Parmenides' First Attack on the Forms: Proclus and the Logical Structure of *Parmenides* 130b-e

1. The Aporetic First Part of Plato's *Parmenides*: Refutation or (Maieutic) Instruction?

At the beginning of the third book of his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, Proclus introduces his exposition on the Forms by listing four problems that should be discussed in any systematic survey of them.¹ These are the questions that will guide him through the next two books of his commentary: first, whether there are Forms at all; second, of what things there are Forms; third, what kind of entities Forms are; and fourth, how sensible particulars participate in Forms. It is only in the *Parmenides* that Plato deals with these questions in a systematic way. Admittedly, the first problem, about the existence of Forms, is not really discussed by Parmenides and the young Socrates, but rather assumed right from the start, when Socrates answers Parmenides' question whether he himself makes a distinction between the Forms themselves and the things partaking in them in the affirmative (*Parm.* 130b). Even though Proclus thinks the existence of Forms can hardly be doubted, he spends the next twenty pages of his commentary on various proofs that one could advance in support of them. The small section on the range of Forms (*Parm.* 130b-e), which occupies the remainder of the third book of Proclus' commentary, concerns the second problem in Proclus' list. Here Proclus goes through a systematic survey of things of which a Platonist may or may not accept Forms. This provides the basis for his exegesis of the passage, which he reads as a plea for a restrictive version of the theory of Forms. Finally, the entire fourth book of Proclus' commentary is devoted to the aporetic discussion about the Forms between Parmenides and the young Socrates (*Parm.* 130c-135b). Throughout the various *aporiai* that are discussed at length in this fourth book, Parmenides and Socrates deal, in reverse order, with the last two problems on

¹ In *Parm.* 784.12-18 Steel. For other references to the four problems in Proclus and Syrianus, see P. d'Hoine, 'Four Problems Concerning the Theory of Ideas: Proclus, Syrianus and the Ancient Commentaries on the *Parmenides*', in: G. Van Riel – C. Macé (eds.), *Platonic Ideas and Concept Formation in Ancient and Medieval Thought*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004, 9-29.

Proclus' list, namely with the doctrine of participation and with the question as to the nature of the Forms.²

The crucial idea behind this systematic treatment of the first part of the *Parmenides* is that its discussion of the Forms, which at first glance may appear to consist of nothing but a set of unresolved puzzles, actually contains Plato's most systematic teaching about the Forms, at least for those who are capable of looking beneath the surface of the text. In this sense the first part of the *Parmenides* may be considered dogmatic or instructive, rather than merely aporetic. Proclus time and again repeats that the aporetic form of the discussion serves a didactic purpose, which is mirrored in the dramatic set-up of the dialogue: in raising puzzles that the young and inexperienced Socrates is not yet able to solve, but which are by no means insoluble, the old Parmenides aims to guard us from possible misconceptions about the Forms and to bring Socrates – and the reader with him – to a more adequate understanding of the doctrine. According to Proclus, Parmenides indeed practises the maieutic method, inciting Socrates to develop his as yet imperfective grasp of the Forms.³ The aporetic outlook of the discussion in fact hides a dogmatic agenda.

However, in Proclus' commentary we also find traces of an older interpretation of the dialogue, upheld by readers less prone to attribute any positive doctrinal content to the first part of the dialogue but convinced that it served a rather critical or even destructive purpose. This alternative reading may at first sight have more affinities with those modern interpretations of the *Parmenides* that construct the first part of the dialogue as a self-criticism on the part of Plato, in the sense that Parmenides would be voicing genuine objections to or at least puzzles inherent in the theory of Forms such as we find it in earlier (middle) dialogues – and not merely to possible misconceptions of that theory, as Proclus would have it. Regardless of the question whether those objections are due and whether or not they can be answered, the idea is that Socrates in the *Parmenides* is incapable of addressing them properly. Along these lines, the main aim of the aporetic discussion in the first part of the *Parmenides* is to expose the

² For Proclus' interpretation of the *aporiai*, see C. Steel, 'L'anagogie par les apories', in: G. Boss – G. Seel (eds.), *Proclus et son influence*, Zürich: Éditions du Grand Midi, 1987, 101-128.

³ See e.g. in *Parm.* 833.14-15; 838.19-25; 849.2-3; 856.25-28; 873.31-32; 905.28-906.2; 907.8-18; 923.23-25; 971.13-22.

need for further dialectical training, and hence to provide a pretext for the second part, where such training is provided. It is to this aporetic reading that we should now turn in more detail.

