

Chapter 1



Troubling Play

“ . . . I have never written of these things; there is not and will not be any written work of Plato’s. What are now called his are the works of a Socrates made fair and young.”

—*The Second Letter*

Paideia in the Parmenides

In studying Plato’s dialogues, especially later dialogues such as the *Parmenides*, we learn that whatever aspect of being we focus on, we always seem to uncover a dialectical interplay of what flows and what abides. For example, unity in the *Parmenides* manifests as many senses as “to be” does. Apparently, to exist at all, in whatever manner, is to stand out as a unified individual from a multiplicity. Not only does unity always seem to be displayed alongside being in any entity, but insofar as “unity” and “being” signify distinct natures, “difference” is also implicitly manifested alongside these two. Along the same lines, Socrates indicates in the *Philebus* (beginning at 23e) that not only does “the limited” reveal itself as an interplay of the limited and the unlimited, of the definite and the indefinite, but even “the unlimited” appears to be a synthesis: the unlimited is in a sense limited, just as the limited is, in a sense, unlimited. The *Parmenides* indicates that inquiry into logos and being is a motivated path that discloses a plurality of modes of being, and that these are not subsumable under a single category.¹ And yet ambiguity is only part of the story: Parmenides’ humorous equivocations still always revolve around a one. In showing Socrates how logos misses the mark, Parmenides indicates by ironic *via negativa* the way of *alētheia*.

In order to evoke this dialectical interplay of unity and multiplicity, the language of philosophy must be both literal and figurative. Plato’s dialogues show how to learn and how to teach (*paideuein*) this discourse. The persistence and striving of dialectic as demonstrated by the mature Socrates in other dialogues (and by Plato’s Socratic caricature of Parmenides) shows

that metaphor lies at the very core of the literal. The priority of being in Platonic dialogue means that the supplementarity of the origin does not imply an unreasonable regress because intelligibility is complemented by a different mode of being. But although participatory being toward the good is one with the goal-oriented strivings of dialectic, being exceeds conceptualization.

Consequently, Plato's reinscription of Eleatic negative dialectic implies much more than the logical method of reduction to absurdity: *elenchi* are supplemented by irony and other nonliteral uses of discourse, such as Socratic analogy. In Socrates' image of the divided line in the *Republic* (509c–511e), modes of disclosure are related both up and down with contrasting modes which serve to contextualize. The icon of the line itself complements the likeness of the good to the sun because orientation toward the good is the occasion for *alētheia*. This convergence of axiology and ontology holds throughout the Platonic corpus; and it becomes especially clear if we remember that the stated aim of Parmenides' game is the philosophical training of Socrates.

But the spirit of philosophy as dialogical (or the unity of logos as a one in many) is an analogue for being itself. For that spirit is neither in the teacher's mind, nor in the thoughts of the learner. Socrates is engaged in philosophical training (*gymnasia*) through dialectical provocation. Because Socrates has arrived independently at the distinction between intelligible meanings and the presence of an entity, Parmenides judges that he is reflective enough to benefit from this troublesome game. Parmenides' pivotal reduction to absurdity of efforts to represent the being of time shows why the distinction between literal and figurative must be reconfigured, but not dispensed with: these poles prove to be inextricable in that the ambiguity they imply is a property of even the most rigorous discourse.

Plato's use of the dialogue form is not insignificant, for philosophical *poiēsis* is explicitly justified within the dialogues by repeated emphasis on the incompleteness and ambiguity of modes of disclosure in logos. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates questions the supposed stability and reliability of the *gramma* (written text), and leads Phaedrus toward the insight that active involvement in living dialogue (275c–277a) engages the learner and more adequately gives insight into the many modes of logos and being. The composition of a text is one form of the decomposition of being because written words can only remind one who has already achieved insight through active engagement. But it is not only the mummification of truths in treatises that reduces and misrepresents the being of philosophy. The impli-

cation is that the *gramma* and the engagement in living dialogue are distinct modes of the being of philosophy. Socrates is not simply privileging speech over writing; rather, he is warning Phaedrus of the dangers inherent to any detachment from active engagement, i.e., the reliance on reminders or representation in any form. Similarly, in the *Seventh Letter*, distinct modes of disclosure concerning beings—names, descriptions, visible figures, and concepts—are said to manifest existence in various limited ways, all of which are inadequate to revealing the *alētheia* of being as such (342a–344d).² Plato's *Parmenides* is also an inquiry into the supposed reliability and permanence of logos.

In the dialogues, Plato says nothing, and even his Socrates rarely—if ever—says anything that is unambiguous. This means that, in order to grasp the implications of that which is said (*logoi*), we need to consider the motivations of the interlocutors in relation to the whole dramatic situation as this develops through (and beyond) the dialogue. Temporal situatedness is invoked by references to a whole cultural context familiar to Plato's contemporaries and by allusions to previous texts, including his own dialogues. The *Apology* purports to be an historical account; Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, ostensibly recounts the speech of Stesichorus from memory; and in the *Symposium*, we have what purports to be an accurate recounting of a conversational round of discourses. The *Theaetetus* is also an account of a previous conversation, as is the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*: such temporal intercontextualizations are too numerous to be insignificant.

Plato's complex temporal framings are most significant in the *Parmenides*, because the inquiry into time itself shows why goal-oriented repetitions of sameness in logos necessarily imply difference and discontinuity. In light of Plato's intentional ambiguities, one might go so far as to say that his primary logos is that logos itself is inadequate to comprehend the truth of being, for a repeated theme of the dialogues (and of the *Parmenides* in particular) is that even philosophical discourse is necessarily incomplete: the reformative remembering (*anamnēsis*) that is truth (*alētheia*) is simultaneously a forgetting.

