrates' claim, it is first of all necessary to turn to Parmenides' criticism of Socrates' theory of Forms. This criticism can be summarised in six arguments or difficulties (ἀπορίαι), of which the third is the primary concern here<sup>3</sup>. The first addresses the question whether participation is in the whole or in a part of the Form (*Parm.* 131 A 4-E 7). The second shows that the "abstraction" of a Form from a manifold of large things (μεγέλα) leads to an infinite regress (131 E 8-132 B 2). It is also known as the first Third-Man argument. The third difficulty is introduced by the suggestion that Forms should be thoughts in human minds (132 B 3-C 11). The fourth demonstrates that, given that Forms are paradigms in/within nature, participation would entail an infinite regress (132 C 12-133 A 10). This argument is better known as the second Third-Man argument. The last two ἀπορίαι are complementary in that the first points out that if the Forms are separate entities, we cannot have knowledge of them (133 A 11-134 C 3), while the second claims that if the Forms are separate and only the gods know them, the gods cannot, at the same time, know human affairs. These two last ἀπορίαι together are also known as the so-called worst difficulty (μέγιστον δὲ τὸδε, 133 B), because they virtually annihilate divine providence (cfr. 134 C: δεινότερον τὸδε). Each of

p. 20; and F. FERRARI, *Platone. Parmenide*, Milano 2004, p. 79. Kutschera further remarks that the text is, in fact, our first testimony for such a conceptualist interpretation of universals. For a general characterisation of concepts and conceptualism in the history of thought, see, for instance, W. HÜBNER, "Konzept/konzeptibel" and "Konzeptualismus", in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Band 4: I-K, Basel-Stuttgart 1976, coll. 1082-91. That Socrates' suggestion in this argument is *not* conceptualist is maintained by B. BOSSI, *Is Socrates Really Defending Conceptualism in 'Parmenides' 132b3-d4?*, in A. HAVLÍČEK-F. KARFÍK (eds), *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium Platonicum Pragense, Prague 2005, pp. 58-74.

<sup>3</sup> I follow an interpretation of Proclus that can be found in book three and four of his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*. Cfr. the comprehensive analysis of Proclus' discussion of these ἀπορίαι proposed by C. STEEL, *L'Anagogie par les apories*, in G. BOSS-G. SEEL (éds.), *Proclus et son influence*, Actes du colloque de Neuchâtel (Juin 1985), avec une introduction de F. Brunner, Zürich 1987, pp. 101-28.

these six steps (or ἀπορίαι) in the first part of the dialogue depend on those that precede it and they unfold in sequence. Each new suggestion about the nature of the Forms or participation should be seen as a reaction to a difficulty raised in the previous step.

With the suggestion that Forms are thoughts, young Socrates introduces ἀπορία three, and the text makes it clear that he is addressing problems raised in ἀπορία one and two. If the Forms are thoughts, Socrates maintains, they no longer face the difficulties mentioned in the first two ἀπορίαι, because as thoughts each of them is one<sup>4</sup>. Hence, we have to keep in mind that with his conceptualist thesis Socrates wants primarily to safeguard the *unity* of the Forms. In his twofold reply, Parmenides will not question this unity, but demonstrates that a Form is rather an object of thought (νοούμενον) and not a thought (νόημα), that is, a thought-process. The argument is based on the assumption that every thought has an object, is a thought of something. As we shall see, the main problem with Socrates' suggestion lies in the fact that he does not specify how a νόημα comes to be (ἐγγίγνεσθαι) in the soul, that is, from where or how it originates and what its object is. But before we enter into a discussion about the argument itself, let us say some words about Socrates' proposal as such.

#### *Can Forms be Thoughts/Concepts?*

The thesis that with Plato Forms are thoughts is rather problematic both because of systematic considerations and also because no warrant for such an interpretation can be found in the dialogues themselves. If Forms are thoughts, their objectivity or shareability could no longer be guaranteed. They would no longer be the standards against which values and norms could be measured. Moreover, how could the fact that Forms are human thoughts accord with

<sup>4</sup> *Parm.* 132 B 5-6: οὕτω γὰρ ἂν ἕν γε ἕκαστον εἴη καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἔτι πάσχοι ἃ νυνδὴ ἐλέγετο.

the *Timaeus*, in which the demiurge orders the all so as to become a cosmos by looking at the paradigm (the sum of Forms)? Hence, strong evidence points to the fact that for Plato, Forms are rather the objective correlates of thought; they are not concepts, that is, mental entities that are confined to souls<sup>5</sup>.

One might answer that Socrates' suggestion could also be read as saying that Forms are *divine* thoughts. What we would get, then, is the well known Middle Platonic doctrine of the Forms as thoughts of God<sup>6</sup>. Forms would be divine concepts, and accordingly divine standards<sup>7</sup>. However, it seems questionable whether the character of the dialogue provides a context for such an interpretation. Moreover, the fact that Plato uses the plural "souls" (*Parm.* 132 B 5) clearly points, I think, to human souls.

There has been a lively discussion as to whose position Plato is targeting with the refutation of the suggestion that Forms are thoughts. For it is obvious that making the young Socrates the mouthpiece of such a position is a dramatic device. The view that Forms are thoughts or concepts in the human mind has been as-

<sup>5</sup> That Platonic Forms are not concepts was pointed out, for instance, by H. CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, I, Baltimore 1944, pp. 214-6 note 128, and Y. LAFRANCE, *Sur une lecture analytiques des arguments concernant le non-être* ('*Sophiste*', 237 b10-239 a12), «*Revue de Philosophie Ancienne*», II (1984) pp. 41-76.

<sup>6</sup> According to J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists (80 B.C. to A.D. 220)*, London-Ithaca (NY) 1977 (cf. also the reprint with a new comprehensive afterword, Ithaca (NY) 1993), p. 95, this doctrine can already be found in Antiochus of Ascalon, but it may go back to the Old Academy.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that in the later Neoplatonic discussion of the relationship between intellect and Forms, we frequently find the assertion that these divine Forms do not have a conceptual character, that is, they do not originate in thought and are not, strictly speaking, thought-dependent. They are rather prior to thought. Regarding Plotinus and Proclus this was pointed out by P. HADOT, *La conception plotinienne de l'identité entre l'intellect et son objet. Plotin et le 'De anima' d'Aristote*, in *Plotin, Porphyre. Études néoplatoniciennes* ("L'âne d'or"), Paris 1999 (first published 1996), pp. 267-78, and R. SORABJI, *Why the Neoplatonists did not have Intentional Objects of Intellection*, in D. PERLER, *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality* ("Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters", LXXVI), Leiden-Boston-Köln 2001, pp. 105-14.

cribed to Plato's nephew Speusippus<sup>8</sup>. However, the evidence for this is not very persuasive<sup>9</sup>. Another candidate for such a conceptualist position is Antisthenes<sup>10</sup>, but, here again, the evidence remains doubtful<sup>11</sup>. As has already been remarked, many scholars have tried to locate the view that Forms are thoughts with a particular philosopher<sup>12</sup>, but instead Plato may not be directing his criticism *ad hominem*, as it were, but rather against the proposition itself. Let us, for a moment consider the possibility that the *Parmenides* is the first dialogue according to the dramatic chronology. We could say, then, that in the *Parmenides* Plato right from the start wanted to point out possible misunderstandings or difficulties in his theory of Forms.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, by J. STENZEL, *s.v. Speusippus* (n. 2), in *RE* II 6 (1929) col. 1665; J. HALFWASSEN, *Geist und Selbstbewußtsein. Studien zu Plotin und Numenius* ("Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse", x), Stuttgart 1994, p. 62 note 177; A. METRY, *Speusippus. Zahl – Erkenntnis – Sein*, Bern-Stuttgart-Wien 2002, and A. GRAESER, *Platons 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 21. It should be said that Stenzel is the only one of these scholars who does not use the word conceptualist or conceptualistic in this respect. He merely paraphrases the doctrine attributed by Ps.-Alexander to Speusippus, namely that for the latter Forms are *διανοίαι*. This paraphrase, however, entails that he basically trusts the report by Ps.-Alexander. For the discussion, see the following note.

<sup>9</sup> In particular, see H.J. KRÄMER, *Aristoteles und die akademische Eidoslehre. Zur Geschichte des Universalienproblems im Platonismus*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», LV (1973) p. 163 note 173, who argues that the testimony for this (PS.-ALEX. [MICHAEL OF EPHEBUS] in *metaph.* 782.31 ff. [fr. 42f Lang, fr. 78 Isnardi Parente]) should not be trusted. It is not entirely clear what M. ISNARDI PARENTE, *Speusippo. Frammenti*, Edizione, traduzione e commento ("La scuola di Platone", I), Napoli 1980, p. 312, makes of the text, but there are elements in her interpretation of the fragment that suggest that she doubts its authenticity. Also J. DILLON, *The Heirs of Plato. A Study of the Old Academy (347-274 BC)*, Oxford 2003, pp. 48-9, judges that for Speusippus Platonic Forms are not (human) concepts. He would rather locate them in the world soul.

<sup>10</sup> Fr. 149 (Giannantoni). On the relationship between Antisthenes and Plato cfr. the study by A. BRANCACCI, *Antisthène. Le discours propre*, Préface de l'auteur à la traduction française, traduit de l'italien par S. AUBERT, Paris 2005 (first published 1990), pp. 151-71.

