

WORDS
&
IDEAS



*The Roots of
Plato's Philosophy*



Fritz-Gregor Herrmann

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parentibus. magistro.

*caris, propter quos hanc lucem semper amatam
aspexi, hoc donum laetitiam pariat.
olim qui iuvenes in ludo nos docuisti,
serius hoc munus nunc tibi iusta ferat.*

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PREFACE

μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν· οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὕτη.

This is indeed very much the predicament of the philosopher: to wonder. Indeed, there is no beginning of philosophy other than that.

My interest in Plato's words and ideas has a history of which I shall give an outline at the beginning. In order to do that, I must talk about Plato first. Socrates' words at *Theaetetus* 155d2–4, quoted above, are addressed to, and are about, the youth Theaetetus. But they could also be seen as Plato's re-interpretation of what Socrates himself had been doing, perhaps in life, certainly in Plato's own earlier dialogues. Socrates' philosophy consists not least in asking questions: 'What is justice?', 'What is courage?', 'What is modesty?', 'What is goodness?'

These questions arise out of puzzlement. They often end in ἀπορία, a situation from which there is 'no way out'. But they also reflect the other side of wondering: admiration, respect and awe. For justice, courage, modesty and goodness are the traditional virtues of Greek culture and Greek consciousness. Socrates wonders about the values which are at the core of the society of which he is a part. Socrates, according to tradition, did not have answers to these questions. Plato did not have all the answers either. But he did have a preliminary answer: the reason why there are no answers of the traditional sort to these questions is precisely that there are some things that cannot be reduced further. When thinking about 'the good' and 'the beautiful', there is no 'definition'. This circumstance, however, does not stop Plato from asking 'what it is'. For Plato, there is an answer even if there is no 'definition'. There can be knowledge of what the good is, or what the beautiful is, without an 'account', a λόγος, that could be given. To mark this insight, Plato turned the Socratic question of 'what it is', τί ἔστιν, into a noun: 'what something is' is the 'being' of that thing, its οὐσία.¹ But when one has arrived at this point and contemplates the οὐσία of something, there is then no further questioning of the accustomed sort. Plato's answer is designed to provide an end point to the question of 'what something is', so that this end point can be the beginning of a new sort of question. These questions of a different sort increasingly occupy Plato in

the dialogues which come after the *Republic*. They will not be the subject of *this* investigation.

However, the Socratic questions of ‘what is justice?’, ‘what is courage?’, ‘what is modesty?’ and ‘what is goodness?’ also lie largely outside the compass of this book. It is the middle period, the transition from Socratic asking about traditional values and traditional concepts to a different type of philosophy in Plato’s later dialogues that I shall be concerned with. This middle ground is occupied by the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium* and the *Republic*. The *Republic* constitutes the summation and consummation of Plato’s wrestling with Socratic questions. The *Symposium* portrays Socrates in the context of all the intellectual currents present in the urbane gatherings of Athens’ cultural elite. The *Phaedo*, by contrast, links Socratic questioning with Presocratic thought. In the *Phaedo*, more than in any other dialogue before the *Republic*, Plato demarcates his own position against the positions of his philosophical predecessors.

This claim concerning the *Phaedo* is the answer to the question from which this investigation took its departure. The point of departure was the *Phaedo*, which I read in Cambridge in the academic year 1990–1. When I had to answer the question whether Plato, in the *Phaedo*, argues for the existence of Forms or, by contrast, assumes the existence of Forms in his proofs of the immortality of the soul without argument, I realized that the words for Forms which I had learned as a schoolboy, εἶδος and ἰδέα, did not appear in the *Phaedo* until just before the final argument on page 102. This was a surprise.

Having read at school chapters from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, Plato’s *Apology*, large parts of the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, large parts of the *Republic*, and *Metaphysics* A 6.987a29–988a17, and M 4–5, 1078b7–1080a11, Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s ‘Theory of Forms’, and in my first years at university in Munich, Heidelberg and Edinburgh the *Gorgias*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus* and *Ion*, I had, through no fault of my teachers, formed an altogether dogmatic view of Plato’s philosophy. In studying the *Euthydemus*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedo* between 1989 and 1991 at Cambridge, I came to see what I did *not* know. Among the many things I did not know and did not understand was why Plato did not throughout use the words for Forms, εἶδος and ἰδέα, in the dialogue that seemed to be *about* forms almost from the beginning. More fundamentally, in reading the *Phaedo* on that occasion, I realized that, once I had become aware of all the various expressions Plato employed in talking about the Forms, the two I did not understand were just those which I had learned many years before, εἶδος and ἰδέα. I realized that I did not know what these words meant. And because of that, I could not translate them any more in any meaningful way.

‘What was it in the terms εἶδος and ἰδέα that made Plato choose them *at the end of the Phaedo*?’ I did not have an answer to that question, and all the answers I could obtain from the people I asked and the books I read at the time seemed, to some extent, coloured by post-Platonic traditions. It seemed as if those Platonist traditions, whether originating with Aristotle and his successors or the Neoplatonists and their successors, did not leave room for such a question. My project – and I was aware that I was not the first to adopt this approach – was therefore to understand Plato from Plato, through Plato, and out of Plato. ‘By studying the words εἶδος and ἰδέα in all of Plato, and in particular in those dialogues up to and including the *Republic*,’ I thought, ‘I shall find the true meaning of the words εἶδος and ἰδέα. And once I have understood the meaning of the words, I may be able to understand Plato’s philosophy.’

This approach was misconceived in at least two fundamental respects: it operated with an implicit notion of ‘meaning’ that was inadequate, and it worked on the premise that Plato – his language and his thought – could be understood without consideration of the traditions that lay behind his philosophy. But it is impossible to understand Plato’s words and ideas without an understanding of the roots of Plato’s philosophy. This book is the result of an attempt to understand Plato’s early philosophy against the background of what came before. The basis of this investigation is the corpus of pre-Platonic texts that have survived, in whole or in part. Its focus is the *Phaedo*. Its method is a mixture of diachronic and synchronic semantics, traditional philological commentary and philosophical analysis. Its result is a revised picture of what precisely the main philosophical influences were at a formative stage of Plato’s own philosophy.

What of εἶδος and ἰδέα? It will become apparent that these two words, which were synonymous in almost all contexts in the common Greek language of the fifth century, did each have *one* philosophical domain which was entirely its own. It was a philosophical consideration that led Plato to bring them together again and make them part of his own answer to the Socratic question of ‘what something is’.

This book is based on work originally undertaken for my Edinburgh PhD. In David Robinson and Christopher Strachan I had two supervisors who were prepared to meet every Wednesday afternoon to read and discuss Plato, and to extend these discussions late into the evening. One cannot wish for better supervision. I must acknowledge in particular the help of David Robinson, who ‘did not believe a word of it’, but who spent years to set me right in matters of Greek language and thought from Homer to Aristotle and beyond. He also read and commented on parts of the final draft of this

Preface

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I have received help of a different kind from John Coxon, the eldest son of the late Allan Coxon (1909–2000), the editor of Parmenides and commentator on Plato's *Parmenides*. John Coxon presented the substantial collection of classical texts and commentaries of his father as a gift to scholars in Edinburgh. The books are now in constant use in various projects, and I am sincerely grateful to John Coxon and to Carolyn, the widow of Allan Coxon.

I should like to acknowledge the generous financial support I received from the Scottish Office in the form of a Major Scottish Studentship from 1992 to 1995, and from the Arts and Humanities Research Board in the form of a Study Leave Award in the spring of 2002. I am grateful for a term's study leave in 2002 to the University of Edinburgh, and to Swansea University for a sabbatical semester in the autumn of 2006.

Four sections of this book are developed from articles and chapters which have previously appeared elsewhere: parts of the chapter on μετέχειν in Part I in *Philosophical Inquiry* 25 (Herrmann 2003a); the chapter on οὐσία in Part III in *New Essays on Plato* (Herrmann 2006b); some material of the chapters on εἶδος in Parts II and III in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 48 (Herrmann 2006a); parts of the chapter on ἰδέα in Part III in *La catena delle cause*, edited by Carlo Natali and Stefano Maso (Herrmann 2005) – I am grateful to the editors.

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INTRODUCTION

As a philosopher and as an author of literary dialogues, Plato is unsurpassed. He is the first and, before imperial Roman times, the only Greek philosopher all of whose published works have come down to us intact. He was recognized already in antiquity as a master of literary composition, a circumstance that contributed to the survival of his works. One approach to Plato's dialogues is to discuss their content as philosophy. Another approach is to consider first the language Plato used in writing these dialogues. For, both as a philosopher and as a writer, Plato is part of a long tradition. Through explicit discussions, literary allusions and verbal echoes, Plato indicates to the readers of his dialogues how his own philosophy is intended to be understood in the context of these literary and philosophical traditions.

