

The Ontological Difference in Parmenides

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I.

Heidegger's relation to the Greeks is usually examined from the perspective of what he owes to them and how his philosophy originates out of an incessant questioning of Greek philosophy. In this paper, I will endeavor to start from the opposite end: rather than asking another version of the question "what does Heidegger owe to the Greeks?" I will raise the question "what do the Greeks owe to Heidegger?" – or, more precisely, what does Parmenides owe to Heidegger. This is to some extent a typical illustration of Heideggerean "destruction" (*Destruktion*),¹ attempting to understand not only what Parmenidean concepts reveal but also what they conceal. The endeavor to uncover the primordial character of philosophical terms and concepts that have been obscured by successive strata of our passively inherited intellectual tradition is indeed the most crucial feature of destruction. But, on the other hand, my approach will deviate from Heidegger's own scheme of historical destruction, attempting to question the very content of this scheme and to turn it against its initiator. In asking what Parmenides owes to Heidegger, I will thus turn destruction against Heidegger's own interpretation of Parmenides, as well as against its conclusions.

My answer to the question concerning Parmenides' debt to Heidegger is suggested by the title of this paper: Parmenides owes to Heidegger the notion of *ontological difference*. This is, in my view, a central notion, able to shed new light on a philosophical position hidden by the accumulated mass of traditional interpretations. Before I proceed with my thesis, let me briefly indicate the place of this notion in Heidegger's thought. The concept of "ontological difference" appears for the first time in the 1927 lectures on *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*,² where it denotes the difference between *Being* and *entities* [*Sein* und *Seiendes*]. Throughout *Being and Time*, Heidegger guards against the idea that Being could possibly be thought

apart from entities. Thus, he is careful to remind us that “Being means Being of entities,” that “Being is each time the Being of an entity,” and that Being is “that which determines an entity qua entity.”³ Nonetheless, the specificity of ontological questioning is secured only under the condition that “Being is not something like an entity.”⁴ In the texts published by Heidegger, the first mention of the “ontological difference” appears in *On the Essence of Ground* (1929).⁵ In the *Beiträge...*, however, Heidegger will renounce the term, now considering it a result of “representational thought,” or a notion that “originates out of a questioning of the entities as such (of the onticity [*Seiendheit*]).” What we rather need, he writes, is “in pre-supposing the difference, to ask beyond it about its unity.”⁶ In the future, Heidegger will try to express this twofold thinking of difference and unity between Being and entities by means of the archaic *Seyn* (“*Beyng*”).

One may argue that associating the poem of Parmenides with the concept of ontological difference is anachronistic. I would like to defend myself against this allegation by bringing forth three introductory arguments:

1. To acknowledge the unity of the history of philosophy, to place a specific philosophical figure within the whole of this history, to trace back the links connecting this figure with his predecessors and successors – these are the distinctive features of an approach to the history of philosophy that *remains philosophical instead of becoming doxographic*. The unity of historical and systematic approach (a typical Hegelian feature present also in Heidegger’s philosophy) is only ensured if we expect earlier texts to answer questions asked by us, here and now.

2. Texts of the past exist in themselves only as physical objects, as a sum of words put together. They become significant entities that produce meaning only within the framework of a hermeneutic circle, which has to be traversed from our own *fore-understanding* to the text and back again. The positivistic appeal to forget our own thoughts and questions in the interpretation of old texts and to avoid bringing together philosophical positions that belong to different epochs does not guarantee the scientific character of the history of philosophy. It rather degrades it to philology or –even worse– to the sheer accumulation of a “stock of opinions” (Hegel).⁷ The process of understanding is a process of merging the horizon of the text with the horizon of its interpreter – both of which have grown diachronically, both of which incorporate history. In our case, this means that, after Heidegger, we cannot read Parmenides as if Heidegger had never existed. It would be hermeneutically dishonest to try to conceal the importance of Heidegger’s philosophy of Being for understanding Parmenides’ philosophy of Being. And it would be not only impossible, but also hermeneutically unwise to avoid making use of our own horizon to its whole extent – an extent decisively enlarged by Heidegger’s philosophy.

3. Nevertheless –and this last point takes some distance from certain traits of Gadamer’s hermeneutics–, I am wary of seeing the history of philosophy as a continuous, linear process starting with the Pre-Socratics and extending smoothly

into the present. This Hegelian legacy tends to suppress genuine *θαυμάζειν* and to overlook existing ruptures. Expounding discontinuity, even through what Rüdiger Bubner once called a “strategic estrangement,”⁸ is always a fruitful way to avoid an unthinking commitment to continuity in the history of philosophy. In order to perform a genuine merging of horizons, we do need such an estrangement, and the more disparate and diverging the horizons are, the more productive their merging will be. This is especially the case for the horizons of an ancient Greek poet and a modern interpreter who tries to approach this poet by taking recourse to a modern philosopher like Heidegger.