Disclosure in logos implies the effort to achieve commensuration between the sign world and human action in a developing (and purely individual) situation; learning involves the ongoing effort to transcend the inadequacies of signs and the habitual practices that are their contexts of significance. But because what drives this process—throughout the Platonic dialogues—is being toward the good in the nonpresence that is transcendence, there is no Platonic "doctrine." Instead, the dialogues exhibit ironic dialectics that destroy efforts to define transcendence. Like

the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist* shows that although no form may be said to be identical to any other, still the *eidos* would not be what it is except for dialectical differentiation from other *eidē*. This negativity is more fundamental than any positive account of essence or 'whatness.'³ Platonic *dialektos* exceeds conceptual dialectic because it is oriented by the goal of invoking the limitations of representation (*mimēsis*).

All of this throws into question Heidegger's declaration, in the introduction to *Being and Time*, that the ancient way of interpreting being as presence requires a thoroughgoing destruction.⁴ According to Heidegger, in Greek ontology being is reduced to the potentiality for discourse. Interpreting being as presence was due to the Greek's total lack of understanding of the ontological significance of time.

But *chronos* is made thematic in the *Parmenides* precisely to underscore the Platonic insight that being has no single, foundational principle of explanation, no ground. Any representation of being is necessarily a misrepresentation.⁵ The being of *chronos* may not be reduced to the now, or represented as a dimensionless time-point (or a line composed of such nothings) without leading to *aporia*. The *Parmenides* indicates that neither the visible presence of an entity nor the intelligible meaning of the *eidos* is intended by Plato as an answer to the question of being. The unity of the *eidē* is hardly seen at all; it is indefinable.

Difference and the Good as *Telos*

In the Eleatic dialogues (*Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*), the Socratic skepticism of Plato's negative dialectic is supplemented and informed by reference to the transcendence of being. Similarly, in the *Republic*, skepticism and political cynicism are overcome not only by indicating the organically interconnected nature of human existence (e.g., the social covenant), but also by remembering the transfiguring moment of insight that informs being toward the good. Is this moment of insight independent of social practice and circumstances? If knowing involves a purely individual moment that exists independently from all external relations, then insight cannot simply be told or learned by example. And yet the *Parmenides* indicates repeatedly that there is no being pure and simple; nothing exists or is intelligible in itself (141e-142a; 159d-160b; 164a-b; 165e-166c). But on the other hand, if there can be no purely private knowing, this need not imply that transformative insight into the whole can be learned by repetition, mechanically, or be memorized.

What is usually referred to as Plato's virtue ethics contrasts with the truth-as-consensus implied in conceptual dialectics. But in what sense is the health of the individual *psuchē* another modality of disclosure of the good? Does Socrates in the *Republic* ever really unify or adequately synthesize an individual perspective with the social *ethos*? If we claim that both *psuchē* and social orderings are reformed in an ongoing process of learning or transcendence, isn't it still the case that the individual dimension of being exists only in oppositional practice that contrasts with the public dimensions of shared practices, language, and conceptual thought?

But the conversion toward the light of *alētheia* depicted in the allegory of the cave (514a-521b) is a long, painful, and to some extent solitary process. The prisoner is freed by an anonymous rescuer and subsequently dragged up the slope to the light and left there blind and lost. When he achieves insight, he immediately returns to the cave to attempt to liberate the others. The prisoners in the cave cannot see each other; they cannot turn their heads and look into one another's eyes. Their fettered isolation is the antithesis of the *kallipolis* that is Socrates' just city. They have no community and no true communication: they know only their meaningless—but habitual—competition over shadows.

In contrast to this failure of community, Socrates uses analogy to indicate what he ambiguously evokes as both the idea and the *habit* (*Republic* 509a5) of the good. Although his remarks indicate that the offspring of the good are what we desire, and that desirous striving guides and sustains existence and knowing, Socrates also says that the good is not a being, it is "beyond beings," or *epekeina tēs ousias* (509b9). Socrates has already brought out the external, public aspect of justice (and of the meaning of ethical terms generally), when he sketched a social covenant hypothesis of the foundation of justice in the state (*Republic* 369a ff.). But if this agreement is constituted by shared practices, then the transcendence of the good indicates that interactions already signify preconceptually.

Significantly, Socrates' account of shared praxis is complemented by poetic images of the just life that indicate the wholeness possible when logos and proportion moderate the unlimited, monstrous passions of the *psuchē*. But this apparently straightforward distinction between two modes of being toward the good, the social covenant and the ethics of individual *aretē*, is anything but clear. Both modalities are in fact based on oppositions between the sameness of the *eidē* and the differences of the circumstance or context. The forms are that by which we measure, evaluate, and moderate whether our judgments pertain to our own individual condition or to the present state of the polis.

If it is asserted that any rational morality (e.g., the social contract) necessarily fails insofar as it cannot consistently either incorporate or ignore the purely individual dimension, this argument is neutralized if it is true—as Parmenides repeatedly indicates—that the purely individual does not exist except insofar as formal repetitions are implied in the disclosure of differing circumstances. Similarly, if it is asserted that any virtue ethics fails insofar as it cannot consistently either ignore or incorporate the public dimension, this claim may obviously be supplemented by the counterclaim that widespread consensus is no guarantor of justice. But in both cases it is the juxtaposition of differing contextualities that gives meaning to the standard; in short, these ethical perspectives differ only in privileging opposite poles of a fundamental ambiguity they both share.

Such oppositions, that reveal the limitations of conceptual dialectics, are characteristic of Plato's *erotic* dialectic. Erotic dialectic involves that which is precognitive; it is the lived interaction with what is chormatic, or otherwise, in which both the socially mediated self and the individual aspect of *psuchē* are continually reformed. What exists implies both an immanent group logic (a public dimension) and a transcendental logic. If existence and disclosure itself is dialogical in that it involves utter singularity as well as reciprocity, nevertheless transcendence is the moment of insight when both the socially mediated self and the order that is *kosmos* are seen through; for this moment involves the apprehension of *to heteron*: the other as other.

