

ON HARTE ON PLATO ON PARTS AND WHOLES

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1. Introduction

Plato's dialogues are filled with talk of parts and wholes. The examples abound, including the whole of virtue and its parts temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom in the Protagoras (among others),¹ the whole of the city and its parts the classes of citizens in the Republic, the whole of the human soul and its rational, spirited, and appetitive parts in the Republic (and elsewhere),² and the whole of the cosmos and its myriad parts in the Timaeus. These composites are not passing concerns; they are, in fact, the central themes of their respective dialogues. But it is far from clear how to understand them. It would be very helpful to have an account of how Plato's dialogues understand composition, of how they take a whole to be related to its parts. Enter Verity Harte and her book, Plato on Parts and Wholes.³

Harte provides focus to her large topic in two ways. First, she zeroes in on what she takes to be the most relevant question for Plato. This is an ontological question: is a whole a genuine entity with a reserved spot in our ontology or not? A negative answer to this question supposes that composition is "ontologically innocent;" that is, it supposes that when parts

I thank Bryan Cross for discussion of Harte's book and the members of the St. Louis Area Group Reading Ancient Philosophy (SLAGRAP) for their thoughts on the Sophist and the Philebus over these past few years.

¹ See especially Laches 189d-199e, Meno 78d-e, and Euthyphro 12c-d.

² See especially Socrates' palinode in the Phaedrus and the discussion of the soul in the Timaeus.

³ Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002. Parenthetical page references are either to this book or to Stephanus pages of Plato's dialogues.

compose a whole, this composition does not create a new entity for our list of beings. A positive answer, by contrast, offers an ontologically committed account of composition; it supposes that composition is ontologically creative.

The second way in which Harte focuses her topic is by concentrating on just some of the talk of wholes and parts in Plato's dialogues. She limits her inquiry to those passages in the Platonic corpus that she takes to offer real theorizing about the relation of parts and wholes as opposed to mere use of part-whole talk. Based on this criterion, she discusses a snippet at the end of the Theaetetus, a string of passages in the Parmenides, some bits of the Sophist and Philebus, and larger chunks of the Timaeus.⁴ (I have listed the principal texts on the handout, and I have arranged them in groups for reasons that will become clear.)⁵

These passages are not for the faint of heart or the woolly of mind: they are among the most compressed and difficult that Plato wrote. But Harte proves an excellent guide. She sets the passages in their contexts and proceeds with careful attention to the details and full awareness of the many possibilities, all without losing sight of her main concerns. Again and again I was struck by how reasonable her readings are. She does not often dwell on why other interpretations are wrong—she generally sticks to her positive program—but she always has some good reasons for the readings she offers.

⁴ One might well object to Harte's application of her criterion, for she seems to admit (213) that the Timaeus does not offer "actual theorizing of the relation between a whole and its parts as such, or of composition in general" (1). Rather, the Timaeus is in because it offers such rich examples of parts and wholes. But then it is not clear whether any principle (aside from convenience) excludes, say, the Republic's rich examples. This, I think, is the point of Nick Smith's review (Journal of the History of Philosophy 42 [2004]: 333-334), which, unfortunately, spends so many words lamenting the book Harte did not write that it says very little about the very good book she did. I will return to the issue of missing examples below, in section four.

⁵ An incomplete draft of the handout follows the paper.

Harte's readings reveal two pictures of composition. Some passages—the Theaetetus snippet (**T1**) and four puzzles in the Parmenides (**T2**)—assume an ontologically innocent account of composition. They treat composition as identity: a whole just is a many. Harte compares this account of composition to recent positions of David Lewis and Donald Baxter (39 with 13-32). In the other passages, however—in a later bit of the Parmenides (**T4**) and especially in the Sophist, Philebus, and Timaeus (**T6-T8**)—Harte finds an ontologically committed account of composition. Of course, ontological commitment does not come for free. If one wants to say that a whole is a genuine, complex individual, an entity created by composition of its parts, then one owes an account of how composition does this. Harte attributes to Plato the view that structure is the key, that wholes are "contentful structures." This appeal to structure Harte compares to mathematical structuralism (175-176). For convenience, I shall refer to the two views of composition that Harte finds in the dialogues the innocent view and the structural view.

Now, it does not befit someone advertised as a critic to do this, but I admit that I find Harte's account broadly persuasive, as far as it goes. Moreover, in what I fear passes into an abnegation of my assignment, I am going to prescind from picking on all the small details where I am not persuaded. (For the love of duty, however, I will not skip on all of the picking.) Instead, I want to emphasize how many interesting questions Harte's account raises without answering. I will try to ask a few of these, to invite Harte to extend her account. My questions fall under three heads: the first concerning Plato's use of the innocent view, the second concerning the structural view that Harte attributes to Plato, and the third concerning some possible examples of structurally viewed wholes in dialogues Harte does not discuss.

