

8.

Proclus and the Overcoming of Eleaticism without Parricide*

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to examine Proclus’ estimation of Plato’s debt to his Eleatic predecessors. On Proclus’ account, Plato brilliantly developed Eleatic theories on being, integrating them within a metaphysical-theological system that makes it possible to identify Parmenides’ one in the second hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*. It will be shown how, in his commentary on the dialogue, Proclus succeeds in passing from Eleatic ontology to Platonic *hen*-ontology without any mention of the Platonic criticism of Eleaticism and the issues that made the ‘parricide’ of Parmenides necessary. Proclus sees the importance of Eleatic ontology to lie in the inescapable unity of Being, while he credits Plato with bringing to completion what is inherent in the works of Zeno and Parmenides, applying the training theorised by the former and tracing the latter’s enquiry back up to the actual One.

KEYWORDS: Proclus, *hen*-ontology, the One-that-is, multiplicity, σκοπός (‘target’).

1. Introduction

In Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* Greek philosophy as a whole is presented as the convergence of different theological and philosophical traditions, harmoniously brought together by Plato’s doctrine.¹ Proclus thereby establishes the unity of all Hellenic theology, sprung from obscure Orphics with revealing names, such as Aglaophamus² – who taught Pythagoras Orphic

* I wish to thank Christopher Kurfess for his suggestions and the careful reading of this text.

¹ See Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 1.1 6.16–7.8. See also Procl. in *Ti.* 3.168.6–7 and Anon. *Proll.* 7.1–8.31. On Proclus’ harmonising effort, see L. Brisson, “La place des Oracles Chaldaïques dans la Théologie Platonicienne,” in Segonds (ed.), *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne: actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13 – 16 mai 1998) en l’honneur de H.D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000) 109–162 and H.D. Saffrey, “Accorder entre elles les traditions théologiques: une caractéristique du néoplatonisme athénien,” in H.D. Saffrey (ed.), *Le néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris: Vrin, 2000) 143–158.

² On this figure associated with Orphism, see L. Brisson, “Nascita di un mito filosofico: Giamblico (VP 146) su Aglaophamos,” in M. Tortorelli Ghidini, A. Storchi Marino & A. Visconti (eds.), *Tra Orfeo e Pitagora. Origini e incontri di culture nell’antichità* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2000) 237–253. His name is revealing because it means ‘having a splendid voice’.

theology³ – and from the thought of well-known Presocratic philosophers, such as the representatives of the Eleatic or Italian school, who contemplated intelligible Being.⁴ Compared to Plotinus, who acknowledges the great importance of Eleaticism and of the *Sophist* for the conceptualisation of Being as identical to Thought,⁵ Proclus considers this development and the *Sophist* itself to be only preliminary (προτέλεια) to the theological mysteries of the *Parmenides*.⁶ In particular, although the Stranger of the *Sophist* (244d14–245b11) and the Parmenides of Plato's *Parmenides* (137c) speak of the same One, it is in the *Parmenides* that Plato develops a more scientific and systematic argument on the whole metaphysical cosmos.⁷

Without ignoring the Neoplatonists' indebtedness to Pythagoreanism, yet at the same time without dwelling on the subject, which lies beyond the scope of the present paper,⁸ I will focus on the *hen*-ontological discussion in the *Parmenides*, which carries a theological significance for Proclus. In order to reconstruct Proclus' theorisation of Being in relation to the One and to beings, I will consider various Neoplatonist texts, particularly some crucial passages from Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*.⁹ These texts will be seen to suggest that while Proclus praises the Eleatics for the scientific accuracy of their dialectical method,¹⁰ it is the contents of their reflection on being that enable the Neoplatonist construction of a metaphysical cosmos.¹¹ My chief aim is to examine the theoretical debt that Plato incurred with the Eleatics,

³ See Iamb. *VP* 146.15–147.1 and Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 1.5 25.24–26.4.

⁴ See Procl. in *Prm.* 629.24–630.14. Citations from the in *Prm.* are to Steel's edition.

⁵ In this article I write 'One', 'Being' and 'Thought' when such terms refer to hypostases, or realms of reality, and 'one', 'being' and 'thought' when they are used with reference to the Presocratic context.

⁶ See Procl. in *Prm.* 1079.18–26. On the Neoplatonist exegesis of the *Parmenides*, see F. Romano, "L'esegesi neoplatonica del Parmenide," in F. Romano, *L'Uno come fondamento: la crisi dell'ontologia classica. Raccolta di studi rari e inediti*, a cura di G.R. Giardina (Catania: CUECM, 2004) 161–177. On the difference between Plotinus' exegesis and Proclus', see W. Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen. Studien zur Neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985) 155–192.

⁷ See Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 1.12 55.23–56.10.

⁸ Pythagoreanism crucially contributed to the essentially metaphysical turn of Platonism through the theorisation of a First Principle that transcends Being. See R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972) 48; M. Bonazzi, "Plotino e la tradizione pitagorica," *Acme* 53 (2000) 39–73; M. Bonazzi, "Pythagoreanising Aristotle: Eudorus and the systematisation of Platonism," in M. Schofield (ed.), *Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoreanism in the First Century BC: New Directions for Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 160–186.

⁹ The importance of Book 1 of the *Commentary on the Parmenides* for an investigation of this sort has also been emphasised by D. Cürsgen, *Henologie und Ontologie. Die metaphysische Prinzipienlehre des späten Neuplatonismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007) 131–135.

¹⁰ See Procl. in *Prm.* 623.28–31; 646.30–647.2.

