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THE ARGUMENT FROM RELATIVES

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1. Introduction

In *Metaphysics A 9* Aristotle explains why none of the arguments for Platonic Forms is successful:

ἔτι δὲ καθ' οὓς τρόπους δείκνυμεν ὅτι ἔστι τὰ εἶδη, κατ' οὐθένα φαίνεται τούτων· ἐξ ἐνίων μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἀνάγκη γίγνεσθαι συλλογισμόν, ἐξ ἐνίων δὲ καὶ οὐχ ὧν οἰόμεθα τούτων εἶδη γίγνεται. κατὰ τε γὰρ τοὺς λόγους τοὺς ἐκ τῶν ἐπιστημῶν εἶδη ἔσται πάντων ὅσων ἐπιστήμαι εἰσὶ, καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἐν ἐπὶ πολλῶν καὶ τῶν ἀποφάσεων, κατὰ δὲ τὸ νοεῖν τι φθαρέντος τῶν φθαρτῶν· φάντασμα γάρ τι τούτων ἔστιν. ἔτι δὲ οἱ ἀκριβέστεροι τῶν λόγων οἱ μὲν τῶν πρὸς τι ποιούσιν ἰδέας, ὧν οὐ φαμεν εἶναι καθ' αὐτὸ γένος, οἱ δὲ τὸν τρίτον ἄνθρωπον λέγουσιν. (990^b8–17)¹

Further, of the ways in which we prove that the Forms exist, none brings them to light; for from some the conclusion does not necessarily follow, while from others it follows that there are also Forms of things of which we do not think there are Forms. For according to the arguments from the sciences there will be Forms of all things of which there are sciences; and according to the one over many there will also be Forms of negations; and according to the argument from thinking of something when it has perished there will be Forms of perishable things, since there is an appearance of these. Further, of the more accurate arguments, some make Forms of relatives, of which we say there is no by-itself kind, while others speak of the third man.

Alexander of Aphrodisias discusses these lines at *In Metaph.* 77. 34–85. 12 Hayduck, a section of his commentary that is thought to rely heavily on Aristotle's lost treatise *Peri ideōn*. In that treatise, the suggestion goes, Aristotle had given a more extensive treatment of the Platonist arguments he mentions only briefly in the *Meta-*

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¹ These lines are repeated, with small changes, at *Metaph.* *M* 4, 1079^a4–13.

physics; Alexander has access to the *Peri ideōn*, and draws from it in order to cast light on *Metaph.* 990^b8–17.²

My subject in this paper is the Platonist argument that ‘establishes Forms from relatives [ἐκ τῶν πρὸς τι κατασκευάζων ἰδέας]’, outlined by Alexander at *In Metaph.* 82. 11–83. 17.³ Through a close analysis of this short but difficult passage, I shall attempt to explain how this argument for Platonic Forms was supposed to work. The argument has received a fair bit of scholarly attention,⁴ but little consensus has emerged about its basic structure. My aim is to revive and defend what seems to me to be a promising but unjustly neglected line of interpretation—originally suggested by Suzanne

² See G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato’s Theory of Forms* [*On Ideas*] (Oxford, 1993), 30–4. In *Metaph.* 79–85 is often said to preserve ‘fragments’ of the *Peri ideōn* (see e.g. Fine, *On Ideas*, 1). I am sceptical of the claim that Alexander is quoting passages from the *Peri ideōn* in these pages; nevertheless, it does seem to me likely that the *Peri ideōn* was Alexander’s main source of information about the Platonist arguments and Aristotelian criticisms mentioned at *Metaph.* 990^b8–17.

³ I shall refer to this argument, as have others, as ‘the Argument from Relatives’. It may be worth entering a couple of caveats about this name. First, it should not be taken to imply that the argument establishes Forms *only* of relatives. Alexander later describes the argument as establishing Forms ‘also [καί] of relatives’ (83. 17, 83. 22–3, 85. 7), the implication being that it establishes some non-relative Forms as well. Second, the name suggests that there was only one Platonist argument that established Forms of (or ‘from’) relatives. Yet in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle speaks of several ‘more accurate’ arguments that make Forms of relatives (note the plural ‘οἱ μὲν’ at *Metaph.* 990^b16). Alexander provides an account of only one such argument.

⁴ The literature on the argument includes: L. Robin, *La Théorie platonicienne des idées et des nombres d’après Aristote* (Paris, 1908), 19–21, 603–8; H. F. Cherniss, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, vol. i [*Criticism of Plato*] (Baltimore, 1944), 229–32; P. Wilpert, *Zwei aristotelische Frühschriften über die Ideenlehre* (Regensburg, 1949), 41–4; S. Mansion, ‘La critique de la théorie des Idées dans le *Περὶ ἰδεῶν* d’Aristote’ [‘Critique’], *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 47 (1949), 169–202 at 181–3 (repr. in S. Mansion, *Études aristotéliennes: recueil d’articles* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1984), 99–132); G. E. L. Owen, ‘A Proof in the *Περὶ ἰδεῶν*’ [‘Proof’], *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 77 (1957), 103–11 (repr. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics* (London, 1965), 293–312, and in G. E. L. Owen, *Logic, Science and Dialectic* (London, 1986), 165–79); W. Leszl, *Il ‘De ideis’ di Aristotele e la teoria platonica delle idee* [*De ideis*] (Florence, 1975), 185–224; R. Barford, ‘A Proof from the *Peri ideōn* Revisited’ [‘Revisited’], *Phronesis*, 21 (1976), 198–218; T. H. Irwin, ‘Plato’s Heracliteanism’ [‘Heracliteanism’], *Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1977), 1–13 at 11; C. J. Rowe, ‘The Proof from Relatives in the *Peri ideōn*: Further Reconsideration’ [‘Reconsideration’], *Phronesis*, 24 (1979), 270–81; Fine, *On Ideas*, 142–70; D. Baltzly, ‘Plato, Aristotle, and the λόγος ἐκ τῶν πρὸς τι’ [‘Lógos’], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 15 (1997), 177–206; M. Crubellier, ‘Deux arguments de la *Métaphysique* à propos du statut catégoriel des formes platoniciennes’ [‘Deux arguments’], *Kairos*, 9 (1997), 57–78 at 67–75.

Mansion—according to which the argument proceeds by *reductio ad absurdum*.⁵

The passage runs as follows:⁶

[I] ἐφ' ὧν ταυτόν τι πλείονων κατηγορεῖται μὴ ὁμώνυμῶς, ἀλλ' ὡς μίαν τινὰ δηλοῦν φύσιν, ἥτοι τῷ κυρίως τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ κατηγορουμένου σημαίνοντα εἶναι ταῦτα ἀληθεύεται κατ' αὐτῶν, ὡς ὅταν ἄνθρωπον λέγωμεν Σωκράτην καὶ Πλάτωνα, ἢ τῷ εἰκόνας αὐτὰ εἶναι τῶν ἀληθινῶν, ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν γεγραμμένων ὅταν τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατηγορῶμεν (δηλοῦμεν γὰρ ἐπ' ἐκείνων τὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰκόνας τὴν αὐτὴν τινὰ φύσιν ἐπὶ πάντων σημαίνοντες), ἢ ὡς τὸ μὲν αὐτῶν ὄν τὸ παράδειγμα, τὰ δὲ εἰκόνας, ὡς εἰ ἀνθρώπους Σωκράτη τε καὶ τὰς εἰκόνας αὐτοῦ λέγομεν. (82. 11–83. 6)

