

The Whole-Part Dilemma: A Compositional Understanding of Plato's Theory of Forms

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Abstract: In this paper, I suggest a way of resolving the whole-part dilemma suggested in the *Parmenides*. Specifically, I argue that grabbing the second horn of the dilemma does not pose a significant challenge. To argue for this, I consider two theses about Forms, namely, the oneness and indivisibility theses. More specifically, I argue that the second horn does not violate the oneness thesis if we treat composition as identity and that the indivisibility thesis ought to be reinterpreted given Plato's later dialogues. By doing so, I suggest a compositional understanding of Plato's theory of Forms, which can resolve the whole-part dilemma.


Keywords: Plato; Parmenides; theory of Forms; one and many.

1. Introduction

In the *Parmenides*, Parmenides argues against one version of theories of Forms, what young Socrates has in mind, by suggesting six different lines

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of criticism.¹ This paper focuses on his second criticism—what I call the whole-part dilemma. The dilemma begins with the following conversation between Parmenides and Socrates:

‘But tell me this: is it your view that, as you say, there are certain Forms from which these other things, by getting a share of them, derive their names—as, for instance, they come to be like by getting a share of likeness, large by getting a share of largeness, and just and beautiful by getting a share of justice and beauty?’

‘It certainly is,’ Socrates replied.

‘So does each thing that gets a share get as its share the Form as a *whole* or a *part* of it? Or could there be some other means of getting a share apart from these two?’

‘How could there be?’ he said. (*Parmenides*, 131a, italics added)

In the conversation, Parmenides and Socrates accept two distinct types of entities, Forms and things that get a share of a Form. I will simply call the latter type of entities *sensible particulars*. As we saw, while suggesting the two options, Parmenides asks Socrates to elucidate the relation that holds between sensible particulars and Forms. This relation is often alluded to by Plato in his dialogues (*Phaedo*, 100c–7; *Parmenides*, 130a–134e; *Sophist*, 256a–b) by various terms, such as “participating in,” “sharing,” or “partaking of.” However, what this participation relation really is remains rather elusive.

According to the standard interpretation of the *Parmenides*, what Socrates and Parmenides both have in mind in reference to the participation relation is what might be called the *Pie Model*.² The Pie Model has two variations: the Whole Pie Model and the Piece-of-Pie Model. The Whole Pie Model says that participants partake in a pie if they get the *whole* pie. The Piece-of-Pie Model says that participants partake in a pie if they get a *part* of the pie.

If we construe Forms as a sort of pies, we can easily see how each variation can be applied to the participation relation.³ I will call the two resulting

¹ In this paper, all references about Plato’s dialogues come from (Cooper 1997).

² For further details, see (Rickless 2007a).

³ Although the Pie Model can be applied more easily to the participation relation if we construe Forms as pies, it does not mean that the shapes of Forms are pies. In fact, what the two variations of the Pie Model require in their applications is that

applications *WPM* and *PPM* respectively. Thus, in *WPM*, sensible particulars participate in a Form by virtue of getting the *whole* of the Form, while in *PPM*, sensible particulars participate in a Form by virtue of getting a *part* of the Form. However, Parmenides points out that neither option is desirable.

The aim of this paper is to suggest a possible way of resolving the whole-part dilemma that Plato could have adopted. More specifically, I will argue that grabbing the second horn of the dilemma—that is, adopting *PPM*, does not pose a significant challenge. To do this, I will take the following steps. First, in Section 2, I will outline the logical structure of the whole-part dilemma. Then, in Section 3, I will clarify the four implications of adopting *PPM* and suggest a compositional understanding of the participation relation between sensible particulars and Forms. After that, in Section 4, I will argue that if the relation between shares of Forms and Forms is compositional, the oneness thesis, according to which every Form is one, is not infringed by *PPM*. Lastly, in Section 5, I will argue that the indivisibility thesis, according to which Forms are indivisible, ought to be reinterpreted given the textual evidence. This will result in a compositional understanding of Plato's theory of Forms, which can resolve the whole-part dilemma.

2. The whole-part dilemma

In this section, I will present the target of this paper, namely, the whole-part dilemma. I begin by reconstructing the dilemma with the Pie Model as follows:

- P1. Nothing except the Pie Model explains the participation relation.
- P2. The Pie Model has two variations: *WPM* and *PPM*.
- P3. Neither *WPM* nor *PPM* is convincing.
- P4. If (P1) & (P2) & (P3), there is no way to understand the participation relation.
- C. Therefore, there is no way to understand the participation relation.

(for *WPM*) every Form is one, or that (for *PPM*) every Form has the parts. To be clear, I am not arguing that the shapes of Forms are pies. As will be argued later, shapes are not essential features of Forms.