2. The Problem of the Range of Forms: A Logical Reconstruction of the Argument

In two passages early in the fourth book of his commentary, Proclus relates how previous interpreters dealt with the first two issues raised in the discussion between Parmenides and the young Socrates, namely the short section on the range of Forms (*Parm.* 130b-e) and the dilemma of participation (*Parm.* 130e-131e). The first passage comes from the opening page of the fourth book, which marks the transition from Proclus' discussion of the second problem (the range of Forms) to the third problem (participation). In these lines, Proclus tells us how some of his predecessors approached the stretch of text pertaining to these two problems:

T1. Since Socrates in his arguments against Zeno has said that Forms both exist and are participated in by things here, and has advanced to the concept of the community of Forms through the things that are participated here (*Parm.* 128e5-130a2), some persons have at once concluded that Parmenides, as if warding off Socrates and his criticism of Zeno, takes a stand against both these notions of Socrates, that is, against the existence of Forms and against the process of participation. For in the preceding discussions⁴ Parmenides has contested the assertion that there are Forms, and in what follows⁵ will contend that sense objects do not participate in them, almost saying in plain words that even if we grant the existence and being of Forms, participation in them is impossible. Consequently, Forms do not exist, nor, if they did, would sensible things participate in them. (*in Parm.* 837.4-15 Steel; tr. Morrow-Dillon, modified)

⁴ *Parm.* 130b1-e4, i.e. in the section pertaining to Proclus' second problem, i.e. the one concerning the range of Forms.

⁵ *Parm.* 130e4-131e7, i.e. in the so-called 'dilemma of participation', which is the first argument belonging to the section about Proclus' third problem, i.e. the problem of participation.

Unlike Proclus, those whom Proclus is referring to here interpreted the aporetic part of the dialogue as a criticism of the Forms on the part of Parmenides, in that they took him to object both to the existence of Forms and to the doctrine of participation. This need not mean, of course, that they believed Parmenides' criticism to be successful. If they did, they could hardly have been (dogmatic) Platonists, yet in what follows we will have good reasons to think they were. What Proclus objects to these anonymous predecessors is primarily that they believed Parmenides' questioning had a critical purpose, rather than reading it as the maieutical conversation that Proclus takes it to be.⁶ In the lines immediately following the above quotation, Proclus relates the syllogistic reconstruction of the argument about the range of Forms which these interpreters relied on in their exegesis of the passage.⁷ A little further in the commentary, Proclus renders this syllogism a second time, in the context of a more elaborate discussion of how his anonymous predecessors formally reconstructed the logic of Parmenides' first two arguments. It is worth reading this passage to some extent, as it will form the basis of our discussion.⁸

T2. About both the previous argument⁹ and this one now before us¹⁰ I observe the same quarrel between the interpretations (ἐξηγήσεων). In each case those who accept the hypothetical proposition (συνημμένα) attack the minor premise (προσλήψεις), and those who accept the minor premise reject the hypothetical proposition. The earlier argument they state somewhat as follows: "if there are Forms, there are Forms of all things; but there are not Forms of all things, as you (Socrates), admit, hence there are no Forms." Those who suppose there are Forms of all things accept the hypothetical proposition, but reject the minor premise, and therefore say that Socrates is justly rebuked for not positing Forms of all things. They accept Parmenides and regard Socrates' caution as invalid. The others take the opposite position; they welcome the minor premise, and discredit the hypothetical proposition as incorrect. (Procl., in *Parm.* IV 856.9-28 Steel; tr. Morrow-Dillon, modified)

⁶ In *Parm.* 837.18-838.5 and esp. 838.19-20 Steel.

⁷ In *Parm.* 837.15-19 Steel.

⁸ [Reference removed for blind review]

⁹ I.e. the argument about the argument on the range of Forms (*Parm.* 130b1-e4).

¹⁰ I.e. the dilemma of participation (*Parm.* 130e-131e7), which Proclus is about to comment on.

The passage continues with the formal reconstruction of the participation argument, but that need not concern us here. It is interesting to see, however, how these anonymous interpreters construct both arguments as hypothetical syllogisms. The form employed here is known from Stoic logic as the ‘second demonstrable’. The terminology with which Proclus refers to the different premises of the argument (using the technical terms *συνημμένα* and *προσλήψεις*) is equally of Stoic provenance,¹¹ even though this should hardly surprise us. The use of hypothetical syllogisms to reconstruct the arguments found in Plato’s dialogues had of course long been part of the Platonic tradition, as e.g. the sixth chapter of Alcinous’s *Handbook* suggests, and Proclus himself makes ample use of them – as well as of the relevant Stoic terminology – elsewhere in his commentaries too.¹²

Yet it is striking how adequate the use of this hypothetical logic is in the context of the *Parmenides*. It cannot be a coincidence that the only example that Alcinous provides of what he calls a ‘mixed syllogism’ (i.e. what we are calling here a hypothetical syllogism, namely a syllogism composed of a hypothetical proposition and a categorical assertion as its two premises) is drawn from the second part of the *Parmenides*, as are nearly all the examples that he gives of so-called ‘pure’ hypothetical syllogisms (consisting of two hypothetical premises and a hypothetical conclusion).¹³ The hypotheses about the One in the second part of the dialogue are indeed particularly suited for being analysed in terms of a hypothetical dialectic.¹⁴ So even before asking ourselves whether or not the hypothetical syllogism provides an adequate rendering of the argument about the

¹¹ For this terminology, see e.g. the characterization of the ‘second demonstrable’ in Diog. Laert. VII 80.