To the modern student of Plato, however, not all allusions to and verbal echoes of earlier writers will be obvious. This is true in particular as regards Plato's philosophical terminology. In considering his philosophical language, one can distinguish the following cases. (1) Plato himself coins a technical term to convey a new philosophical concept. (2) Plato adopts a philosophical term from one (or more) of his predecessors, either (a) adopting the philosophical concept to which the term referred or (b) adapting and adopting the term to convey a new philosophical concept. (3) Plato, in introducing a philosophical concept, mentions a philosophical term one of his predecessors had used, not in order to adopt and to employ it subsequently, but only at the point of introducing a new thought.²

Approaching Plato's writings through a study of his philosophical language is a preliminary step towards a study of his philosophy. An understanding of Plato's language is indispensable for an interpretation of his philosophy. But since Plato's own aim was primarily a philosophical one, we are entitled to ask how much importance Plato would have attached to the terms he adopts to express his thoughts. We can ask if there are instances of what appear to be key philosophical terms in Plato's own philosophy that in reality owe their presence in Plato's dialogues solely or primarily to their previous occurrence in the writings of earlier thinkers. Some terms may have acquired their own momentum and thus have their own history within Plato's thought by having become fruitful in his thinking and philosophy. But others may have their function exclusively or predominantly at the stage of Plato's formulating

a thought for the first time: once the thought is introduced, the reference to earlier philosophical thinking is no longer needed and the inherited terminology may be discarded. In investigating a set of terms deemed central to the philosophy of Plato's middle dialogues and in unearthing the roots of Plato's language and thought, one aim of this book is thus to allow the modern reader of Plato's dialogues to see what is old and what is new, what is inherited and what is distinctive in his philosophy.

The language of Plato's *Phaedo*

The range of the terms selected and of the text passages studied is closely confined: while other works of Plato's early and middle period will on occasion be adduced to sketch the intellectual and semantic context, the dialogue which forms the starting point of this investigation is the *Phaedo*. The dialogue occupies pages 57 to 118, less than a fifth of the first volume of the five-volume Oxford Classical Texts edition. Yet, in this dialogue, and more specifically on pages 95e to 107b, we have Plato's ontology in a nutshell, together with the terminology of Plato's so-called Theory of Forms or Theory of Ideas. In this one passage, we find: Plato's search for αἰτία or 'explanation'; the method of ὑπόθεσις or 'assumption'; καλόν and ἀγαθόν, 'beautiful' and 'good', as central topics of Plato's concern, singled out by the phrase αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, 'itself by itself'; in addition, the relationship which the many beautiful things have with 'that beautiful' is referred to as μετέχειν, 'having of' or 'sharing'; the relationship 'the beautiful' has with the many beautiful things in the perceptible realm is that its παρουσία, its 'presence', or its κοινωνία, its 'communion', makes them beautiful; through 'the beautiful', beautiful things come to be beautiful. Then, the discussion widens to include things big and small as well as mathematical numbers. At 101c2 ff., not only is the verb μετέχειν, 'having of' or 'sharing', repeated, but a noun μετάρχεις, 'a sharing', is coined to highlight this important relationship; and in addition, δυάς and μονάς, the 'dyad' and the 'monad', are referred to as that whose ἰδία οὐσία, whose 'own being' or 'nature', 'things which are two' or 'which are one' respectively 'have of' or 'share'. Eventually, the terms εἶδος, 'type', and ἰδέα, 'figure', the two words which used to be translated as 'idea' and which are now more commonly translated as 'form', are introduced at 102b1 and 104b9 respectively. The former, εἶδος, is introduced together with the notion that 'the things coming to have a share' in any one of the εἶδη, τὰ μεταλαμβάνοντα, have their 'designation' and their 'name', their 'benaming'³ or ἐπωνυμία, from those 'types'. μορφή, 'form', occurs twice. In addition, things like μέγεθος, 'bigness', are repeatedly said 'to be in', ἐνεῖναι and εἶναι ἐν, the many things around us, or in this specific case in a person who is big. Thus we have, as the vocabulary of Plato's

ontology in the *Phaedo*, μετέχειν, ‘having of’ or ‘sharing’; μεταλαμβάνειν, ‘coming to share’; μέτασχεσις, ‘a sharing (in something)’; αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, ‘itself by itself’; εἶδος and ἰδέα, ‘idea’; μορφή, ‘shape’ or ‘form’; οὐσία, ‘being’; ἐπωνυμία, ‘designation’ or ‘benaming’; παρουσία, ‘being there’ or ‘presence’; κοινωνία, ‘communion’; ἐνεῖναι and εἶναι ἐν, ‘being in’; ὑπόθεσις, ‘assumption’; and αἰτία, ‘cause-and-reason’. The object of this investigation is to explore the meaning and the usage of some of these words and a few of their close congeners⁴ in Plato’s dialogues, and the historical conditions which led Plato to adopt these terms.⁵ The philosophers who will turn out to be most relevant in connection with one or more of the technical terms listed are the Pythagoreans, and in particular Philolaus of Croton; the atomists, and in particular Democritus of Abdera; and Anaxagoras of Clazomenae and Diogenes of Apollonia.

No special pleading is required to make claims concerning a connection of one sort or another particularly between what Plato says in the *Phaedo* and on the one hand the Pythagoreans, on the other Anaxagoras and Diogenes; indeed, both Anaxagoras and the Pythagorean Philolaus are named in the dialogue. The originality of this study lies rather in the precise way in which connections are claimed to have obtained between the various philosophical systems. Working out the details of the premises on which such specific claims can be made will occupy the bulk of the main chapters of the book. This will involve discussion of significant occurrences of the terms selected, from their earliest attested instances to the time of Plato, in the various genres and types of Greek literature. Often, the first contexts considered will be from the Homeric epics, but what is probably the first instance of ἰδέα, for example, is found in a poem by Theognis, i.e. dating, if the poem is genuinely by Theognis, most probably to some time in the sixth century BC. The inclusion of non-philosophical texts in our discussion serves a double purpose. It allows to determine whether philosophical usage is in tune with common language or constitutes technical usage; and, as importantly, it helps in determining not only what a particular term could mean and how it was used, but also what a particular term did not mean and how, to the best of our knowledge, it was not used.

Approaches to Plato

In translating passages of Greek, notably from Plato’s dialogues, I shall often in my own usage diverge from the terms traditionally found in translations of Plato’s dialogues and discussions of his philosophy. The intention in this is to avoid the often unconscious adoption of concepts which were developed in the course of centuries of post-Platonic tradition. One corollary of this tradition is that of doing Ancient Philosophy ‘in Latin’. This may be

illustrated with the following example:

For Plato posited that forms which are in corporeal matter are derived from forms subsisting without matter, by way of a certain participation. For he went on to posit a certain man, subsisting non-materially, and similarly a horse, and accordingly also concerning the other things out of which these particular sensibles here are constituted, in that there remains in corporeal matter a certain impression from these separate forms, by way of a certain assimilation which he called participation. And according to the order of forms Platonists went on to posit an order of separate substances; say, there is one separate substance which is horse, which is the cause of all horses; above it is a certain separate life, which they call life per se, and cause of all life; and beyond there is a certain <substance> which they name being itself, and cause of all being.

While one may not agree that all of this was held in just this way by Plato, there is probably little in the terminology itself that would be deemed terminologically offensive by the majority of philosophically trained twenty-first-century readers. But how close this terminology is to that of mediaeval scholasticism, a glance at the Latin will teach:

Plato enim posuit formas quae sunt in materia corporali, derivari a formis sine materia subsistentibus, per modum participationis cuiusdam. Ponebat enim hominem quemdam immaterialiter subsistentem, et similiter equum, et sic de aliis, ex quibus constituuntur haec singularia sensibilia, secundum quod in materia corporali remanet quaedam impressio ab illis formis separatis, per modum assimilationis cuiusdam, quam participationem vocabat. Et secundum ordinem formarum ponebant platonici ordinem substantiarum separatarum; puta quod una substantia separata est quae est equus, quae est causa omnium equorum; supra quam est quaedam vita separata, quam dicebant per se vitam, et causam omnis vitae; et ulterius quamdam, quam nominabant ipsum esse, et causam omnis esse.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.65.4

It is not difficult to find Greek equivalents for most of the terms underlined:

assimiliatio	ὁμοίωσις	causa	αἰτία
constituo	συνίστημι	corporalis, -e	σωματοειδής, -ές
forma	εἶδος	immaterialis	ἀυλός
impressio	ἀποτύπωμα	materia	ὕλη
ordo	τάξις	participatio	μέθεξις
per se	καθ' αὐτό, καθ' αὐτά	pono, posui	τίθημι, ἔθηκα
sensibilia	αἰσθητά	separatus	χωριστός
subsistere	ὑφίστασθαι	substantia	οὐσία

But a glance at the Greek words shows two things: first, more than a third of the terms listed here are not actually Plato's; and secondly, of those which can be found in Plato, perhaps the two most significant ones, εἶδος and οὐσία,

have as Latin equivalents in the passage of Aquinas words which may be suited to a translation of some Aristotelian contexts, but which could not be used in a literal translation of a dialogue of Plato's. This last claim, potentially controversial, will be substantiated in the course of the discussion of Plato's usage below.