The first and second premises set two horns of the dilemma. According to the conversation between Parmenides and Socrates, the participation relation should be one of the following two cases: either particulars get a *part* of a Form and thereby participate in the Form, or they get the *whole* of a Form and thereby participate in the Form.

From my perspective, the least controversial premise is the fourth one. If we have only two options of understanding the participation relation, and neither is desirable, then it conceptually follows that there is no way to understand the participation relation. On the contrary, the most controversial premise is the third one, given that it is the core premise that constitutes the dilemma. To support this premise, Parmenides attempts to show that both horns (i.e., WPM and PPM) generate an undesirable consequence. It can be explained as follows.

First, let us assume that WPM is true. Then, it is possible that different particulars get one and the same Form. For example, in this model, some objects are beautiful by virtue of getting the Form of Beauty. The issue with accepting such a case is that it demands that one and the same thing be in separate places simultaneously.

Second, let us assume that PPM is true. Then, each particular gets a different part of a Form. That is, in this model, some objects, let us say, are beautiful in virtue of getting a different part of the Form of Beauty. So, PPM does not demand that one and the same thing be in separate places simultaneously. However, Parmenides seems to believe that this option leads to a violation of the oneness and indivisibility theses; every Form is (1) one and (2) incomposite. He says, “Then are you willing to say, Socrates, that our one Form is really divided? [If so,] will it still be one?” (Plato 1997, 131c) Socrates and Parmenides agree that it won’t be so, and conclude that PPM is problematic as well.

The conclusion is so detrimental that one cannot simply bite the bullet. The participation relation is indispensable in Plato’s theory of Forms. So, if one wants to endorse Plato’s theory of Forms, one should deny one of the premises in the dilemma. Indeed, there have been some debates around the first horn.⁴ I will not deal with them here. Instead, I will focus on suggesting

⁴ Cherniss, Peck, and Sayre deny the third premise by grabbing the first horn, and several critics like Rickless and Panagiotou argue against them. In this paper, I will

a possible way to resolve the whole-part dilemma on the basis of PPM, the second horn.

3. A compositional account of the participation relation

One way to argue against the dilemma's second horn is to simply deny the following two theses of Forms:

Oneness: Every Form is one.

Indivisibility: Forms are indivisible.

According to this strategy, Forms do not need to be one and can be divided. So, in accordance with this strategy, one might endorse PPM to give an account of the participation relation between sensible particulars and Forms. However, this suggestion does not seem attractive. First, given Plato's theory of Forms, the two theses cannot be discarded for no reason. Second, and more importantly, even if there is a positive reason to surrender them, it seems that three unanswered questions remain: (I) What is the nature of the parts of Forms? (II) What is the role played by them? (III) What is their relation to Forms? Thus, in this section, let me first show that PPM in fact gives us direct answers to these questions. In subsequent sections of the paper, I will then turn to the oneness and indivisibility theses, arguing that in certain interpretation of these theses PPM is compatible with them.

I begin by focusing on what PPM really implies. To be specific, accepting PPM is tantamount to taking the following claims to be true.

- (A) Forms have shares as their parts.
- (B) The relation that holds between the shares and the Forms is a part-whole relation.
- (C) The parts (i.e., shares) are (individually, not collectively) distinct from the Form that they belong to.
- (D) The parts of a Form are property instances.

not judge whether their arguments are persuasive. For more details, see (Cherniss 1932), (Peck 1953), (Panagiotou 1987), (Sayre 1996), and (Rickless 2007a).

First, (A) says that Forms have parts and that these parts are called ‘shares.’ The former directly follows from what PPM says. According to PPM, sensible particulars participate in a Form in virtue of getting a part of the Form. That is, PPM implies that Forms have parts. The latter can be seen in the conversation between Parmenides and Socrates quoted in section 1. In the conversation, Parmenides asks Socrates a question about the two variations of the Pie Model by saying, “Does each thing that gets a *share* get as its share the Form as a whole or a part of it?” (*Parmenides* 131a5–6) This shows that Parmenides considers the possibility that a Form has shares (or more strictly, the entities which Parmenides and Socrates call shares) as its parts. And this possibility is the core assumption that constitutes PPM. Thus, if we endorse PPM, then we must construe a share as a part of a Form.