¹¹ See R. Chlup, *Proclus. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 47–61.

and hence the way in which Proclus reinterprets Platonic references to Eleatic ontology. The underlying hypothesis is that according to Proclus the Platonic texts express not a deconstructive critique of Eleatic thought, but rather an attempt to identify Parmenides' thought as one of the fundamental historical antecedents of Plato and Platonism.¹² The history of philosophy is thus seen to find its culmination in Plato,¹³ who developed some brilliant Eleatic insights in his own particular fashion.

2. From the Sophist to the Parmenides: an introduction to ontology, hen-ontology and henology

The fact that Proclus aims to rewrite the history of Plato's critique of Eleaticism is evident not just from the *Platonic Theology*, but also from the *Commentary on the Parmenides*: the *Platonic Theology* is not the starting point of Proclus' thought, but rather – as is well-known – the outcome of his exegesis of the *Parmenides*.¹⁴ Already from this preliminary observation it is clear that Proclus' interpretation of Eleaticism has a theological twist, because the *Parmenides* is Plato's theological dialogue and the *Platonic Theology* is a summa of late Neoplatonist theological-metaphysical thought. In order to reconstruct Proclus' reception of Eleatic ontology, it is not enough to consider his references to the *Sophist*, whose proximity to the *Parmenides* was nonetheless quite clear to Neoplatonist exegetes.¹⁵ Indeed, Proclus' interpretation of the *Sophist* can only partly be reconstructed, because Proclus may never have written a commentary on the *Sophist*.¹⁶ However, from the *Platonic Theology* it is possible to derive an exegesis of *Sph.* 242c–245e: by comparing the plural-

¹² On the Eleatic school and its followers, see Procl. in *Prm.* 623.28–31.

¹³ See Anon. *Proll.* 7.3–5.

¹⁴ See H.D. Saffrey, "La Théologie Platonicienne de Proclus, fruit de l'exégèse du *Parménide*," *RThPh* 116 (1984) 1–12, C. Steel, "Le *Parménide* est-il le fondement de la Théologie platonicienne," in Segonds (ed.), *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne*, 373–398 and C. Steel, "Une histoire de l'interprétation du *Parménide* dans l'antiquité," in M. Di Pasquale Barbanti & F. Romano (eds.), *Il Parmenide di Platone e la sua tradizione. Atti del III Colloquio Internazionale del Centro di Ricerca sul Neoplatonismo* (Catania: CUECM, 2002) 11–40.

¹⁵ See Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 3.21 73.10–12 and M.-A. Gavray, *Simplicius lecteur du Sophiste: contribution à l'étude de l'exégèse néoplatonicienne tardive* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2007) 17–22.

¹⁶ This is suggested by C. Steel, "Le *Sophiste* comme texte théologique dans l'interprétation de Proclus," in E.P. Bos & P.A. Meijer (eds.), *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill 1992) 53, who as weak evidence in support of the opposite hypothesis points to only one passage from the *Commentary on the Parmenides* (774.24).

ists' position and that of the monists, Proclus establishes that, according to the pluralists' perspective, the multiplicity of beings can be traced back to a single principle, namely the Monad of being, whereas the monists' perspective leads to the positing of a principle that transcends Being.¹⁷ Therefore, the pluralists' thesis leads to the One-that-is,¹⁸ that of Parmenides to the One in itself. So despite the lack of a Neoplatonist commentary on the dialogue, it is possible to infer a harmonising interpretation of Platonism and Eleaticism, which will be brought to completion with the exegesis of the *Parmenides*.

To be more precise, this interpretation suggests that the same exegetical procedure which Proclus applies to the *Parmenides* was also applied to the *Sophist* – which in the Iamblichean reading order for the dialogues is included among the physical dialogues and hence comes before the *Parmenides*¹⁹ – where, according to Proclus, the Eleatic Stranger's speech on non-being ultimately confirms Parmenides' doctrine. However, it is precisely in the *Sophist* that Plato, through the Stranger's words, makes the philosophical move which some people might regard as a 'parricide' against Parmenides, namely, the admission within thought and speech of non-being, understood as difference. It is this new conception of non-being that Proclus exploits in the *Parmenides*, strategically avoiding any mention of the fact that it was developed in explicit opposition to Parmenides.²⁰ The *Parmenides* revealed by Proclus' treatment of Plato's *Parmenides* takes his own hypothesis, namely that the one exists,²¹ as the starting point of the dialectical discussion, and ultimately reaches the One in itself.²² The chain of negations²³ does not lead to an impossibility, but to the First Cause, that is, the One beyond Being: "Now the hypothesis that the One exists is true. The Eleatic Stranger also demonstrates this when he is countering as absurd the thesis that the One does not exist."²⁴

In order to show that Proclus not only finds no trace of parricide in Plato's

¹⁷ See Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 1.4 18.13–20 and 2.4 34.12–35.9.

¹⁸ See Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 3.24 84.26–85.4.

¹⁹ On the reading order, see Anon. *Proll.* 26.13–44.

²⁰ On Proclus' interpretation of the *Sophist*, see Steel, *Le Sophiste comme texte théologique dans l'interprétation de Proclus*, 51–64.

²¹ See Pl. *Prm.* 137b2–3 with Procl. *in Prm.* 638.17–639.7 and 1032.26–1035.32.

²² See Procl. *in Prm.* 1039.33–36.

²³ See Procl. *in Prm.* 1079.21–26.