In discussing Plato's usage, I shall often use language suggestive of Plato's possessing a high degree of reflection, not only on the world around him, but also on his own activity. I shall speak in terms of Plato's addressing, accepting or rejecting a certain view; of Plato's being aware of who among his predecessors and contemporaries held what view; and of being aware in what respect or respects views held by others differed from views held by himself, or views being developed by himself. In the same way, I shall describe Plato's attitude to the common Greek language in which he was brought up, and the particular terminologies which he encountered in the writings of others. I am aware that this is open to criticism. We cannot, in the strictest sense of the word, *know* what Plato thought or what his intentions were, regardless of whether a character in a dialogue pronounces on a matter which is the topic of our discussion or not. But there are degrees of probability. Presumably, we know more about Plato's thoughts concerning geometry than we know about his culinary tastes, both because of the content of the dialogues and because of our knowledge of philosophical and literary conventions. We can see, for example, how fifth-century Athenian tragedians reacted to one another in composing their tragedies.⁶ Moreover, we can make deductions from Aristotle's writings: leaving aside his explicit statements concerning the history of philosophy, which are always coloured in one way or another in accordance with his own philosophical purposes, we can reconstruct from the very way in which he transformed and distorted views of his predecessors – be it deliberately or otherwise – at least some of the ways in which philosophical speculation was pursued.⁷ Thus, to say that in this or that point of content or turn of phrase Plato is consciously reacting to Anaxagoras is not an outrageous statement. On the other hand, were one to leave out the qualification 'consciously', this weaker claim might still contribute to our understanding of what Plato was doing, and might thus still be worth considering. I shall sometimes make claims of this weaker and safer sort, sometimes of the stronger, more controversial and less demonstrable sort. For – to echo Socrates' words in the *Phaedo* – while it will always be safer to make a claim of the safer sort, it may sometimes be more illuminating to entertain the stronger claim as a possibility. Ultimately, though, it often matters more to see where the roots of Plato's philosophy lie than to determine the extent to which Plato was aware of all the influences on his own thinking at each stage.

Introduction

As regards stages of Plato's thinking, I should briefly state my position regarding authenticity and chronology. I cannot here add positive arguments to the ones with which the scholarly discussion abounds.⁸ I do, though, hold the following as incontrovertible: first, Plato, whether he was born in 429, 428, 427 or in 424 BC,⁹ did not write all the dialogues, epigrams and letters handed down to us under his name simultaneously or in one and the same year, but whatever he did write he wrote over a period of many decades; secondly, there were contexts in antiquity in which authors of literary creations attributed their creations, for one reason or another, to the authorship of a well-known historical (or, for that matter, mythological) figure, rather than claiming them for their own. However, between these assertions and any definitive statement concerning the authenticity of a particular Platonic dialogue and its relative chronological position to one and all of the other dialogues, there lie many steps which require detailed argumentation, and one must avoid adopting the rash attitude of jumping to conclusions which is castigated by Socrates in the *Philebus* (16c–17a). All the same, for present purposes it is fair to state the relative chronological order of some of the dialogues which I think most probable. Much of my own reasoning behind this order is without doubt impressionistic, but some arguments will emerge in the course of subsequent discussion to support aspects at least of this arrangement.

Ion
Laches
Charmides, Protagoras
Gorgias
Meno
Euthyphro
Phaedo, Symposium
Republic
Parmenides, Theaetetus
Sophist
Politicus, Cratylus
Phaedrus, Timaeus
Philebus

Where two dialogues appear on one line, I am not certain about their chronological order relative to each other. I do not know where to place the *Lysis* and *Euthydemus*, other than that they both seem to me to come after the *Gorgias* and before the *Parmenides*, and I do not regard the *Hippias Major* as authentic.

Not much depends on the actual historical order of composition for my argument, but my impressionistic beliefs may on occasion explain the order in which parts of the subsequent discussion proceed. By way of clarification,

though, a word regarding the *Parmenides* and, in connection with that, the order in which arguments from different dialogues must be discussed: the discussion between Socrates and Parmenides in the first part of the dialogue is clearly a critique of something. Moreover, it is, to my mind, clearly a critique which can be understood only against the arguments of the *Phaedo* in particular, but also of some of the other dialogues besides. This fact has a corollary. Regardless of whether the critique of the *Parmenides* is interpreted as self-criticism on Plato's part, as philosophical development, as warning against a mis-reading, e.g. by taking things *au pied de la lettre*: as a critique, this passage can be understood and evaluated only against an understanding and evaluation of the earlier passages and contexts there criticized; and for as long as it is not decided whether, and if so to what extent, Plato is serious in his critique in the *Parmenides*, one must not confuse the issues discussed in the earlier dialogues by importing in a haphazard fashion bits and pieces from that later dialogue. The old rule is in principle correct, that each dialogue must first be read as a piece of argumentation in its own right. This, though, is true only in a qualified way of individual arguments within dialogues. Of course, one must, here as well, first understand each argument. But what Plato wants to achieve with an argument, whether he is committed to it or otherwise, what function he thinks it can perform: all that can only be seen in the context of the dialogue in which it is embedded. But if this is true for a particular dialogue, it cannot be denied that, with a view to Plato's oeuvre as a whole, on occasion something may be learnt from a later dialogue for the understanding of an earlier work. No generalizing prescript will be fully satisfactory.¹⁰

Plato's response to his predecessors: two examples

It may be asked with a view to the undertaking as a whole: What is the benefit of such a study? What do we gain for an understanding of Plato's *philosophy* from a knowledge of the history of certain words which form part of Plato's *language*? Is it not sufficient to read the dialogues of Plato and the treatises of Aristotle to arrive at a correct picture of their shared beliefs as well as their differences, and does not that enable us sufficiently to interpret these two authors? Two simple examples may illustrate the limitations, but also the possibilities, of what can be achieved by a study of words and phrases of the sort here undertaken.

i. Zeno

A much-discussed problem in Plato's *Phaedo* is that of the first sustained discussion in that dialogue of something's being introduced with the tag 'itself', where the Greek for 'itself', αὐτό, which is added to a phrase, signifies somehow that – in contrast with (the) many things of the perceptible world

Introduction

around us which are such-and-such – what is such-and-such ‘itself’ is not the same as those many things.¹¹ The first occurrence of αὐτό, ‘itself’, in this technical sense is at *Phaedo* 65d, when Socrates first introduces what for Plato is his main concern throughout the early and middle dialogues. Socrates asks Simmias (65d4–8):

φραμέν τι εἶναι δίκαιον αὐτὸ ἢ οὐδέν;
φραμέν μέντοι νῆ Δία.
καὶ αὖ καλὸν γέ τι καὶ ἀγαθόν;
πῶς δ’ οὔ;

Do we say that ‘just itself’ is something or nothing?
By Zeus, we certainly do say <that it is something>.
And again beautiful <is> certainly something, and also good <is something>?
But how not?

The tag αὐτό then recurs nine pages later, at *Phaedo* 74a. The overt context of 74a is that of ἀνάμνησις or ‘remembering’, the word often translated as ‘recollection’. But, as Plato indicates clearly by the way he lets Socrates comment on his arguments, there is no commitment on the author’s part to either this notion of ἀνάμνησις specifically or indeed to a belief in the immortality of the soul of the individual in general.¹² The purpose of *Phaedo* 74a–75d is rather to discuss one aspect of what is at 102b being referred to by Phaedo, the character of the dialogue, as τὰ εἶδη, ‘the ideas’, ‘the types’, i.e. the things themselves, things like the beautiful itself, the good, the just, and so on. Here, at 74a, the issue is introduced abruptly by Socrates’ question (74a9–12):

σκόπει δὴ, ἢ δ’ ὅς, εἰ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει. φραμέν πού τι εἶναι ἴσον, οὐ ξύλον λέγω ξύλω οὐδὲ λίθον λίθῳ οὐδ’ ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ ταῦτα πάντα ἕτερόν τι, αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον· φῶμέν τι εἶναι ἢ μηδέν;

Thus look, said he, if that is so. We say somehow that equal is something,¹³ not wood, I mean, to wood, nor stone to stone, nor another <one> of such things, but beside all those something other, the equal itself: should we say that that is something or nothing?