<sup>11</sup> A. GRAESER, *Platons 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 20, for instance, argues against the Antisthenes hypothesis, while A. BRANCACCI, *Antisthène cit.*, pp. 165-8, still maintains that Plato is attacking Antisthenes.

<sup>12</sup> A. GRAESER, *Platons 'Parmenides'*, cit., even claims that the whole first part of the dialogue is directed against Speusippus.

Hence with the argument against conceptualism, he probably intended to show that Forms are not (human) thought dependent entities.

Before we turn to analyse Parmenides' reply to Socrates' suggestion, it should be said (as was observed by many commentators) that with Socrates' suggestion that Forms are thoughts, Plato may have intended to allude to Parmenides' doctrine of the identity of being and thought. It is, however, not so clear what Plato was exactly aiming at with this reference. He, most probably wanted to illustrate that the identity thesis of being and thought is not valid, or, at least, needs to be qualified<sup>13</sup>. With Plato, only entities that really exist, that is, the transcendent Forms, are *true* objects of thought.

<sup>13</sup> F.M. CORNFORD, *Plato and Parmenides. Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's 'Parmenides'*, Translated with an Introduction and a running Commentary, London 1939, p. 92, asserts that Plato, through the character Parmenides in the dialogue, repudiates the doctrine that «to think is the same thing as to be». This seems to be also the opinion of R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 169, cfr. also note 30 below. On the other hand, K. DORTER, *Form and Good in Plato's Eleatic Dialogues*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1994, pp. 35-6, upholds that the argument agrees with the doctrine of the historical Parmenides. This is also the thesis of L. BRISSON, *S'il (= le monde) est un. La seconde partie du 'Parménide' de Platon considérée du point de vue de Parménide et de Zénon*, in M. BARBANTI-F. ROMANO (a cura di), *Il 'Parménide' di Platone e la sua tradizione*, Atti del III Colloquio Internazionale del Centro di Ricerca sul Neoplatonismo (Catania, 31 maggio-2 giugno 2001), Catania 2002, p. 53. A.H. COXON, *The Philosophy of Forms. An Analytical and Historical Commentary on Plato's 'Parmenides'*, with a new English translation, Assen 1999, p. 108, even claims that Parmenides in his refutation of Socrates' suggestion is «applying to it the argument of his poem». J.A. PALMER, *Plato's Reception of Parmenides*, Oxford 1999, does not discuss the issue in connection with *Parm.* 132 B 3-C 11. Finally, S. SCOLNICOV, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, Translated with Introduction and Commentary, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2003, pp. 1-6, maintains that Plato's whole dialogue is directed against Parmenides. Already the dialogue between Zeno and the young Socrates, at the outset of the work, points to the fact that Socrates, with his theory of Forms, wanted to solve problems that were posed by Parmenides' doctrine of being. Therefore it is safer to maintain that Plato tried to *qualify* Parmenides' doctrine of the identity of being and thought.

*Parmenides' Argument Reconsidered*

At first sight, it might be surprising that in Parmenides' reply we do not find any of the arguments a modern reader of Plato might advance against the thesis that Forms are thoughts. I mean first of all the arguments from shareability and objectivity<sup>14</sup>, that is, the fact that thoughts are not necessarily the same for every individual and that they therefore are not necessarily objective standards. Parmenides builds his refutation on other grounds, as will become clear from the following summary.

## (A) PARMENIDES' FIRST ARGUMENT

(a1) Forms are thoughts<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. A. GRAESER, *Platons 'Parmenides'*, cit., pp. 20-1: «[E]ine Deutung von Ideen als gedankliche Entitäten könnte sich ohnehin nur für den Fall anbieten, daß die in Frage stehenden Gebilde objektiven und damit intersubjektiven Charakter hätten». Cfr. also F.M. CORNFORD, *Plato and Parmenides cit.*, p. 91, and R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 168.

<sup>15</sup> Note that at *Parm.* 132 B 3-4, the subjunctive with μή expresses a doubtful assertion, cfr. H.W. SMYTH, *Greek Grammar*, revised by G.M. MESSING, Harvard 1956 (2002<sup>21</sup>; first published 1920), § 1801. This stresses the character of Socrates' suggestion as rather tentative. In the same passage, some scholars have been tempted not to take τούτων together with τῶν εἰδῶν, but to interpret it as an objective genitive going with νόημα. This is, for instance, the view of R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 173, and S. SCOLNICOV, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 63. M.L. GILL-P. RYAN, *Plato. Parmenides*, Indianapolis-Cambridge 1996, p. 39, have even assumed that Socrates was deliberately unclear. To my mind, τούτων should certainly belong to τῶν εἰδῶν, because otherwise Socrates would, with his own suggestion, already anticipate the argument to follow. For only *after* Socrates has suggested that the Forms are thoughts, does Parmenides show that every thought must have an object. If Socrates in *Parm.* 132 B 3-5 had already said that Forms are thoughts of "these things" (τούτων), Parmenides could skip the first step of his argument. Moreover, there are no suitable candidates to figure as the point of reference for "these things". Finally, Proclus in his commentary *ad loc.* does not mention any ancient commentator who would not have taken τούτων together with τῶν εἰδῶν. To avoid the difficulty F. FERRARI, *Platone. Parmenide*, cit., p. 217 note 51, proposes to read, with the codex T, τούτων ἤ. However, from a palaeographical point of view it is not very likely that this is what Plato wrote, since Proclus in his commentary *ad loc.* and the majority of the mss. confirm the reading ἤ τούτων. Admittedly, the word order is rather unusual, but it seems not impossible to understand the sense correctly. This is also confirmed by most of the older translators who kept the word order, but nevertheless took τούτων together with τῶν εἰδῶν.

- (a2) Thoughts are always thoughts of something that is.  
 (a3) This something is over/on “all these things” (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν), it is a unity, one *Form* (ιδέα), always the same.  
 (a3') It is a unity, because it is thought to be one (τὸ νοούμενον ἔν εἶναι).

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 (Ac) Forms are not thoughts (*i.e.* thought processes), but rather objects of thought (νοούμενα).

(B) PARMENIDES' SECOND ARGUMENT

- (b1) Forms are thoughts (*i.e.* thought processes).  
 (b2) All participants become like the Forms (*Parm.* 129 a 3-6)<sup>16</sup>.

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 (Bc) Either everything, since it consists of thoughts (ἐκ νοημάτων εἶναι), thinks or everything (*i.e.* all the participants), although it consists of thoughts, does not think (ἀνόητος)<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> It has been objected that this premiss may not be universally valid since the passage in question (129 A 3-6) talks only about forms of Likeness and Unlikeness and not about forms in general. However, the argument is clearly based on the assumption that participants become like the forms they are participating in (cfr. also 130 E-131 A). There is no indication in the whole of the *Parmenides* or in other Platonic dialogues that this assumption is problematic. What is discussed, however, is how exactly the participants can become like the Forms. Or, in other words, how participation works. What is troublesome in the argument is the phrase ἐκ νοημάτων ἕκαστον εἶναι – everything consists of thoughts (132 C 10-1), since already in difficulty one (131 A 4-E 7; esp. 131 E 3-5) it was stated that a Form cannot be present in the participant either as a whole or in part. However, it is perhaps more advisable not to make too much of the expression ἐκ νοημάτων ἕκαστον εἶναι, since it is found in a *reductio* argument. Consider also that thoughts may be considered incorporeal (cfr. also S.C. RICKLESS, *Plato's Forms in Transition. A Reading of the 'Parmenides'*, Cambridge 2007, p. 80: «we may safely presume that thoughts do not have parts» – Rickless, however, favours the reading that the *whole* thought is in the participant; an option which is certainly excluded in difficulty one) so that the problems of difficulty one where forms were apparently considered corporeal entities do not arise. However that may be, it is clear how Parmenides' argument is supposed to work in the given context.

<sup>17</sup> This reconstruction, especially the correct translation of ἀνόητος, is argued for below. It is immediately clear why the conclusion presents an absurdity, since inanimate beings like sticks and stones certainly do not think. Moreover, a thought (thought process) that does not think is likewise an impossibility.



Although the reconstruction of the argument as a whole is a matter of considerable disagreement among modern commentators, it seems clear that the first part is based on the distinction between, on the one hand, thought or thought process (νόημα) and, on the other, the object of thought (νοούμενον). At this point, we cannot but notice a certain ambiguity. Speaking about “objects of thought” (νοούμενα), we might mean that these objects are the contents of thought, that is, they are mind dependent entities and hence confined to minds. However, “objects of thought” could also be entities that exist independently of a mind, but are nevertheless thought by this mind. In other words, objects of thought would be trees, dogs, etc. (really existing entities) that *constitute* the contents of thought. In short, whenever we speak about objects of thought, we might mean either (γ1) an inner-mental content or (γ2) objects outside the mind that *constitute* or figure as such a content. It is clear that for non-conceptualists (γ1) in many cases presupposes (γ2). On the other hand, fictitious entities such as goat-stags or golden mountains can only be objects of thought in the sense (γ1). Since my interpretation aims to show that Parmenides' arguments are designed to refute conceptualism, I want to argue in what follows that νοούμενον refers to both (γ1) and (γ2) or, in other words, that the object of thought refers to something that is mind independent/outside the mind. It has, as it were, a *fundamentum in re*.

Furthermore, in my reading, I have tacitly taken for granted that Parmenides' reply is, in fact, twofold. This was already suggested by Cornford<sup>18</sup>. However, as we shall see, Allen was to cast doubt on this interpretation.