¹² See e.g. *in Remp.* II 107.2-5; *in Alc.* 262.14-263.2 (here Proclus uses conversion by negation to analyze the argument); 254.20 ff.; *in Crat.* § 30, 10.23-11.1; § 33, 11.18-23; § 38, 12.24-27; § 46, 15.1-26; *in Tim.* I 439.2-11; cf. 444.10.

¹³ Cf. the observation made by J. Dillon in the notes to his translation, p. 81.

¹⁴ Cf. the judgement of Alcin., *Didasc.* 151.7-9. Yet Proclus himself, strangely enough and in spite of what he announces at *in Parm.* 1007.20-26, makes almost exclusive use of categorical syllogisms in the formal reconstructions that he provides in books six and seven of his commentary. The only place where he does take recourse to a hypothetical syllogism is 1104.21-24, where he also provides a reconstruction of the same argument by means of a categorical syllogism, thus suggesting that one and the same argument can at least sometimes be constructed both as a hypothetical syllogism and as a categorical one.

range of Forms,¹⁵ one cannot easily rid oneself of the impression that this logic is very well suited to the broader context of the dialogue. For someone who thinks that the dialectical exercise in the second part of the dialogue aims to provide the dialectical training that Socrates needs to overcome the difficulties raised in the *aporiai* about the Forms, it should have been tempting to think that the logic adopted in the discussion between Parmenides and Socrates about the Forms should in some relevant ways anticipate the hypothetical dialectic of the second part.

The hypothetical logic is of course also very well suited to what we know of Zeno's *reductio ad impossibile* arguments and to the way they are presented by Plato at the outset of our dialogue.¹⁶ The philosophical conversation of the *Parmenides* indeed starts at *Parm.* 127d-e with a discussion of Zeno's first argument against plurality. After having heard Zeno read the argument twice, Socrates paraphrases it as follows:

T3. Then Socrates, after he had heard it, asked Zeno to read the first hypothesis of the first argument again; and when he had read it, Socrates said, "Zeno, what do you mean by this: if things are many, they must then be both like and unlike, but that is impossible, because unlike things can't be like or like things unlike? That's what you say, isn't it?" "It is," said Zeno. "If it's impossible for unlike things to be like and like things unlike, isn't it then also impossible for them to be many? Because, if they were many, they would have incompatible properties." (Plato, *Parm.* 127d-e; tr. Gill – Ryan)

¹⁵ Since Proclus is aware that one and the same argument can sometimes be put both in a categorical form and in a hypothetical form (see the previous note), it would be an interesting question to ask whether and how the argument about the range of Forms could be constructed as a categorical syllogism. One could perhaps think of a syllogism like this: 'There are forms of all sensible particulars ('all that we see'). Hair is a sensible particular. Hence, there must be a form of hair.' Yet, such a categorical syllogism would of course no longer imply a refutation of the existence of Forms, but rather teach us how one should understand the doctrine. (Note, however, that Proclus at *in Parm.* 832.12-14 Steel relates a hypothetical syllogism proposed by one of his anonymous predecessors to prove the existence of a Form of dirt).

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that Proclus, in his *Commentary on Euclid's Elements*, constructs *reductio ad impossibile* arguments as hypothetical syllogisms 'of the second type': see *in Eucl.* 255.26-256.8; cf. K. Ierodiakonou, 'A Note on *Reductio ad impossibile* in Post-Aristotelian Logic', in: J.-B. Gourinat – J. Melaire (eds.), *Logique et dialectique dans l'Antiquité*, Paris: Vrin, 2016, 347-361 (esp. 355-6).

In his commentary on this passage, Proclus suggests that what Socrates is doing here is putting Zeno's argument into a hypothetical syllogism:

T4. He [i.e. Socrates] has set forth the whole argument very succinctly and clearly, having accurately identified the first hypothesis and seen the purpose of the argument as a whole. And if you want to consider each of its parts, you have the first hypothesis at the very beginning, the second after Zeno's assent, the minor premise in 'but this is impossible', and the conclusion in 'it is impossible that being is many'. Zeno develops each of these parts at length, but Socrates analyses the syllogism as those who are well-versed in dialectic do, taking the premises in their technical form and forming them into a figure.¹⁷ (Procl., in *Parm.* II 696.7-15 Steel; tr. Morrow – Dillon, modified)

In discussing the syllogism, Proclus uses the same technical terminology as he did in the case of the argument about the range of Forms. He also employs a syllogism of the same figure (*modus tollendo tollens*) – with only this difference, that he here adds the inverse proposition of the initial conditional as an additional hypothetical premise, presumably to better match Plato's text.¹⁸ It need not surprise us to find the same hypothetical logic employed in Zeno's argument and in Parmenides' objections to the theory of Forms. The discussion about the Forms was of course

¹⁷ On the presentation of Socrates as a logical expert: see also the references in Segonds and Luna's note *ad locum* (*Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, livre I, Tome I, 2me partie, p. 288 n.1).

