

Viewing Parmenides Through Appropriated Lenses – Two Aspects of  
Plutarch's and Proclus' Interpretations of Parmenides' Poem

Å se Parmenides gjennom tilegnede linser – To aspekter ved Plutark  
og Proklos sine fortolkninger av diktet til Parmenides

Vår 2020

Atle Solheim Ytrehus

Universitetet i Bergen

Institutt for filosofi og førstesemesterstudier

Masteroppgave i FILO350

Veileder: Kristin Sampson



## Abstract

Parmenides' philosophical poem is preserved to us today only in fragments consisting of what ancient writers chose to quote from the poem. Modern interpreters who aim at uncovering the meaning of Parmenides' poem are limited by what these writers quoted from the poem and how they preserved these quotations. In general, these writers did not set out to preserve the poem for posterity. They, rather, often made use of the text of the poem for their own purposes. However, in light of the sparse set of evidence the extant fragments can present, these purposes, as a part of the context in which the fragments of the poem are preserved, are themselves potentially a valuable resource that can be made use of by modern interpreters of the poem. Two such writers are Plutarch and Proclus who both quoted from and presented interpretations of Parmenides' poem.

In this master's thesis I consider how and to what extent reading Parmenides' poem through the perspectives of Plutarch and Proclus can be helpful or harmful for interpreters who seek to uncover the meaning of the poem. I do this by looking how Plutarch and Proclus presented two aspects of what the information we today possess about Parmenides and his poem. Plutarch is one of our ancient sources to the claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver to his native city Elea, and he relates this biographical fact to his interpretation of Parmenides. Proclus is our sole source to fragment B5, a short and problematic fragment. By looking at the context in which Plutarch and Proclus present these pieces of information I here attempt to evaluate whether the perspectives on Parmenides that these two writers present can fruitfully also be taken on in the future.

## Sammendrag

Parmenides filosofiske dikt er bevart til oss i dag bare gjennom fragmenter bestående av hva forfattere i antikken valgte å sitere fra diktet. Moderne fortolkere som ønsker å avdekke mening til diktet til Parmenides er begrenset av hva disse forfatterne siterte fra diktet og hvordan de bevarte disse sitatene. Disse forfatterne tok generelt ikke sikte på å bevare diktet for ettertiden. Isteden tok de i bruk diktets tekst for til sine egne formål. Sett i lys av at fragmentene imidlertid er et begrenset sett med kildemateriale, disse formålene, som en del av konteksten fragmentene er bevart i, er i seg selv muligens en verdifull kilde som moderne fortolkere av diktet kan ta i bruk. To slike forfattere er Plutark og Proklos, som begge siterte fra og la fram fortolkninger av diktet til Parmenides.

Jeg vurderer i denne masteroppgaven hvordan og i hvilken grad det å lese diktet til Parmenides gjennom perspektivene til Plutark og Proklos kan være til hjelp eller hindring for fortolkere som ønsker å avdekke meningen med diktet. Jeg gjøre dette ved å se på hvordan Plutark og Proklos presenterte to deler av informasjonen vi besitter om diktet til Parmenides i dag. Plutark er en av kildene våre fra antikken til påstanden om at Parmenides var en lovgiver til Elea, hjembyen hans, og Plutark relaterte dette biografiske faktum til innholdet i hans fortolkning av Parmenides. Proklos er vår eneste kilde til fragment B5, som er et kort og problematisk fragment. Ved å se på konteksten hvor Plutark og Proklos presentere denne informasjonen forsøker jeg her å evaluere om perspektivene på Parmenides som disse forfatterne presenterer kan også være gunstig å ta i bruk også i framtiden.



## Preface

My interest in Parmenides stems from initially wanting to understand him in order to gain a better perspective on what I saw as peculiar and interesting about Plato and Aristotle. The following can be understood as an account of the problems I was faced with when I tried to use Parmenides to make sense of those later thinkers. What I found out was that Parmenides did not just influence later thought, thinkers in the tradition that was influenced by Parmenides also arguably substantially influence how we can understand Parmenides today.

I first want to thank my supervisor Kristin Sampson for helping me work through my ideas about Parmenides. I am very grateful for the help she has given me. In addition, I also want to thank the Bergen Ancient Philosophy Group, especially for letting me present for them an earlier version of chapter 2 of this master's thesis and for providing plentiful feedback on what I presented. My parents have provided me with great support and encouragement for which I feel very lucky. I am incredibly thankful for the help I have received from my father who has read and commented on all the material here, mostly with the language, but also substantially. Finally, Kine and Barnabas mean the whole world to me. They never stop making me smile no matter what I am doing, for which I could never thank them enough.

## Table of Contents

Viewing Parmenides Through Appropriated Lenses – Two Aspects of Plutarch’s and Proclus’ Interpretations of Parmenides’ Poem .....	1
Abstract .....	3
Sammendrag.....	4
Preface .....	6
Introduction.....	9
0.1. The Ancient Tradition that Preserved Parmenides’ Poem .....	14
0.1.1– Plutarch and Proclus and how they preserved Parmenides’ Poem .....	18
0.2. Remarks on the Content and Form of Parmenides’ poem .....	20
1. Chapter One – Problems and opportunities in modern Parmenides-scholarship.....	25
2. Chapter Two – Plutarch on Parmenides and Legendary Lawgivers.....	39
2.1 – Colotes’ attack on Parmenides.....	40
2.2 – Plutarch’s Interpretation of Parmenides in response to Colotes.....	43
2.3 – Interpretation and Biography .....	46
2.4 – Lawgiver and philosopher – the best human Life .....	48
2.5 – Stories about Legendary Lawgivers and Parmenides’ Poem .....	53
2.6 – Colotes and Plutarch as antecedents to a modern debate.....	64
2.7 – Compulsory originality and the codification of law.....	68
2.8 – Concluding remarks.....	70
3. Chapter Three – Parmenides’ Fragment B5 and Proclus’ Transmission of the Fragment .....	72
3.1. Proclus’ view of Parmenides’ poem as completed – rather than corrected – by Plato .....	73
3.2 – The question of how interpreters should approach B5.....	80
3.3 – How Proclus presents B5 and the philosophical background against which he presents it.....	87
3.4 – A <i>xunon</i> beginning of an inquiry into what has no beginning.....	101
3.5 – Concluding remarks.....	112
Conclusion .....	115
References.....	119
Translations of ancient works cited .....	125





## Introduction

Everything must be studied from the point of view of itself, as near as we can get to this, and the point of view of its relations, as near as we can get to them.

Samuel Butler, *The Note-books of Samuel Butler* XIX

Why do they that are reputed to be of distinguished lineage wear crescents on their shoes? [...] was it a lesson in obedience to authority, not to be discontent at being governed by a king, but—just as the moon is willing to attend her superior and to hold second place, “ever gazing towards the rays of the sun,” as Parmenides puts it—thus to be content with their second rank, having a ruler and enjoying the power and honor derived from him?<sup>1</sup>

Plutarch, *Roman questions* 76, 281A1-282B11.

In this master’s thesis, I attempt to lay out how Plutarch and Proclus, respectively, presented two aspects of the information we possess today about Parmenides’ philosophical poem. In doing so, my aim is to consider how and to what extent reading Parmenides’ poem through Plutarchian and Proclean lenses can be helpful or harmful for interpreters who seek to uncover the meaning of the poem.

---

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Coxon (2009). The quotation from Parmenides’ poem is fragment B15.

In 1966, excavators at Velia in Italy discovered a marble head that fit a headless herm with an inscription indicating that the head was meant to represent Parmenides that was found a few years earlier with. Parmenides was a citizen of Elea (ancient Velia) who was born in the middle to late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE<sup>2</sup> and is known as the author of one written work – a partially preserved philosophical poem. As the archeologist Hans Jucker noted, two years after the discovery was made, the bust was not a good source as to what Parmenides himself looked like or any early account of his physical features. According to Jucker, the bust of Parmenides appears to be modeled after the well-known portrait of Meterodorus, the Epicurean philosopher who lived roughly 200 years after Parmenides.<sup>3</sup> The bust itself is from the first century CE.<sup>4</sup> Exactly why the sculptor chose to use the portrait of Meterodorus to depict Parmenides is not clear, but it is possible that there was no earlier tradition of portraits of Parmenides that the so-called Velia Parmenides could have been modeled after. The bust found in Velia is the only ancient portrait known today that purports to depict Parmenides' likeness. After the bust was made, it was inscribed with the name of Parmenides. However, while the citizens

---

<sup>2</sup> These dates correspond to two different sources that suggest when Parmenides was born, in either approximately 540 BCE or 515 BCE. Diogenes Laertius in the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 1.16, referring to a text by Apollodorus from the second century BCE that we do not possess, claims that Parmenides was born in 540 BCE. Line 127b of the dialogue *Parmenides*, Plato, on the other hand, maintains that Parmenides was roughly 65 years old when the events mentioned in that dialogue supposedly took place, making it necessary for Parmenides to have been born around 515 BCE. Neither of these suggestions are entirely historically convincing. On the one hand, Apollodorus's knowledge of a figure who lived three centuries earlier can be questioned without any further knowledge of the sources he himself was using, which we have no knowledge of. Also, as Burnet's (1897) 127 observation that Parmenides was born in 540 BCE, which was the supposed year of the foundation of Elea and the year of Xenophanes 'flourishing', makes the claim suspect because the coincidence of these events can seem suspicious. On the other hand, Plato had ample literary reason to make his fictional Parmenides young enough to be able to meet Socrates; if Parmenides had been any older than 65, the supposed journey he had undertaken to Athens from Elea could have seemed unlikely. Guthrie (1979) 2, in contrast, ignoring the possible liberties that Plato could have taken because of his wish to present the dramatic encounter between Socrates and Parmenides and Zeno, claims that Plato "had no reason to give such exact information about their ages unless he knew it to be correct." A similar claim is made in Kirk and Raven (1957) 263. While there is some reason not to give an exact date in response to when Parmenides was born due to this uncertain set of evidence, to claim that he was born roughly between the two suggested dates is not obviously unreasonable. Beyond dating the poem, however, the argument against the date inferred from what Plato says about Parmenides is noteworthy. Because it is possible that Socrates' meeting with Parmenides was merely a fiction, it might not be acceptable to take for granted that Plato or the historical Socrates had any knowledge of Parmenides that went beyond what other ancient authors could have known about him.

<sup>3</sup> Jucker (1968) 183.

<sup>4</sup> Coxon (2009) 41.

of Elea in the first century CE might have thought they were looking at a marble portrait of Parmenides, they were in fact looking at a bust sculptured after a model depicting Meterodorus. It is interesting, as Sheila Dillon comments regarding the bust, that “the choice was made to inscribe falsely an on-hand Meterodorus and pass it off as Parmenides, rather than to invent a new fictional portrait of the local philosopher [...].”<sup>5</sup> Dillon points out that whoever was responsible for selling the bust refrained from choosing to freely create a new portrait of Parmenides, but rather chose to appropriate an image of Meterodorus and present it as Parmenides. Because it presents an appropriated image, the Velia Parmenides is only a misleading source of what Parmenides looked like. Instead, as we now can tell, it is a source of the tradition of depicting the physical appearance of Meterodorus.

The appropriation of the image of Meterodorus to Parmenides can itself be seen as an image resulting from the transmission of the limited information we possess today about Parmenides’ poem. This poem is currently preserved only in fragments that were quoted by later authors like Proclus and Plutarch. However, unlike the case with the Velia Parmenides, the preserved fragments of Parmenides’ poem do seem to be quotations from the poem (although they may have been quoted from memory) rather than writings written by someone other than Parmenides himself,<sup>6</sup> as would be the case if there was a perfect analogy between the situation surrounding how the poem is preserved and the bust found in Velia. The fragments and other pieces of information preserved by ancient authors about Parmenides are not primarily appropriated images that falsely depict Parmenides and his work. Instead, what authors such as Proclus and Plutarch convey about Parmenides exhibit their own appropriation of Parmenides by way of the ‘lenses’ through which they transmit the poem. How they present the fragments of the poem, which pieces of information they

---

<sup>5</sup> Dillon (2006) 28.

<sup>6</sup> In chapter 3 section 2 below I discuss the possibility of fragment B5 of the poem being an inauthentic part of Parmenides’ poem.

transmit, and which pieces of information they leave out are the results of them viewing Parmenides through what I refer to by using this metaphor of lenses.

It is by having knowledge of several other busts depicting Meterodorus that Jucker could claim that the Velia Parmenides presents an appropriated image. Similarly, here it is my intention to present the background against which Plutarch relates that Parmenides was a lawgiver to Elea and Proclus' citation of what is called fragment B5 of Parmenides' poem. In the case of Plutarch, which is what I will look at in chapter 2, his interpretation of the poem arguably reflects the extended context in which he understood Parmenides to have been a lawgiver to Elea. As the different lives Plutarch wrote of the legendary lawgivers of Greece can indicate, in saying that Parmenides was a lawgiver, Plutarch arguably understood both Parmenides' written work and life to have corresponded to a set of biographical commonplaces that characterized the written lives of legendary lawgivers. Like how Jucker looked at the Velia Parmenides with knowledge of the Meterodorus portraits, pointing out how this set of biographical commonplaces might correspond to how Plutarch interpreted the poem shows the contingency of Plutarch's interpretation, depending on the validity of Plutarch's seemingly questionable conception of how the lives of lawgivers were structured.

Regarding Proclus' citation of fragment B5, which is addressed in chapter 3, the presentation of that fragment shows that how the fragment is preserved to us is influenced by Proclus' Neoplatonic background. His citation of B5 happens in a context that cannot be straightforwardly understood without knowledge of that background. Furthermore, Proclus himself understood Parmenides' poem to have been an incomplete account that was only completed by Plato's writings. B5 is presented by him not in order to transmit the meaning of the fragment, but instead to support that his understanding of the relationship between Parmenides and Plato is correct. However, the context in which Proclus preserves B5 has mainly influenced interpreters through it being difficult and

convoluting. It is through misinterpretations of Proclus that B5 has often been approached by interpreters.

A common theme of the two chapters is that how Plutarch and Proclus both preserve information about the poem can motivate reading the poem as if it was not written by Parmenides himself in answer to a question or problem. Plutarch understands Parmenides' poem as an expression of Parmenides' life as he was engaged politically with his native city as a lawgiver. Consequently, there was no philosophical problem or question that led Parmenides to write his poem in the eyes of Plutarch. Parmenides' motivation behind writing his poem was, rather, to supposedly give an expression of the life he led engaged philosophically with his work as a lawgiver, which could lead others to follow him. Similarly, Proclus does present fragment B5, "It is common for me \ from where I begin, for I will return there again," in a way that has made interpreters less likely to inquire into where that point of beginning could have been, which is unclear from the text we possess.

This theme is also the reason why I chose to focus on Plutarch and Proclus in my master's thesis. By approaching and laying out these two aspects of how the two later thinkers understood Parmenides, I aim to consider whether the question of what Parmenides' poem might have been written in answer to is a problem that should be further addressed by interpreters of Parmenides. Alternatively, it is possible to metaphorically wear crescents on one's shoes – following what Plutarch suggests might have been the meaning behind that practice amongst distinguished Romans – and show obedience to the authority of Proclus and Plutarch as interpreters of Parmenides. Such obedience is understandable because of the problematic interpretive position of modern interpreters of Parmenides' poem. However, blind obedience to an authority is clearly misguided. Whether Proclus and Plutarch should have any authority over how Parmenides' poem is to be read should be established by closely considering how they preserved and interpreted Parmenides, which coincides with what I attempt to do in the two chapters dealing with Proclus and Plutarch.

With the purpose of establishing a background for these two chapters dealing with Proclus and Plutarch, I will in the two following sections present accounts of the ancient tradition that preserved Parmenides' poem and the content and form of the poem.

### 0.1. The Ancient Tradition that Preserved Parmenides' Poem

Parmenides' philosophical poem likely dates from the late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE,<sup>7</sup> while the preserved fragments of the poem were quoted by ancient authors who lived as late as the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>8</sup> That the poem is preserved in such a manner does not distinguish it from the work of the thinkers who are referred to as Presocratic philosophers. In fact, with a few possible exceptions,<sup>9</sup> none of the original writings of any of the Presocratic philosophers are preserved today. These philosophers are approached by modern interpreters, again with those few possible exceptions, only through what later ancient authors chose to quote from their works. As is the case regarding these other thinkers, the tradition that preserved Parmenides' poem is an unavoidable resource for any interpreter of Parmenides because it is only through it that we can access the fragments we possess of his written work.

The ancient authors who presented quotations from the works of the Presocratics are a resource to us today in so far as we want to get the clearest picture possible of the complete works of the

---

<sup>7</sup> These dates correspond to the suggested dates of Parmenides' birth that are mentioned in note 2 above.

<sup>8</sup> Simplicius, who died in 560 CE, is responsible for preserving at least nine different fragments of the poem: B1.28–32; B2.3–8; B6; B71–2; B8; B9; B11; B12; B13; B20. Cf. Coxon (2009) 2. Fragment 20 might not be a genuine fragment of the poem; cf. note 11 below.

<sup>9</sup> Two possible exceptions are the Derveni Papyrus, a philosophical commentary on an Orphic poem, and the Strasbourg Papyrus, which contains portions of what is seemingly the original text of one of Empedocles' poems.

Presocratics and attempt to understand the meaning of those works. Problematically, however, the authors in the tradition that preserved fragments of the works of the Presocratics did not as a general rule set out to assist us in our attempt to interpret the meaning of the works they quoted from. According to Jaap Mansfeld, speaking about the later tradition, “The ideas of earlier philosophers were used and interpreted in many ways, and, more often than not, served merely as springboards.”<sup>10</sup> That history should be practiced for the sake of giving an objective account of the past is not a notion that we should expect to find in these authors. While the authors who preserved the works of the Presocratics are our only access to these works, they also present their own prejudices and preconceptions through what they preserved the earlier works as a lens, following the same metaphor I applied to Plutarch and Proclus, through which modern interpreters necessarily have to view the Presocratics. These prejudices and preconceptions might, of course, not necessarily have limited how they viewed the earlier works, but it is problematic for modern interpreters to know whether they did or not.

What is today the most prominent account of the tradition that preserved and interpreted the works of the Presocratics is the one presented by Hermann Diels. In the case of Parmenides’ poem, the commonly accepted arrangement of the 19 preserved fragments<sup>11</sup> of Parmenides’ poem was presented by Diels in his *Parmenides Lehrgedicht* and revised in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Later, the second work and the arrangement Diels presented was edited by Walter Kranz. Thus, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* and the ordering of fragments it presents are referred to as simply Diels-Kranz or DK. Diels had gathered both testimonia dealing with the authors in question as well as

---

<sup>10</sup> Mansfeld (1999) 22.

<sup>11</sup> The so-called Cornford fragment was suggested by Francis Cornford (1935) as the 20<sup>th</sup> fragment of the poem. One of Mourelatos’ (2009) 185 suggested translation of the fragment is: “Such, immobile, is that for which as a whole the name is: “to be.” The fragment is quoted by Plato in the *Theaetetus* 180e1 and twice by Simplicius his commentary on the *Physics* at 29.18 and 143.10. Because of its apparent similarity, it is possible that the fragment is a misquote of B8.38. Barnes (1979) 14-16 argues in favor of it not being a genuine fragment of the poem, while Mourelatos (2009) 187 is more reserved and notes that it is “wrong-headed to press interpretive conclusions from Cornford’s fragment.”

the fragments he understood to be direct citations of their original texts, where the former are called A-fragments and the latter are called B-fragments. The 19 fragments of Parmenides' poem are B-fragments and are referred to as B1 to B19.<sup>12</sup>

According to David Runia, it was Diels' work that enshrined the concept of the Presocratics.<sup>13</sup>

Because the term Presocratics defines a tradition by what came after it, it can appear to be an elusive concept. Furthermore, as Runia notes, one seemingly troubling aspect of referring to the thinkers Diels mentions in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* as Presocratics is that some of them lived after Socrates.<sup>14</sup> In response to these issues, instead of being understood as having a temporal meaning, the term can perhaps be understood as referring to thinkers who were not influenced by Socrates.<sup>15</sup> That there was an ancient distinction between philosophy as Socrates conceived of it and that of earlier thinkers is suggested by Aristotle in book 1 of the *Metaphysics*, where he says that Socrates, in contrast to earlier thinkers, "disregarded the physical universe and confined his study to moral questions."<sup>16</sup> While the Presocratics certainly did not refer to themselves as Presocratics, or even under any other common term, applying the concept today to Parmenides and the other thinkers Diels mentions in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* can be justified in light of the influence Socrates had on later thought.

Moreover, in grouping the thinkers who we refer to as the Presocratics, Diels was echoing an ancient tradition that preserved collections of *doxai*, which can be translated as the 'views' or 'tenets,' of

---

<sup>12</sup> Diels' ordering also includes numbers assigned to each of the thinkers whose work he presented in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, where Parmenides is number 28. The first fragment of the poem can, thus, be referred to as DK28 B1. Furthermore, Diels also collected what he believed to be fragments that are imitations of the authors in question. These, which I do not mention any examples of in this thesis, are called C-fragments. I will always refer to the fragments by the order given to them by Diels, and I will refer to them by the letter indicating what type of fragment it is and the number assigned to it. Unless I specify otherwise, I will always be referring to fragments of Parmenides' poem.

<sup>13</sup> Runia (2008) 28.

<sup>14</sup> Runia (2008) 28. Most notably, Democritus is thought to have died 30 years after Socrates.

<sup>15</sup> Kranz makes this suggestion in the introduction to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (1954) viii.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 987b. Trans. Tredennick (1933).



these thinkers. In his earlier work *Doxographi graeci*, Diels had attempted to reconstruct parts of the ancient tradition that preserved fragments of the works of the Presocratics. In this work, Diels coined the term doxography, which he used to describe the tradition that, starting with the work of Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus, we also only possess fragments of – presented by the *doxai* of earlier thinkers in a form that categorized them by the topics each of the *doxai* were seen as dealing with. As noted by Mansfeld, "This reconstruction of the secondary tradition forms the backbone of [...] the *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*."<sup>17</sup> What Diels attempted to achieve by this reconstruction was to show that the works of ancient doxography that we do possess – for instance, Pseudo-Plutarch's *Placita Philosophorum* and Diogenes Laertius' work of biographies of philosophers – was influenced by Theophrastus, who can appear to be a more trustworthy source than the later authors, which gives the later authors increased credibility as historical sources to the Presocratics. Therefore, Mansfeld cautions those who make use of Diels' work by claiming, "All other editions of the so-called Presocratics or of individual Presocratics [...] are entirely indebted to DK and so to the hypothesis concerning the genealogy of the secondary sources that underlie this work."<sup>18</sup> It is noteworthy that the hypothesized genealogy in question does not start with the works of the Presocratics themselves, but rather with Theophrastus' work of doxography. Diels also assumes that Theophrastus' knowledge of the work of the Presocratics itself is trustworthy.

In addition to the doxographic tradition, a further set of sources to Parmenides' poem that Diels makes use of are authors who appear to have been in possession of the complete poem and not just one of the works that was indebted to Theophrastus' doxography. Some of these sources are commentators who comment on philosophical works, notably Simplicius in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* and Proclus in his commentary on Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*. There are also sources such as Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, and Clement of Alexandria, who quoted from

---

<sup>17</sup> Mansfeld (1999) 24. According to Mansfeld, the title of Theophrastus' work was likely to have been *Physikai doxai*.

<sup>18</sup> Mansfeld (1999) 25.

Parmenides' poem in their own independent works of philosophy or theology. However, as I will discuss the Proclus' quotation of fragment B5 in the commentary on the Parmenides,<sup>19</sup> it can be difficult to ascertain if these thinkers were in fact in possession of the text of Parmenides' poem, or if they only made use of a doxographical work when they quoted from the poem.

### 0.1.1– Plutarch and Proclus and how they preserved Parmenides' Poem

Both Plutarch and Proclus fit into the broad category of Platonist philosophers. The interest they show in Parmenides can, thus, possibly be explained by the reverential and significant role Parmenides arguably plays in some of Plato's dialogues. In Plato's dialogue the *Sophist*, Plato has an unnamed follower of Parmenides, also from Elea, take on a role similar to what Socrates more regularly does in Plato's dialogues by being the questioner in a dialogue with his interlocutor. Notably, the dialogue *Parmenides* gives an account of a supposed meeting between an aged Parmenides and a young Socrates. There, Parmenides both challenges Socrates' ideas and engages in complicated discussions dealing with what Plato presents as Parmenides' own thinking. Furthermore, at 183e of the *Theaetetus*, Parmenides is referred to by Socrates as "venerable and awesome," which is perhaps indicative of Plato's attitude toward Parmenides. Plato, however, as John Palmer says, "nowhere simply sets out his view of Parmenides."<sup>20</sup> It can, therefore, be problematic to refer to Plato when giving an account of Plutarch's and Proclus' Platonist interpretations of Parmenides, even though they were clearly influenced by Plato. Nevertheless, in light of how Plato describes

---

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 3.2 below.

<sup>20</sup> Palmer (1999) 13.

Parmenides, it is not unreasonable to argue that Proclus' and Plutarch's motivation behind their interest in Parmenides is owed to Plato.

While Plutarch can be referred to as a Middle Platonist, Proclus can be called a Neoplatonist. In giving an account of the two terms' historical background, Leo Catana argues against making a distinction between what is, through the two terms, referred to as two separate philosophical movements. Because he rejects the characterization of Neoplatonism as a distinct tradition opposed to earlier Platonism, "the division," Catana says, "is untenable and we ought to remove it."<sup>21</sup> A point of continuity between the two supposedly distinct traditions is, as Julia Annas argues, the ideal of divine likeness that Plato mentions at 176A-B of the *Theaetetus*.<sup>22</sup> A further point of similarity specifically between Plutarch and Proclus is their common emphasis on Plato's *Timaeus*. One difference between Plutarch's and Proclus' Platonism is that Proclus – as someone writing in the tradition following Plotinus – put emphasis on the dialogue the *Parmenides* and Plato's concept of the One.<sup>23</sup>

Plutarch, who lived from roughly 45 to 120 CE, is arguably best known as the author of his biographical 'parallel lives' of famous Greeks and Romans. He also wrote dialogues like *De genio Socratis*, which were modeled after the platonic dialogues. We know Plutarch to have quoted a total of 6 lines from Parmenides' poem in his written work, of which two lines, fragments B14 and B15, are not quoted by any other authors.<sup>24</sup> The main work in which Plutarch interprets Parmenides' poem is *Adversus Colotem*, which I will discuss in chapter 2 below.

---

<sup>21</sup> Catana (2013) 1.

<sup>22</sup> Annas (1999) 52-69.

<sup>23</sup> According to George Karamanolis (2010), "It is not an exaggeration to say that Plutarch's interpretation of the *Timaeus* shapes his entire philosophy." Cf. Plutarch's *On the Generation of Soul in the Timaeus*. Meanwhile, Proclus notes in his commentary on the *Timaeus* I 12–13, the different subject matters of the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* together cover the whole cosmos; the first dialogue dealing with the sensible and the second the intelligible.

<sup>24</sup> Coxon (2009) 4.

Proclus served as the head of the Platonic Academy in Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, living from approximately 412 to 485 CE. Among his extensive work, Proclus notably wrote substantial commentaries on 12 of Plato's dialogues. Throughout his work, Proclus quoted 21 lines of Parmenides' poem. In these quotations, A. H. Coxon finds five instances where he sees it as likely that Proclus presented variants of what other authors quoted from the poem that are likely caused by Proclus misquoting the text of the poem.<sup>25</sup> Unlike Plutarch, who more likely was in possession of the text of the poem as he was writing, it is not obvious whether Proclus quoted from the original text of the poem, if he quoted from memory, or if he quoted from a doxographical work. Furthermore, unlike Plutarch, who sets out to present what he views as Parmenides' philosophical position in *Adversus Colotem*, Proclus does not as explicitly lay out an interpretation of Parmenides.

## 0.2. Remarks on the Content and Form of Parmenides' poem

In this section, I give a cursory overview of the content and form of Parmenides' poem with the aim of contextualizing my later comments about the poem.

As I have pointed out, what we today see as Parmenides' poem is a reconstruction based on what ancient authors chose to quote from the poem. The 19 fragments of the poem vary to a large degree in length, while the form of the fragments mostly conform to one another. Fragment B8 is 61 lines long, while fragment B15A is only a single word, *hydatorizon* ("rooted in water"), referring to the

---

<sup>25</sup> Coxon (2009) 5.