But one consequence of Socratic critique is that even the sameness of logical identity is shown to be permeated by nonlogical otherness. Here too differentiation in action is more fundamental than conceptual dialectics insofar as the actuality of thought arises in opposition to its own potentiality. The analogical likenesses of being toward the good are *aitia*—the occasion—for intelligibility, as illustrated by the divided line: orientation toward the good is the condition of possibility for *epistēmē* and *alētheia* (*Republic* 508e). Socrates' analogies indicate that goal-oriented existence is more fundamental than the disclosures of empirical correlations and formal relations; such knowing is occasioned by the striving for the good.

This shows—as the divided line illustrates—that any representation or argument also implies its own role within the contextuality of being toward the good. This axiological vectoring is ontologically prior to the spatial, temporal, and logical arrangements it discloses. The metaphor of the vector indicates a precognitive correlation and differentiation that is neither expression of identity, nor hypothesis, term, or sign. Rather it is something utterly different, without which sign, term, hypothesis, and

logic itself are all completely unintelligible. This preconceptual projecting or orientation—though informing every moment of every disclosure—can only be thought as negativity, as pure transcendence; it is the “otherwise,” or beyond (*epekeina*) of existence itself. The limited intelligibility of participatory being is informed by this heterogeneity.

The unification of the *Parmenides* is informed by this governing dichotomy: the analogicity of interpretations of existence over against the negativity of intelligibility. *Parmenides* recasts Socrates’ initial distinction between thing and form into a differentiation between modes of disclosure in logos: an orientation toward form in itself as opposed to disclosure as activity or use. This dichotomy is itself challenged insofar as *Parmenides* shows that intelligibility partakes of the *poiēsis* of imagination—time in itself is nothing—apart from the projections and reorientations of temporal activities, there is no *chronos*. Time “is” in the correlations and differentiations of teleological existence. Neither the separately existing *eidos* nor the materialistic reduction of form to presence allows a univocal account of time, for the instant neither is nor is not (155e–157b).

Moreover, even if conceptual unity is not, the precognitive syntheses of *eikasia*—imagination—persist (164b–165e). But that which is disclosed as correlated and differentiated for preconceptual active engagement, is for thinking merely odd juxtaposition—not intelligible synthesis—and yet persistent thought reveals its own analogicity.

Parmenides makes the incompleteness of intelligibility evident for Socrates by exploiting the indefinability of the notion of the individual as such. But if the individuality of the individual eludes definition, nevertheless the pure singularity of form—in its nonpresence—would seem to be a condition of possibility for definition itself. And yet how is singularity disclosed except by way of differentiation in varying circumstances and relations? If it seems obvious that there would be no shared practice, no consensus, no logos and no categories of explanation without individuals, nevertheless *Parmenides* shows Socrates repeatedly that meaning involves a play of differences between signs that are empty in themselves. There is no universal meaning apart from active embeddedness in a whole of contextuality that exceeds representation.

If it initially appears that learning is simply the ongoing effort to achieve commensuration between socially mediated categories and the individual *psuchē*—the reevaluation of meanings and critique of the shared practices from which consensus is derived—it must also be acknowledged that this activity of differentiation cannot be understood as a private mental process. Being toward the good, for Plato, gives logos its contexts of sig-

nificance; logical identity is derived in opposition to existence. The *Parmenides* shows that intelligibility is not in itself foundational; but its reductions to absurdity leave standing the Platonic insight that orientation toward the good is the occasion of *epistemē* and disclosure (*Republic* 508e).

Why is there something good, rather than merely something? This may be the leading question of Plato's earlier dialogues.⁶ Does Socratic dialogue indicate that individual moments of insight do not occur except in and through the erotic relation to the other that informs and constitutes *psuchē*? Or if being toward the good is always already socially mediated, does this imply that *kosmos* simply names the orderings of *ergon* (action) and *logos* that arise and inform human habits of prudence? After all, *erōs* (desire) is the divine artist who transforms chaos into *kosmos*, and the sphere of his art is human action. Significantly, for Plato this entire process is informed by transcendence—the apprehension of heterogeneity—and consequently the ordering is never simply a human ordering, public or private. The pursuit of self-interest—whether calculated or not—has as its condition of possibility the apprehension of *to heteron*, the otherness that informs all disclosure.

Even if it is true that desire is always my desire—it implies my existence—nevertheless Socratic *eros* involves neither hubristic self-indulgence nor slavish conformity. And Plato avoids relativism because both the particular and the universal exhibit an immanent *and* a transcendent aspect: in a different situation, different relations of ideas are disclosed. If *alētheia* involves formal repetition in reference to differing circumstances, the *Parmenides* indicates that any disclosure in *logos*, whether logical or empirical, can only be disambiguated insofar as it is contextualized both up and down. This is consistent with the claim that the only Platonic absolute is this *lived* differentiation: orientation toward the good as otherwise than beings. The erotic dialectic indicates this archaic unity of axiology and ontology; being and knowing are informed by the prereflective engagement with the other as potentiality for disclosure.

The *Parmenides* indicates this by showing that the distinctions between opposed modes of being may not be developed to the point of reducing one dimension to another. Form is neither entirely separate from nor reducible to the presence of entities. Because the proportionality that is rational discourse is not a synthesis but a juxtaposition that preserves difference, *Parmenides*' various examples of reasoning ironically highlight irreducible ambiguities as well as inevitable privileging; and *Parmenides*

shows Socrates that the effort to definitively eliminate these simply multiplies contradictions.