²⁴ Procl. *in Prm.* 1065.12–13. All translations of the *Commentary on the Parmenides* are taken from G.R. Morrow & J.M. Dillon, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). On the composition of the *Commentary on the Parmenides* see C. Luna & A.-Ph. Segonds (eds.), *Proclus, Commentaire sur le 'Parménide' de Platon* 1.2 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007) xlii–liii.

texts, but feels the need to reaffirm and acknowledge the Eleatic's role as the father of Platonic metaphysics, who acknowledges the One in itself – i.e. the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* – as the First Principle, I will now move on to examine:

- 1a) in what way Proclus presents Eleaticism as a historical antecedent of Platonism;
- 1b) how the *Parmenides* stages the perfecting of Eleatic ontology (§§ 3; 4);
and
- 2a) Zeno's defence of Parmenides' thesis (that the one exists), along with the Platonic criticism of Parmenidean monism, which becomes an argument in support of the plurality of Being;
- 2b) the Neoplatonist defence of Parmenides' ontology through the identification of the σκοπός ('target') of the *Parmenides* (§§ 5; 6).

According to Proclus, it is in the *Parmenides* that Plato praises Eleaticism: the ancient interpreters, he writes, have “rightly” (εὖ) stated that Plato has brought Zeno's and Parmenides' writings to completion, by applying the training theorised by the former, and by tracing the latter's enquiry back up to the actual One.²⁵ However, it is worth emphasising that Proclus endeavours to integrate Eleaticism into Platonism by receiving the terminology of Eleatic texts within an essentially theological-metaphysical context. For this reason, the whole discussion here cannot be limited to Eleatic *ontology*; rather, it seems necessary to introduce the terms *hen-ontology* and *henology*.²⁶ Indeed, Proclus' discussion of Eleaticism is centred on the inescapable unity of Being: without the unity of Being, ensured by the One, being could never be predicated of entities.

3. *In search of Parmenides, the father of Platonic ontology*

Antecedents for the Neoplatonists' henological and theological interpretation are to be found in Moderatus of Gades, Numenius of Apamea, Clement of Alexandria, Alcinous and Platonising Gnostic texts.²⁷ As first emphasised by Dodds in a landmark article, the distinction between the One and Being

²⁵ See Procl. in *Prm.* 997.13–17.

²⁶ The term *hen-ontology* refers to the account of being in relation to the One; the term *henology* concerns the doctrine of the One. On this see Cürsgen, *Henologie und Ontologie*, 87–130.

²⁷ See J.D. Turner, “The Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism: Interpretations of the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*,” *VChr* 60 (2006) 9–64.

springs from a metaphysical exegesis of the *Parmenides* and the *Republic*.²⁸ However, what lies behind the Neoplatonist interpretation is more than just Plato. Plotinus reflects not only on Parmenides' conception of the one – which lets itself be grasped through a multiplicity of aspects²⁹ – but also on the conceptions of Anaxagoras, Heraclitus and Empedocles,³⁰ as well as Pythagoras and Pherecydes.³¹ According to Plotinus, the intrinsic limit of the Parmenidean interpretation is its lack of exactness: in the *Parmenides*,³² Plato is more precise than Parmenides,³³ insofar as he distinguishes between a first One (τὸ πρῶτον ἓν), a second One (ἓν πολλά/the One-Many), and a third One (ἓν καὶ πολλά/the One and Many).³⁴

The anonymous author of the *Prolegomena*, writing after Proclus and under his influence,³⁵ falls within the same exegetical strand as the founder of Neoplatonism when he states:

The point is that, while they only recognized the contributory causes, Plato made a distinction and defined as the real causes the exemplary, the efficient, and the final cause.³⁶ Anaxagoras, it is true, as from a vision in a heavy slumber, declares the Intelligence to be the efficient cause,³⁷ but he failed to apply this principle to his account of coming-to-be and passing away; instead,³⁸

²⁸ See E.R. Dodds, “The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One,” *CQ* 22 (1928) 129–142, who pointed to the second part of Plato's *Parmenides* as the main Plotinian source for the notion of a One that is beyond being. On the ontological and metaphysical exegesis of the *Parmenides*, a hallmark of Plotinian thought and later Platonism, see H.-R. Schwyzer, “Die zwiefache Sicht in der Philosophie Plotins,” *MH* 1 (1944) 87–99; Steel, “Une histoire de l'interprétation du Parménide dans l'antiquité,” 11–40; and M. Bonazzi, “Un lettore antico della *Repubblica*: Numenio di Apamea,” *Méthexis* 17 (2004) 71–84.

²⁹ See Plot. 5.1.8.22–23; 6.6.18.42–43.

³⁰ See Plot. 5.1.9.1–7.

³¹ See Plot. 5.1.9.27–32. For an analysis of the presence of the Presocratics in Plotinus, see G. Stamatellos, *Plotinus and the Presocratics. A Philosophical Study of Presocratic Influences in Plotinus' Enneads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). As M. Vorwerk, “Plotinus and the Parmenides: Problems of Interpretation”, in J.D. Turner & K. Corrigan (eds.), *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage, II: Reception in Patristic, Gnostic, and Christian Neoplatonic Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010) 23–33, 30 highlights: “It is only within the doxography [...] that Plotinus introduces the first three hypotheses of the *Parmenides* as a correction of Parmenides himself.”

³² See Pl. *Prm.* 137c–142a; 144e5; 155e5.

³³ See Parm. DK 28 B3 (= LM 19 D6.8).

³⁴ See Plot. 5.1.8.22–23.

³⁵ See A. Motta, “Platone nelle università del mondo antico. Gli appunti di un anonimo studente della metà del VI sec. d.C.,” *Intersezioni* 38 (2018) 145–168.