[II] κατηγοροῦμεν δὲ τῶν ἐνταῦθα τὸ ἴσον αὐτὸ ὁμώνυμῶς αὐτῶν κατηγορούμενον· οὔτε γὰρ ὁ αὐτὸς πᾶσιν αὐτοῖς ἐφαρμόζει λόγος, οὔτε τὰ ἀληθῶς ἴσα σημαίνοντα κινεῖται γὰρ τὸ ποσὸν ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ μεταβάλλει συνεχῶς καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀφωρισμένον. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἀκριβῶς τὸν τοῦ ἴσου λόγον ἀναδεχόμενον τῶν ἐνταῦθά ἐστὶ τι. ἀλλὰ μὴν ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ὡς τὸ μὲν παράδειγμα αὐτῶν τὸ δὲ εἰκόνα· οὐδὲν γὰρ μᾶλλον θάτερον θατέρου παράδειγμα ἢ εἰκῶν. (83. 6–12)

[III] εἰ δὲ καὶ δέξαιτό τις μὴ ὁμώνυμον εἶναι τὴν εἰκόνα τῷ παραδείγματι, ἀεὶ ἔπεται ταῦτα τὰ ἴσα ὡς εἰκόνας εἶναι ἴσα τοῦ κυρίως καὶ ἀληθῶς ἴσου. (83. 12–14)

[IV] εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, ἔστι τι αὐτόισον καὶ κυρίως, πρὸς ὃ τὰ ἐνθάδε ὡς εἰκόνας γίνονται τε καὶ λέγεται ἴσα, τοῦτο δὲ ἔστιν ἰδέα, παράδειγμα [καὶ εἰκῶν]⁷ τοῖς πρὸς αὐτὸ γινόμενοις. (83. 14–17)

[I] In those cases in which some same thing is predicated of many things, not homonymously, but so as to indicate some single nature, these [predications] are made truly about these things either (a) by [each thing] being strictly what is signified by the predicate, as when we call Socrates and Plato human beings, or (b) by their being images of the true ones, as when we predicate human being of painted humans (for in those cases we indicate the images of human beings, signifying the same particular nature in all of them), or (c) because one of them is the paradigm, the others images, as if we were to call both Socrates and the images of him human beings. (82. 11–83. 6)

[II] But when we predicate the equal itself of the ones here, we predicate it of them homonymously. For the same account does not apply to all of

⁵ See Mansion, 'Critique', 182–3 n. 42. I should mention at the outset that although I agree with Mansion's proposal that the argument proceeds by *reductio ad absurdum*, my account of the argument will differ considerably from hers.

⁶ I use Harlfinger's edition of the *recensio vulgata*: 'Edizione critica del testo del "De ideis" di Aristotele', in Leszl, *De ideis*, 15–39. The fourfold division of the passage is my own.

⁷ Deleted by Harlfinger.

them, and we do not signify things that are truly equal, for the quantity in the sensibles changes and alters continually, and is not determinate. But none of the ones here receives the account of the equal precisely. But then nor by one of them being a paradigm, another an image; for one is no more a paradigm or an image than another. (83. 6–12)

[III] But if indeed one were to accept that the image is not homonymous with the paradigm, it always follows that these equals are equals as images of what is strictly and truly equal. (83. 12–14)

[IV] But if this is the case, then there is something that is an Equal-itself and is strictly [equal], by relation to which the ones here, as images, both come to be and are called equals; and this is a Form, a paradigm of the things that come to be [equal] by relation to it. (83. 14–17)

2. The classification in part I

Part I of the passage is comparatively straightforward. In it, the Platonist proponent of the argument (henceforth: ‘the Platonist’) lays the groundwork for what follows by distinguishing three different types of non-homonymous predication.

I begin with some definitions of non-homonymous and homonymous predication.

Non-homonymous predication. A predicate, F ,⁸ is predicated of a number of items (x, y, z, \dots) *non-homonymously* if and only if

- (i) it is true that each of the items (x, y, z, \dots) is (an) F ,

and

- (ii) the term ‘ F ’ means the same thing as applied to each of the items.⁹

The predicate human being is predicated of Socrates and Plato non-

⁸ I take the predicates (the things-predicated, τὰ κατηγορούμενα) at issue in our passage to be non-linguistic rather than linguistic items. For example, I take the predicate ὁ ἄνθρωπος (the example predicate in part I) to be the *universal* human being, as opposed to the *expression* ‘human being’. This is how predicates are conceived elsewhere in Alexander’s discussion of the Platonist arguments mentioned at *Metaph.* 990^b8–17. See e.g. 80. 8–15 (cf. 81. 10–11), 83. 34–84. 1, 84. 22–7. In each of these passages the Platonist is presented as identifying predicates with Platonic Forms, which are obviously non-linguistic items. In these passages, then, predicates are not words but things, πράγματα.

⁹ Alternatively, we might put it as follows: a predicate F is predicated of some number of items non-homonymously if and only if (i) it is true that each of the items is (an) F , and (ii) there is a single account or definition of ‘ F ’ that applies to all of them. Cf. *Cat.* 1^a1–6 on homonyms.

homonymously. Both are human beings, and the term ‘human being’ means the same thing as applied to each of them.

Homonymous predication. A predicate F is predicated of a number of items (x, y, z, \dots) *homonymously* if and only if

- (i) it is true that each of the items (x, y, z, \dots) is (an) F ,

but

- (ii) the term ‘ F ’ *does not* mean the same thing as applied to each of the items.

The predicate sharp is predicated homonymously of a sharp knife and a sharp note: both are sharp, but the term ‘sharp’ means one thing as applied to the knife, and another thing as applied to the note.

With these definitions in place we can now take a closer look at part I’s three types of non-homonymous predication. I label them ‘strict predication’, ‘non-strict predication’, and ‘mixed predication’, respectively.¹⁰ Strict predication occurs when a predicate F is predicated of several items non-homonymously, and each of these items is *strictly* ($\kappa\rho\upsilon\acute{\iota}\omega\varsigma$) F or *truly* ($\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\acute{\omega}\varsigma$) F (82. 13–83. 2). The predicate human being is predicated in this way of Socrates and Plato: it is predicated of them non-homonymously, and both Socrates and Plato are strictly (or truly) human beings.

The Platonist’s second type of non-homonymous predication, non-strict predication, occurs when a predicate F is predicated of several items non-homonymously, and these items are not themselves strictly or truly F , but are *images* of what is strictly or truly F .¹¹ At 83. 2–4 we are given the example of ‘painted humans’ ($οἱ \gamma\epsilon\gamma\rho\alpha\mu\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nuοι$). Suppose you are standing in the Metropolitan Museum, looking at Jacques-Louis David’s *The Death of Socrates*. The Platonist’s claim is this: first, the predicate human being is (correctly) predicated of each of the figures in the painting; you may point to any one of them, and correctly say of it, ‘That is a human being’. (Contrast the case in which you say of one of the figures, ‘That is a

¹⁰ These labels should not be taken to imply that it is only the first kind of non-homonymous predication that is predication ‘in the strict sense’. They are all genuine kinds of predication; the labels are instead meant to reflect certain facts about the subjects of predication in each type of case.