II.

In contrast to his interpretation of other major figures of the philosophical tradition like Aristotle or Hegel, Heidegger’s version of Parmenides shares the most crucial commonplaces of the traditional readings of the poem. These commonplaces arise out of the underlying, deep-seated conviction that Parmenides was a philosopher of immobility, solidity and stagnation, who proclaimed a numerical unity of Being, denied plurality or multiplicity and ultimately rejected the world altogether. This *opinio communis* is very old; it originates from the Platonic dialogue *Parmenides*, where the young Socrates takes for granted that Parmenides “say[s] in his poems that everything is one” (128a-b), and from the *Sophist*, where the Stranger criticizes Parmenides as one of those who “speak of the all as one” (244b). Following this, Aristotle blames Parmenides for not thinking “physically,” i.e. for not taking into account the true features of the natural world.⁹ We could trace this tradition even earlier, back to the so-called pupils of Parmenides, namely Zeno and Melissos. The latter, an untalented pseudo-philosopher and vulgar epitomizer, is especially responsible for associating Parmenides with a fictitious Eleatic School.

Presenting Parmenides as a philosophical Gorgo who immobilizes the world is the dominant interpretation. But there are ruptures in this interpretation as old as the tradition itself. The same Platonic Socrates, for instance, expresses in *Theaetetus* some serious concerns: “I’m afraid that we’ll fail to understand what he said and that we’ll fall even far shorter of what he had in mind when he said it” (184a). Surprisingly enough, Heidegger, the advocate of “hermeneutic violence” and one of the most innovative interpreters of older texts, appears unwilling, in the case of Parmenides, to take notice of this and other, more important, ruptures. He instead adopts the most conventional views held throughout this long interpretive tradition. Heidegger’s reading focuses on a philosophical term that reveals the enormous, innovative conceptual power of Parmenides: the participle *ἔόν*, “being.” This term emerges gradually within the poem. It is first introduced as a parallel to the verb *ἔστί* or *εἶναι*, but becomes towards the end of the part of Truth the principal concept of this ontology. The participle *ἔόν* is the subject-matter of the most extensive fragment

bequeathed to us (fr. 8), and its privileged treatment by the manuscript tradition has certainly contributed to the over-evaluation of the importance of this participle. In the unity of ἐόν, the traditional interpretation sought the justification for its own fixation on the numerical monism presumably held by Parmenides.¹⁰

Heidegger's interpretation offers from the beginning a fundamental insight into the "twofold character" of all participles and into the tension involved in each of them:

The word "being," by its structure, sounds and speaks like the terms "blossoming," "gleaming," "resting," "aching," and so on. The grammatical name of long standing for words so formed is *participle*. They participate, they take part, in two [different] meanings. But the essential point is not that there are only two meanings, instead of three or four, but that the two meanings refer to each other. Each of the two meanings is one of the pair. The word "blossoming" can mean: the given something that is blossoming – the rosebush or apple tree. If the word is intended in this sense, it designates what stands in bloom. "Blossoming" designates the given something that is blossoming, and intends this something by itself as that to which blossoming is fitting and proper. The word "blossoming," if it means, for instance, the rose, here almost represents the proper name for what it designates. In its linguistic form, it has the character of a substantive, a noun. "Blossoming," so understood, is used in its *nominal* meaning. But blossoming may also mean "the act of blossoming," in contrast with "the act of wilting." What is meant is not the given plant that happens to be blossoming or wilting, but "to blossom, to wilt." Here "blossoming" is used in its *verbal* meaning. Participles take part in both the nominal and the verbal meaning.¹¹

Heidegger will present this participial twofold once more and with special reference to ἐόν in "Anaximander's Saying":

Thus ὄν says "being" in the sense of *to be* a being; at the same time it names a *being* which is. In the duality of the participial significance of ὄν the distinction between "to be" and "a being" lies concealed.¹²

This insight into the duality of the participle ἐόν is, in my view, crucial for an understanding of the Parmenidean philosophy of Being. Heidegger claims that this philosophy is founded exactly on the tension caused by this duality, which has not, however, been taken explicitly into account by the poet. Particularly the famous expression "this is to say and to think, Being is" (6.1) is treated by Heidegger as the clearest indication of the inability to differentiate explicitly the two meanings and keep them apart:

What is the call that speaks to us from Parmenides' saying? "Let lie before you, and take to heart, ἐὸν ἔμμεναι, Being being."¹³ In terms of grammar later on, and thus seen from the outside, Parmenides' saying says: take to heart ἐόν as participle, and with it take heed of ἔμμεναι in ἐόν, of the Being

of entities. However, no further inquiry and thought is given to the duality *itself* of entities and Being, neither to the essence of the duality nor to the origin of that essence.¹⁴