2. The Role of the Innocent View

From what I have said thus far, Harte's findings might suggest to you a "developmentalist" reading of Plato. Indeed, one could cobble together a story of Plato's development from material in Harte's book. On this story, Plato's initial theorizing about the part-whole relation, in the Theaetetus, leads him to the innocent picture, but he finds this sufficiently puzzling to continue to look for a superior view. In the Parmenides, he repeatedly records how puzzling the innocent picture is—that is the point of the passages of **T2**—and he gropes unsuccessfully and then gestures more promisingly toward an alternative to the innocent picture. (The grope is in **T3** and the gesture in **T4**.) Just to be sure that we get the point, he takes one more shot at the innocent view in the Sophist (**T5**), but he is now set to develop the alternative, structural picture, which he does in the Sophist, Philebus, and (by exemplification) the Timaeus (**T6-T8**).

But this story of Plato's progress is not Harte's story. She rejects a developmentalist approach because she thinks that the innocent picture is consistently introduced as a problem. It is clear enough that the innocent view is considered puzzling in the Parmenides (**T2**) and problematic in the Sophist (**T5**). If the only theorized account of composition that is ever introduced favorably is the structural view, then we should not think that Plato once held the innocent view and then came to reject it in favor of the structural view. Crucial to this rejection of the developmentalist story is Harte's insistence that the innocent view is invoked in the Theaetetus (**T1**) as a problem. It is the only premise crucial to both horns of a dilemma that Socrates and Theaetetus need to escape, and Plato signals that something fishy is up by having Theaetetus put up a good fight against the innocent view (39ff.). And there is something fishy about the innocent view that whole just is its parts, for it seems to say that a whole is both a one and a

many. So the innocent view of composition is not endorsed in the Theaetetus; only the structural view is endorsed in Plato's dialogues.

Harte's rejection of the developmentalist reading raises questions, and her case could be made stronger than it is. Let me start by noting a problem with her case. Harte argues that Plato did not develop from accepting the innocent view to rejecting it. That seems to me right, but it also seems to me to leave a developmentalist reader alive and well, for Plato might well have developed from seeing no alternative to the problematic innocent view to embracing the structural alternative. More needs to be said to show that Plato's dialogues manifest a consistent adherence to the structural view of composition. Now, I think that more can be said, for I think that there are examples of explicitly structural wholes in dialogues that committed developmentalist readers of Plato take to be earlier than the Theaetetus. But whether these examples count as structural wholes will depend upon what exactly the structural view is, and so I postpone introducing three such examples until we have plumbed Harte's interpretation of the structural view more fully.⁶

Let us say, for the interim, that a stronger case can be made for a robustly anti-developmental reading of Plato's dialogues on composition. If that is so—if Harte's anti-developmentalism is correct—then why did Plato spend so much time discussing the innocent view? He clearly thinks that it is important (cf. 150n58). But why? The developmentalist reader has a good answer to this question: Plato addresses the innocent picture because he does not yet see an alternative, and as soon as he realizes that it is mistaken, he moves away from it. But we have agreed to discredit that answer. At first blush, Harte has a good answer, too. She thinks that Plato

⁶ If the three examples I introduce really are examples of structural wholes, then the title of Harte's third chapter ("A New Model of Composition") is perhaps misleading (the model would be new only in the context of Harte's book, or only if a model has to be theorized more fully than it is in the three examples I introduce).

targets the mistaken innocent picture for special attention because he associates it with Parmenides and his Eleatic followers. After all, Parmenides of Elea's insistence that only one is and Zeno of Elea's insistence that a many is problematic fuel the puzzles of the innocent view of composition in the Parmenides (**T2**), and Eleaticism is on the front burner when the innocent view is rejected in the Sophist (**T5**).

This seems to me entirely reasonable so far as it goes, but it raises two further questions. First, does Plato think that Parmenides holds the innocent view? To see the force of this question, one has to distinguish between Parmenides as Plato saw him and Eleaticism more generally. Plato is quite capable of considering and disparaging Eleatically inspired views without thereby criticizing Parmenides. Consider, for example, the "late learners" of the Sophist, who hold the Eleatically inspired belief that because the many cannot be one nor the one many, a person should not say that a human being is good (Sph 251b6-c2). The "Eleatic Stranger," Plato's unnamed director of the conversation, disparages these "late learners" rudely (251c2-6).