<sup>18</sup> F.M. CORNFORD, *Plato and Parmenides cit.*, pp. 90-2. This interpretation can be traced back to PROCL. *in Parm.* IV 901, 24 Cousin: δύο λόγοις χρώμενος [*scil.* Parmenides]. Several other modern interpreters agree with Cornford and Proclus. See, for instance, M.L. GILL-P. RYAN, *Plato. Parmenides, cit.*, p. 39, M.H. MILLER, *Plato's 'Parmenides'. The Conversion of the Soul*, Princeton 1986, pp. 54-5, and S.C. RICKLESS, *Plato's Forms in Transition cit.*, p. 75.

*The Meaning of νόημα and ἀνόητος*

At this point, a short digression is needed on the meaning of νόημα and ἀνόητος in the argument. In the reconstruction, I have assumed that νόημα means “thought process” or “act of thought”, following such respectable commentators and scholars as Proclus, F. Ast, and F.M. Cornford<sup>19</sup>. Modern interpreters, however, have been more reserved. Brisson, after remarking that νόημα can have two meanings, active and passive (that is, thought process and object of thought)<sup>20</sup>, states: «C'est ce second sens qu'il faut, semble-t-il, ici privilégier, et non le premier qui cependant ne peut être exclu»<sup>21</sup>. Yet, a passage in the *Parmenides* itself makes it plain that νόημα carries an active meaning. In *Parm.* 132 c 3, we find the expression νόημα νοεῖ. The syntax of the sentence compels us to take νόημα as

<sup>19</sup> Proclus explained νόημα as νόησις (*in Parm.* IV 892.9-15 Cousin); F. Ast in his *Lexicon Platonicum* likewise translated νόημα as *cogitatio* and ἀνόητος as *non cogitans*. F.M. CORNFORD, *Plato and Parmenides cit.*, p. 91, in his magisterial commentary, translated ἀνόητος as *not thinking* and wrote «the word “thought” [νόημα] is ambiguous; but the context makes it plain that “thought” means an act of thinking». Also R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., pp. 169-70, recognises the ambiguity of the word νόημα.

<sup>20</sup> Sometimes commentators did not realise that νόημα can also have an active meaning. Even the grammarian A.N. JANNARIS, *An Historical Greek Grammar*, London-New York 1897 (repr. Hildesheim-Zürich-New York 1987), § 1024, gives a flawed characterisation of the words ending in -μα when he notes that only after 600 A.D. does -μα signify the action as well as the abstract notion, *i.e.* the result of action. P. HADOT, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, I, Paris 1968, p. 362, has pointed out that this is not true as far as the Stoics are concerned: «Or, dans le stoïcisme, les formations en -μα sont utilisées très fréquemment pour désigner des activités (ἐνέργημα, κατόρθωμα, ἀμάρτημα, εὐχρηστήμα, βλάμμα, ὠφέλημα)». Hadot himself is indebted to O. RIETH, *Grundbegriffe der stoischen Ethik*, Berlin 1933, p. 109 ff.

<sup>21</sup> L. BRISSON, *Platon. Parménide*, Traduction inédite, introduction et notes, Paris 1999<sup>2</sup> (first edition 1994), p. 39 note 85. F. FERRARI, *Platone. Parmenide*, cit., p. 80, maintains that the word νόημα means both “object of thought” and “thought process” in the passage. For this, he refers to G. CASERTANO, *Critica delle idee ed argomentazione dialettica nella prima parte del 'Parmenide'*, in A.M. BATTEGAZZO (a cura di), *Dimostrazione, argomentazione dialettica e argomentazione retorica nel pensiero antico*, Genova 1993, pp. 385-403: 395. However, the latter does not adduce any proof for the claim.

the subject of νοεῖ<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, it can only have an active meaning. This confirms the older interpretations of Proclus, Ast, and Cornford. On the other hand, R.E. Allen offered a counterargument against an exclusively active interpretation of νόημα, namely that the word *changes* its meaning in the second part of the argument<sup>23</sup>. That such an interpretation is, however, untenable will be seen below in our analysis of Allen's interpretation of the passage.

As regards ἀνόητος (*Parm.* 132 C 11), both Ast and Cornford have rightly observed that it has the meaning *non-thinking*<sup>24</sup>. The arguments are as follows: (1) I. Schudoma was correct that Plato was intending a pun with the expression<sup>25</sup>. It can hardly be rendered in English<sup>26</sup>. (2) Plato uses ἀνόητος more than fifty times, while νοητός

<sup>22</sup> *Parm.* 132 C 3-4: Οὐχ ἑνός τινος, ὃ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἐκεῖνο τὸ νόημα ἐπὸν νοεῖ, μίαν τιὰ οὖσαν ιδέαν; Already G. STALLBAUM (ed.), *Platonis Parmenides cum quattuor libris prolegomenorum et commentario perpetuo, accedunt Procli in Parmenidem commentarii nunc emendatius editi*, Lipsiae 1839, *ad loc.*, gave the correct explanation of the sentence. νόημα is the subject of the relative clause, and we should understand the construction as follows: ὃ ἐκεῖνο τὸ νόημα νοεῖ ἐπὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν. ἐπὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν should be taken together with ὃ.

<sup>23</sup> R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 175, interpretation betrays that he thinks that in the first part, νόημα has an active sense, while from 132 C 9 onwards it signifies «the content of an act of thinking». Although, this is not made explicit by Allen himself, the assumption that νόημα changes its meaning underlies his whole interpretation. Cfr. below pp. 326-7 with note 67.

<sup>24</sup> For the meaning of these verbals cfr. H.W. SMYTH, *Greek Grammar*, cit., § 472: «Verbals in -τός, -τή, τόν either (1) have the meaning of a perfect passive participle, as κρυπτός *hidden*, παιδευτός *educated*, or (2) express *possibility*, as νοητός *thinkable*, ὁρατός *visible*. Many have either signification, but some are passive only, as ποιητός *done*. a. Usually passive in meaning are verbals from deponent verbs, as μιμητός *imitated*. b. Usually active in meaning are compounds derived from transitive active verbs; but some intransitive verbs make active verbals, as ῥυτός *flowing*. c. Many are active or passive, others only active: μεμπτός *blamed, blamable, blaming*, πιστός *trusting in (rare), trusted*, ἀπρακτός *doing nothing, not done*, φθεγκτός *sounding*».

<sup>25</sup> I. SCHUDOMA, *Platons 'Parmenides'*, Kommentar und Deutung, Würzburg 2001, p. 24: «Das Wortspiel läßt sich im Deutschen kaum wiedergeben. *noema* ist sowohl der Denktakt wie auch das Gedachte als Ergebnis des Denkens; *anoetos* kann nicht-denkend heißen oder auch gedankenlos, unsinning, tōricht (so der normale Sprachgebrauch bei Platon)».

<sup>26</sup> «Thoughtless», which is used by some translators, is not really appropriate, since it has the connotation «careless of consequences or other's feelings» which cannot be found in the Greek verbal.

is used only half as often. It usually means “not understanding”, “unintelligent”, “senseless” or “silly” and it can be said, for example, of persons or of an opinion (δόξα). Thus, if I say of a person that he or she is ἀνόητος, it is implied that this person does not make sufficient use of his/her νοῦς/intelligence. (3) R.W. Smyth observes that verbals that are formed from transitive verbs (in our case νοεῖν) usually are active<sup>27</sup>. (4) Given that νόημα means “thought process” in the text in question (as was argued for above), we cannot possibly translate ἀνόητος by “not thought” or “unthinkable”<sup>28</sup>. Only if we agree with Allen that νόημα in the final paradox (132 C 9-11) signifies «the content of the act(s) of thinking», would such a meaning seem to be admissible<sup>29</sup>. That Allen’s reading of the passage is, however, unsound will be shown below. Finally, it should be noted that ἀνόητος is used in our passage in opposition to νοεῖν (132 C 11). That quite naturally entails that it also means the opposite, namely “not thinking”, as Ast, Cornford, and others after them have pointed out.

*Of Thoughts and their Objects. An Analysis of the First Argument (A)*

Parmenides’ reasoning takes its start from the insight that every thought has an object that is (a2)<sup>30</sup>. This “is”, however needs

<sup>27</sup> H.W. SMYTH, *Greek Grammar*, cit., § 472.

<sup>28</sup> This is the translation of R.E. ALLEN, *Plato’s ‘Parmenides’*, cit. A parallel for ἀνόητος signifying “unthinkable” can be found in PARM. fr. 8, 17, where the word appears together with ἀνόησιμος.

<sup>29</sup> See R.E. ALLEN, *Plato’s ‘Parmenides’*, cit., p. 177, and the discussion of his interpretation below.

<sup>30</sup> For structurally identical arguments in Plato, cfr. *soph.* 244 C-D, where we read that every name is a name of something, that is, every name signifies something that is. R.E. ALLEN, *Plato’s ‘Parmenides’*, cit., p. 169, compares the two passages. According to him, the parallel in the *Sophist* «provides a further reason why the historical Parmenides cannot be identified with the Parmenides of the dialogue», since the parallel argument in the *soph.* (244 C-D) is directed against the historical Parmenides. In *resp.* V 476 E, we find the same statement as regards knowledge (γνώσις). The whole argument (476 E 4 ff.) is most convincingly analysed by J.A. PALMER, *Plato’s Reception*

to be qualified, and two main readings seem admissible<sup>31</sup>. The first claims that the object of thought simply refers to the Platonic Forms. The second reading tries to show that the objects of thought are not the transcendent Forms, but common elements on/over (ἐπί) individuals, which human thought unifies into one object of thought or one Form<sup>32</sup>. The first interpretation was initially formulated by H. Rochol<sup>33</sup>:

«[The argument] means that thought, exact scientific and philosophical thinking [...] must necessarily have an objectively existing object, the Ideas, the existent Ones<sup>34</sup>».