Or in other words: “Parmenides does not yet think the duality as such; he does not at all think through the unfolding of the twofold.”¹⁵

In the onset of Greek philosophy and in its “openness,” Heidegger can thus detect the origin of all metaphysical aberrations that followed: “The history of Being begins with the oblivion of Being, since Being –together with its essence, its distinction from entities– keeps to itself. The distinction collapses. It remains forgotten”; thus, “the oblivion of Being is oblivion of the distinction between Being and entities.”¹⁶ In the history of occidental thought, “nowhere do we find an experience of Being itself; nowhere do we encounter a Thinking that thinks the truth of Being itself and thus truth itself as Being. This is not thought even there, where pre-Platonic thought (the outset of occidental thought) prepares the evolution of metaphysics through Plato and Aristotle. It is true that the expression ἔστιν (ἔόν) γὰρ εἶναι names Being itself; but it does not think presence precisely as presence and out of its own truth. The history of Being begins –and it begins necessarily– as an oblivion of Being.”¹⁷

III.

Heidegger’s emphatic insistence on the twofold character of the participle ἔόν has been one of the most important contributions of the last decades towards a revised understanding of Parmenides. Turning this awareness of the participle’s ambiguity against Heidegger’s own interpretation, however, I would like to argue that Parmenidean ontology does *not* fall victim to the ambiguity suggested by Heidegger. On the contrary, Parmenides’ only aspiration is to explicitly reflect on the difference between the ontic and the ontological, between entities and Being. In this context, I will argue that Parmenides uses the participle ἔόν exclusively in its verbal dimension, so that the participle has to be treated as a perfect synonym of the verb “Is.” If, on the other hand, we attribute to Parmenides an oscillation between the verbal and the nominal aspects of ἔόν, if we accuse him of confusing the two notions, if we acknowledge even the slightest presence of the nominal meaning in ἔόν, we would end up in the deadlocks of the traditional “monist” reading of the poem.

The participle ἔόν appears for the first time in fr. 2.7. Arguing against the existence of the second ontological route of οὐκ ἔστι (“Is-not”), the goddess rejects every possibility of knowing or expressing μὴ ἔόν (“Non-Being”):

The other [route, to think] that Is-not and that it is necessary not-to-be,
this I tell you is a path without any tidings;
for neither could you know Non-Being –for this is impossible–
nor could you express it.

This close correlation of οὐκ ἔστι and μὴ ἔόν indicates a parallel, equally close

connection between ἔστι and ἐόν. This connection is made explicit in fr. 4.2, where νόος is presented as grasping Being by means of a noetic connection established among a plurality of entities:

for Thought will not cut off being from holding fast to being

This noetic bond is possible if, in perceiving the things of our world, we are not misled by the way they appear, but are guided by their true nature, and mainly by the fact that all of them altogether *are*.¹⁸ Parmenides' Being is not a single, enormous, solitary container, enclosing a uniform mass of existence – or, in other words: Being is not one and unique in a nominal sense. In this nominal sense, there are many ἐόντα, many entities that exist, and it is for this very reason that fr. 4.2 speaks of several beings that have to be noetically connected. The same idea appears in 8.25:

...everything is full of Being;

therefore everything is continuous: Being consorts with Being.

A nominal aspect here would not only be irrelevant, but would completely destroy the crux of the argument. If we assume of two things that “x is” and “y is,” it would be absurd to understand their continuity, their “holding fast,” as something related to the distinct things x and y as such. This continuity is not achieved by means of a reposition of x or y in space, but concerns exclusively the Is-ness common to x and y; it is not an ontic, but an ontological continuity. Similar is the outcome of 8.47-48:

nor is Being such that it might be here more

and there less than Being, since it is all inviolate.

A thing x can undeniably be more or less than another thing y. What cannot be more or less is the Being of x or y; Being in itself does not permit any quantitative or qualitative differentiation. And the synonymy between ἐόν and εἶναι becomes even clearer in the passage 6.1-2 quoted earlier:

This is necessary to say and to think: Being is; for Being is,

whereas Nothing is not.

The word “Being” appearing twice in this translation stands once for the participle ἐόν and once for the verb εἶναι in the original. Translating a Greek participle and a Greek verb by the same English word is in this case not a necessary evil, but a solution absolutely consistent with Parmenidean thought, which even requires this coincidence of translations. The same close relationship is asserted from the opposite direction in 8.1-3:

Sole the account still remains

of the route, that Is. And on this route there are signs

very many: that Being is ungenerated and imperishable...