Let me give two reasons to doubt that Plato attributes the innocent view of composition to Parmenides, one complicated and one simple. The complicated reason is that the argument by which Harte thinks that the Eleatic Stranger discredits the ontological innocence of composition in the Sophist leaves an obvious escape route. Harte renders this very difficult argument—the second one in **T5**—as an elegant trilemma (esp. 104), but for our purposes, only the first horn of the argument matters, for it is to the first horn that the Eleatic Stranger assigns Parmenides. The Stranger quotes Parmenides' poem (B8.43-45) to attribute to him the view that being is a whole of parts (Sph 244e2-7). He then argues that no monist can say that being is a whole of parts, because he would have to admit as well that there is the one itself, in addition to being, since the one itself is without parts

(245a5-b3). The Stranger's argument has the monist assuming, first, that there is some oneness itself and, second, that oneness itself is partless. Harte admits that the first of these assumptions is not bolstered in the text (109n97, 111n100), and to bolster it, she assigns to the monist a problematic position that Socrates articulates in the Parmenides (111n100). But there is no question that some Eleatically inspired person might hold both of the assumptions that lead from Parmenidean monism to contradiction. My question is, does the Stranger—or does Plato—think that Parmenides holds them? To my mind, it is the second assumption that the Stranger cannot reasonably attribute to Parmenides. After all, if the Stranger's Parmenides believes that being is one whole that consists of parts, how stupid would he have to be to believe in addition that unity is partless?⁷

The simple reason to doubt that Plato's dialogues attribute the innocent view of composition to Parmenides is that in the dialogue named for him, the character Parmenides tries to move away from the innocent view (**T3**) and then clearly articulates a non-innocent view (**T4**).⁸ These two reasons together suggest that Plato's treatment of Eleaticism might be quite

⁷ Harte thinks that the Stranger does lay this incriminating assumption at the Eleatics' doorstep (110). She quotes the Stranger, who says (in her translation, 110), "According to the correct account what is truly one must surely be said to be completely without parts" (Sph 245a8-9), and she suggests that the "account" the Stranger refers to must be the Eleatic account. But, first, the Stranger does not call it the monist's account. He calls it the correct account (τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον). The parallel passage to which Harte refers to establish that "according to the account" means "according to the Eleatics' account" (245c5-6) makes no reference to the correct account and picks out a different claim. (I agree with Harte that τῷ λόγῳ in 245b2 refers back to τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον in 245a9. I merely deny that 245c5-6 gives any succor to the supposition that τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον is the Eleatics' account.) And, second, even if we should think that some Eleatic or Eleatically inspired position is subject to the refutation the Stranger produces, do we have reason to believe that he—or Plato—thinks that Parmenides is?

⁸ Harte notes the irony: "despite being the original Eleatic, Plato's Parmenides here sees no virtue in the claim that composition is ontologically innocent" (129). Is it merely ironic?

complex. It might be, as John Palmer has recently argued,⁹ that the Parmenides and Sophist include the problematic Eleaticism of the Sophists alongside a more heroic Parmenides of Plato's historical imagination. If that is right, then Plato's obsession with the innocent view of composition is not borne of trying to slough off Eleaticism; rather, he is trying to separate a sophistical Eleaticism from the Parmenidean inheritance that he continues to claim.

I have a second question to complicate Harte's insistence that Plato focuses on the innocent view of composition because of its Eleatic connections, namely, what about the Theaetetus? Socrates and Theaetetus reject a promising dream-account of knowledge as true belief plus an account in part because of a dilemmatic argument both of whose horns depend upon the innocent view of composition (in **T1**). Why is the innocent view of composition being assumed? We cannot say that Plato is targeting the Eleatics here. Eleaticism is conspicuously absent from the Theaetetus. In fact, when Theaetetus insists that Socrates and Theodorus consider the views of the Eleatics (Tht 183c8-d2), Socrates begs off elaborately (183e3-184a2). Are we supposed to see not only that the innocent view of composition is the source of trouble in **T1** but also that if the innocent view of composition is removed, then Socrates and Theaetetus would be able to articulate the correct view of knowledge? Or does Plato leave the end of the Theaetetus aporetic and at the fault of the innocent view of composition to set up the Sophist, whose drama immediately succeeds the Theaetetus' (cf. 149-150)?

⁹ Plato's Reception of Parmenides (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

3. The Structural View

My questions about the role of the innocent picture of composition call for speculation about Plato's relation to Parmenides and about his purposes in writing the Theaetetus. Not everyone is keen on such speculation, and I would not blame Harte for refusing to engage in it. But now I want to turn to the structural view of composition that Harte attributes to Plato and raise questions closer to the heart of her project.

There are two things to say about the structural view of composition right from the start. First, there is not one fully determinate view (266, 273). Rather, the various places in which Harte finds the structural view of composition present slightly different specifications of the same very general idea. Second, that same very general idea is due largely to Harte. The word 'structure' that does so much work in holding the various discussions together is Harte's word. It does not, to my knowledge, translate any of Plato's words. Plato talks instead of harmony, (due) measure, commensurability, and proportion, which Harte calls "bywords for structure" (190, 210, 271). This is not an objection, but a call for caution. Harte wants to link Plato's different words on different occasions to a single, general concept that she calls structure, and we should cautiously examine whether this is a reasonable thing to do.