The abruptness of this question is to an extent mitigated by the fact that this pattern of thinking had briefly been introduced at 65d, and of course by the circumstance that body (and subsequently also soul)¹⁴ has been talked about as being ‘itself by itself’, αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, since 64c. The terminology of ‘αὐτὸ τό’, followed by a noun or nominalized expression, on the other hand, is familiar to readers from Plato’s earlier dialogues. This usage is not frequent, but it does occur in a relevant way to isolate and single out a topic under discussion as stripped of all attending circumstances, i.e. without the other things that habitually co-occur with what is under investigation, be

that co-occurrence in the world accessible to the senses or in one's thought. A good example is *Protagoras* 354c. Socrates interrogates an imagined group of people and seeks to obtain agreement on their reactions from Protagoras (354c3–e2):

οὐκοῦν τὴν μὲν ἡδονὴν διώκετε ὡς ἀγαθὸν ὄν, τὴν δὲ λύπην φεύγετε ὡς κακόν;

συνεδόκει.

τοῦτ' ἄρα ἡγείσθ' εἶναι κακόν, τὴν λύπην, καὶ ἀγαθὸν τὴν ἡδονήν, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ χαίρειν τότε λέγετε κακόν εἶναι, ὅταν μειζόνων ἡδονῶν ἀποστερήῃ ἢ ὅσας αὐτὸ ἔχει, ἢ λύπας μείζους παρασκευάζῃ τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ἡδονῶν· ἐπεὶ εἰ κατ' ἄλλο τι αὐτὸ τὸ χαίρειν κακὸν καλεῖτε καὶ εἰς ἄλλο τι τέλος ἀποβλέψαντες, ἔχοιτε ἂν καὶ ἡμῖν εἰπεῖν· ἀλλ' οὐχ ἔξετε.

οὐδ' ἐμοὶ δοκοῦσιν, ἔφη ὁ Πρωταγόρας.

ἄλλο τι οὖν πάλιν καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ λυπεῖσθαι ὁ αὐτὸς τρόπος; τότε καλεῖτε αὐτὸ τὸ λυπεῖσθαι ἀγαθόν, ὅταν ἢ μείζους λύπας τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ οὐσῶν ἀπαλλάττῃ ἢ μείζους ἡδονὰς τῶν λυπῶν παρασκευάζῃ; ἐπεὶ εἰ πρὸς ἄλλο τι τέλος ἀποβλέπετε, ὅταν καλῆτε αὐτὸ τὸ λυπεῖσθαι ἀγαθόν, ἢ πρὸς ὃ ἐγὼ λέγω, ἔχετε ἡμῖν εἰπεῖν· ἀλλ' οὐχ ἔξετε.

ἀληθῆ, ἔφη, λέγεις, ὁ Πρωταγόρας.

Now, do you pursue pleasure as being something good, but flee pain as something bad?

It seemed to him, too <, that they did>.

So you think that thing to be something bad, pain, and pleasure something good, as you also call 'enjoying' itself then to be something bad when it deprives of pleasures greater than the ones which it holds, or when it affords pains greater than the pleasures <entailed> in it. Because if you call 'enjoying' itself bad according to something other <than that>, and with a view to some other end, you would also be able to tell us <what it is>; but you will not be able <to do so>.

Nor do they seem to me <to be able to do so>, said Protagoras.

So again in turn is it the same thing with 'feeling pain' itself? Do you then call 'feeling pain' itself good, whenever it either rids of greater pains than the ones which are <entailed> in it, or when it affords pleasures greater than the pains it affords? Because if you have in view some other end, when you call 'feeling pain' itself good, some end other than that with a view to which I say <you call these things>, you can tell us <what it is>; but you cannot.

What you say is true, said Protagoras.

'Enjoying' itself and 'feeling pain' itself are processes or states or affections or passions of human beings, and are in that not on a par with 'just', 'good' and 'beautiful'. But as far as usage of the tag 'itself' is concerned, the passage from the *Protagoras* is comparable to that in the *Phaedo*.¹⁵ In Socrates' singling out in the *Phaedo* the just, the good, the beautiful and then, at 74a, the equal with the tag αὐτό, there is thus nothing new in terms of the language or terminology employed.

The next step in Socrates' argument, at *Phaedo* 74b, is to ask for the origin of our knowledge and understanding of what is equal. The phrase λαβόντες...ἐπιστήμην at 74b4 refers to the process of acquisition of conscious awareness of the equal in this life.¹⁶ In seeing equal objects, equal sticks and stones, we arrive at knowledge of the equal as being different from the many equal things; for equal stones and sticks sometimes 'appear equal to one, but not to another'. Leaving aside the vexed issue of how the datives in τῷ μὲν...τῷ δὲ... are to be construed at 74b8,¹⁷ on any reading the many equal objects are contrasted with the equal itself which does not appear equal and unequal. But instead of saying αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον ἔστιν ὅτε ἄνισόν σοι ἐφάνη, '<with regard to> the equal itself, is it <the case> that it has ever appeared unequal to you', Socrates says (74c1–2):

τί δέ; αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα ἔστιν ὅτε ἄνισά σοι ἐφάνη, ἢ ἡ ἰσότης ἀνισότης;

But what about this: <with regard to> the equal(s) themselves, is it <the case> that they have ever appeared unequal(s) to you, or equality inequality?

The sense of the passage 74a–75d as a whole is clear, but there is, starting with Olympiodorus (*In Phaedonem* 159.11.12–15), widespread disagreement over, on the one hand, both meaning and reference of the phrase αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα, on the other Plato's motivation for using here, as at *Parmenides* 129b, but not elsewhere in the *Phaedo*, nor anywhere else in the other middle dialogues, a nominalized articulated neuter adjective in the plural rather than the singular.¹⁸ Does αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα refer to the multiple instantiations of the notion of 'the equal itself' in the minds of many human beings, as Olympiodorus suggests? Does it refer to what is equal in nature as logically being more than one thing, because equality expresses a relation? Does the plural expression refer to perfect instantiations of equality, for example in the realm of mathematics?¹⁹

Regardless of which of these solutions one were to adopt, a two-fold difficulty remains: first, why would Plato use a different expression without making use of it subsequently, either by showing in what way it has a different point of reference or by exploiting the fact that he had at his disposal this linguistic variant; and secondly, in connection with the latter, why is there an apparent plural phrase αὐτὰ τὰ ὅμοια, 'the similar(s) itself', at *Parmenides* 129b, and only there?

A possible answer to the question why Plato uses the plural phrase at *Phaedo* 74b may indeed lie hidden in the *Parmenides*. There, Socrates had asked Zeno to repeat the opening argument of his treatise. Socrates then summarizes (127e1–4):

πῶς, φάναι, ὦ Ζήνων, τοῦτο λέγεις; εἰ πολλά ἐστὶ τὰ ὄντα, ὡς ἄρα δεῖ αὐτὰ ὅμοιά τε εἶναι καὶ ἀνόμοια, τοῦτο δὲ διὰ ἀδύνατον· οὔτε γὰρ τὰ ἀνόμοια ὅμοια οὔτε τὰ ὅμοια ἀνόμοια οἶόν τε εἶναι; οὐχ οὔτω λέγεις;

How, he said, Zeno, do you mean that? If the things-that-are are many, that thus it is necessary that they are similar and also dissimilar, but that this surely is impossible: for neither are the dissimilar(s) capable of being similar(s), nor the similar(s) dissimilar(s)? Don't you say (and mean it) so?

It has been pointed out that all of Socrates' summary must be Zeno's first argument, i.e. that the example of 'many cannot *be* because they would be similar and dissimilar at once' is Zeno's first example.²⁰ This is confirmed by three passages in Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 619.30–620.1, 632.6–15 and 788.29–31. The first reads:

ὁ δὴ τοῦ Παρμενίδου μαθητῆς Ζήνων...γράφει τι βιβλίον, ἐν ᾧ δαιμονίως ἐδείκνυεν οὐκ ἐλάττω ἐπόμενα δυσχερῆ τοῖς πολλὰ τὰ ὄντα τιθεμένοις ἢ ὅσα τοῖς ἐν τὸ ὄν εἰρηκόσιν ἔδοξεν ἀπαντᾶν· καὶ γὰρ ὅμοιον καὶ ἀνόμοιον ταῦτόν ἐδείκνυ καὶ ἴσον καὶ ἄνισον ἐσόμενον...

Thus Zeno, the pupil of Parmenides...writes a book, in which he showed in miraculous manner that there follow difficulties no less severe for those who posit that there are many things than those encounter who have said that what *is* is one: for he also showed that the same thing will be similar and dissimilar and equal and unequal...