¹⁸ This I take to be the only *formal* difference. There is of course another important difference, namely that in Zeno's arguments the apodosis of the hypothetical proposition contains a contradiction (which reduces the initial hypothesis to absurdity), whereas in the argument about the range of Forms the apodosis is not formally unacceptable, but only because it conflicts with an important assumption that Socrates presumably makes about the forms (namely that there cannot be Forms of such trivial things such as hair, mud and dirt). Yet Proclus himself seems to see this as a possible variant of the same logical structure, which is that of the Stoic 'second demonstrables'. At *in Parm.* 702.2-7, Proclus argues that a hypothesis can be overthrown either because what follows from it (i.e., presumably, the apodosis of the hypothetical clause) contains a plain contradiction (e.g. that the same thing is like and unlike) or an incompatibility of terms (e.g. that the same thing is man and horse), or – second option – because it conflicts with something previously accepted. The latter is the case for instance in geometry, where a *reductio ad absurdum* proof can be constructed by showing that what follows from the alternative assumption is inconsistent with the principles of geometry. In his analysis of *reductio ad absurdum* at *in Eucl.* 254.22-255.7, Proclus specifies that in the case of geometry the impossibility of the consequent can either be due to its being inconsistent with common notions, postulates or definitions, or with something that has been proved earlier. In the case of the argument from the *Parmenides* commentary that concerns us here, the apodosis of the argument (i.e. that there are Forms of all things) rather is something that Socrates simply is not ready to accept because of some previously formed conviction, without having to assume that this is something he has previously thought through very well or came to accept as an unshakable truth.

elicited by Socrates' own demand to apply Zeno's arguments to the intelligible realm and it is after all the Eleatic Parmenides who is leading the discussion. At any rate, in his discussion of the syllogism, we also see Proclus explicitly tracing the different premises of the argument back to Plato's text:

T5. The argument was this: 'If things are many, the same thing will be like and unlike; if the same thing is not like and unlike, things are not many; but it is impossible that the same thing should be both like and unlike; and therefore things are not many'. The first argument as a whole consists of two hypothetical propositions with a minor premise and a conclusion. Socrates asks to hear the first hypothesis of the first argument, namely this: 'If things are many, the same thing will be like and unlike.' For this is one of the three hypotheses. The second is, 'If the same thing is not like and unlike, things are not many'. The third is the minor premise, 'It is impossible that the same thing should be like and unlike'. Both the two hypothetical propositions and the minor premise are called hypotheses, and from them the asserted conclusion follows. (Procl., in *Parm.* II 695.1-13 Steel; tr. Morrow – Dillon, modified)

Now, since the hypothetical dialectic in the second part of the dialogue is assumed to be a more systematic development of Zeno's own reduction arguments,¹⁹ one can easily see how that second part provides a training that might help to solve the puzzles in the aporetic part of the dialogue, if those puzzles themselves are based on roughly similar, though no doubt much simpler, hypothetical arguments. Thus, for anyone who reads the first part of the dialogue as merely providing a pretext for the dialectical discussion of the second part, it would be quite suitable to interpret the puzzles about the Forms as hypothetical arguments. But, as we will see, this need not be the case for Proclus.

4. The Exegetical Motivation Behind the Logical Reconstruction

¹⁹ At least Proclus thinks it is: see in *Parm.* 997.13 ff. On Proclus' understanding of Eleatic dialectic in the *Parmenides*, see J. Dillon, 'Proclus and the Parmenidean Dialectic', in: J. Pépin – H.D. Saffrey (eds.), *Proclus, lecteur et interprète des anciens*, CNRS: Paris, 1987, 265-275, and D. Del Forno, 'Proclus on the Hypothetical Method and the Concept of ἰδιότης', *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 29, 2018, 45-58.

If we now leave the logic of the argument about the range of Forms aside for a moment, we can concentrate on how the argument actually relates to the text of which it attempts to render the logic. In the short passage under consideration (*Parm.* 130be), Parmenides first asks Socrates whether he accepts the distinction between the Forms themselves and the sensible particulars partaking in them. As we have seen, Proclus takes this to be a rhetorical question that aims to confirm the existence of Forms and provides the starting point for the entire discussion that follows. Without pausing to wait for Socrates' answer, Parmenides immediately continues by presenting Socrates with four different sets of things: 1) likeness, one, many, and all the other things mentioned by Zeno in the preceding discussion (thus including, presumably, quite general forms like identity and difference, and being and non-being); 2) the just, the beautiful and the good, and all other such things (i.e. all such evaluative notions as one uses in moral and aesthetic judgements); 3) man, fire, and water (i.e. natural species and elements); and 4) trivial and worthless items such as hair, mud and dirt. In each case he wants to know from Socrates whether or not he accepts Forms of such items. Socrates' answers show a decline in confidence. While he couldn't be more sure that there are Forms of the first two classes of items, he is more doubtful about the third and turns out to be quite puzzled about the fourth. In this last case, Socrates at first quickly dismisses Forms of hair, mud and dirt, declaring that there can't be anything more to them than 'what we see'. Yet he immediately confesses to have been quite troubled by them, since one might want to think that the same rule should apply to all classes of items. He eventually shies away from spending his time with such trivialities, out of fear for falling into a 'pit of nonsense'. In a final, enigmatic comment on the matter, however, Parmenides blames Socrates' youthful age for caring too much about what other people think of him and thus for reckoning such trivial items not worthy of consideration.