Earth. All but one fragment (fragment B18, which is preserved in a Latin translation) is preserved in Greek. In general, the common division of the poem into two parts, *aletheia* and *doxa*, correlates with how well preserved the fragments are. The fragments commonly thought to be in the *aletheia*-section, fragments B1 to B8, are generally longer and provide a better picture of how that section of the poem might have been structured, compared with fragments B9 to B19.<sup>26</sup> Without any apparent clear evidence in favor of his suggestion, Diels estimated that we possess 90 percent of the *aletheia*, while we only possess 10 percent of the *doxa*.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Diels' claim reflects that what we view as the *aletheia* was given more attention than the *doxa* by the ancient authors who quoted from the poem.

Instead of the normal two-part division of the poem, Gallop helpfully suggests that the fragments can be seen as falling into four main sections.<sup>28</sup> Gallop's first section consists of only the proem, which is the second longest of the fragments. It describes an unnamed young man's (a *kouros*) journey to meet a goddess. The proem distinguishes itself from the rest of the poem in that it is the only fragment that is not narrated by the goddess in full. There is no indication in the text we possess that any other fragment is not a part of the goddess' subsequent address to the young man. In what follows, I will alternately refer to the goddess as the narrator-goddess. At the end of the proem, the goddess introduces her narration of the rest of the poem by telling the young man, in a statement that can seem to support the two-part structure of the poem, "You must be informed of everything, both the unmoved heart of persuasive reality and the beliefs of mortals, which comprise no genuine conviction [...]."<sup>29</sup> While there appears to be a clear distinction in value between these two different

---

<sup>26</sup> The account of the poem I give here is an account of the orthodox view of the poem rather than the unorthodox view suggested by Cordero (2011).

<sup>27</sup> Diels (1897) 25-26.

<sup>28</sup> Gallop (1984) 5. As Gallop (1984) 30n11 also mentions, "The modern collocations, 'Way of Truth' and 'Way of Seeming,' have no textual basis either in the poem or in other ancient sources." Another set of collocations that also have no textual basis as labels to sections of the poem are the '*aletheia*' and the '*doxa*.' Like Gallop, I nevertheless follow the practice of using these terms to refer to the first and second part of the poem respectively, with the *aletheia* ending at either B8.51 or at the end of B8.

<sup>29</sup> B1.28-31. Unless I specify otherwise, I use Coxon's translation of the fragments.

parts of what the young man is told he must learn, it is notable that the narrator-goddess tells him that learning both is necessary.

Gallop's second section of fragments consists of the shorter fragments B2 to B7. In fragments B2, B4, B6, and B7, the narrator-goddess presents what she in B2.2 calls the different conceivable "ways of inquiry." How many ways she actually presents is a topic for debate in the secondary literature on the poem.<sup>30</sup> She presents at least two ways, corresponding to, respectively, "the unmoved heart of persuasive reality" and "the beliefs of mortals."<sup>31</sup> "The more enigmatic and short fragments B3 and B5; however, do not clearly fit into Gallop's second group of fragments. Where B5 should be placed in the poem is a topic for discussion in chapter 2.

Fragment B8.1-50 is Gallop's third section. In B8, the goddess presents the way of inquiry corresponding to "the unmoved heart of persuasive reality," which is in B2.3 referred to as the "journey of persuasion." The subject of this journey in B6 is referred to as *to eon*, which can be translated as 'Being' or 'what-is.'<sup>32</sup> Even though fragments B2-B8 (or B1-B8) are commonly referred to as the *aletheia*, the goddess' "journey of persuasion" itself is only presented in B8. B8 lays out what the narrator-goddess in B8.2 calls the "signs" along the "way of persuasion," a way which is in B8.1 alternatively called "that a thing is" or, in my literal translation, "that is" (*hōs estin*). These signs appear to be the attributes the goddess assigns to *to eon*. In his account of the arguments and the argumentative structure of B8, Richard McKirahan groups the different attributes of *to eon* in B8 in

---

<sup>30</sup> See note 62 below.

<sup>31</sup> The first way is in B2.3 said to be "that a thing is" – or literally, "that is" (*hopōs estin*) – "and that it is not for not being." The other way is in B2.5 referred to as "that a thing is not" – or "that is not" (*hōs ouk estin*) – "and that it must needs not be."

<sup>32</sup> Which of these two translations are favored by commentators can depend on how the meaning of the subjectless *esti* in B2 is understood. In this master's thesis I choose to translate *to eon* as Being or to leave the term untranslated. In chapter one I give an account of the discussion surrounding the meaning of *esti* in B2.

six groups. Examples from each of these groups are: “ungenerated;” “whole;” “never was, will not be, is now;” “changeless;” “steadfast;” and “one.”<sup>33</sup>

Gallop’s final section consists of fragments B8.51-61 and B9 to B19. This section coincides with what is commonly called the *doxa*. The narrator-goddess introduces the *doxa* in B8.51-52 by saying, “from this point learn human beliefs, hearing the deceptive composition of my verse.” In the fragments that are preserved from this section of the poem, the goddess appears to give an account of the world that a learned human being potentially could give in opposition to the seemingly more divine ‘way of persuasion’. Unlike what she presents in the ‘way of persuasion’, in the *doxa* the narrator-goddess gives an account of creation and birth, and also presents a cosmology.

Regarding the form of the fragments, a significant aspect of Parmenides’ poem is that it was written in dactylic hexameter. What characterizes the form of the dactylic hexameter is a poetic metrical structure based on long and short syllables, as well as norms, such as the so-called Hermann’s bridge, which govern how each line should be broken up by *caesura*. Dactylic hexameter is typically a meter of epic poetry and is found in the works of Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric hymns, and later in the Latin epics of Virgil and Ovid. One reason why the dactylic hexameter of the poem is noteworthy is that it does not appear to be an obvious choice for Parmenides to make use of it. Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Pherecydes, and Acusilaus all authored prose works earlier than or at roughly the same time as Parmenides wrote his poem.<sup>34</sup> A further significant aspect of Parmenides’ use of a hexameter poem as a way of expression is the juxtaposition between the poetic form and the philosophical content of the poem.

---

<sup>33</sup> McKirahan (2008) 191.

<sup>34</sup> Cherniss (1977) 19n32 and n33.

Parmenides' poetic style has sometimes been criticized. According to Proclus, Parmenides "embraced the unadorned, sparse and clear form of narrative,"<sup>35</sup> while Plutarch maintained that Parmenides' poetry is more like prose.<sup>36</sup> After having criticized him for his unclarity and "almost impenetrable obscurity," Jonathan Barnes claims about Parmenides' poetry, "the case presents no adjunct to the Muse's diadem."<sup>37</sup> In particular, the proem, which is not where Parmenides directly presents what we can call his philosophizing, can be seen as stuttering poetically. Interestingly, however, the very first phrase in the poem that is explicitly philosophical is also better poetry than the preceding poetic account. The proem concludes with a claim that is both interesting and philosophical and poetically. Coxon's translation shows the intricate complexity of the phrase: "how it was necessary that the things that are believed to be should have their being in general acceptance, ranging through all things from end to end."<sup>38</sup> Concerning the phrase's poetic accomplishments, the alliteration and the rhythm in the Greek text can be striking, especially the last three words: "*hōs ta dokeunta \ chrēn dokimōs einai dia pantos panta perōnta.*" This is at the beginning of the narrator-goddess' account, which fits well with the presentation of a more poetically accomplished phrase than what has preceded it. Thus, while Parmenides' style can be criticized, there are also examples of skillful poetry in the poem.

---

<sup>35</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 665. Trans. Coxon.

<sup>36</sup> Plutarch, *How a Young Man Should Listen to Poetry* 2, 16. Trans. Gallop.

<sup>37</sup> Barnes (1982) 155.

<sup>38</sup> In Tor's (2017) 209 suggested translation of the passage he translates *ta dokeunta* as "things that seem and are accepted," which includes two possible translations of the word. Mourelatos (2008) 209 is an example of an interpreter who would only translate 'things that are accepted,' taking this phrase to refer to a third kind of object of inquiry, in addition to the attributes of *to eon* and the opinions of mortals. Mourelatos wants some of the objects of the *doxa* to have some share in reality. Owen (1960) 85 – in arguing against the notion that Parmenides "meant to claim an independent validity for his cosmology, a reality of some kind of degree for the phenomena described in it" – would instead translate *ta dokeunta* as 'things that seem.'



# 1. Chapter One – Problems and opportunities in modern

## Parmenides-scholarship

I will in this chapter present an account of the modern interpretive situation surrounding Parmenides' poem that I position myself within.

Recently, interpreters of Parmenides' poem, such as Shaul Tor and Chaira Robbiano, have come to see aspects of the study of the poem as being at an impasse, or as increasingly ambiguous and complex. Against this backdrop of the increasingly problematic problems concerning the poem, Tor and Robbiano both turn to ancient authors and the ancient tradition that preserved Parmenides' poem as authorities to the meaning of the poem. Viewing these authors as authorities is, thus, a way of coping with an increasingly difficult interpretive situation surrounding Parmenides' poem. In this section I will present two classic problems interpreters of Parmenides' poem have been faced with and show how these problems – rather than being solved – have increasingly been viewed as problematic. By taking recourse to the conceptual framework of authors in the tradition that preserved and first interpreted Parmenides' poem, Tor and Robbiano both subscribe to a reading of Parmenides that de-emphasizes the importance of the classic problems surrounding Parmenides' poem. One such problem is the problem of what Parmenides might have reacted to in writing his poem. Following Catherine Osborne, my approach to Parmenides' poem is to give an account of how parts of the information we possess about Parmenides are embedded in the context of how Plutarch and Proclus transmitted those pieces of information. Unlike Osborne, I do this in order to consider whether there is reason to think that how Plutarch and Proclus view Parmenides' poem exemplify a

fruitful way of approaching the poem, and consequently, whether it is advisable for interpreters like Tor and Robbiano to view the poem through a Plutarchian and Proclean lens.

One example of an apparent interpretive impasse can be found in a discussion centered on the question of the meaning of the word *esti* and its derivatives in the poem, especially in light of how it is used in fragment B2. In B2, the narrator-goddess presents a young man with two possible paths of inquiry. Regarding the two paths she says in B2.3-5, translated literally from the Greek by Robbiano,<sup>39</sup>

*ē men hopōs estin te kai hōs ouk esti mē einai*

the one that is and that is not possible that is not

*pethous esti keleuthos (alētheiē gar spēdei)*

it is the course of persuasion, for truth will follow

*hē d' hōs ouk estin te kai hōs chreōn esti mē einai*

the other that is not and that should not be

The word *esti* (the third person singular of the word meaning ‘to be’) presents a problem of interpretation because here it is presented without a subject, as verbs often are in Greek, but it is also not easily discernible what that subject is from the context. At least three separate ways of interpreting the function of the *esti* have been presented in the literature on the poem. One suggestion, presented prominently by G. E. L. Owen, is that *esti* should be understood existentially, in that the paths of inquiry the goddess is speaking about things that can be said to exist and things that can be said not to exist.<sup>40</sup> Another way of interpreting the function of the *esti* is that it is itself a subject missing a predicate, and that the poem lays out what it is for a thing to be, that is, what the predicates are of the kind of things along the first path the goddess speaks about in B2. One

---

<sup>39</sup> Robbiano (2006) 79.

<sup>40</sup> In addition to Owen (1960), examples of other interpreters who subscribe to the existential reading are Tarán (1965) and Gallop (1979). What characterizes Owen’s position among others who also understand *esti* existentially is that he maintains that, for Parmenides, what exists is what can be spoken of.

prominent interpreter who understands B2's *esti* predicatively is Alexander Mourelatos.<sup>41</sup> A third way of understanding the *esti*, presented by Charles H. Kahn, is to see its meaning as veridical, in that one of the two paths deals with what is the case, while the other path deals with what is not the case.<sup>42</sup>

However, Kahn later moderates his earlier claims about the function of the *esti* as veridical. Rather than claiming that the function of *esti* should be seen as the same throughout the poem, Kahn suggests that the word can be seen to have more than one function in the poem. Referring to the infinitive form of *esti*, Kahn claims that "Parmenides' new conception of Being must be seen as a complex assemblage and unification of a half dozen different functions of the verb *einai* in Greek."<sup>43</sup> For my present purposes, the key word in this quotation is 'complex'. Rather than what the earlier inquiry into Parmenides' poem had as its target, that is, seemingly one answer that would make sense of the whole poem,<sup>44</sup> Kahn expresses that he now sees the potential answer that will make sense of the question he is asking as a complex and intricate answer.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, other classic problems in the tradition of Parmenides-research have more recently been seen as having complex rather than simple answers. One such problem is the problem of the course of the journey of the young man as he travels to meet the goddess in the poem. The journey of the young man has often been seen as having either a downward or an upward trajectory, as a *katabasis* or an *anabasis*.<sup>46</sup> The interpreters who see the journey as a *katabasis* have focused on the motifs in

---

<sup>41</sup> Mourelatos (1970). Other interpreters who support Mourelatos' position are Austin (1986), Curd (2004), and Graham (2006). Calogero (1932) also expressed the same position earlier than Mourelatos.

<sup>42</sup> Kahn (1969).

<sup>43</sup> Kahn (2002) 86.

<sup>44</sup> Even in his earlier article, Kahn had noticed that his veridical reading was not applicable to all of the poem. Nevertheless, about the three different interpretations dealing with the function of the *esti*, Kahn (1969) 713 maintained, "Parmenides himself does not distinguish these three notions, but I think that we must do so [...]."

<sup>45</sup> Brown (1986) 54; Long (1996) 144; Waterfield (2000) 50; Robbiano (2006) 80; and Tor (2017) 295, all make similar claims to Kahn (2002) about the complex and ambiguous meaning of *esti*.

<sup>46</sup> A third option is to see the course of the journey as following the journey of the sun across the sky. For an account of different interpretations that see the young man's journey as corresponding to the course of the sun, see Krauss (2013) 453, cf. Tor (2017) 347-348n1, 356-358.

the poem that resemble Hesiod's underworld Tartarus in the *Theogony* 721-819. Similar to how Hesiod describes Tartarus, Parmenides describes the young man traveling to a distant and otherworldly place. Like Parmenides does at B1.11, Hesiod consistently speaks of the underworld as a distant place by using the word *entha* or 'there' when referring to it. Another resemblance to Parmenides' poem is that Hesiod describes Tartarus seen from above as a "great chasm."<sup>47</sup> In the poem, the young man reaches the goddess by passing through gates that open as a "gaping chasm," (B1.18.) possibly implying that his destination on the other side of the gate is the underworld. However, in favor of the view that the journey is an *anabasis*, these gates are labeled as "aethereal" by Parmenides, even though they also have a stone threshold, as is recounted at B1.12-13. Furthermore, depending on how the phrase is read, B1.10 can appear to express that the trajectory of the maidens that escort the young man is toward the light from the "House of Night,"<sup>48</sup> perhaps implying that the course they are traveling is toward the heavens rather than the dark underworld. Alternatively, the passage can be read as expressing that the maidens traveled from the House of Night and toward the light in order to pick up the young man, and then traveled back with him to where they came from.<sup>49</sup>

In considering different aspects of the young man's journey, Alexander Mourelatos concludes that "The honest conclusion from all this is that the topography of the journey is blurred beyond recognition."<sup>50</sup> In the eyes of Mourelatos, the interpretive problem presented to us by the poem is apparently insurmountable. He continues, "So we are not in a position to specify a particular story of a journey ("theme") as the archetype of Parmenides' narration."<sup>51</sup> There is still, for Mourelatos,

---

<sup>47</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* 741. For descriptions of the many other points of resemblance between Hesiod's Tartarus and Parmenides' poem, see Morrison (1955) 59-60; Schwabl (1963); Dolin (1962) 96; Burkert (1969); Furley (1973); Pellikaan-Engel (1978) 8-10; Songe-Møller (2002) 34; Miller (2006) 7-8; and Palmer (2009) 54-55. Palmer is an example of a modern proponent of the view that the young man's journey is a *katabasis*.

<sup>48</sup> Kahn (2009) 213. Notable proponents of the *anabasis* view are Diels (1897) 7-8; Jaeger (1947) 93; Cornford (1952) 118; and Kahn himself.

<sup>49</sup> Miller (2006) 20.

<sup>50</sup> Mourelatos (2008) 15.

<sup>51</sup> Mourelatos (2008) 15-16.

much that can be said about the journey of the young man throughout the poem, but there is not a common theme than we can point out as the simple explaining factor that lets us make sense of the proem or even the poem as a whole. Mourelatos' approach is one of looking at common motifs and attempting to understand how the separate literary allusions might influence the meaning of the poem. He points to the motific similarities between Odysseus' journey in the *Odyssey* and the young man's journey throughout the poem but refrains from claiming that the young man's journey is an allegory to Odysseus' journey.<sup>52</sup> Instead, Mourelatos suggests that Parmenides used the older motifs "to think new thoughts in and through them."<sup>53</sup> The upshot of his approach is that, like Kahn's approach to the problem of the *esti*, it attempts to seek out a complex and multi-faceted answer, which will not be a clear and unambiguous solution to the problem it set out to deal with. According to Mourelatos, regarding how the journey of the young man is presented by Parmenides, "the blur is intentional."<sup>54</sup> For Mourelatos, the intentional aspect of the "blur" consists in that the literary motifs of the journey are Parmenides' way of expressing his own thought rather than directly linking what he is expressing with the works his motifs are alluding to.

Furthermore, Mitchell Miller understands both the proem and the poem as a whole as being intentionally ambiguous. A particularly interesting example Miller presents regarding the ambiguity of the proem is the phrase used to describe the gates that open for the young man; a 'gaping chasm'. With the similar phrase used for Tartarus in the *Theogony*, the phrase can allude to an opening below us into the underworld. However, the word translated as 'gaping,' *achanes*, has the connotation of an opening above, like that over a roofless temple.<sup>55</sup> In answer to whether we should understand the opening as one below or above us, Miller replies, "It would be a mistake, I think, to choose: Parmenides interweaves pointed cues for each reading, and in *chasm' achanes* he brings the two

---

<sup>52</sup> Mourelatos (2008) 32.

<sup>53</sup> Mourelatos (2008) 39.

<sup>54</sup> Mourelatos (2008) 16.

<sup>55</sup> Miller (2006) 22.

together into a balanced conjunction of opposites.”<sup>56</sup> In a nuanced criticism of Mourelatos, Miller argues that there is a difference between seeing the proem as intentionally blurred and intentionally ambiguous. In Miller’s view, Parmenides “elicits a clear, and clearly contradictory, double sense” of the journey of the young man.<sup>57</sup>

In the context of the increased reluctance toward finding unambiguous and clear answers to the problems Parmenides’ poem presents, exemplified by the responses given to these problems by interpreters such as Kahn, Mourelatos, and Miller, Robbiano and Tor attempt to approach the poem in a way that is seemingly more clear and secure. In the case of Tor’s interpretation of Parmenides, he directly makes reference to Plutarch’s reading of Parmenides in *Adversus Colotem* as a resource we can make use of when interpreting Parmenides. “There is much interpretive insight and potential,” Tor says, “in the basic interpretation of the ontological question which Plutarch adopts in his response to Colotes.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, by looking at what is “conceptually possible” for Plato, who Tor appears to understand as expressing the same view as Plutarch, Tor can “lend further, extrinsic support” to the interpretation he is advancing of the “earlier and more obscure text of Parmenides.”<sup>59</sup> Appealing to these later authors is one way for Tor to approach this perceived obscurity of the poem. In looking at what is conceptually possible for these thinkers, Tor is suggesting that Parmenides shared with them a conceptual framework that we can access through the texts of the later ancient authors.

Robbiano explicitly presents her interpretation of Parmenides as a contrast to those who are focused on the problems the poem has presented in the past. In addition to the two problems I have laid out above, Robbiano mentions the questions of why Parmenides uses the hexameter as a poetic form,

---

<sup>56</sup> Miller (2006) 23.

<sup>57</sup> Miller (2006) 23n39.

<sup>58</sup> Tor (2017) 302.

<sup>59</sup> Tor (2017) 302.

how many 'ways' of inquiry there are in the poem (a question that is often centered on whether the word *eirgō* should be placed in the lacuna in fragment B6.3<sup>60</sup>), the question of what kind of monist Parmenides was, and the question of what Parmenides means by 'what is not'.<sup>61</sup> Robbiano's alternative approach is, rather than approaching Parmenides' poem through the problems or puzzles the poem seems to present, to understand the poem as an attempt to make its readers achieve spiritual progress. In support of this approach, she refers to a claim that Pierre Hadot makes about an aspect of Hellenistic philosophy that is applied to ancient philosophy in general. In a context where he is speaking about Hellenistic philosophy but making a generalization regarding all of ancient philosophy, Hadot says, "Above all, the work, even if it is apparently theoretical and systematic, is written not so much to inform the reader of a doctrinal content but to form him, to make him traverse a certain itinerary in the course of which he will make spiritual progress [...]. One must always approach a philosophical work of antiquity with this idea of spiritual progress in mind."<sup>62</sup>

What Hadot expresses is a methodological view about how to approach ancient thinkers that both Robbiano and Tor subscribe to. Robbiano and Tor argue that Parmenides attempts to transform his readers toward what is expressed in the poem via the processes of "becoming being"<sup>63</sup> and "*homoiosis theoi*",<sup>64</sup> respectively. In reading Parmenides' poem with an eye for how it can appear to encourage spiritual progress amongst its readers, both Robbiano and Tor maintain that what Parmenides sets out to do in his poem is to appeal to his readers to transform their lives in a way

---

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Nehamas (1981).

<sup>61</sup> Robbiano (2006) 12-13.

<sup>62</sup> Hadot (1995) 266. That Hadot applies that aspect of Hellenistic philosophy to all of ancient philosophy is criticized by Christoph Horn. Horn maintains that the approach to ancient philosophy that Hadot advocates for should not be applied to the Presocratics. He agrees with Hadot in that viewing philosophy as being about 'spiritual progress' is helpful when we are talking about the Hellenistic period, but he does not extend that presumption back in time to the Presocratics. According to Horn (1999) 18, "Im fall der Vorsokratiker lässt sich Hadots These kaum bestätigen." One of the arguments Horn presents in favor of his view is that he does not see the Presocratics as occupied with the moral and practical questions that later thinkers were focused on, following what I have mentioned that Aristotle expressed about Socrates' pivotal role in the history of ancient Greek philosophy.

<sup>63</sup> Robbiano (2006) 9-34.

<sup>64</sup> Tor (2017) 252-284.

that corresponds to what is expressed in the poem. Tor takes his lead from Socrates' suggestion in Plato's *Theaetetus* 176b that we should strive to escape from Earth and become like gods through contemplation, which is seen by Plutarch as perfectly coinciding with human virtue.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, Robbiano suggests that what Parmenides wanted to achieve by being an advocate for 'becoming being' was to make his readers take part in "peacefulness, steadfastness and constancy"<sup>66</sup> – what can appear to closely resemble stoic virtues.

By appealing to the later ancient authors' notion of spiritual progress as an alternative lens through which the poem can be approached, Robbiano and Tor shift the focus of interpretation from the classic problems interpreters of Parmenides have faced to the problem of how Parmenides influenced the lives of his readers. In particular, Tor, by linking his interpretation to Plutarch, comes to this approach by viewing parts of the tradition that first preserved and interpreted Parmenides as authorities to how the poem should be understood today. Tor is himself conscious that his approach to Parmenides might be questioned by others. "Nowadays," Tor says, "one runs the risk of being diagnosed with 'Platonitis' by offering an interpretation of Parmenides which is deemed excessively close to later Platonic attitudes."<sup>67</sup> However, there are many examples of interpreters of Parmenides who adopt an approach similar to Tor's. Like Tor, Kurfess cautions readers of the poem from grasping interpretations that stand in opposition to, for instance, the one presented by Proclus.

Flattering though it may be to think that we have better insight into Parmenides' thought than did Simplicius, Theophrastus, Proclus, or other figures in the ancient tradition, we would do well to remember that, even for the worst readers and thinkers among them, their access to the poem was superior to our own. When their text or interpretation appears to conflict

---

<sup>65</sup> Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta* 550d1-e5. Cf. Torri (2019) 246.

<sup>66</sup> Robbiano (2006) 145.

<sup>67</sup> Tor (2017) 302. Cf. Cordero (2011) 100.



with ours, we ought to reconsider the bases for our own reading before dismissing theirs as mistaken.<sup>68</sup>

The same sentiment is expressed by Kahn, who says, “Plato was in a better position than we are to understand what Parmenides had in mind.”<sup>69</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer’s position regarding how to approach interpreting the Presocratics is similar to Kahn’s. “[...] I insist on the fact,” Gadamer maintains, “that our sole access to the topic of ‘the Presocratics’ is Plato and Aristotle.”<sup>70</sup> Unlike the works of the Presocratics, the works of Plato and Aristotle have, Gadamer notes, “been handed down to us authentically and completely,” and can open new and better interpretive options for readers who attempt to read the Presocratics through an Aristotelian and Platonic lens.<sup>71</sup> What Tor, Kurfess, Kahn, and Gadamer all have in common is the view that ancient readers such as Plato were in a better position than we are to understand Parmenides’ poem.

A notable interpreter of the Presocratics, who has expressed a position akin to those who argue in favor of the preeminence of the ancient sources is Catherine Osborne in *Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy*. Osborne frames her discussion partially around a claim made by Jonathan Barnes. “Our knowledge of the Presocratics,” Osborne notes that Barnes has claimed, “must rest upon their ipsissima verba. Few verba survive. Hence, our knowledge of the Presocratics is exiguous.”<sup>72</sup> Barnes’ claim about how much we actually know about the Presocratics, despite all the work of everyone

---

<sup>68</sup> Kurfess (2016) 9.

<sup>69</sup> Kahn (1988) 237: “Since Plato has given us a much fuller and more explicit statement of his conception of Being, this conception, if used with care, may help us interpret the more lapidary and puzzling utterances of Parmenides himself.”

<sup>70</sup> Gadamer (2000) 31-32.

<sup>71</sup> Gadamer (2000) 33. Gadamer’s view of tradition, prejudices, and authority, which is reflected in his views about how the Presocratics should be approached, has been the topic of a debate between him and Jürgen Habermas. In his review of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, reprinted in Habermas (1988), Habermas argued that Gadamer’s positive view of appealing to authorities as a part of interpretation is problematic. Gadamer’s approach, according to Habermas, is limited by not instead making use of reflection when it is applied to spheres of understanding where an interpretation is restricted by social forces, such as “systems of domination” (174). Gadamer (1975) 248, however, had maintained, “authority has nothing to do with obedience; it rests on recognition.” As the debate between them can highlight, Gadamer’s view of the role of authorities in interpretation is that authorities are established through recognition of that there is reason for it to be seen as an authority, and that Gadamer does not see blind obedience itself as valuable.

<sup>72</sup> Osborne (1987) 2; Barnes (1979) 10.

who studies them, is akin to Robbiano's and Tor's view that Parmenides' poem is increasingly seen as problematic rather than made clear. Like Tor and Robbiano, Osborne is an advocate for approaching the Presocratics from a new angle instead of accepting the problematic situation of studying these thinkers. In the case of Barnes' claim about the primacy of *ipsissima verba*, she would accept Barnes' conclusion if she thought the premise were true, which she does not. Instead, she challenges Barnes' view by emphasizing the need for a contextualistic approach to the writings of the Presocratics.

Osborne criticizes those who in effect only study the Presocratics through Diels' B-fragments by claiming, "it is [...] the traditional use of the 'fragments' without their accompanying context which represents an uncritical approach based on potentially misleading evidence."<sup>73</sup> What Osborne argues in favor of is reading the fragments in the context they were quoted, with the aim of presenting a full account of an ancient interpretation, and only then moving on to do the same with other ancient readings. In Osborne's view, the fragments we possess from the works of the Presocratics need to be contextualized to the fullest extent possible in order to assist our interpretations. Consequentially, ignoring that context or not giving an extensive enough account of it is seen by her as to our detriment as interpreters. Three influential reviewers of Osborne's book, Mourelatos, Malcolm Schofield, and even Barnes himself, all seem to agree with the sentiment that Osborne's call for an increased awareness of the context in which fragments are preserved is a good thing.<sup>74</sup>

Further than merely advocating for reading the fragments in context; however, Osborne also sees modern readers of the fragments as substantially limited as compared with the ancient authors who quoted them. Both she and Tor appear to understand themselves to be in an epistemic situation that is parallel to Parmenides' image of the moon in fragment B15 – the fragment Plutarch quotes in the context of the question of why Romans wear crescents on their shoes – which is said to only shine so

---

<sup>73</sup> Osborne (1987) 9.