Rochol's interpretation has the advantage that it outrightly excludes the following objection<sup>35</sup>. One could claim that Parmenides' argument is not valid, since, for instance, goat-stags or griffins do not exist, although we can, admittedly, think of them. The answer to such an objection would be that, from a Platonic perspective,

*of Parmenides*, cit., pp. 31-55. He points out that against the non-Platonists, who are called "lovers of sights and sounds", the reasoning is not compelling, since it already presupposes the existence of Platonic Forms. And again, in the *Theaetetus* 188 E ff., a similar argument is employed with regard to δόξα.

<sup>31</sup> S. SCOLNICOV, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 64, calling the contents of thought "real" does not commit himself to either of the two readings. For his "real" would likewise have to be qualified further.

<sup>32</sup> From Proclus' commentary we can infer that in Antiquity also a third possibility was discussed, namely that τινός refers to an agent who thinks the thought, cfr. PROCL. in *Parm.* IV 899.11-7 Cousin. This interpretation of the passage was championed, as Proclus tells us, by philosophers who put forth a conceptualist interpretation of Platonic Forms (ὅσοι μὲν τὰς ιδέας νοήσεις εἶναι ψιλὰς υπέλαβον, in *Parm.* V 899.11-2). Hence, with this somewhat peculiar reading, they wanted to defend themselves against Parmenides' criticism.

<sup>33</sup> K. DORTER, *Form and Good* cit., pp. 34-7, and F. FERRARI, *Platone. Parmenide*, cit., pp. 80-1, seemingly agree with him.

<sup>34</sup> H. ROCHOL, *The Dialogue 'Parmenides'. An insoluble Enigma in Platonism?*, «International Philosophical Quarterly», XI (1971) p. 506.

<sup>35</sup> Such an objection is formulated by Fronterotta in G. CAMBIANO-F. FRONTEROTTA, *Platone. Parmenide*, Roma-Bari 2000 (first edition 1998), p. 113 note 26. Cfr. also F. FRONTEROTTA, *Μέθεξις. La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, Pisa 2001, p. 225 note 2.

griffins and goat-stags are not the objects of a νόημα, they are rather the objects of imagination (φαντασία)<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, the examples of virtues, like justice or piety, would also not undermine Parmenides' argument, since for a Platonist these really exist. There are Forms of justice and piety<sup>37</sup>.

Furthermore, in *resp.* v 467 D we find a similar use of “to be” (εἶναι) in the sense of “really existing” and an argument that comes rather close to Rochol's reading. Socrates argues there that knowledge (γνώσις) must necessarily have an object that *is*. He goes on to identify this object with the transcendent Forms, which are the only entities (with the probable exception of the gods) that really are<sup>38</sup>. The parallel reasoning seems to confirm the strong or ontological reading of εἶναι in the passage of the *Parmenides*<sup>39</sup>. On the other hand, such a strong reading also presents certain difficulties. For instance, by no means does Plato always use νόημα in its technical sense. Moreover, such a reading would make Parmenides the mouthpiece of Plato's doctrine of the Forms, since by claiming that a thought must be of something that *really is*, he would be an orthodox Platonist<sup>40</sup>.

It depends on how we interpret Parmenides' criticism. Do his arguments reveal something about the true nature of the Forms<sup>41</sup>?

<sup>36</sup> Cf. G. CAMBIANO-F. FRONTEROTTA, *Platone. Parmenide*, cit., p. 113 note 26.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. again *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> The argument is analysed by J.A. PALMER, *Plato's Reception of Parmenides*, cit., pp. 31-55; cf. note 30 above.

<sup>39</sup> That is, “being” as “really existing”.

<sup>40</sup> This is indeed the view of H. ROCHOL, *The Dialogue 'Parmenides' cit.*, p. 509, who claims that the Parmenides of the dialogue is «as good a Platonist as Plato himself and a much better one than young Socrates». The scholars who hold that the Parmenides of the dialogue is identical with the historical Parmenides (cf. note 13 above) would certainly disagree with Rochol's assertion.

<sup>41</sup> This is, for instance, Proclus' view who finds in Parmenides' “criticism” a maieutical procedure. He is, however, far from agreeing with Rochol's interpretation. For Proclus' maieutical interpretation of Parmenides' criticism cf. C. STEEL, *L'Anagogie cit.*, and M. ERLER, *Platons Schriftkritik und der Sinn der Aporien im 'Parmenides' nach Platon und Proklos*, in J. PÉPIN-H.D. SAFFREY (éds.), *Proclus. Lecteur et interprète des Anciens*, Actes du colloque international du CNRS (Paris, 2-4 octobre 1985), Paris 1987, pp. 153-63.

This is not improbable, since in the end of his criticism Parmenides states that one should not abandon the theory of Forms, for then all dialectical discourse (διαλέγεσθαι) would be impossible<sup>42</sup>.

Yet, other objections can be raised against Rochol's interpretation. Firstly, although he claims that Parmenides' argument concludes from the existence of thinking to the existence of an *objectively* existing object of thinking, that is, the Forms<sup>43</sup>, nowhere in the text is this explicitly stated. Secondly, if it really were Parmenides' aim to show that a thought «must necessarily have an objectively existing object, the Ideas», as Rochol claims, why did he not say so? Of course, one could assume that he is just sowing clues, so that Socrates might eventually reach an understanding of the Forms. Such an interpretation is, for instance, defended by the Neoplatonist Proclus<sup>44</sup>.

However, let us again remember what it is that Parmenides wants to show. He wants to show that a Form cannot be a thought, but must be an object of thought, a νοούμενον (Ac). In order to do so, he argues that a thought is a thought of something that is (a2). In the final step (a3), he identifies this object of thought with a unity that is over “all things/entities/participants/cases” (ἐπὶ πάντων)<sup>45</sup>. In the event that he really intended to show that this unity ought to be identified with an “objectively existing Idea”, he would, I think, have phrased his words differently. Most importantly, consider that the unity spoken of here, is not a characteristic of the Form itself, which in the strong reading it should be, but that it is thought that brings this unity about (τὸ νοούμενον ἐν εἶναι, *Parm.* 132 C 6; a3')<sup>46</sup>. If Parmenides wanted to imply that the Platonic Forms are

<sup>42</sup> *Parm.* 135 B-C.

<sup>43</sup> H. ROCHOL, *The Dialogue 'Parmenides' cit.*, pp. 506-7: «[T]his theory, concluding from the existence of thinking to the existence of an objectively existing object, is at the same time the gist and the basic theory of Platonism». This sentence is quoted, with approval, by K. DORTER, *Form and Good cit.*, p. 35 note 21, and F. FERRARI, *Platone. Parmenide*, cit., p. 81 note 149.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. note 41 above.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. note 47. I intentionally leave the meaning of the Greek phrase open here.

<sup>46</sup> Against this reading of the text, it has been objected that the Greek here does

the objects of thought (νοούμενα), he would certainly not have said that their unity is brought about by thought (α3'). Platonic Forms are by definition unitary and their unity surely does not depend on human minds. In the passage in question, however, they are not unitary by themselves, they are only unitary qua being an object of thought. Generally speaking, one can say that in the first three ἀπορίαι the Forms are not really separate from their participants. Only in ἀπορία four, where the Forms are said to be paradigms in nature, does this radically change. From that point on, they, as it were, transcend their participants.

For these reasons, it seems more plausible to turn to the second reading, that does not claim that the object of thoughts are the transcendent Platonic Forms, but that they are identified with common elements on/over (ἐπί) individuals. This entails that Parmenides is merely aiming to refute Socrates' suggestion by a *reductio ad absurdum* (see especially the final part of the argument, *Parm.* 132 C 9-11 and 132 C 12: ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τοῦτο, φάναι, ἔχει λόγον). There is ample evidence that the first argument (A) not only distinguishes between thought and the object of thought, but further aims to show that this object points in fact to something outside the soul (γ2)<sup>47</sup>. This clearly emerges from the expression that the thought

not necessarily imply that the unity in question is brought about by thought. However, it is significant, I think, that Plato uses the phrase τὸ νοούμενον ἐν εἶναι; and we have to ask ourselves why he does so. I agree that the Greek might be understood in a different way (*i.e.* "which is assumed / taken to be one"), but my reading of the text is certainly possible as well and the whole argument suggests to understand νοεῖσθαι in the same lines as νόημα before.