With that in mind, I would like to raise three groups of questions about the structural view of wholes that Harte attributes to Plato. The first group comprises a few questions about the various passages, and those in the second and third groups concern the two general principles that Harte takes to be central to the structural view, the rational constraint and the normative constraint.

So consider the Parmenides' suggestion of an alternative to the innocent view of composition (**T4**). At the beginning of the third deduction,

Parmenides sketches an account of a "one complete whole that has parts" (Prm 157e4-5: ἐν ὅλον τέλειον μόρια ἔχον). For such to be the case, (T9): "the part is not a part of the many or of all things; rather, it is part of some single form and some one that we call a whole, which is created as a complete one out of all."¹⁰ Here we get composition that is ontologically creative and so a clear alternative to the innocent view. But two points are worth noticing. First, it is a form (ιδέα, 157d8) that is crucial, and this raises questions about the relation between Parmenides' new account of composition and the forms (εἶδη) that Socrates was discussing earlier in the dialogue.¹¹ Harte declines to explore in that direction.¹² Instead, she suggests that Parmenides' talk of form calls structure to mind, and to bolster her suggestion, she turns to Aristotle's Lexicon (Metaphysics Δ), where one definition of 'whole' offers talk of position, which, according to a definition of 'disposition' (διάθεσις), suggests the arrangement of parts with respect to place, capacity, or form (εἶδος) (132-133). This hardly secures the attribution of structure to Parmenides' new notion of a whole, though it does support the possibility that Parmenides has structure in mind. I wonder if a look back to the earlier talk of forms in the Parmenides might suggest another possibility.

A second thing to notice about Parmenides' allegedly structural account of wholes is that he defines a whole as the form and not as the

¹⁰ Prm 157d7-e1: οὐκ ἄρα τῶν πολλῶν οὐδὲ πάντων τὸ μόριον μόριον, ἀλλὰ μιᾶς τινὸς ιδέας καὶ ἐνός τινος ὃ καλοῦμεν ὅλον, ἐξ ἀπάντων ἐν τέλειον γεγονός

¹¹ Note that Parmenides treats the terms ιδέα and εἶδος interchangeably when he insists that anyone who gives up on forms will "entirely destroy the power of dialectic" (135b5-c2, and for the robust sense of διαλέγεσθαι, cf. Phl 57e6-7).

¹² Harte notes (132n25) that Parmenides appeal to form takes form to be composite, whereas Socrates in the Phaedo takes form to be incomposite (and cf. Parm 129b6-c1). From this it follows that Parmenides' form is not exactly like the forms of the Phaedo. But it does not follow that we should refuse a connection between them, as Harte does (132n25). Note again Parm 135b5-c2. Harte later claims not to know where to start to establish a connection (270).

entity of informed parts. This contrasts with the version of the structural view that Harte finds in the Philebus and Timaeus. In those dialogues, a whole is not the structure itself but "contentful structure" (178, 189, etc.). It also, and perhaps not coincidentally, contrasts with Aristotle's account of a whole as something whose parts are disposed in relation to a form. Aristotle, like the Philebus and Timaeus, has the whole including the parts, whereas Parmenides says that the whole just is the form in relation to which parts are disposed.

These considerations prompt doubts about how well Parmenides' alternative to the innocent view of composition fits the structural view. Might not Parmenides' articulation of a whole bridge two different ways of accounting for the wholeness and unity of a complex individual?

In the Sophist, Harte finds what seems to me to be much clearer evidence of the structural view. The Stranger and Theaetetus agree that within a given domain of, say, letters, some elements combine and others do not, and Harte quite reasonably argues that this amounts to the insistence that composition is restricted. "What, then," she asks (153), "is the basis for the constraints upon combinations within a domain?" "The constraints are based, [she] suggest[s], upon the presence of certain structural relations between the elements of a domain" (155). Once again, all the talk of structure is being imported by Harte, though I find her appeal to structure much more plausible and illuminating in this context than I do in the Parmenides.¹³ For the Stranger and Theaetetus do seem to suppose

¹³ Once again, Harte is fully aware of what she is doing, and she is careful not to claim more than she is entitled to. She concludes that the Sophist's "description of expertise" "can be seen to imply, first, that composition is restricted and, second, that it is restricted on the basis of the presence or absence of certain structural relations between the elements of the domain" (155, emphasis mine), and she later reports that structure is "extrapolated, rather than simply extracted" from the Sophist's example of syntactic space (177). Again, though, Harte gives in temptation to look for extra support for her extrapolation, and the results are not entirely convincing. In this case, she reads structural relations off the Sophist's metaphors of mixing and combining (155-156), but it seems to me that she gets her support only by sliding from the reasonable inference

that the combination of words into meaningful sentences depends on syntactic structure.