Second, (B) naturally follows from (A). If a Form has some shares as parts, then the relation between the shares and the Form is a part-whole relation. In other words, the shares, in some sense, collectively compose the Form.⁵ Third, according to PPM, each share is (individually, not collectively) distinct from the Form it belongs to; otherwise the same difficulty WPM faced—one and the same thing should be in separate places simultaneously—will arise again. Lastly, PPM assumes (D) as well, since according to PPM, sensible particulars have their properties in virtue of getting shares. In this sense, shares can be construed as playing the same role as property instances which are sometimes also called ‘tropes’ in the terminology of contemporary metaphysics.⁶

In fact, it is frequently pointed out by those who might be called *Platonic trope theorists* that there is a distinct type of entities in Plato’s metaphysical view, what Socrates calls shares, and these shares play the role that property instances typically do. For example, McPherran (1988), Mertz (1996), and Buckels (2018) argue that Plato’s middle dialogues (e.g., the *Republic*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Parmenides*) as well as later ones (e.g., the *Theaetetus* and the *Timaeus*) show that the role of shares of

⁵ This will be explained further in the next section.

⁶ See (Maurin 2018).

Forms is to ascribe non-repeatable properties to sensible particulars.⁷ Mertz writes:

Summarizing the textual evidence, in the *Republic* (510d), Plato refers to a class of “visible forms,” and in the *Parmenides* (130b), gives examples of the likenesses that we each possess, in contrast to LIKENESS itself...Similarly, in the *Phaedo* (102d–3b), OPPOSITENESS, LARGENESS, and SMALLNESS are distinguished from cases of oppositeness, largeness, and smallness that are “in us” ...In the *Theaetetus* (209a–d), it is argued that unit properties are needed to individuate what would otherwise be just bundles of universals. (Mertz 1996, 83–84)

However, while Platonic trope theorists explicitly mention that Plato admits the existence of shares which are very similar to property instances, they do not mention the relation between shares and Forms much. McPherran writes, “Immanent characters [shares] are likenesses of Forms and so act as properties.”⁸ Although I agree that shares are likenesses of Forms (or images of Forms), I believe that more can be said about this. In fact, one advantage of adopting PPM is that it gives an additional account of the relation between shares and Forms. In PPM, the relation is based on a part whole relation. That is, the shares collectively compose a Form. Thus, according to this model, the claim that shares bear a resemblance to Forms can be explained by the fact that shares compose Forms.

By making the implications of PPM explicit, we are now in a position to be able to give the following answers to the above three questions: (I) the parts of Forms are shares; (II) shares play the role of ascribing a non-repeatable properties to an object; (III) their relation to Forms is compositional.

Please note that this line of thought is not arbitrary. In the *Parmenides*, Parmenides and Socrates both agree that PPM is one of the two genuine options that must be considered in explaining the participation relation.

⁷ It is rather controversial how to arrange Plato’s dialogues. Different scholars may order the dialogues differently.

⁸ McPherran calls shares of Forms immanent characters. See (McPherran 1988, 534).

And taking the relation between shares and Forms to be compositional is the most natural way to endorse PPM. Thus, as a working hypothesis, I suggest that the relation between shares and Forms is a part-whole relation. To emphasize this, I will call shares of a Form *Form parts*.

Now I will give a final account of the participation relation on the basis of PPM. As mentioned earlier, the participation relation is the relation that holds between sensible particulars and Forms. Here sensible particulars are complex entities. To explain in what sense they are complex, I draw on another kind of entity that is mentioned in the *Timaeus*, namely, the receptacle. According to the *Timaeus* (50e5–8), the receptacle is a sort of base in which properties are able to inhabit. The most crucial feature of the receptacle is that it lacks any qualitative characteristics in its own right (except that it is characterless).

By accepting this entity, PPM can give a compositional account of the participation relation between sensible particulars and Forms. Sensible particulars are complex entities whose constituents are the receptacle and Form parts. The receptacle is the base in which Form parts are able to inhabit. Form parts are property instances, and they enable sensible particulars to maintain some properties. The relation of Form parts to Forms is compositional. As a result, the compositional account of the participation relation can be articulated as follows:

The receptacle possesses a Form part that is a constituent of a Form, and thereby, the sensible particular resulting from the combination of the Form part and the receptacle participates in that Form.

The plausibility of this articulation depends on two pending issues; the oneness and indivisibility theses. I will turn to them in the subsequent sections.

4. The problem of oneness and composition as identity

In this section, I argue that PPM is compatible with the oneness thesis if the relation between Form parts and Forms is understood to be compositional. To begin, let me consider again Parmenides's words, "Then are you willing to say, Socrates, that our one form is really divided? Will it still be one?" (*Parmenides*, 131c8–9)

Parmenides's first question involves the indivisibility thesis. So, this section focuses on his second question. As we see, it seems that Parmenides implicitly assumes that if Forms were divided into parts, they could not be one. However, does the antecedent necessarily imply the consequent? I do not think so if the relation between Form parts and Forms is compositional.