Plato has Socrates allude to this paradoxical feature of ontological discourse at the beginning of the discussion.⁷ Socrates remarks to Zeno (with characteristic irony) that Parmenides furnishes many proofs that the all is one, while he (Zeno) offers many proofs that it is not many; for the young Socrates this simply means that each says the same thing with only the appearance of difference. But in what follows, Parmenides vindicates Zeno and metastasizes this kind of paradox, showing Socrates that all disclosure is dialogical but chorismatic: the disjunction or separation (*chōris*) that Socrates affirms to exist between the ideal and the real permeates even the *eidē*.

Because transcendence as such is never manifest, the dimension of otherness is not reducible to presence or *ousia*. But habits of thinking and action blind us to *heteron*, consequently philosophy involves the ongoing effort to remember the erotic dialectic that arises in and through being with the other. Socratic critique disrupts humanly constituted orderings and allows transcendence, the reforming of the whole that occurs with recognition of the other as other. Such disruption is the beginning of learning. *Aporia* and contradiction are the immediate goals of Socratic critique because they facilitate the fundamental reinterpretation that is learning.

Transcendence as the Overcoming of Dialectic

In the *Parmenides*, a very young Socrates learns that existence is not derived from the idea as from a ground or principle; entities do not resemble ideal originals that exist separately. Rather, participatory being is shown to be an activity of differentiation; Parmenides shows Socrates that the individual, as such, is as elusive as the idea itself. Socrates initially asserts that the individual is known by means of the universal; he is one even though he has different aspects (129c–d). But Parmenides' game demonstrates that nothing exists or is intelligible in itself (141e–142a; 159d–160b; 164a–b; 165e–166c).

Viewed in this light, the *noēsis* (thought) of the earlier dialogues becomes an odd kind of dialectic indeed, for it involves the freedom to overcome dialectic itself. At the limit of this overcoming lies a new field of disclosure: being toward the good that is beyond beings. This field of disclosure is otherwise than entities, for in this modality of existing toward the good, the object of knowledge and the mode of knowing are one. This freedom of thinking and being is the goal (*telos*) of philosophy; but such

transcendence is neither simply above the divided line as its goal, nor beneath the line as its condition of possibility. Rather, as the occasion of knowledge and *alētheia*, it informs every moment of being and knowing, however we choose to schematize these. Any spatial, temporal, or logical schematism implies its own embeddedness in a deeper, precognitive contextualizing. In showing Socrates the limits of conceptual schemata (by way of repeated reductions to absurdity), Parmenides clears the way for a transfiguring moment of insight into the whole that cannot be adequately conceptualized, but only lived.

This does not imply that the *elenchi* of the *Parmenides* are overcome by a Platonic rational morality. It is true that for Plato the transcendence of the good is not simply the name for an indefinitely repeatable function of the sign; and both the learning of information and the overcoming of hubris involve a fundamental transformation that involves the ongoing reevaluation of the meanings of terms. But, against a simple moralistic interpretation of Plato, we need to recall that the habit of the good not only indicates the teleology and transcendence of knowing; the transcendence of the good primarily refers to the fundamental teleology of human existence. In the more complete *alētheia*, distinct modes of inquiry converge in a wholeness that eludes partition and the conceptualizations of *logismos*. The *Seventh Letter* states that inquiry into virtue must be supplemented by study of what is true and false about existence itself (344b). Plato's later dialogues invoke this dimension of existence that is otherwise than entity by showing ontology to be more fundamental than epistemology. The *Philebus* indicates this intercontextuality by showing that accounts of the ethical are simultaneously also ontological. This is so because the ground of both knowledge and morality is participatory being toward the good.⁸

But if social interactions are oriented toward the good in its transcendence, they will instantiate reflective dialogue by allowing the otherness of the other to be preserved. And in the ideal community, the truly just polis, the openness of this approach would allow a social covenant governed by philosophy. But this ideal in no way implies that dialogical morality constitutes an ethical theory that serves as the basis for distinguishing philosophy from sophistry. The *Parmenides* indicates that no conceptual discourse could be foundational, either for itself or for other modes of disclosure. The discontinuous nature of *alētheia* means that strictly speaking, there are no foundations: modes of being are bounded by otherness, and differing modes of disclosure have unique criteria of significance. The Platonic dialogues show that *logos* is exceeded by, bounded by, and permeated by *muthos*: for the surprising result of the *Parmenides* is that every

moment of every disclosure is irreducibly ambiguous and aporetic. The nonpresence of *to heteron* informs every moment of disclosure. This result reiterates the Socratic injunction that learning is only possible on the basis of humility. Because the offspring of the good are simultaneously also non-good, wisdom involves recognition of one's own ignorance: knowing is founded in being, and existence exceeds the grasp of conceptual thought.

Only dialogue that preserves this radical differentiation allows transcendence. If Socratic *elenchos* cannot prevent the disasters that political arrogance wreaks in human life, at least it can expose the cynical hubris that underlies ideology. On the one hand, negative dialectic is employed as a logical corrective in order to unseat the sophistries that are used to justify disproportionate individualism; for singular being "is" only in opposition to the generality of universality. On the other hand, Platonic *dialektos* is apophatic insofar as it clears the way for insight into a dimension of being that withdraws from perception and thought. The mind must be humbled by *aporia* before it is elevated by philosophical *poiēsis*: neither of these moments is adequate in itself.

Because Socrates' defiant critique is oriented toward the transformation of human existence in this axio-ontological wholeness (and not merely a revision of particular beliefs), his wondering contemplation of being never degenerates into estrangement. After the effort to know the divine otherness—the unmixed good in itself—the philosopher descends again into the dialogically mixed *kosmos* of human social praxis. The *aretē* (excellence, function) of the philosopher is this movement between the good in itself (that may not be known conceptually) and the tragic twilight realm of cave society. Only those capable of this movement, of turning the eyes of the *psuchē* both upward and downward in this way, should be guardians (*Republic* 501a–c).