In the Philebus (**T7**), all beings are classed in four kinds: the unlimited, limit, mixtures of limit and the unlimited, and causes of mixtures (Phlb 23c1-e8). Harte finds the structural view of wholes in the account of mixtures out of the unlimited and limit. This seems plausible. Among its virtues, it sensibly picks up on Socrates' earlier endorsement, in **T10**, of the view "that the things that are always said to be are composed of one and many, since they have limit and unlimitedness naturally in them."¹⁴ But there are complications.

To explore them sensibly, we need to remember that Socrates is at this point limiting his attention to those beings that are imperishable. Perishable beings might be composed of one and many, too, but he is not at the moment worried about the fact that a particular human being is a one and a many. Rather, he is fixated on the fact that the abstract type 'human being' is both one and many (14c11-15a7).

The complications arise when Socrates reports a god-given method that is inferred from the view that he endorses about the constitution of all (eternal) things (**T11**):

Since this is how things are put into order, we should always seek a single form (μίαν ιδέαν) in every single case, with the assumption that it is there, for we will find it in there, and if we grasp it, then after the one we should look for two, if that is how

that "the existence of a composite depends on the actions of its parts upon each other" to the unsupported claim that the existence of a composite depends "on their [viz., its parts'] internal structural relations" (156).

¹⁴ Phlb 16c9-10: ...ὡς ἐξ ἑνὸς μὲν καὶ πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν ἀεὶ λεγομένων εἶναι, πέρας δὲ καὶ ἀπειρίαν ἐν αὐτοῖς σύμφυτον ἔχόντων. Harte rightly distinguishes between this ontological claim and the method proper that is inferred from it (see the following) in the report on the god-given method at 16c5-17a5. This allows us to see that the limit and unlimited mentioned here are the same as the limit and unlimited of the later fourfold classification of being. But it leaves the questions about the method itself that I raise.

it is, and if not, for three or some other number, and so on in the same way for each one (ἕν) of those things until one sees of the initial one not only that it is one, many, and unlimitedly many, but also how many it is. And one should not apply the form (ἰδέαν) of the unlimited to the plurality before one understands every number of the plurality between the unlimited and the one, and then one can let each one of them all go to the unlimited. (Phlb 16c10-e2)

What is strange about this method, in light of Harte's interpretation, is that it does not seem to call for an examination of structure. Rather, we seem to get an account of division, a method very much on display in the Sophist and Statesman. On this reading, a unity (such as pleasure) is to be examined in terms of its proximate constituents (different kinds of pleasure), each of which is to be treated as a unity in turn for an examination of its proximate constituents, and so on, until one has enumerated all the kinds of constituents. Only at that point will one stop dividing the many kinds and allow oneself to consider the remaining source of plurality to be unlimited by any kind-distinctions (limit). Now, there is a structure to a classification tree, but the structure is not particular to any given unity that one is examining and classification does not require attention to the structure itself.

But Harte has a response to this. She points to Socrates' two illustrations of the god-given method, the study of phonetic and musical (Phlb 17a6-e8, cf. 18b5-d2). What she insists, quite reasonably, is that a classification of phonetic or musical sounds requires an understanding of the structural relations among the various phonetic or musical sounds. One cannot identify any pitch for a classification of musical sounds unless one has a grasp of how that pitch relates to other pitches: the pitch is defined by its relations to other pitches, and these relations are expressible in structural terms, indeed, in terms of mathematical structure. The reference to

mathematical structure is harder to square with Plato's account of the structure of phonetic sounds, but there is no doubt that the later discussion of music as a mixture of limit and unlimited (at 26a2-4) only reinforces Harte's account, for the limit of the fourfold classification of all being is explicitly mathematical (25a6-b3).

So, if I understand Harte properly, then she need not reject the view of the god-given method as a method of division and classification. She need only insist that division and classification presupposes an understanding of structural relations among the parts being divided and classified, and she can back that insistence up with Socrates' examples, not to mention the later discussion of mixtures out of the limit and unlimited. But Harte distances herself from the view of the god-given method as a method of division and classification (esp. 207), and so I have run through all of these complications only to ask, does Harte really think that the description of the god-given method at 16c10-e2 is not about division and classification?¹⁵ Or, more open-endedly, what is the relation between the method of collection and division and the structural view of wholes?