¹¹ The ‘true ones’ ($\tau\acute{\alpha} \acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\omega\acute{\alpha}$) at 83. 2 are clearly those F s that are truly ($\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\acute{\omega}\varsigma$) or strictly ($\kappa\rho\upsilon\acute{\iota}\omega\varsigma$) F .

horse'.) Second, the term 'human being' means the same thing as applied to each of the figures in the painting. Obviously, none of these figures is *truly* (*ἀληθῶς*) a human being; they are all mere images of true human beings—of Socrates himself, of Crito, of Plato, and so on.¹²

The final type of non-homonymous predication, mixed predication, occurs when a predicate *F* is predicated of several items non-homonymously, and one of these items is a paradigm *F*, while the others are images of a paradigm *F*. The predicate human being is said to be predicated in this way of Socrates and his images (83. 4–6). The Platonist holds that when one speaker says, 'That is a human being', pointing at Socrates himself, and a second speaker utters the same words, pointing at a depiction of Socrates in a painting, (1) both speakers say something true; and (2) the expression 'human being' means the same thing on each occasion. As is often noted,¹³ this contrasts strikingly with the Aristotelian view of this sort of predication, according to which the predicate human being is predicated *homonymously* of Socrates and his images.¹⁴

(I am tempted to say that mixed predication should be extended to cover cases in which *more than one* of the subjects of predication is a paradigm *F*. If 'human being' means the same thing as applied to Socrates and to Plato, *and* it means the same thing as applied to Socrates and to the images of Socrates, then it must mean the same thing as applied to Socrates, to Plato, and to the images of Socrates. If mixed predication were not to cover such cases, then part I's classification of types of non-homonymous predication would fail to be exhaustive—which seems to be contrary to what the Platonist intends.)

We may summarize part I of the passage as follows. If a predicate *F* is predicated of several items non-homonymously (that is, if each of the items is (an) *F*, and if the term '*F*' means the same thing as applied to each of them), then *either*

¹² The Platonist's somewhat paradoxical-sounding position is that it can be true that a thing is (an) *F* even when that thing is not 'truly *F*' or 'strictly *F*' or 'a true *F*'. It is true that the figures in David's painting are human beings, but they are not *truly* human beings.

¹³ See e.g. Owen, 'Proof', 104–5; Baltzly, 'Λόγος', 180.

¹⁴ See e.g. *DA* 412^b20–2: 'when [its sight] fails, [the eye] is no longer an eye, except homonymously, like the stone eye and the painted eye [*ἢς ἀπολειπούσης οὐκέτ' ὀφθαλμός, πλὴν ὁμωνύμως, καθάπερ ὁ λίθινος καὶ ὁ γεγραμμένος*]'. Cf. also *Meteor.* 390^a10–13; *PA* 640^b36–641^a3; *Pol.* 1253^a20–3. *Cat.* 1^a2–6 may make a similar point. (I say 'may', because the interpretation of the example there is controversial: see Owen, 'Proof', 104 n. 6.)

- (a) each of the items is strictly or truly F (=strict predication); or
- (b) none of the items is strictly or truly F , but each is an image of a strictly or truly F paradigm (=non-strict predication); or
- (c) one (at least) of the items is a paradigm F , whereas the others are images of a paradigm F (=mixed predication).

It seems that this classification is intended to be exhaustive, and indeed we shall see later on that the Platonist's argument can only be successful if there are no other types of non-homonymous predication beyond the types distinguished here. But why, we might ask, does the Platonist take the classification to be exhaustive? We are given no explanation of this, and so to answer this question we are forced to go beyond the text.¹⁵ I want to suggest that the Platonist's commitment to the exhaustiveness of the classification was probably a result of his commitment to the following disjunctive principle:

For any predicate F , if F is predicated of x , then either (I) x is strictly or truly F , or (II) x is an image of what is strictly or truly F .

From this principle it follows that when a predicate F is predicated of a number of items non-homonymously, there can only be three possibilities: (a) that each of the items is strictly or truly F ; (b) that each of the items is an image of what is strictly or truly F ; or (c) that some of the items are strictly or truly F , while the others are images of what is strictly or truly F . This is very close to the claim that strict, non-strict, and mixed predication exhaust the possible types of non-homonymous predication. It is reasonable, therefore, to suspect that the Platonist took the classification given in part I to be exhaustive *because he accepted the disjunctive principle*.

Of course, this immediately raises the question of why the Platonist should have accepted that principle. I speculate that the reasoning would have gone something like this. (1) Take the predicate human being. This predicate clearly belongs to real-life human beings. (2) The predicate also seems to belong to the *images* of real-life

¹⁵ As far as I am aware, the question of why part I's classification might be thought to be exhaustive has not previously been raised in the literature on the argument. But it is a question worth asking, because it is not immediately obvious why there should not be other types of non-homonymous predication, and at the same time it seems that, on any reasonable interpretation of the argument, the exhaustiveness of the threefold classification is going to be vital to the argument's success.

human beings. At any rate, when someone, standing in front of *The Death of Socrates*, points to the figure of Socrates and says, ‘That is a human being’, they have apparently said something true. (They would have been wrong to say, for example, ‘That is a horse’.) This suggests that the predicate human being belongs to the figure of Socrates in the painting.¹⁶ (3) The predicate human being appears to be predicated of no other sorts of entity besides real-life human beings, on the one hand, and their images, on the other. There seem to be no other sorts of entity which can correctly be described as human beings. (4) So, if the predicate human being is predicated of a thing, there seem to be just these two options: either this thing is a real-life human being (that is, something that is ‘strictly’ or ‘truly’ a human being), or else it is an image of a real-life human being.

The Platonist may then have assumed that what is observed to hold for the predicate human being (and for other predicates like it: horse, cow, and so on) holds in general, for *all* predicates. If it does, then, for any predicate *F*, if *F* is predicated of *x*, then either (I) *x* is something that is strictly or truly *F*, or (II) *x* is an image of what is strictly or truly *F*. And this is the disjunctive principle.

3. The opening sentence of part II (83. 6–7)

In the rest of the argument the Platonist puts the classification of part I to work, using it to argue for the existence of the Form of Equal. From this point onwards, however, the going becomes much tougher. We must begin by getting clear on the meaning of the opening sentence of part II:

κατηγορούμεν δὲ τῶν ἐνταῦθα τὸ ἴσον αὐτὸ ὁμωνύμως αὐτῶν κατηγορούμενον.
(83. 6–7)

But when we predicate the equal itself [*to ison auto*] of the ones here, we predicate it of them homonymously.¹⁷

¹⁶ This step in the argument might be challenged in various ways. For example, has the person who says, ‘That is a human being’, pointing at the depiction of Socrates, really said something true? Or have they said something that is literally false, but thereby *conveyed* something true (e.g. ‘That is a representation of a human being’)? Maybe the latter—but I am not claiming that the argument I am presenting here is unimpeachable. It is simply my best guess as to how the disjunctive principle might have been arrived at.

¹⁷ A more literal translation would be: ‘But we predicate the equal itself of the ones here, it being predicated of them homonymously.’ For discussion see Barford, ‘Revisited’, 210, and Fine, *On Ideas*, 243 n. 18.

I start with the phrase ‘*to ison auto*’. The first point to note is that this phrase looks to be an instance of the familiar Platonic formula ‘*auto to F*’ (‘the *F* itself’).¹⁸ Now of course, instances of this formula often refer to Platonic Forms, the unchanging, intelligible beings of which the inhabitants of the sensible world are images or likenesses. And so one’s initial inclination—given that we seem to have here an instance of the ‘*auto to F*’ formula—may be to read the opening sentence of part II as a claim about the Platonic Form of Equal, understood as a non-sensible paradigm, and its relation to its many sensible participants (‘the ones [i.e. the equals] here’). This inclination should be resisted, however. The obvious difficulty with this reading is that it would be unlikely for the Platonist to be making such a claim about a non-sensible, paradigmatic Form of Equal at this early stage in the argument. The claim at 83. 6–7 presupposes that there *is* such a thing as the equal itself (whatever it is). Yet a non-sensible, paradigmatic Form of Equal is the very thing the Argument from Relatives seeks to establish. Its existence cannot be presupposed here.