The second passage, 632.6–15, says about Plato's Parmenides:

δεικνύντα τὸν ὅμοιον τρόπον ἐκείνῳ τὰ ἀντικείμενα περὶ ταῦτόν· καὶ ὡς ἐκεῖνος ἤλεγχε τὰ πολλὰ δεικνὺς αὐτὰ καὶ ὅμοια καὶ ἀνόμοια καὶ ταῦτὰ καὶ ἕτερα καὶ ἴσα ὄντα καὶ ἄνισα, κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ δὴ καὶ αὐτὸν ἀποφαίνειν τὸ ἐν ὅμοιον καὶ ἀνόμοιον, καὶ οὐχ ὅμοιον καὶ οὐκ ἀνόμοιον, ταῦτόν, οὐ ταῦτόν, ἕτερον, οὐχ ἕτερον, καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων ὡσαύτως, καὶ τιθέντα καὶ ἀναιροῦντα τὰ μαχόμενα, καὶ οὐχ ὡς ἐκεῖνος τιθέντα μόνον...

showing in a manner similar to him [Zeno] the opposites concerning the same thing: as that man [Zeno] made his proof in showing that the many things are themselves both similar and dissimilar and the same and other and being equal also unequal, so he [Plato's Parmenides] also thus showed in the same way that the one is similar and dissimilar, and not similar and not dissimilar, the same, not the same, other, not other, and for each proposition in that same manner, both positing and abolishing the contested items, and not just positing, as that man [Zeno] had done...

Finally, we find at 788.29–31:

δεύτερον τοίνυν ἐκεῖνον παραλάβωμεν τὸν λόγον, ὅς φησιν αὐτὰ μὲν τὰ φαινόμενα καὶ ἴσα καὶ ἄνισα, καὶ ὅμοια καὶ ἀνόμοια...

Secondly, let us now take up that argument which says that the phenomena themselves are equal and unequal, and similar and dissimilar...

As has been noted by Hoffmann and Dillon, this is evidence on the one hand for the presence of the argument concerning the many as similar and

dissimilar discussed by Socrates at *Parmenides* 129b, but on the other also for the presence of the pair ‘equal – unequal’ in Zeno’s treatise, and that not at a random place, but in second position right after ‘similar – dissimilar’. The context in Zeno, as is stated in the *Parmenides* and confirmed by Proclus, is that of reaching a paradox concerning the things that *are* by making deductions from the premise ‘if there are many (things)’ or ‘if many (things) *are*’. The second consequence is that ‘[if there are many] they are both equal and unequal’, which may have been presented by Zeno as a refutation of the assumption that ‘there are many’. That is to say, the constituents of Zeno’s hypothetical world would be the many which are equal and unequal. Zeno constructs the paradox that τὰ ἴσα are ἄνισα. This statement, the second in Zeno’s book, must have been a famous sophism, together with the one that τὰ ὅμοια are ἀνόμοια. This is why Socrates can say (*Phaedo* 74b7–c2):

ἄρ’ οὐ λίθοι μὲν ἴσοι καὶ ξύλα ἐνίοτε ταῦτά ὄντα τῷ μὲν ἴσα φαίνεται, τῷ δ’ οὐ;

πάνυ μὲν οὖν.

τί δέ; αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα ἔστιν ὅτε ἄνισά σοι ἐφάνη, ἢ ἡ ἰσότης ἀνισότης;

Do not stones which are equal, and also sticks, sometimes, while being the same, seem equal to one, but to another not?

Very much so.

But what about this: Have the equals themselves ever seemed to you unequal, or equality inequality?

In speaking of ‘equal’, he uses a famous Zenonian example. In introducing the notion of φαίνεται, ‘appears’, i.e. what elsewhere in Plato is the opposition of ‘appearance’ and ‘being’, itself an opposition of Presocratic origin, he removes the sting from Zeno’s argument, since now the fact that something ‘appears equal and unequal’ to someone does not entail that there is something that ‘is equal and unequal’. And by using, at this one point, the expression αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα, Plato is not so much abstracting from the examples of stones and sticks, which indeed contained the plural form of the adjective, as quoting a Zenonian ‘τὰ ἴσα...ἄνισα’ by the *ad hoc* creation of ‘αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα...ἄνισα...’. And since this is indeed not in concord with either common usage or Plato’s own usage in this passage, before or after, he immediately adds the nouns, ‘ἢ ἡ ἰσότης ἀνισότης’, so that the quotation can stand as a quotation, but cannot give rise to confusion; confusion is avoided by the immediate reformulation; the connective ἢ, ‘or’, is effectively exegetic, or explanatory, rather than disjunctive, or introducing an alternative.²¹

What difference does pointing to Zeno as one specific source for a discussion of the issue of τὰ ἴσα make to an interpretation of *Phaedo* 74a–75d? The question of philosophical doctrine, i.e. does αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα refer to a unity or a plurality, is certainly not resolved simply by naming an earlier

philosopher who talked about a plurality of objects as being ἴσα καὶ ἄνισα; the consequent question of where these multiple objects would have to be located ontologically is *a fortiori* not answered by such a reference. The grammatical-*cum*-linguistic issue of whether an articulated neuter plural adjective could, and whether it would, be taken by a fourth-century Greek readership to refer to a plurality or otherwise is even less affected. (All that can be said is that if, as argued by Dale 1987, the ‘neuter plural adjective’ expression need not imply plural reference at all, Plato *can* use this expression without introducing a new item in addition to αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον.) But while the linguistic issue is barely touched and the point of philosophical doctrine as such not affected, a decision on whether or not to see an implied reference or allusion to Zeno will make a difference in the following way: *if* the phrase αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα brings to mind Zeno on any level, that may be its sole function. The reader may not be entitled, and is certainly nowhere in the text encouraged, to ask for the philosophical implications of the plural at this point. The phrase is not introduced ‘as a plural-phrase’, but ‘as a Zeno-quotation’. The function of the clause αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα ἔστιν ὅτε ἄνισά σοι ἐφάνη would thus be to contrast what Socrates is doing with what Zeno was doing.²² Zeno, or so it is perceived and presented, thought that he could deduce from ‘there are many things’ the contradictory ‘the equal(s) are unequal’ as detrimental to the assumption of plurality in some way. Socrates contrasts ‘the equal (are) unequal’, which is harmless if interpreted as ‘equal sticks and stones sometimes are (or appear) *in some way* unequal’, with ‘the equal(s) themselves (are) never unequal’ and ‘equality never inequality’, which guarantees the logical structure of the world and explains contradictory appearances. There is at least the possibility that Plato did indeed use the puzzling phrase αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα, and that this phrase would be puzzling to the ancient Greek reader if he had time to reflect on it, but that at the same time its function was exhausted once Zeno had been brought to mind, for which reason it could be discarded, not to be used again.²³ Only when Zeno became the subject of discussion in the *Parmenides* would Plato reactivate this device, on that occasion with the very first rather than the second example of the famous Eleatic treatise, viz. ‘the similar’.

We have here an example of a phrase, a formulation, which Plato uses at two points in his dialogues because it recalls a specific argument of one of his predecessors. In the *Phaedo*, this phrase, which constitutes a modified adaptation of a Zenonian example, is integrated into Plato’s new ontological model, in which the many equal things, the many equals, are contrasted with ‘the equals themselves’, that is to say ‘equality’, ‘the equal itself’. The concept of such a thing as the equal itself, or indeed the beautiful itself and the good itself, etc., will continue to be fundamental to Plato’s thought. The plural

phrases ‘the equals themselves’ and ‘the similars themselves’, by contrast, are used only where Zeno’s thought is evoked.

ii. Parmenides

The second example concerns Plato’s response to Parmenides at *Symposium* 210e–211e as discussed by Friedrich Solmsen.²⁴ In his article ‘Parmenides and the description of perfect beauty in Plato’s *Symposium*’, Solmsen demonstrates two things. On the one hand, he shows that Plato’s conception of what that is which he calls ‘that which *is* beautiful’, αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι καλόν, owes something specific to Parmenides. On the other hand, he plausibly traces some of the *terms* Plato uses at *Symposium* 210e–211e back to Parmenides, but explains with regard to other terms Plato uses in what way that, while being not the same as those of Parmenides, they are equivalents to terms used by Parmenides. Of particular significance is Solmsen’s discussion of 211a8–b2:²⁵

