NOTES ON PLATO'S PARMENIDES

Authentication of dialogue: Pythodorus to Antiphon to Cephalus of Clazomenae.

Original conversation: in the house of Pythodorus in the Ceramicus outside the walls.

Narration of Cephalus (to whom?): location unknown, after the fall of the Thirty.

Thus, an interval of around fifty years.

Zeno: if the many are, then they are both like and unlike. [This is the form taken by several of Zeno's paradoxes of plurality--see Kirk, Raven and Schofield, THE PRESOCRATIC PHILOSOPHERS.]

Socrates: Suppose there are forms of likeness and unlikeness just by themselves, in which like and unlike things participate to varying degrees and in varying respects. Then, although the forms can't be both like and unlike, why can't this be true of things which are not forms?

Parmenides' objections:

ONE: If the forms are, they can be in things neither as parts nor as wholes.

TWO: If the many are like a form, then the form cannot be one. (Third Largeness Argument)

THREE: If the forms are just be themselves, they cannot be known by us.

Dilemma: These arguments seem effective against the forms, but if the forms are not, then nothing can have any fixed characteristic, and language cannot have any fixed meaning.

Parmenides: If Socrates is to define the just, the beautiful, and the good, he will need more stringent training in "idle talk".

This training should be like Zeno's discourses, except that it should not be confined to the visible domain, and it should trace the consequences of both affirmative and negative existential hypotheses.
If A is (or is not), then what is so both for A and for others, both absolutely and relatively?

An elaborate example, using Parmenides' own hypothesis of the One.

If the One is, then:

- it has no parts
- it has no shape
- it is not anywhere, neither in itself nor in another
- it is neither in motion nor at rest
- it is neither the same nor other than either itself or others
- it is neither like nor unlike either itself or others
- it is neither equal nor unequal either to itself or to others
- it is neither of the same age nor younger nor older either than itself or than others
- it does not exist in time
- it has nothing
- it is not of anything
- there is of it no knowledge or opinion.

On the other hand,

- it has being
- it is both one and many, whole and parts, limited and unlimited
- it has shape
- it is both in itself and in another
- it is both at rest and in motion
- it is both the same and different both as (from) itself and others
- it is both like and unlike both itself and others
- it is both equal and unequal both to itself and to others
- it is in time
- it both is and is becoming older, younger, and of the same age as, both itself and others
- of it there is both knowledge and opinion.

GENERAL SCHEME:

- if the One is, it has none of the contrary characteristics
- if the One is, it has all the contrary characteristics
- if the One is, the many have all the contrary characteristics
- if the One is, the many have none of the contrary characteristics
- if the One is not, it has all the contrary characteristics
- if the One is not, it has none of the contrary characteristics
if the One is not, the many have all the contrary characteristics
if the One is not, the many have none of the contrary characteristics.

INTERPRETATIONS OF DIALOGUE:
1. Parmenides gives Socrates his big lesson in dialectic.
2. The Parmenidean One meets the Forms, and Parmenides reveals weaknesses in both theories. On this view, Socrates' philosophy in part is motivated by the quest for a way to talk about the many. This theme occurs also in the Theaetetus and Sophist.
3. Plato uses the notion of a meeting between Socrates and the Eleatics (i. e., Parmenides and Zeno) to promote the Forms and reply to current objectors and to current proponents of the Eleatic philosophy. (A. E. Taylor's view.)
4. Plato reveals the nature of the gods. (Proclus' view.)