We would do better to adopt a proposal of Gail Fine’s. Fine suggests that the phrase ‘*to ison auto*’ at 83. 7 refers ‘neutrally’ to the property of equality.¹⁹ As she points out, instances of the ‘*auto to F*’ formula do not invariably refer to (non-sensible, paradigmatic) Platonic Forms. The formula is sometimes used simply as a way of picking out the property or universal—the *F*, or *F*-ness—as contrasted with the many *F*s.²⁰ And one can accept the existence of the property of *F*-ness without accepting that there exists a (non-sensible, paradigmatic) Platonic Form of *F*-ness.

Following Fine, then, I think that we should understand ‘*to ison auto*’ at 83. 7 as referring (‘neutrally’) to the property of equality.²¹

¹⁸ So e.g. Mansion, ‘Critique’, 182 n. 42; Irwin, ‘Heracleiteanism’, 11; Fine, *On Ideas*, 17; Baltzly, ‘Λόγος’, 179.

¹⁹ *On Ideas*, 150; see also 288 n. 54. And cf. Cherniss, *Criticism of Plato*, 230. Cherniss does not discuss the phrase explicitly, but his paraphrase of the passage suggests that he too takes it to refer to the property of equality.

²⁰ e.g. ‘*αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν*’ at *H.Ma.* 286 D 8, 288 A 9, 289 C 3, D 2, 292 C 9. Cf. *Prot.* 330 D 8–E 1; *Theaet.* 146 E 9–10; *Euthphr.* 6 D 10–11, E 3; *Rep.* 4, 435 B 1–2.

²¹ This seems preferable to Owen’s interpretation of ‘*τὸ ἴσον αὐτό*’ (‘Proof’, 103, 105–6). Owen takes the expression to refer to the (linguistic) predicate ‘absolutely equal’, a predicate which in his view is synonymous with the predicate ‘strictly [κυρίως] equal’. But ‘*τὸ ἴσον αὐτό*’ appears to be an instance of the Platonic ‘*αὐτὸ τὸ F*’ formula, and it seems unlikely that the ‘*αὐτό*’, as it appears in that formula, has the force of the adverb ‘*κυρίως*’. Consider, for example, the distinction at *Rep.* 476 B–C

But what is it for the equal itself—understood as the property of equality—to be predicated of a thing? Fine holds that predicating the equal itself of x is a matter of *defining* equality in terms of x .²² She suggests that the expression ‘the ones here’ (‘τῶν ἐνταῦθα’) at 83. 6 should be understood as referring not—as most commentators suppose—to sensible equal objects (such as equal sticks and stones), but instead to ‘sensible properties’: the property of being two centimetres long, the property of being three centimetres long, and so on.²³ ‘Predicating the equal itself of the ones here’ is, therefore, on Fine’s view, a matter of defining equality in terms of one or more of these sensible properties. She takes the Platonist’s claim at 83. 6–7 to be that if we define equality in terms of such sensible properties, we shall be forced to admit that equality is ‘homonymous’—in other words, that it is not really a single, unitary property at all, but is *many* properties. (Just as sharpness is not a single, unitary property, but is many properties: the property of being good for cutting or slicing, the property of being of a relatively high pitch, and so on.)

I favour a different understanding of what it means for the equal itself (the property of equality) to be predicated of a thing. It is preferable, I think, to understand ‘the equal itself is predicated of x ’ as the claim that the property of equality *belongs to* x . On this view, the equal itself is predicated of Socrates just in case Socrates has the property of being equal (to something or other).²⁴ Similarly, the pale itself is predicated of Socrates just in case Socrates has the property of being pale, the large itself is predicated of Socrates just in case Socrates has the property of being large (relative to something or other), and so on.

between beautiful things (καλὰ πράγματα) and ‘αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν’ or ‘αὐτὸ κάλλος’. This is surely a distinction between the various things that have the property of being beautiful, on the one hand, and ‘Beauty itself’, on the other—not a distinction between the various beautiful things and ‘that which is absolutely (or strictly) beautiful’. (It may of course be true that Beauty itself *is* absolutely beautiful; what I am denying is that this is what ‘αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν’ means.)

²² See *On Ideas*, 150: parts II–IV (83. 6–17) ‘are not asking what things have the property of *being equal*; they are asking what has the property of *being the equal itself*, i.e. what has the property of being the property of equality. Another way of putting the concern of [parts II–IV] would be to say that they want to know what the property of equality is, or how it is to be defined.’

²³ *On Ideas*, 151. Cf. also Irwin, ‘Heracleiteanism’, 11.

²⁴ So ‘the equal itself is predicated of Socrates’ means the same thing as ‘the equal is predicated of Socrates’.

This interpretation is supported by an examination of the neighbouring discussions of the ‘One over Many’ argument (*In Metaph.* 80. 8–81. 22) and the Third Man (83. 34–85. 12). In both these passages the Platonist is characterized as holding that Platonic Forms are predicated of particulars—for example, that the Form of Human Being (*ὁ ἀνθρώπου*) is predicated of particular human beings (Socrates, Plato, etc.).²⁵ The view here being attributed to the Platonist is evidently not that the Form of Human Being is *defined* in terms of the particular human beings. The claim is rather—to use the conventional Platonic terminology—that the particular human beings ‘participate in’ or ‘share in’ the Form of Human Being. I suggest that, in a similar way, the claim that the equal itself (i.e. the property of equality) is predicated of *x* should be understood not as a claim about how the property of equality is defined, but rather as the claim that *x* instantiates the property of equality, or has a share of it.²⁶

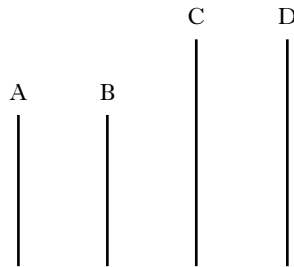
How then are we to understand ‘the ones here’ (*τῶν ἐνταῦθα*) at 83. 6? Fine’s view, as I mentioned, is that they are ‘sensible properties’, such as the property of being two centimetres long, or the property of being three centimetres long. While this interpretation of ‘the ones here’ is conceivable, I take the more common view that the expression refers to sensible objects, not properties.²⁷ More specifically, I suggest that the expression refers to all those objects in the sensible world (that is, ‘around here’) that we ordinarily take to be equal (to something or other). So, for example, each of the lines A–D in Figure 1 will count as one of ‘the ones [i.e. the equals] here’: A is equal (to B), B is equal (to A), C is equal (to D), and D is equal (to C).

We can now turn to the meaning of the sentence as a whole (‘But

²⁵ 84. 4–5. Cf. 80. 8–15, 81. 10–11, 83. 34–84. 1, 84. 22–7.

²⁶ Fine’s alternative interpretation would be compelling if it were true that ‘*A* is predicated of *B*’ always meant ‘*B* has the property of being *A*’. Were this true, ‘the equal itself is predicated of *x*’ would indeed mean what Fine takes it to mean, namely, ‘*x* has the property of being the equal itself’ (see *On Ideas*, 150; the relevant passage is quoted in n. 22 above). However, 84. 4–5 shows that ‘*A* is predicated of *B*’ does not always mean ‘*B* has the property of being *A*’. The Platonist claims: ‘The Form of Human Being is predicated of Socrates.’ This means that Socrates *participates in* the Form of Human Being; it does not mean that Socrates *has the property of being* the Form of Human Being.

²⁷ Compare *Phaedo* 74A–75B, where the sensible equals are equal objects (sticks, stones, and the like), and not properties. For the view that ‘the equals here’ in the Argument from Relatives are sensible objects, see also Owen, ‘Proof’, 106.