About the Timaeus (**T8**), like the Sophist, I have no particular questions to ask. The Timaeus offers examples for Harte's account of the structural view, and these examples agree with the Philebus about the importance of mathematical, or, to be more precise about the Timaeus, geometrical structure. {I will advertise Allan's paper here if I am speaking first and he is discussing the Timaeus, as I expect.}

But I do have questions about how all of these accounts fit together, even leaving the Parmenides aside. Harte finds three features to be

¹⁵ It seems to me that τὸ ἄπειρον in the description of the method itself (16d7,e1,e2) and, even more, the plural ἄπειρα (16d6), cannot represent "unlimitedness" as "a property of an undifferentiated phenomenon such as sound, the content of a domain of science, conceived in the absence of structure" (204), though I find that characterization just fine for ἀπειρία in the ontological claim on which the god-given method is premised (16c10).

essential to the structural view that is supposed to run through all of these texts. First, structure is irreducible: it defines a whole an entity that is not merely its parts, and it indeed defines the parts, as well, since the parts are "structure-laden" and so cannot exist or be identified except in relation to the structure of which they are parts. Second, structure is intelligible: it is discovered by science. And third, structure is normative: it is essentially good. The latter two features also serve as constraints on Plato's answer to the question of what contentful structures there are. There are no bad wholes, and all the wholes are there to be discovered by science. There might be a question about how these constraints relate to each other. Harte does not address this question, but I take it that Plato's dialogues give no hint that science could discover bad wholes. Each constraint points to exactly the same wholes. My questions concern each of the constraints individually.

So take the rational constraint first. Harte might give the impression that each science is separate, and so each structure is separately analyzable. This impression just tracks the diverse examples in Plato's dialogues of particular structures that are studied by particular sciences—phonetics, music, climatology, medicine. But I wonder if this is not just a first approximation of how one should account for wholes. I would have thought that on the view of Plato's dialogues, one has to see how everything hangs together to have an account of any single domain. Harte's work helps to ground this thought. She links the holistic ontology of the structural view—the insistence that parts are "structure-laden"—with the holistic epistemology that many scholars find in these same Platonic dialogues. Now, once one decides that one has to understand a whole domain in order to know any part of that domain, then one can hardly fail to think that one cannot know that whole domain without understanding the larger whole in which it is a part. So the question is: do Plato's dialogues bear out the

insistence of a perfectly holistic epistemology and ontology? Do they represent the intelligible universe—not just the material cosmos but all that is intelligible—as a single coherent whole? I will return to this idea in a bit.

But I also want to ask more directly about the rational constraint. Harte imagines that a "neo-Platonic" appropriation of Plato's structural views might say that there are wholes wherever there are structures to be described by scientific generalizations (275, with n. 12; cf. 164-165). It would help me immensely in thinking about what counts as the relevant sort of structure to know whether Harte thinks that this program would greatly revise common sense on the number of complex individuals. If science can make powerful generalizations about relations between Missouri salamanders and, say, Midwestern chicken-farmers, then is there a whole comprising Missouri salamanders and Midwestern chicken-farmers? Or is the only such whole something much larger—some ecosystem—of which Missouri salamanders and Midwestern chicken-farmers are just two among very many parts? I hope that these two questions about the rational constraint might not be unrelated.

And then what about the normative constraint? Harte leans very heavily on a line near the end of the Philebus (**T12**) in which Socrates says, in Harte's translation (190),

Any blend which does not have measure or the nature of proportion in any way whatsoever, of necessity destroys both its ingredients and, primarily, itself. A thing of this sort is truly no blend at all, but a kind of unblended disaster, a real disaster for the things which acquire it.¹⁶

¹⁶ Phlb 64d9-e3: "Ὅτι μέτρον καὶ τῆς συμμετροῦ φύσεως μὴ τυχοῦσα ἤτισοῦν καὶ ὁπωσοῦν σύγκρασις πᾶσα ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀπόλλυσι τὰ τε κεραννύμενα καὶ πρώτην αὐτήν· οὐδὲ γὰρ κρᾶσις ἀλλὰ τις ἄκρατος συμπεφορημένη ἀληθῶς ἢ τοιαύτη γίγνεται ἐκάστοτε ὄντως τοῖς κεκτημένοις συμφόρα.

This Harte takes to say that goodness is essential to any contentful structure, because, "where measure goes, only good things follow" (211). Now, it is true that Socrates immediately goes on to say that "measure and commensurability are beauty and virtue in every case" (*Phlb* 64e7-8). But Socrates is not thereby insisting that every mixture is beautiful and virtuous, full-stop. He has said that a mixture must have measure in some way and to some degree, and so he is committed to the claim that a mixture must have beauty and virtue in some way and to some degree. That is perfectly consistent with the idea that some mixtures are mixed more perfectly than others, that some manifest more measure, beauty, and virtue than others. Of course, Socrates does not linger over all of these degrees of virtue. But that should not be surprising. He has his own purposes here, which involve convincing Protarchus that the unmeasured pursuit of pleasure is a disaster and the measured life of intelligence is perfectly beautiful and virtuous.¹⁷

4. Additional Examples of Structured Wholes?

I now come to examples of wholes from Platonic dialogues that Harte does not discuss. It seems to me that asking Harte to extend her account today to address these examples will be quite informative. On the one hand, if they display a structural view of wholes, as I think they do, then they provide strong support for a robustly anti-developmental reading of the Plato's dialogues on parts and wholes (cf. §2), but they also reinforce questions I have tried to raise for Harte's characterization of the structural view (in §3). But if, on the other hand, they do not display a structural

¹⁷ In the terms of Harte's example of the perfect bath (186-189): a bad mixture of hot and cold water will be a disaster and fail to be a bath, and a bath must have some good in it, but a bath need not be perfect to be a bath. Harte sticks to the view, by contrast, that only the perfect bath is a bath (193 with n. 55).

view, then Harte's explanation of why they do not might well shed new light on what the structural view of composition is.