As we have seen, the anonymous interpreters whom we have mentioned earlier interpreted this argument in terms of a hypothetical syllogism aimed at the refutation of Forms. In their view, the passage should be constructed as an argument against the existence of Forms. Unlike Proclus, these interpreters do not take the opening question of the discussion – Parmenides' question whether Socrates distinguishes between Forms and sensible particulars – to imply a simple

confirmation of the existence of Forms, but rather take it as a hypothesis that needs investigation. They thus construct it as the *protasis* of the conditional: ‘*if there are Forms*, there should be Forms of all things’. Moreover, these anonymous interpreters must have read Parmenides’ final remark as expressing the idea that there is no reason to set limits on the range of Forms (presumably, if one accepts Forms in the first place). This is confirmed by Proclus’ comments on *Parm.* 130e:

T7. In thus rebuking Socrates’ expression of bewilderment Parmenides may appear to some persons to be himself positing Forms of all things, including the trivial, the most material, and the unnatural. For why would he rebuke Socrates, if he did not himself attribute the existence of these things to an ideal cause? (Procl., *In Parm.* 834.26-835.3 Steel; tr. Morrow-Dillon, slightly mod.)

In order to construct a refutation from this hypothetical premise, one needs of course a second premise to the effect that there are no Forms of all things. Proclus tells us that the anonymous interpreters indeed thought this was Socrates’ take on the issue. This must imply that they regarded Socrates’ initial unprompted denial of Forms of trivial items as implying a plain and final rejection of such Forms. This is also the position endorsed by Proclus, but in two passages in his commentary, Proclus again refers to some anonymous predecessors who defended this view on more logical grounds. Commenting on *Parmenides* 130c2-3, where Socrates gives voice to his puzzlement about Forms of natural kinds and elements, Proclus indeed writes the following:

T8. Let us also state, in a more logical fashion, as some (interpreters) put it, that (Socrates), trying to avoid the sorites, before expressing his denial about some items, found this state of doubt between full denial and assent. For it would be strange, and in no way characteristic of a man of science, for him to bring in denials immediately after his previous affirmations. So before he denies Forms of any objects, he first says he is puzzled about these that have just been put before him. Consequently, here again Socrates meets the issue fully, assenting, doubting, or denying, according to the measure of the reality of the things under consideration. (Procl., *in Parm.* 813.19-26 Steel; tr. Morrow-Dillon, modified)

A little further in the commentary, where he is concerned with *Parmenides* 130d3-9, i.e. with Socrates' ambivalent answer to the question whether or not he accepts Forms of trivialities, Proclus refers a second time to this logical interpretation of Socrates' attitude in the discussion:

T9. As we can proceed from what is common in the particulars to the one in them and then to the common term that is posterior to them, so also it may be possible to advance in this case to something else, the one prior to them all.²⁰ But then he sees that if he allows Forms of these things, he will be compelled, proceeding on the sorites model, to posit Forms of all things, including matter itself. (Procl., in *Parm.* 834.10-15 Steel; tr. Morrow-Dillon, modified)

These interpreters, with whom Proclus seems to sympathise on this occasion, take Socrates' position in the debate to shift from a straightforward confirmation of the first two classes of Forms, over doubt concerning the third class, to a clear-cut denial of the fourth. What is interesting is that they provided an explanation for Socrates' denial of Forms of trivialities in logical terms. Socrates does not accept Forms of trivial items, since he is afraid that otherwise he might fall victim to the sorites paradox. The sorites, or 'fallacy of the heap', is essentially a vagueness paradox, claiming that it is impossible to determine when a heap of sand from which ever more grains of sand are removed ceases to be a heap. It thus suggests that it is impossible to set strict boundaries or sharp criteria to distinguish between a heap and what is no longer a heap.²¹ Applied to our problem about the range of Forms, the idea presumably is that if one isn't able to come up with clear criteria to distinguish those things of which one should accept Forms from those of which one shouldn't, then one will be forced to introduce Forms of all things, even of what is entirely opposite to the intelligible nature of the Forms, namely pure matter. It is precisely to avoid this consequence that Socrates thinks the

²⁰ What Proclus alludes to here is the procedure to move from the observation of something common in particular things, first to the universal *in re*, and then to the abstracted universal (the universal *post rem*). The latter further allows to transition to the Platonic Form, which is a universal *ante rem*, as the cause of the common feature present in particulars.

