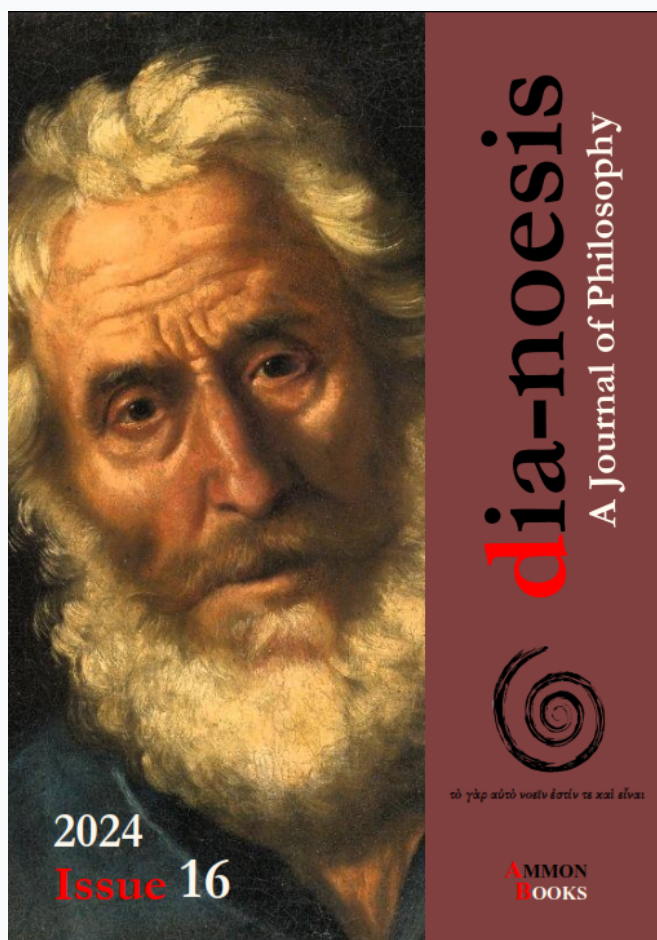


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Integrated dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides*: a comparative analysis of Proclus' and Ficino's Commentaries on *Parmenides*

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Abstract

Plato's *Parmenides* was considered as the main ontological work of the ancient philosophy and used for this reason as the summit of the philosophical curriculum of the New Platonic Academy established by the Neoplatonists after Iamblichus. Proclus' *Commentary*, based on Syrianus, serves as a key reference text for understanding of the sophisticated concepts of the dialogue. After the not fully survived commentaries of Proclus and Damascius, a great enterprise was undertaken by Georgios Pachymeres in Late Byzantium for a complete commentary and later in Renaissance by Marsilio Ficino, the founder of the revived Platonic Academy in Florence. In this article the focus is given in those passages of *Parmenides* where Ficino has given comments differentiated from the respective comments of Proclus. Lastly, some remarks are presented concerning the structure of dialectical schema of *Parmenides*, which can be considered as a great standard for an in-depth analysis of the various levels of being in ontological theories.

Keywords: Proclus, Ficino, Plato's *Parmenides*, Proclus' *Commentary* on Plato's *Parmenides*, Ficino's *Commentary* on Plato *Parmenides*, Pachymeres's *Commentary* on Plato *Parmenides*, Platonic dialectic

1. Introduction

Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus established, in Late Antiquity, a philosophical school based on Platonic teachings enriched with mystical-theurgical practices. This system came to be known in modern times as Neoplatonism. Later, Plutarch of Athens and Syrianus revived the center of Platonic studies in Athens, where they transmitted the knowledge of their predecessors. The central figure in this school was Proclus, a disciple of Plutarch and Syrianus, who offered a tightly rationalistic system, philosophically related to the polytheistic ancient tradition.