The first set of examples comes from the Gorgias. Socrates is trying to convince Calicles that the well-ordered, self-controlled life is better than the constant pursue of more and bigger pleasures. He appeals to the idea that things are made better when they have a certain organization (τάξις, 503e6 et passim), and he gives as examples the houses and ships (Gorg 503e-504a) and the human body (504a). After he generalizes the point (506d-e), he insists that orderliness (κοσμιότητα, 508a2) holds together the cosmos. This is not explicitly a discussion of wholes and parts, but, then, neither are some of the most helpful passages in the Sophist and Philebus. What is undeniable is that Socrates focuses on the internal organization or structure of various entities that are, in fact, complex individuals. Indeed, he associates the creation of artifacts with putting things into an order (503e-504a). Moreover, he is explicit that orderliness comes in degrees, with more orderliness being better, and so normativity is in the picture without the extreme normative constraint. Of course, the Gorgias does not explore ontology directly or ask the crucial question that distinguishes the structural view of wholes from the innocent view. But the Gorgias does manifest commitments that suggest the structural view.

Plato's Republic holds similar lessons concerning the soul as a whole consisting of parts. A certain tripartite organization of the soul is intrinsic to the soul's existence, but Socrates is explicit that psychological orderliness comes in degrees (472c4-d1). Even though most of us fall far short of the harmonious psychology of the philosopher-rulers, we can strive to approximate their virtue. Again, we have an emphasis on organization to constitute a complex whole, and we have normativity built into this

organization without the extreme normative constraint on wholes that Harte finds in the Philebus.¹⁸

My final example is explicitly about a whole. In the Phaedrus, Socrates discusses the science of rhetoric and what it takes for a speech to be a whole:

Every speech must be composed like a living creature, with a body of its own, so that it is neither without a head nor without feet, but has middle parts and extremities that have been written to suit one another and the whole work.¹⁹

Here the crucial idea is that the parts of a speech have to be fitted to each other and to the whole. That is what makes them parts of the speech. One might think that the various figures that one finds in handbooks of rhetoric are parts of rhetorical speeches. Phaedrus, at least, thinks that that these figures are crucial to what the rhetor knows (266d5-6). But Socrates disabuses him of this notion: the elements of rhetorical handbooks are things one must know before one learns rhetoric (269b4-c5, esp. b7-c1). The parts of an artful speech are not readymade in the handbooks. Rather, a speech is a whole constructed on a particular topic (that the speaker must know, 259e-266c) for a particular audience (whose soul the speaker must know, 268a-272b) on a particular occasion. In sum, we have talk of complex unity that depends upon rejecting pre-existing "parts" and fashioning a whole out of elements that are fitted to each other for that particular whole.

We also have a rather interesting point in relation to Harte's reflections on holistic epistemology, for Socrates in the Phaedrus insists that no one will

¹⁸ But note Rep 422e. I am ceding further discussion of the Republic's talk of the soul or city as a whole to Allan.

¹⁹ Phdr 264c2-5 (cf. 268d3-5): ...δεῖν πάντα λόγον ὡς περ ζῶον συνεστάναι σῶμά τι ἔχοντα αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ, ὥστε μήτε ἀκέφαλον εἶναι μήτε ἄποιν, ἀλλὰ μέσα τε ἔχειν καὶ ἄκρα, πρέποντα ἀλλήλοις καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ γεγραμμένα.

ever know the soul of his audience—as the expert rhetor must—unless he also "knows the whole" (270c1-5). Socrates appears to be saying that knowledge of human souls requires understanding them in the context of the whole cosmos (cf. 269e4-270a3). Moreover, he offers a "true argument" for this conclusion that appeals to the need to investigate the soul's power of acting and being acted upon (270c9-d7). This suggests that someone who wants to understand the soul needs to study the interactions of souls as parts within the whole cosmos.²⁰ The Socrates of the Phaedrus seems committed to a perfectly holistic epistemology and ontology.

Now, I might be pushing Harte's anti-developmental reading of Plato on parts and wholes too far, or I might be attenuating the structural view of wholes that she finds in the Sophist, Philebus, and Timaeus. But I hope that these briefly introduced examples will allow us to explore more fully and perhaps even extend Harte's exciting and genuinely helpful study.