³⁶ On the theory of causes in Neoplatonism, see S.E. Gersh, *KINHTEIS AKINHTOS. A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 45–57 and L. Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 86–113. See also Anon. *Proll.* 17.40–48 and, on this passage, A. Motta, *λόγους ποιῶν. L'eredità platonica e il superamento dell'aporia dei dialoghi* (Napoli: Iniziative editoriali Paolo Loffredo, 2018) 200 n. 151.

³⁷ See DK 59 B12 (= LM 25 D27).

³⁸ See also Pl. *Phd.* 97b8–99c7. Plato criticises Anaxagoras not for having failed – like the other natural philosophers – to find suitable causes to account for the appearance of given forms, but rather for having ignored the

he based his explanation on such things as whirling air and wind, but never on intelligence.³⁹

Clarity, precision and a scientific approach mark Plato's superiority over his predecessors. Although the Presocratics trace the study of nature back to that of matter,⁴⁰ without paying due attention to the true causes of the physical world,⁴¹ this does not mean that they are completely mistaken. By narrowing the question down to Eleatic ontology, Plotinus argues that Plato distinguishes (διαίρει) what Parmenides has failed to distinguish, while the Anonymous emphasises that Plato distinguished (διέκρινεν) between actual causes and contributory causes. Both these Neoplatonist authors stress the fact that Plato has better defined some crucial and correct Presocratic insights, including the Eleatic reflection on being and thinking. As Parmenides⁴² – Plotinus claims – “correctly (ὀρθῶς) says that ‘thinking and being are one and the same,’” Proclus argues:

if there is intellection in the One Being according to Parmenides, then there is also motion, since inevitably there must be life along with intellection; everything after all that lives moves by virtue of living.⁴³

Every clarification that Proclus attributes to Plato, as an admirer of Parmenides, might be viewed as the acknowledgement of a (Neo)Platonist philosophical orientation in the unitary tradition prior to Plato.⁴⁴ In the specific case of the passage just quoted, Parmenides, according to Proclus, envisages being as something motionless and fixed in its identity, although thought makes it mobile (at least in a noetic sense).⁴⁵ This acknowledgement preserves the great

causal function of the Intellect, in particular its function as final cause. See Dam. *in Phd.* 1.412.1–6; Simp. *in Ph.* 3.16–19, 10.32–11.3.

³⁹ Anon. *Proll.* 8.3–10. All translations of the *Prolegomena* are from L.G. Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*. Introduction, Text, Translation and Indices (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1962).

⁴⁰ See Procl. *in Ti.* 1.2.9–15.

⁴¹ The study of nature – as is also clear from Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (1.2.1–9) – entails an investigation of the material and formal causes, as well as the instrumental (*in Ti.* 1.357.12–15), and of the actual causes, namely the efficient, exemplary, and final.

⁴² Plot. 5.9.5.29–32 is quoting DK 28 B3 (= LM 19 D6). According to the *Index* of Plotinus' *Enneads* in P. Henry & H.R. Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964–1982), echoes of DK 28 B3 (= LM 19 D6) occur in seven places: 1.4.10.6; 3.5.7.51; 3.8.8.8; 5.1.8.17–18; 5.6.6.22–23; 5.9.5.29–32; 6.7.41.18. On this Parmenidean fragment, see G. Casertano, *Parmenide il metodo la scienza l'esperienza* (Napoli: Guida, 1978) 16–17, 61–67.

⁴³ Procl. *in Prm.* 1153.3–6.

⁴⁴ On the interpretation of Parmenides based on the *Sophist's* theory of the highest genera, see J. Mansfeld, *Die Offenbarung des Parmenides und die menschliche Welt* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1964) 78 and M. Abbate, *Parmenide e i neoplatonici. Dall'Essere all'Uno e al di là dell'Uno* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2010) 176–177.

⁴⁵ See Gersh, *KINHETOS AKINHOTOS*, 101–117.

theoretical weight of Eleaticism. In his *Commentary on the Parmenides* Proclus states that the arguments adduced by Parmenides in the *Parmenides* are of absolutely remarkable depth,⁴⁶ as Socrates himself had already noted in the *Theaetetus*. There – Proclus writes – Socrates recalls that he came across the elderly Parmenides as he was philosophising about being by presenting not training methods, but profound insights.⁴⁷ Admiration for the Eleatics, therefore, is not limited to their method, but extends to the acknowledgement of a spiritual father for Platonic ontological theory (or rather *hen*-ontological theory, as we shall see). When in the *Prolegomena* to Plato’s philosophy the Anonymous reconstructs the history of Plato’s teachers, he explicitly mentions Parmenides:

Further he attended courses by Cratylus the Heraclitean and Hermippus the Parmenidean to become acquainted with the doctrines of Heraclitus and Parmenides; as a result he wrote two of his dialogues, the *Cratylus* and the *Parmenides*, in which he refers to the teachings of these men.⁴⁸

It seems, then, that within the *Parmenides* it is possible to find teachings with which Plato became familiar through his acquaintance with Hermogenes, as mentioned by Diogenes Laertius (and not with Hermippus, as erroneously reported by the Anonymous).⁴⁹ According to the metaphysical interpretation of the *Parmenides*,⁵⁰ the σκοπός (‘target’⁵¹) of the dialogue is not simply being as conceived by Parmenides, since the positive and negative statements made by the Eleatic philosopher in the dialogue do not apply to Being, “which is to say to the One-that-is” (ὅπερ ἦν τὸ ἓν ὄν⁵²). Therefore, Parmenides would start off by talking about ‘his’ one,⁵³ i.e. the One-that-is⁵⁴ and, based on the consequences of this hypothesis, would then move on to discuss everything that has come into being starting from the One.⁵⁵ Thus in the *Parmenides* Eleatic ontology intertwines

⁴⁶ See Procl. in *Prm.* 636.8–9.