In the *Philebus*, both pleasure and intelligence are shown to be informed by this dialogical reciprocity. Socrates argues that the opposition of the one and the many is a necessary feature of language (15d). Every entity is both a definite one and an indefinite many (16d). The difference between a merely contentious discussion and philosophy is both moral and intellectual (17aff); because the philosopher loves the truth more than personal power, reputation, or victory in argument, he is granted recognition of the intermediate forms between the one and the many. The implication is that being itself is analogous to an opposition or mixture arising from the juxtaposition of formal unity and an irreducible plurality of possible contextualizations, for Socrates asserts this analogy holds whatever one we take as thematic for investigation (17d–e). If the opportunistic

individualism of the sophist leads him to exploit one or another term in this odd proportionality, nevertheless the wholeness of the disclosure is deformed if a self-centered, disproportionate desire (e.g., *philoneikia*, contentiousness) is privileged over the desire for *alētheia*.

Therefore the question as to what constitutes a good existence is both more important and more difficult than hedonists realize. For the movement from the sick *erōs* to the divine *erōs* is not simply a conceptual movement. Not only is it the case that pleasure is in the differentiation from pain, but even intelligence itself intimately involves its opposite within itself (60d–e). This means that any possible conceptual dialectic is inherently incomplete: form, like number, is always of something. Therefore the good life is acceptance of this mixed and ruptured economy, the multiply-differentiated struggle for well-being and limited intelligibility (61b).

Although the *Parmenides* does not explicitly develop the axiological dimension of participatory being, the introductory exchanges between Socrates and Parmenides (130b–137c) accomplish at least two things that are essential. First of all, they depict Socrates as owing something to the community simply by virtue of the fact that, in the aging Parmenides, he had a teacher; he was educated in a tradition. Parmenides' game involves repetition; it is not simply free spontaneity. Socrates is initiated into the customs and uses—the discourses—of a philosophical tradition. And, as suggested in the *Republic* (520b), only the spontaneously formed philosopher would be free of an obligation to return to the cave.

But in terms of the content of the *Parmenides*, the chorismatic moment of participatory being is underscored in another way, insofar as the dialectical play will reduce to absurdity any nonteleological (or unmixed) schematism of time. Parmenides shows Socrates that no idea in itself is knowable; existence is odd mixture. The game shows that logos is differential; it involves the interplay of dialectical and transcendent dimensions. If disclosure in logos implies both irreducible individuality and transcendent universality, still singularity is only by way of universality. The precognitive orientations that contextualize linguistic disclosure are themselves informed by a restless ecstasy; Dionysian unification is pure action, and such engagement tolerates no inward-turning distraction. Erotic interplay is living in advance of oneself.

It is thus the opposition between the chaos of the *agora* and the focused quiet of philosophical conversation that informs the dialogues; there is no Platonic monologue because existence itself is differential, prior to linguistic articulation. The Eleatic dialogues throw into question the notion of simple self-identity—just as, in the earlier dialogues—Socrates'

aretē is manifested in his preference for the confusion of the marketplace and loquacious dialogue with others over the silent solitude of hills and forest. Socrates chooses death rather than exile. The estrangement from the mixed wholeness—the unity in opposition of dialogical interplay—is the death of the philosophical spirit, even if the motivation for this exile is the desire for an individual experience of transcendence.

It is precisely because all existence is differential *metechlein*, or partnership, that Plato's *Parmenides* evokes this sense in which neither individual entity nor ideal universality has being or admits of definition. Being is only in the activity of differentiation between the formal repetition of a nexus of ideas in developing circumstantial relations. Existence is in this way disclosed as a momentous opening of teleology and transcendence. But because the effort to know the wholeness of any one probes the bounds of being, the *Parmenides* indicates that this activity of differentiation may be the only necessary condition disclosed to thinking. If every mode of disclosure has its own irreducibly unique criteria of significance there can be no overarching discourse that unifies all possible modes of logos. The *Parmenides* shows this to be the case: for intelligibility participatory being is disclosed as juxtaposition, not synthesis. What is lived as precognitive analogicity is, for thinking, only negativity. The comic irony of *Parmenides*' troubling play is therefore isomorphic with the mature Socrates' ironic dialectic, for the goal of both is undercutting the ideology (or idolatry) of efforts to define transcendence.

Being as a Dialogical Relating To the Other

Plato's dialogues show that the individual in knowing only approaches the fullness of *alētheia* by remembering the a priori interrelations of significance and the organic connectedness of the mixed wholeness that is the disclosure of being. These relations to the other (*pros allēla*) do not inform only the ethical and communal dimension of human being. Socratic critique involves a recognition of the transcendence that is learning, the otherwise than of logos itself and of being. But transcendence is only possible in relation to immanence: there is no unmixed presence, and nonpresence in itself may not be known conceptually. Meaning itself involves this play of incommensurables: it is more than a dialectical interconnection of relations.

Because the activities of reason are situated, goal-oriented, and temporal, *Parmenides* demonstrates that the misguided effort to achieve a univocal reduction of dialogical being (especially in representations of *chronos*)

leads to irreducible *aporia*. His troublesome game of negative dialectic exposes the impasse, and in this way remembers transcendence. The dangerous purpose of Parmenides' troubling play, then, is to carry logos beyond its limits, to evoke the nonhuman origins of human intelligibility: the whole that may not be thought. The transcendence of the good means that the conditions of possibility of intelligibility are not themselves intelligible; the darkly comical discussion of the one in the *Parmenides* evokes these limits, the beyond of logos and being. The irony of Parmenides' dialectical demonstration hinges on the sophistical omission of the teleological dimension of being toward the good. Parmenides' comedy of errors is a miming of conceptual reductions of being's transcendence to intelligible presence.