<sup>47</sup> Although this was strongly disputed by R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., pp. 170-2 and 174-5, his attempt to demonstrate that in the phrase "a thought of something" (νόημα τινοῦς), "of something" should be taken as a genitive of definition or content and should point to the intentional object of thought was not successful. Cfr. the discussion of Allen's interpretation below. That Parmenides' argument concludes, in fact, from thought to an object outside the mind was pointed out, for instance, by F.M. CORNFORD, *Plato and Parmenides cit.*, p. 91, M.F. BURNYEAT, *Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed*, «The Philosophical Review», XCI (1982) p. 21, and G. FINE, *On Ideas. Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*, Oxford 1993, pp. 132-3. In principle, I agree with these scholars, but at the same time propose to qualify their statement. With his argument, Parmenides does



thinks a unity that is on/over all these instances (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἐπόν), where πᾶσιν should be understood as all the participants (πᾶσιν τοῖς μετέχουσιν)<sup>48</sup>. This realist reading of the argument can be paralleled by two similar expressions in ἀπορία one and two. In the first passage, it is said that, given that a Form can be compared with a sail, this sail spread over many people is a ἐν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς, and it is taken for granted that the people in question represent the participants. In the second ἀπορία, the participants are likewise termed πάντα; moreover, it is said there that a Form like “largeness” originates/appears in the human soul if we look over the many large things, that is the things that participate in “largeness” (ἐπὶ πάντα ἰδεῖν)<sup>49</sup>. This reading is warranted by other Platonic passages. ἐπεῖναι, for instance, can be used in a concrete sense, that is of a colour being on a surface (*Lys.* 217 C). In *Hipp. ma.* 300 A-B, the verb

not conclude *stricto sensu* that the object of thought is outside the mind, but points out that it refers to something that is outside the mind (*i.e.* to something on/over [ἐπὶ] the participants). Both Socrates and Parmenides can be taken to agree, however, that these participants exist outside the mind.

<sup>48</sup> This is also the interpretation of K.M. SAYRE, *Parmenides' Lesson. Translation and Explication of Plato's 'Parmenides'*, Notre Dame (Indiana) 1996, pp. 83-4. Note, however, that Proclus supplies not τοῖς μετέχουσιν, but τοῖς εἶδεσιν. The reasons for this lie in his complex interpretation of the different ἀπορία as finally leading to a true insight into the nature of the Forms; cfr. C. STEEL, *L'Anagogie cit.* A discussion of Proclus' interpretation would, however, go far beyond the scope of this paper. Yet another interpretation of ἐπὶ πᾶσιν is provided by G. FINE, *On Ideas cit.*, p. 133: «Plato makes it plain that forms are 'over all these cases', *i.e.* they are general or shared». From the context of her reconstruction of the argument, however, it emerges that she understands it along the same lines as Sayre, since she explicitly speaks about shared properties or shared forms in things, that is, in participants.

<sup>49</sup> It is rewarding to quote Waddell's observation *ad loc.*, see ΠΛΑΤΩΝΟΣ ΠΑΡΜΕΝΙΔΗΣ. *The 'Parmenides' of Plato*, ed. by W.W. WADDELL, Glasgow 1894 (repr. Frankfurt a.M. 1975): «ἐπὶ πάντα with ἰδεῖν does not seem to be a common phrase with Pl[ato]; L[iddell] and S[cott] quote Iliad XXIII, 143 ἰδὼν ἐπ' οἴνοπα πόντον». It seems that ἐπι- here has the force of an “over-view” or a generalisation. It is not a detailed observation but rather a generalisation through sight. The same force of ἐπι- can, I think, be found in words like ἐπιλογισμός, for which cfr. EPICUR. *ep.* I 72-3, *sent.* 20 and 22 (with M. SCHOFIELD, *Epilogismos: An Appraisal*, in M. FREDE-G. STRIKER (eds), *Rationality in Greek Thought*, Oxford 1996, pp. 221-37) and PLOT. I 3 [20] 6, 10 ff.

is said of a common element (κοινόν) that makes both a sound and a sight (ὄψις) beautiful.

«Thus both [*scil.* a sound and a sight] possess something, which is the same, that makes that they are both beautiful, namely this common element (τὸ κοινὸν τοῦτο) which is likewise on both of them commonly (ἔπεστι κοινῇ) and on every single one separately. For otherwise, I think, both together and each one on its own would not be beautiful»<sup>50</sup>.

Consider, finally, the following parallel from the *Symposium* (from the famous ascent to the Form of the beautiful).

«A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies. First, if the leader leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realize that the beauty of any one body is brother to the beauty of any other (τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὀψοῦν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι) and that if he is to pursue beauty of form (τὸ ἐπ' εἶδει καλόν) he'd be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same (ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτὸν ἡγεῖσθαι τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος)»<sup>51</sup>.

The parallel is rather striking. First, we note the already familiar expression ἐπί + dat. referring to an attribute or common element on sensible individuals. Moreover, the idea that these common elements are unified in thought is present too (ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτὸν ἡγεῖσθαι τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος). If we look at a manifold of beautiful individuals we have to realise that their beauty

<sup>50</sup> Ἔχουσιν ἄρα τι τὸ αὐτὸ ὃ ποιεῖ αὐτάς καλὰς εἶναι, τὸ κοινὸν τοῦτο, ὃ καὶ ἀμφοτέραις αὐταῖς ἔπεστι κοινῇ καὶ ἑκατέρῃ ἰδίᾳ· οὐ γὰρ ἂν που ἄλλως ἀμφοτέρα ἴε καλαὶ ἦσαν καὶ ἑκατέρῃ (300 A-B).

<sup>51</sup> *Symp.* 210 A 4-B 3: δεῖ γάρ, ἔφη, τὸν ὀρθῶς ἰόντα ἐπὶ τοῦτο τὸ πρᾶγμα ἄρχεσθαι μὲν νέον ὄντα ἰέναι ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ σώματα, καὶ πρῶτον μὲν, ἐὰν ὀρθῶς ἡγήται ὁ ἡγούμενος, ἐνὸς αὐτὸν σώματος ἐρᾶν καὶ ἐνταῦθα γεννᾶν λόγους καλοῦς, ἔπειτα δὲ αὐτὸν κατανοῆσαι ὅτι τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὀψοῦν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι, καὶ εἰ δεῖ διώκειν τὸ ἐπ' εἶδει καλόν, πολλῇ ἄνοιᾳ μὴ οὐχ ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτὸν ἡγεῖσθαι τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος· (translated by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff). For this use of ἐπί see also *Men.* 75 A 4 and A 8.

is “akin”. This is so, because it has a common source, the Form of beauty. This is why “the beauty of all bodies is one and the same”, that is, there is only one Form of beauty. Note, once again, that it is thought that recognises this unity.

However, against this interpretation of ἐν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς or ἐν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν a strong argument can be adduced. It could be claimed that since Aristotle and Alexander refer to the Platonic Forms as a ἐν ἐπὶ πολλῶν, the phrase ἐν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς or ἐν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν «must have seemed to be not an inappropriate expression to use of the separate ideas but an intentional reference to them»<sup>52</sup>. This argument provides a most interesting objection and it seems to overturn the preceding reasoning. However, three points can be put forth in order to seriously question its validity. First, the phrase ἐν ἐπὶ πολλῶν, used by Aristotle and Alexander to refer to the transcendent Platonic Forms, is in fact different from the formulation employed in the *Parmenides* (ἐν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς) in that it should be understood as ἐν ἐπὶ πολλῶν κατηγορούμενον (a unity that is predicated of many individuals). Thus, the phrase rather expresses a logical relation. What Aristotle and Alexander are criticising is, of course, that Plato has separated these predicates/universals. Second, we should not forget that the dramatic purpose of the *Parmenides* consists in pointing to a stage of the theory of Forms in which the theory itself is still the subject of considerable discussion and modification. Against this background, the parallel usage of ἐπί that can be found in the first two ἀπορίαι (referred to above) is certainly of more importance than later references to the theory of Forms that consider it a fully developed doctrine. We can add to this that up to the present day it remains an open question whether Aristotle's and Alexander's repre-

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. H. CHERNISS, *Lafrance on Doxa*, «Dialogue», xxii (1983) pp. 146-7. It should be said that Cherniss is commenting here on an interpretation of the *Theaetetus* (184 B 5-186 E 12). The argument could, however, also be applied to the passage in Plato's *Parmenides* that constitutes the focus of our investigation. The remarks of Cherniss on the usage of ἐπί in the context of the Platonic theory of Forms remain fundamental.

sentation of the Plato's theory of Forms is in all or most respects adequate<sup>53</sup>.

Note, finally and most importantly, that Cherniss' claim that ἔν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς or ἔν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν can be seen as an "intentional reference" to Platonic Forms is not convincing. The passage in the *Theaetetus* which he appealed to is situated in the section on common elements (κοινά) which are said to be perceived by the soul all by itself. Now, Cherniss' claim presupposes that we identify the κοινά in the *Theaetetus* passage with transcendent Forms. This, however, seems rather unlikely given that in the examples of κοινά also "non-being" figures. In his recent commentary on the dialogue, D. Sedley calls the κοινά "the commons", "common predicates", "a priori predicates", "predicable of sensible properties"<sup>54</sup>.