The signs indispensable to the route of ἔστι mentioned in this fragment are nothing but characteristics of ἐόν. And further on, at a crucial point of the argument against the generation of ἐόν, the goddess reminds us once more (8.15-16):

And the decision about these matters lies in this:
either Is or Is-not.

I believe that the equivalence between ἔστι, εἶναι and ἐόν, their semantic identity founded on the exclusively verbal character of ἐόν, has been made clear by our previous reflections.¹⁹ The participle ἐόν is not nominal: it is neither a unique huge thing nor a collective expression, denoting the totality of things or events of our world. For this totality, the Greeks would use the plural τὰ ὄντα or, simply, τὸ πᾶν. And clearly enough, Parmenides claims that this totality is not identical with his ἐόν, but rather full of it: “everything is full of Being” (8.24). In fact, his innovative ontological investigation deals with πάντα τὰ ὄντα, with all entities, but projects this totality in a new perspective: he treats πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἢ ὄντα, “all beings *qua* beings.”²⁰

IV.

When Heidegger blames Parmenides for not having made a clear distinction between Being and entities, his critique is usually founded upon verse 6.1 and the expression ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι:

“For Being is.” Long have I been thinking about this expression, long have I been entangled in it. For doesn’t it degrade Being to the level of entities? Only of entities can we say that they are. But Parmenides says here: Being *is*.²¹ Being *is* not; It only gives Being [*Sein gibt Es*], as the disclosure of presence.²² The historicity of the history [*Das Geschichtsartige der Geschichte*] of Being determines itself apparently only out of the way in which Being occurs [*geschieht*], i.e. [...] out of the way in which It gives Being. At the beginning of the disclosure of Being, it is true that Being, εἶναι, ἐόν is being thought, but not the “It” that “gives.” Parmenides says instead ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι, “For Being is.”²³

How can we evaluate this argument? Valid or not, in my view this reasoning rests on certain presuppositions that are exclusively Heidegger’s own and proves inadequate for a proper understanding of Parmenides.

In the 1920s, when Being would mean for Heidegger nothing but “the Being of entities,”²⁴ he would see no problem in incidentally ascribing to Parmenides the “discovery of the Being of entities.”²⁵ This is made even clearer in a 1931 lecture: “Entities, precisely when we take them as entities, are nothing but the Being [...] When we ask about entities as such, when entities as such are put into question, we ask about the Being [...] As far as we know, the first to ask about entities in a way trying to grasp Being was the one who also gave the first answer to the question ‘what is the Being?’: *Parmenides*.”²⁶ Along these lines, Heidegger’s own project was not so far away from the traditional ontological project envisaged by Aristotle, who had articulated it by means of a question “that will always be asked, and always will cause difficulty”: the question τί τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν; (1028 b2-4). And the distinction between Being and entities, for its part, was not so far from the traditional project of an ontology, which, contrary to the particular sciences, does not divide entities in

sections, but investigates them in their totality and ἡ ὄντα, qua entities.

To be sure, Heidegger would describe the direct (εὐθύς) falling apart of Being qua λεγόμενον into the various ways of addressing it (κατηγορίαι) as a neglect of the unity of these categories.²⁷ More importantly, he would claim for himself an investigation of Being within the horizon of time and not as something ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχον, as “always remaining the same.” Nevertheless, in my opinion, these divergences only confirm that *the same question*, that of the ὄν ἢ ὄν, should be posed *once again and more profoundly*. It is this very question that has been abandoned by the late Heidegger, for whom Being is not the Being of entities any more, but the completely “Unmasterable” (*das Unverfügbare*). When the late Heidegger addresses a “Being” that “speaks” and “attunes,” “possesses” and “employs,” “sleeps” and “waits,” “sends” and “beckons,” “throws” and “is angry,” “reverses” and “heals,” this phraseology only indicates his deviation from the accountability of philosophical conceptuality and his recourse to a μῦθόν τινα διηγέσθαι, to “telling a story.”²⁸ At the same time, this phraseology indicates the true character of his *Kehre* as a “Turn” from ontology to the philosophy of history – the latter in a linkage with the history of philosophy as deep and dense as only Hegel would have wished.