Many interpreters of Plato miss the significance of the dialogue by ignoring or downplaying the playful irony that signifies the priority of difference and absence over simple presence.⁹ Thus one strategy in interpreting Plato's *Parmenides* involves the claim that contradictions are implicit to the systematic, dialectical revelation of the whole that is truth. Hegel, for example, understood contradiction to be a necessary feature of the method of ontology.¹⁰ Similarly, Viggo Rossv er argues that contradictions are the result of the inherent limitations of dialectic.¹¹ Robert Brumbaugh interpreted the contradictions as indications that the scope of the method of inquiry must be extended beyond that of any merely formal system to its completion in normative evaluation.¹²

Other interpreters attempt to resolve the contradictions between hypotheses by emphasizing that claims are made about unity in many different senses. This line of interpretation, with minor variations, may be discerned in Cornford, Allen, Miller, Meinwald, and Turnbull, among others.¹³ But a deficiency that both streams of interpretation share is that of suppressing or even completely ignoring the comic irony and the mimings of sophistry in Parmenides' provocations. More seriously, none of them adequately consider the ontological significance of the dialogue's third beginning on the instant (155e–157b).¹⁴ But the dialogue is intentionally crafted in a way that is both aporetic and ambiguous, and Plato had good reasons for ensuring such interpretive controversies. The content of the *Parmenides* explains why its form eludes schematism, why neither the non-contradictory (but thoroughly ambiguous), nor the allegedly univocal (but thoroughly contradictory) interpretation stands alone. Inquiry into time, being, and logos leads to the insight that meaningful discourse is essentially chorismatic: the disclosure of being in language implies both repetitions that are equivocal as well as the discontinuity of *aporia*.

Parmenides' style of training, his provocative play, indicates that the notion of nontemporal (or nonteleological) identity in itself is deeply aporetic; if the presumption of such temporal location without dimension is a necessary condition of ratio, still in itself it is not rational. Parmenides reveals the antinomic nature of the instant in the dialogue's third beginning (155e–157b). The third beginning on the instant evokes the ontological significance of heterogeneity, and indicates the paradoxes implicit to any schematism of time. The third beginning is central in the development of the theme of the *Parmenides*. The account of the instant demonstrates the closing over that occurs alongside the disclosure of truth in logos: both ambiguity and contradiction are implied in representations of time.¹⁵ Because Parmenides repeatedly appeals to the principle of non-contradiction and its implicit notion of simultaneity, the application of formal representations to existence (especially in the second beginning) involves the notion of pure presence in an instant. But by the law of the excluded middle, the instant should either exist or not exist; and yet it is neither being nor nonbeing (156e–157b).

The existence of the instant is logically impossible, and yet its existence is required by the intelligibility that shows it to be impossible. The third beginning shows that when a formal system is applied to beings, this resolves some ambiguities, but at the expense of producing contradictions.

Consequently, it is not only Pythagorean mathematical cosmology that Parmenides throws into question, but also the ordinary discourse of mortals. But why does Parmenides ironically juxtapose different modes of logos, not only within deductions, but even within statements? If, with the silently observant Socrates, one tries to think one's way beyond the ambiguities and paradoxes of the *Parmenides*, one discerns an awareness on Plato's part that no term in itself is a sign.¹⁶ Expression directed toward itself signifies nothing: logos is meaningful only as dialogue, in the mode of toward-another, that is, in relation to the other. The intelligibility of experience and discourse that it is absurd to deny (*Parmenides* 135b–c) is analogous to a proportion. But this analogicity of existence itself arises in and through interrelations with entities, indicating that the *eidos* is an archaic projection of future possibilities of experience based on the materiality of past encounters. This movement of confirmation, failure, and transfiguration is permeated by negativity insofar as the very presence of the present is a project. Parmenides indicates this by showing that no term has meaning in isolation; apart from its differences in relation to a network of other terms, and apart from imagined possibilities of future experience, logos would be insignificant gesture.

The relation of ideas implicit in the network of signs, their mutual interdefinition, proves to be limited, derivative, and to some extent arbitrary. The *Parmenides* indicates the reasons for the sophistic privileging of terms that are in fact only significant in opposition: unity / plurality, form / formlessness, knowledge / ignorance, mastery / slavery, and so forth. Terms signify in their differences in relation to one another, and in the context of an organically interconnected whole metaphorically described as participation (*metechein*).¹⁷ This implication of the dialogue's inquiry into time—that the *eidos* in itself is nothing—means that the approach to the question of being in the Platonic dialogues develops as an inquiry into the dialectical interrelation of language and human action. Consequently Parmenides' troublesome game, in exposing the inadequacy of representations of existence, is in many ways isomorphic with a phenomenological description of transcendence.

Parmenides enhances Socrates' insight by demonstrating a negative dialectic that discloses unity in opposition without succumbing to the pitfalls of any positive method. Negative dialectic reduces some hypothesis to absurdity by showing that it implies a contradiction. In such a method, positive correlations are incidental: necessary conditions are revealed by way of a double negation. This procedure reveals a necessary condition to be a hypothesis whose inadequacy is sufficient evidence that a second is inadequate. Parmenides demonstrates for Socrates the inadequacies of a variety of modes of logos, including finally dialectic itself. Parmenides' negative dialectic survives these *elenchi* only to the extent that it is the thinking that attempts to expose even its own inadequacies. Like the Platonic Parmenides, the mature Socrates of other dialogues displays a ratio that is informed by the ongoing re-cognition of its own lack of proportionality.