²⁰ My discussion of the Phaedrus uses some ideas I have developed in "Knowing the Whole: Comments on Mary Louise Gill, 'Plato's Phaedrus and the Method of Hippocrates,'" in The Metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, The Fifth Henle Conference in the History of Philosophy, Part II, ed. Scott Berman (The Modern Schoolman 80,4 [2003]), 315-323.

ON HARTE ON PLATO ON PARTS AND WHOLES

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1. Introduction

The principal question:

Is a whole a complex individual, that is, an entity created by composition out of parts, or is it just a collection of parts, understood so that it earns no spot in one's ontology?

The principal texts:

- T1** Theaetetus 202d-206b (objection to knowledge as true belief plus an account on grounds that there can be no account of a whole if there is no account of its parts)
- T2** Parmenides 129c-d (Socrates is both one and many)
Parmenides 131a-c (does a particular participate in the whole form or just part?)
Parmenides 137c-d (if one is one, it cannot be a whole or have parts)
Parmenides 142c-144e (the one must have unlimited number of property-parts and unlimited number of instance-parts)
- T3** Parmenides 144e-145c (the one must be a whole and its parts)
- T4** Parmenides 157b-e
- T5** Sophist 244b-245e (two arguments against the monist account of being)
- T6** Sophist 250e-253b
Sophist 261d-262e
- T7** Philebus 16c-18d (the god-given method and illustrations)
Philebus 23c-27c (the four-fold division of being into limit, unlimited, mixture, and cause and illustrations)
- T8** Timaeus esp. 27a-36b, 46c-57d, and 68e-69b

The principal answers:

The innocent view of composition (**T1, T2**).

The structural view of composition (**T4, T6-T8**).

(**T3** offers an unstable alternative to the innocent view, according to which a whole is just a container, disjoint from its parts, which are now, absurdly, parts and not parts of a whole. **T5** rejects the ontological innocence of the innocent view, but without introducing the structural view.)

2. The Role of the Innocent View

A developmentalist reading.

Harte's rejection of the developmentalist reading.

Building a better case for rejecting the developmentalist reading.

Questions in the wake of rejecting the developmentalist reading.

Why does Plato spend so much time on the innocent picture he finds problematic?

Harte: Because he is targeting Parmenides and his Eleatic followers.

But (1) does Plato really target Parmenides here, or just some misguided Eleaticism?

Complicated reason: the arguments against the monists in **T5** are weak.

Simple reason: Parmenides' presents an alternative to the innocent view in **T4**.

And (2) what about the Theaetetus? The Eleatics do not seem to be targeted in **T1**.

3. The Structural View

T9 Parm 157d7-e1: οὐκ ἄρα τῶν πολλῶν οὐδὲ πάντων τὸ μόνιον μόνιον, ἀλλὰ μιᾶς τινὸς ιδέας καὶ ἑνὸς τινος ὃ καλοῦμεν ὅλον, ἐξ ἀπάντων ἓν τέλειον γεγονός the part is not a part of the many or of all things; rather, it is part of some single form and some one that we call a whole, which is created as a complete one out of all.

T10 Phlb 16c9-10: ...ὡς ἐξ ἑνὸς μὲν καὶ πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν ἀεὶ λεγομένων εἶναι, πέρασ δὲ καὶ ἀπειρίαν ἓν αὐτοῖς σύμφυτον ἔχόντων. "...that the things that are always said to be are composed of one and many, since they have limit and unlimitedness naturally in them."

T11 Phlb 16c10-e2: Since this is how things are put into order, we should always seek a single form (μίαν ιδέαν) in every single case, with the assumption that it is there, for we will find it in there, and if we grasp it, then after the one we should look for two, if that is how it is, and if not, for three or some other number, and so on in the same way for each one (ἓν) of those things until one sees of the initial one not only that it is one, many, and unlimitedly many, but also how many it is. And one should not apply the form (ιδέαν) of the unlimited to the plurality before one understands every number of the plurality between the unlimited and the one, and then one can let each one of them all go to the unlimited.

T12 Phlb 64d9-e3, Harte's translation (190): "Ὅτι μέτρου καὶ τῆς συμμετρου φύσεως μὴ τυχοῦσα ἡτισοῦν καὶ ὀπωσοῦν σύγκρασις πᾶσα ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀπόλλυσι τὰ τε κεραννύμενα καὶ πρῶτην αὐτήν· οὐδὲ γὰρ κρᾶσις ἀλλὰ τις ἄκρατος συμπεφορημένη ἀληθῶς ἢ τοιαύτη γίγνεται ἐκάστοτε ὄντως τοῖς κεκτημένοις συμφόρα. Any blend which does not have measure or the nature of proportion in any way whatsoever, of necessity destroys both its ingredients and, primarily, itself. A thing of this sort is truly no blend at all, but a kind of unblended disaster, a real disaster for the things which acquire it.

4. Additional Examples of Structured Wholes?

T13 Gorgias

T14 Republic

T15 Phaedrus