FIG. 1. *Equal lines*

when we predicate the equal itself of the ones here, we predicate it of them homonymously'). If I am right about (i) how to understand the phrase '*to ison auto*' ('the equal itself'), (ii) what it means for the equal itself to be predicated of a thing, and (iii) what 'the ones here' are, the sentence may be paraphrased as follows:

Firstly, we predicate equality of each of the equals here—that is, we predicate it of each of the sensible objects that we take to be equal (to something or other). Secondly, the property of equality is predicated of these objects *homonymously*; which is to say, the term 'equal' does not mean the same thing as applied to all of them.

4. An interpretative problem

This, I think, is the most plausible interpretation of the opening sentence of part II—at least when this sentence is considered by itself. However, a difficulty emerges as we read on. If the sentence is understood in this way, it seems to be in direct conflict with an assumption that plays an important role in the later stages of the argument:

(NH) The equal (*to ison*) is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously.²⁸

This claim is not explicitly stated anywhere in the text, but there is good reason to think that the argument relies on it.²⁹ To see this,

²⁸ This could also be stated as 'The equal itself is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously', assuming that I am right that predicating *the equal* of *x* is the same as predicating *the equal itself* of *x*.

²⁹ Most commentators agree that the argument relies on (NH) or something like

we can momentarily jump ahead to part III, where we get the intermediary conclusion that the sensible equals are ‘images of what is strictly or truly equal’ (83. 13–14).³⁰ This is a crucial step in the argument; it provides the basis for part IV’s conclusion that there is a Form of Equal. But what is it that warrants the intermediary conclusion? Here is a suggestion. The claim that the sensible equals are images of what is strictly or truly equal is entailed by the following three premisses, together with (NH):

- (1) There are only three possible types of non-homonymous predication (strict, non-strict, mixed).
- (2) When the equal is predicated of the sensible equals, this is not a case of strict predication.
- (3) When the equal is predicated of the sensible equals, this is not a case of mixed predication.

From (1)–(3) we get

- (4) If the equal is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously, this can only be a case of non-strict predication.

From (4) and (NH) it follows that

- (5) The equal is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously, and this is a case of non-strict predication.

And from (5) and the definition of non-strict predication³¹ it follows that

- (6) Each of the sensible equals is an image of something that is strictly or truly equal.

This is part III’s intermediary conclusion.

it. Barford is an exception: see ‘Revisited’, 200–2. For criticism of Barford’s interpretation see Rowe, ‘Reconsideration’, 271–2.

³⁰ Properly speaking, of course, this claim is not asserted outright; we are told that it follows ‘if indeed one were to accept that the image is not homonymous with the paradigm’. But it is clear that the Platonist thinks that we *should* accept this, and so it is clear that he thinks that the intermediary conclusion does follow. (The significance of the if-clause is not immediately apparent, however. I shall come back to it in sect. 8.1 below.)

³¹ Non-strict predication, recall, occurs when a predicate *F* is predicated of several items non-homonymously, and each of these items is an image of a strictly or truly *F* paradigm.

There is evidence in parts I–II of the passage that the Platonist thinks that we should accept each of (1)–(3). Part I strongly suggests that he thinks we should accept (1). Part II clearly argues, *inter alia*, that the sensible equals are not truly equal (83. 8), and that none of the sensible equals is any more a paradigm of equality than any other (83. 11–12). From this we can infer that the Platonist thinks we should accept (2) and (3).

Since (1)–(3) together with (NH) entail the intermediary conclusion that we get in part III, it is natural to suppose that the Platonist *also* thinks we should accept (NH). It seems a reasonable hypothesis that (NH) is an additional, suppressed premiss in the Platonist’s argument for the intermediary conclusion.³²

So here we have our problem. As we have just seen, it is reasonable to suppose that the intermediary conclusion is based, in part, on (NH). But how can the Platonist expect us to accept *both* (NH) *and* the claim made by the opening sentence of part II? (NH) tells us that each of the sensible equals has the property of being equal (to something or other), and that the term ‘equal’ means the same thing as applied to each of them. The opening sentence of part II, by contrast, apparently tells us that each of the sensible equals has the property of being equal (to something or other), and that the term ‘equal’ *does not* mean the same thing as applied to all of them. The two claims seem obviously contradictory.³³

³² I am not saying anything at the moment about how the Platonist’s argument for the intermediary conclusion actually moves from these four premisses—(1), (2), (3), and (NH)—to that conclusion. My present claim is merely that it is plausible that the intermediary conclusion is *based on* these four premisses. There are different ways in which one might go about deriving the conclusion from the premisses. (My own account of how the argument for the intermediary conclusion proceeds—by *reductio ad absurdum*—is given in sects. 5–8 below.)

³³ I should note that this problem is avoided on Fine’s interpretation of the argument. On Fine’s view, the claim at 83. 6–7 is to be interpreted as the claim that ‘if equality is defined in sensible terms, it is homonymous’ (*On Ideas*, 154). She holds that the rest of part II (83. 7–12) defends this conditional, and that parts III–IV (83. 12–17) then argue that equality is *not* to be defined in sensible terms, since equality is not homonymous (*On Ideas*, 154–5). This avoids the inconsistency, but it does so at what I think is too high a price. I have already indicated my disagreement with Fine’s interpretation of 83. 6–7, which rests on a questionable view of what it means for the equal itself to be predicated of a thing. A further difficulty for her interpretation is this. If, as is plausible, part III’s intermediary conclusion is based on the four premisses just mentioned—(1), (2), (3), and (NH)—then Fine’s conditional (‘if equality is defined in sensible terms, it is homonymous’) is not required for the argument to go through. Those four premisses entail the intermediary conclusion by themselves. Nor is there any obvious role for Fine’s conditional to play in the move from the intermediary conclusion to the argument’s overall conclusion in part IV. So this

What is the solution? One possibility would be to try to reconstruct the argument for the intermediary conclusion in such a way that it does not rely on (NH). Unfortunately, however, it is hard to know what such a reconstruction would look like. It is unclear how the intermediary conclusion could be meant to follow from what we find in parts I–II of the passage, unless (NH) is supplied as an additional premiss. (Ask yourself: what other assumption(s), besides (NH), could we add to (1)–(3) in order to derive the claim that the sensible equals are images of what is strictly and truly equal?)

An alternative would be to try to argue that the opening sentence of part II and (NH) in fact concern different predicates, and so do not contradict one another: at 83. 6–7 we get a claim about the predicate *to ison auto*, whereas (NH) is a claim about a second predicate, *to ison*, or the equal.³⁴ But this strategy does not seem very promising either. To repeat a point made earlier, it seems that the expression ‘*to ison auto*’ at 83. 7 is an instance of the Platonic ‘*auto to F*’ formula, and that it refers here to the property of equality. If this is right, then ‘*to ison auto*’ at 83. 7 and ‘*to ison*’ in (NH) refer to the very same property (the property of equality).

Another possible way to reconcile the opening sentence of part II and (NH) might be to argue that what is really meant at 83. 6–7 is that ‘the equal itself is predicated of the equals here homonymously, if it is predicated of them *alone*’.³⁵ With the sentence interpreted in this way, both it and (NH) could be true at the same time, and indeed together they would entail the Platonic conclusion that there is something equal, beyond all the equal objects in the sensible world.³⁶ The difficulty is that the text does not say ‘. . . if it is predicated of them *alone*’. Given what the text actually says, the two claims do appear to be in conflict.

My suspicion is that the attempt to reconcile the opening sen-

is an additional problem for Fine’s interpretation of the opening sentence of part II: so interpreted, the sentence appears redundant.

³⁴ This is Owen’s strategy in ‘Proof’, 105–6. According to Owen, the opening sentence of part II is a claim about the predicate ‘absolutely equal’ (see n. 21 above), whereas the assumption required by the argument of parts III–IV concerns the predicate ‘equal’.