At this point, let us come back to our text. It can be said that we do not learn in our passage how or why the human soul is able

<sup>53</sup> On this point, cfr. the comprehensive study of G. FINE, *On Ideas cit.* D.T. DEVEREUX, *Separation and Immanence in Plato's Theory of Forms*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», XII (1994) pp. 85-8, argues that the use of ἐπὶ in the first part of the *Parmenides* would point to the fact that the Forms are separate from their participants. He is, however, confusing two different issues. First, we can state that in the first ἀπορία it is shown that Forms cannot be *in* their participants. This entails, quite naturally, that from ἀπορία two onwards, Forms are no longer said to be *in* the participants, but rather *on/over* (ἐπὶ) them (like the sail is *on/over* the individuals covered by it). Second, this does not mean, however, that the Forms would already be truly *separated*, since such an interpretation cannot be extracted from the text. That this is, however, what Devereux meant is already indicated in the title of his article. Only from ἀπορία four onwards are the Forms really separated from their participants, because they are said to exist as paradigms *in nature*. My impression is that Plato uses ἐπὶ in the *Parmenides* and elsewhere, because it does not imply a commitment as to how the Forms are related to their participants. That they are, however, not entirely separate from them is clearly shown by ἀπορία three, given that our interpretation is correct. In this context, it is most remarkable that also Aristotle uses similar language when referring to the (Aristotelian) Forms in matter, see *metaph. Z* 11. 1036 a 31 (ἐπιγίγνεσθαι ἐπὶ) and the parallel passages collected by M. FREDE-G. PATZIG, *Aristoteles 'Metaphysik Z'*, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, München 1988, *ad loc.* This clearly shows that also for Aristotle the use of ἐπὶ did not necessarily refer to separate or transcendent Forms.

<sup>54</sup> See D. SEDLEY, *The Midwife of Platonism, Text and Subtext in Plato's 'Theaetetus'*, Oxford 2004, pp. 106-7, 112, 115-6, 159. Sedley agrees that the "commons" are not yet Platonic Forms (p. 115), and once (p. 107) refers to them as concepts.

to unify these objects in thought or even to think them. Later, different models were suggested as to how this may work, the most prominent of them are abstraction and collection<sup>55</sup>. We should abstain, of course, from reading all of this into the *Parmenides* passage, but it has become clear, I hope, that there is something going on which would need further clarification either on Plato's or Parmenides' part, namely how thoughts or concepts can come into being in the human mind (ἐγγίγνεσθαι, *Parm.* 132 B 4-5). If we look at other dialogues in Plato's œuvre, it becomes plain that he does not endorse any kind of abstractionism<sup>56</sup>. With Plato, as Cherniss put it, «[Forms] were the objective correlates of the mental concepts and it is their objective existence that makes all abstraction possible»<sup>57</sup>.

To sum up, Parmenides demonstrates that a Form cannot be a thought process, but must be an object of thought (Ac)<sup>58</sup>. At this point, one should recall that Socrates wanted to safeguard the unity of a Form with his suggestion. Reading the first part of Parmenides' refutation, it becomes clear that unity plays an eminent role as the argument proceeds. It is not the case, however, that Parmenides ar-

<sup>55</sup> Cfr. A. DE LIBERA, *L'art des généralités. Théories de l'abstraction*, Paris 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Cfr. R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., pp. 176-7, and CH. HELMIG, *What is the Systematic Place of Abstraction and Concept Formation in Plato's Philosophy? Ancient and Modern Readings of 'Phaedrus' 249b-c*, in G. VAN RIEL-C. MACÉ (eds), *Platonic Ideas and Concept Formation in Ancient and Medieval Thought* ("Ancient and Medieval Philosophy", Series I, XXXII), Leuven 2004, pp. 83-97.

<sup>57</sup> H. CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, cit., I, pp. 214-6 note 128.

<sup>58</sup> Recently, S.C. RICKLESS, *Plato's Forms in Transition* cit., pp. 75-80, has proposed a different reading of the argument. Assuming that the argument has two parts, he claims that the result of the first argument is an infinite regress. In this way, he wants to connect it to the previous argument (first Third Man argument). Rickless writes «the result that every form is a thought of a form generates an infinite regress of forms» (p. 77). However, such a reading is not very likely, because (1) nowhere the text points to a regress (while in the two Third Man arguments the regress is always clearly marked), (2) nowhere it is said that a form is actually a thought of a form (this is merely an inference by Rickless), (3) rather, it seems that Parmenides shows by means of a reduction that a Form cannot be a thought (νόημα), but must be an object of thought (νοούμενον), (4) finally, it is not even clear why or how the argument could generate an infinite regress (*pace* Rickless).

gues that in identifying Forms and thoughts the unity of the Forms would be done away with. Quite the contrary is true. He rather points out that the unity in question is not the thought-process, but an object of thought (νοούμενον). This object of thought, which is identified with the Form, is a unity because it is unified by thought (τὸ νοούμενον ἐν εἶναι, a3'). It is characterised (a3) as being something on/over all these instances (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἐπόν) and as always the same over these instances (ὅτι ὄν τὸ αὐτὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν). As I have tried to argue above, this means that the object of thought in question is not a mere mental entity (γ1), but originates from or depends on a common element that is over/on (ἐπί) the many participants. It is an object of thought in the sense of (γ2). Hence, it has, as it were, a *fundamentum in re*.

*Forms as Causes. An Analysis of the Second Argument (B)*

The second argument (B) is considerably shorter than the first. It takes its start from Socrates' initial suggestion that Forms are thoughts, that is, thought processes (b1)<sup>59</sup>. If the Forms are thoughts the participants would all think, which in the case of, say, sticks and stones would be obvious nonsense. On the other hand, it is likewise absurd if everything participates in Forms (thoughts) and does not think (ἀνόητος). The argument presupposes what was said in *Parm.* 129 A 3-6, namely that the participants become like the Forms (b2). What makes this second argument slightly problematic is the phrase ἐκ νοημάτων ἕκαστον εἶναι (132 C 10-1). It suggests that everything (all the participants) *consist* of thoughts. However, it was already stated in 131 E 3-7 that a Form cannot be *in* the participant. I think that we cannot fully account for this in-

<sup>59</sup> Note that R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., would not agree at this point, since he interprets the refutation of Parmenides as being a continuous whole. According to him, the passage that corresponds to my second argument (B) starts off with the result reached, namely that a Form (as νόημα/νοούμενον) is a "content of an act of thinking". See the detailed discussion of Allen's reading below.

consistency, but it does certainly not affect the argument as such. For the implied meaning is that everything participates in thoughts and hence becomes "thought-like"<sup>60</sup>. Against this background, it seems reasonable to term argument (B) the argument from participation or causation. After this analysis of the two arguments, let us now turn to Allen's reading of the passage.

*Allen's Reading of Parm. 132 B 3-C 11*

In a rather influential article, which was later reproduced in his important commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Allen contested the classical interpretation of the *Parmenides* passage<sup>61</sup>. According to Allen one should not distinguish two arguments<sup>62</sup>. The whole passage, he explains, ought to be read as forming one single continuous argument.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the classical interpretation, as summarized above, would imply an «act/object distinction of twentieth-century realistic epistemology»<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Cfr. above note 16.

<sup>61</sup> A first version of his interpretation was published as an article: R.E. ALLEN, *Ideas as Thoughts: 'Parmenides' 132b-c*, «Ancient Philosophy», I (1980-81) pp. 29-38. Later, he incorporated the revised article in his monograph, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., pp. 167-79.

<sup>62</sup> On the whole, L. BRISSON, *Platon. Parménide*, cit., pp. 39-41, agrees with Allen's reading. M. MIGLIORI, *Dialettica e Verità. Commentario filosofico al 'Parmenide' di Platone*, Pref. di H. KRÄMER, Introd. di G. REALE, Milano 1990, pp. 146-8, attitude towards Allen's interpretation remains somewhat unclear; see especially p. 147 note 45. It is rather surprising that F. FRONTEROTTA, *Μέθεξις* cit., p. 225 note 4, can claim that both Allen and Brisson interpret the passage as a refutation of conceptualism («una formidabile confutazione del concettualismo epistemologico»). In fact, especially Allen maintains exactly the opposite. It seems that also S. SCOLNICOV, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., pp. 63-4, reads the passage as consisting of one single argument, although he does not say that explicitly. Finally, S.C. RICKLESS, *Plato's Forms in Transition* cit., pp. 75-80, clearly distinguishes two separate arguments.

<sup>63</sup> R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 174: «Parmenides' argument is presented as one and continuous, with its refutative conclusion offered at the end, not as two separate arguments, one of which shows that the object of thought exists independently of the act of thinking».

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Allen does not say exactly what this means. He is certainly prepared to admit that the passage does provide a distinction between the act of thinking and the content of thought, but he does not want to grant that this content of thought exists *independently* of minds.

«The argument does indeed provide a distinction between the act of thinking and the content of thought, but in no way suggests or implies that the content of thought exists independently of minds»<sup>65</sup>.

Thus, what Allen so firmly criticises is that the distinction between the act of thinking (νόημα) and the object of this thought (νοούμενον) implies that the latter refers to something that exists outside a mind. I have classified such an understanding of the meaning of “object of thought” above as (γ2). Therefore, Allen is anxious to stress that the νοούμενον is rather the *content* of thought and that in the phrase νόημά τινος (cfr. *Parm.* 132 B 11), the τινος should be understood as a *genitive of definition*<sup>66</sup>. The content of thought is, according to Allen, still in a soul (γ1).

Allen’s long commentary on the passage is quite remarkable, since he is the only scholar who has tried to discuss the argument extensively and to point to its philosophical implications. As noted, it is characteristic of his reading of the passage that he sees it as one single continuous argument, in which νόημα first carries an active meaning (process of thinking), but is later used in the passive meaning («contents of an act of thinking»)<sup>67</sup>. This *shift of meaning* of

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-2: «To sum up. The genitive in “thought of something” must be definitory, and may be objective. If it is also objective, it need not be taken to imply that some thoughts are not thoughts of themselves, or that objects of thought do not depend on thinking for their existence». For the different interpretations of τινος that have been suggested, cfr. above p. 315 with note 32.