It is worth noting that there are various understandings of composition. Among them, I endorse a specific view of the composition, one that treats the composition as an identity relation. I will call this specific view of composition *CAI* for short. One key claim of *CAI* is that the composition is ontologically impotent, that is, "when parts compose a whole, the composition does not create a new entity for our list of beings" (Brown 2004). This is because *CAI* treats the composition as an identity relation. Thus, according to *CAI*, being divided into many parts does not entail the nonexistence of the whole, since the parts are in themselves identical to the whole. Thus, if the relation holding between Forms and Form parts is compositional, then a Form *is nothing over and above* the Form parts constituting it. Thus, *CAI* preserves the oneness thesis.

CAI is controversial. The debate on whether it is a tenable view is ongoing.⁹ However, it seems less controversial that Plato accepts this view. Indeed, a number of passages in different dialogues confirm it. For example, the idea that the whole is just the same as the parts is first mentioned in the *Parmenides*. In this dialogue (129c1–d2), Socrates admits that "the entire parts of his body and he himself are the same." Additionally, the first deduction in the *Parmenides* (137c4–142d) assumes that the one is not many, and shows that this assumption leads to undesirable consequences. The first deduction thus supports the claim that Plato accepts *CAI*. Furthermore, a similar idea also appears in the *Theaetetus* (204a7; 205a9–10). Here, Socrates claims that "when a thing has parts, the whole *is* necessarily

⁹ Although *CAI* is controversial, its restricted version, which states that there is more than one composition relation and only some kind of particular enjoys the composition relation as identity, is less controversial. McDaniel (2004), a main critic of *CAI* also admits that some versions of *CAI* can be compatible with some versions of compositional pluralism. The point is that it is the restricted version of *CAI* that I will endorse as below. For more details, see (Baxter 1988), (McDaniel 2004), and (Wallace 2011).

all the parts” and also that “in the case of a thing that has parts, both the whole and the sum will be the parts.”¹⁰ Therefore, I conclude that Plato endorses CAI.

One might wonder how one is identical to many in the framework of Plato’s theory of Forms by pointing out that it seems to violate the thesis of radical purity (or RP for short), according to which, Forms do not have contradictory properties in the same respect. However, there are at least two ways of dealing with this issue. First, we can adopt the developmentalists’ view and deny RP, since RP is just mentioned once in the *Republic* (436b). Indeed, Priest (2013) and Rickless (2007b) adopt this strategy. Second, we might argue that CAI does not violate RP. Specifically, Form parts can be regarded as one only if they are under the concept of Forms, while Form parts can be regarded as many only if they are under the concept of Form parts. To put it another way, the question of how many things are there is an ill-formed question since counting is necessarily tied to our concepts. So, we should ask “How many Forms are there?,” or “How many Form parts are there?” Then, it will turn out that the Form parts and the Form do not have contradictory properties *in the same respect*.¹¹

Before we proceed further, it is worth mentioning that there is a competing interpretation of Plato’s view of composition suggested by Harte. Harte (2002) argues that although Plato seems to endorse CAI in the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides*, he denies it and endorses the so-called *structural view* in later dialogues (e.g., the *Sophist*, the *Philebus*, and the *Timaeus*).

According to Harte (2002), the structural view says that there is an additional element aside from parts required by composition, namely, structure. By extracting the notion of structure from the later dialogues, Harte argues that later Plato’s view of composition suggests that certain parts compose a whole only when they are arranged in a *proper* way. This claim, if true, can significantly challenge my work, since the current arrangement of Form parts in the receptacle may not be sufficient to compose a Form.

¹⁰ Italics added.

¹¹ For more details, see (Wallace 2011).

However, even if Harte's extraction of the notion of structure is appropriate,¹² it is still questionable whether parts without a presumed order actually entail the non-existence of a whole. This is because it is one thing to say that structure affects the normative status of composite objects, such as labeling them good or bad, but another thing to insist that the parts are unable to compose the whole without possessing a proper order. Consider the case of the weather Harte (2002) mentions in her book. Even if elements of weather create good weather only if they are arranged in a specific way, that is not to say that there would be no weather if the elements are arranged differently.¹³

Moreover, for the sake of argument, even if Harte's interpretation of Plato's view of composition is right, it should be emphasized that my argument can still stand. This is because her interpretation is not committed to the claim that Plato could not have been a *compositional pluralist*. According to compositional pluralists (e.g., Fine (2010), Baxter and Cotnoir (2014)), there is more than one basic parthood relation. That is, they claim that different kinds of objects may possess different composition relations that can be defined in terms of different basic parthood relations. For example, as Fine (2010) points out, the way in which the letter 'n' is a part of the expression 'no' is different from the way in which it is a part of the set of letters {'n,' 'o'}. The difference lies in our *concepts* of them associated with their criteria of identities. Unlike the case of the word 'no,' the identity of sets is solely determined by its members. To put it another way, sets do not conceptually require a structure to establish their identity: Any sets are the same just in case they have the same members.