οὐδέ που ὄν ἐν ἑτέρῳ τι, οἷον ἐν ζώῳ ἢ ἐν γῆ ἢ ἐν οὐρανῷ ἢ ἔν τῳ ἄλλῳ, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ μεθ’ αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς ἀεὶ ὄν [‘nor in any way being in another, as in a living being or on land or in the sky or in anything else, but being uniform, eternally, itself by itself with itself’]. The former half of the description continues to cut off the true καλόν from its individual manifestations. [Note 17: Cf. 211b7–d1, where after the separation of αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν from its individual manifestations the latter are again treated as way stations leading to the former.] With the second part we may compare ταῦτόν τ’ ἐν ταῦτῳ τε μένον καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ τε κείται [Parmenides B8, 29; ‘it lies, the same, and remaining in the same, and by itself’], notwithstanding the fact that Parmenides employs the reflexive pronoun only once, in καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ [‘by itself’] (cf. Plato’s καθ’ αὐτό), while in the two other instances he stresses sameness. Elsewhere Plato does know sameness as the opposite of otherness – cf. *Parm.*, *ibid.* 57f. – e.g. when he points out that a Form μονοειδὲς ὄν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἔχει [*Phaedo* 78d5–7; ‘being uniform, itself by itself, it is in the same manner according to the same’]. By such a description he asserts at one and the same time self-identity and the ‘by itself’ (i.e. separateness). [Note 18: Besides *Phaedo*, 78d5–7 (here quoted) note also d1–5 and similar characteristics combined in the description of the soul, which is συγγενής [‘akin’] to the Forms, *Phaedo*, 79d1–6. The ταῦτόν [‘the same’] vested in the one Form is emphasized as early as *Meno*, 72c2 (cf. 74a9, 75a4).] In the present context [*Symposium* 211a–b] αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό [‘itself by itself’] suits his purpose because it brings out the contrast to ἐν ἑτέρῳ τι [‘in some other’] (a8) as effectively as does Parmenides’ own τῷ δ’ ἑτέρῳ μὴ ταῦτόν [‘but not the same as another’] (58 in the section on δόξαι [‘opinions’]), and Parmenides too as soon as he had introduced distinction and duality uses – in the same line as μὴ ταῦτόν [‘not the same’] – a κατ’ αὐτό [‘by itself’], which Plato (like some contemporary interpreters) may have understood as reflexive, although it is not certain that it was meant thus by Parmenides.

This suggests strongly that Plato not only, as one would expect, operates broadly speaking within the Eleatic tradition, but that he makes specific and conscious reference, adopting the phrase καθ' ἑαυτό, 'by itself', and standardizing it in his own terminology as αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, 'itself by itself', an expression he frequently employs to isolate things like the beautiful itself, but which in dialogues after the *Republic* gains wider currency in his philosophy.

It is worth exploring the implications of Solmsen's observations. His claim is not that, before Plato, it was only Parmenides who used the phrase καθ' ἑαυτό, 'by itself', or that Plato was the first to combine it with the pronoun αὐτός, 'self'. For illustrative purposes, one may consider the following examples of related expressions. In his *History*, Thucydides refers to Syracuse as (7.28.3):

πόλιν οὐδὲν ἐλάσσω αὐτήν γε καθ' αὐτήν τῆς τῶν Ἀθηναίων,

a city in no way smaller, itself by itself, than that of the Athenians.

Among the dramatists, Sophocles lets Oedipus address the chorus at the beginning of *Oedipus Rex* (62–4):

τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὑμῶν ἄλγος εἰς ἓν ἔρχεται
μόνον καθ' αὐτόν, κοῦδέν' ἄλλον, ἢ δ' ἐμὴ
ψυχὴ πόλιν τε κάμει καὶ σ' ὁμοῦ στένει.

For your affliction is directed to one thing
alone by itself, and nothing else, while my
soul moans for the city and for me and for you at once.

In Euripides' *Ion*, Ion addresses Xuthus, king of Athens, who has just been identified as his father. He is reluctant to move with him to Athens, thinking of the childless wife who would be his step-mother (607–11):²⁶

ἐλθὼν δ' ἐς οἶκον ἀλλότριον ἔπηλυσ ὦν
γυναϊκὰ θ' ὡς ἄτεκνον, ἢ κοινουμένη
τὰς συμφορὰς σοι πρόσθεν, ἀπολαχοῦσα νῦν
αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν τὴν τύχην οἶσει πικρῶς,
πῶς οὐχ ὑπ' αὐτῆς εἰκότως μισήσομαι...

But given that I shall come to the house as to a foreign house, being a stranger,
and to your wife as to someone who is childless, having had in common
those afflictions with you, previously, but who will now, left destitute,
herself by herself bear this fate bitterly,
how will I not – quite properly – be hated by her...

In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the simple Strepsiades is led through the *phrontisterion* of Socrates by one of the students, who explains the various tasks pursued in this establishment (187–94):

STREPSIADES: ἀτὰρ τί ποτ' εἰς τὴν γῆν βλέπουσιν οὐτοῖ;

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- STUDENT: ζητούσιν οὔτοι τὰ κατὰ γῆς.
STREPSIADES: βολβούς ἄρα
ζητούσι...
τί γὰρ οἶδε δρώσιν οἱ σφόδρ' ἐγκεκυφότες;
STUDENT: οὔτοι δ' ἐρεβοδιφῶσιν ὑπὸ τὸν Τάρταρον.
STREPSIADES: τί δῆθ' ὁ πρωκτὸς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν βλέπει;
STUDENT: αὐτὸς καθ' αὐτὸν ἀστρονομεῖν διδάσκεται.
STREPSIADES: But why ever do they look into the earth?
STUDENT: They are searching for what is under the earth...
STREPSIADES: Truffles it is thus
they are searching...
But what are those doing, stooping to the ground so much?
STUDENT: Those are scrutinizing Erebus under Tartarus.
STREPSIADES: But why does their anus look at the sky?
STUDENT: Itself by itself it is being taught to do astronomy.

In Book 3 of the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon has Socrates observe a fellow symposiast (3.14.2):

καταμαθῶν δέ ποτε τῶν συνδειπνούντων τινὰ τοῦ μὲν σίτου πεπαυμένον, τὸ δὲ ὄψον αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ ἐσθίοντα...

but when at some stage he perceived one of the fellow symposiasts leaving aside the bread, but eating the meat itself by itself...

The phrase 'itself by itself' is thus part of the common Attic language, used to single out a person or thing for consideration by itself, in isolation from its context. And while the passage from Aristophanes may be meant to reflect 'Socratic' usage, and while Xenophon may have written this part of the *Memorabilia* after some of Plato's middle dialogues had become publicly available, both passages look all the same as if they were reflecting common usage rather than specialized philosophical terminology. Nor does Plato use the tag καθ' αὐτ- exclusively in the context of 'Forms'. In the *Meno*, Socrates says (88c4–d1):

εἰ ἄρα ἀρετὴ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τί ἐστὶν καὶ ἀναγκαῖον αὐτῷ ὠφελίμῳ εἶναι, φρόνησιν αὐτὸ δεῖ εἶναι, ἐπειδήπερ πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτὰ μὲν καθ' αὐτὰ οὔτε ὠφέλιμα οὔτε βλαβερά ἐστὶν, προσγενομένης δὲ φρονήσεως ἢ ἀφροσύνης βλαβερά τε καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίνονται.

So if excellence is one of the things in the soul and if it is also necessary for it to be something beneficial, then it must be understanding, since indeed all the things to do with the soul are themselves by themselves neither beneficial nor harmful, but when understanding or lack of understanding enter in addition, then they become harmful or beneficial.

At the end of the dialogue, Socrates sums up what has been achieved in the

following words (100b2–6):

ἐκ μὲν τοίνυν τούτου τοῦ λογισμοῦ, ὃ Μένων, θεῖα μοῖρα ἡμῖν φαίνεται παραγιγνομένη ἢ ἀρετὴ οἷς ἂν παραγίγηται· τὸ δὲ σαφὲς περὶ αὐτοῦ εἰσόμεθα τότε, ὅταν πρὶν ᾧτινι τρόπῳ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις παραγίγνεται ἀρετὴ, πρότερον ἐπιχειρήσωμεν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ ζητεῖν τί ποτ' ἔστιν ἀρετὴ.

So, from this calculation, Meno, excellence reveals itself to us as something that comes to be with those with whom it comes to be by divine dispensation: but we shall know clearly about that when, before attempting to search for the manner in which excellence comes to be with people, we attempt to search for whatever excellence is, itself by itself.