³⁵ See Leszl, *De ideis*, 195; cf. also Crubellier, ‘Deux arguments’, 74.

³⁶ The argument would go as follows: (i) the equal itself is predicated of the sensible equals homonymously, if it is predicated of them alone; (ii) the equal (i.e. the equal itself) is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously (= (NH)); therefore, (iii) the equal itself is *not* predicated of the sensible equals alone; that is, the equal itself is also predicated of something else, besides the sensible equals.

tence of part II and (NH) will not succeed: they are genuinely inconsistent with one another. We need a different approach to the problem.

5. The argument proceeds by *reductio ad absurdum*

The Argument from Relatives aims to persuade an anti-Platonist opponent of two related Platonic theses: first, that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm; and second, that there is a Form of Equal. I want to suggest that the Platonist's argument for these theses proceeds in two phases, a negative phase (parts I–II) and a positive phase (parts III–IV).

In parts I–II, the negative phase of the argument, I think that we should take the Platonist to be drawing out an unacceptable consequence of his opponent's denial of the first thesis,

(IM) Each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm.

The unacceptable consequence is stated at the beginning of part II, at 83. 6–7: 'when we predicate the equal itself of the ones [i.e. the equals] here, we predicate it of them homonymously'. The purpose of the rest of part II (83. 7–12) is to explain why the opponent is committed to this, given the classification provided in part I. Parts I and II together can therefore be described as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the opponent's denial of (IM).

In parts III–IV, the positive phase of the argument, the Platonist then argues that because the consequence stated at 83. 6–7 is unacceptable—that is, because the equal (i.e. the equal itself) is predicated of the sensible equals *non*-homonymously (= (NH)), the opponent must admit that (IM) is true. This admission requires him to concede that there exists a non-sensible paradigm of equality; and this paradigm is identified as the Form of Equal.

Other interpretations of the argument face the difficulty of showing how the opening sentence of part II is consistent with (NH). On the interpretation I am proposing, by contrast, the conflict here is not something that we must somehow try to explain away. This is because the claim at the beginning of part II is not a claim that the Platonist thinks we ought to accept. Rather, it is a claim that the

anti-Platonist opponent is *forced* to accept, as a result of his anti-Platonism.

I mentioned at the start of the paper that in claiming that the argument proceeds by *reductio ad absurdum*, I am reviving a line of interpretation that was originally suggested by Suzanne Mansion.³⁷ I follow Mansion in holding that the opening sentence of part II is not supposed to reflect the Platonist's own position, but is an unattractive claim to which one is committed if one is an anti-Platonist. The precise details of Mansion's account are somewhat difficult to make out,³⁸ and it is perhaps not altogether surprising that her proposal about the argument's structure did not find favour with other commentators. Yet I think she was right about the basic shape of the argument. We should accept her thought that the argument proceeds by *reductio ad absurdum*, even though we may disagree with her about how exactly the *reductio* works.

Now admittedly there might seem to be a drawback to this interpretation: there is no explicit indication in Alexander's text that the opening sentence of part II is supposed to state a consequence of the opponent's anti-Platonist position. Even so, in my view the interpretation still manages to provide the most satisfactory way of dealing with the problem of the conflict between the opening sentence of part II and (NH). It provides a solution to that problem without requiring us to sacrifice either (a) the most plausible reading of the opening sentence of part II (considered by itself), or (b) our hypothesis that the later stages of the argument rely on (NH).

6. The Platonist's opponent

In the remainder of the paper I shall go through parts II–IV of the passage step by step, illustrating how the above interpretation is able to make good sense of how the argument unfolds. Before I embark on this project, however, it will be helpful for me to begin by spelling out more fully the position of the anti-Platonist opponent I take the Platonist to have in his sights.

³⁷ 'Critique', 182–3 n. 42. Barford also describes the argument as proceeding by *reductio ad absurdum* ('Revisited', 200), but his view of the argument's structure has little in common with Mansion's and my own.

³⁸ In particular, it is difficult to see why, on her view, the claim stated at 83. 6–7 follows *only* for anti-Platonists, and not also for Platonists.

I suggest that this opponent is someone who endorses the following three claims:

- (i) There is no such thing as the Form of Equal.
- (ii) It is not the case that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm. (That is, (IM) is false.)
- (iii) The equal (the equal itself, the property of equality) is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously (= (NH)).

The first claim denies the existence of the Form of Equal, here understood as a non-sensible, truly equal paradigm, of which equal objects in the sensible world are images. The Platonist's ultimate goal is to get the opponent to recant this first claim.

The opponent's rejection of the Form of Equal is closely connected with the second claim: that it is not the case that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm. The Platonist believes that if the opponent can be made to give up this second claim, he can also be made to give up the first.

The third component of the opponent's position is (NH), a view that the Platonist himself shares. The Platonist's strategy will be to show that—although the opponent does not initially realize this—(NH) is in tension with the second claim. If the opponent is to continue to endorse (NH), therefore, he must admit that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm.

One might wonder why it is that the Platonist attributes (NH) to his opponent. The answer, I suggest, is simply that the Platonist takes (NH) to be an attractive, common-sense view, and therefore a view that his opponent can reasonably be expected to share. To accept (NH) is to hold that the term 'equal' means the same thing as applied to each of the sensible equals. It is to hold that even though things can be equal in various different respects (in length, in area, and so on), there is nevertheless a single definition of equality, satisfied by all the sensible equal things. An analogue would be the related property of largeness. There are, of course, different respects in which things can be large: a mountain may be large in respect of its height; a marketplace may be large in respect of its area. Nevertheless (the Platonist will insist), it is plausible that there is a single, overarching definition of largeness—a definition which the mountain and the marketplace both satisfy.³⁹

The final point I want to make about the Platonist's opponent

³⁹ See *H.Ma.* 294 B, where Hippias is expected to agree that there is a single thing

is a point about the relative strength of his commitment to each of the above three claims. According to my interpretation of the argument, the Platonist's strategy is to use the opponent's commitment to (NH) as a lever to force him to abandon his anti-Platonism. If this is right, the Platonist must take the opponent to be someone who is more strongly persuaded of (NH) than of the other two claims. This suggests that the opponent is not meant to be someone who dismisses the very notion of paradigmatic Forms as incoherent. Instead we might think of him as someone whose anti-Platonism is motivated by considerations of theoretical simplicity. Failing (at present) to see any good reasons to admit a special class of non-sensible, paradigmatic entities, he concludes that such entities do not exist.

I shall now go through parts II–IV step by step.

7. The price of anti-Platonism: the argument of part II

7.1. *An unacceptable consequence of anti-Platonism*

But when we predicate the equal itself of the ones here, we predicate it of them homonymously. (83. 6–7)

I have already said quite a lot about this sentence, so here I can be brief. The main point to emphasize is that, according to my interpretation, this is not a claim that the Platonist is putting forward *in propria persona*. It is, rather, a claim to which the *opponent* is committed, because he denies (IM), the Platonic claim that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm.⁴⁰

that makes all large things large ('the exceeding'). As David Sedley has pointed out ('Equal Sticks and Stones' ['Sticks'], in D. Scott (ed.), *Maieusis: Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat* (Oxford, 2007), 68–86 at 71), the fact that an interlocutor like Hippias is expected to agree to this claim, without argument, suggests that it was thought to be uncontroversial: the sort of thing that practically everyone would accept. Sedley argues persuasively that Plato regarded both largeness and equality as 'easy' properties—properties that are commonly recognized to be unitary (unlike virtue, say, whose unitary nature is disputed: see *Meno* 72 c–73 a), and whose definitions are easy to master ('Sticks', 69–71; cf. also Sedley, 'Platonic Causes', *Phronesis*, 43 (1998), 114–32 at 127–8).