<sup>74</sup> Barnes (1988) 331; Schofield (1988) 538; Mourelatos (1989) 116.

far as it reflects the light of the sun. Going beyond Kurfess' encouragement to reconsider the basis for our own readings when we disagree with an ancient interpreter, in speaking about Hippolytus' interpretation of Heraclitus, Osborne claims, "Presocratics scholars have no justification for asserting that what Hippolytus saw in the text was not there or was incorrect as a reading of that text."<sup>75</sup> Rather than challenging the ancient readings, modern scholars must, in the eyes of Osborne, be content with laying out all ancient readings as the basis of an "exploration of the range of meaning brought out by the creative use of the text."<sup>76</sup> The creative use of the text she refers to is how ancient authors interpreted the work of the earlier thinker, and the modern interpreter is not to go beyond the compound range of meaning established by all the ancient authors who commented on a text or a certain passage.

Harold Cherniss notably criticized those who uncritically made use of Aristotle as a source of the Presocratics. In contrast to what Osborne says about what the modern interpreter is justified in asserting, Cherniss saw his task as an interpreter as consisting of "stripping off the Aristotelian form" of what Aristotle expressed about the Presocratics, or as reversing "Aristotle's process of interpretation."<sup>77</sup> Cherniss is an explicit target for Osborne's criticism because she understands him as believing that "objective truth" should be what the interpreter should try attain about their object of interpretation, a notion she rejects.<sup>78</sup> "We are explorers," Barnes emphatically proclaims regarding Osborne's approach, "mapping out readings. We are trappers, setting out gins for creative insight. And the truth? The correct interpretation? How naïve – how very Anglo-Saxon – to think that there is any such beast."<sup>79</sup> As appealing as Barnes' ironic criticism might be to some – as it is to me – it is important to remember that Osborne, as well as Tor and Robbiano, are not primarily making a general hermeneutical point about the limits of our understanding. Instead, they are responding to

---

<sup>75</sup> Osborne (1987) 22.

<sup>76</sup> Osborne (1987) 10.

<sup>77</sup> Cherniss (1944) xiii, 347.

<sup>78</sup> Osborne (1987) 22.

<sup>79</sup> Barnes (1988) 332.

the constraints of scholarship into the works of the Presocratics, which is illustrated by the very fragmented evidence we possess.

However, as Palmer and Schofield point out, Osborne herself also talks about recognizing and assessing the biases of ancient authors who interpreted the Presocratics.<sup>80</sup> “Reading an embedded text,” Osborne says regarding the type of reading she is an advocate for, “instead of a fragmented text we read it as a functioning and meaningful system, governed by the preoccupations of an interpreter we can assess [...]”<sup>81</sup> By talking about assessing the preoccupations of an ancient interpreter, Osborne seems to Schofield and Palmer, as Schofield says, to never quite decide on “how much or how little a relativist about meaning and interpretation she is.”<sup>82</sup> While Osborne is critical of Cherniss for attempting to get behind what Aristotle says about the Presocratics, she herself here purports to not only ‘map out’ what the ancient interpreters said, but also assess the biases they bring to their readings of the texts. By being open to recognizing the biases and assessing the preoccupations of ancient interpreters of the Presocratics, Osborne suggests that there is some truth that can be uncovered by examining those biases. “Osborne’s basic mistake,” Palmer says, “consists in failing to keep distinct the two types of historical project,” referring, respectively, to recognizing biases and exploring the range of possible meanings. The exploration of what the ancient interpreters said about the Presocratics, Palmer continues, “should not be mistaken for a guide to a better understanding of the Presocratics in *their* own right.”<sup>83</sup> Palmer suggests that when we use an ancient interpreter as a guide to how a Presocratic thinker might be understood, that guide might be leading us astray. Nevertheless, the ancient interpreters do act like guides to modern interpreters both tacitly and consciously. In the case of Palmer’s interpretation of Parmenides, he considers – in opposition to Cherniss – Aristotle to be a good guide to the meaning of Parmenides’ poem.<sup>84</sup> Thus,

---

<sup>80</sup> Schofield (1988) 538; Palmer (1999) 14n13.

<sup>81</sup> Osborne (1987) 10.

<sup>82</sup> Schofield (1988) 538.

<sup>83</sup> Palmer (1999) 14n13.

<sup>84</sup> Palmer (2009) 44.

he himself is open to the possibility of judging the merits of ancient interpreters as guides to the meaning of the works of the Presocratics.

My approach in this master's thesis is to, like Osborne, explore the contexts in which B5 and the claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver are embedded. I am also motivated by the problematic results of inquiries into Parmenides' poem – and that so “few verba survive” – to look at the context in which the evidence we have is presented. Unlike Osborne, I do not want to only present the context in which Proclus and Plutarch lays out parts of information about Parmenides' poem for a future repository of the context of all we know about Parmenides. Furthermore, my goal is not primarily to see if the interpretations Plutarch and Proclus present are correct, or – like Cherniss – to decontextualize what they say about Parmenides so that their claims are stripped of their interpretations, supposedly leaving only what Parmenides meant. Rather, my primary aim is to attempt to consider, by giving accounts of how they understood Parmenides, whether we have reason to believe that further readings of Parmenides through a Plutarchian and Proclean lens are fruitful, or whether the interpretive lens they present is – like the Velia Parmenides – appropriated from somewhere else so that it does not accurately represent Parmenides. The point I will specifically focus on is that Proclus and Plutarch arguably discourage further inquiries into what Parmenides might have been responding to when he wrote his poem. What that point of beginning might have been is not a question I will attempt here to give an in-depth answer to, but by looking at Proclus and Plutarch, I attempt to see if they were justified in thus arguably excluding that method of inquiry from future inquiries into Parmenides' poem.

In light of Parmenides' own concern with what the right method of inquiry is, I think my approach here bears a slight resemblance to what Parmenides did in his poem. More than what the results of an interpretation might be, different interpretations can present future paths that we can choose to follow or abandon, regardless of whether they follow a method that has been made explicit. Tor and

Robbiano exemplify how reading Parmenides through those who interpreted him can lead readers down a path because they both inquire into how Parmenides, through his poem, supposedly set out to transform its readers' way of life. Furthermore, a path is a limit in the sense that one is constrained by where it is heading when following it. That, of course, does not mean that by leaving a path of interpretation, there is complete freedom to do whatever one wants. In the specific case of if Proclus' and Plutarch's approach were rejected, an alternative path is to attempt to understand Parmenides as responding to the thinkers who came before him, on the basis of what we know about thinkers such as Anaximander and Hesiod. In contrast, because of how Plutarch views Parmenides as a lawgiver and that Proclus deemphasizes the role of what B5 refers to as a point of beginning, reading Parmenides through Plutarch and Proclus can arguably lead interpreters away from inquiring into the relationship Parmenides had with the thinkers who came before him.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Barnes (1979) 163; Songe-Møller (2002) 23; Curd (2004) 77; and Miller (2006) 24 all expressed different opinions about what the poem might have been written in answer to. Barnes thought Parmenides was responding to a problem that arises in everyday language when we make what is apparently true statements about non-existent objects, such as a Pegasus. Songe-Møller suggests Parmenides might have responded to Hesiod's problematic concept of *chaos*. Curd instead presents Anaximander's *to apeiron* as a possible problematic concept Parmenides was reacting against. Miller, arguing in favor of intentional ambiguity, suggests that both *chaos* and *apeiron* was being responded to by Parmenides.

## 2. Chapter Two – Plutarch on Parmenides and Legendary Lawgivers

Plutarch is one of our sources to the claim that Parmenides, in addition to being a philosopher, was a lawgiver to his native Elea. In this chapter it is my intention to present the background against which Plutarch makes that remark about Parmenides' biography, with the aim of considering how and to what extent Plutarch's interpretation can be a valuable source to the meaning of Parmenides' poem. Plutarch's belief that Parmenides was a lawgiver arguably influenced how he understood Parmenides' poem. For Plutarch, that Parmenides was a lawgiver also implied that Parmenides fit into an interpretive framework through which Plutarch understood lawgivers. Because that interpretive framework is seemingly applied indiscriminately by Plutarch to any of his stories about lawgivers, his interpretation of Parmenides is questionable to the extent that it corresponds to what I refer to as a set of biographical commonplaces. Plutarch, I will ultimately suggest, is not a good source to the meaning of Parmenides' poem when his interpretation corresponds to his questionable assumptions about lawgivers. Therefore, viewing Parmenides through a Plutarchian lens might be problematic if what is established about Parmenides can seem to correspond to those questionable assumptions. In order to present a contrast to Plutarch's view of lawgivers, I will at the end of this chapter present an alternative historical conception of how the codification of Greek law took place. This alternative conception, I suggest, might present a way of viewing the codification of law that can also indicate how Parmenides' poem might alternatively be viewed.

## 2.1 – Colotes’ attack on Parmenides

*Adversus Colotem* is the primary work in which Plutarch lays out an account of Parmenides’ poem. As the name of the work implies, *Adversus Colotem* was presented as a response to a book written in the third century BCE by the Epicurean Colotes of Lampsacus, entitled *On the fact that according to the doctrines of the other philosophers it is impossible even to live*. What Plutarch says about Parmenides in the *Adversus Colotem*, including that he mentions that Parmenides was a lawgiver, is a part of that response. Thus, it can be helpful – in order to give an account of the claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver – to first present how Colotes can appear to have viewed Parmenides as well as how Plutarch responded to Colotes.

Colotes’ book is itself only preserved in Plutarch’s quotations of it in *Adversus Colotem*. In her study of Plutarch’s response to Colotes, Eleni Kechagia says about the style of Colotes’ book, “it seems to have been formulated in everyday language that could be understood by any reader of average education.”<sup>86</sup> A common way for Colotes to substantiate the claims he made against other philosophers seems to have been, Kechagia notes, to “employ snapshots of everyday life, usually in vivid and slightly comic language.”<sup>87</sup> An illustrative example is an image Colotes appears to have presented about Socrates. Seemingly, as is indirectly referred to by Plutarch in 1117F of the *Adversus Colotem*, Colotes had maintained that Socrates was led by his philosophizing to eat grass rather than food and put his cloak around a pillar rather than around his body.<sup>88</sup> In contrast to the lofty figure of Socrates who Plato portrayed in his dialogues, Colotes suggests that Socrates’ philosophizing led him to live what appears to be a humorously bad life where even trifling things like getting dressed could be a problem.

---

<sup>86</sup> Kechagia (2011) 115.

<sup>87</sup> Kechagia (2011) 115.

<sup>88</sup> Mansfeld (1994) 184 suggests Socrates was presented by Colotes as a “proto sceptic.”



Thinkers in the tradition of Hellenistic philosophy, according to A. A. Long and Hadot, understood philosophy as aiming at securing a good life for those who practiced it.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, according to Kechagia, Colotes' argumentation "presupposes that philosophy ought to have a positive impact on human life."<sup>90</sup> The general point that Colotes argued in favor of, as the title of his book shows, was that following the doctrines of other philosophers made life unlivable. In maintaining that philosophers like Socrates and Parmenides made life unlivable, Colotes presupposed that what he viewed as the doctrines of past thinkers were supposed to be guides to how human life should be lived. He did not think they were good guides to how life should be lived, but he did judge them as guides. Regarding Socrates, in what is seemingly a direct quotation presented by Plutarch, Colotes says, "but you, Socrates, practiced pretentious arguments; for you said one thing to those with whom you happened to converse, but you did another."<sup>91</sup> With this claim, Colotes is saying that Socrates' philosophizing failed to influence his life. His words themselves, Colotes suggests, were not the problem. The problem was rather that these words did supposedly not assist those who followed them in living a good life. In criticizing Socrates for not being able to live according to his words, Colotes seems to give an expression of the ideal that one should live according to one's teaching. That Socrates' philosophy supposedly fails as a guide for human life corresponds to him supposedly failing to live up to that ideal.

Kechagia finds in total four passages that she believes can be quotations of what Colotes said about Parmenides. Frequently, in what is quoted from the earlier text in *Adversus Colotem*, Colotes seems to have claimed that the other philosophers had abolished (*anairein*) either certain aspects of life or all of life itself, so that it is no longer livable.<sup>92</sup> In response to Colotes, Plutarch argued that Parmenides "had abolished neither fire nor water nor precipices nor inhabited cities in Europe and

---

<sup>89</sup> Hadot (2002); Long (2006).

<sup>90</sup> Kechagia (2011) 129.

<sup>91</sup> Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1117D. Trans. Kechagia (2011). All quotations of Plutarch's own supposed quotations of Colotes are here presented in Kechagia's translations.

<sup>92</sup> Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1113B, 1114B, 1114D, 1116A, 1116E, 1119D, 1120B, 1124D.

Asia, as Colotes claims.” (1114B) Who is responsible for the seemingly arbitrary nature of the grouping of entities in this quotation is difficult to tell. These could have been the exact entities Colotes claimed Parmenides had abolished, or Plutarch might have mentioned some, but not all, of the entities originally mentioned by Colotes. A further possibility is that all these different entities might have been mentioned in a part of Parmenides’ poem that we do not possess, likely in the *doxa*. Both fire and water, in fact, are spoken of by Parmenides in that section of the poem. Fire is explicitly mentioned at B8.56 and B12.1, but also alluded to elsewhere in the *doxa* with references such as to the ‘pure torch’ of the sun at B10.2. Water is indirectly spoken of in B15A, the one-word fragment “water-rooted.”<sup>93</sup>

According to Plutarch, in a seemingly more direct quotation of Colotes, “Colotes says that Parmenides plainly abolished everything by postulating one being.” (1114D) In light of how Plato makes use of the term in the *Parmenides*, the sense of this quotation is not that Parmenides *only* postulated one being, but rather that Parmenides postulated the concept of the one being. In the previous quotation we were given no reason for why Parmenides supposedly had abolished all those entities, but here we get an explanation that might also explain why those specific entities were abolished. We do know that Parmenides said that Being, *to eon*, was ‘one’ in B8.6. That *to eon* is ‘one’ is one of many of the attributes assigned to *to eon* in B8. It is, therefore, possible that Colotes had an opinion of the relationship between the *aletheia* and the *doxa* of Parmenides’ poem. What this view of the relationship consisted in was seemingly that what was postulated in one section led Parmenides to abolish what was spoken of in the second section. In another quotation at 1113F, Plutarch quotes Colotes as referring to the “shameful sophistries” of Parmenides. At 1113F-1114A,

---

<sup>93</sup> In contrast, Hershbell (1972) 203 says, “The examples are probably from Colotes’ work; whether they correspond to anything in Parmenides is less clear.” He does suggest that the cities in Europe and Asia might refer to what is now sometimes seen as a misreading of B1: “all cities,” translating *pant’ astē*. However, as J. H. Lesher (1994) mentions, *astē* is an emendation and the best manuscript only has the word *atē*, which makes the phrase unintelligible. Coxon (2009) 271 suggests that the word alternatively could be read as *antēn* (“face to face”). While Lesher ultimately argues in favor of reading *astē*, it is not certain what the text of Parmenides’ poem said when Colotes might have read it.

Plutarch probably makes another indirect quotation of Colotes. Plutarch says, “by saying that all there is is one, he has prevented us from living,” talking about Parmenides. Maybe either this quotation or 1114D is a paraphrase of the other. ‘Prevent from living’ and ‘abolish’ seems to have had a similar meaning for Colotes. While these four quotations do not give anywhere close to a full account of how Colotes viewed Parmenides, they do show that Colotes might have had an opinion of the relationship between the two sections of the poem. It is also clear that Colotes expressed a negative opinion of Parmenides, just like with all the other philosophers his book dealt with.

## 2.2 – Plutarch’s Interpretation of Parmenides in response to Colotes

Even as it is somewhat unclear whether Colotes had any opinion about how the poem’s *aletheia* and *doxa* related to one another on the basis of what Plutarch appears to quote from his book, the relationship between the two sections of Parmenides’ poem appears to have been central to how Plutarch responded to Colotes. In response to Colotes’ interpretation of Parmenides’ poem, Plutarch maintains that Parmenides did not ‘abolish everything’ because when he said that everything was ‘one’ he was making a distinction between what is sensible and what is intelligible. Parmenides, Plutarch says, “saw that reality includes something opinable and includes something intelligible as well, and that what is opinable is uncertain and subject to variation over a wide range of attributes and changes [...].”<sup>94</sup> The significant point Plutarch is making is that, according to him, Parmenides understood both the uncertain and opinable, on the one hand, and the intelligible, on the other, as a part reality. The distinction Plutarch presents between what is opinable (*doxaston*) and what is

---

<sup>94</sup> Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1114C. Trans. Coxon (2009).

intelligible (*noēton*) corresponds, in how he presents them, to the two sections of Parmenides' poem. Parmenides himself does not use these terms as headings to the sections of his poem. As I have also quoted above, however, Parmenides does have the narrator-goddess tell the young man at the end of the poem, here in Plutarch's quotation of these passages, that it is necessary that the young man should learn "'both the precise heart of persuasive reality,' [B1.29] which has to do with the intelligible and invariably the same, 'and of the beliefs of mortals, which comprises no genuine conviction' [B1.30]."<sup>95</sup> The word 'reality' is here Coxon's translation of *aletheia*, which Plutarch links with the 'intelligible and invariably the same.' In opposition to this intelligible and motionless *aletheia*, for Plutarch, is the changeable *doxa*; the word 'beliefs' is a translation of *doxas*.

Considering what the narrator-goddess says in B1.29-30, that the poem can be divided up into two sections called *aletheia* and *doxa* has some textual support. Plutarch's further characterization of these two sections is noteworthy. Plutarch is not of the opinion that the *doxa* is the same as the second way of inquiry presented by the goddess, namely what she says in fragment B2.6: "that is not, and that must needs not be." Because for Parmenides, according to Plutarch, "reality includes something opinable," the way of inquiry presented in B2.6 has to be different from what the goddess does in the *doxa*. It, thus, fits with neither of the two ways presented by the goddess in B2, respectively the way "that is," or the way of Being, and the way "that is not," or the way of non-Being. What Plutarch more specifically means by the opinable is "uncertain and subject to variation," or what is subject to 'becoming' rather than subject to the motionless Being, but also not what has no part in being at all.

Against Colotes, Plutarch's claim is that Parmenides does not 'abolish' everything we encounter in our everyday lives; rather, he merely expressed the belief that these things have lesser ontological priority than what is unchanging and one. According to Plutarch, Parmenides does not

---

<sup>95</sup> Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1114D-E. Trans. Coxon (2009).

[...] abolish those of our affections that belong to the world of becoming and of appearances, but points out to those who follow that there are other things more stable than these and more enduring in so far as their being is concerned because they are not generated nor are destroyed nor suffer anything. (1116A)

That Parmenides supposedly emphasized the ontological superiority of what is stable and 'one' does not mean, Plutarch maintains, that he claims that what the goddess is speaking of in the *doxa* does not exist. Rather than making a clear distinction between what is and what is not – Being and non-Being – Plutarch understands Parmenides as having found a new way of speaking of entities that have a share in Being to varying degrees.

A problem for the connection Plutarch arguably makes between the *alēthēia* and the *doxa* is how the narrator-goddess concludes the *aletheia*, as well as that she in B1.30 says there is no "genuine [*alēthēs*] conviction" in *doxa*. "Therewith I put a stop for you," she says in B8.51-52, concluding the *aletheia*-section of the poem, "to my reliable discourse and thought about reality [*amfis alētheiēs*]; from this point learn human beliefs, hearing the deceptive composition of my verse." The *doxa*, thus, is viewed by her as with a 'deceptive composition' and lacking 'genuine [*alēthēs*] conviction.' These phrases can appear to present *alēthēia* as standing in opposition to *doxa*, rather than claiming that what is a matter of *doxa* has a lesser share in what the poem's *alēthēia* deals with. Plutarch's response to B1.30 is that the claim made there concerning the *doxa* shows that Parmenides "required a different label from that used for the other, that which always is." Thus, the seeming exclusion of what is spoken of in the *doxa* from the subject of the *alēthēia* is only a question of labels, according to Plutarch; what the *doxa* deals with is labeled differently, but it is not excluded from the *alēthēia*. Parmenides "account concerning what-is, that it is one," rather, "does not amount to an elimination of the many sensibles, but an indication of their difference from the intelligible." The text, however, does not unambiguously support Plutarch's reading. If Colotes did use the text of Parmenides' poem to support his criticisms of Parmenides, he could potentially have pointed to

fragments such as B1.30 and B8.51-52 in order to make the claim that what Parmenides maintained was spoken of in the *doxa* should be viewed as not having a share in Being, and thus be 'abolished.' Through his interpretation, Plutarch is responding to what a tension between what is spoken of in the *doxa* and the earlier characterizations of the ways of inquiry in the poem. His solution, which may or may not be correct, is to suggest that Parmenides is not abolishing what he is speaking of in the *doxa*, but rather that Parmenides presents it under a new label. Thus, Parmenides, in Plutarch's view, is neither abolishing the *doxa* nor speaking of it as if it was fully a part of the *alēthēia*.

### 2.3 – Interpretation and Biography

Plutarch's claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver occurs in the context of his interpretation of Parmenides' poem, which was centered on giving an account of the poem's *doxa*. On the one hand, that Plutarch connects the claims about Parmenides' poem with such a claim about the life of Parmenides can be seen as a response to Colotes, who precisely argued that the problem with Parmenides and the other philosophers was that their writings were failed guides for human life. However, on the other hand, Plutarch can at the same time also appear to be relying on biographical claims about Parmenides in order to support the content of his interpretation, as a tool that could shape how he understood Parmenides' poem. The second point is supported by how Cicero presents what he viewed as an interpretive tool that interpreters could make use of when dealing with difficult texts.

In his study of ancient *prolegomena*, or the questions that were to be settled before one could begin the study of a text, Jaap Mansfeld claims that one such preliminary interpretive question, first explicitly presented by Cicero in the first century BC, was to present a biography of the author and to

attempt to understand how the text in question agreed with the biography.<sup>96</sup> In a context where he is speaking about the interpretation of texts, Cicero notes a number of interpretive tools an interpreter can make use of when dealing with ambiguity and other problems that might hinder interpretation. In presenting one of these tools, Cicero says,

In the next place, one ought to estimate what the writer meant from the rest of his writings and from his acts, words, character and life and to examine the whole document which contains the ambiguity in question in all its parts, to see if anything agrees with our interpretation or is opposed to the sense in which our opponent interprets it.<sup>97</sup>

Supporting Cicero, Mansfeld notes that the four elements that the interpreter ought to consider is also mentioned in similar ways elsewhere. There is a parallel in a claim made by Galen, about “the indispensability of a thorough acquaintance with his own *bios*, *erga* and *tropos tēs psyches* for those who want to study his works” without studying his *On Proof*.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Mansfeld notes that “Porphyry dwells at appropriate length on what we certainly may call the *facta*, *dicta*, *animus* and *vita*” in his *Vita Plotini*.<sup>99</sup> Other notable examples of writers who introduced their interpretations with a *bios*, a life or biography, of the author they were interpreting are Thrasyllus, Epictetus, as well as Diogenes Laertius, whose biographies of philosophers Mansfeld suggests may have been copied from the biographical introduction of exegetical works that Diogenes was in possession of.<sup>100</sup> Insofar as these examples show that biography was seen as an interpretive tool also elsewhere at roughly the same time as Plutarch was writing, there is some reason to consider if Plutarch might have viewed looking at a biography as a way to make sense of a text, especially considering that the content of Plutarch’s interpretation of Parmenides is linked to biographical claims.

---

<sup>96</sup>Mansfeld (1994) 178. As Mansfeld notes, it was Schäubin (1977) who first pointed out that Cicero makes the earliest explicit reference to the rule for interpretation in question.

<sup>97</sup> Cicero, *De inventione* II 116. Trans. Hubbell (1949) and Mansfeld (1994).

<sup>98</sup> Mansfeld (1994) 178-179; Galen *on the Order of My Own Books* 83.7.

<sup>99</sup> Mansfeld (1994) 179.

<sup>100</sup> Mansfeld (1994) 179.

## 2.4 – Lawgiver and philosopher – the best human Life

It is towards the end of *Adversus Colotem* that Plutarch stresses the biographical point that Parmenides was a lawgiver, a *nomothētēs*, to his *polis*, and was supposedly still celebrated as a lawgiver in his native Elea 500 years after his death.<sup>101</sup> “Parmenides,” Plutarch claimed, “adorned his native city with the best laws, and as a result every year the citizens administer an oath to the magister to abide by the laws of Parmenides.”<sup>102</sup> Plutarch is here not reluctant in his praise of Parmenides. Parmenides supposedly equipped Elea *nomois aristois*, with the “best laws,” and all the citizens of Elea supposedly were a part in the process of honoring these laws. Plutarch presented this claim about Parmenides’ biography in the context of presenting the political accomplishments of the philosophers Colotes had criticized for not making life livable. While Plutarch also praises these other philosophers, arguably no one else is praised as highly as Parmenides.

---

<sup>101</sup> In addition to this claim made by Plutarch, there is an ancient tradition that maintained that Parmenides was a lawgiver, even though this tradition does not provide any clear historical evidence in favor of the veracity of the claim. With the exception of Speusippus, but only as referred to in Diogenes Laertius, the sources who claim Parmenides was a lawgiver or involved in the government of Elea are from the Hellenistic period or later. “Parmenides too,” Diogenes Laertius mentions, “is said to have given laws to his fellow citizens, as Speusippus declares in his book *On Philosophers*.” (449, 5. Trans. Hicks) This book has been lost, so we have no way to know what exactly Speusippus might have said. Furthermore, Speusippus himself lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, so he could not have had first-hand knowledge of Parmenides’ life. The other sources are Strabo in his *Geography* i, 346, 17–22, who claimed, “I believe that [Elea] was well governed both through the efforts of these men [including Parmenides] and in still earlier times,” (Trans. Coxon [2009]), and Themistius, *Oration* xxxiv, 10 who said, “Nor did Parmenides descend [from philosophy] in giving laws to the Italians, for he filled what is called Great Greece with law and order.” (Trans. Coxon [2009]) R. Westman (1955) 242 suggests that Plutarch’s own claim about Parmenides being a lawgiver could have been one of the many pieces of information about philosophers Plutarch referred to from his notebooks, which he sometimes mentions making use of. One example of Plutarch referring to these notebooks is in *De Tranquillitate Animi* 464E-F. Cf. Martin (1969) 69-70.

<sup>102</sup> Plutarch *Adversus Colotem* 1126A-B. Trans. Coxon (2009).



In regard to Plato, while Plutarch is rightly called a Platonist and strongly sympathized with Plato, he viewed Sparta as it was established by its lawgiver Lycurgus as superior to the city in speech in Plato's Republic, because Sparta was a virtuous city in deed.<sup>103</sup> Still, Lycurgus' Sparta is not viewed more favorably than Plato's city in speech because Plutarch saw philosophers as of lesser value than lawgivers. What Lycurgus achieved was seen as superior because his life was in accord with his laws and could, therefore, be a paradigm others could follow.

Plutarch himself sets out to influence others to become more virtuous through his written biographies, where his intention was to present virtuous paradigms that his readers would be drawn to follow. "[V]irtuous action," which is what he sets out to present through his Lives, Plutarch says in the second chapter of the *Life of Pericles*, "straightway so disposes a man that he no sooner admires the works of virtue than he strives to emulate those who wrought them."<sup>104</sup> A further explanation of this phenomenon is given by Plutarch with reference to the Platonic form of the Good: "The Good creates a stir of activity towards itself, and implants at once in the spectator an active impulse."<sup>105</sup> In order for this stir to be created, virtue itself must be exhibited, rather than taught without reference to a paradigmatic figure to look up to. Plutarch is, however, not describing, by referring to "an active impulse," something akin to a 'virtuous reflex' that is triggered by seeing others perform virtuous acts. The previous quotation continues: "it does not form his character by ideal representation alone, but through the investigation of its work it furnishes him with a dominant purpose." Using the phrase *historia tou ergou*, Plutarch emphasizes that both the virtuous acts and the reflective inquiry into those acts is necessary, in his view, for his readers to become virtuous through reading his *Lives*.

The legendary lawgivers of Greek cities were frequent subjects of Plutarch's Lives and he appears to have viewed them with great admiration. In a study of Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* and *Life of Solon*,

---

<sup>103</sup> *Life of Lycurgus* 31.2.

<sup>104</sup> Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 2.2. Trans. Perrin (1916).

<sup>105</sup> Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 2.3. Trans. Perrin (1916).