In fact, the late Heidegger’s real objection against Parmenides does not lie in a phrase like “Being is.” Instead, what Parmenides allegedly misses is the presence of an “It” that “gives” history as an *Ereignis* of concealment and disclosure. This missing, however, cannot be treated as a deficiency on Parmenides’ part. His own ontology, in this case a precursor of the Aristotelian one, has as its topic an ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχον, a Being that always remains the same: it has no history or temporality, it “neither was once nor will be” (8.5). In the view of Parmenides or of anyone unwilling to share Heidegger’s background and its numerous assumptions, the objection that only of entities could we say that they *are*, but never of Being that it *is*, is a formal objection, and, in the end, a superficial criticism. As already pointed out, the real crux of Heidegger’s digression from Parmenides remains his concern about temporality and his determination to integrate it into his own ontological project. Heidegger was the first philosopher to adopt as his explicit goal an attempt to approach Being not as something ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχον, something “always the same,” but in its unfolding within time and history. In this respect, he was the first to question the traditional schism between ontology and temporality, established by Parmenides and corroborated by Plato and Aristotle. I wonder whether the fragmentary outcome of the endeavor of *Being and Time*, the rejection of ontological investigation that followed, and Heidegger’s eventual Turn towards the philosophy of history provide us with a last, indirect verification of the validity of that traditional schism.

V.

Be it as it may, Parmenides not only does not fail to recognize the difference between Being and entities, but this difference constitutes precisely the core of his

philosophy and the central theme around which his whole poem has been structured. Let us turn back to the last part of the proem (1.28-32):

It is necessary that you learn everything:
both the unshaken heart of persuasive truth
as well as the mortals' opinions, in which there is no true conviction.
But nevertheless these you shall learn as well, how appearing things
should be accepted: all of them altogether as beings.

It is no exaggeration that especially the last two of these verses are probably the most contentious in Greek literature. Nearly every single word of the Greek original is debatable both in its philological analysis and in its philosophical evaluation and interpretation. Since the detailed arguments of my own proposal have already been presented elsewhere,²⁹ I will here present only its conclusions.

It is indisputable that the goddess mentions here not only the two regions of Aletheia and Doxa,³⁰ but also something different, introduced by the double adversative ἄλλ' ἔμπης (“but nevertheless”). While Aletheia and Doxa initially seemed to exhaust the contents of knowledge, in the last two verses the goddess refers to something beyond these two regions. I assume this “third” to be not a third region, but rather a kind of mediation between the two or, more specifically, the transition from human Doxa to the divine Aletheia. This mediation appears at first as a clarification of the preceding indictment of mortal opinions. Although these opinions can never be accepted in themselves, an “acceptance” is entirely possible for their objects. The δοκοῦντα, the intentional correlates of δόξαι, are acceptable and *have to be accepted*, if they are conceived qua ὄντα, “as beings.” This ending of the proem (περ' ὄντα), although attested in three out of four manuscripts, had vanished for decades, yielding to the *variatio* περὶ ὄντα.³¹ Its reinstatement helps us to identify and comprehend not only the structure of this passage, but also that of the whole poem, and possibly of Parmenidean philosophy in general. ὄντα here is not used as a *copula*, but has the whole ontological gravity of the verb εἶναι; it bears the emphatic ontological meaning typical in the rest of the poem.

Line 29 announces the part of the poem called Aletheia, line 30 announces the part called Doxa. Since 1916 and Karl Reinhardt,³² nearly everybody has been searching for a relation between these two parts. The last two verses give us a major hint for the appropriate identification of this relation. Truth is nothing but a proper insight into the objects of opinions: the δοκοῦντα are acceptable, inasmuch as they *are*. They only lead to inappropriate opinions if we approach them by means of our deficient, misleading sensation; but they function as a *locus* of truth if we grasp them noetically, qua beings. Accordingly, the third point made by the goddess is neither a third region, nor does it indicate a third part in the poem, but simply affirms the Being of the δοκοῦντα: the Being of the entities of our world. It is precisely this noetic affirmation that marks the transition from opinions to truth. This transition

occurs suddenly, ἐξαίφνης. It presupposes that we grasp with our νόος the irresolvable ontological controversy between Being and Non-Being, as presented in fr. 2. This ontological dilemma forces us constantly to affirm Being and deny Non-Being. But the Being that we affirm is nothing other than the Being of entities, of the δοκοῦντα. These are not mortal inventions or fictions, phantasms, “hallucinations” or “dreams,”³³ but thoroughly real things; previously comprehended within the δόξα, they now constitute the correlative subject-matter of the “heart of truth.”