⁴⁷ See Procl. in *Prm.* 636.12–13.

⁴⁸ Anon. *Proll.* 4.4–9.

⁴⁹ See D.L. 3.6.

⁵⁰ This will be discussed in greater detail below.

⁵¹ On the target of the dialogues, see A. Motta, “The theme and target of Plato’s dialogues in Neoplatonist cosmological theory,” *The Classical Quarterly* 73.1 (2023) 78–89.

⁵² See Procl. in *Prm.* 638.20.

⁵³ See C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology,” in M. Pickavé (ed.), *Die Logik der Transzendentalen. Festschrift für J. A. Aertszen zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003) 592–594.

⁵⁴ See Pl. *Prm.* 137b1–4.

⁵⁵ See Procl. in *Prm.* 638.13–19.

with *hen*-ontology, only to then give way to Neoplatonist henology: the dialogue named after Parmenides discusses beings insofar as they all stem from the One, i.e. insofar as they are the One's offspring (ἐκγονα).⁵⁶ And the question of beings that come from the One is addressed precisely by Parmenides, someone who – according to Proclus' interpretation – is of the same rank as Being, since Being is the focus of his thought and since he primarily defines it as one.⁵⁷

4. *The perfecting of Eleatic ontology through Proclus' hen-ontology*

As I will endeavour to argue, perfecting the Parmenidean doctrine, according to which being – not the One in itself – is the principle of all things, does not mean killing Parmenides, but rather paving the ground for the more correct notion of the One above Being. In other words, it means overcoming the limits and inaccuracies found in the Parmenidean formulation of being. The *Parmenides* does not support the idea that Plato carried out an act of parricide against Parmenides – the very act performed in the *Sophist* – but rather increasingly appears to tone down any purported break with Eleaticism. In support of this thesis, Proclus explains that, as opposed to the *Sophist*, where Parmenides is refuted because he does not yet talk about the One, in the *Parmenides* Parmenides' discussion *de facto* leads to the true One: that One which is free from all multiplicity, and which is not only transcendent with respect to being, but cannot countenance the attribute 'that-is'.⁵⁸

As for the philosophy of Parmenides, here Plato is superior in so far as Parmenides declared Being to be the principle of all things that are; Plato, however, showed that this is not so, but the One is beyond it. For if it were Being, all things would aspire to be,⁵⁹ since everything is dependent on its principle; but as a matter of fact we see some people despising being for the sake of a greater good.⁶⁰ It follows that Being is not the One Principle of everything, but the One, which transcends⁶¹ (ἐπαναβέβηκεν) Being.⁶²

⁵⁶ See Procl. in *Prm.* 641.1–6.

⁵⁷ See Procl. in *Prm.* 628.1–6 and in *Prm.* 708.8–27.

⁵⁸ See Procl. in *Prm.* 638.9–27.

⁵⁹ On the differences between the first two Principles, see Plot. 5.3.10; 5.5.13; 6.7.20.16–18.

⁶⁰ The same expression occurs in El. in *Porph.* 1.8–9. See also Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 1.25 111.19–21; in *Alc.* 144.4–5; 337.12–13; in *R.* 2.89.27–28, 90.25–26; Dam. in *Phd.* 1.475.1–3, 2.91; Olymp. in *Alc.* 117.13–15.

⁶¹ On the transcendence of the First Principle, see Plot. 5.6.6.

⁶² Anon. *Proll.* 8.24–31.

In this passage from the *Prolegomena*, it is clear that, according to Parmenides, being is the principle of all beings. Despite the use of the verb ἐπαναβαίνω, it is equally evident that the author is referring to DK 28 B7–8 DK (= LM 19 D8) without any polemical intent, whereas the DK 28 B7–8 is criticised in Pl. *Sph.* 243b3–250d4 and *Prm.* 141e7–142a1. Based on the cosmo-literary theory of the Neoplatonists, which stresses the importance of considering each dialogue a unitary cosmos,⁶³ isolated passages of a dialogue do not produce any unity and therefore, in the specific case at hand, do not offer an overall picture of the reception of Eleatic ontology. Moreover, according to Proclus, Plato often engages with the history of philosophy, but – as he does with the principles of wisdom as a whole⁶⁴ – strews his reflections throughout his dialogues, eventually bringing them together in the *Parmenides*, the theological dialogue *par excellence* which, along with the *Timaeus*, crowns the bi-cyclical curriculum of the dialogues studied in schools.⁶⁵ In order to prove the remarkable unity and comprehensiveness of the Platonic doctrine contained in the *Parmenides*, Proclus recalls that, whereas Socrates in the *Phaedo* accuses Anaxagoras of Clazomenae of not using intellect in a proper way, and of explaining the nature of things through “air currents, dispositions, and other such things,” in the *Sophist* Socrates asks the Eleatic Stranger to introduce him to the philosophy of the Italian school. In these dialogues, Proclus explains, Socrates “separately accomplishes” what the *Parmenides*, already in its dramatic structure, shows within a unitary framework: this dialogue brings together in Athens not just the Italian philosophers, in order for them to transmit their ancestral ideas to the Athenian philosophers, but also the Ionic philosophers of Clazomenae, in order for them to receive the Italians’ teachings.⁶⁶

What lies behind this rather literary reflection – for Proclus is talking about the dramatic structure of the dialogue – is actually the crucial idea that without the perfecting of Parmenides’ ontological theory and its harmonisation within the metaphysical-theological context of (the school of) Athens, the Neoplatonist system could never attain historical and theoretical perfection. The formal, historical and theoretical perfection that the *Parmenides* stages within the Platonic corpus is – as just noted – the outcome of the recombination into a harmonious whole of ‘partial’ reflections to be found in other dialogues, even in a dialogue not included

⁶³ On this theory, see Motta, *λόγους ποιεῖν*, 188–212.