Lukas de Blois argues that one ‘commonplace,’ or *topos*, of how Plutarch generally referred to lawgivers was that they fulfilled the ideal of the ‘good statesman.’<sup>106</sup> In keeping with the intended function of Plutarch’s *Lives*, these men presented themselves in those *Lives* as paradigms for future action, while the law codes they supposedly wrote were themselves important only in light of their virtuous character. In the case of the *Life of Lycurgus*, which illustrates this point, Lycurgus was said to have put no laws into writing, even supposedly going as far as to forbid the writing down of laws. (13.1) While the practice of not putting laws into writing went against a historical increase in the use of written laws, as Gagarin argues,<sup>107</sup> not writing down laws and instead exhibiting them through ones actions does illustrate Plutarch’s ideal of law.

Considering the admiration that Plutarch seemingly shows towards these men, there is reason to see his characterization of Parmenides as a lawgiver as an important piece of what formed the background for his reading of Parmenides. In fact, a part of Plutarch’s conceptual framework was that lawgivers were similar to philosophers, in that individuals from the two separate groups of people were increasingly good the more they could be characterized as also having the characteristics of someone who belonged to the other group. Plutarch saw praiseworthy philosophical activity, on the one hand, and the codification of praiseworthy law, on the other, as similar, both in how these activities structured the life of those who engaged in them, and in the conditions for their success – which for a philosopher was to engage with law and society, while for a lawgiver was to be surrounded by philosophers. Plutarch’s reading of Parmenides’ poem is, thus, closely related to Plutarch’s idea of how the codification of Greek law took place.

---

<sup>106</sup> De Blois (2008) 146-147.

<sup>107</sup> Gagarin (1986) 57.

In *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, in regard to the ideal that one's actions should live up to one's words, Plutarch expresses the view that philosophers should be held to an even higher moral standard than others regarding how their actions corresponds to their doctrines.

In the first place I require that the consistency of the doctrines be visible in their lives, for it is even more necessary that the philosopher's life be in accord with his theory than that the orator's language, as Aeschines says, be identical with that of the law. The reason is that the philosopher's theory is law freely chosen for his own [...].<sup>108</sup>

Plutarch here shows his own similarities to Colotes. Not only does he argue that the philosophers theory should be exhibited through his actions, he also subsequently goes on to criticize philosophers, such as Zeno of Citium (not of Elea), for distancing themselves from the world and their native cities rather than engaging in them politically. Zeno of Citium, Plutarch notes at 1034F, not only moved from his native city to Athens, but once he was in Athens he also did not want to become an Athenian citizen.

In *Adversus Colotem*, Plutarch similarly criticizes Colotes, as well as Epicurus and Metrodorus, for not having taken part in public service, claiming that they "dissuade their followers from public service and quarrel with those engaged with it."<sup>109</sup> These remarks, as well as the positive characterizations of the public life of the philosophers Colotes criticizes, come in response to a claim, seemingly quoted verbatim by Plutarch, that Colotes made in praise of "the men who drew up laws and customs and established the government of cities by kings and archons." These men, Plutarch quotes Colotes as saying, "brought about great security and peace and freed us from turmoil. But if one abolished these institutions, we shall live the life of beasts and anyone who encounters another will nearly

---

<sup>108</sup> Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1033A-B. Trans. Cherniss and Mansfeld (1994). Cf. Mansfeld (1994) 190n342.

<sup>109</sup> Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1127E. Trans Einaros and De Lacy (1967). In light of these remarks and the contrast Plutarch draws between these thinkers and Parmenides, it is thinkable that Plutarch would himself not have chosen a marble portrait of Metrodorus as an image that was supposed to represent Parmenides.

devour him.”<sup>110</sup> Colotes’ view appears to be that the philosophers who are his targets interfere with established society in a way that is harmful to it by only negatively breaking down what the others who were responsible for establishing the government had built up. Plutarch’s response is that if it did happen that the laws were taken away, the philosophers own teachings could serve the function of what the laws had done in the past: “For if someone takes away the laws, but leaves us with the teachings of Parmenides, Socrates, Heraclitus and Plato, we shall be very far from devouring one another and living the life of wild beasts [...]”<sup>111</sup> Plutarch is here only pointing to a hypothetical situation. Parmenides, however, supposedly actually did what the other philosophers only potentially could do. Parmenides did not abolish the institutions that holds a city together, he instead is the only example Plutarch presents of someone who did the opposite by having been the one who was supposedly responsible for having brought about everything Colotes praises.

The other legendary lawgivers who establish the laws of Greek cities, in contrast to the orators mentioned by Plutarch in chapter 1 of *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, were themselves also freely laying out laws, like the philosophers were for their own lives. Because men such as Lycurgus were to be viewed by others as paradigmatic figures, they needed to present themselves as such by living up to the laws they had laid down and, thus, had as much responsibility to adhere to the ideal of correspondence between one’s thinking and actions as the philosophers. Furthermore, it was through acquaintance with philosophers, as well as the lawgivers’ own ability to practice philosophy, that made sure these men were and remained good. Plutarch, De Blois argues regarding the lives of Lycurgus and Solon, “brings forward that philosophy, as a law implanted in the ruler by a good education, neutralizes the moral risks involved in the exercise of power.” Furthermore, these statesmen are moral, in the eyes of Plutarch, only with the help of philosophy, saying in *To an*

---

<sup>110</sup> Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1124D. Trans. Kechagia (2011).

<sup>111</sup> Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1124D-E. Trans. Einaros and Lacy (1967).

*Uneducated Ruler*, “nothing imparts this disposition [the light of justice] in men except the teachings of philosophy [...]”<sup>112</sup>

## 2.5 – Stories about Legendary Lawgivers and Parmenides’ Poem

Plutarch was prone to use commonplaces in his biographies of historical people. As is the case regarding that Plutarch presented his lawgivers as fulfilling the moral ideal of the ‘good statesman,’ there are also several other commonplaces in his lives of lawgivers. Significantly for my present purpose of giving an account of the background against which Plutarch presented his claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver, the shared commonplaces regarding how the lives of lawgivers are structured by Plutarch are mirrored in the structure of Parmenides’ poem.

Referring to a suggestion made by R. H. Barrow that intends to explain how Plutarch wrote his Lives, Gerard Lavery says, “Plutarch was a child of an age hardly conscious of change [...]”<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, according to Lavery, Plutarch was “fundamentally lacking in imagination.” These characteristics, Lavery goes on to suggest, “may be the very factor which enabled the author to become the greatest synthesizer in antiquity.” Regarding Plutarch not being conscious of change, Lavery continues, “this adds another element to the sameness of his biographical verdicts, however entertaining they may be. In a sense, then, if it is not too harshly phrased a judgement,” he says, presenting a strong opinion, “Plutarch was unable, in imagination, to project himself into the past or future. In a sense he could not even project himself into the present, the changing world of the early Empire.”<sup>114</sup> Lavery is making these claims in a context where he is giving an account of Plutarch’s lives of Lycurgus, Solon

---

<sup>112</sup> Plutarch, *To an Uneducated Ruler* 782A. Trans. Fowler (1936).

<sup>113</sup> Barrow (1967) 146-149.

<sup>114</sup> Lavery (1974) 380-381.

and Cato the Elder. His stern remarks about Plutarch's imagination are motivated by the fact that these three men from different cultures all are presented basically similarly by Plutarch. Therefore, using Plutarch as an historical source to the lives of any of these men is questionable when the lives have been seen together and one loses the impression that the three are presented as individuals.

In opposition to the impression Plutarch might give, the legendary lawgivers of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> (as well as, including Parmenides, the early 5<sup>th</sup>) centuries do not appear to have been subject of much attention before well into the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, at the same time as it became increasingly common to claim that they were associated with philosophers.<sup>115</sup> In the case of Solon, there are only 4 citations of his laws in the 75 preserved speeches by Attic orators dated prior to 356 BC, while in the 64 speeches of a later date he is cited 32 times.<sup>116</sup> When Plutarch wrote his lives of lawgivers in the first and second century AD, based on the evidence we possess, it is unlikely that he would have had any sources dating before the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

In addition to there being limited historical information about the lawgivers that did not date from later than the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there is preserved – with the notable exception of the laws attributed to them as well as Solon's poetry – no texts written by the legendary lawgivers. These limited sources did not play a substantial role in the construction of the written lives of the lawgivers. Instead, it coincides with the lack of sources that the lives of lawgivers bear a remarkable resemblance to each

---

<sup>115</sup> In book two of the Politics, Aristotle labels a supposed chain of teacher-pupil relationships between philosophers and lawgivers as "heedless of chronology." (2.1274a) This supposed chain of influence went from Thales of Miletus, to Zaleucus, to Charondas. Zaleucus and Charondas were the legendary lawgivers of respectively Epizephyrian Locri and Catania. While others followed Aristotle in his criticism of this story, (Cicero [*De Legibus* 2.6.15] refers to Timaeus of Sicily as believing that Zaleucus was only a fictional figure), in general, it became more and more common to claim that legendary lawgivers spent time with or were students of philosophers. Zaleucus and Charondas were said to have studied under Pythagoras in addition to Thales, and both Lycurgus and Solon supposedly also met philosophers as a part of their education. Lycurgus supposedly traveled to Ionia and India where he met with philosophers (Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus* 4), and Solon supposedly also met with Thales, as well as other philosophers. (Szegedy-Maszak [1978] 203n17; 202n13; 203n16),  
<sup>116</sup> Ruschenbusch (1958). Cf. Fantuzzi, (2010) 20n5.

other by making use of the same set of biographical commonplaces, which were generally how the lives of these legendary figures were understood.

Andrew Szegedy-Maszak, in his study of the *topoi* of legendary lawgivers, groups these commonplaces into the following three common biographical stages. First, one man – who, because of his excellent education from philosophers and others, is “uniquely suited for the task of legislation” – arises to a position of prominence in response to a crisis between two factions or forces in the city. As an example, Lycurgus, according to Plutarch, traveled to India as a young man and met with the so-called Gymnosophists.<sup>117</sup> Secondly, this man is selected as lawgiver, argues in favor of his law code – which sometimes is said to be received from a god – and responds to a challenges to it. In the case of Solon, as Szegedy-Maszak notes, “After the *seisachtheia*, the cancellation of debts, Solon was assailed by both rich and poor alike. On perceiving the value of the measure, the people empowered Solon to complete his task, but once he had finished, he was barraged again by complaints from all sides.”<sup>118</sup> Thirdly, the law code is established in the city, not just for the moment, but also with some provision stating that it is to be adhered to in the future. As the law code is established the lawgiver departs from the city.<sup>119</sup> Herodotus put forward that Solon left Athens for 10 years after his law code was established, a period of time that coincided with how long the Athenians were supposedly bound by the law code. (1.29.1.) Herodotus’ story – written much earlier than the other sources to the lives of lawgivers in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE – about Solon leaving Athens as well as his further travels, might have been what established this as a commonplace. Similar to Solon, Lycurgus is by Plutarch said to have likewise left his native city after this law code was established. Before he left, he supposedly made the Spartans swear an oath to uphold his law until he returned. “He then,” Szegedy-Maszak says, “made the promise, and the code, permanent, by never returning to Sparta,” because he committed suicide by fasting, according to Plutarch. Plutarch also makes

---

<sup>117</sup> See note 117.

<sup>118</sup> Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 205-206; Plutarch, *Life of Solon* 16.3.

<sup>119</sup> Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 208.

reference to several traditions about where Lycurgus supposedly died, showing that he was not alone in making use of the biographical commonplaces of lawgivers.<sup>120</sup>

Antoni Capizzi, in his *La porta di Parmenide*, makes use of the biographical accounts of legendary lawgivers in order to interpret Parmenides' poem. One argument Capizzi presents in favor of his position is that there is a connection between, on the one hand, that the narrator-goddess in fragment B8 supposedly puts emphasis on the concepts of immobility and *atrekeia*<sup>121</sup> and, on the other, Plutarch's account of the on-going tradition of showing respect for Parmenides laws as well as that legendary lawgivers devised to keep their laws established in their cities. In speaking of immobility and *atrekeia* as a second important attribute focused on by Parmenides in B8, in addition to what he views as the principle of *homoiotēs*, Capizzi claims,

La seconda serie di attributi, che esprimono immobilità e rispetto della tradizione, si connette invece col giuramento di fedeltà alle leggi di Parmenide attestatoci da Plutarco, e più in generale con gli accorgimenti escogitati da tutti i legislatori greci per rendere immutabili le proprie leggi: Licurgo si era fatto promettere che la costituzione spartana non sarebbe stata modificata fino al suo ritorno, lasciandosi poi morire di fame in esilio [...].<sup>122</sup>

Capizzi does not mention that it is Plutarch who is the source to also the second claim, that Lycurgus died of hunger in exile. Earlier in his book, Capizzi argues that Parmenides' poem might have been inspired by Zaleucus of Epizephyrian Locri in Italy, who was another legendary lawgiver. According to Capizzi, "il discorso della dea a Parmenide [...] ci fa pensare, come tale, che Parmenide abbia, nel proemio, preso a modello Zaleuco [...]."<sup>123</sup> Zaleucus was on one account, which Capizzi says is

---

<sup>120</sup> Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 208. Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, 29.

<sup>121</sup> I am unable to find the term *atrekeia* – meaning 'precise truth' or 'certainty' – used in the poem. It is also not mentioned in Coxon's extensive glossary.

<sup>122</sup> Capizzi (1975) 64-65.

<sup>123</sup> Capizzi (1975) 48.



preserved by Aristotle, said to have received his law-code from Athena.<sup>124</sup> Parmenides could, then, have been led to model his own account of his goddess after Zaleucus. In the first quotation from Capizzi, the direction of the argument is that because Lycurgus established his law code by starving himself to death and Parmenides was celebrated in Elea after his death, we can infer certain things about the meaning of fragment B8. In the second quotation, Capizzi views Zaleucus' life as the model on the basis of which we can understand Parmenides' poem. In either case, aspects of the biography of legendary lawgivers are used to explain the poem.

The correspondence between the poem and the lives of legendary arguably goes further than the points of correspondence that Capizzi presents. Capizzi does not view these lives as instantiations of biographical commonplaces, so he does not look at the overall structure of these stories (which is what Szegedy-Maszak lays out) and the overall structure of the poem. The results by comparing the two shows that there are many commonalities between them, especially if we follow Plutarch's interpretation of the poem.

Parmenides' poem begins with a proem that describes a young man's journey to meet a goddess. Similar to that the legendary lawgivers' in the first section of biographical *topoi* travel in order to seek out education, the young man's journey has been characterized as a journey towards philosophical or divine insights and inspiration.<sup>125</sup> When the young man reaches the goddess she presents to him – in B2 – what she claims is the only two possible ways or routes of inquiry. These are what I have referred to as the way of Being and the way of non-Being. In Plutarch's interpretation of the poem, Parmenides, rather than following one of these two ways of inquiry, looks at entities as they are in-between these two ways of inquiry. Similarly, the lawgivers were said to solve a dispute between two

---

<sup>124</sup> More precisely, this story is preserved to us by Clement of Alexandria in the *Stromata* 1.170.3, who refers to a work supposedly by Aristotle, *The Constitution of the Locrians*, which is only preserved in fragments. Cf. Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 205.

<sup>125</sup> Curd (2004) 20.

antagonistic factions in their cities. What solved the dispute in the city was the introduction of the lawgiver's new law code that could reshape the lives of everyone in the *polis*; what solves the struggle between Being and non-Being in Parmenides' poem, according to Plutarch, is the new label for what the goddess speaks of in the *doxa*, which has an intermediate ontological status between Being and non-Being. Furthermore, that the lawgiver is sometimes said to receive their law code from a god,<sup>126</sup> parallels, in Parmenides' poem, that it is a goddess with a divine nature who instructs the young man.

In the second section of biographical *topoi*, the lawgivers were said to spread and argue in favor of their law code, and successfully defend the code against a new challenge to it. According to Parmenides' goddess, the second section of the poem, *doxa*, is presented so that "the knowledge of mortals can never drive past" the young man. (B8.60-61) This appeal to the young man to prepare for rhetorical conflict<sup>127</sup> is similar to the conflict in the lives of the lawgivers because both are arrived at through a similar structure – from education and inspiration, to the resolution of a two-sided conflict, to the new possibility and reality of conflict – making the two strongly resemble each other as secondary battles that have to be fought after an initial battle is already won.

The ending of Parmenides' poem has not been preserved, so it is not possible to know to what extent the poem explicitly expressed the third and last section of the lawgivers' biographical *topoi*. In Plutarch's Lives, the lawgivers departed from their cities so that the law code they embodied could not be altered by the lawgivers' own actions after it had been established.<sup>128</sup> While in Parmenides

---

<sup>126</sup> Lycurgus (Strabo, *Geography*, 10.4.19; cf. Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, 5.3) and Zaleucus (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.170.3) were suggested to have received their law codes from respectively Apollo and Athena. While Plutarch claims Minos, Zoroaster and Numa were all also said to have conversed with gods (*Life of Numa*, 4.6-8). Cf. Szegedy-Maszak (1978) n28-31.

<sup>127</sup> That this is a reference to rhetorical conflict is made clear in the use of 'driving past' (*parelassē*), which implies a struggle similar to that of a horse race, but with knowledge taking the place of the horses.

<sup>128</sup> A contrasting view is found in Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 208, as he appears to attempt to reach for a conclusion that is not supported by what he has previously argued: "Indeed it might even be said that the hidden hero of the legends is codified law itself; once the code is self-sustaining, the legislator becomes

poem the goddess claimed that Being is the same both now and in the future (B8.36),<sup>129</sup> she also encouraged the young man to judge by *logos* her testing (*elenchus*) of the route of non-Being (B7.5-6). The goddess asks the young man himself to attempt to evaluate, and thus attempt to do away with, what she had expressed, while maintaining that he would come to see that she is correct. Here, then, there can appear to be both a close connection, in their applicability into the future, and a point of dissonance, in how fragile they are to outside influence, between the law codes and the teaching in the philosophical poem as it is preserved to us. However, as Capizzi notes, if Parmenides' was still being praised in Elea a long time after his death shows that would imply that he was an example of a lawgiver who did establish his laws successfully. Even if we cannot know whether the poem itself included some sort of provision that would secure its continued validity, Parmenides did somehow successfully secure his own continued status as a lawgiver, according to Plutarch.

The structure of Parmenides poem, as expressed through Plutarch's interpretation of it can, thus, be seen to correspond to the stories of legendary lawgivers. One way of interpreting these points of commonality is to maintain that Plutarch was himself influenced by what he knew about Parmenides' biography when he presented his interpretation of the poem. As I have pointed out, Mansfeld argues that a common interpretive tool used by interpreters of texts around the time Plutarch lived was to first look at an author's biography and then interpret the text in correspondence with that biography. Plutarch could possibly have responded to earlier writers who made the claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver and shaped his interpretation of the poem in response to that claim. That Parmenides was a lawgiver certainly meant much more for Plutarch than another biographical fact might have meant.

---

superfluous. It is in this context that all of the details of the legends acquire their significance. They do not represent careless error or simple hagiography. Rather they are consistent and unified in that they contribute to the idea of the excellence of the laws." But that the law was self-sustaining cannot be the case when, as Szegedy-Maszak himself points out, all the law codes are said to need to have a provision to ensure their own permanence, and the lawgiver was himself a threat to the laws. Furthermore, that the stories told about lawgivers are consistent and unified does not mean that they showed the excellence of the laws as ultimately unrelated to the life of the lawgiver who established them. Because it made a difference whether the lawgivers left their cities, these legends still show that laws were viewed as dependent upon the paradigmatic figure of the lawgiver.

<sup>129</sup> It was also said to be "held by the chains of necessity" (8.30-31). Trans. Coxon (2009).

With the biographical fact that someone was a lawgiver, for Plutarch, followed his whole conception of what it was to codify law and what went into that process. In so far as Plutarch interpretation corresponds to this conception of how the lives of lawgivers were structured, it is possible to understand what is peculiar about Plutarch's interpretation as having been influenced by the biographical commonplaces of legendary lawgivers. In so far as he was viewing the poem through the lens of the supposed biographical fact about Parmenides, Plutarch would arguably have been led to attempt to make the poem correspond to what that biographical fact entailed for him. Because Parmenides was said to be a lawgiver – and because a writer's written work and their life should correspond – it might have entailed that the poem should be understood as yet another biographical account of a legendary lawgiver.

A significant aspect of Plutarch's interpretation of Parmenides is the role he ascribes to the *doxa*. In reading the poem, Plutarch puts less emphasis on the clear distinction between the way of Being and the way of non-Being, and rather sees Parmenides as having gone beyond this pairing when he presented his account of mortal opinions in the *doxa*. This aspect of Plutarch's interpretation corresponds, as I have noted, to the commonplace in the stories of legendary lawgivers, exemplified by the conflict Solon dealt with between debtors and creditors. Solon's solution to the problem made neither side of the conflict completely satisfied, as Plutarch tells the story in *Life of Solon* 16.3.

Plutarch's intermediate being similarly is neither fully Being nor non-Being. Colotes' interpretation presents a contrast that can highlight how it is Plutarch's peculiar interpretation that corresponds to the biographical commonplaces of lawgiver. If the biographical commonplace was made to correspond to Colotes' interpretation of Parmenides, it would heavily favor one of the sides in the two-sided conflict. Colotes' claim that Parmenides is led to abolish everything because he posits the one being can arguably be understood to be about the two parts of Parmenides' poem. If that is the case, then if his interpretation corresponded to the biographies of lawgivers, it could entail that, hypothetically in the specific case of Solon, that Solon heavily favored the creditors over the debtors

in the conflict between them. Rather than finding a middle ground position, Colotes viewed Parmenides as completely favoring the one to the detriment of everything else. What this comparison with Colotes' interpretation shows, is that it is Plutarch's peculiar interpretation that makes the poem arguably correspond to the biographical commonplaces of lawgivers.

That Parmenides' poem in Plutarch's interpretation arguably corresponds to what is seemingly a set of commonplaces that was applied indiscriminately to lawgivers, can make Plutarch's interpretation less believable. Regarding the biographical commonplaces themselves, the individual stories about the lives of lawgivers are arguably increasingly less believable the more they can be seen to correspond to the set of commonplaces. As I have noted that Lavery points out, the subject of Plutarch's Lives were different people from different cultures, and it would make more sense to expect them to live individually distinct lives rather than all having lives that basically adhere to the same structure. Furthermore, the distance of the sources from the events they are speaking of (Parmenides lived later than the common subjects of lives of lawgivers), as well as that the interest in his group of people seemingly only started in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, suggests that the stories might not be trustworthy.

This seeming emergence of the writing down of biographical information of lawgivers coincides with another historical development dealing with the way the relationship between a writer and a text was understood. It gradually became an ideal, as I noted that Colotes and Plutarch holds to be important, that what one wrote should be attested in one's life or character. However, there is some reason to see this ideal as not accepted immediately and uncritically. An early expression of the idea in question is found in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* 149-150, pointed out by Mansfeld, where Agathon comments, "the poet should have character traits corresponding to [those of the persons in] the dramatic works he has to compose,"<sup>130</sup> which in the context of the play is clearly meant to be

---

<sup>130</sup> Mansfeld (1994) 188.

ridiculous. Agathon continues to say that, “thus, if he is placing women on the stage, he must contract all their habits in his own person.” In this early presentation of the ideal of the correspondence between writer and what he writes, it is presented as an arguably odd ideal, and not something Aristophanes necessarily himself commits himself to. Mansfeld goes on to mention that when a similar idea is apparently first attested (following the traditional ordering of Plato’s dialogues) by Plato in the *Laches* 188c-e, it is Laches who expresses it, not his interlocutor Socrates. These somewhat reluctant early attestations of the ideal of the likeness of one’s character to one’s writings suggest that the ideal – as it is found in Plutarch – was the result of a process of gradual development that should not without much reluctance be traced back to Parmenides.

There is, then, some reason to see the commonalities between the lives of lawgivers as having influenced how Plutarch interpreted Parmenides’ poem, and applied to the poem in a way that was not clearly justified. That Plutarch saw Parmenides as a lawgiver could have influenced his interpretation because it is possible that Plutarch saw biography as an interpretive tool that the text should be understood in terms of, following the *prolegomenon* expressed by Cicero. An alternative way to account for the similarities between the structure of the poem (in Plutarch’s interpretation of it) and the biographical commonplaces is that the direction of influence, rather, went from the poem to the lives of lawgivers. Beyond what I have already referred to, modern scholars have shown extreme doubt about the truth of biographical claims made in the genera of ancient lives.<sup>131</sup> In a study of the written lives of Greek poets, in the introduction to the first edition of her book, Mary Lefkowitz goes as far as to claim, “virtually all the material in all the lives is fictional.”<sup>132</sup> One main reason Lefkowitz holds this position is that the biographical information in the lives appeared to have been deduced by inference from the written texts of the poets. The same can be said about the lives of philosophers.<sup>133</sup> Thus, similar to how each poet’s own poetry, according to Lefkowitz, influenced

---

<sup>131</sup> Lefkowitz (1981); Momigliano (1971); Chitwood (2004).

<sup>132</sup> Lefkowitz (1981) viii.

<sup>133</sup> Mansfeld (1999) 34.

the content of their written biographies, the claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver could have been made on the basis of the structural similarities between his written work and these other stories about lawgivers.

There are some reasons to favor the view that the direction of influence between the biographical commonplaces and Plutarch's interpretation of Parmenides' poem went from the former to the latter, rather than – as would be the case in one of the lives the poets – from the poem to the biographical fact. Most importantly, Plutarch is not the only source for the claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver to Elea. Regardless of if it was true or not, Plutarch could likely have found the claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver somewhere else, possibly in Speusippus. Furthermore, if Parmenides' poem influenced how Plutarch viewed other lawgivers, then that influence would have had to be much more significant than if the biography influenced the poem. In giving the account of biographical commonplaces of lawgivers, Szegedy-Maszak is not just referring to Plutarch, even though he is an important source for him. The tradition of referring to the legendary lawgivers as a common group of people is found in 2.1274a of Aristotle's *Politics*, and it is Herodotus who is the first source to Solon's biography, which seemingly was a model for some of the later commonplaces between lawgivers. It is not clear that Parmenides' poem itself influenced Plutarch's conception of what it was to be a lawgiver. Potentially, someone else – like Speusippus – could have been influenced by Parmenides' poem in the creation of the commonplaces of lawgivers, but I know of no evidence for such a claim.

I have so far in this chapter laid out how Plutarch interprets Parmenides in response to Colotes, and the wider context surrounding Plutarch's claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver. I have also pointed out that Plutarch appears to have believed in the ideal of the correspondence between an author's written work and their life. Furthermore, Plutarch could have seen an author's biography as an interpretive tool that could be applied to the author's written work. Consequentially, I believe there

is some reason to see Plutarch's interpretation of Parmenides as influenced by a set of questionable biographical commonplaces of lawgivers.

Finally in this chapter, I will first present how the positions laid out by Plutarch and Colotes can be seen as antecedents to a modern debate that can resemble the one Plutarch took part in with Colotes. It is in that modern debate that Tor refers to Plutarch as an authority. In conclusion, I will attempt to give an account of another historical view of how the codification of Greek law took place in order to present an alternative to Plutarch's position as well as to the modern readers who can be understood to be following him.

## 2. 6 – Colotes and Plutarch as antecedents to a modern debate

Both Colotes' and Plutarch's interpretations can arguably be seen as antecedents to respective modern readings of Parmenides' poem. Readings arguably akin to Colotes', such as Owen's,<sup>134</sup> have in the past gathered support. According to Owen, the *doxa* was only a "didactical exercise," and he maintains that even though the *doxa* makes cosmological claims, "Parmenides did not write as a cosmologist."<sup>135</sup> The *doxa*, which is seemingly about the world and cosmos we live in, in Owen's interpretation, is not something Parmenides actually cared about more than as a rhetorical text that was supposed to shift its readers attention towards the *aletheia*.

In opposition to Owen's reading, however, also readings similar to Plutarch's Platonist interpretation have recently become somewhat common. Some commentators have pointed out that parts of the

---

<sup>134</sup> Owen (1960). Cf. note XX in chapter 1 below.