At *Meno* 100b, the phrase αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, 'itself by itself', which is neuter, may, grammatically, qualify the indirect question, 'whatever excellence is', or it may qualify ἀρετὴ, 'excellence', which is feminine, because the object of a search or definition, as the thing looked for, is often referred to by neuter pronouns. At *Meno* 88c, it is unspecified 'things in the soul' which are said to be neither good nor bad if looked at in isolation. In neither case are we dealing with 'Forms' in the sense of the *Phaedo*, though the nouns εἶδος, 'type', and οὐσία, 'being', had been introduced by Socrates in his search for what excellence is at *Meno* 72a–73a.²⁷

If all of that is taken into account, what Solmsen's analysis does show is that after having used the phrase αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, which is part of common Attic idiom in the second half of the fifth century, in contexts that anticipate 'Forms', and after having used it in the *Phaedo* in a semi-technical way to refer to the things themselves which are at the centre of Socrates' investigations, Plato creates in the *Symposium* a context in which there are so many explicit and implicit allusions to and echoes of the poem of Parmenides that he effectively tells the reader that some of what Parmenides has said about his 'being' in some significant ways applies to 'the beautiful', which has now been revealed as the highest object of human desire and striving. At the same time, as Solmsen emphasizes, the differences between Parmenides and Plato are as obvious as what is shared.

Plato has thus, after having used the phrase αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό on previous occasions, used this passage in the *Symposium* to reveal his philosophical roots which manifest themselves in this case in his adaptation of a particular phrase that has become an integral part of Plato's own philosophical terminology. It is interesting to note, as does Solmsen, that at least in the extant fragments of Parmenides the phrase with the reflexive pronoun occurs only once. This does not in any way invalidate either Plato's exercise or Solmsen's interpretation. It must be observed that this interpretation itself does, of course, not hang on this one phrase; rather, by comparing the one passage,

as a whole, with the other, as a whole, and by then looking for individual parallels, a dependency can be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt. Once this has been done in the case of *Symposium* 211a–b, and once a connection between Plato’s use of *αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό* and the thought of the Presocratic Parmenides has been established, the reader of Plato is then entitled to ask to what extent earlier occurrences of the same phrase in Plato are also already evidence for an acquaintance with and a conscious echo of the Presocratic. Indeed, one may conclude that it is unreasonable to assume that use of the phrase *αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό* in the *Phaedo* at least could be thought of as independent of Parmenides.

Before leaving this example, a final consideration. While the phrase *καθ’ αὐτό* is otherwise not found in the extant fragments of the Presocratics, two fragments of Anaxagoras contain the phrase *ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ*, ‘unto itself’, which seems to express either the same as Parmenides’ *καθ’ ἑαυτό*, or, if not that, so at least a closely related notion (B6,1–9; B12, 4–11).²⁸

καὶ ὅτε δὲ ἴσαι μοῖραὶ εἰσι τοῦ τε μεγάλου καὶ τοῦ μικροῦ πλήθος, καὶ οὕτως ἂν εἶη ἐν παντὶ πάντα· οὐδὲ χωρὶς ἔστιν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ πάντα παντὸς μοῖραν μετέχει. ὅτε τοῦλάχιστον μὴ ἔστιν εἶναι, οὐκ ἂν δύναίτο χωρισθῆναι, οὐδ’ ἂν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ γενέσθαι, ἀλλ’ ὅπωςπερ ἀρχὴν εἶναι καὶ νῦν πάντα ὁμοῦ. ἐν πᾶσι δὲ πολλὰ ἔνεστι καὶ τῶν ἀποκρινομένων ἴσα πλήθος ἐν τοῖς μείζουσι τε καὶ ἐλάσσουσι.

And when there are shares of the big and the small equal in amount, also in that way would there be everything in everything: nor is there ‘being separate’, but everything has a share of everything. And when there is no ‘being the smallest <thing>’, it would not be possible to be separated-and-apart, nor to come-to-be unto itself, but just as with respect to its beginning, so also now, everything is together. But in all <things> there are many <things>, and equal as regards their number of what is discrete in the larger and the smaller <things>.

τὰ μὲν ἄλλα παντὸς μοῖραν μετέχει, νοῦς δὲ ἔστιν ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτοκρατὲς καὶ μέμεικται οὐδενὶ χρήματι, ἀλλὰ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐπ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἔστιν. εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἦν, ἀλλὰ τρωι ἐμέμεικτο ἄλλωι, μετεῖχεν ἂν ἀπάντων χρημάτων, εἰ ἐμέμεικτό τρωι· ἐν παντὶ γὰρ παντὸς μοῖρα ἔνεστιν, ὡςπερ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεθεν μοι λέλεκται· καὶ ἂν ἐκώλυεν αὐτὸν τὰ συμμεμειγμένα, ὥστε μηδενὸς χρήματος κρατεῖν ὁμοίως ὡς καὶ μόνον ἐόντα ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ.

Now as for the other <things>, they have a share of everything, but mind is unlimited and self-governing and is mixed with no thing, but alone is itself unto itself. For if it were not unto itself, but mixed with any other <thing>, it would have of all things, if it were mixed with any: for in everything there is a share of everything, as was said by me in the foregoing: and the <things> mixed with it would have prevented it, so that it would not have ruled any thing in the same way as it <now> does, being itself unto itself.

Clearly, the way in which Mind in Anaxagoras is ‘by itself’ or ‘unto itself’ owes something to Parmenides’ description of his ‘being’. Anaxagoras’ dialect, albeit much affected by corrections in the course of transmission, has strong Ionic traces, and ἐπί with the genitive of the reflexive may well have been used by him not as a conscious alternative chosen to express something different, but as an idiomatic phrase synonymous with Parmenides καθ’ ἑαυτό. This seems to be supported by fifth- and early fourth-century usage. The phrase αὐτὸ ἐφ’ ἑωυτοῦ is frequent in the Hippocratic corpus; Herodotus has αὐτὸν ἐφ’ ἑωυτοῦ at 5.106.17 and 7.10.9 of an individual, and more often ἐφ’ ἑωυτῶν in the plural, of citizens of a city. But the expression is not restricted to the Ionic dialect. Thucydides puts αὐτῆ δ’ ἐφ’ ἑαυτῆς, said of a city, in the mouth of the Syracusan Athenagoras at 6.40.2; the same phrase is used by Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.1.34; Plato himself uses αὐτὸ δ’ ἐφ’ αὐτοῦ at *Theaetetus* 160b10.

That is to say, while καθ’ αὐτό is certainly overall more frequent than ἐφ’ αὐτοῦ to express that someone or something is ‘by itself’, both expressions are in use and, so far as we can see, are synonymous. Plato could, had he so wished, have adopted Anaxagoras’ ἐφ’ αὐτοῦ, given his acquaintance with Anaxagoras’ writings and in particular given his use of Anaxagoras B6 and B12.²⁹ It is Plato’s conscious decision to use καθ’ αὐτό, and *Symposium* 211a–b shows that, *inter alia* by using this phrase, Plato set what he said about the beautiful itself in relation to what Parmenides had said. Moreover, given the frequency of the phrase in the *Phaedo* and its occurrence in the *Meno*, Plato’s decision to use καθ’ αὐτό is not bound up with the context in the *Symposium*. Already with a view to the dialogues of his middle period as a whole, one must think in terms of Plato’s reception of Parmenides’ poem itself, not of an indirect reception of Parmenides’ thought through later Eleatics and other Presocratic philosophers.³⁰

These two examples³¹ illustrate in different ways how an investigation into Plato’s usage in conjunction with and in the context of interpretation of his philosophical thought may lead to pre-Platonic philosophical contexts an awareness of which enriches our understanding of Plato, because it allows us to ask for the specific differences between Plato’s thought and that of his respective predecessors. These differences often point most clearly to what Plato’s own philosophical contribution is at any given place. In the case of the first example, αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα, we were dealing with a phrase which itself did not become part of Plato’s technical vocabulary. In the case of (αὐτὸ) καθ’ αὐτό, the phrase did establish itself as part of Plato’s technical terminology and was as such received and adapted by Aristotle and subsequent philosophers. Both are examples of *phrases* rather than technical *terms*.³² And both examples have

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here been dealt with largely within the context of fifth- and fourth-century philosophy. This was possible because, while Plato's philosophical affiliations needed elucidation, there was no controversy over what the words under scrutiny meant themselves. That is, to some extent, different with the terms which form the subject of the subsequent investigation.

In the case of the verbs μετέχειν and μεταλαμβάνειν, ἐνεῖναι and παρῆναι, and of the nouns παρουσία, εἶδος, ἰδέα and μορφή, it is important to see who among Plato's predecessors used which term in what context. But it is as important to establish in the first place what these terms meant.³³ Especially where there is controversy, this is not possible from within the corpus of sixth- to fourth-century philosophical texts alone. In establishing the semantics of μετέχειν, μεταλαμβάνειν, ἐνεῖναι, παρῆναι, παρουσία, εἶδος, ἰδέα and their congeners, Part I and Part II are thus concerned with the histories of these words in Greek literature before the *Phaedo*, as in matters of usage and application only extensive diachronic discussion will allow certainty. The focus of Part III is on the usage of the *Phaedo*. It opens with a discussion of οὐσία, as Plato's own philosophical coinage, and in the subsequent chapters attempts an application of the results of the findings of Part I and II to a reading of *Phaedo* 95e–107b.