⁶⁴ Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 1.5 23.22–24.1 and 1.7 32.3–6.

⁶⁵ See Anon. *Proll.* 26.13–44.

⁶⁶ See Procl. in *Prm.* 630.1–13.

in the canonical reading curriculum.⁶⁷ Indeed, Proclean *hen*-ontology – like Neoplatonic metaphysics more generally – necessarily entails an interpretation of the *Republic*,⁶⁸ and particularly of what it states about the Good in Book 6. In *Dissertation* 11 of his *Commentary on the Republic*,⁶⁹ Proclus writes that Socrates shows that the Good is beyond Being through the analogy of the sun. This illustrates how the Good ensures the subsistence of the truth, which is superior to Being just as light is more venerable than what is visible precisely by virtue of the light itself.⁷⁰ With regard to this claim, Proclus further ‘clarifies’ a Parmenidean insight – which is to say that he reinterprets it, albeit not explicitly. If the light which proceeds from the Good is called truth by Plato,⁷¹ then, according to Proclus, it is clearly superior to Being, since Parmenides too speaks of the truth, but as an attribute of ‘his’ one.

Therefore, having acknowledged the importance of Parmenides’ reflection on Being,⁷² Proclus sees this Presocratic philosopher’s *auctoritas* as the foundation of Platonic philosophy and of his own metaphysical system: the Parmenidean identity between being and thought enables the Neoplatonists to argue that Being/Intellect is a reality encompassing the intelligible forms and which cannot coincide with the First Principle.⁷³

Another proof that Intelligence is not the first Cause is this: if it were, since there is a plurality of forms, there will also be a plurality of intelligences; and if this is true, the principle will be a manifold, which is absurd, for at the beginning of things there must be unity.⁷⁴

From a causal point of view, too, what subsists by virtue of the Good cannot coincide with the First Principle or First Cause; hence, the Neoplatonic One is different from the Parmenidean one. In turn, the Neoplatonic One, from which Being derives the unity and truth ensuring the identity between being and thought,⁷⁵ does not coincide with the Intellect.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ On the reasons for the absence of the *Republic* from the Neoplatonist “canon” of dialogues, see D. O’Meara, “Plato’s ‘Republic’ in the School of Iamblichus,” in M. Vegetti & M. Abbate (eds.), *La Repubblica di Platone nella tradizione antica* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1999) 193–205.

⁶⁸ See L.P. Gerson, “From Plato’s Good to Platonic God,” *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 2 (2008) 93–112.

⁶⁹ On the peculiarities of this Proclean text, see D. Baltzly & J.F. Finamore, Proclus’s *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* 1.1–6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 9–15.

⁷⁰ See Procl. *in R.* 1.277.23–27. Cf. Procl. *Theol.Plat.* 2.4 33.12–17.

⁷¹ See Procl. *Theol.Plat.* 1.21 100.13–15; *in R.* 1.279.26–29.

⁷² See Steel, “Le *Sophiste* comme texte théologique dans l’interprétation de Proclus,” 51–64.

⁷³ The Intellect is ‘One-Many’ (ἐν πολλὰ), according to Pl. *Prm.* 144e5: see Plot. 5.1.8.26; 5.3.15.11. An extensive discussion of this may be found in R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino* (Roma: Carocci, 2009) 49–79.

⁷⁴ Anon. *Proll.* 9.37–41.

⁷⁵ On the First Principle beyond truth itself, see Procl. *in R.* 1.280.24 ff.; 277.14 ff.

⁷⁶ See Procl. *Theol.Plat.* 2.4 31.25–26.

5. *Parmenides, Zeno and the ‘Uni-Multiplicity’ of Being*

At the beginning of the *Commentary on the Parmenides* Proclus describes the setting of the dialogue and the arrival of Parmenides and Zeno. The two are not just citizens of Elea, but also members of the Pythagorean school,⁷⁷ and they have come to Athens for the Great Panathenaia, in order to help suitably gifted Athenians to acquire ‘knowledge of divine beings.’⁷⁸ For many Athenians and foreigners this is an occasion to come together and listen to a reading of Zeno’s book against the multiplicity of beings. Zeno’s book is a disguised attempt to support the Parmenidean thesis that being is one: the book has been written in response to the foolish questions of those who, incapable of grasping the truth, infer from the statement that being is one that it is impossible for both Parmenides and Zeno to exist at the same time. Zeno, Parmenides’ pupil, believes that Parmenides’ thesis does not require any additional proof; yet, ‘in a remarkable way’⁷⁹ and without openly siding with Parmenides, he shows that those who posit the multiplicity of being run into no fewer difficulties than those who instead support that being is one. In fact, according to Zeno those who posit the many encounter even worse difficulties. It is at this point that Proclus breaks off his description of the narrative in order to express his personal opinion on the cogency of the Eleatic theses on Being:

And if I may interpolate my opinion, I think he did so plausibly. For Being must be both one and many; every monad has a plurality correlative with it, and every plurality is comprehended under some appropriate monad. But since in every case the ground of plurality is tied up with the monad and cannot exist without it, these men of Elea were focusing their attention upon the incomprehensible unifying causality of the monad when they made the One Being primary. Seeing that every plurality exists in unity, they declared that the One Being is prior to the many; for what primarily is, is one, and from it the plurality of beings proceeds.⁸⁰

According to Proclus, Zeno’s argument contributes to showing that Plato derives the ‘uni-multiplicity’ of Being precisely from Parmenidean mon-

⁷⁷ See Procl. in *Prm.* 618.22–619.10. See note 8 above. On the importance of Pythagoreanism, see the previous remarks in this paper. With reference to what has just been stated, see also D. O’Meara, *Pythagoras revived. Mathematics and philosophy in late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) and C. Steel, M. Bonazzi & C. Lévy (eds.), *A Platonic Pythagoras: Platonism and Pythagoreanism in the Imperial Age* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

⁷⁸ Procl. in *Prm.* 619.12–13: εἰς τὴν τῶν θεῶν ἐπιστήμην.