The life of the mortals is determined by the way they shape their opinions. For example, a house is big or small, made of wood or stone, inhabited or empty, and some day will burn or be demolished. Water is cold or warm, clear or dirty, can become steam or ice. A man is white or black, tall or short, created out of a seed and bound to die. Water, house, man – these are some of the various entities, the δοκοῦντα, that constitute the subject-matter of mortals’ opinions. In her Truth, the goddess underlines something constantly ignored by mortals, although they permanently make use of it and mention it in their discourse; and they ignore this something although it constitutes the condition of the possibility of every saying, perceiving or thinking. Whatever they say about house, water or man, they always name “being,” which they immediately proceed to overlook and transcend, in order to accomplish their predications. But Being is always there, present, παρῶν. If the house burns, the man dies or the water evaporates, this is indifferent to Being as such; for steam *is*, as well as the remains of the house *are* – and a dead man *is* too: According to an awkward Parmenidean view, the only difference between alive and dead is that the latter does not perceive light, warmth and voice, but cold and silence.³⁴

Parmenidean Being is not identical with the totality of entities, but offers a new perspective for noetically grasping the unity of this totality. It does not annul plurality, but establishes the only true unity within multiplicity. This unity is not the unity suggested by the Ionians. The function of all the signs of Being in fr. 8 is to show the inadequacy of the traditional cosmogonic and cosmological approach of ἀρχή when compared with the new ontology. The quest for an ἀρχή emerges on the level of the plurality of entities, and an ἀρχή has to belong to this ontic level if it is to fulfill its function as the origin and the sustaining ground of this plurality. Only Being as an *ontologicum* is something χωριστόν, something separate, that does not have to transform itself into plurality, but simply performs a noetic *Aufhebung* of pluralism. Parmenides considers the Ionian cosmological schemes as dangerous to his ontological project, and this is why the most significant polemic of the poem is not located in the part of Doxa, against the mortals, but in fr. 8, against his philosophical colleagues. His Aletheia does not want to explain *how* things are, but simply to state *that* things *are*. The categories of generation and corruption, time and space, movement and alteration can certainly apply to particular entities, but not to their Being as such.

VI.

The Being of Parmenides is not the “indeterminate immediate,” as Hegel called it, but a genuine concept. It is not “indeterminate,” for it receives its determination from the negation of its constant opponent, Non-Being, as well as from the negation of erroneous opinions. It is not “immediate,” for it arises as the outcome of a quasi-absolute mediation of all entities within Reason. Neither is Being a transcendent entity. It is not something that exceeds every experience, but rather emerges as the concentrated experience of the ontological investigation. Above all, it is in no sense an “object,” for it is not a particular entity. It might be of some interest to apply here Heidegger’s analysis of the formal structure of every questioning presented in § 2 of *Being and Time* and the distinction made there between *Befragtes*, *Gefragtes* and *Erfragtes*. The *Gefragtes* of Parmenides, that “which is asked about,” is Being: that which “determines entities as entities.” The *Erfragtes*, the “really intended” of the question or the “meaning” to be obtained, is the sheer, monolectic affirmation of that Being. The distinctive feature of this philosophy is that its *Gefragtes* and *Erfragtes* are identical. Whenever the question of Being is posed, the answer is immediately given: “Is, and it is impossible not-to-be” (2.3). But what about the *Befragtes*, “that which is interrogated” throughout this question? The interrogated is not a specific entity, a certain phenomenon or something hidden behind phenomena, but the very world, as formed in the totality of δοκούντα. Being is not itself a specific entity, but it can be grasped only within entities, if they are not treated as this or that, as growing or diminishing, but simply as beings.³⁵

This is the attempt of the first part of the poem, called Aletheia. The second part, called Doxa, has more than one ambition. It begins by revealing the causes of human aberrations and proceeds to present a cosmic διάκοσμος, a “world-arrangement” based on the mixture of the two forms of Light and Night/Darkness. This second part involves an answer to a distinct quest, which is now not ontological but cosmological.³⁶ Yet, the main concern of Parmenides is not to “derive” (as Reinhardt thought³⁷) his cosmology from the ontology of the preceding Aletheia. At the end of the poem, when the Goddess promises to help Parmenides “learn everything,” her ἡμὲν-ἡδέ, this paratactic “both A and B,” does not indicate any arising of cosmology out of ontology. Instead of anachronistically applying the metaphysical scheme of *derivatio* and trying to construct a physical cosmos out of ontological categories, we should rather acknowledge that Truth and true δόξα constitute two *autonomous, self-sustaining approaches, which in complement exhaust the sphere of possible knowledge*, without being reduced to one another. Parmenides’ concern is not to create a world from Being, but to make his cosmology compatible with ontology. This is only possible if the new cosmological system is purified from any presence of Non-Being. As a result, he has to stress that “Non-Being does not partake in any of the two” constituent forms of Light and Darkness (9.4). The διάκοσμος does not contradict Truth, but completes

the program of knowing and understanding “everything” (τὰ πάντα).