To clarify the point that my view is consistent with Harte's interpretation of Plato, it is worth noting that the objects Harte deals with in her

¹² Plato never explicitly mentions the notion of structure.

¹³ One might wonder whether some particular kinds other than weather could have a different composition relation. I would assume that they do. However, as we will see, I will endorse the view that there is also another composition relation. In addition, since the objects that Harte deals with in her book are limited to several kinds, I do not have sufficient resources for handling this issue. So, I will focus on claiming that Forms and Form parts may have a different composition relation from one that Harte suggests.

book are limited to the combinations of sensible particulars such as weather, notes, and letters.¹⁴ Thus, even if we accept that the composition relation holding between sensible particulars demands that there be a structure in composing a complex entity, it does not necessarily follow from this that the relation requiring a structure has to be applied to all kinds of composite objects. Then, it can be argued that the criterion of the identity for Forms does not involve any structure. That is, any Forms are the same just in case they have the same Form parts.

To be sure, the shape of a Form will differ according to how the Form parts are laid in the receptacle. However, this does not jeopardize the above criterion of identity for Forms. This is because according to Plato, the property of having a certain shape is not an essential property of Forms that is closely tied with the identity condition for Forms. For example, a round Form cannot have been round *from the beginning*. The only way for a Form to be round, according to Plato, is to participate in another kind of Form like the Form of Roundness or the Form of Change.¹⁵ Consequently, there is no good reason to say that the identity of a Form is determined by the structure of Form parts. This completes my argument for the claim that understanding the composition relation between Form and Form parts in a way that CAI theorists suggest does not conflict with Harte's interpretation of Plato's view of composition.

¹⁴ I do not doubt that the composite objects Harte deals with in her book are limited to sensible particulars. Harte argues that the composite objects she introduces are indeed *scientific objects*. Thus, from my perspective, there is no reason to apply the structural view to all kind of objects. For more details, see (Harte 2002, 268).

¹⁵ What is the relation between Forms? How can we explain the way that a Form participates in another Form? I have no definite answer to these questions. However, for current purpose, it would be sufficient to say that the relation between Forms is not involved with a criterion of identity for Forms, given Plato's theory of Forms. In addition, as a very rough sketch, it could be suggested that the way that a Form participates in another Form is related to how their Form parts are arranged in the receptacle. The point is that on PPM, the relation between Form parts and Forms is different from the one between Forms. The former is compositional, the latter is not.

In sum, I argued that if the relation between Form parts and Forms is understood to be compositional, the oneness of Forms could be preserved. This is because Plato treats composition as identity. Some developmentalists like Harte may understand Plato's view of composition differently. However, even if we accept their view, it does not exclude the possibility that there is more than one composition relation. Therefore, if we treat composition as identity with a certain limited applicability, then PPM is compatible with the oneness thesis.

5. Negotiability of the indivisibility thesis

In this section, I argue that the indivisibility thesis is negotiable. What I mean by "negotiable" is that we can decide whether to preserve this thesis in the way it is traditionally understood on the basis of potential theoretical benefits. Put simply, I argue that we can obtain some theoretical benefits at the cost of the indivisibility thesis. This results in sacrificing some orthodox readings of Plato. Nevertheless, I believe that the trade-off is worth considering since the cost is lower than expected.

So, my strategy in this section is not to argue that the indivisibility thesis should be discarded. Rather, I will merely focus on showing that there are substantial theoretical rewards to be gained if we replace the traditional thesis with a less stringent one, what might be called the *likely indivisibility thesis* (or LID for short): Forms are most likely indivisible.

Again, the cost is not too high in that this thesis replacing traditional indivisibility thesis can play much of the same role as the original one. Furthermore, from my perspective, the original thesis is controversial enough so as to warrant the consideration of an alternative one.

To argue for this line of thought, I will evaluate the costs and benefits of surrendering the original indivisibility thesis by focusing on the textual evidence commonly said to uphold it. More specifically, I will consider two passages mentioned by Rickless (2007b) that have been regarded as supporting materials for the indivisibility thesis, one in the *Phaedo* and the other in the *Timaeus*, arguing that neither passage is decisive when it comes to upholding the original version of the indivisibility thesis and that given

the theoretical benefits we should adopt an alternative, less stringent version of the thesis.