⁷⁹ Procl. in *Prm.* 619.33: δαιμονίως.

⁸⁰ Procl. in *Prm.* 620.4–16.

ism.⁸¹ In this section of the dialogue, therefore, Parmenides and Zeno would be discussing the One-that-is, i.e. the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. The reference to the monad – a term which in mathematics describes the first element in a series of numbers – indicates that Being is the peak of the hierarchical series proceeding from the One.⁸² The Eleatics' one would thus be the Monad of Being, from which the multiplicity of intelligible reality derives and on which it depends: according to Proclus' reinterpretation of Parmenides' being, the summit of all entities is found to be anterior to their multiplicity.

So also Parmenides knows that intelligible plurality proceeds from the One Being, that prior to the many beings there is this fundamental One Being in which the plurality of the intelligibles has its unity. It is therefore far from true that he had to deny plurality because he posited the One Being – he who in the passages above superposes that beings are many; rather in saying that the many get their being, whatever it is, from the One Being, he rightly regards this cause as sufficient and so declares that Being is One.⁸³

Therefore, while on the one hand Parmenides and Zeno may be credited with having identified the 'uni-multiplicity' (ἐν πολλά) of Being, on the other hand the limit of Eleatic ontology lies in having identified this Being with the One understood as First Cause. The one discussed by Zeno is not absolutely transcendent, but rather a One-Many: for the Eleatics, "seeing that every plurality exists in unity, [...] declared that the One Being is prior to the Many."⁸⁴ This is justified by the fact that this being is at the same time, and primarily (πρώτως), one and the source of the multiplicity of beings. The difference between Zeno and Parmenides, according to Proclus, is that whereas Parmenides leaves multiplicity out of his discussion on being, focusing on the unity of being,⁸⁵ Zeno – who is 'daemonic' and inferior to his teacher – attempts to trace the multiplicity of being back to the unity from which it derives and on which it depends. Indeed, a discourse on multiplicity that overlooks unity would engender confusion and disorder: "Thus he showed that when the One is taken

⁸¹ On Parmenides' monism, see P. Curd, *The Legacy of Parmenides. Eleatic Monism and Later Presocratic Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 64–97.

⁸² See Procl. *Inst.* 21: "Every order has its beginning in a monad and proceeds to a manifold co-ordinate therewith; and the manifold in any order may be carried back to a single monad"; transl. E.R. Dodds, *Proclus. The Elements of Theology*. A revised Text with Introduction and Commentary, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

⁸³ Procl. *in Prm.* 708.34–709.6.

⁸⁴ Procl. *in Prm.* 620.13–15.

⁸⁵ See Procl. *in Prm.* 620.13–15, where it is stated that Parmenides did not deem it appropriate to re-descend towards multiplicity and instead chose to focus entirely on the unitary nature of the One-that-is, limiting his enquiry to the contemplation of this One. Cf. *in Prm.* 1030.19–20: Parmenides "shrinks from once again descending into 'the multiplicity of arguments' from his intellectual and simple form of activity."

away there is complete confusion and disorder among the Many.”⁸⁶ Moreover, a person who leaves the one out, even inadvertently, acts like someone who posits a rift between the divine and things. This is how Zeno ultimately conforms to his teacher’s view: “If Being is not a many, either nothing at all exists or Being must be one”.⁸⁷ By conforming to Parmenides’ view, Zeno accepts that the one “exists in itself prior to plurality, and plurality is what it is entirely (πάντως) from the One,”⁸⁸ and comes to interpret in causal terms (κατ’ αἰτίαν) the multiplicity of the one, which “cannot be preserved in mere plurality.”⁸⁹

6. *Conclusions: the σκοπός (‘target’) of the Parmenides and the henological outcome*

Zeno *de facto* fails to provide adequate support for Parmenides: he fails to move beyond the discussion of the One-that-is, as Parmenides is made to do in the dialogue. To understand how Parmenides manages to save Eleatic ontology, becoming the father not just of Neoplatonic *hen*-ontology but also of henology, it is necessary to take a closer look at the issue of the σκοπός (‘target’) of the *Parmenides*.⁹⁰ First of all, it must be said that it is far from easy to identify the σκοπός (‘target’), as is shown by the historical analysis of the interpretations of the dialogue provided by Proclus in the introduction to the commentary. However, this analysis is useful, because 1) it leads to the truthful and “wholly sacred and mystical” analysis developed by Proclus’ teacher, Syrianus;⁹¹ and 2) it allows us to better grasp the exegetical strategy which Proclus deploys in order to save Parmenides.

In the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, as in the *Platonic Theology*, we find essentially two historical-interpretative hypotheses regarding the σκοπός (namely, the logical and the theological), although each is then further divided into two sub-hypotheses in order to outline the various stages in the exegesis of the dialogue.⁹² What is most interesting for the purpose of the

⁸⁶ Procl. *in Prm.* 620.28–30.