<sup>135</sup> Owen (1960) 101.



cosmological and biological claims made in the *doxa* appear to have been the result of new discoveries previously not attested anywhere else.<sup>136</sup> As can be noteworthy in the present context, the fragments of the poem that is preserved in *Adversus Colotem* and nowhere else, fragment B14, is one of the fragments that articulates relatively sophisticated astronomical insights. B14 reads, “Daylight into the night, a light from somewhere else, wandering around the earth.”<sup>137</sup> The subject here is the moon, which is, Mourelatos notes, interestingly said to be wandering around rather than above the earth.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, as Popper and Graham also points out, Parmenides is showing through this fragment and B15 that he is aware that it is the sun that illuminates the moon.<sup>139</sup>

In light of the negative value that the narrator-goddess can appear to assign to the *doxa* in B1.30 – as I pointed out as a problem for Plutarch’s interpretation above - it can seem problematic that Parmenides would include here what is seemingly the interesting results of scientific inquiry. How, it could be asked by those who offer an interpretation akin to Plutarch’s, could someone who apparently inquired into nature in order to make or lay out new discoveries believe that these findings are only deceptions or that they are to be abolished? Because this question is difficult to answer there might be reason for interpreters to put a greater emphasis on what the goddess does in the *doxa* rather than how she introduces the *doxa*; regardless of the value assigned to the *doxa* by the poem itself, the contents therein might be worth studying for interpreters today.

---

<sup>136</sup> According to Mourelatos (2013) 170, in contrast to how Parmenides’ *doxa* has been seen in the past, “it now appears more likely that its astronomical tenets either represent scientific discoveries made by Parmenides himself or reflect his own engaged grappling with quite recent discoveries made by others.” See also Popper (2012), Graham (2006) and Mansfeld (2015). Unlike the other three who focus on Parmenides’ astronomical insights, Mansfeld notes Parmenides’ apparent biological discoveries, looking at both A fragments, i.e. testimonia, and B fragments. Cf. also the discussion mentioned in chapter 0.1 above between Cordero (2011) and Kurfess (2016). Cordero passionately rejects the connection between Parmenides’ *doxa* and the Platonic concept of appearances, but still believes that Parmenides was committed to some of the proto-scientific accomplishments recounted in the *doxa*. Cordero’s unconventional solution is, as a result, to rearrange the fragments of the poem so that some of the cosmology is placed in the *aletheia*.

<sup>137</sup> Trans. Mourelatos (2013).

<sup>138</sup> Mourelatos (2013) 175.

<sup>139</sup> Popper (2012) 68; Graham (2006) 180-181.

It is in the context of this discussion about the role of the *doxa* in Parmenides' poem that Shaul Tor refers to the authority of Plutarch, with the aim of supporting the view that the *doxa* should be viewed positively. Tor maintains that Plutarch's Platonist reading of Parmenides is the best available interpretation because of, on the one hand, that it is able to account for the interpretive problem the *doxa* can present, and, on the other hand, because there is reason to view the interpretive position of ancient authors as superior to our own. According to Tor, as I noted in chapter 1, even though both modern readers and Plutarch are construing Parmenides in terms of their own "conceptual frameworks,"<sup>140</sup> Plutarch is in a privileged position compared to modern readers because his reading shows the conceptual possibilities of Plato, Parmenides' – from a modern perspective – close predecessor. Because of the historical situation Plato and Plutarch found themselves in, they would have been in a better position than we are to understand Parmenides, Tor suggests. This second part of Tor's argument has arguably been made less convincing by the connections I have laid out above. The conceptual possibilities of Plutarch himself – not considering his relation to Plato – were seemingly limiting in so far as the questionable biographical commonplaces structured his interpretation.

Like Plutarch, Tor sets out to explain what Parmenides did in the *doxa*. Plutarch argued that Parmenides pointed to certain entities with lesser ontological priority in the *doxa*, which can – in contrast to what Colotes maintained – be linked to that Parmenides was taking an active part in society where entities of that kind can be found. One aspect of Plutarch's account of Parmenides is that it is centered on explaining the *doxa*. Similarly, Tor frames his account of the *doxa* as an attempt to answer an aetiological question by asking why Parmenides would choose to write that section of the poem.<sup>141</sup> At the same time, for Tor, the *aletheia* only presents an epistemological question and he never attempts to ask why Parmenides would choose to write that section. At the outset, Tor

---

<sup>140</sup> Tor (2017) 301.

<sup>141</sup> Tor (2017) 163-221.

views the *aletheia* through the lens of the ethical ideal of *homoiōsis theoi* (likeness to god) which stops any other inquiries into why Parmenides might have wanted to write the *alēthēia*: “we cannot explain how a mortal – Parmenides – was first able to register and evaluate such arguments without making reference to that mortal’s epistemically significant interaction with the divine.”<sup>142</sup> By making it necessary to make such a reference to the divine, however, Tor is excluding any further inquiry into how Parmenides “was first able to register and evaluate such arguments” that does not view Parmenides as having been divinely inspired, which the lack of any inquiry into that point of beginning by Tor indicates.

Plutarch himself viewed the human process of *homoiōsis theoi* as like being influenced by a virtuous paradigm. “God offers himself,” Plutarch says in *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance*, “to all as a pattern of every excellence and in doing that he renders human virtue (which is in some way or other assimilation to him) accessible to all who can follow God.”<sup>143</sup> As a supposedly successful lawgiver and philosopher, Parmenides too, like Plutarch’s God, served as a paradigm for virtue, as Plutarch understood him. Like Tor, Plutarch did not give an account of what Parmenides’ poem might have been written in response to. In Plutarch’s reading, the poem should not be understood as a response to a specific thinker, problem or question. Instead, as an expression of the virtuous paradigm that Parmenides himself supposedly exhibited, the poem was seemingly only to be understood as motivated by the attempt to bring others to Parmenides’ own way of life.

---

<sup>142</sup> Tor (2017) 284.

<sup>143</sup> Plutarch, *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance* 550d. Trans. De Lacy.

## 2.7 – Compulsory originality and the codification of law

According to Moses Finley, the legendary lawgivers I have discussed in this chapter “invented freely in a sort of compulsory originality which characterized every aspect of archaic Greek life and culture.”<sup>144</sup> In Finley’s view, exceptional archaic Greek individuals were themselves responsible for the largely unaided invention of everything from new political institutions to abstract philosophy. Like what is the case with the views expressed by Plutarch and Tor, following Finley’s position entails not attempting to look at what these legendary figures might have been influenced by or which specific issues they might have reacted against. The notion that there was one lawgiver who was responsible for writing a complete law code corresponds to both Finley’s suggestion about the free, compulsory originality under which these figures worked, as well as Plutarch’s and Tor’s view of Parmenides as divinely inspired and as inspired to give an expression of his virtuous life.

In the case of what the legendary lawgivers achieved, there is some reason to believe that the stories that claim law codes were the product of the work of one incredible individual are not historically accurate. In arguing against both Finley’s and Plutarch’s view of the role of legendary lawgivers in the codification of Greek law, Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp emphasizes that the literary tradition that speaks of legendary lawgivers is untrustworthy.<sup>145</sup> However, the writers in this tradition also, Hölkeskamp

---

<sup>144</sup> Finley (1981) 100.

<sup>145</sup> Hölkeskamp (1992) 55, expressing some of the arguments I have presented, says, “But what do we really know about the early arbitrators and law-givers and about early Greek law and legislation in general? Literary sources are extremely scanty and naturally late, sometimes obscure and dubious, always difficult of access and evaluation - and most of the extant material is all the more problematic just because the early law-givers became towering figures who were, as it were, truly dear to the hearts of all Greeks in the heyday of the polis-culture. Indeed, the universal theoretical interest in these figures as well as the widespread practical importance of *nomos* and *nomothesia* [legislation] must have influenced and sometimes utterly distorted what has come down to us about early lawgivers and legislation – the tradition is, in a way, a philosophical, historical and ideological smokescreen.” See also Hölkeskamp (1993) and Hölkeskamp (1999). Chapter 3 of the latter work deals individually with the process of codification of law in a large number of individual *poleis*, unfortunately not including Elea.

notes, “actually quoted and discussed, or at least mentioned in passing, individual laws and their contents in detail.”<sup>146</sup> A fair number of these laws, he goes on to say, “can be shown to be old and probably authentic.”<sup>147</sup> Other ancient laws are preserved through inscriptions. What is remarkable about them is that “the topic of all these laws are particular issues, concrete problems or offences, and that they seem to be extraordinarily narrowly defined.” According to Hölkeskamp, codification appears to have been a process that took place step by step through the enactment of individual laws, all apparently responding to specific transgressions and relying on what was previously unspoken norms.<sup>148 149</sup>

If we are to believe that Hölkeskamp is correct in his analysis of the codification of Greek laws, Plutarch’s lives of legendary lawgivers fail to shed light on how the process of codification took place. Because of the close connection between Plutarch’s lives of lawgivers and his interpretation of Parmenides’ poem, there is, by analogy, reason to see Plutarch’s reading of Parmenides as making use of problematic conception of how law codes were shaped, as well as what shaped the work of an historical figure, in interpreting Parmenides. Plutarch’s seeming willingness to attempt to make an author’s biography and work correspond to one another can appear to have meant that he was unlikely to understand both the enactment of laws and the actions of someone like Parmenides as responses to problems that arose in specific situations. For Plutarch, the philosopher-lawgiver presented in his way of life the equivalent of a law code that others would be encouraged to follow

---

<sup>146</sup> Hölkeskamp (1992) 89.

<sup>147</sup> Hölkeskamp (1992) 89.

<sup>148</sup> Possibly because they were only applicable in specific situations, the content of the laws do not appear to have shaped the biographical narrative later authors told about the lawgivers who supposedly established law codes containing these laws.

<sup>149</sup> Critics of Hölkeskamp point out that only a small number of the inscriptions of laws, which is what Hölkeskamp uses as his sources, are preserved. And therefore, Gagarin (2002) 1619 argues, “a fuller record of the archaic evidence might reveal examples of just the sort of large-scale, and to some extent comprehensive, legislation Hölkeskamp seeks to deny.” Against this view, Hölkeskamp (1992) 90 maintains, “there is no hint whatever that these *nomoi* were dependent parts of general and systematic laws on inheritance, contract and penal law or fully-fledged comprehensive ‘law codes’.” A second point of criticism against Hölkeskamp is that the main focus of early written laws was often legal procedure, rather than, as Hölkeskamp maintains, the specification of sanctions. (Osborne [2000]; Thomas [1995].)

by virtue of the exemplary life he led. The law code and the way of life of the philosopher were both, for Plutarch, expressions paradigms that could reshape an individual's life. Because they were seen in terms of having lived a complete life from birth to death, what motivated a philosopher or lawgiver to live this way was either left unquestioned or seen as akin to divine inspiration.

Hölkeskamp criticism of Plutarch's conception of the codification of law can illustrate that – contrary to Finley's assertion that those who influenced all aspects of life in archaic Greece were best characterized as driven by compulsory originality – in order to properly understand the process of codification, it can be helpful to be aware of the specific situations and concrete problems that compelled the establishment of these abstract ideas and institutions. Similarly, Plutarch's reading of Parmenides can be criticized as a starting point for a modern interpretation in so far as it might lead interpreters in an unreasonable way away from the problems and question presented by past thinkers that Parmenides himself might have been faced with.

## 2.8 – Concluding remarks

To the extent that I have shown any limits of Plutarch's interpretation of Parmenides in this chapter, it has been related to how he made use of biographical commonplaces in order to interpret Parmenides' poem. Any criticism I want to direct at viewing Parmenides' poem through a Plutarchian lens is limited to how far his interpretation corresponds to that questionable framework of commonplaces. Because it seems to me to be some reason in favor of seeing Plutarch's interpretation of Parmenides as shaped by his concept of what it meant to be a lawgiver, I do also think there is some reason to be critical of Plutarch's interpretation of Parmenides' poem.

While it is possible for a modern reader of Parmenides to appeal to Plutarch's interpretation in support of their own reading, I do not think it is possible to attack the content of a modern reading of Parmenides that is similar to Plutarch's just because Plutarch is a questionable authority to the meaning of the text. It is precisely Plutarch's role as an authority that is questioned by the presentation of the connection between his biographical commonplaces and his interpretation of Parmenides' poem. The positive content of interpretations like Mourelatos' and Mansfeld's, who want to direct attention towards the *doxa*, is not any less valid because their interpretations corresponds to Plutarch's. However, seeing the limits of Plutarch's interpretation can also call attention to if all the consequences of following his interpretation are commendable. One such consequence is arguably that a reader who follows Plutarch is less likely to see Parmenides as a thinker who potentially responded to a specific situation, a specific problem, or what might have been viewed as a specific philosophical transgression – such as the philosophically problematic concepts of thinkers like Anaximander and Hesiod.

### 3. Chapter Three – Parmenides’ Fragment B5 and Proclus’

#### Transmission of the Fragment

[...] ξυνὸν δέ μοί ἐστιν,  
ὀππόθεν ἄρξωμαι· τόθι γὰρ πάλιν ἴξομαι αὖθις  
[...] it is common for me  
from where I begin, for I will return there again.<sup>150</sup>

Fragment B5 of Parmenides’ poem says, for the speaker – ostensibly the goddess-narrator – a certain place is common, which is a statement she explains by saying she will return there again. B5 is preserved to us by Proclus in a context that has led some commentators to question the authenticity of the fragment. Others have needed to translate the word *xunon* in the fragment in a strained way in order to make sense of the fragment. In this chapter it is my aim to lay out the background against which Proclus preserved the fragment by both focusing on his general reading of Parmenides and how he understood the immediate context in which he quoted the fragment. On the one hand, how Proclus preserved B5 has arguably presented problems for interpreters who have not adequately understood what he was doing when he was quoting the fragment. On the other hand, his interpretation can also arguably be of some help to the interpreter of the fragment who adequately understands what Proclus was trying to do when he quoted it.

---

<sup>150</sup> B5. My translation.



### 3.1. Proclus' view of Parmenides' poem as completed – rather than corrected – by

Plato

One noteworthy aspect of Proclus' interpretation of Parmenides is that he suggests that Parmenides' poem should be understood as already indicating what is more fully expressed by Plato. Proclus notes that others have understood Plato to be correcting Parmenides, in contrast with his own understanding of the relationship between Parmenides and Plato. In the commentary on Plato's dialogue, the *Parmenides*, Proclus says,

[...] some have previously said in fact that whereas Parmenides bases his entire treatment on Being, Plato, after discovering that the One is superior to both Being and all existence, corrects Parmenides, presenting him as basing even his principle on the One. For just as Gorgias, Protagoras, and each of the other [philosophers] presents his own hypotheses better in Plato's writings than in his own, so too Parmenides is a better philosopher in him (i.e., Plato) and more deeply initiated than he is seen [to be] on his own.<sup>151</sup>

Here, Proclus is commenting on 137c–142a of the *Parmenides*, where the character Parmenides discusses the dialogue's so-called First Hypothesis, "if One is One, then what can we deduce about it?," which plays an important role in Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*.<sup>152</sup> What can appear to be appealing to Proclus about the discussion on the First Hypothesis is that the One is presented

---

<sup>151</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1032. Trans. Coxon (2009).

<sup>152</sup> The *Parmenides* ends the discussion of the First Hypothesis on a reluctant note, with Parmenides and his interlocutor, a young man named Aristotle, seemingly not committing themselves to what they have discussed. "Then can these things be true of the One?" Parmenides asks Aristotle, concluding the First Hypothesis-section of the dialogue, to which Aristotle responds, "I think not." (142a6. Trans. Fowler [1925]) Despite these concluding remarks, which seemingly could lead an interpreter to see what Parmenides is there attempting to do as simply impossible, Proclus, similar to other Neoplatonists, apparently sees the section dealing with the First Hypothesis as the most important part of the dialogue; according to James Wm. Forrester (1977) 1, "for a philosopher of Neoplatonic inclinations, the First Hypothesis may well be the most important single text in the Platonic corpus." In fact, Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides* itself ends after he has commented on the First Hypothesis, leaving out the large subsequent portion of the dialogue. What the negative answers Aristotle gives Parmenides at the end of the First Hypothesis entails for Proclus and the Neoplatonist, according to Gerd Van Riel (2017) 75, is that "this negation is not an absurdity but rather the final recognition of the insufficient nature of any kind of determination of the absolute one."

as an ontologically superior entity, superior even to Being. A focus point for Neoplatonist interpreters of Plato like Proclus was that Plato sometimes expressed that the object of philosophy was both different in kind and superior to the objects of other types of inquiry. Illustratively, in the *Republic*, which Proclus in the context of the quotation above goes on to refer to, Plato presents Socrates as saying that the Good is “beyond being.”<sup>153</sup> Epistemologically, Proclus appears to understand Plato to be expressing that knowledge of what is referred to as the Good and the One is acquired in a different way from how knowledge of other entities is acquired. Parmenides’ aim in the eyes of Proclus is seemingly to surpass the kind of inquiry that is directed at other entities in order to approach the ontologically superior One. The difference between what Proclus here refers to as what “some have previously said” about Plato correcting Parmenides, and his own position is that Proclus suggests that Parmenides’ poem also was written to indicate the superiority of the One, even though, as Proclus goes on to refer to others as saying, “Parmenides does not appear saying anything about the One itself in his poems (since it is ineffable).”<sup>154</sup> Instead, even as he emphasizes and presents this competing view, Proclus does not understand Plato to have presented in his dialogue *Parmenides* as a different and better philosopher than what he is on his own. Proclus’ point is, rather, that Parmenides, from his inquires in the First Hypothesis as well as in his poem, “ascends to the One itself, which he (i.e., Plato) in the *Republic* calls unhypothetical,”<sup>155</sup> even as the One by itself cannot directly be an object of inquiry. For Proclus, even though Parmenides’ poem can appear to express a position that is different from Plato’s, the poem should be understood as a part of this ‘ascent’ toward the Platonic concept of the One, which is indicated by Parmenides, even as it is not an explicit object of inquiry.

It is notable that Proclus refers to the alternative interpretation that views Plato as correcting Parmenides. According to this alternative interpretation, Parmenides was mainly concerned with

---

<sup>153</sup> Plato, *Republic* 509b8.

<sup>154</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 1033. Trans. Coxon (2009).

<sup>155</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 1033. Trans. Coxon (2009).

Being, or what is called *to eon* in Parmenides' poem. On only the basis of Parmenides' poem, without considering Plato's writings, such a suggestion can be appealing. An example of a modern interpreter who challenges the notion that the One is a central concept in Parmenides' poem is Richard McKirahan. In examining fragment B8 of the poem, which is where Parmenides presents the so-called "signs" "along the way" of *to eon*, (B8.2) McKirahan notes that while Parmenides says that *to eon* is One, he notably seems to not present any arguments in favor of this aspect or attribute of *to eon*.<sup>156</sup> In contrast, fragment B8 is itself remarkable because it not only presents several aspects of *to eon*, but it also repeatedly presents arguments in favor of that these attributes are applicable to *to eon*. As an example, an argument that is made in favor of these arguments *to eon* is 'ungenerated' is presented as a rhetorical question in B8.6, "For what birth will you investigate for it?" In fact, compared with what is preserved of the works of earlier Presocratic thinkers, Parmenides' poem is distinguished in that it presents many arguments in favor of the claims that are made.<sup>157</sup> In the context of fragment B8, as McKirahan notes, the attribute One and the related attribute "unique" are seemingly the only attributes not established by argument among those mentioned in the introductory list of attributes of *to eon* in B8.2-6.<sup>158</sup> For McKirahan, the lack of arguments in favor of the attribute One being applicable to *to eon* suggests that it is possible that Parmenides might not have viewed this attribute as important. According to McKirahan, "If he considers the attribute especially important, it would be very odd for him to have constructed arguments for all the rest of the listed attributes and not to have proved this remaining one as well."<sup>159</sup>

However, even as he sees that there is some reason to be skeptical of claims about the centrality of the attribute One, McKirahan also states that "these considerations do not settle the historical

---

<sup>156</sup> McKirahan (2009) 215.

<sup>157</sup> McKirahan (2009) 189: "It is universally recognized that Parmenides' introduction of argument into philosophy was of paramount importance."

<sup>158</sup> McKirahan (2009) 215.

<sup>159</sup> McKirahan (2009) 215.

question of what Parmenides actually thought.”<sup>160</sup> Because of its nature as a historical question, the problem of the meaning of B8 and the poem as a whole is only with difficulty discernible from the text we are in possession of. It is interesting that Parmenides did not provide any argument in favor of that *to eon* is One, but what do we really have reason to take from such a fact alone? Seemingly, Proclus could himself use the same argument as McKirahan to support his own position. If the One is to be approached differently than other objects of inquiry, as it should be in the eyes of Proclus, it could be argued that Parmenides consciously refrained from presenting arguments in favor of the attribute One because he viewed it to be of a different kind from the other attributes.

Nevertheless, Proclus does not argue against those who hold a view similar to McKirahan’s primarily by looking at the poem itself. Instead, Proclus’ approach is to argue that Parmenides’ poem only indirectly expresses a position similar to Plato’s. Moreover, it is by reading the poem through Plato that he is able to interpret the poem as indicating that Platonic position. Because the poem is only indicating the Platonic concept of the One, as Proclus sees it, it can be problematic for an interpreter to understand the poem without first having read Plato. “It seems to me well said by the older [commentators],” Proclus says in his commentary on the *Parmenides*, “that Plato brought to completion the treatises of both Zeno and Parmenides [...] elevating the theorizing of the latter to the very thing that really is One.”<sup>161</sup> Proclus’ claim here that Plato completed Parmenides’ poem – using the verb *teleioō* – stands in contrast with the claim that Plato corrected Parmenides, which Proclus disagrees with. Proclus’ use of *teleioō* could imply that he understood Parmenides’ poem as always itself having tended toward Plato’s completion of it. However, from the perspective of an interpreter of Parmenides’ poem, it can be difficult to see Parmenides’ poem as incomplete without first having seen its completion by Plato.

---

<sup>160</sup> McKirahan (2009) 216.

<sup>161</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 997. Trans. Coxon (2009).

Proclus understands Plato to have made Parmenides' poem come to its completion; this shows that it is possible to understand Proclus' interpretation of Plato and his Neoplatonist background as akin to the marble portrait of Metrodorus that is used as a model for the Velia Parmenides. Proclus saw the meaning of Parmenides' poem as fully expressed by Plato rather than the poem itself. Similarly, the likeness of Metrodorus' portrait stood in place of Parmenides' own appearance for the sculptor who made the Velia Parmenides, according to Dillon. However, as I have noted, Kurfess expresses, with reference to Proclus, that the difficult interpretive situation modern readers of Parmenides' poem find themselves in can give us increased reason to initially favor the views of ancient interpreters of the poem over our own interpretations. In an analogy to the sculptor of the Velia Parmenides, we as modern readers of the poem might want to look toward Proclus as our own Metrodorus portrait, hoping that Proclus captures the 'likeness' of Parmenides' poem.

At the same time, Proclus' reading of Parmenides is itself a good example of the difficulty of applying an author like Proclus as an authority – or even as a resource – to the question of the meaning of Parmenides' poem. In the specific case of interpretations of fragment B5 of the poem, which Proclus is our only source to, applying Proclus as an authority or resource without being aware of his view of how Parmenides was to be interpreted as indicating a Platonic position has only led modern commentators to have difficulty engaging with that fragment. In regard to fragment B5, the way this difficulty has most notably been manifested is that a large number of commentators have chosen to not translate the word *xunon* in the fragment as 'common', and rather choose to translate it as 'indifferent,'<sup>162</sup> even though no other instances of the use of the word can be found where this is what is meant by *xunon*.<sup>163</sup> The authenticity of the fragment has been questioned,<sup>164</sup> and frequently

---

<sup>162</sup> Diels (1897), Kirk and Raven (1957), Taran (1965), Mansfeld (1964), Bormann (1971), Ballew (1974), Guthrie (1979), Bodnar (1985), Mourelatos (2008).

<sup>163</sup> See section 4 below.

<sup>164</sup> Jameson (1958).

in studies on Parmenides little discussion is devoted to B5.<sup>165</sup> The reluctance often shown toward giving an interpretation of B5 – either by the explicit claim that it is spurious, or simply by it not being devoted much time in an interpretation of the poem – makes it stand out among the other fragments that are thought to be in the *aletheia*-section of Parmenides’ poem. The fragments in the *aletheia* are commonly interpreted meticulously and seen in relation to one another as constituent parts of a whole. However, B5 has often been interpreted only with difficulty in relation to the rest of the poem.<sup>166</sup> Both the relative lack of attention given to it compared to other parts of the poem, as well as how unsympathetic interpretations of B5 have been to the Greek text of the poem (exemplified by the translation of *xunon*), highlight that fragment B5 has been seen as problematic by commentators.

Francis Cornford’s reaction to how B5 is presented by Proclus is testimony to how the fragment has been seen as being problematic. Proclus presents B5 in his commentary on Plato’s Parmenides between two other quotations from Parmenides’ poem, both from fragment B8, specifically B8.25 and B8.44. “Frag. 5 appears here in Proclus,” Cornford remarks, discussing how Proclus presents the fragment, “and this might indicate a gap.”<sup>167</sup> It is Cornford’s suggestion that the way in which Proclus quotes B5 indicates a lacuna in B8 as it is quoted by Simplicius, who is our main source to B8, and that Proclus is showing us that B5 was placed in this lacuna. In suggesting that there is a lacuna in B8, Cornford is seemingly attempting to give justice to his view of the context in which fragment B5 is

---

<sup>165</sup> More recent longer works on Parmenides’ poem that only briefly mention fragment B5 are Curd (2004) 69, Robbiano (2006) 9, Mourelatos (2008) 157, Palmer (2009) 85n104 and Wedin (2014) 4n5 and Martin (2016) 150. While Austin (2007) and Tor (2017) are examples of a works on Parmenides that do not mention B5. However, Palmer and Curd both do question the translation of *xunon* as ‘indifferent’. There is, nevertheless, some scholarly literature on the fragment. The scholars who have most notably engaged with B5 in the last 50 years are Bicknell (1979) and Bodnar (1985).

<sup>166</sup> Raven’s reading in Kirk and Raven (1957) goes arguably the furthest in the other direction by relating B5 to the rest of the poem. He understands B5 to be expressing that all parts of the *aletheia* are equal to one another in that they all convey the same point, over and over. This reading, however, is criticized by Bodnar (1985), Bicknell (1979), and Taran (1965).

<sup>167</sup> Cornford (1939) 41. In addition to B5, Cornford (1939) 41 also suggests that B4 should be placed in this lacuna. See also note 19 below.

presented by Proclus; if B5 is presented by Proclus in between two quotations from B8, then B5 itself should be understood as a part of B8, Cornford seems to maintain.

However, Cornford's claim is irreconcilable in that B8, in a possible contrast to B5, is preserved in a seemingly reliable way by Simplicius. Simplicius, indeed, shows that he can be seen as a reliable source to the text of Parmenides' poem by being conscious of the problematic interpretive situation of his readers in relation to Parmenides. When presenting a commentary on book 1 of Aristotle's *Physics*, Simplicius chooses to quote B8.1–52 of Parmenides' poem. "Even if one might think it pedantic," Simplicius says, introducing the quotation, "I would gladly transcribe in this commentary the verses of Parmenides on the one being, which aren't numerous, both as evidence for what I have said and because of the scarcity of Parmenides' treatise."<sup>168</sup> In commenting on this quotation by Simplicius, it can be noted that even though Simplicius claims lines 1–52 of fragment B8 "aren't numerous," it is the single longest preserved quotation from any Presocratic philosopher, providing Simplicius' readers with what can be seen as a more direct perspective on the text of Parmenides' poem than is normally achieved through any ancient quotation of the works of the Presocratics.<sup>169</sup> Partially, Simplicius chooses to quote from Parmenides because he has experienced the text of Parmenides' poem to be rare, which shows that he was aware of the difficult situation interpreters of Parmenides could be in because of scarcity of evidence. Because of the length and apparent accuracy of Simplicius' quotation, as well as the fact that he presents the quotation seemingly with the intention of preserving Parmenides' poem, Cornford's claim that there is a lacuna in B8 where B5 originally was located is problematic, which shows that using Proclus as an authority to how we are to understand B5 can itself be a problematic undertaking.

---

<sup>168</sup> Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, 145–146. Trans. Taran (1987).

<sup>169</sup> In highlighting the apparent accuracy of Simplicius' quotation of B8 as contrasted with what Sextus Empiricus quotes from the fragment in *Adversus Mathematicos*, Mansfeld (1999) 39 notes, "Simplicius' quotations enable us to see that the long continuous text of Parmenides, quoted by Sextus M. 7.111, is in fact a patchwork, combining passages from different sections of the poem and omitting crucial lines in the poem."

