A NOTE ON PLATO’S PARMENIDES 128 e 5-130 a 2

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Over the course of the last few years, there has been a prolonged controversy about the interpretation of \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \iota\sigma\alpha \) at Phaedo 74 c 1. During the course of this controversy, the usual assumption has been that an apparently parallel passage at Parmenides 129 b 1-3, where Plato employs the expression \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \delta\mu\omega\alpha \), may be used to cast light on the sense of \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \iota\sigma\alpha \). Gradually, it has become the more or less universally ¹ accepted view that the expressions \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \iota\sigma\alpha \) and \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \delta\mu\omega\alpha \) are alternative, though unusual, ways of referring to the respective Forms.

In this paper, I want to re-examine the Parmenides passage, and to offer some new arguments (as well as answer the older objections) in favour of the view that \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \delta\mu\omega\alpha \) does not refer to the Form. Unlike earlier accounts, however, I shall not take it for granted that the conclusions I shall be reaching will necessarily have implications for the interpretation of \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \iota\sigma\alpha \). While I do not wish to deny that there are similarities, I do not think that the similarities are quite so close as have been traditionally assumed. For example, despite the commonly noticed similarity in form between the expressions \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \delta\mu\omega\alpha \) and \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \iota\sigma\alpha \), even a superficial examination of the language of the Parmenides passage reveals a number of dissimilarities. Plato writes of \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \delta\mu\omega\alpha \) and \( \tau\alpha \; \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\muomega \) (not \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\muomega \)) ². It is generally assumed by commentators that in two later passages which mention \( \tau\alpha \; \pi\omicron\omicron\lambda\alpha \)

¹ A recent exception is to be found in the article by M. V. Wedin, \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \iota\sigma\alpha \) and the Argument at Phaedo 74b7-c5, Phronesis 22 (1977), 191-205. A useful bibliography of a number of the main articles is provided by Wedin at the end of his paper.

² J. M. Rist, Equals and Intermediates in Plato, Phronesis 9 (1964), 30, blur this difference by talking of \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \tau\alpha \; \delta\mu\omega\alpha \) and \( \tau\alpha \; \delta\mu\omega\alpha \); similarly he alternates between \( \alpha\nu\tau\alpha \; \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\muomega \) and \( \tau\alpha \; \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\muomega \). However, as I shall argue later, this particular carelessness with the text is of no real significance.
(129 b 6-7 and d 5), there is a parity of status between τὰ πολλά and ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία and τὰ ἀνώμοια. But here again, we notice that Plato merely talks of τὰ πολλά, not ἀυτὰ τὰ πολλά. So given that there are four specific references to things whose status has been the object of controversy, only in one of them is there an obvious parallel with the language of the Phaedo passage.

To begin, let us consider the status of ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία at 129 b 1. I shall pick up the threads with R. S. Bluck’s 3) interpretation, together with J. M. Rist’s criticisms of Bluck. Both agree that the key passage is to be found in the sentences b 1-4, εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία τις ἀπέφασεν ἀνόμοια γιγνόμενα ή τὰ ἀνώμοια ὁμοία, τέρας ἃν, οἷμαι, ἣν εἰ δὲ τὰ τοὺτων μετέχοντα ἀμφοτέρων ἀμφότερα ἀποφαίνει πεπονθότα, οὔδεν ἐμικεῖ, ὃ Ζήνων, ἀτόπον δοκεῖ εἶναι . . . Concerning these sentences, Bluck makes two observations. First of all, he contends that ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία are contrasted with things that partake of both Likeness and Unlikeness. In this respect, he is surely right; however, merely to say that ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία doesn’t establish that the phrase refers to anything other than the Form. Bluck’s second and more controversial claim is that the phrase refers to things which are simply alike, and may include a reference to the Form itself.

Rist begins his criticism with a textual point. He argues that Bluck’s first claim would have been clearer if he had said that “. . . ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία are contrasted with those things which partake of both ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία and ἀυτὰ τὰ ἀνώμοια, for it is hard to see how the τοὺτων can refer to anything but τὰ ὁμοία and τὰ ἀνώμοια” 4). Given this argument about the reference of τοὺτων, Rist contends that since only Forms, and not Form copies, admit of participation, we must take ἀυτὰ τὰ ὁμοία as another name of the Form.

If Rist is right in his claim about the reference of τοὺτων, it seems to me that his case is very strong indeed. But I do not think that his interpretation of the text has to be accepted. The relevant phrase is not τοὐτῶν simply, but rather τοὐτῶν . . . ἀμφοτέρων. Moreover, if we look at the use of ἀμφοτέρων in the context, matters

4) Rist, op. cit., 30.