I will start with the passage from the *Phaedo*:

Are not the things that always remain the same and in the same state *most likely* (*malista eikos* [μάλιστα εἰκός]) not to be composite, whereas those that vary from one time to another and are never the same are composite? (*Phaedo*, 78c6–8)

Here, Socrates's point is that it is not extremely *probable* that what is always constant and invariable is divisible. Does this passage really bolster the indivisibility thesis? It does not appear to do so. Rickless admits this as well. He says, "Here, Socrates does not commit himself to the strong claim that Forms are incomposite" (Rickless 2007b, 43). Thus, strictly speaking, this passage is inconsistent with the indivisibility thesis. What the passage literally means is that even the things that always remain the same and in the same state are, *in principle*, divisible. Therefore, I conclude that far from supporting the indivisibility thesis, this textual evidence states the truth of a less stringent version of the indivisibility thesis (LID) that Forms are most likely indivisible.

One might wonder whether we should interpret the passage in light of the tendency of Forms to remain the same. For instance, one may argue that we can interpret the term 'most likely' as 'extremely plausible.' Then it may be that the passage supports the indivisibility thesis. However, this possible objection requires us to accept a wide scope view for the term 'most likely.' To be more specific, since it requires us to interpret the term 'most likely' as 'extremely plausible,' it demands that the term 'most likely' be placed *outside* of the that-clause. For example, the result would be the following:

- (α) It is most likely (it is extremely plausible) that the things that always remain the same and in the same state are not composite.

However, the cited passage is not like (α), but rather like the following:

- (β) The things that always remain the same and in the same state are most likely not composite.

This is in accordance with the Greek text: the passage comprises an ACI-construction dependent on Cebes' previous "It seems to me ... to be this way (δοκεῖ μοι ... οὕτως ἔχειν *dokei moi ... houtōs echein*)."

Accordingly, practically all translators (e.g., Grube (1997), Gallop (1975), and Jowett (1892)) adopted the narrow scope view that demands the term 'most likely' be placed *inside* of the that-clause when they translated the *Phaedo*. Consequently, the objection is not in accordance with the standard construal of the grammatical structure of *Phaedo* 78c6–8.

In what follows, let us consider the second passage that is commonly taken to support the indivisibility thesis, the passage from the *Timaeus*:

The component from which he [the father] made the soul and the way in which he made it were as follows: In between [(a)] the Being (*ousia*) that is indivisible and always changeless, and [(b)] the one that is divisible and comes to be in the corporeal realm, he mixed [(c)] a third, intermediate form of being, derived from the other two (*Timaeus*, 35a2–5).

According to the standard reading, (a), (b), and (c) refer to the Form of Being, the sensible particular, and the soul, respectively. Based on this reading, Rickless (2007b) regards the passage as the strongest evidence upholding the indivisibility thesis. I will call this passage *35a2*. In his view, the indivisibility thesis cannot be discarded given the traditional reading of *35a2*. In other words, he claims that we cannot put a price on the value of the indivisibility thesis, given *35a2*.

If the thesis has a high value, then nobody would be willing to trade it. However, I believe that the value of the thesis is set too high by *35a2*. So, I will attempt to lower the value *to the point* where it can be exchanged for some theoretical benefits.

To begin with, it could be pointed out that *35a2* is inconsistent with what Socrates says in the *Phaedo* if we interpret it as I did above. However, this inconsistency *per se* is not decisive for two reasons.¹⁶ First, it might seem rather unfair if I reject that *35a2* supports the indivisibility thesis

¹⁶ Thus, it would be worth noting that the passage in the *Phaedo* shouldn't be regarded as my main reason to deny the claim that *35a2* supports the indivisibility thesis.

solely based on my preferred reading of 78c6–8 in the *Phaedo*. Second, and more importantly, it is easy for developmentalists to assume that Plato decided to make his claim about the indivisibility of Forms much stronger in his later dialogues.

Luckily, there are three other passages in the Platonic corpus (in the *Sophist*, *Theaetetus*, and even the *Timaeus*) that show that the *Timaeus* passage just quoted presents an anomaly and give us good reason to adopt LID. Let me start with the *Sophist*, where we can easily find the idea of blending of Forms. In reply to the question about a good man, Plato says that man is one Form and good is another. The idea is simple and straightforward. Some Forms partake of other Forms.

This idea is mentioned explicitly in the Stranger's conversation about five kinds of Forms, Change, Rest, Being, Sameness, and Difference. It is worth noting that not only Change partakes of Being, but also Being partakes of Change. In the *Sophist*, Plato says that change is necessary for intelligence. Since Forms are intelligence-bearers (or truth-bearers), it follows that certain Forms like Being should partake in the Form of Change. Thus, if what Plato says in the *Sophist* is true, it is highly doubtful that Forms are changeless. The problem is that 35a2 states that what is assumed to be the Form (i.e. the Form of Being) is changeless. Therefore, the *Sophist* casts doubt on whether we should accept 35a2 in a literal sense.