There has, after Cornford's suggestion about B5, been some debate about the authenticity of the fragment and the reliability of Proclus as a source to the works of the Presocratics. In sections 2 and 3 below, I will consider the two related problems of, on the one hand, whether the fragment is authentic and, on the other, how our understanding of the fragment today can be aided by how Proclus presents the fragment. While there are few if any voices among commentators today who forcefully argue that the fragment is inauthentic, the reluctance commentators show toward interpreting B5 can be ascribed to some apparent uncertainties surrounding how the fragment is preserved. These uncertainties were themselves related, as the example of Cornford's problematic view of the fragment itself can illustrate, to what I view as an insufficient awareness of the context in which Proclus presented the fragment. Notably, Proclus presented an unorthodox interpretation of Parmenides. Failing to adequately understand this context is, I argue, one reason why commentators either refrain from engaging with B5 or view it as an inauthentic fragment. Therefore, looking at the context in which B5 is preserved can open up further inquiries into the meaning of the fragment. Insofar as the context Proclus presents the fragment in is not investigated and laid out, readers of the fragment cannot easily attempt to differentiate between the meaning of the fragment and the context it is presented in, which may lead interpreters who question how Proclus makes use of the fragment to also question the authenticity of the fragment.

### 3.2 – The question of how interpreters should approach B5

How Proclus quotes fragment B5 and our inability to corroborate his citation led G. Jameson to argue that B5 should be treated as suspect and that one should not develop an interpretation of the poem



around it.<sup>170</sup> As I have noted, more recent interpreters of the poem who only marginally mention B5 can be seen to be passively agreeing with Jameson in so far as they appear to only reluctantly find a place for B5 in their interpretations. Some of these interpreters also explicitly point at the uncertainty surrounding the fragment as a reason for why they refrain from engaging with it. Jameson himself refers to Olof Gigon, who in his account of the poem says, "Wir übergehen 28 B 5, das von geringerer Bedeutung und nicht sicher festzulegendem Sinne ist."<sup>171</sup> More recently, Palmer has noted that while he views his own interpretation of the fragment to have some merit, "fr. 5 is so brief, enigmatic, and bereft of context that any interpretation of it can only be speculative [...]."<sup>172</sup> Similarly, Sturt B. Martin expresses the opinion that to refuse to guess its meaning is "the most prudent way to deal with this fragment," and he refers to Palmer as observing that "there is no context for this very brief fragment."<sup>173</sup> The claim that there is no context for B5, or that it is bereft of context, is imprecise. There is, of course, the context of how Proclus presents the fragment. Martin, in particular, comments on fragment B3 of the poem at length, which, like B5, is quoted as a single line by the authors who preserve it.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, it can appear that he does not refer to the length of the fragment when he says its lack of context warrants him not to comment on it. Seemingly, both Palmer and Martin ignore the context in which Proclus presents the fragment. Neither mentions in their brief comments on the fragment if there is any reason for them choosing to ignore the context in Proclus' commentary on the Parmenides.

Unlike Gigon, Palmer, and Martin, Jameson explicitly points out that B5 seems out of place as it is quoted by Proclus. According to Jameson, in opposition to what Cornford suggests, the fact that B5 is quoted in between B8.25 and B8.44 indicates that Proclus could have quoted the fragment from

---

<sup>170</sup> Jameson (1958) 21.

<sup>171</sup> Gigon (1945) 257.

<sup>172</sup> Palmer (2009) 85n104.

<sup>173</sup> Martin (2016) 150.

<sup>174</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Plotinus and Proclus all quote B3. In section 3 below I refer to Proclus' quotation of that fragment in his commentary on the Parmenides.

memory, and that the fragment is, thus, suspect. That Proclus could have quoted B5 from memory is a reasonable claim for which Jameson provides some evidence. Referring to E. R. Dodds, Jameson suggests that B5 could have been quoted from memory because Proclus elsewhere appears to quote from ancient authors from memory rather than from their original texts.<sup>175</sup> In further emphasizing this point, Jameson also notes how Proclus quotes Empedocles' fragment DK31 B52. Proclus introduces that fragment by saying "Empedocles somewhere says: [...]"<sup>176</sup> which, because of the explicit unspecificity, suggests to Jameson that Proclus was quoting the fragment from memory. Therefore, because of how B5 is presented and that Proclus is known to quote others from memory, Jameson maintains, "frg. 5 should be treated as suspect; it has no more authority behind it than Proclus' memory and cannot be introductory to any argument of the Way of Truth as we know it."

Coxon, seemingly in support of a position similar to Jameson's, points out that how Proclus presents a citation of B8.29 from Parmenides' poem at four different times in the commentary on the Parmenides is illustrative of how Proclus made use of the works of other philosophers. In these four quotations, Proclus uses two different forms of the verb *mimnō*, 'I remain,' neither of which is the one Simplicius makes use of in his quotation of the fragment. Proclus once quotes the fragment as "tauton en tautō mimnon,"<sup>177</sup> using the participle of the verb, while in the three later instances where he quotes the same fragment he instead uses the present form *mimnei*.<sup>178</sup> Simplicius, in his quotation of the fragment, instead has *te menon* in place of Proclus' *mimnon* and *mimnei*.<sup>179</sup> Coxon ascribes Proclus' use of the form *mimnei* to a confusion with Xenophanes fragment DK21 B25, "aiei d' en tautō mimnei," which to Coxon indicates that Proclus made these quotations from memory. In

---

<sup>175</sup> Jameson (1958) 21. Jameson cites E. R. Dodds who shows that Proclus' short citations from Plato are often inaccurate.

<sup>176</sup> Jameson (1958) 21; Proclus' commentary on the Timaeus, II 8.

<sup>177</sup> Trans. Coxon (2009).

<sup>178</sup> The latter three citations are from pages 1134, 1152 and 1177 of Cousin's edition of Proclus' commentary on the Parmenides, while the first is on page 639.

<sup>179</sup> Coxon (2009) 6 translates the fragment using *mimnon* and *te menon* both as "remaining the same in the same state," while with *mimnei* he translates "it remains the same in the same state." The different verb forms used, thus, do not appear to change the sense of the fragment.

the case of the first quotation, however, where Proclus uses the word *mimnon*, the quotation “appears to come from an earlier commentary on Plato’s Parmenides and perhaps reproduces the version given in this source.”<sup>180</sup> What Coxon’s suggestions can call attention to is that when Proclus quoted a part of Parmenides’ poem he could be quoting from memory, quoting directly from the poem itself or, alternatively, quoting directly from another secondary work. In the context of Jameson’s view that the fragment might be spurious, this third alternative is noteworthy. If Proclus quoted B5 from another secondary source – notwithstanding the inaccuracies that might be the consequence of transmission – Proclus would himself have been unaware of the context the fragment was presented in, even as he could have correctly quoted the fragment.

That Proclus might have quoted B5 from an anthology of sayings of philosophers is a middle-ground position that is supported by that, while Proclus can be seen as partially an untrustworthy source, as he is by Jameson, he can also be seen as trustworthy. On the one hand, there is some reason to believe that Proclus did in fact possess the text of Parmenides’ poem. He elsewhere both quotes longer sections of the poem and shows detailed knowledge of the *aletheia*.<sup>181</sup> In light of his view of Proclus’ quotations from Parmenides’ poem, Mansfeld maintains that “Proclus undoubtedly had access to a copy of the text [of the poem].”<sup>182</sup> The epic language of B5 that Proclus preserves, which I will return to later in discussing the meaning of *xunon*, itself supports that B5 in particular is a direct citation of the text of the poem. B5 has the epic forms *hoppothen* and *xunon*, rather than the Attic *hopothen* and *koinon*. Proclus’ use of *xunon* rather than *koinon* in the fragment is especially noteworthy because he frequently uses *koinos* as a technical term. In quoting from memory, he could supposedly have been less likely to use the more unfamiliar dialect of epic poetry than if he were quoting directly from the text of the poem.

---

<sup>180</sup> Coxon (2009) 6.

<sup>181</sup> Specifically, Proclus’ quotation of B2 in his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* I, 345, 18–25 and his paraphrase of the *aletheia* in the commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* 1077–8; cf. Bodnar (1985) 61n3.

<sup>182</sup> Mansfeld, (1999) 38.

On the other hand, how Proclus quotes B5 supports that Proclus himself was either unaware of, or at least not primarily concerned with how that fragment fits into the poem as a whole. The impetus behind Jameson's position, which he argues in favor of by framing Proclus as an unreliable source of verbatim quotations, is that Cornford's suggestion – that B5 should be placed in B8 – seems to him to be wrong. Jameson is not making an unfounded assumption when he assumes that Simplicius is a more trustworthy source than Proclus. However, that Proclus seems to sometimes quote other authors from memory, which is what Jameson sets out to establish, does not mean that is the case. That B5 seemed out of place in B8 can, alternatively, be explained by that Proclus presented B5 in a way that did not reflect how it originally was presented by Parmenides. Furthermore, in how Simplicius introduces his quotation of B8, as I have quoted above, he mentions that at the time when he is writing – only a generation after Proclus – copies of the text of Parmenides' poem had become rare, which is the reason why he sees fit to quote that long section from it. The rarity of the text of the poem makes it more likely that Proclus did not have a copy of the full text that preserved the context of B5. In a contrasting claim to what Mansfeld maintains, Taran says about B5, "it cannot be excluded that Proclus himself may have copied the fragment out of an anthology, for I see no evidence that he knew the whole of Parmenides' poem."<sup>183</sup> As Diels pointed out, what he calls doxographical works were widely read in antiquity, and it was not unlikely that Proclus might have been in possession of a doxographical work that included quotations from Parmenides' poem.<sup>184</sup>

In the case of the question of to what extent Proclus directly quoted from the text of the poem, the balance of opinion and evidence appears to me to favor that Proclus could have directly quoted the text of B5, even though it is unclear if Proclus knew the context in which Parmenides presented the fragment. While the implicit reluctance of interpreters' of Parmenides' poem toward B5 is striking,

---

<sup>183</sup> Taran (1965) 51.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. chapter 3.2 below and Mansfeld (1999) 24.

that the authority of B5 is only rarely explicitly questioned – which it is not by commentators such as Curd, Mourelatos, and Tor – can arguably be seen as more noteworthy in the discussion of whether the fragment is spurious. However, Jameson’s position is not easily refuted by what is a relatively scarce set of evidence in favor of the fragment’s authenticity. Taran, who suggests in the quotation above that Proclus might have quoted the fragment from a doxographical work, argues that uncertainty about the meaning of the fragment – which is what he understands Jameson’s position to be motivated by – should not lead us to think that the fragment is inauthentic. According to Taran, “The fact that we cannot recover the reason for the statement contained in the fragment – i.e., the reason why the goddess will come back to any point from which she begins – is not a motive to doubt the authenticity of the fragment as Jameson does.”<sup>185</sup> The uncertainties surrounding the fragment gives Jameson reason to view the fragment as inauthentic, while for Taran these uncertainties are themselves not seen as good enough a reason to view the fragment as inauthentic.

Like Taran, Istvan Bodnar states that Proclus’ “construal of the text and its philosophical interpretation do not stand or fall together.”<sup>186</sup> But Bodnar goes further than Taran by being more open to the possibility of forming an interpretation of the fragment and criticizes Taran’s reluctance toward deciding on an interpretation of B5. While presenting different interpretation of the fragment, Taran limits how he interprets the fragment to that “while some of these conjectures go beyond the evidence so that there is no good reason to support one against the others, other conjectures are based on premises that may be proven wrong.”<sup>187</sup> For Taran, we are limited by how Proclus presents the fragment to only being able to disprove some unfounded interpretations of it. Bodnar has a different standard for how certain an interpretation needs be, and thus believes that “we are able to contrast and rank different interpretations of this fragment.”<sup>188</sup> While I ultimately

---

<sup>185</sup> Taran (1965) 53. Regarding the interpretation Taran presents of the fragment, see section 4 below.

<sup>186</sup> Bodnar (1985) 63n23.

<sup>187</sup> Taran (1965) 51.

<sup>188</sup> Bodnar (1985) 57.

disagree with the interpretation Bodnar ranks the highest among the ones he considers, I find his willingness to form an opinion of the fragment despite uncertainties admirable, even more so than how Taran approaches the fragment. When dealing with the Presocratics, whose work is only known in fragments such as B5 and B8, it can appear to be limiting to have too high a standard for what kind of material should be the basis of an interpretation. In fact, viewing B5 in a context where it is contrasted with how B8 is preserved might not be very fruitful for interpreters of B5. B8, as the longest preserved quotation of any of the Presocratics, is itself not a typical fragment of the works of the Presocratics. The standard of evidence it might establish for other fragments might be unrealistic, which could potentially limit interpreters from approaching the available evidence.

However, even if it can seem praiseworthy in this context to both not be too skeptical about B5 and to approach Proclus' interpretation with suspicion, it is questionable to treat the text of the fragment and the context it is preserved in as two separate entities without careful attention to Proclus' interpretation of it. Bodnar, in stating that Proclus' "construal of the text and its philosophical interpretation do not stand or fall together," makes a distinction between the context in which Proclus preserves the fragment – which he suggests 'falls' – and the fragment itself – which he, nevertheless, attempts to interpret. In light of the view that Proclus might have quoted the fragment from a doxographical work, Bodnar's approach can be seen to be justified. However, this view about what Proclus knew about the fragment is not obviously correct, even if it might be the view that is most likely to be correct. Whether Proclus acted like the sculptor of the Velia Parmenides or if he is a reliable source to the meaning of Parmenides' poem can appear to not be unambiguously indicated by the available evidence. Furthermore, the transmission of the fragment by Proclus can remain a problem regardless of whether we let it hinder us from approaching the fragment. Because the problematic way Proclus preserves the fragment can be seen as a reason for why interpreters are both implicitly and explicitly skeptical of B5, simply ignoring the context in which the fragment is preserved might not be an adequate basis for a response to those who do think the fragment

remains problematic. Therefore, approaching B5 through an account of how Proclus understood it, as I do below, might be warranted. Two further reasons in favor of my approach is that, first, even if we do not accept that his view of the fragment is correct, how Proclus presents the fragment is the one tool we can potentially use – outside of the text of the fragment itself and the wider context of Parmenides’ poem – to assist our own interpretation of B5. Second, explicating how Proclus understood the fragment can show which parts of modern interpretations are dependent on assumptions they have adopted from Proclus. As I note in section 5 below, Bodnar’s own interpretation of B5 is remarkably similar to how Proclus interprets the fragment, which can beg the question about to what extent someone like Bodnar could have been passively influenced by Proclus. By clarifying Proclus’ interpretation in order to see what it peculiar about it, it can potentially become possible to see which parts of the context he presents the fragment in are helpful – and potentially harmful – for an interpretation of the fragment. For these reasons I will now look at how Proclus presents fragment B5 and give further context to the quotation of the fragment by laying out some relevant aspects of Proclus’ philosophical position.

### 3.3 – How Proclus presents B5 and the philosophical background against which he presents it

Proclus introduces his quotations of B8.25, B5, and B8.44 at page 708.9–11 of Cousin’s edition of his commentary on the Parmenides by saying, “Parmenides was looking at Being itself, that which is transcendent of all things and the highest of things-that-are, in which Being is primarily revealed – [and he did so] not as a person ignorant of the plurality of intelligibles.”<sup>189</sup> In an apparent contrast to

---

<sup>189</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 708. Trans. Coxon (2009).

Parmenides' interest in the "highest of things-that are," Proclus here maintains that Parmenides was also concerned with a multitude of intelligible entities. Proclus' assertion can be understood to be directed against a different interpretation of Parmenides that only sees him as interested in what can alternatively, in Glenn Morrow's and John Dillon's translation of the passage, be called the "transcended summit" of Being. Proclus, as a Neoplatonic philosopher, was himself concerned with explaining reality.<sup>190</sup> For him, all of the world was potentially an object for philosophical inquiry, not just abstract concepts or transcendent ideas that might appear to have no bearing on the reality we experience. Correspondingly, in introducing the three citations in question, Proclus' claim is that Parmenides himself was of a like mind, which is a point Proclus argues in favor of while showing that he understands his position is not shared with every reader of the three quotations. In saying that Parmenides was not "ignorant of the plurality of intelligibles," (*oukh ōs agnoōn to plēthos tōn noētōn*), Proclus uses the double negation of *oukh* and *agnoōn*, rather than the simple statement *noōn*. In doing so, Proclus emphasizes rhetorically that while it is possible to understand Parmenides as unconcerned with plurality, this is not the case. He then repeats this point at 709.1, concluding about Parmenides that "it is therefore far from true that he had to deny plurality because he posited the One Being."

As I pointed out in section 1, the reason why Proclus understood Parmenides to not be in disagreement with Plato was that he understood the two earlier thinkers to not be speaking about the same thing; according to Proclus, speaking about Plato's One and Parmenides' One Being, "the two men are looking at different Ones [...]."<sup>191</sup> The concept of the One Being presents the One as a part of Being. Parmenides himself in his poem does not use the term the One Being. It is, rather, Proclus' term for what he understands Parmenides to be talking about. In introducing B8.25, B5, and B8.44, it is this One Being Proclus is referring to when he mentions the "highest of things-that-are,"

---

<sup>190</sup> "The primary motivation behind all Platonic philosophy, including Proclus', is to explain reality." Martijn and Gerson (2017) 48.

<sup>191</sup> Proclus, Commentary on Plato's Parmenides 1134. Trans. Coxon (2009).



or the highest of all beings. In Parmenides' poem, in the eyes of Proclus, what was Parmenides' object of concern was never 'beyond being,' which was instead how Proclus understood the Platonic concepts of the Good and the One.

A difference between the things Proclus understood Parmenides and Plato, respectively, to be talking about is that Parmenides' One Being, unlike Plato's One, was by Proclus thought to be assigned the attribute of being in motion (*kinēsis*), like any other object among the multitude of intelligible entities. According to fragment B3 of Parmenides' poem as Proclus quotes it, "it is the same there to think and to be."<sup>192</sup> As Pieter d'Hoine suggests, it is one of the "fundamental axioms of Greek thought," Proclus interprets the meaning of B3 to be what can be seen as an expression of an idealist ontological position, entailing "That which is can be an object of thought, or, inversely, only that which is intelligible really exists."<sup>193</sup> Proclus quotes this fragment in order to argue that what Parmenides' poem is about, i.e., the One Being, is in motion. Proclus also quotes B8.35–36 and B6.1 to make the same point, which he more fully lays out by saying,

by putting intellection in Being he clearly admits that some motion belongs to it, namely, intellectual [motion], which Plato knows as well, since he is the one who says that it is not even possible to conceive of intellect without motion. And so if according to Parmenides there is intellection in the One Being, there is motion as well since together with intellection there is certainly life, and every living thing is moved precisely in virtue of living.<sup>194</sup>

In giving an account of Plato's *Sophist* 248e–249d and the Neoplatonic view of the relationship between motion and intellect (*nous*), Eric D. Perl states that, for Plato, "the 'motion' attributed to intelligible being is [...] the activity of intellectual apprehension."<sup>195</sup> With the perceived result of being

---

<sup>192</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1152. Trans. Morrow and Dillon (1992). Coxon translates Proclus' quotation of the fragment as "There the same thing is for conceiving as is for Being," which can arguably be said to be how Parmenides understood the text of the fragment. However, Proclus seems to have understood the connection between thinking and Being as stronger than what Coxon's translation indicates.

<sup>193</sup> d'Hoine (2017) 99.

<sup>194</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1152-1153. Trans. Coxon (2009).

<sup>195</sup> Perl (2014) 135.

able to link his interpretation with Neoplatonism, Perl argues that “Plato understands intellectual apprehension as a ‘being with’ [*sunousia*] the forms,” rather than as an “objectifying ‘gaze’ of the soul upon intelligible ‘objects’ extrinsic to itself,” where he understands ‘forms’ as referring to the same as ‘Being.’<sup>196</sup> In interpreting Parmenides as attributing motion to Being, Proclus appears to express a position that is similar to how Perl understands the relationship between motion and Being in Plato. By saying that intellection is together with – or happens at the same time as (*hama*) – life, Proclus is suggesting that intellection is the same as having the kind of affinity for an object, which is referred to as *sunousia* by Plato. The upshot of Perl’s interpretation, which is also what is suggested by Proclus, is that ‘intellectual apprehension’ is itself seen as the same as what is apprehended. In commenting on how he sees this view expressed by Plotinus, Perl says, “The forms [...] are not inert ‘objects’ but are the contents of living intelligence and as such are one with it in the unity of act and content, apprehension and the apprehended.” These moving acts of living intelligence is what Proclus, by quoting fragment B3, points out that Parmenides says is the same as Being, and consequently also the One Being.

Proclus elsewhere<sup>197</sup> argues that Being, life, and intellect forms a triad that constitutes “three different levels of reality between the One and the Soul [...]”<sup>198</sup> There is, for Proclus, a hierarchy between these three levels of reality in that, d’Hoine says, “Being ‘proceeds’ through the motion and rest associated with Life to Intellect.”<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, that there are Beings without life and living things without intellect shows which of the three are the “higher causes,” because the more general of the three must be more important ontologically.<sup>200</sup> But while there is such a hierarchy, there is also a continuity between the different levels, which can be used to gain knowledge of the structure of reality. As Proclus points out in the quotation above, it is possible to establish that there is intellect

---

<sup>196</sup> Perl (2014) 147.

<sup>197</sup> Proclus, *Platonic Theology* III 6, 26.

<sup>198</sup> d’Hoine (2017) 99.

<sup>199</sup> d’Hoine (2017) 100.

<sup>200</sup> d’Hoine (2017) 100; Proclus, *Elements of Theology* § 101, 90.

and motion in Being by signaling that there is life in Being, where the 'lesser cause' is established as an element of the 'higher.'

In contrast to how he sees Parmenides' One Being, the One, according to Proclus, "is above Intellect and all intellectual existence."<sup>201</sup> The One, unlike what Parmenides is talking about, is not in motion because it does not take part in 'intellectual existence.' The view that Parmenides was himself talking about an object that was not in motion is an attractive position, and one that even Proclus points out is partially correct. Immediately after Proclus points out that Parmenides' One Being is in motion, he also makes what can be a more obvious point for a reader of the poem, namely that Parmenides in fragment B8 "declares that the One Being is unmoved, calling it "unshaken" and "remaining" and of its own nature 'unmoved.'"<sup>202</sup> In the Sophist 248e–249d, where Plato's character, Eleatic Stranger, talks about how motion and the intellect relates to Being, the Eleatic Stranger is not laying out – like Proclus – what he seems to understand to be the orthodox interpretation of Parmenides' poem. Instead, he is presenting what he, at 241d of that dialogue, is afraid might be called a 'patricide' of Parmenides, who he views as an intellectual father-figure. Therefore, when Proclus is pointing toward the connection made between motion, intellect, and Being, which are reluctantly presented in the Sophist as something that is expressed by Parmenides, he is rejecting the worry that the Eleatic Stranger expresses by not viewing what he does in the Sophist as a 'patricide.' However, as Proclus shows by frequently referring to the views of other commentators who disagree with him, seeing the Eleatic Stranger's worry as unfounded can be seen as problematic. Through the characterizations of what Parmenides says about what Proclus calls the One Being in fragment B8 – exemplified by the three attributes of to eon referenced by Proclus – 'unshaken,' 'remaining' and 'unmoved' – it can seem as though Parmenides only emphasizes that what he is talking about is not in motion.

---

<sup>201</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1084. Trans. Coxon (2009).

<sup>202</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1153. Trans. Coxon (2009).

The background against which Proclus reconciles what are the seemingly contradictory notions that Parmenides both understood Being as unmoved and as in motion is that Proclus further characterized the motion of the intellect as ‘immobile motion’ (*kinēsis akinētos*).<sup>203</sup> This characterization, which itself can be seen as a problematic description, points toward what Proclus called the ‘double nature’ of the acts of the intellect. In the Parmenides, Plato had problematized the relationship between, on the one hand, the intelligible and immaterial forms and, on the other, sensible and material entities in which the forms are thought to be present or in which they participate.<sup>204</sup> Proclus understood this relationship in terms of an account of the twofoldness of the intellect. In line with Proclus’ view that the apprehended and intellectual apprehension is the same, “the act of Intellect has a double nature, the first is intellective, unified with the real beings and indivisible; it exists together with the intelligible aspect of the intellect itself, or rather: it is both the intelligible itself and the intellect.” Furthermore,

The other [act] is directed toward the external and to things that have capacity to participate in Intellect. In fact, the Intellect makes them also intellective, shining as it were the light of its own intellection and passing it on to the other things.<sup>205</sup>

What can be seen as particular about the view Proclus expresses – which is referred to by d’Hoine as a “notorious principle of Neoplatonic metaphysics”<sup>206</sup> – is that he views the otherwise immobile intellect as effecting other entities, rather than positing a further ontologically foundational entity that is mobile with an affectual nature. d’Hoine notes that Proclus can be understood to express a reading of 29e1–3 of the *Timaeus*, “where it is said that the Demiurge, being good and therefore lacking envy, wishes the entire creation to resemble him as closely as possible.”<sup>207</sup> The intellect as Proclus understands it similarly has the effect of making other entities resemble it and making them take part in itself. Consequentially, Proclus understands the immaterial forms to be intelligible

---

<sup>203</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* II 251.5. Trans. Tarrant (2017)

<sup>204</sup> 131a4–e4. Cf. also Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s view of the forms in *Metaphysics* A 9, 991a20–B9.

<sup>205</sup> Proclus, *Platonic Theology* V 18, 64–65. Trans. Saffrey and Westerink. *Quoted in d’Hoine* (2017).

<sup>206</sup> d’Hoine (2017) 107.

<sup>207</sup> d’Hoine (2017) 107.

models that themselves emanate – “shining [...] the lights of its own intellection” – to the material and sensible.

Returning to the immediate context of Proclus’ quotation of B5, at page 707 of Cousin’s edition of the commentary on the Parmenides Proclus says, as an example, that ‘man’ has a double nature, “one transcendent and one participated [...]” Proclus goes on to explain,

For the things that exist in other, i.e. the common terms and the terms that are participated, must have prior to them that which belongs to itself—in a word, the unparticipated. On the other hand, the transcendent Form which exists in itself, because it is the cause of many things, unites and binds together the plurality; and again the common character in the many is a bond of union among them. This is why Man himself is one thing, another is the man in the particulars; the former is eternal, but the latter in part mortal and in part not.<sup>208</sup>

In this quotation, Proclus shows how he understands the relationship between the forms and entities such as ‘man’ by avoiding to claim that the “common character in the many” is itself what is here translated as a “transcendent form.” The common character in the many is, rather, an image of the form that is passed on to it by the form itself. Moreover, because of its double nature, an entity such as ‘man in the particular’ is in part not like the form ‘man’ because the form is not found as a part of that entity – the form shows its own likeness in any particular man, but it is not itself present in any one man. Insofar as any particular entity is affected by the form, it is eternal, but it is still not the same as the form it is affected by. It is thus “part mortal and in part not,” or part in motion and part immobile.

---

<sup>208</sup> Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides 707. Trans. Coxon (2009).

I have noted that Proclus introduces fragments B8.22, B5, and B8.44 by claiming that Parmenides was not “ignorant of the plurality of intelligibles.”<sup>209</sup> What Proclus is referring to with that claim is that the forms emanate into material entities. This interpretation, however, has often not been seen as the obvious meaning of any of the three citations. B8.25 states that “what-is draws near to what-is” (*eon gar eonti pelazei*), and B8.44 says that to eon, is “equal in weight from the center” (*messotheren isopalēs*), while Proclus quotes B5 as, in my modified version of Coxon’s translation, “[...] it is common for me \ from where I begin, for I will return there again” (*xunon de moi estin \ oppothen arxōmai; todi gar palin ixomai authis*). “All these phrases show that he,” Proclus says of Parmenides, “posits many intellectual beings and an order among them of first, middle, and last, and an inexpressible unity.”<sup>210</sup> The images of the forms, as I have pointed out that Proclus believes, are still themselves thought to be intellectual beings. They are, however, still only images of the forms. There is thus a hierarchy among intellectual beings. Especially B8.44 seems to resist such an interpretation, because to eon is said to be *isopalēs*, equal in weight. It is the equal nature of to eon that would thus appear to be what Parmenides stresses, rather than any hierarchical order among intellectual beings. Similarly, B8.25 can appear to be stressing the uniformity of to eon when it is stated that it draws near to itself. As for B5, the most common interpretation of it holds that it expresses that two different places are either the same as each other or that the difference between them is insignificant.<sup>211</sup> There can, therefore, appear not to be any implicit order among what the fragment speaks of as a beginning and return.

In these alternatives to Proclus’ interpretation, however, one aspect of the different fragments has been deemphasized, namely that they all deal with directions of movement. In B8.25, to eon is not simply said to be in the same location as itself, it rather moves toward itself. In B8.44 it is “from the

---

<sup>209</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 708. Trans. Morrow and Dillon (1992).

<sup>210</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 708. Trans. Morrow and Dillon (1992).