Parmenides' troublesome game shows, on the one hand that interrelations of ideas are never really present because they are a potentially infinite manifold defined by differences; moreover, the intelligible presence of a structural whole—an ideal matrix—is ultimately shown to be paradoxical insofar as this would imply a contradictory account of time. On the other hand, Parmenides suggests that his doubly negative mode of variation and difference is compatible with disclosure of unity in opposition, for it is absurd to employ intelligible discourse to deny the possibility of intelligibility (135b–c). But such unification implies an oddly mixed integrity, because it is a whole that exceeds the sum of its parts. This unity in opposition simply cannot be grasped by thought (*noēsis*), because the act of reducing ambiguity produces contradiction: Parmenides' account of the instant implies that thought itself essentially involves unintelligible nonpresence.

The demonstration's central reductions to absurdity of efforts to represent time (151e–157b) develop the references to *anamnēsis* in earlier dialogues.¹⁸ The fact that terms for memory and recollection are used imprecisely in the dialogues need not prevent us from acknowledging that Plato's accounts of the process of learning are teleological. If generalizations based on experience and dialogue are themselves treated as images, this will mean that the trust (*pistis*) based on past confirmations will be supplemented by the ironic detachment that accompanies the imagination of future failures in confirmation. This theme of repetition and discontinuity is introduced in the first lines of the dialogue (see 126c–127d).¹⁹ Because logos itself is a system of images or icons,²⁰ the study of meanings involves inquiry into the uses and abuses of signs (*sēmata*). Parmenides not only shows Socrates that any semantics presupposes an interpretation of existence, he also demonstrates that discourse is irreducibly plural because being is ambiguous: it is the intercontextual juxtaposition of modes of disclosure that allows significance in logos.

Recollections and projections of imagined possibilities are implicit to the disclosure of truth in logos; and *alētheia*—especially with regard to the problematic of time—is the overarching theme of the dialogue. Parmenides agrees that it is the unifying form that makes possible intelligible discourse and therefore philosophy (135b–c). The impasses relating to the metaphor of participation then, are surmountable in some way. Consequently, it is not the fact that there are forms of disclosure in language that is to be thrown into question; rather, it is how this disclosure of being is to be understood that presents difficulties. The *Parmenides* unpacks the metaphor of sharing in being (130e ff.), and reveals in a negative way—by reductions to absurdity—how participatory being may not be understood. Parmenides demonstrates repeatedly and in a variety of ways that being—the *ontos on*—is not reducible to the presence of the *eidos*: dimensions of irreducible heterogeneity are implicit to the meaning of every representation of sameness in logos. If we cannot reason without some notion of presence or actuality, nevertheless actuality itself is impossible to conceive.

Therefore the metaphor of participatory being does not simply indicate the variety of human activities in and through which entities are disclosed. Parmenides' dialectical demonstration shows Socrates that even ideal being exhibits the one-in-many, teleological structure implied in the perception of entities; consequently it is not the distinguishing of various modes of disclosure that ends in *aporia*, but the effort to make one mode foundational. The notion of being as participation is not a theory; it is a descriptive account of the disclosure of what exists. Similarly, the *chōris-*

mos is not a problem that admits of a solution; it is a feature of all disclosure in *logos*, including even the meta-semantic inquiry into the variety of forms of discourse. The primary Platonic insight that informs the *Parmenides* is that modes of disclosure are finite and oddly mixed. Strictly speaking, there is no disclosure (*alētheia*) in itself: truth as disclosure is transcendent, not true. No observation of phenomena could falsify such conditions of possibility of intelligible experience. The descriptive, metaphorical notion of participatory being toward the good evokes the situated, goal-oriented character of both logic and sense perception. But the transcendence that is learning is only possible alongside the *aporia* that is *chōrismos*.

Logos Toward Itself versus Toward the Other

Parmenides' demonstration will vindicate Zeno by reducing to absurdity Socrates' attempted solution of Zeno's paradoxes. Socrates distinguishes the *eidos* in itself from the entities that share in the being of the idea (128e9–129b1). Prior to demonstrating the absurdities implicit to Socrates' initial understanding of being, Parmenides sharpens the focus of the distinction between an idea in itself and the entity that instantiates it. Parmenides recasts Socrates' initial distinction between form and thing, and orients it toward two modalities of the activity of disclosure, characterized briefly at 136a–c as the analysis of a hypothesis toward-itself as distinguished from verifying its meaning toward-another, or *pros hauta kai pros allēla* (136b1).²¹ Parmenides' subsequent demonstration will reveal that the hypothesis analyzed in relation to itself refers to the intelligible meaning of an event or entity: a word, for example, expresses the meaning of the entity or event with which it may be identified. But the *pros hauta* expression seems inherently to bear this sense. For unlike the sign that merely points to an entity or event, an inherently meaningful sign would bear intelligibility without presupposing the actual existence of what it signifies.

Is there any inherently meaningful sign? How could this toward-itself function of *logos* relate to the presence of entities? In fact, Parmenides' dialectical demonstration will show that *logos* directed entirely toward itself ultimately signifies nothing. We can get a sense at the outset as to why this is so by considering the following example. If I have a hundred yen in my pocket, I know many things in an a priori way about this amount of money. I know that it is twice as much as fifty yen, and half as much as two hundred. Such ideal relations may be produced indefinitely, even in relation to one moment of an entity's existence (*Parmenides* 143c–144c).

But such relations of ideas, even when they are commensurable, do not themselves inform: I do not know how much money I have unless I also know many other things in an experiential sense, for example, what the money will buy in the local economy.²² This emptiness of the sign in itself is why the troublesome game focuses on time: Parmenides makes *chronos* central to his analysis in order to throw into question his own beginning; namely, the distinction between formal repetition and differentiation in context.