<sup>67</sup> Although this is not made explicit by Allen himself, it clearly emerges from the following assertion: «Parmenides at this point [*scil.* *Parm.* 132 C 8, end of the first argument (A) according to the classical interpretation] has forced the distinction between the activity of thinking and the content of thought. The content of thought is an Idea, one over many. It follows that since sensibles partake of Ideas, and Ideas are thoughts, sensibles partake of *thoughts*, that is, *the contents of acts of thinking*» (*ibid.*, p.



νόημα necessarily follows from reading the passage as constituting one single argument. Allen explicitly attacks an interpretation that finds in the passage a refutation of conceptualism, for he does not want to concede that the object of thinking (νοούμενον) is mind independent or refers to something that is mind independent (γ2)<sup>68</sup>.

As far as the first part of the passage is concerned (132 B 3-C 8), Allen's reading is identical with the interpretation given above (A). Given the conclusion (Ac) that Forms are not thoughts, but objects of thought (νοούμενα), Allen assumes that from now on also νόημα means «object of thought», *i.e.* «the content of an act of thinking». In other words, whereas according to the classical interpretation a new argument (B) begins at 132 C 9, Allen assumes that the first argument continues. But since the result reached in (Ac) is that the Forms are not thoughts, but objects of thought, Allen is forced to take νόημα in 132 C 10-1 to mean "object of thought" or "the content of an act of thinking". For otherwise the crucial distinction between νόημα and νοούμενον would not be employed in the final part of the passage. The classical interpretation, on the other hand, does not allow for such a shift of meaning. It rather concludes that since a Form is said to be the object of thought (νοούμενον) and not the thought/thought process itself (νόημα), Socrates' suggestion is shown to be pointless. Accordingly, the remainder of the passage introduces a second argument (B), the argument "from participation/causation".

Returning to Allen's reading, we can state that he wants to detect a *shift of meaning* of νόημα in the argument. For him, the passage forms a continuous whole. In a first step, νόημα is eventually determined as the object of thought (νοούμενον). In a second step, the absurd consequences of this are then pointed out. This reading has the clear advantage that it can explain the phrase νόημα νοεῖ (132 C 3), which for scholars who assume that νόημα throughout carries a passive meaning poses a real difficulty.

177, Italics are mine).

<sup>68</sup> In particular *cfr. ibid.*, pp. 170-2 and 174-5.

Furthermore, against Cornford he objects that τί δὲ δῆ; (132 C 9) would not have the force of introducing a new argument<sup>69</sup>. However, this is not very compelling, since the phrase τί δὲ δῆ; occurs rather frequently in Plato and it is clear from parallel passages that Plato does use it to introduce a new point in the discussion. Thus, just before our passage we find the sentence τί δὲ δῆ; πρὸς τόδε πῶς ἔχεις; (131 E 8) to introduce the second ἀπορία<sup>70</sup>. The remainder of Allen's reconstruction can be summarised as follows:

- (I) 1. Everything participates in the Forms.  
2. The Forms are νοήματα, *i.e.* the contents/results of acts of thinking.

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Everything participates in the contents/results of acts of thinking.

- (II) 1. The Form is in the participants either in whole or in part<sup>71</sup>.  
2. A thought (contents/result of an act of thinking) can only exist in a soul.

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The participant itself must be a soul.

Hence, every participant, being soul, must think, but this is obviously impossible in the case of sticks or stones (or other inanimate entities), which also participate. Allen concedes that the final

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174. This was justly criticised by M.H. MILLER, *Plato's 'Parmenides' cit.*, p. 216 note 37. The rest of Miller's critique of Allen is, however, flawed by the fact that he is convinced that νόημα, or more generally the Greek nouns ending in -μα, refer to the result or product of an action. However, as was shown above, this is untenable. Secondly, Miller misrepresents Allen's interpretation when he writes that Allen would interpret νόημα exclusively as the "act of thinking". As far as I can see, apart from Miller's response not much has been said about Allen's reading of the passage. The only scholar who criticised Allen's overall conclusion was Fronterotta (in G. CAMBIANO-F. FRONTEROTTA, *Platone. Parmenide*, cit., p. 113 note 26), without, however, going into further details.

<sup>70</sup> For τί δέ; as introducing a new argument see R. KÜHNER-B. GERTH, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*, Zweiter Teil: *Satzlehre*, Zweiter Band, 3. Auflage, Hannover-Leipzig 1904, § 531.3.

<sup>71</sup> *Parm.* 131 A 4-6.

step of the argument allows two readings that are both equally admissible, depending as to how one determines the sense of ἀνόητος (132 C 11).

(III') Thus, if thoughts are only in souls and thoughts are in things which do not think, then such things must be stupid or unconscious (ἀνόητος in an active sense)<sup>72</sup>.

(III'') Or thoughts in things which are not thinking are unthought or not thinkable (ἀνόητος in a passive sense)<sup>73</sup>.

Finally, Allen affirms:

«This refutation would be impossible if Ideas had already been proved to exist separately from minds; the argument so far from requiring the act/object distinction of twentieth century realistic epistemology, precludes it. *For Parmenides' refutation turns on the assumption that Ideas are in their participants, and that therefore thoughts are in their participants if Ideas are thoughts*»<sup>74</sup>.

Allen's interpretation, and this becomes clear at first sight, is much more complicated than the classical reading of the text, defended, for instance, by Cornford. The first part of his reconstruction is identical with that of his predecessors. From 132 C 6-7 onwards, however, Allen assumes that the conclusion reached, namely that a νόημα is not a thought process, but rather a νοούμενον, will be used also in the rest of the argument, and that νόημα from now on means "the contents of an act of thought". The classical interpretation, on the other hand, assumed (1) that νόημα, throughout the passage, carries the meaning "thought-process", and that (2) νοούμενον, as content of thought, would refer to something outside

<sup>72</sup> R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 177: «ἀνόητα has an active meaning: if thoughts are present only in minds, and thoughts are present in things that do not think, those things must be stupid or unconscious».

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178: «On the other hand, ἀνόητα also has a passive meaning: thoughts in things that do not think are unthought or unthinkable – much too deep for tears».

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* (Italics are mine).

the soul, namely to a common element on/over (ἐπί) the many participants (γ2). This νοούμενον is a unity, because it is unified in thought (τὸ νοούμενον ἐν εἶναι).

To integrate Parmenides' final paradox within the framework of his reading, Allen has to introduce a series of additional premisses. In fact, the entire second syllogism (II) consists of premisses that cannot be derived from the text, namely that (II.1) the Form is in the participants either in whole or in part, and that (II.2) a thought can only exist in a soul. The first premiss Allen takes from ἀπορία one (131 A 4-6). The second premiss looks like an innocent common sense assumption, but in this particular context, it is not acceptable. By saying that a thought must be in a soul Allen outrightly excludes the classical reading of the last part of the passage (as will become clear shortly) and obscures the final paradox. For it is said at that point that if Forms were thoughts, everything would consist of thoughts (ἐκ νοημάτων ἕκαστον [*scil.* τῶν μετεχόντων] εἶναι). This entails that the participants participate in thoughts, but not that the participants are in a soul. Hence, the paradox is less complex than Allen wanted to make us believe, namely, given that Forms are thoughts, even, for instance, sticks and stones (or other inanimate beings) would be thought-like, although they admittedly do not think.

What is more, in saying that every thought must be in a soul (II.2), Allen by definition excludes a realist reading of the passage, for two reasons. First, he neglects the distinction made in the text between the object of thought and thought process. For although he is indeed correct that an object of thought in the sense of a contents of thought (γ1) presupposes some kind of mental agent, this by no means holds true for objects of thought in the sense (γ2), that is, objects outside the mind which *constitute* the content of thought. Second, the classical reading of the passage claims exactly this, namely that the objects of thought (γ2) are outside the mind/soul. Hence, by introducing the premiss that thoughts have to be in souls (a premiss, it should be repeated, that cannot be found in the passage in question), Allen right from the start excludes the position he attempts to refute. To sum up, this addi-

tional premiss represents the classical example of a *petitio principii* (begging the question), since his conclusion (the object of thought cannot be outside the soul) is already assumed by one of the premisses, namely by his claim that a thought must be in a soul.

Let us, however, come back to premiss II.1, namely that the form is in the participant either in whole or in part. Admittedly, Allen can claim support for this premiss from 131 A 4-6. A careful reading of what follows this passage, however, shows that it is later refuted (131 E 3-7)<sup>75</sup>. There, it is declared to be impossible that a Form, either in whole or in part, could be in the participant<sup>76</sup>. Moreover, Allen's reading is also unconvincing for another reason. His explanation of III' and III'' is hardly intelligible and it does not really clarify the paradox. To sum up, everything seems to indicate that it is indeed wiser to return to the classical reading of the text.

### *Parmenides' Arguments Reconsidered*

In the last part of my contribution, I would like to return to Parmenides' reasoning in (A) and (B) and see whether the two arguments can be considered valid. Most of the interpreters agree, *pace* Allen<sup>77</sup>, that the arguments are intended to refute a conceptualist position, namely that Forms are thoughts in the human mind. Until now, argument (B) has not received much attention. As far as (A) is concerned, most commentators maintain that the argument is not valid. For from the fact that we think of something, it does not follow by any means that this merely intentional object exists independently of thought. This goes without saying for objects such as goat-stags or golden mountains. As I have tried to show, however, Parmenides' first argument (A) seems to imply that thought pre-

<sup>75</sup> Cf. K. DORTER, *Form and Good in Plato's Eleatic Dialogues*, cit., p. 31 note 17, who points to the same mistake in Allen's interpretation of *Parm.* 132 A 1-B 1 (second ἀπορία).