PART I

CHAPTER 1

μετέχειν

Socrates' first dialectical encounter in Plato's *Parmenides* is with Zeno, the younger companion and 'pupil' of Parmenides. Having listened to an exposition by Zeno, Socrates asks him to read out again the first *ὑπόθεσις* or 'supposition' of the first *λόγος* or 'argument' of his *συγγράμματα* or 'treatise' which had then for the first time been brought to Athens, by Zeno and Parmenides themselves (127a7–d7). Socrates then summarizes this first *ὑπόθεσις* (127e1–4):³⁴

εἰ πολλά ἐστὶ τὰ ὄντα, ὡς ἄρα δεῖ αὐτὰ ὁμοιά τε εἶναι καὶ ἀνόμοια, τοῦτο δὲ δὴ ἀδύνατον· οὔτε γὰρ τὰ ἀνόμοια ὅμοια οὔτε τὰ ὅμοια ἀνόμοια οἶόν τε εἶναι;

[You say, Zeno:] If things are many (Or: If there are many things), it is then necessary for them to be similar and also dissimilar, but that is impossible; for neither can dissimilar be similar nor similar be dissimilar.

Socrates objects to this way of reasoning (128e6–129b6):

οὐ νομίζεις εἶναι αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ εἰδὸς τι ὁμοιότητος, καὶ τῷ τοιούτῳ αὐτὸ ἄλλο τι ἐναντίον, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀνόμοιον· τούτων δὲ δυοῖν ὄντων καὶ ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ καὶ τᾶλλα ἃ δὴ πολλά καλοῦμεν μεταλαμβάνειν; καὶ τὰ μὲν τῆς ὁμοιότητος μεταλαμβάνοντα ὅμοια γίνεσθαι ταύτη τε καὶ κατὰ τοσοῦτον ὅσον ἂν μεταλαμβάνῃ, τὰ δὲ τῆς ἀνομοιότητος ἀνόμοια, τὰ δὲ ἀμφοτέρων ἀμφοτέρα; εἰ δὲ καὶ πάντα ἐναντίων ὄντων ἀμφοτέρων μεταλαμβάνει, καὶ ἐστὶ τῷ μετέχειν ἀμφοῖν ὁμοιά τε καὶ ἀνόμοια αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς, τί θαυμαστόν; εἰ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὰ τὰ ὁμοιά τις ἀπέφαιναν ἀνόμοια γινόμενα ἢ τὰ ἀνόμοια ὅμοια, τέρας ἂν οἶμαι ἦν· εἰ δὲ τὰ τούτων μετέχοντα ἀμφοτέρων ἀμφοτέρα ἀποφαίνει πεπονθότα, οὐδὲν ἔμοιγε, ὦ Ζήνων, ἄτοπον δοκεῖ, οὐδέ γε εἰ ἐν ἅπαντα ἀποφαίνει τις τῷ μετέχειν τοῦ ἐνός καὶ ταῦτα ταῦτα πολλά τῷ πλήθους αὐτὸ μετέχειν.

Do you not believe there to be, itself by itself, a certain 'type' that is similarity,³⁵ and to such a thing again some other thing opposite, which is: dissimilar? <And do you not believe that> while these two things *are* [Or: while these

are two], I and you and the other things which we call many come to share in them? And those which come to share in similarity come to be similar both in the way, and to the extent, in which they come to share <in similarity>, but those <which come to share> in dissimilarity <come to be> dissimilar, and those <which come to share in> both <come to be> both? But even if all things come to share in both, which are opposite, and if <all things>, through sharing in both, are similar and dissimilar, themselves from themselves, why is that surprising? Certainly, if someone were to show the similars themselves becoming dissimilar, or the dissimilar similar, that would be alarming, I think: but if he shows that those which share in both have this double fate, that, Zeno, does not seem to be anything extraordinary, nor yet if someone shows all things as one through sharing in one, and in turn these same things as many through sharing in multitude.

In response to Socrates' criticism, Parmenides commends his zeal and seeks further clarification concerning the sorts of εἶδη, 'ideas' or 'types', which Socrates supposes there are. In his subsequent discussion of Socrates' views (131a–134e), Parmenides employs the same dialectical mode of argumentation as Zeno had used in his ὑπόθεσις, and as Parmenides himself will use again in the ὑποθέσεις of the second half of the dialogue:

If things share in or partake of an εἶδος, an 'idea' or 'type', like similarity and dissimilarity, one and many, just, beautiful, good, etc., then they partake of either a part of it or of the whole. But they cannot partake of the whole. Therefore they must partake of a part. But if they partake of a part, then what they partake of must be divisible into parts. However, assuming the divisibility of εἶδη leads to absurdities. Therefore, things cannot partake either of the whole or of parts of εἶδη. Again, if there is an εἶδος whenever there seems to be one ἰδέα 'on', 'at' or 'with' (ἐπί) all of a set of many things – what is traditionally referred to as the 'one-over-many' argument – then there will be an infinite number of εἶδη for each set of many things. But this, too, is absurd. And so forth with the ὑποθέσεις that εἶδη are thoughts, that they are paradigms, and that they are separate. One would perhaps expect that the conclusion, in each case, is that therefore one should not posit or assume there to be participation in εἶδη in the first place. This, however, is not what Parmenides actually concludes; he rather suggests that a different sort of training is necessary if one wants to undertake a defence of the view that those εἶδη exist and are something, but that, at the same time, this view of Socrates', that there *are* εἶδη, is necessary for intelligent discourse (134e–135d). Despite this insistence on the part of Parmenides, though, many readers ancient and modern have seen Plato's arguments here as detrimental to the assumption of the existence of what is referred to as 'εἶδη' by Socrates and Parmenides.³⁶ One of the aims of the investigation in this chapter will be to uncover some of the underlying assumptions of

Parmenides' first attack on Socrates' suggestion that there are certain εἶδη besides the many things there are, and to investigate in what ways Plato could have responded to these assumptions. The point of departure in this investigation is the observation that when Parmenides summarizes Socrates' position, just as Socrates had summarized Zeno's before beginning with his criticisms, Parmenides adopts Socrates' own usage of 128e6–130a2 and characterizes the relationship between the many things in this world and the εἶδη (130e5, 131a4, 8, b5, c5, 9, e3) as μετέχειν or 'sharing' (131c6); the particular things in this world, which stand in such a relation to these εἶδη, are referred to as μετέχοντα or 'what is sharing' (131c6); and the process of a thing's getting into such a relationship is designated as μεταλαμβάνειν or 'coming-to-share' (130e6, 131a1, 4, 5, e4, 5; μετάληψις, 'a coming-to-share', 131a5). This usage is familiar from earlier dialogues, notably the *Phaedo*.³⁷ Accordingly, the criticisms Parmenides advances against Socrates' suggestions, which resemble suggestions made in the *Phaedo*, have, in some respect, been seen as criticisms advanced against what is maintained in the *Phaedo*. This applies in particular to the notion of μετέχειν or 'sharing' as introduced in that dialogue. However, before one can attempt to discover what, if anything, has changed in Plato's mind between his writing the *Phaedo* and his writing the *Parmenides*, one must ask what motivated Plato in the first place to use the language of μετέχειν in the *Phaedo*.

Looking at pre-Platonic occurrences of the verb μετέχειν, μεταλαμβάνειν and their cognates will enable us to see both what Plato meant when he introduced the term μετέχειν in the *Phaedo* and, in the event, to whom among his predecessors he was responding in doing so. This, in turn, may shed light on the question of stages of development in Plato's philosophy.

1. ἔχειν and μετέχειν: the syntax and semantics of 'having' and 'sharing'

The Greek verb μετέχειν denotes a state or event of 'sharing', μεταλαμβάνειν the process of 'coming to share'.³⁸ The two words are often translated as 'partake', 'participate', and this is certainly a correct rendering in many contexts; but unlike the Latin *parti-cipio*, derived from *pars*, 'part', and *capio*, 'take', neither μεταλαμβάνειν nor μετέχειν is inherently or necessarily connected with μέρος or any other Greek word for 'part'.³⁹ This is, of course, not meant to suggest that in English all instances of 'participate' refer to the having of a part of something.⁴⁰ However, only if it were the case that the Greek words μετέχειν and μεταλαμβάνειν necessarily entailed just that, would a question like that by Parmenides at 131a4–5 be inevitable:

οὐκοῦν ἦτοι ὅλου τοῦ εἶδους ἢ μέρους ἕκαστον τὸ μεταλαμβάνον
μεταλαμβάνει;