The representational unity that allows enumeration or countability, is derived by abstracting from the very contextual wholeness that gives significance to the representation. The *Parmenides* shows that the intelligibility of experience (participatory being) is analogous to a proportion that involves both the toward-itself and toward-another modes of disclosure. But Parmenides demonstrates other modes as well, for differentiations are also disclosed within these two thematic orientations. The difficulty is that this notion of proportion is merely an analogy: intelligibility has another aspect as well; it is also simultaneously a disproportion. The *telos* of thinking—the end of the effort to achieve commensuration—is recognition of thinking's own incommensurability (*to mē metechon*). Parmenides invokes this limit by testing his own beginnings (*archai*). Two apparently opposite orientations in logos are finally shown to be oddly unified in an inexpressible turning (*tropos*)

The toward-another (*pros allēla*) mode of inquiry is not the effort to isolate intelligible meaning in itself, but rather to indicate significant interrelations between natures (or characteristics) that exist. In Parmenides' demonstration, this mode of signification indicates correlations and contiguities among both entities and meanings: this usage shows that the toward-another function of logos indicates the interconnectedness of being. In this way the indicative sign points beyond itself toward a different nature, its other. The toward-another mode of logos articulates the differentiations that inform both experience and dialectic. No meaning is implicit to the term in itself; its function is to point beyond itself to something different that exists. The indicative function of toward-another discourse is to gesture toward the immanence of other characters or meanings.

One effect of Parmenides' dialectical demonstration is that this relational (toward-another) mode of disclosure seems to engulf the idea in itself. This occurs insofar as the idea in itself loses content as it is abstracted from the contextual relations that give it significance. And yet without the unique singularity of a nature or a feature (indicated by the *eidōs*), there could be no dialectical differentiation of meanings. But even if it is true

that there is being only where there is the logos of being, nevertheless this logos is derivative: meaning is relative to context. Relations of ideas, even if tautologous, are nevertheless relations, and it is the differences between *eidē* in a particular context that allows disclosure.

So on the one hand, apart from its contexts of significance the idea in itself is nothing, and the real interrelations that allow significance seem to overcome the empty idea in itself. The attempt to disclose all the relations implied by even one fact is an impossibly enormous task. But on the other hand, every disclosure of difference may apparently be named and described in logos. This seems to imply that an idea accompanies every feature of every entity. Indeed, Parmenides indicates precisely this at various points in the dialogue (e.g., 130b–131a, and 143c–144e). But this implies that the *eidē* are an indefinite and potentially infinite multitude. Because any entity might be enumerated and categorized in indefinitely many ways, ideal potentiality now seems to engulf real actuality; any one may be counted as a whole or indefinitely many. The metaphor of participatory being is a phenomenologically accurate basis for the articulation of this paradox. The *Parmenides* evokes a radical heterogeneity that is irreducible; for it informs both real and ideal relations, and therefore limits the philosophical effort to disclose it. Rationality is analogous to a ratio; but this ratio implies a juxtaposition of representations that masks the nonrational conditions of possibility that inform rationality itself.

What then is the precise character of this interrelation of logos functions, and in what way, exactly, does the inquiry into language involve questions about the being of time? Or, to put it differently, why should the reflection on time and being involve inquiry into modes of discourse? Parmenides' *gymnasia*, his troubling game, will show the young Socrates that his initial distinction (between idea in itself and particular instantiation) implies absurdities and must be reconfigured, but not dispensed with. In this dialogue, the figure of Parmenides critically examines his own hypothesis: he throws into question the sameness of *noien* (to think) and *einai* (to be). Plato's *Parmenides* reinscribes the words of the goddess of *alētheia*. Beyond the provocative irony of Parmenides' troubling play is Plato's transformative insight into the legacy of father Parmenides.

Given the explicitly pedagogical framing developed in the first part of the dialogue, can the mode (*tropos*) of training that constitutes the major part of the *Parmenides* (137c–166c) be construed as an example of the culmination of the familiar (but ambiguous) Socratic account of the training of the guardians? In support of this construal, it is surely no accident that the most important fact we are given about the young Aristotle, who is

Parmenides' uncomprehending respondent throughout the dialectical demonstration, is that he later became a member of the Thirty Tyrants.

Analysis of the *Parmenides* will reveal that its form and its content are unified, and that the humorous and ironic reasoning it exhibits evokes an ambiguity implicit in being. The dramatic device of conducting a discussion with a minor interlocutor (Aristotle) as an educational demonstration to engage the major interlocutor (Socrates), heralds the ironic nature of the discourse. The ambiguous character of the discourse is also suggested by the distinction that initiates the demonstration in the first place; for Socrates' distinction between intelligible meanings and the presence of an entity, which is developed in the first third of the dialogue, is not dropped once it is disqualified as a way to disarm Zeno's paradoxes. On the contrary, though it is no solution to the dialogue's *aporiai*, the distinction between eidetic and phenomenal disclosure is not eliminated but radically reconfigured in the troubling dialectical game that constitutes the remaining two-thirds of the dialogue, where the discussion focuses on the being of unity. In Parmenides' game, neither young Socrates' conception of formal unification nor Zenonian paradox is simply eliminated: both these moments are transfigured and enhanced by his troubling play. Parmenides' own hypothesis about the being of the one is chosen as the subject of the exercise because the metaliteral character of philosophical reflection becomes inescapably obvious on consideration of the nature of unification.

The responsibility that is both prerequisite and result of *dialegesthai*, as conceived by Plato, involves the recognition that the troubling play of philosophy is, in a vital sense, its own reward. A Socratic intellectual humility tempers the audacity of the most rigorous inquiry. Humility and wonder accompany the Platonic insight that the nature of philosophical discourse springs from an original ambiguity in being itself; and in this way, wonder facilitates the development of modes of *erōs*. It is this process of transcendence that is traced in this essay.