<sup>76</sup> *Pace* R.E. ALLEN, *Plato's 'Parmenides'*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

supposes an object/objects outside itself<sup>78</sup>. Is it, therefore, hopelessly flawed? I shall provide a fresh way of looking at the argument in order to somewhat rehabilitate it.

I propose to suggest that the kernel of the argument is not the problematic conclusion from thought to an object outside itself, but rather the question how a thought comes about, how the mind «comes to be furnished» (John Locke), how we, in other words, form concepts. Looked at from this perspective, the argument becomes much more convincing. Every thought, as thought process, needs an object. No one would doubt this. The question is what the status of such an object may be. Does it have an existence outside the mind? In this context, let us come back to our distinction made at the outset between two senses of “object of thought” (νοούμενον). If we say that Parmenides concludes from the thought to something existing outside the mind, we mean that he concludes from a thought or a content of thought (γ1) to something that *constitutes* this content (γ2). In general, objects of thought as mental contents (γ1) are characterized by an “intentional inexistence”<sup>79</sup>. Therefore, we are not permitted to conclude that such a content exists outside the human mind. To conclude from a thought to an object outside the human mind seems, however, to lie at the basis of Parmenides’ reply to Socrates’ proposal that Forms may be thoughts. Even before Plato, the invalidity of such an inference had been pointed out by Gorgias of Leontini<sup>80</sup>. He reminds us that the

<sup>78</sup> This is in accordance with M.F. BURNYEAT, *Idealism and Greek Philosophy cit.*, p. 21, statement: «What is remarkable about this argument is its swiftness and the brutality of its *realism*. Plato is certainly capable of more sophisticated treatment of the relation of thought to its objects. [...] But the very fact that he allows his Eleatic spokesman to get away with it reveals, I think, that it simply did not occur to him that there might be a serious philosophical thesis to be developed out of Socrates’ suggestion that Forms are thoughts» (Italics are mine).

<sup>79</sup> Cfr. R.M. CHISHOLM, *s.v. Intentionality*, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, IV (*Hinduism to Logic*), London-New York 1967.

<sup>80</sup> GORG. 82 B 3, 79 D.-K. (= fr. 3, 79 Buchheim). This text was the subject of an interesting article by V. CASTON, *Gorgias on Thought and its Objects*, in V. CASTON-D.W. GRAHAM (eds), *Presocratic Philosophy*, Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos, Aldershot 2002, pp. 205-32, a discussion of which would, however, go beyond

fact that we think of a chariot driving on the sea by no means implies that such a chariot really exists. Therefore, Parmenides' inference does not seem to be valid.

But is Parmenides/Plato committed to such an error? First of all, the example of fictitious entities seems not appropriate to refute Parmenides' reasoning, because according to Plato there are no Forms of them. Let us remember that the extension of the world of Forms was already discussed in 130 B-D<sup>81</sup>. From the list given there, we can conclude with certainty that fictitious entities are excluded. The whole discussion between Socrates and Parmenides about the nature of Forms and participation presupposes the discussion on the extension of Forms.

Secondly, and most importantly, if we consider the argument as being about concept acquisition, as suggested above, we rather have to ask *why can we think of something after all*. For Plato, thought is constituted by means of, on the one hand, innate knowledge, and on the other, sense perception. The interplay of both makes recollection and universal thought possible<sup>82</sup>. Against this background, saying that a thought necessarily has an object boils down to the problem of how a (universal) thought comes about/originates. Thought, somehow, has to start from sense perception. That is, the content of thought originates first of all because of sense perception. If Forms were mere thoughts, we could not relate our mental contents to the world we live in. One of the main problems of a conceptualist approach to reality lies in the fact that it is not easy to see how or from where the content of universal thoughts could possibly originate.

the scope of this paper.

<sup>81</sup> On the question of what things are there Forms see the excellent overview in H. DÖRRIE-M. BALTES, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, Band 5: *Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus. Platonische Physik (im antiken Verständnis)*, II: *Bausteine 125-150*, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1998, pp. 336-50.

<sup>82</sup> I do not want to address the problem here whether recollection is only concerned with higher learning, see D. SCOTT, *Recollection and Experience. Plato's Theory of Learning and its Successors*, Cambridge 1995. Contrary to Scott, I suppose that we can only have universal thoughts/concepts because of our innate knowledge.

For Plato, who undoubtedly was a realist, it is obvious that common properties or common attributes are outside the mind. We have warrant for this both in *symp.* 210 B-C, but also in *Phaedr.* 249 B-C. Both passages illustrate how universal thought originates. It has to take its start from common properties which are caused by a single Form. Because of this, it is reasonable to argue that if we think of some universal, we initially think of it as a common property that several individuals share. I take it that Plato holds that we can perform such a mental operation, that is, to go over from many individuals that share a common attribute to a single universal thought, because we possess innate knowledge<sup>83</sup>.

Coming back to argument (A), we can state that saying a thought needs an object Parmenides suggests that in order to *originate*, a thought needs an object, a *fundamentum in re* (some common attribute or property). A thought as thought process is empty. Therefore, Forms cannot be human thoughts (empty thought processes). The contents of human thought results from a combination of sense perception and recollection. Universal thought takes its start from common properties of individuals<sup>84</sup>.

Moreover, argument (B) is rather interesting. Nowadays, we might consider it less convincing because of its strong ontological implications. However, in Antiquity it found an interesting echo. Aristotle advances similar arguments against the existence of Forms and against participation<sup>85</sup>. In short, the problem is that Forms *qua*

<sup>83</sup> On PLAT. *Phaedr.* 249 B-C see CH. HELMIG, *What is the Systematic Place cit.*

<sup>84</sup> Cfr. ARISTOT. *an. post.* B 19. 100 a 7-8: τοῦ ἐνὸς παρὰ τὰ πολλά, ὃ ἂν ἐν ἅπασιν ἐν ἐνῇ ἐκείνοις τὸ αὐτό. This characterisation of a universal concept in the human mind recalls the already familiar phrase from PLAT. *Parm.* 132 C 6-7: Εἶτα οὐκ εἶδος ἔσται τοῦτο τὸ νοούμενον ἐν εἶναι, ἀεὶ δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν;

<sup>85</sup> See ARISTOT. *metaph.* A 9. 990 b 27-34; *metaph.* I 9. 1059 a 10-4; cfr. also *top.* E 7. 137 b 3-13. The problem is touched upon in G.E.L. OWEN, *Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of the Forms*, in ID. (ed.), *Aristotle on Dialectic: the 'Topics'*, Papers of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum, Oxford 1968, pp. 103-25 (esp. 122-5), but comprehensively addressed by G. VLASTOS, *The "Two-Level Paradoxes" in Aristotle*, in *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1973, pp. 323-34 (originally published in 1971), who calls it the "two-level paradox". I am indebted to Jan Opsomer (Köln) for the references. Another reminiscence of the *Parmenides* passage is *de an.* Γ 4. 429 b 26-8 (noted by R.D.



Forms have certain properties that the participants certainly do not share. For instance, Forms are by definition eternal or immobile. Then, however, the question arises why these properties are not shared by the participants. With the Neoplatonists, it was considered especially troublesome, since for them the Forms were held to be divine thoughts and as such causes of all things. The solution Proclus advances in his commentary interprets the Forms both as causes and caused, that is, as causes they only bestow a certain particular feature (ιδίωμα) on their participants, while their being thoughts does not necessarily belong to their nature, but is only an acquired or caused property<sup>86</sup>.

We are now in a position to say that Parmenides' refutation of Socrates' suggestion yields two results. First, Forms are not thought processes, they are rather objects of thought (in the sense of  $\gamma 2$ ). Second, if Forms are thought processes, all the participants would either think or, although being a thought, not think<sup>87</sup>. Argument one (A) has an epistemological character, while the second argument (B) can be termed "ontological" or "from participation".

### *Concluding Considerations*

I have criticised Allen's argument and re-established the reading that the refutation of conceptualism in Plato's *Parmenides* has a strong realist ring, so strong that Burnyeat even spoke of the «brutality of its realism». It uses a distinction between thoughts and objects of thought. These objects of thought refer to something outside the human mind, namely to a common element on/over ( $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ ) the many participants. Allen's attempt to question this was not successful and his reconstruction should be rejected because it contains several flaws and inaccuracies. It became clear that his read-

Hicks in his commentary *ad loc.*)

<sup>86</sup> PROCL. in *Parm.* IV 901.18-906.2 Cousin.

<sup>87</sup> For the reconstruction of the second argument cfr. above pp. 324-5.

ing of the passage as one continuous argument is untenable. In particular, the fact that in order to make his case Allen introduced additional premisses, which cannot be found in the passage in question, proved to be incorrect. Both arguments advanced by Parmenides against Socrates' suggestion that Forms are thoughts (A, B) can be considered valid in a Platonic context. It was pointed out that the first argument (A) is not based on the questionable conclusion from a thought or content of thought to an object outside the mind. Rather, it tries to solve the question how a thought *originates* and argues that thoughts (as thoughts of Forms) need to have a *fundamentum in re*. That is, every act of recollection takes its start from sense perception and from the common properties of individuals.