⁴⁰ It might be objected that the use of the first person, 'we predicate . . .' ('κατηγοροῦμεν . . .'), at 83. 6 is a sign that the sentence represents the Platonist's own position (cf. Barford, 'Revisited', 210), instead of stating, as I claim, a consequence of the opponent's position. My reply is that we should construe 'we' broadly: it means not 'we

7.2. *The unacceptable consequence elucidated and explained*

For the same account does not apply to all of them, and we do not signify things that are truly equal. . . . (83. 7–8)

The first clause here ('For the same account does not apply to all of them') simply clarifies the preceding claim: to say that 'when we predicate the equal itself of the ones here, we predicate it of them homonymously' is effectively to deny that there is a single account or definition of equality that applies to all the sensible equals.

The second clause ('and we do not signify things that are truly equal. . . .') is more informative: it is because the sensible equals are *not truly equal* that the opponent must say that the equal itself is predicated of them homonymously, if at all. Here we should bear in mind the details of the opponent's position. The opponent denies that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm. This means that if he is to maintain that the equal is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously (=NH), he cannot say that this is a case of non-strict predication. Instead, he has two options: it must either be a case of strict predication or a case of mixed predication. For it to be a case of strict predication, all the sensible equals must be truly equal.⁴¹ For it to be a case of mixed predication, at least one of the sensible equals must be a paradigm of equality.⁴² On the reasonable assumption that being a paradigm of *F*-ness involves being truly *F*, this second option requires that at least one of the sensible equals be truly equal.

As far as the opponent is concerned, then, the truth of (NH) requires that some or all of the sensible equals be truly equal. This is what the Platonist denies at 83. 8 ('and we do not signify things that

Platonists', but rather 'we people in general'. (Here I agree with Rowe, 'Reconsideration', 272–3.) So the point at 83. 6–7 is that the opponent's denial of (IM) has the unacceptable consequence that when we—i.e. we people in general—predicate the equal itself of the equals here, we do so homonymously. (The first-person plurals in part I of the passage, at 83. 1, 3, and 6, should likewise be construed broadly. So too the first-person plurals in Alexander's report of the 'Object of Thought' argument, at 81. 26 and 29.)

⁴¹ From the definition of strict predication: strict predication occurs when a predicate *F* is predicated of several items non-homonymously, and each of these items is strictly or truly *F*.

⁴² From the definition of mixed predication: mixed predication occurs when a predicate *F* is predicated of several items non-homonymously, and at least one of the items is a paradigm *F*, while the others are images of a paradigm *F*. (Note that I am here assuming that mixed predication is supposed to cover cases in which more than one of the subjects of predication is a paradigm *F*: see p. 156 above.)

are truly equal'). And this is why, according to the Platonist, the opponent is committed to the unacceptable consequence stated at 83. 6–7. The sensible equals are not truly equal, and as a consequence the opponent is forced to say that the equal (the equal itself) is predicated of them homonymously.

7.3. *The appeal to flux*

. . . for the quantity in the sensibles changes and alters continually, and is not determinate. (83. 8–10)

Next the Platonist offers an explanation of *why* the sensible equals are not truly equal. I take the claim here to be that the quantity in each of the sensible equals 'changes' from being equal, when considered in relation to the quantity in certain things, to being unequal, when considered in relation to the quantity in certain others.⁴³ Consider line A in Figure 1 above: the quantity in this line (two centimetres) goes—or 'changes'—from being equal, when considered in relation to the quantity in line B (also two centimetres), to being unequal, when considered in relation to the quantity in line C (three centimetres). On this understanding of the Platonist's appeal to flux at 83. 8–10, the basic idea is that if a thing—or the quantity in a thing—goes from being *F* in some relations (or in some contexts, or situations) to not being *F* in other relations (or contexts, or situations), that thing cannot be something that is *truly F*. To take another example, Gulliver (of *Gulliver's Travels*) goes from being large when he is among the diminutive inhabitants of Lilliput, to not being large when he is among the giants of Brobdingnag, and because of this (the Platonist will say) he is not to be counted as truly large.⁴⁴

Notice that on this reading of 83. 8–10, the instability of sensible

⁴³ This interpretation of 83. 8–10 is indebted to Fine, *On Ideas*, 152 (cf. also Irwin, 'Heracliteanism', 11). I differ from Fine mainly in my view of the nature of the sensible equals: she takes them to be properties, whereas I take them to be objects.

⁴⁴ The idea that Gulliver 'changes' from being large to not being large could no doubt be challenged. One way of challenging it might be to argue that what changes is not Gulliver himself, but rather the meaning of the word 'large'. For example, when used of someone on the island of Lilliput, 'large' might mean *more than six inches tall*. But when used of someone on the island of Brobdingnag, 'large' might mean *more than eighty feet tall*. On this view of the meaning of 'large', we should not say that Gulliver goes from having the property of being large, when in Lilliput, to lacking it, when in Brobdingnag. There is no 'property of being large' that Gulliver first has and then loses as he goes from place to place. Instead, the word 'large' comes to mean different things as Gulliver's situation changes: first, *more than six*

things—or, strictly speaking, of their quantities—in the Argument from Relatives corresponds to the instability of the many *F*s in *Republic* 5. At 479 A–E the many beautifuls, larges, doubles, etc. are contrasted with the eternally unchanging Forms. It is implied that the unstable (or ‘wandering’) nature of the many *F*s consists in the fact that, for example, the many larges are both large (relative to some things) and small (relative to others), the many doubles are both double (relative to some things) and half (relative to others), and so on.⁴⁵ Similarly in our passage, on the present reading of 83. 8–10, the instability of ‘the quantity in the sensibles’ consists in the fact that the quantity in any sensible thing goes from being equal (relative to the quantity in some things) to being unequal (relative to the quantity in others).⁴⁶

7.4. *Mixed predication is ruled out*

But none of the ones here receives the account of the equal precisely. But then nor by one of them being a paradigm, another an image; for one is no more a paradigm or an image than another. (83. 10–12)

As we saw above, the fact that the sensible equals are not truly equal rules out both strict and mixed predication. The purpose of 83. 10–12 is to explain why mixed predication is ruled out.

The first sentence (83. 10–11) emphasizes a consequence of sensible flux: ‘none of the ones here receives the account of the equal precisely [*ἀκριβῶς*]’. I take this to be another way of saying that none of the sensible equals is strictly (*κρίως*) or truly (*ἀληθῶς*) equal. From this it follows that none of the sensible equals has any more (or less) of a claim to paradigm status than any other (83. 12). (This follows on the reasonable assumption, mentioned above, that being a paradigm of *F*-ness involves being strictly or truly *F*.) And

inches tall; then, *more than eighty feet tall*; and so on. It should be noted, however, that this view of the meaning of ‘large’ cannot be accepted by anyone who thinks that the large is predicated of the sensible larges non-homonymously. If the meaning of ‘large’ varies in this way, then the large is predicated of the sensible larges *homonymously*: applied to someone in Lilliput, ‘large’ means one thing; applied to someone in Brobdingnag, it means something else.

⁴⁵ See Irwin, ‘Heracleiteanism’, 11.

⁴⁶ For an alternative reading of 83. 8–10 see Owen, ‘Proof’, 109. On Owen’s view, the Platonist is claiming that sensible objects are constantly undergoing minute fluctuations in size. I prefer my interpretation of the appeal to flux (a variation on Fine’s interpretation) because it makes the instability of sensibles in the Argument from Relatives line up with the instability of sensibles in passages such as *Rep.* 479 A–E.

so when the equal is predicated of the sensible equals, this cannot be a case of mixed predication. This would require at least one of the sensible equals to be a paradigm of equality, and the others to be images.