The *Gerfragtes* of Doxa is the true constitution and nature of the physical world. The *Erfragtes* is the presentation of the divine διάκοσμος that follows the insight into the origin of human errors and their correction. Finally, the *Befragtes*, the “interrogated” of the question asked in Doxa, would again be nothing but the whole world, the totality of δοκοῦντα. This totality of δοκοῦντα is therefore *the crucial and only conjunction of the two parts* of the poem. The guiding questions in Doxa and Truth both have the same *Befragtes*, the same “interrogated” object, and both parts lie upon a common ontic foundation: they do not involve two different objects of analysis, but the same, unique world and its δοκοῦντα. The title *On Nature* might thus be appropriate for both parts of the poem. Parmenides never tried to depict a “two-world-doctrine,” as neither Plato did. He only tried to elucidate the one, unique world by means of two different approaches: one ontological and one physical.

Beyond this conjunction of the two approaches, there still remains a gap, or even a schism. It is a gap not separating two different objects of knowledge, but two different forms of knowledge. This gap cannot be bridged by any “harmonizing” practice like the one initiated by Reinhardt. In contrast, Parmenides himself clearly acknowledges this schism and even underlines it through the presence of a goddess, who announces the content of his ontology in the form of a divine revelation. While Doxa, even as a part of the true account of διάκοσμος, remains an eminently human endeavor, essentially adjusted to the *conditio humana*, the part of Truth appeals throughout to divine forces like *Moira*, *Ananke* or *Dike*.

Describing the way to philosophy as a mythical chariot-riding conveys the inability to conceptually grasp and express this way, an inability evident not only in Parmenides, but also in Plato, Aristotle, or even Hegel. Heidegger’s strategy, by contrast, is different. Throughout the 1920s, he continually attempted to illustrate the deeply “phronetic” character of ontology. In the “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle,” philosophy is nothing but a “phenomenological hermeneutics of facticity,” while ontology and metaphysics appear as an extract of praxis. In the fragmentary *Being and Time*, the question of Being remains without a response, probably because it is founded (and thus restricted) upon a preliminary quest for the Being of *Dasein*, so that every ontological category is forced to be the distillation of a pre-ontological, practical understanding of Being within “everydayness.” In *Being and Time* Heidegger seeks to give *theoretical* evidence for the primacy of *praxis*. The outcome appears to present one more failure to use *theoria* as a ladder, which can then be thrown away after we have climbed up to the hills of *praxis*.

While Heidegger founds ontology on *praxis*, Parmenides finds it on a goddess – and thus nowhere. This explicit denial to provide any founding makes the difference between Aletheia and Doxa, between the divine and the human, between ontology and cosmology, even clearer and more visible. Being as the Being of entities and, at the same time, as the ultimately Other of entities, ontology as completely distinct

from cosmology or *praxis* – this has been a constant concern for Parmenides. The Eleatic was the first and probably the most determined adherent of the ontological difference.³⁸

Notes

¹ The most significant illustration of the scope and function of Heidegger's concept of *Destruktion* is found in an extremely important text of 1922 entitled *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation*. This text was first published in 1989 (ED. H.-U. Lessing, *Dilthey-Jahrbuch* 6, pp. 237-269), and recently in vol. 62 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Klostermann 1975 – [= GA]). English translations have been presented by M. Baur ("Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle. Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation," *Man and World* 25, 1992, pp. 355-393) and by T. Kisiel ("Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection With Aristotle. An Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation," in M. Heidegger, *Supplements. From the Earliest Essays to "Being and Time" and Beyond*. Albany: SUNY Press 2002, pp. 111-145).

² GA 24, p. 22 and § 22.

³ *Being and Time* [= BT], p. 9. References are made to the pagination of the German original (*Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen Niemeyer¹⁶1986), which is also indicated in the margins of the English translation (by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson: *Being and Time*. New York: Harper & Row 1962). – Throughout this paper, we refer to English translations without pointing out our alterations.

⁴ BT, p. 4.

⁵ English transl. by W. McNeill, in *Pathmarks*. Cambridge: CUP 1998, p. 105.

⁶ *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 1936-39 (published 1989). GA 65, p. 250.

⁷ See the Hegelian criticism of this approach in the chapter "The History of Philosophy as an Accumulation of Opinions," in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (vol. I, transl. by E.S. Haldane. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1995, pp. 11-15).

⁸ *Antike Themen und ihre moderne Verwandlung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1992, pp. 7-13.

⁹ *De Caelo* 298b 14; see also *Phys.* A 2-3, *Met.* A 3-5.

¹⁰ On the notions of monism and dualism in Parmenides, see my "Parmenidean Dualisms," forthcoming.

¹¹ *What is Called Thinking?* (transl. by J.G. Gray). New York: Harper, pp. 219-20.

¹² "The Anaximander Fragment," in *Early Greek Thinking* (transl. by D.F. Krell and F.A. Capuzzi). New York: Harper & Row 1975, p. 32.