Second, the *Theaetetus* explicitly indicates the possibility of Forms being divided. In the *Theaetetus* (204a1), Socrates says, "Let the complex be a single form resulting from the combination of the several elements when they fit together." This clearly indicates composite Forms. Here, it is worth paying attention to Owen's (1953) claim that the *Timaeus* ought to be dated before the *Theaetetus* on various grounds. If Owen is right about this, then it could be argued that Plato was reluctant to discard the indivisibility thesis until the *Timaeus*. I admit that it is suspicious that Owen's thesis is indeed right. However, it is apparently sufficient to show that his claim can play the desired role—that is, the role of moderating the value of the indivisibility thesis.

Third, one could still be unsatisfied at this point and may argue that we should determine whether to accept the indivisibility thesis on the basis of the *Timaeus* alone. I do not see any reason why. Plato would likely not

want this either because it is nearly impossible to construct the theory of Forms with just the *Timaeus*.

However, let us grant for the sake of argument that we should ascribe to Plato the indivisibility thesis on the basis of *Timaeus* alone and ignore all other texts in the Platonic corpus that would favor adopting LID instead. Even in this case, there is evidence within the *Timaeus* that challenges the view that we ought to adopt the indivisibility thesis in its traditional form. In fact, the paragraph immediately following 35a2 reads as follows:

Similarly, he [the Father] made a mixture of the Same, and then one of the Different, in between their indivisible and their corporeal, divisible counterparts. And he took the three mixtures and mixed them together to make a uniform mixture, forcing the Different, which was hard to mix, into conformity with the Same. Now when he had mixed these two together with Being, and from the three had made a single mixture, he *redivided* the whole mixture into as many parts as his task required (*Timaeus*, 35a5–11).¹⁷

In the above passage, the term ‘redivided’ is worth noting. My question is this: If (a) in 35a2 is indeed indivisible, how could the Father (namely, God) *re*-divide the whole mixture, which includes (a), into many parts? The way I see it, this requires that (a) be the sort of thing that can be divided in principle at least. If not, then the term ‘redivided’ is unsuitable in this context.¹⁸ This strongly suggests that the indivisibility thesis in its traditional form is too strong and the less stringent version (LID) seems more plausible, even in the context of the *Timaeus* alone. Thus, I suggest that we should not take 35a2 literally. Specifically, I suggest that there is

¹⁷ Italics added. Here’s the Greek for reference: μεγνός δὲ μετὰ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ ἐκ τριῶν ποιησάμενος ἕν, πάλιν ὅλον τοῦτο μοίρας ὅσας προσήκεν διένειμεν, ἐκάστην δὲ ἕκ τε ταύτου καὶ θατέρου καὶ τῆς οὐσίας μεμειγμένην.

¹⁸ It might be argued that Forms are indivisible, but the mixture of Forms and other elements can be divided. However, I do not see how this should work. Socrates says that the Father redivided the mixture into *many* parts. Given this, the divided parts should contain some part of Forms. As a result, we should accept an uncanny view about mereology to endorse this move.

a hidden phrase like ‘most likely’ in 35a2. Accordingly, the result will be as follows: “the Being that is most likely indivisible and changeless...”

At this point, let me summarize my argument again. I have attempted to moderate the value of the indivisibility thesis by casting doubt on the passages in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* that are said to uphold the indivisibility thesis. Specifically, in regard to the passage in the *Phaedo*, I argued that the passage does not actually support the thesis. In regard to the passage in the *Timaeus*, I argued that the passage does not accommodate some passages in the *Sophist*, *Theaetetus*, and *Timaeus* as well as the *Phaedo*. Therefore, I conclude that the indivisibility thesis is not the sort of thing that can never be sacrificed fully.