<sup>211</sup> Diels (1897), Jameson (1958), Kirk and Raven (1957), Taran (1965), Bicknell (1979), Holscher (1986), Cordero (2004), and Coxon (2009). Bodnar (1985), who supports his interpretation on Barnes and Owen, is an interesting exception because the points of similarity between his interpretation and Proclus’ interpretation.

center” (*messothen*) that to eon is said to be equal in weight. And B5 speaks of movement away from (and possibly back to) a point of beginning. That to eon is characterized by these directions of movement in the quotations could imply that Parmenides, like Proclus, understands what he is talking about as in ‘immobile motion’ by itself remaining motionless while affecting other entities. Proclus emphasizes the mobility of everything but the One itself, so in claiming that Parmenides’ poem is not about the One he argues that what Parmenides is talking about is in motion.

Karsten makes what I understand as an interesting suggestion about how B5 should be interpreted by stating that 707.15 in the above quotation from Proclus’ commentary on the Parmenides can be understood as Proclus’ paraphrase of fragment B5.<sup>212</sup> 707.15 is the line that reads, “the common character in the many is a bond of union among them.” Karsten himself notes that knowledge of the Neoplatonic tradition and Proclus – which I have attempted to lay out and that Karsten says he himself possesses – is needed in order to understand Proclus’ supposed paraphrase.<sup>213</sup> According to Karsten, Proclus’ interpretation of B5 centers on the meaning of the word *xunon*, which is here translated as “common.” This word is a key word in Proclus’ interpretation of B5, like it is in all other interpretations of the fragment. One parallel between 707.15 and B5 that supports the one being a paraphrase of the other is the use of the word *koinos* in 707.15. *Koinos* is here translated as ‘common character.’ B5 mentions one or multiple places that are *xunos* to the speaker from where the speaker begins. Because that place/those places are *xunos*, B5 explains, the speaker will again return to a place. In speaking in general about B5 it is necessary to be vague about the places of beginning and return. How many of them there are and if they are the same place or not hinges on which interpretation of the fragment one subscribes to. But if B5 is understood as a paraphrase of 707.15,

---

<sup>212</sup> Karsten (1835) 75.

<sup>213</sup> Karsten (1835) 75–76: “Ista interpretatio profecto tam ingeniosa est tamque subtilis, ut Neo-platonico paene acumine opus sit ad eam intelligendam et explicandam.” Karsten ultimately believes Parmenides in B5 is expressing hesitation about where he should start his inquiry.

the meaning of the fragment could be that from where the speaker begins and the place to which they return would share a common character as a 'bond of union' between them.

Regardless of whether Karsten is correct in that 707.15 was meant as a paraphrase of B5, 707.15 does show how Proclus used the term in his dialect that corresponds to Parmenides' *xunon*. Karsten's suggestion, however, is not itself unreasonable. That Proclus quoted B5 to show that Parmenides wanted to say something about the common character of separate entities is plausible. B5 speaks of two points that are linked together somehow, and the characterization of the first point that appears to link it together with the second is given by the word *xunon*, which Proclus could reasonably have understood as having the same meaning as *koinos*. Therefore, the common point could be seen as what the bond of union between the two points consists in. The further implications, as my exposition of Proclus' view shows, that they are bound together, i.e., that they are affected by the same form, is not because the common character itself binds them together. What they have in common – what is *koinos* – could be that they both are images of a form. That form is itself in motion through movements that come from its center and through movements that draws entities toward itself, as B8.25 and B8.44 can be understood to express. I will in what follows accept that 707.15 is a paraphrase of B5 as a working hypothesis because it is plausible and because it – interestingly – links Proclus' interpretation with Bodnar's modern interpretation. According to Bodnar, if we accept 707.15 as a paraphrase of B5 it would mean "Proclus' exegesis is parallel to my reconstruction."<sup>214</sup> Whether Bodnar's interpretation is correct in regard to both Proclus and Parmenides is a question I will return to in section 5 below.

In accepting 707.15 as an accurate paraphrase of Parmenides' fragment B5 (and not just as what Proclus himself believed), there are some interpretive concessions we must make to how B5 should be interpreted.

---

<sup>214</sup> Bodnar (1985) 61.



- (1) First, we must accept that *xunos* should in fact be translated as “common character,” making the sense of the beginning of the fragment “from where I begin has a common character.” Proclus understood this common character to be shared by different entities in so far as the same form emanated into them.
  
- (2) Second, which is implied by the first point, the fragment can be understood as speaking of multiple points of beginning, all sharing the common character in question, in the sense expressed in point 1. In regard to the discussion of how many points of beginning there are, a consequence of what seems to be how Proclus understood B5 is that Parmenides was there speaking of the multitude of entities that are images of a form. What is peculiar about one specific point of beginning is thus not what is being emphasized. Because of the unclear function of the subjunctive verb *arxōmai*, the text of the fragment is ambiguous in regard to the question of if it refers to one beginning or several.<sup>215</sup> Proclus’ interpretation suggests there can be several points of beginning.
  
- (3) Third, the place of return that the fragment mentions could be seen as distinct from where the speaker begins. Even though it can be natural to assume that a point of return refers back to an earlier mentioned point of beginning, in accepting Proclus’ interpretation, we can be led to assume that the point of return is only the same as the point of beginning in that they both are images of the same form.
  
- (4) Fourth, the speaker’s role in the fragment is marginal. The fragment says, “from where I begin is common *for me*.” This use of the verb in the first-person and the dative first-person

---

<sup>215</sup> Understanding *arxōmai* either with an iterative or generalizing function would imply that there are multiple points from where the speaker begins. “[...] I always begin [...]” or “[...] I again and again begin [...]” both posit multiple points of beginning. If it is interpreted instead as simply indicating the future (“[...] I will begin [...]”), then the fragment states that there is only one point from where the speaker will be beginning. Cf. Bodnar (1985) 63n20; Bicknell (1979) 9.

personal pronoun has no bearing on what can appear to be Proclus' interpretation as I understand it. In how Proclus presents B5 it would appear to make no difference if the fragment was an impersonal statement.

(5) Fifth, because Proclus quotes them together, we must accept that B5, B8.25, and B8.44 all are making a similar point. Because of Simplicius, we do know the context of B8.44 and B8.25 and, considering that context of those fragments in the poem, Proclus' interpretation can be seen as questionable. The directions of movement that these quotations can seem to mention is not being emphasized by that context. Especially the line immediately before B8.25, "it is all full of being,"<sup>216</sup> seemingly goes against Proclus' claim that Parmenides is speaking about entities that have a share of Being to a greater and lesser degree, i.e., images of the forms have a lesser share of Being than the forms themselves. By accepting Proclus' interpretation, we would have to reject these worries.

(6) Sixth, we must understand B5 as a widening of the concept of *to eon* as it is presented by Parmenides elsewhere. In reacting to how Proclus presents B5, Taran notes,

Proclus quoted this fragment together with [B8.25 and B8.44] to show that Parmenides, besides the conception of the One, was aware of the principle of *to plēthos tōn noētōn* [the plurality of intelligibles]. Therefore there can be no doubt that Proclus considered this fragment to refer to Being; whether this is correct I am inclined to doubt because of the content and of the kind of context in which the quotation occurs.<sup>217</sup>

Similar to this quotation and the further claims Taran makes about the fragment (which I have quoted above), Bicknell says that Proclus "almost certainly found the lines, which he

---

<sup>216</sup> B8.24. Trans. Coxon (2009).

<sup>217</sup> Taran (1965) 51.

mistakenly referred to Being, in an anthology.”<sup>218</sup> By saying that Proclus understood the fragment to refer to Being, both Taran and Bicknell are making imprecise claims. Proclus is not suggesting that B5 should be understood as B8.25 and B8.44 are normally understood – namely as making claims about *to eon* that are similar to the other claims made in B8. Rather, Proclus’ interpretation entails that all three quotations show that Parmenides’ Being is also in motion and that the intelligible emanates into the material and sensible.

(7) Finally, we are led by Proclus to refrain from seeing Parmenides as being in conflict with Plato. By viewing the subject of Parmenides’ poem in motion and as inclusive of plurality, Proclus is presenting arguments in favor of his overarching view of seeing Parmenides’ poem in harmony with how he interprets Plato. If we are to accept how Proclus presented B5 as reflecting the meaning of the fragment in Parmenides’ poem, there is increased reason to understand Parmenides as not making claims about an entity like the One. By supposedly understanding *to eon* to be in motion, Parmenides could have posited that there is a more ontologically basic entity beyond what is being talked about that he is unable to explicitly address. In the above quotation it is inaccurate of Taran to indicate that Proclus understood Parmenides to have conceived of the One. As I have pointed out, Proclus’ interpretation of Parmenides stands in explicit opposition to interpretations of Parmenides that sees him as having primarily attempted to talk about what Proclus understood Plato to ultimately be concerned with, namely the One.

By articulating this set of assumptions, I have attempted to make these different aspects of Proclus’ interpretation of fragment B5 conspicuous. The reluctance shown by commentators toward B5 can partially be attributed to the difficult context in which Proclus preserves the fragment, as well as the tendency to uncritically accept or reject Proclus aspects of interpretation. Even though I have

---

<sup>218</sup> Bicknell (1979) 10n3.

presented these points separately, viewing different aspects of Proclus' interpretation as separate from each other can be problematic. These points show the importance of the context that the fragment is presented in for its interpretation. It is possible, but – as I have mentioned – not necessarily true, that Proclus' interpretation was inspired by him knowing the context of B5 in Parmenides' poem. Therefore, as point 5 states, Proclus appears to have understood the meaning of B5 as expressed in the context of the two citations from B8. However, we also need to be conscious of point 6, namely that contrary to what some commentators I will mention in the next section appear to believe, Proclus is not straightforwardly suggesting that B5 should be understood as a part of B8. He is instead suggesting that these three quotations widen the concept of *to eon*, in contrast to how it more commonly is understood. Point one, two and three are similarly related to one another as consequences of Proclus' theory of participation in the forms. Furthermore, regarding point 4, that Proclus seemingly ignores the narrative elements of B5 can also reflect that he might not have been concerned with looking at the whole poem when he quoted the B5. That he ignores these narrative elements can indicate that we have less reason to attempt to find evidence for how the fragment was positioned in the poem from the context Proclus presents it in.

Finally, by looking in detail at Proclus' reading of the fragment and the context he presents it in, we can see that the different interpretive choices Proclus makes do not fully make sense without reference to his interpretation as a whole. Proclus acted as an editor when he chose B5 to express his own interpretation of Parmenides (and an aspect of his own philosophical position). These editorial decisions regarding how to present the fragment only makes sense within the context of his interpretation, which aimed at presenting Parmenides as presenting an incomplete position that was in agreement with Plato. In using Proclus as a source for a modern interpretation of Parmenides' fragment B5, the possible advantages and limits of his interpretive position can be appreciated and understood only while keeping in mind that all the individual elements of how he presented the fragment supported his Neoplatonic reading of Parmenides. Taking one of these aspects of his

interpretation and applying it to a modern reading without reference to how Proclus understood the claim is, therefore, questionable. At the same time, it is also possible that Proclus both expressed his own position and gave us some evidence that can be used in order to establish the meaning of the fragment. Specifically, regarding the meaning of *xunon*, the meaning of the word ostensibly presented by Proclus can seem to correspond to how Parmenides might have used the word.

### 3.4 – A *xunon* beginning of an inquiry into what has no beginning

While few commentators have subscribed to Proclus' interpretation of B5, several have selected pieces of the context in which he presents the fragment in order to support their interpretations, seemingly without being aware of the full context. Consequentially, these interpretations can be seen as problematic. The way this problematic aspect has presented itself in their readings is primarily through the widespread translation of *xunon* as 'indifferent'. Starting with Diels, interpreters of the fragment have not agreed with either Proclus understanding or the dictionary definition of *xunon*.<sup>219</sup> In fact, according to Karl Bormann's representative opinion, translating *xunon* as 'common' in fragment B5 is "unparmenideisch".<sup>220</sup> Taking their lead from Proclus, these commentators believe that the subject of B5 is *to eon*.<sup>221</sup> Even though they do not follow Cornford's problematic suggestion that there was a lacuna in B8 in which B5 should be placed, they seemingly take that Proclus' places the fragment in between B8.25 and B8.44 as indicating the wider context of B8 is what explicates the meaning of B5. However, they do not follow Proclus' Neoplatonic interpretation of any of the three quotations at 708.15 in his commentary on the *Parmenides*. Consequently, without their controversial interpretation of the meaning of *xunon*, what is expressed

---

<sup>219</sup> Diels (1897) 67.

<sup>220</sup> Bormann (1971) 180.

<sup>221</sup> Diels (1897) 67; Kirk and Raven (1957) 268.

in B5 can appear to stand in stark contrast to what Parmenides asserts in B8. Specifically, the speaker of B5 can appear to give a positive attribute to a beginning – an *archē* – while the goddess-narrator in B8 claims that *to eon* is *anarchon*, i.e. without *archē*.

Before engaging with these commentators and how they make use of Proclus, I will first present my own account of the meaning of the word *xunon* in order to attempt to bring out the problems with the accounts that translate it as ‘indifferent’ or as another phrase with the same meaning. As I have pointed out, the question of the meaning of *xunon* is arguably an important aspect of any interpretation of fragment B5. While the meaning of the word is generally said to be simply ‘common’, looking at how it is used elsewhere by both Parmenides and others can shed light on what is meant by it. Presenting examples of how a word is used in order to bring out its meaning, which I do here, is itself problematic. The examples themselves are potentially ambiguous, and they cannot cover all uses of the word. I will, nevertheless, provide some examples of the use of *xunos* from the Iliad, Parmenides’ poem, and Proclus’ interpretation in order to attempt to point to what can seem to be one important meaning of the word. At the same time, those who follow Diels’ in translating *xunon* as ‘indifferent’ can be said to not be justified in doing so. Diels supports his translation with reference to Heraclitus’ fragment DK22 B103 and no other uses of the word. Based on the meaning of the word in that fragment alone we cannot conclude that the meaning of *xunon* was ‘indifferent’.

Three examples of the use of *xunon* in the Iliad are as follows.

*gaia d’eti xunē pantōn kai makron Olumpos* (15.193)

The earth and high Olympus remain yet common to us all.

*xunon Eneualios* (18.309)

Alike to all is the god of war.

*Xunon de kakon poleessi titheisi* (16.262)

A common evil they [wasps] make for many.<sup>222</sup>

In these quotations, what is *xunon* is something many all stand in a similar relationship to. The earth and Olympus, war, and the evil inflicted by wasps are all things that people indiscriminately are affected by or stand in a relation to, regardless of who they are or what they are doing. Similarly, *xunon* in fragment B10 of Parmenides' poem is attributed to *aithēr*. Just like with earth, the *aithēr* too can be characterized as *xunon* because everyone stands in the same relation to it. These things are *xunon* to these groups of people not because these people are characterized in a specific way.

Wasps do not differentiate between people; the quotation above continues: "And the wasps, if so be some wayfaring man ran as he passed by rouse them involuntarily, fly forth one and all in the valor of their hearts, and fight each in defense of his young". The wayfaring man does not have any qualifying feature that leads the wasps to attack him. He is attacked because the wasps are a *xunon kakon*, an evil that has no regard for who they are attacking. That the wasps do not discriminate between different people, however, does not mean that a passerby should be indifferent to them. They influence everyone in the same way, but they still have a great effect on people that it is wise to be wary of. What is *xunon*, which these examples indicate, is arguably something that affects indiscriminately, or something one stands in a relation to beyond one's own control.

Similarly, for Proclus the common element in the many is present in them because the same form radiates or emanates into them. Proclus' conception of how the forms participate in entities can, thus, possibly illustrate the meaning of *xunon* in the fragment. The meaning is 'common,' not because it refers to several entities or places that have the same internal characteristics, but rather, because these stand in the same relation to something they are affected by. The aspect of these

---

<sup>222</sup> *Homer, The Iliad. Trans. Murray (1924).*

entities that binds them together, in the eyes of Proclus, is not a unifying characteristic that each of them themselves possess that make them the same as each other.

In a possible contrast to how *xunos* is presented in the above quotations, Heraclitus fragment B103 reads, "On the circumference of a circle the beginning [*archē*] and end are common [*xunon*]." It is apparent why Diels related this fragment to B5. Both speak of an *archē* and both label that *archē* *xunon*. However, that Diels takes this fragment as evidence in favor of translating *xunon* as 'indifferent' is not justifiable based on how the word is used in this fragment alone. If *xunon* is translated as 'indifferent' the fragment would be claiming that it is arbitrary where a beginning and end is on a circle. This is a possible claim that Heraclitus could have made. However, it is not the only way to interpret the fragment. Alternatively, if *xunon* is understood in the sense of the quotations from the Iliad and Parmenides' fragment B10, then the meaning of the fragment would be that the beginning and end of a circle stands in an indiscriminate relationship to the whole circumference of the circle. The beginning and end of a circle would then affect its circumference equally, like the wasps in the Iliad 16.262. At one time one point on the circumference is affected in a way so it is the beginning, at another time the same point might be the end. Both of these interpretations are, in my opinion, possible based on the internal meaning of the fragment itself. But considering that 'indifferent' is elsewhere never the meaning of *xunon*, it is safe to say that we do not have any reason to understand it that way in DK22 B103, and therefore, also not in Parmenides' fragment B5.

Interpretations that, nevertheless, understand the meaning of *xunon* to be akin to 'indifferent' do so because they otherwise see the meaning of the fragment as problematic in the context in which Proclus presents it. The reason why translating *xunon* in the arguably more natural way I have presented above is sometimes avoided is that B5 can appear to be out of place in B8. One attribute



of *to eon* that is mentioned in B8.27 is that it is *anarchon*, meaning ‘without *archē*’.<sup>223</sup> The verb-form *archōmai* of the noun *archē* is what is translated as ‘I begin’ in B5. If B5 is to be understood in the context of B8, it can appear problematic that the goddess is referring to her own *archē* while she at the same time, in B8.27, claims that Being has no *archē*. It is in response to that problem that *xunon* is translated as ‘indifferent’. With *xunon* translated as ‘indifferent’, B5 fits better into the context of B8 because the fragment does not, then, positively mention an *archē*. Rather – in apparent agreement with B8.27 – B5 says that the goddess’ *archē* is indifferent to her.

I have noted above that we need to see B5, B8.25 and B8.44 as expressing Proclus’ own interpretation. Therefore, to believe that Proclus’ simply indicated that we should use our understanding of B8 to make sense of B5 would be arguably misguided. The commentators who do use the wider context of their interpretations of B8 to make sense of B5 are the ones who choose a translation like ‘indifferent’ for *xunon*. One such commentator is Coxon, who suggests, “the only explicit evidence for the context of the fragment relates it to the nature of *to eon* and the simile of the sphere in fr. 8.”<sup>224</sup> The simile of the sphere is found in B8.43, a line before *to eon* is said to be equal in weight from the middle in B8.44, quoted by Proclus. By referring to B8.43, Coxon makes reference to a fragment that Proclus does not quote in order to establish the meaning of B5. Correspondingly, without explicitly referencing the simile of the sphere,<sup>225</sup> Diels claims that B5 illustrates Parmenides’ “runden Weltsystem”.<sup>226</sup> Raven, furthermore, points to the phrase *alêtheiês eukukleos* (well-rounded truth) in fragment B1.29 in favor of a similar – and particularly speculative – reading of B5 which holds that the fragment states that “every attribute of reality can be deduced

---

<sup>223</sup> Kahn (1960) 235-236 notes that *archē* is a term that has the basic double meaning of both “to rule” and “to go first, to begin.”

<sup>224</sup> Coxon (2009) 286.

<sup>225</sup> Diels (1897) 67 could potentially have reached this conclusion without considering in detail the context of B8.44. The right translation of *xunon* seemed to him even superficially to be ‘indifferent’ (translating *tauton*, the same). “Oberflächlicher Betrachtung muss es scheinen als ob *xunon* die sonst freilich nicht nachweisbare Bedeutung von *tauton* habe.” He does, nevertheless, state that B5 is about *to eon*.

<sup>226</sup> Diels (1897) 67.

from every other.”<sup>227</sup> In order for B5 to express circularity, which is what these interpreters believe it does, the point of return in the fragment must be interpreted as the same point as the point of beginning. Regarding the inquiry the goddess can appear to give an account of in B5, these interpreters present the view that the goddess believes that any point where she begins her inquiry is somewhere she will eventually return, which supposedly makes it indifferent where that point of beginning is. Here, then, these readings disagree with Proclus. They do, however, at the same time appear to think it is obvious that B5 should be read together with the other fragments Proclus presents alongside it, even going so far as to read the context of another parts of B8 that what Proclus quoted into B5.

Through B5, B8.25 and B8.44, Proclus is not pointing to the circularity of Parmenides’ Being. Instead, he is attempting to show that Parmenides understood that there was a multitude of intelligible entities that stood in a hierarchical relationship with the forms and the One Being. What specifically Proclus pointed to in the three quotations was that Parmenides saw Being as in motion. In claiming that B5 is about *to eon* and is expressing its circularity, as I have noted, commentators such as Diels and Raven offer a problematic translation of *xunon* in order to make sense of the fragment in the context they present it.

In contrast, Bodnar’s interpretation of B5 is much closer to how Proclus presented the fragment. Written in 1985, Bodnar’s article on B5 is the last significant contribution to the debate surrounding the meaning of the fragment.<sup>228</sup> Bodnar explicitly states that if we follow Karsten’s suggestion of understanding 707.15 as a paraphrase of B5, then “Proclus’ exegesis is parallel to my

---

<sup>227</sup> Kirk and Raven (1957) 268; Jameson (1958) 22; and Bicknell (1979) 9 choose to read *eupetheos* instead of *eukukleos*, and Bicknell suggests, “whoever was responsible for the importation of *eukukleos* into B1.29 was seduced” by the similarity of the context there to B8.43.

<sup>228</sup> A more recent article on B5, Bogaczyk-Vormayr (2016), only repeats the idea that the fragment expresses a circular conception of the goddess’ inquiry.

reconstruction.”<sup>229</sup> However, Bodnar’s interpretation also does not completely correspond to how Proclus present the fragment. In pointing to what makes his own and Proclus’ interpretations similar, Bodnar states, “B5 singles out the unifying characteristic of all, and so constitutes the metaphysical entity Being.”<sup>230</sup> Bodnar understands this claim as parallel to Owen’s interpretation of the poem, as slightly modified by Barnes.<sup>231</sup> Bodnar points to how they understand fragment B2, which they take to indicate that Parmenides’ poem is about the existence of entities. “The first and most fundamental characteristic,” Bodnar says, explaining Owen’s and Barnes’ interpretation, of any object of inquiry “will be that it exists.”<sup>232</sup> Here, however, Bodnar, Owen and Barnes’ position is not the same as Proclus’. Proclus’ reason for quoting B5 is not to show what unifies entities insofar as they exist. He also does not point to a characteristic that entities themselves possess as individual entities, but rather to how they are affected by the forms.

The consequence of interpreting B5 in light of how Owen and Barnes understands B2 is expressed by Bodnar thus: “Construing B2 in this way allows us to say that it is indifferent whence (which object of inquiry) we embark on our inquiry, we will always arrive back to the same conclusion, viz . that it exists.”<sup>233</sup> Bodnar’s interpretation, therefore, preserves the translation of *xunon* as ‘indifferent’ while it at the same time avoids viewing B5 as presenting a circular picture of reality, like Diels and those who follow his interpretation. The reason why Bodnar himself does not want to commit himself to the view that B5 presents a circular image is that if one is bound to return to ones starting point it, in fact, becomes far from arbitrary where one begins; “It is anything but indifferent to me whether I start off as e.g. a beggar or millionaire.”<sup>234</sup> Interestingly, Bodnar sees preserving the translation Diels offered of *xunon* as an argument in favor of his own alternative interpretation. It, unlike Diels’

---

<sup>229</sup> Bodnar (1985) 61.

<sup>230</sup> Bodnar (1985) 61.

<sup>231</sup> Owen (1960) 94-95; Barnes (1979) 157. *The interpretation Bodnar presents centers for Owen and Barnes on the question of the subjectless esti in B2. Cf. chapter 1 below.*

<sup>232</sup> Bodnar (1985) 61.

<sup>233</sup> Bodnar (1985) 61.

<sup>234</sup> Bodnar (1985) 58.

interpretation, makes better sense of the fragment if we accept ‘indifferent’ as the translation of *xunon*, he argues here.

Two further targets for Bodnar are Uvo Hölscher and Peter Bicknell, who both argue, in contrast to how Proclus presents the fragment, that we should understand B5 as referring to a single starting point. Hölscher is, nevertheless, still committed to the translation of *xunon* as ‘indifferent’.

Furthermore, the starting point referenced to in the fragment is, according to Hölscher, the first way of inquiry that the Goddess presents, namely the *alēthēia*, which he suggests she returns to at the end of the poem.<sup>235</sup> In response, Bodnar claims that Hölscher’s interpretation, which views the poem as beginning and ending at the same point, also does not do justice to that point being

‘indifferent’.<sup>236</sup> Bicknell, however, points out what I have noted and what Curd and Palmer also suggest,<sup>237</sup> namely that ‘indifferent’ is a “strained” translation of *xunon*. His alternative translation of *xunon* is “a basic point”, referring to – similar to Hölscher’s view – “the fundamentality of the master argument.”<sup>238</sup> Bodnar does not criticize Bicknell’s position other than by pointing to that he prefers the readings of the subjunctive *archōmai* that has the connotations of repeated action, unlike Bicknell who understand the subjunctive as expressing one future action – one future beginning.<sup>239</sup>

Bodnar’s interpretation does not, in his view, hinge on the meaning of *xunon*. After having criticized others for not following Diels’ translation of the word, he ultimately points out that the translation he has presented thus far is not supported by the evidence at our disposal. However, he argues that his translation can be substituted with the more natural ‘commonly/universally present’ without changing the meaning of the fragment. Following what he thinks is Proclus’ example, he glosses

---

<sup>235</sup> Hölscher (2014) 68-69. The first edition of Hölscher’s book is from 1969.

<sup>236</sup> Bodnar (1985) 58.

<sup>237</sup> See note X above.

<sup>238</sup> Bicknell (1979) 9.

<sup>239</sup> Bodnar (1985) 63n20; Bicknell (1979) 10n15.

*xunon* as “‘general’, ‘commonly/universally present’.”<sup>240</sup> This is seemingly not how Proclus presented the term in B5. Proclus did arguably not think that what is common or universal is present in all entities, but rather that they take part in the common or universal in a relational way, insofar as they are affected by the forms. Bodnar’s interpretation of B5 is finally that the goddess expresses that every point from where she can begin her inquiry exists, because existence is commonly present among them all, and therefore, it is indifferent from where she should start.

That *xunon* refers to something that is present everywhere is not as clearly a mistranslation as ‘indifferent’. Some of the quotations that I quoted from the Iliad as well as Parmenides fragment B10 can be understood as also possibly having that meaning. The earth is commonly present in the sense that it is always there. Similarly, the *aithēr* is something that is always present. Other examples more clearly only fit the relational meaning of *xunon*. The god of war is not always present, but he does not discriminate between different people. And wasps similarly affect everyone equally, but they are thankfully not universally present. If we are to refer to Proclus in this context, having in mind the background of how he understood the relationship between forms and the multitude of other entities, it is more clear that he uses *xunon* in the relational sense rather than as referring to what is commonly present throughout the multitude of entities. A common point between Bodnar’s interpretation and the interpretations of those who follow Diels is that they both base their understanding of the fragment on Proclus, but they do so in a limited way that arguably misconstrues how Proclus himself presented B5.

Finally, for interpreters of B5 it can be important – if we disagree with Osborne’s approach to the Presocratics – to see to what extent Proclus himself presented his own interpretation through his quotation of B5 rather than how Parmenides understood the fragment. As I have noted, Bodnar himself is not committed to the view that Proclus presents the correct interpretation of the

---

<sup>240</sup> Bodnar (1985) 61.

fragment, even though he sees his own interpretation as corresponding to Proclus'.<sup>241</sup> Similarly, all other interpreters of B5 do not aim at giving an account of how Proclus understood the fragment, but only make use of his interpretation in order to present their own. However, if they had considered Proclus' position more closely, they might have found reason to reconsider the basis for their own positions. Those who understand B5 as expressing a circular image would arguably benefit from seeing the peculiarities of how Proclus relates B5 to the two other fragments from B8. To the extent that their reading of B8 does not fit with Proclus', they might consider whether B5, as Proclus presents it, should not be understood in the context of how they understand B8. Regarding Bodnar, that he understands the meaning of *xunon* as 'indifferent' (even when he changes the translation to 'universally present' the meaning is still 'indifferent') might be influenced by seeing that he is arguably not correct in stating that Proclus understood the word the same way as him.