The opening claim of part II (83. 6–7) has now been defended. The Platonist has argued that when the equal is predicated of the sensible equals, this cannot be a case of strict or of mixed predication. The proposal that the argument is a *reductio* of the opponent's anti-Platonist position—or more specifically, of his denial of (IM)—enables us to explain why the remaining type of non-homonymous predication, non-strict predication, is also ruled out. It follows that if one is an anti-Platonist, one must deny that the equal is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously: it can only be predicated of them homonymously, if it is predicated of them at all.

Here we see a significant explanatory benefit of reading the argument of part II as a *reductio*. Lines 8–12 rule out two types of non-homonymous predication—strict and mixed—but appear to leave non-strict predication as an available option. How, in the light of this, is the Platonist entitled to conclude that the equal is predicated of the sensible equals homonymously? The proposal that the argument is a *reductio* provides an answer. We are assuming, for the sake of *reductio*, that it is not the case that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm. This is why non-strict predication is also ruled out.

8. A Platonic result: the argument of parts III–IV

8.1. *The sensible equals are images (part III)*

But if indeed one were to accept that the image is not homonymous with the paradigm, it always follows that these equals are equals as images of what is strictly and truly equal. (83. 12–14)

The argument now enters its positive phase. In parts III–IV the Platonist turns from drawing out an unacceptable consequence of the opponent's anti-Platonist position to explaining how the opponent must revise his ontology if this consequence is to be avoided. It has already been shown in part II that when the equal is predicated of the sensible equals, this cannot be a case of strict or of mixed pre-

dication. This means that if the opponent is to continue to claim that the equal is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously, he must say that this is a case of non-strict predication. In other words, he must admit something that he has hitherto denied: that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm. This is the intermediary conclusion drawn in part III: ‘it always follows that these equals are equals as images of what is strictly and truly equal’. (I take the ‘always’ (‘ἀεὶ’) at 83. 13 to indicate that whichever of the sensible equals one chooses, *in every case* it will be an image of a strictly or truly equal paradigm.)

One initially puzzling feature of 83. 12–14 is the qualification with which the intermediary conclusion is introduced: ‘. . . if indeed one were to accept that the image is not homonymous with the paradigm . . .’.⁴⁷ To understand this qualification, it will help to think back to our earlier discussion of part I’s classification (Section 2 above). There we saw that the Platonist takes real *F*s and their images to be non-homonymously *F*. The qualification at 83. 12–13 refers directly to this point, and implies that the success of the argument is somehow contingent upon it. The explanation of this, I suggest, is that if paradigm *F*s and image *F*s were *homonymously F*, there would only be reason to accept the existence of *one* type of non-homonymous predication—strict predication—and not the existence of the other two types of non-homonymous predication distinguished in part I.

Why is this? First, it is clear that if, for any term ‘*F*’, ‘*F*’ means one thing as applied to paradigm *F*s and another thing as applied to image *F*s, purported cases of mixed predication (as when human being is predicated of Socrates and his images) will fail to count as cases of *non-homonymous* predication at all. Moreover, purported cases of non-strict predication will turn out simply to be cases of strict predication. Suppose, for example, that the expression ‘human being’ means *two-footed land animal* as applied to Socrates himself, but *image of a two-footed land animal* as applied to his images. It will follow that each of these images is strictly or truly what, *as applied to them*, is meant by the expression ‘human being’. Thus, when human being is predicated of Socrates’ images, this will count as a case of strict predication, and not—as the Platonist proposes—as a case of non-strict predication.

⁴⁷ I follow Fine in reading ‘εἰ δὲ καὶ’ at 83. 12 as non-concessive (*On Ideas*, 17 and 325–6 n. 60).

This allows us to explain why we find an appeal to the non-homonymy of paradigm and image in part III. If paradigm *F*s and image *F*s were homonymously *F*, the Platonist's threefold classification would collapse. Yet the classification is crucial to the argument of part III, where the Platonist argues that in order to retain the view that the equal is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously, the opponent must admit that this is a case of non-strict predication. For this argument to work, non-strict predication must be a genuine type of non-homonymous predication.⁴⁸

8.2. *The existence of the Form (part IV)*

But if this is the case, then there is something that is an Equal-itself⁴⁹ and is strictly [equal], by relation to which the ones here, as images, both come to be and are called equals; and this is a Form, a paradigm of the things that come to be [equal] by relation to it. (83. 14–17)

The present lines complete the argument. Here the Platonist argues that once the opponent has conceded that each of the sensible equals is an image of a strictly or truly equal paradigm (part III), he must also concede that such a paradigm exists. This paradigm is identified as the Form of Equal.

We may observe that the Platonist's final conclusion is that there is *one* Form of Equal, even though part III's intermediary conclusion ('these equals are equals as images of what is strictly and truly equal') is consistent with there being many truly equal paradigms. The thought may be that the intermediary conclusion only *requires* the existence of one truly equal paradigm; positing the existence of many such paradigms would therefore be ontologically profligate.⁵⁰ The Platonist may also have further reasons for rejecting a plura-

⁴⁸ The qualification at 83. 12–13 therefore makes good sense. Accordingly, I do not think there is any need to accept Mansion's proposal ('Critique', 183 n. 42) that lines 12–14 were added to the original argument by Alexander or a later copyist.

⁴⁹ I capitalize 'Equal-itself' to indicate that this term ('ἀνθρώσων') refers specifically to the Platonic Form of Equal—unlike the phrase 'τὸ ἴσον αὐτὸ' back at 83. 7, which refers neutrally to the property of equality. Cf. Fine, *On Ideas*, 288 n. 54.

⁵⁰ The opponent might object that even positing a single Form is profligate: does the existence of an image of a thing really entail the existence of the thing itself? If not, then, *contra* the Platonist, the intermediary conclusion does not require the existence of any paradigm at all. This is a serious worry for the final stage of the Platonist's argument, but it is worth remembering that if the opponent accepts the intermediary conclusion ('the equals here are equals as images . . .'), then he has already made a major concession to the Platonist, even if at this point he digs in his heels and resists the argument's overall conclusion.

lity of Forms of Equal (consider, for example, the ‘Third Couch’ argument of *Republic* 10, 597 B–D).

9. Conclusion

The Platonist Argument from Relatives, presented by Alexander at *In Metaph.* 82. 11–83. 17, is notoriously difficult to interpret. But in this paper I have argued that we can make good sense of it once we see it as proceeding in two phases, a negative phase and a positive phase. The first, negative phase, which comprises parts I–II, is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the opponent’s denial of (IM), the claim that each of the sensible equals is an image of a truly equal paradigm. The Platonist argues that if the opponent wants to deny this, he must also deny that the equal (the equal itself) is predicated of the sensible equals non-homonymously. In the second, positive phase of the argument (parts III–IV) the Platonist argues that in order to avoid this unacceptable consequence, the opponent must abandon his resistance to Platonism, and accept the existence of a paradigmatic Form of Equal, of which the sensible equals are images.

A potential drawback to this interpretation, noted earlier, is that we are never explicitly told that the aim of parts I–II is to bring out an unacceptable consequence of the opponent’s anti-Platonist position. Yet although this may seem a disadvantage of the interpretation, I think that the pay-off is more than sufficient to outweigh it. On the most plausible reading of the opening sentence of part II, this sentence is in conflict with (NH), the assumption which licenses the conclusions drawn in parts III–IV. The chief advantage of the interpretation offered here is that it acknowledges and explains this inconsistency—as other interpretations do not—while at the same time giving the Platonist a coherent argument for the existence of the Form.

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