⁸⁷ Procl. *in Prm.* 621.10–11.

⁸⁸ Procl. *in Prm.* 621.14–16.

⁸⁹ See Procl. *in Prm.* 621.13–14.

⁹⁰ On the σκοπός of the *Parmenides*, see G. Radke, *Das Lächeln des „Parmenides“: Proklos Interpretationen zur platonischen Dialogform* (Berlin – New York: W. de Gruyter, 2006) 232–305.

⁹¹ See Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 1.8 33.22–23.

⁹² On the history of the interpretations of the dialogue as presented by Proclus, see Radke, *Das Lächeln des „Par-*

present enquiry is the fact that the Neoplatonists are only capable of saving Parmenides and Parmenidean ontology through a metaphysical reading of the dialogue, which is to say by reinterpreting – and in some cases clearly stretching – the very heart of Eleaticism.

In discussing the hypothesis according to which the *Parmenides* is a merely polemical exercise carried out with no consideration for its contemplation of real things, Proclus criticises those exegetes who have identified being as the object of the dialogue. He argues that, according to these interpreters, Plato, like the Eleatics, sought to establish that being is one by using the Eleatics' method, namely by presenting Zeno as refuting the Many and Parmenides as revealing the One-that-is.⁹³ This perspective has been partially overcome by those interpreters who regard the logical exercise as useful for acquiring experience and abilities in discussion.⁹⁴ Whereas in the former case the *Parmenides* would be an aporetic dialogue, in the latter interpretation leads to the identification of three 'positive' nuclei (the aporias on the ideas, the theoretical teaching of the method, and an example of its practical application).

However, we are still far from the heart of the Neoplatonist interpretation. A first real turn in the history of the exegesis of the dialogue occurs when the logical exercise is assigned a metaphysical connotation,⁹⁵ i.e. when the exegetes shift their attention from the method to the object, which according to some interpreters is Parmenides' one.⁹⁶

Indeed, although the hypotheses do actually take their departure from Parmenides' One, which is identical with the One Being of the dialogue, yet as they proceed from this point they sometimes fix upon the notion of One apart from Being and develop the implications of genuine unity, purged of all plurality and therefore as transcending Being and repudiating that predicate.⁹⁷

Yet, the σκοπός ('target') of the *Parmenides* does not coincide with the One in itself, the true One to which the consequences of Parmenides' hypothesis leads. In order to fully grasp the purpose of the dialogue, to overcome the indebtedness to Eleatic *hen*-ontology, and to attain henology, it is necessary – within this metaphysical interpretation – to outline the law of

menides," 517–547; E. Gritti, *Proclo. Dialettica, Anima, Esegesi* (Milano: LED, 2008) 154–165; and S. Mesyats, "Iamblichus' Exegesis of *Parmenides*' Hypotheses and His Doctrine Of Divine Henads," in E. Afonasin, J. M. Dillon & J. Finamore (eds.), *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁹³ See Procl. in *Prm.* 630.37–633.12.

⁹⁴ See Procl. in *Prm.* 633.13–635.27.

⁹⁵ See C. Steel, "Iamblichus and the theological interpretation of the *Parmenides*," *SyllClass* 8 (1997) 15–30.

⁹⁶ See Procl. in *Prm.* 635.28–638.2.

⁹⁷ Procl. in *Prm.* 638.17–23.

Neoplatonic causality and its principles.⁹⁸ Identifying such principles helps us grasp the fact that the enquiry carried out in the dialogue concerns the truth represented by all beings, not only insofar as they all derive from the One and depend on a single Cause, but also – Proclus adds – insofar as each entity possesses a divine quality depending on the degree to which it participates of the One, seeing that God and the One coincide.⁹⁹ Such is the reading of the *Parmenides* offered by Proclus’ master Syrianus.¹⁰⁰ It is a reading which, through the character of Parmenides, reconciles Eleatic ontology with the metaphysical developments of late Platonism. It does so within a new theological framework¹⁰¹ that sees Parmenides and his school as the historical antecedent of Platonism:

Considering such to be the dialogue’s purpose, our master denied that it was about Being, or about real beings alone; he admitted that it was about all things, but insisted on adding “in so far as all things are the offspring of one cause and are dependent on this universal cause,” and indeed, if we may express our own opinion, in so far as all things are deified; for each thing, even the lowest grade of being you could mention, becomes god by participating in unity according to its rank. For if God and One are the same because there is nothing greater than God and nothing greater than One, then to be unified is the same as to be deified.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ On Neoplatonic causality, see Chlup, *Proclus*, 62–98.

⁹⁹ See Procl. in *Prm.* 641.3–12.

¹⁰⁰ See C. D’Ancona, “La doctrine des principes: Syrianus comme source textuelle et doctrinale de Proclus. 1^{ère} partie: Histoire du problème,” in Segonds (ed.), *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne*, 189–225 ; C. Luna, “La doctrine des principes: Syrianus comme source textuelle et doctrinale de Proclus. 2^e partie: Analyse des textes,” in Segonds (ed.), *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne*, 227–278; and J. Dillon, “Syrianus’s Exegesis of the Second Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*: The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe Revealed,” in Turner & Corrigan (eds.), *Plato’s Parmenides and Its Heritage*, II, 133–141.

¹⁰¹ See L.G. Westerink, “Proclus et les Présocratiques,” in J. Pépin & H.D. Saffrey (eds.), *Proclus. Lecteur et interprète des anciens* (Paris : Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1987) 105–112.

¹⁰² Procl. in *Prm.* 641.1–12.

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