How Proclus presents B5 shows the difficulties that can come with making use of an ancient source to form an interpretation of an even more ancient text. When making use of Proclus as a source to the meaning of Parmenides' poem, it is seemingly necessary to understand – to the best of one's abilities – both the whole of Parmenides' poem itself and the complete context in which Proclus understood the poem. A risk one runs by inadequately understanding the context in how Parmenides' fragment was preserved is that misunderstanding the context can also lead one to misunderstanding the poem.

Nevertheless – from the perspective of an historian – it is also possible to fault Proclus for making use of Parmenides' poem only for his own purposes. To say that Proclus presented B5 in a way that lucidly expressed Parmenides' intended meaning is clearly wrong. Regarding the question of what the narrator's point of beginning is in B5, it is possible that Proclus did not present the fragment in the correct context. Like Hölscher and Bicknell both suggests, B5 might have been an introductory

---

<sup>241</sup> Bodnar (1985) 63n23.

part of the poem that indicated the source from which the rest of the goddess' speech would follow. Daniel Graham argues against understanding the word *archē* as it is used by the Presocratics with the connotations given to it by Aristotle, which is that it is at the same time a point of beginning and a power that is continually present in what follows from that beginning. In regard to the Milesian Presocratic thinkers, in *Metaphysics I* Aristotle argues that they understood the term as an underlying principle that was present in all things, "the substance continuing but changing in its attributes."<sup>242</sup> Graham's point, arguing against applying Aristotle's notion to the thinking of the Presocratics, is that the *archē* can simply be understood as meaning 'starting point' where, in the case of the accounts of the Milesians, everything began, but it was not something that continued to have power over what it set in motion. For Thales, on Graham's account, water does not continue to be present in everything even though everything has its source in water.<sup>243</sup>

Graham's interpretation of the meaning of *archē* stands in clear opposition to how Bodnar interprets the word in B5, which is that the goddess says where she begins is 'universally present'.

Understanding *archōmai* as having that meaning in B5 does not as clearly go against Proclus' interpretation, because he arguably understood the subject of B5 as being affected by what is referred to as a beginning. What we can criticize Proclus for is that he did present the goddess as the subject of B5. That the fragment is in the first person clearly indicates that it is the goddess-narrator who is the subject, but – as I have noted – that is not something reflected in how Proclus presents the fragment.

That the fragment speaks of a return as well as a beginning means that the point of beginning cannot simply be a source in the sense Graham understands the term. The goddess says that the place where from she begins is *xunon* because she will again return there. Therefore, that point of origin does

---

<sup>242</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983B10. Trans. Tredennick (1933).

<sup>243</sup> Graham (2006) 31n12.

seem to have some power over her. Nevertheless, we still do not need to understand the beginning as being present throughout her further inquiry. The goddess' beginning can be understood as something she is repeatedly affected by. Not as something she reaches through her routes of thinking (or something she, through her force of will, plans out and sets into motion), but something that leads her on her way. The goddess would then be led back to the point where she began, not because she is on a circular path that ends where she started out, but rather because that point of origin is so important that it repeatedly presents itself to her, over and over again.

This is my own interpretation of the fragment, which is primarily supported by my account of the meaning of the word *xunon* and Graham's account of the meaning of *archē*. To the extent that the correct meaning of these two words is reflected in the interpretation, it has – in my opinion – some value as an interpretation. Proclus' presentation of the fragment both supports and is in conflict with my interpretation. How Proclus presents the meaning of *xunon* supports it, while it is not supported by that he does not present the role of the goddess in the context where he quotes the fragment.

### 3.5 – Concluding remarks

In drawing a line back to chapter 1, I want to conclude this chapter with a reference to a position Mansfeld expresses in an article on the proems of the poems of the Presocratics. In his view, which is similar to the view I referred to Miller and Mourelatos as having expressed about the proem of Parmenides' poem, the proems are seemingly intentionally unclear. One example Mansfeld points to is the beginning of Empedocles' poem.<sup>244</sup> According to Mansfeld, "Empedocles purposely made a riddle his starting-point, in order to create an atmosphere of suspense and to incite curiosity."<sup>245</sup> Similarly, it might have been the case that the starting point referred to in B5 was never made clear

---

<sup>244</sup> Empedocles' poem begins thus: "Hear first the four roots of all things: bright Zeus and life-bringing Hera and Aidoneus and Nestis, whose tears are the source of mortal streams." Trans. Wright (1981).

<sup>245</sup> Mansfeld (1995) 227.



by Parmenides. Mansfeld points out that the text we possess that we know is from the beginning of Parmenides' poem is notably obscure. One example he notes is the passage at the very end of the poem, which ends with the phrase *pantos panta perōnta*. (B1.32) This striking phrase is also, as I referred to in chapter 0.2 above, difficult to interpret. This very first sentence in the poem that is explicitly philosophical is also one of the more obscure in the whole poem. Similarly, while the *esti* is subjectless in fragment B2, it is spoken of less obscurely later in the poem in fragment B6.

If B5 was the goddess' reference to her own beginning, it would arguably have been presented in the poem soon after the proem, in the middle of these other obscure passages. It is possible that just like we do not know what the goddess' point of beginning is, because of how Parmenides had presented his ideas, neither did the ancient readers of the poem. What this idea can indicate is that it is not certain that Parmenides' poem is so problematic and difficult to interpret primarily because of the evidence we possess. Alternatively, also Proclus could have been unsure about the context in which B5 was originally presented in the poem – even if he did possess the full poem – so that he presented fragment out of its original context might be understandable. Therefore, to attempt to avoid the problems the poem can present to us today – by trying to get a more secure interpretive footing by appealing to the authority of authors like Proclus – might be misguided.

As B5 is preserved to us it can potentially present the problem of where the goddess' point of beginning was. It does not as clearly present that problem as long as we understand her point of beginning as 'indifferent' to her, or as 'universally present'. To the extent that the readings that translate *xunon* thus is supported with reference to how Proclus preserves the fragment, Proclus can be seen to be a part of the reason for why commentators today do not attempt to explicitly ask where the goddess' point of beginning might have been. At the same time, however, the readings that do not see B5 as emphasizing that the goddess is speaking of an important starting point are motivated by misreadings of Proclus rather than the full context in which he presented B5. His view

of Parmenides as having expressed an incomplete Platonic position is itself problematic because of the very notion that someone would knowingly express an incomplete philosophical position. It has evidentially also been problematic that readers are not aware of what his position consists in.

Viewing Parmenides' poem through a Proclean lens is an interesting endeavor. On the one hand, understanding his Neoplatonic background is necessary in order to approach his quotations from the poem, as Karsten already pointed out in 1835. On the other hand, considering how he presents the meaning of the word *xunon*, it might be beneficial for modern readers to attempt to read specifically fragment B5 in a similar manner as Proclus did. Ultimately, one does not have to subscribe to his whole interpretation in order to give an account of the background against which Proclus presented the fragments, which is necessary in order to avoid pitfalls such as what Diels arguably fell into. However, even if that background is laid out completely and transparently and we knew as much as Proclus did about the poem, we might still be faced with difficult problems of interpretation.

## Conclusion

The aim of this master's thesis was to consider how and to what extent reading Parmenides' poem through Plutarchian and Proclean lenses can be helpful or harmful for interpreters who seek to uncover the meaning of the poem today. I have here, in the two chapters dealing with Plutarch and Proclus, found two different, but related answers to these questions.

In chapter one I first gave an account of modern research into Parmenides' poem on the basis of the view that interpreters have come to see the classic problems associated with the poem as increasingly problematic. One reaction against these increasingly problematic issues, which I presented there, is to adopt interpretations from ancient authors who might have been less restricted when reading the poem than what modern readers currently arguably are. I indicated that my own approach in each of the two following chapters was to both lay out the context in which what we know about Parmenides is preserved and attempt to consider what the consequences might be of looking at the poem through that context.

The chapter on Plutarch and his claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver showed that there is some reason for interpreters to support their interpretations only reluctantly on how Plutarch understood Parmenides' poem. However, this claim was only said to be valid to the extent that Plutarch's interpretation of Parmenides can be linked to the network of biographical commonplaces that he made use of when writing biographies of lawgivers. That chapter, thus, showed a specific way in which understanding Parmenides through the context of a thinker who seemingly preserved information about him and his poem can potentially be harmful to a modern interpreter of Parmenides' poem.

The chapter on Proclus and how he preserved fragment B5 showed that how Proclus preserved B5 has seemingly made the fragment difficult to approach for interpreters. However, even though Proclus exhibits a contentious view of Parmenides and his poem, many issues with how interpreters today view fragment B5 can be ascribed to them not adequately understanding the context in which Proclus presented the fragment. One such issue is the interpreters of the fragment who follow Diels, and another issue is that interpreters disregard the fragment because they see the context it is presented in as convoluted. The chapter concluded that while there are aspects of Proclus' interpretation that are questionable, specifically how he appears to have understood the meaning of the word *xunon* in the fragment can be worthwhile to consider for interpreters who disagree with him.

Contrasting the latter two chapters with each other can show that there is not just one way to relate to the ancient sources we have to Parmenides' poem. Even though Proclus and Plutarch are broadly similar by both presenting Platonist philosophical positions, how we can use and understand the context in which they present Parmenides' poem is dissimilar. Nevertheless, to what extent the two are similar and dissimilar sources to Parmenides, and what is peculiar about each of them, is first shown by looking at the context in which they preserve and present information about the poem, which is what I have given an account of in this master's thesis. The peculiarities of each of them regarding what they related about Parmenides is found in either case by considering the background against which and the context in which they preserved information about Parmenides and his poem.

A common theme between the two chapters is that both the context of Plutarch claim that Parmenides was a lawgiver and the context in which Proclus presents fragment B5, might lead readers to not approach the specific problem of what Parmenides might have been reacting to when

he wrote his poem. For Plutarch, because he arguably viewed Parmenides' poem as an expression of a network of biographical commonplaces, there is seemingly no room for asking what the poem might have been written in response to. Regarding Proclus, misreadings of how he presents the poem has led interpreters to think that the narrator-goddess in fragment B5 says that where she begins is indifferent to her. Because Proclus himself deemphasized the role of the speaker of B5, he is also arguably a reason why readers do not question what the point of beginning in the fragment might refer to, which they might otherwise have done.

Reading Parmenides through Proclean and Plutarchian lenses might, therefore, make readers less likely to approach the problem of what Parmenides' poem might have been a reaction to. However, the question of whether looking towards Proclus and Plutarch is helpful or harmful for readers of Parmenides is also a question of intent. Under the circumstances that one understands Plutarch as an authority to Parmenides' poem, that might hinder one's interpretation. But reading these ancient interpreters with an eye for what their perspectives might contribute to modern discussions is not thereby excluded as a possibility. Plutarch's view of the *doxa* in the poem is interesting and noteworthy, even though it is arguably not possible to appeal to him as an authority in order to point out that those who share his view are correct.

What I myself perceive as one virtue of this master's thesis is that I have indicated that there is a connection between Plutarch's network of biographical commonplaces and the structure of Parmenides' poem on his interpretation, which has not to my knowledge been pointed out before. Its validity, therefore, is much more questionable than it would otherwise be, which I have tried to indicate by pointing out how my conclusions about how Plutarch reads Parmenides are always reliant on whether or not there is such a connection between the poem and how Plutarch viewed legendary lawgivers. A second point that I view as a virtue is that I have tried to approach fragment B5 despite all the problems surrounding it. Any conclusion regarding a fragment like B5 will have to be

uncertain, but there is still, in my opinion, value in trying to approach such a fragment. Uncertainty, which some readers of the poem are more afraid of than others, is difficult to avoid when dealing with a text like Parmenides' poem.

There are so many other problems and questions that seem worthwhile to me to approach when it comes to the issues I have brought up here. One such problem is the nature of the relationship between the different thinkers in the tradition that preserved Parmenides' poem, and specifically between Plutarch and Proclus. I have here not at length compared the two, which could possibly further shine light on how each of them stands in relation to Parmenides. Another issue is Plato's role in how the poem is understood and preserved in antiquity. Furthermore, despite my conclusions about it, fragment B5 still presents an intriguing problem to me in light of the suggestion that it is not just perplexing because of how it is preserved. Finally, a related problem, which is again related to the problem I have repeatedly mentioned through this master's thesis, is the problem of what that point of beginning that B5 speaks of might possibly be. Considering what I have uncovered about Plutarch's and Proclus' readings of Parmenides, I do not think there is reason to in the future avoid the problem of what the poem could have been written in answer to.

## References

- Annas, J. (1999). *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Vol. 57). Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Aristotle. (1933). Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vols. 17, 18 (H. Tredennick, Trans.). In. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Austin, S. (1986). *Parmenides: Being, Bounds, and Logic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Austin, S. (2007). *Parmenides and the History of Dialectic: Three Essays*. Las Vegas: Parmenides.
- Ballew, L. (1974). Straight and Circular in Parmenides and the "Timaeus". *Phronesis*, 19(3), 189-209.
- Barnes, J. (1979). *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Vol. 13). London and New York: Routledge.
- Barnes, J. (1988). The Presocratics in context. *Phronesis*, 33(1-3), 327-344.
- Bicknell, P. J. (1979). Parmenides, DK 28 B5. *Apeiron*, 13(1), 9.
- Bodnár, I. (1985). Contrasting images: Notes on Parmenides B 5. *Apeiron*, 19(1), 57 - 63.
- Bogaczyk-Vormayr, M. (2016). Parmenides' Poem: Riddle from B 5. *Ethics in Progress*, 7(2), 95-103.
- Bormann, K. (1971). *Untersuchungen Zu den Fragmenten*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Brown, L. (1999). Being in the Sophist: A Syntactical Enquiry. In G. Fine (Ed.), *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (pp. 455-478). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burkert, W. (1969). Das Proömium des Parmenides und die Katabasis des Pythagoras. *Phronesis*, 14(1), 1-30. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1163/156852869X00019>
- Burnet, J. (1892). *Early Greek Philosophy* (Vol. 1). London: A & C Black.
- Butler, S. (2019). *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*. Glasgow: Good Press.
- Calogero, G. (1932). *Studi sull'eleatismo*. Roma: Bardi.
- Capizzi, A. (1975). *La porta di Parmenide: due saggi per una nuova lettura del poema* (Vol. 14). Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.
- Catana, L. (2013). The Origin of the Division between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. *Apeiron*, 46(2), 31-65.
- Cherniss, H. F. (1935). *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*. Baltimore The Johns Hopkins press.
- Cherniss, H. F. (1977). *Selected Papers*. Leiden: Brill.

- Chitwood, A. (2004). *Death by Philosophy: The Biographical Tradition in the Life and Death of the Archaic Philosophers Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Democritus*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Cordero, N. L. (2004). *By Being, It Is: The Thesis of Parmenides*. Las Vegas: Parmenides.
- Cordero, N. L. (2010). The 'Doxa of Parmenides' Dismantled. *Ancient Philosophy*, 30(2), 231-246.
- Cornford, F. M. (1933). Parmenides' Two Ways. *The Classical Quarterly*, 27(2), 97-111. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/636813](http://www.jstor.org/stable/636813)
- Cornford, F. M. (1939). *Plato and Parmenides Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Cornford, F. M. (1952). *Principium Sapientiae the Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coxon, A. H. (2009). *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction and Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and a Commentary* (Vol. 31). Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing.
- Curd, P. (2004). *The Legacy of Parmenides: Eleatic Monism and Later Presocratic Thought*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing.
- d'Hoine, P. (2016). Platonic Forms and the Triad of Being, Life, and Intellect. In *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Blois, L. (2008). The Ideal Statesman: A Commonplace in Plutarch's Political Treatises, His Solon, and His Lycurgus. In *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'* (pp. 317-324). Berlin-New York: De Gruyter.
- Diels, H. (1897). *Parmenides Lehrgedicht*. Berlin: Georg Reimer.
- Diels, H. (1954). *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker : Griechisch und Deutsch* (7. Aufl. herausgegeben von Walther Kranz. ed.). Berlin: Weidmann.
- Dillon, S. (2006). *Ancient Greek Portrait Sculpture: Contexts, Subjects, and Styles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dolin, E. F. (1962). Parmenides and Hesiod. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 66, 93-98. doi:10.2307/310737
- Fantuzzi, M. N. (2010). *Solon the Athenian, the poetic fragments* (Vol. 326). Leiden: Brill.
- Finley, M. I. (1981). *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* (B. D. Shaw & R. P. Saller Eds.). London: Chatto & Windus.
- Forrester, J. W. (1972). Plato's Parmenides: The Structure of the First Hypothesis. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 10(1), 1-14.
- Furley, D. J. (1973). Notes on Parmenides. *Phronesis*, 18, 1-15.



- Gadamer, H. G. (1975). *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gadamer, H. G. (2000). *The beginning of philosophy* (R. Coltman, Trans.). London: Continuum.
- Gagarin, M. (1986). *Early Greek Law*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gagarin, M. (2002). Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp. Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber und Gesetzgebung im Archaischen Griechenland. *The American Historical Review*, 107(5), 1618-1619.  
doi:10.1086/ahr/107.5.1618
- Gallop, D. (1991). *Parmenides of Elea : A text and translation with an introduction*. Toronto: Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Gigon, O. A. (1945). *Der Ursprung der griechischen Philosophie von Hesiod bis Parmenides*. Basel: Schwabe.
- Graham, D. W. (2006). *Explaining the Cosmos: The Ionian Tradition of Scientific Philosophy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. (1979). *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume 2, the Presocratic Tradition From Parmenides to Democritus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1988). *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Hadot, P. (1995). *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (A. I. Davidson, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell Oxford.
- Hadot, P. (2002). *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (M. Chase, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Hershbell, J. P. (1972). Plutarch and Parmenides. *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 13(2), 193-208.
- Horn, C. (1998). *Antike Lebenskunst: Glück und Moral von Sokrates bis zu den Neuplatonikern*. München: Beck.
- Hubert, M. (1969). Plutarch's Citation of Empedocles at Amatorius 756D. *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 10(1), 57-70.
- Hölkeskamp, K. J. (1992). Arbitrators, Lawgivers and the "codification of Law" in Archaic Greece: Problemas and Perspectives. *Metis*, 7(1), 49-81.
- Hölkeskamp, K. J. (1993). Written law in archaic Greece. *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, 38, 87-117.
- Hölkeskamp, K. J. (1999). *Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber und Gesetzgebung im archaischen Griechenland* (Vol. 131): Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Hölscher, U. (2014). *Vom Wesen des Seienden : Die Fragmente*. Hamburg: Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

- Jaeger, W. (1947). *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (E. S. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jameson, G. (1958). "Well-rounded truth" and circular thought in Parmenides. *Phronesis*, 3(1), 15-30.
- Jucker, H. (1968). Zur Bildnisherme des Parmenides. *Museum Helveticum*, 25(3), 181-185. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/24813990](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24813990)
- Kahn, C. H. (1960). *Anaximander and the origins of Greek cosmology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kahn, C. H. (1969). The Thesis of Parmenides. *Review of Metaphysics*, 22(4), 700 - 724.
- Kahn, C. H. (1988). Being in Parmenides and Plato. *La parola del passato*, 43(238-243), 237-261.
- Kahn, C. H. (2002). Parmenides and Plato. In V. Caston & D. W. Graham (Eds.), *Presocratic Philosophy. Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos* (pp. 81-94).
- Kahn, C. H. (2009). *Essays on Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Karamanolis, G. (2014). Plutarch. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Karsten, S. (1835). *Philosophorum Graecorum veterum operum Reliquiae, Parmenides*. Amsterdam.
- Kechagia, E. (2013). *Plutarch against Colotes: A lesson in history of philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kirk, G. S., & Raven, J. E. (1957). *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Vol. Cambridge): Cambridge University Press.
- Kraus, M. (2013). Parmenides. In H. Flashar, D. Bremer, & R. G. (Eds.), *Die Philosophie der Antike. Vol. 1: Frühgriechische Philosophie*. Basel: Schwabe.
- Kurfess, C. (2016). The Truth about Parmenides' Doxa. *Ancient Philosophy*, 36(1), 13-45.
- Lavery, G. B. (1974). Training, Trade and Trickery: Three Lawgivers in Plutarch. *The Classical World*, 67(6), 369-381. doi:10.2307/4348068
- Lefkowitz, M. R. (1981). *The Lives of the Greek Poets*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Leshner, J. H. (1994). The Significance of κατά πάντ' ἄ< σ> τη in Parmenides Fr. 1.3. *Ancient Philosophy*, 14(1), 1-20.
- Liebert, H. (2009). Plutarch's Critique of Plato's Best Regime *History of Political Thought*, 30(2), 251-271. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/26224100](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26224100)
- Long, A. A. (1996). Parmenides on Thinking Being. *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy*, 12(1), 125-151.
- Long, A. A. (2006). *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Mansfeld, J. (1964). *Die Offenbarung des Parmenides und die menschliche Welt*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Mansfeld, J. (1994). *Prolegomena: Questions to Be Settled Before the Study of an Author Or a Text*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Mansfeld, J. (1995). Insight by Hindsight Intentional Unclarity in Presocratic Proems. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 40, 225-232. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/43646585](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43646585)
- Mansfeld, J. (1999). Sources. In K. A. Algra, Barnes, J., Mansfeld, J. & Schofield, M. (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mansfeld, J. (2015). Parmenides from right to left. *Études platoniciennes*(12).
- Martijn, M., & Gerson, L. P. (2017). *Proclus' System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, S. B. (2016). *Parmenides' Vision: A Study of Parmenides' Poem*.
- McKirahan, R. D. (2008). Signs and arguments in the Parmenides B8. In P. Curd & D. W. Graham (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, M. (2006). Ambiguity and transport: Reflections on the proem to parmenides' poem. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30, 1-47.
- Momigliano, A. (1971). *Second thoughts on Greek biography*. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company.
- Morrison, J. S. (1955). Parmenides and Er. *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 59-68.
- Mourelatos, A. P. D. (1989). Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy: Hippolytus of Rome and the Presocratics. *Ancient Philosophy*, 9(1), 111-117. doi:10.5840/ancientphil19899130
- Mourelatos, A. P. D. (2008). *The Route of Parmenides: A New Revised Edition with a New Introduction, Three Additional Essays and a Previously Unpublished Paper by Gregory Vlastos*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing.
- Mourelatos, A. P. D. (2013). Parmenides, Early Greek Astronomy and Modern Scientific Realism. In J. McCoy (Ed.), *Early Greek Philosophy. The Presocratics and the Emergence of Reason* (pp. 91-112). Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Nehamas, A. (1999). On Parmenides' Three Ways of Inquiry. In A. Nehamas (Ed.), *Virtues of Authenticity* (pp. 125-127). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Osborne, C. (1987). *Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy: Hippolytus of Rome and the Presocratics*. London: Duckworth.
- Osborne, R. (2000). Review. Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber und Gesetzgebung im archaischen Griechenland. KJ Holkeskamp. *The Classical Review*, 50 (2), 497-499.
- Owen, G. E. L. (1960). Eleatic Questions. *Classical Quarterly*, 10(1-2), 84-.
- Palmer, J. A. (1999). *Plato's Reception of Parmenides* (Vol. 66). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Palmer, J. A. (2009). *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press UK.
- Pellikaan-Engel, M. E. (1974). *Hesiod and Parmenides: A New View on Their Cosmologies and on Parmenides' Proem*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert.
- Perl, E. D. (2014). The motion of intellect on the Neoplatonic reading of Sophist 248e-249d. *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, 8(2), 135-160.
- Popper, K. R. (2012). *The World of Parmenides: Essays on the Presocratic Enlightenment*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Robbiano, C. (2006). *Becoming Being: On Parmenides' Transformative Philosophy*. Berlin: Academia.
- Runia, D. T. (2008). The Sources for Presocratic Philosophy. In P. Curd & D. W. Graham (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ruschenbusch, E. (1958). Patrios Politeia: Theseus, Drakon, Solon und Kleisthenes in Publizistik und Geschichtsschreibung des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. *Historia*, 7(4), 398-424.
- Schofield, M. (1988). Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy: Hippolytus of Rome and the Presocratics. Catherine Osborne. *Isis*, 79(3), 537-538. doi:10.1086/354829
- Schwabl, H. (1963). Hesiod und Parmenides: Zur Formung des parmenideischen Prooimions (28 B 1). *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 106(2), 134-142. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41244182>
- Schäublin, C. (1977). Homerum ex Homero. *Museum Helveticum*, 34(4), 221-227. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/24815405](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24815405)
- Songe-Møller, V. (2002). *Philosophy Without Women the Birth of Sexism in Western Thought*. London: Continuum.
- Szegedy-Maszak, A. (1978). Legends of the Greek lawgivers. *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 19(3), 199-209.
- Taran, L. (1965). *Parmenides: A Text with Translation, Commentary, and Critical Essays* (Vol. 76). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Thomas, R. (1995). Written in stone? Liberty, equality, orality and the codification of law. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 59-74.
- Tor, S. (2017). *Mortal and Divine in Early Greek Epistemology: A Study of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Torri, P. (2019). The telos of Assimilation to God and the Conflict between theoria and praxis in Plato and the Middle Platonists. In *Thinking, Knowing, Acting: Epistemology and Ethics in Plato and Ancient Platonism* (pp. 228-250). Leiden: Brill.
- Van Riel, G. (2017). The One, the Henads, and the Principles. In P. M. D'Hoine, M. (Ed.), *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Waterfield, R. (2009). *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists*. Oxford: OUP Oxford.

Wedin, M. V. (2014). *Parmenides' Grand Deduction: A Logical Reconstruction of the Way of Truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA.

Westman, R. (1955). *Plutarch gegen Kolotes: seine Schrift "Adversus Colotem" als philosophiegeschichtliche Quelle*. Helsinki: Edidit Societas Philosophica.

#### Translations of ancient works cited

Aristotle. (1933). *Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vols. 17, 18* (H. Tredennick, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cicero, M. T. (1949). *De inventione ; De optimo genere oratorum ; Topica* (H. M. Hubbell, Trans.). London; Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann ; Harvard University Press.

Empedocles. (1981). *Empedocles: the Extant Fragments* (M. R. Wright, Trans.). New Haven/London: Hackett.

Homer. (1924). *The Iliad* (A. T. Murray, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Laertius, D. (1972). *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (R. D. Hicks, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Plato. (1925). *Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9* (N. H. Fowler, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. (1916). *Plutarch's Lives* (B. Perrin, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. (1936). *Moralia X* (N. H. Fowler, Trans.). Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. (1959). *Moralia VII* (B. D. L. Einarson, P. H., Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. (1967). *Moralia XIV* (B. D. L. Einarson, P. H., Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. (1976). *Moralia XIII. 2* (H. F. Cherniss, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Press.

Proclus. (1992). *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (G. R. Morrow & J. M. Dillon, Trans.). Princeton Princeton University Press.

Proclus. (2017). *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus: Volume 6, Book 5: Proclus on the Gods of Generation and the Creation of Humans* (H. A. S. Tarrant, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Simplicius. (1987). *The Text of Simplicius Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* (L. Tarán, Trans.). Berlin: W. de Gruyter.

Pensumliste FILO350  
Vår 2020  
Student: Atle Solheim Ytrehus  
Veileder: Kristin Sampson

Antall sider: 3157

Cordero, N. L. (2004). *By Being, It Is: The Thesis of Parmenides*. Las Vegas: Parmenides. 195 pages.

Coxon, A. H. (2009). *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction and Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and a Commentary* (Vol. 31). Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing. 387 pages.

Curd, P. (2004). *The Legacy of Parmenides: Eleatic Monism and Later Presocratic Thought*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing. 242 pages.

Hadot, P. (2002). *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (M. Chase, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 350 pages.

Kahn, C. H. (2009). *Essays on Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 217 pages.

Kechagia, E. (2013). *Plutarch against Colotes: A lesson in history of philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 303 pages.

Mourelatos, A. P. D. (2008). *The Route of Parmenides: A New Revised Edition with a New Introduction, Three Additional Essays and a Previously Unpublished Paper by Gregory Vlastos*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing. 284 pages.

Palmer, J. A. (1999). *Plato's Reception of Parmenides* (Vol. 66). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 260 pages.

Palmer, J. A. (2009). *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press UK. 349 pages.

Robbiano, C. (2006). *Becoming Being: On Parmenides' Transformative Philosophy*. Berlin: Academia. 211 page.

Tor, S. (2017). *Mortal and Divine in Early Greek Epistemology: A Study of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 359 pages.

Ulvik, 31. juli 2020