Before proceeding further, it is worth noting that LID also has some theoretical foundations. First, we may see that the passage in the *Phaedo* literally supports LID. Moreover, other, additional passages in the *Timaeus* may be used as well to support it. The passages involve the conversation between Timaeus and Socrates about giving an account. In the *Timaeus* (29b3–29c7), Socrates agrees with Timaeus’s point that we can only give a sort of *likely account* (*eikos logos*) of a certain subject. This is because we are no more than human in nature (*Timaeus* 29c–d). If so, Timaeus’s point can provide a theoretical basis for LID in that LID has a good fit with the notion of a likely account; LID not only allows for cases in which a Form is not yet divided into parts, but also for cases in which a Form has been divided.¹⁹

Now, I shall obtain several theoretical advantages at the cost of the indivisibility thesis. While it is true that the indivisibility thesis has been supported by the orthodox reading of 35a2, it may also be that 35a2 is controversial enough to contemplate the adoption of a weaker form of the thesis, namely, LID. If this is the case, then several potential benefits will motivate us to adopt LID. In other words, I believe that the theoretical

¹⁹ Please note that I am not arguing that the notion of a likely account contradicts the indivisibility thesis. Rather I am merely attempting to provide some theoretical foundation for LID. The reason to cast doubt on the indivisibility thesis is based on my discussion of the two passages that are commonly said to support the thesis, not the notion of a likely account.

benefits of LID will act as a tiebreaker in the decision of whether or not to weaken the indivisibility thesis.

First, since LID is a less stringent thesis than the original one, it can improve the coherence of Plato's dialogues and provide developmentalists with an adequate explanation. Regarding the debate on indivisibility of Forms, the aforementioned inconsistencies between dialogues—especially between the *Timaeus* and later dialogues—can be accounted for if we replace the indivisibility thesis with LID. Second, Since PPM does not violate LID, LID can play a key role in giving a compositional account of the participation relation between sensible particulars and Forms by providing a theoretical base for PPM. Again, according to the compositional account, the receptacle possesses a Form part that is a constituent of a Form, and thereby, the sensible particular resulting from the combination of the Form part and the receptacle participates in that Form. Third, this line of reasoning may be the best suited for Platonic trope theorists. Trope theorists typically owe their explanatory power to the notion of exact resemblance. And the best-well known strategy for dealing with this notion is to treat it as primitive. Many trope theorists maintain that there is no further explanation for the notion of exact resemblance because it is the notion that constitutes our conception of tropes. They just take it for granted that there are some property instances that are qualitatively the same but numerically different. However, even if Platonic trope theorists can follow this strategy, they have one more task than non-Platonic trope theorists. The task is that they need to elucidate how the notion of exact resemblance can be related to Forms. The final reward of LID is the simple answer it provides through PPM; the fact that some tropes exactly resemble each other can be explained by the fact that they compose a Form. That is, the reason why, let say, some red tropes resemble each other perfectly is that they compose the Form of Redness.²⁰ Thus, the exact resemblance is not a primitive concept in this model. Rather, the notion of Form is a primitive one.

Lastly, I shall conclude this paper by evaluating the costs. A big expenditure is that endorsing LID takes us away from the traditional reading

²⁰ Plato denies the existence of a Form of a color. This is just mentioned as an example.

of Plato. The indivisibility thesis will no longer be preserved in its traditional form. In addition, it makes it harder to explain the perfection of Forms. According to LID, Forms can be divided in principle. If so, how can we explain the perfection thesis, which states that Forms are perfect? This could be a burden for someone opting for the trade-off and will require further work on another occasion.

Another cost is that surrendering the indivisibility thesis and endorsing PPM forces us to accept the claim that there are tropes (or property instances) in Plato's metaphysical view. However, certainly some scholars might not want to be a trope theorist even in a loose sense. Thus, if one disagrees with the key idea of tropes and wants to remain an orthodox Platonist, one is better off not giving up the indivisibility thesis. On the contrary, if one has some of the intuitions that trope theorists have, I would strongly recommend to reap several theoretical benefits at the cost of the indivisibility thesis. Adopting LID and taking the relation between shares of Forms and Forms to be compositional would be one of the most attractive options for Platonic trope theorists.

6. Conclusion

The whole-part dilemma begins with Parmenides's question of what the participation relation is. And this question led us to an investigation of the relation between Forms and shares of Forms. From my perspective, the dilemma is the device that is designed to initiate the thought that the relation in question *might be* compositional.

In this paper, I pushed the mentioned thought to the greatest degree. By doing so, I suggested a compositional understanding of Plato's theory of Forms, and argued that the whole-part dilemma can be resolved by this understanding. Again, the compositional approach is not arbitrary. Taking the relation between shares and Forms to be compositional is the most natural way to grab the second horn of the whole-part dilemma.

While I am not too concerned about the oneness of Forms, I think the plausibility of this paper depends on how convincing my argument regarding the indivisibility thesis was. I hope one finds the argument persuasive and contemplates the option of adopting PPM. At the cost of the indivisibility

thesis, we can not only clarify the core notion of Plato's theory of Forms, but also eliminate inconsistency between dialogues. Finally, my attempt will also help Platonic trope theorists carry their own burden by providing a simple account of the notion of exact resemblance without invoking an additional primitive concept.

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