²¹ Diog. Laert. II 108 credits the Megarian Eubulides with the invention of the paradox. On the ancient uses of the paradox, see now e.g. R.J. Hankinson, 'Self-Refutation and the "sorites"', in: D. Scott (ed.), *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*, Oxford: OUP, 2007, 351-373 (esp. 352 ff. and the literature quoted there).

introduction of ever new Forms should come to a stop at some point – that point being, presumably, where one reaches those things that are so trivial, worthless and immersed in matter that there is nothing more to them than what we see.²² However one interprets the paradox, the assumption of those who first applied it here must have been that Socrates is in any case convinced that the ideal world should have strict boundaries, i.e. that there cannot be Forms of ‘all things’, even though he doesn’t know precisely on which grounds he can put that boundary.

One would think that this point could easily be made without taking recourse to the sorites paradox. For this reason, I find it hard to imagine that anyone else could have come up with this interpretation than those interpreters who were eager to find logical subtleties on every page of the *Parmenides*. Even though there are no conclusive arguments to prove that the anonymous exegetes to whom Proclus is referring here are the same as those who first proposed the formal reconstruction of the hypothetical syllogism, it is tempting to identify them nonetheless.

5. Proclus’ Assessment of the Syllogism: Helpful, but Misleading

However that may be, we now know how the two premises of the hypothetical syllogism about the range of the Forms could be traced back to the actual text of the *Parmenides* passage. Together the two premises form, as we have seen, an

²² For the application of the sorites to our passage, see the note by Luna and Segonds to their edition of the passage: *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, livre III, tome 2, n.45 p. 207-210. According to Luna and Segonds Proclus thinks Socrates is aware that he doesn’t have any sound criterion to distinguish between those things of which there are Forms and those things of which there aren’t and that he will thus fall victim to the sorites. However, it seems more natural to read the passage to the effect that Socrates believes that he has to withdraw from Forms of trivialities since *otherwise* there will be no longer any way to stop positing ever new Forms of ever more material entities. In T8, Socrates introduces doubt, since he is aware that he cannot immediately change from complete assent to radical denial. In T9, Socrates senses that one cannot posit Forms for all common features of sensible particulars, since then there wouldn’t be any chance to put limits to the world of Forms. The way Proclus puts it, Socrates’ denial of Forms of trivialities seems to be a strategy to avoid the paradox, even though Socrates may still be confused about the precise criterion (he may wrongly take triviality or worthlessness as a criterion for denying Forms, thinking that if he would accept Forms of hair, mud and dirt, there would be no chance to avoid Forms of anything that is utterly material and base, including matter). On his own count, Proclus does have a criterion to block the sorites (and exclude Forms of hair, mud and dirt): see e.g. *in Parm.* 831.17-832.3 Steel.

argument against the existence of Forms. But that does not need imply that the argument is successful in destroying the hypothesis. To say that both premises have textual support in the dialogue and that together they entail the destruction of the hypothesis of the Forms is not yet to make any judgement about the truth of either of these premises. No dogmatic Platonist could have accepted the conclusion of the syllogism. Proclus told us in T2 that among his predecessors two strategies have been adopted to avoid the conclusion. Some of them apparently thought that the hypothetical proposition on which the entire argument hinges, and which renders Parmenides' position in the debate, was untenable. According to these interpreters, accepting the theory of Forms need not entail the acceptance of Forms of all things. Others took issue with Socrates' restrictive interpretation of the doctrine and hence they must have found no fault in accepting Forms of all things. Both strategies, it seems, are compatible with the idea that the young Socrates in the dialogue is insufficiently trained in dialectic to lay his finger on the weakness of the argument: either because he doesn't grasp the problematic nature of the hypothesis that Parmenides is inflicting on him, or because his own take on the issue of the range of Forms is flawed. In both cases, we may assume, only a more thorough dialectical training can help Socrates overcome the difficulties raised and thus save the theory of Forms.

As we will see in a moment, Proclus himself does not accept the syllogism as an adequate reconstruction of what is going on in the debate between Socrates and Parmenides. Yet apparently he did find it useful to report the syllogism in his own commentary. The syllogism allows him to present a state of the art on the problem of the range of Forms in the preceding commentary tradition, without referring to the advocates of the different views by name. It is well known that Proclus in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, contrary to what he does in for instance the *Timaeus* commentary, hardly calls any of his sources by name. This is certainly not because the *Parmenides* commentary relies any less on previous exegetical work. Apparently, the polished style and format of the commentary did not allow for much personal polemics and made Proclus prefer to focus on the different positions in the debate, rather than on the persons who actually held those positions.