¹³ This is how Heidegger "translates" line 6.1 of the poem; in the German original: "Lass vorliegen und nimm in die Acht, Seiendes seiend" (*Was heisst Denken?* Tübingen: Niemeyer 1954, p. 136).

¹⁴ *What is Called Thinking?*, pp. 223-4.

¹⁵ "Moirai," in *Early Greek Thinking*, p. 91.

¹⁶ "The Anaximander Fragment," in *Early Greek Thinking*, p. 50.

¹⁷ GA 5, p. 263.

¹⁸ To the best of my knowledge, the only other interpreter who has pointed this out is J.

Owens: “The fragment [4] envisages a multiplicity of things, each of which may be called ‘a being’” (“The Physical World of Parmenides,” in J.R. O’Donnell (ed.): *Essays in Honour of A. C. Pegis*. Leyden: Brill, pp. 387-8).

¹⁹ From a philological point of view, this semantic identity has been asserted by L. Tarán: “let it be stated once and for all that the different idioms which Parmenides uses to express Being and non-Being are synonymous” (*Parmenides. A Text with Translation, Commentary, and Critical Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1965, p. 37). I cannot, however, follow Tarán in the justification of this assertion, where he insists in vain that “for Parmenides there is only one absolute Being.”

²⁰ The interpretation of K. Held is rather embarrassing, when he states: “the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* of Parmenides-research is the supposition that τὸ εἶν is ambiguous, i.e. that in Parmenides we can set out from a difference between Being and entities” (*Heraklit, Parmenides und der Anfang von Philosophie und Wissenschaft*. Berlin / New York: de Gruyter 1980, p. 512). On the contrary, I believe that precisely the supposition (made by Heidegger) of an ambiguous εἶν would prohibit us from ascribing to Parmenides a notion of ontological difference.

²¹ *Vier Seminare*. Frankfurt: Klostermann 1977, p. 135.

²² *Zur Sache des Denkens*. Tübingen: Niemeyer 1969, p. 6.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁴ BT, p. 6.

²⁵ BT, p. 212. Heidegger was even more “generous” in a 1926 lecture, where he described Parmenidean νόος as something that “does not see any isolated entities, which exist as this or that, but only the One Being itself. This view does not conceal reality. It views what is the case for every entity; Being is present to it, even if entities are absent or far away.” (GA 22, pp. 65-6).

²⁶ GA 33, p. 25.

²⁷ See GA 33, pp. 11 ff.

²⁸ Thus exactly what *Being and Time* was trying to avoid (see BT, p. 6).

²⁹ *Die erste “zweite Fahrt.” Sein des Seienden und Erscheinen der Welt bei Parmenides*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink 1997, pp. 36-51. See also *Parmenides, Cosmos, and Being. A Philosophical Interpretation*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 2007, pp. 23-6.

³⁰ I write *Aletheia* and *Doxa* in capital letters and in the singular when I refer to the first and the second part of the poem respectively, without any presumptions concerning the content or the epistemic status of these parts.

³¹ A.P.D. Mourelatos has shown that this *variatio* cannot be sustained, due to lack of any meaning (*The Route of Parmenides. A Study of Word, Image and Argument in the Fragments*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press 1970, p. 213).

³² *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie*. Frankfurt: Klostermann 1916. A key chapter of this work (“The Relation between the Two Parts of Parmenides’ Poem”) has been translated in A.P.D. Mourelatos (ed.): *The Pre-Socratics. A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Anchor Press 1974, pp. 293-311.

³³ See W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. II. Cambridge: CUP 1965, p. 75.

³⁴ See the account of Theophrastos (*testimonium* A 46). Uvo Hölscher drew out of this testimony the “existential consequences” of the Parmenidean doctrine of Being (*Anfängliches*

Fragen. Studien zur frühgriechischen Philosophie. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1968, pp. 126-9). Unfortunately, this excellent analysis cannot be followed when it presents this existential dimension as the “genuine earnestness” of the poem. I would rather say that the “fundamental ontology” of Parmenides has its ontic foundation in *Dasein*; but although it does arise out of *Dasein*, it should not be reduced to it, nor does it coincide with an “existential analytic.”

³⁵ Aristotle is well-known as a rather bad doxographer. However, one of his comments in *De Caelo* should be taken very seriously: He there says of the “Eleatics” that “they assumed nothing but perceptible substances to be” (298b 20-21).

³⁶ See Thanassas, *Die erste “zweite Fahrt”*..., pp. 157-205, and *Parmenides, Cosmos, and Being*..., pp. 61-75.

³⁷ *Parmenides*..., pp. 74-82; see also transl. in Mourelatos (1974), pp. 305-11.

³⁸ I would like to thank Kenneth Knies for help in smoothing out the prose for this final version.