We have indeed sufficient grounds to suppose that the two views on the range of Forms that are here distinguished *in abstracto* were actually defended by previous commentators on the *Parmenides*. The restrictive view on the range of Forms had been mainstream from Middle Platonism onwards, as Alcinous' *Handbook* testifies, if not already from the Old Academy.²³ It can hardly be doubted that previous commentators on the *Parmenides*, such as Iamblichus, whom Proclus extensively relies on in this work, had defended this view in their exegesis of the passage that concerns us here, as does Proclus in his own commentary. It has been argued that Amelius may have been among the anonymous interpreters who accepted Forms of all things, and his commentary on the *Parmenides* would have been the most obvious place to advance this view, but there may perhaps have been others as well.²⁴ That Proclus would be primarily targeting Neoplatonist interpretations of the dialogue need not exclude that the syllogism on which he relies for presenting these opinions could be of a much older date. For there is nothing implausible in the view that Proclus is employing a syllogistic reconstruction of the argument that had long been part of the exegetical tradition of the dialogue to distinguish between the different exegetical positions of his more immediate predecessors and to point to the different exegetical choices a commentator of the dialogue could make.

Be that as it may, Proclus does not believe that the argument should be constructed as an argument directed at the refutation of the Forms. We recall that, in his view, the *Parmenides* passage that we are concerned with here provides a positive teaching on two points: after a confirmation about the existence of Forms, Parmenides and Socrates simply provide instruction about the problem of the range of Forms. Proclus himself advocates a restrictive view on the range of Forms and he does not think that Parmenides' final remark points in a different direction. According to Proclus, Parmenides has no intention to urge Socrates to accept Forms of all things, neither to expose an incompatibility between Socrates' restrictive view on the range of Forms and his belief in their existence. All

²³ See Xenocrates' definition of a Form, which Proclus transmits in his *Commentary on the Parmenides* (888.12-28; esp. 14-15) and which indeed seems to set restrictions on the scope of the theory, as Proclus claims. For Alcinous, see *Didasc.* IX 163.23-31.

²⁴ **[Reference removed for blind review]**. Amelius may not have been the only Platonist who accepted Forms of all things, but there is no other known advocate of this controversial position and I do believe that Amelius is Proclus' main target in this passage.

Parmenides intends to do, is to encourage Socrates not to renounce to the study of the φαυλότατα, for even if he rightly denies Forms for them, they should be accounted for somehow and it is certainly not below the dignity of a philosopher to do so. This is what we can make up from Proclus' own exegesis of *Parmenides* 130e:

T10. But I think this rebuke was addressed not to Socrates,²⁵ but to those who consider that the generation of things so trivial and insignificant is uncaused. (...) That Socrates, in denying a formal cause of these trivial and particularly material things, also denies that they have any cause – this Parmenides inferred from Socrates' declaration that these things are only 'what we see'; for if he had seen that nothing is uncaused he would not have uttered this phrase. (Procl., in *Parm.* 835.3-5 and 22-6 Steel; tr. Morrow-Dillon)

This interpretation fits within Proclus' broader view on the first part of the dialogue. Parmenides has no intention to refute the hypothesis of the Forms, but wants to induce Socrates to improve his understanding of them by means of the maieutical method and to save him from possible misunderstandings.²⁶ Since Proclus regards the existence of Forms and the range of Forms as two separate problems, both of which imply positive instructions, there can be no way of constructing the argument as a refutation of the hypothesis of the Forms. Hence despite his adoption of the syllogism as a useful way to distinguish between the different exegetical positions held by his predecessors, on his own count Proclus does not accept the hypothetical syllogism as an adequate rendering of the logic of the argument.

6. The Syllogism on the Range of Forms and the Logical Interpretation of the *Parmenides*

²⁵ At in *Parm.* 835.4 one should read τοῦτον (with Cousin) instead of the manuscript reading τοῦτο, which was kept in the OCT edition (Steel).

²⁶ See the passages quoted above, n. 000.

This finally brings us to the obvious question who were the anonymous interpreters who first formulated the hypothetical syllogism to construct the passage that concerns us here. Elsewhere I have argued that the interpretation of the first part of the *Parmenides* in terms of the four problems can be traced back to Iamblichus,²⁷ which implies that the syllogism must antedate the Syrian philosopher. The proponents of the syllogistic reconstruction were Platonists, and more particularly dogmatic Platonists. The most natural context in which such a reconstruction could have been proposed is that of a commentary on the *Parmenides*. There is no reason to doubt that a dogmatic Platonist could have come up with a reading of the *Parmenides* according to which it is Parmenides' aim in the dialogue to refute the hypothesis of the Forms, provided that the refutation is either unsuccessful or does not affect the genuine hypothesis of the Forms – as Proclus' anonymous predecessors seem to have done.²⁸

In the prologue of his commentary, Proclus goes through a number of proposals that his predecessors had advanced to determine the *skopos* of the dialogue.²⁹ Like his master Syrianus, Proclus himself believes that the key to the dialogue is to be found in the discussion of the hypotheses in the second part of the *Parmenides*, which they read as a cryptic survey of Plato's theology. This is of course a variant of the typically Neoplatonic interpretation of the dialogue, which features a metaphysical interpretation, according to which the different hypotheses about the One go through the different levels of reality as they proceed from the First principle. Yet in the context of this prologue Proclus also discusses a few other interpretations of the dialogue that are at odds with his own. The first interpretations that he takes into consideration, are the so-called 'logical' interpretations of the dialogue, the advocates of which either think that the dialogue has a polemical aim, for instance to parody Zeno's arguments, or believe that the main purpose of the dialogue consists in logical exercise, i.e. presumably

²⁷ See P. d'Hoine, 'Four Problems Concerning the Theory of Ideas', p. 23-27.

²⁸ A priori a dogmatic Platonist who thought that Parmenides' arguments amount to a refutation of the Forms could have explained this posture in several ways: he could simply have claimed that, unlike Socrates, the Platonic Parmenides was not convinced by the hypothesis of the Forms, but a more plausible approach would have been to claim that Parmenides' arguments were merely dialectic, Parmenides playing as it were the devil's advocate.

²⁹ See in *Parm.* 630.15-645.6. See C. Steel, 'Une histoire de l'interprétation du *Parménide* dans l'Antiquité', in: M. Barbanti – F. Romano (eds.), *Il Parmenide di Platone e la sua tradizione*, Catania: CUECM, 2002, 11-40.

in the dialectical training that it provides in the hypothetical method.³⁰ Carlos Steel has brought this latter reading into connection with a Middle Platonic interpretation that classified the *Parmenides* as an expository or doctrinal dialogue (ὕφηγηματικός) about logic or dialectic (λογικός), of which we find traces in Diogenes Laertius, Alcinous and Albinus.³¹ Proclus tells us that the upholders of this interpretation divided the dialogue in three main chapters or κεφάλαια.³² The first chapter, which advances the *aporiai* about the Forms, in their view merely aims to establish the need for further dialectical training, 'by demonstrating that for those who turn to the study of being (i.e. the Forms) without mastering it (i.e. dialectic), even true hypotheses (i.e. such as the hypothesis of the Forms) are overturned' (in *Parm.* 634.13-15; tr. Morrow-Dillon). Thus, these commentators think that Parmenides is trying to refute the hypothesis of the Forms, while the young Socrates is unable to defend it due to his lack of experience in dialectic. In their view, the first chapter merely offers the pretext for the second chapter, which consists in a short statement of the hypothetical method in the transitioning section of the dialogue (*Parm.* 135b3-137b5), and for the third chapter (*Parm.* 136b6-165e1), which provides the required training in this method by applying it, by way of an example, to the hypotheses about the One. This logical interpretation is, I take it, the most natural context in which the syllogistic reconstruction of our argument could have been proposed. The interpretation of the argument about the range of Forms in terms of a hypothetical syllogism makes perfect sense for one who thinks that the method developed in the second part of the *Parmenides* provides the tools to unravel the *aporiai* of the first part. Moreover, this interpretation has no problem to accommodate, or rather requires, that the aim of the first part of the dialogue is merely aporetic and makes no positive claims about the theory of Forms. It also suggests a vivid interest in the logical subtleties that can be found in the dialogue, or perhaps even a willingness to interpret the dialogue in terms of such logical features as formal

³⁰ The logical interpretations of the dialogue are discussed at in *Parm.* 630.15-635.18, as well as in a parallel text from the *Platonic Theology*: see *Theol. plat.* I 8-9. For the logical interpretation of the dialogue, see Carlos Steel, 'Proclus et l'interprétation 'logique' du *Parménide*', in: L.G. Benakis (ed.), *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale*, Turnhout: Brepols, 1997, 67-92.

³¹ See Steel, 'L'interprétation logique du *Parménide*', 74-75.

³² in *Parm.* 634.6-13 Steel.

sylogisms and logical paradoxes, which are well-known from other Middle Platonic texts.³³

All these elements suggest that we should credit the anonymous, presumably Middle Platonic interpreters of the dialogue with the syllogistic reconstruction of the argument that we have discussed in this paper. If that is correct, then the argument that we have analysed offers a nice example of the methods and tools that were used in the interpretation of the first part of the dialogue by those who thought the *Parmenides* was primarily concerned with logic or dialectic. This interpretation, with which Proclus presumably became acquainted through the commentaries of closer predecessors, such as Iamblichus and possibly Plutarch of Athens, thus made its way to the masterly synthesis of the ancient exegeses of the dialogue that his own *Commentary on the Parmenides* is.

³³ Once again one may think of chapter VI of Alcinous' *Didascalicus* as testimony for this practice. Proclus' own qualification of the interpretation of Socrates' puzzlement in terms of the sorites as 'λογικώτερον' (*in Parm.* 813.19) may but need not hint that it was propounded in the context of such 'logical' interpretations of the dialogue.