It is of interest to get a glimpse of the structure of the curriculum followed by the pupils of the School. Proclus informs us about a so-called ‘major mysteries’ course, introduced by Iamblichus, presented in two cycles: a first cycle consisting of ten dialogues of Plato, and a second cycle made up of two dialogues. The second cycle was the culminating point of the curriculum and included physics in the frame of Plato’s *Timaeus* and metaphysics in the frame of Plato’s *Parmenides*. Dillon and O’Meara argue that the

¹ In Plotinus, 2015, you can find the complete works of Plotinus; Bowe, 2003, is concerned with Plotinus’ approach to Aristotle and Aristotle’s approach to Plato, aiming to show the significance of the Platonic Metaphysical Hierarchy.

² In Porphyry, 2023, you can find the complete works of Porphyry.

³ In Iamblichus, 2021 you can find the complete works of Iamblichus; in Kupperman, 2014, the philosophy, theology and theurgy of Iamblichus are presented.

⁴ Neoplatonism is described in detail in Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, 1998; in Remes, *Neoplatonism (Ancient Philosophies)*, 2008; in Slaveva-Griffin & Remes, *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, 2014. Cf. Anna Griva – Markos Dendrinos, 2023.

⁵ In Longo, 2000, we are informed about the life and works of Syriamus.

⁶ In Pachoumi, 2024, we can see the conceptual blending of ritual actions and philosophical concepts presented by Proclus concerning Hieratic Art; in Siorvanes, 2022, we are informed about the texts of Proclus that combine Neo-Platonic philosophy and science; in Chlup, 2012, the enormous influence of Proclus on Byzantine, medieval, Renaissance and German Classical philosophy is exercised.

students were led to the discovery of the transcendent, immaterial, and divine causes of the universe through studying the philosophical science of the divine, that is, the 'theological' science or metaphysics. Therefore, metaphysics was the goal of the curriculum, reached, at a preparatory level, by a reading of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and, at a superior level, far more adequately, we may suppose, by reading Plato's *Parmenides*, the culmination of the course in Plato's dialogues and of the curriculum as a whole .

Therefore, the need for an analytical commentary on *Parmenides* was crucial, and that was the great work of Proclus, based on the oral and probably written sources of Syrianus. Proclus' surviving Commentary⁸ stops at the explanation of the conclusion of the first hypothesis (142a). Fortunately, comments and allegorical explanations of Proclus concerning the remaining hypotheses are provided in the introduction of his Commentary, as well as in Proclus' *On the Theology of Plato*⁹.

The Neoplatonists Proclus and Damascius¹⁰, whose commentaries have been partially preserved, focus on a theological-metaphysical interpretation of the Parmenidean

⁷ Dillon, John & O'Meara, Dominic J., 2014, pp.1-3.

⁸ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Books I-VII, Dillon & Morrow, Internet Archive, and also, Luna & Segonds *Proclus. Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon* (t.I: 2007, t. II: 2010, t. III: 2011, t. IV: 2013, t. V: 2014, t. VI: 2017).

⁹ Proclus Diadochus, *On the Theology of Plato*, Translated by Thomas Taylor, Internet Archive, and also, Saffrey & Westerink, *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne* (t.I: 1968, t. II: 1974, t. III: 1978, t. IV: 1981, t. V: 1987, t. VI: 1997). You can also refer to the Introduction of Thomas Taylor to *Platonic Theology* (Taylor, T., *Introduction to the Six Books of Proclus' On The Theology Of Plato*, Wikisource).

¹⁰ In Ahbel-Rappe, 2010, Damascius' *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*, the last surviving independent philosophical treatise from the Late Academy, is presented; Athanassiadi, 1999, features the Greek text of Damascius' *Philosophical History* (the story of the pagan community from the late fourth century AD), reconstructed critically from Photius' *Epitome* and Suidas' *Lexicon*; Golitsis, 2023, presents the novel perspectives of Damascius about time in respect to Plato, Aristotle and his Neoplatonist predecessors.

hypotheses, whereas Pachymeres' integrated commentary¹¹ in Late Byzantium, complementing the surviving Proclus' Commentary on the first hypothesis, is based mainly on a logical exegesis of the specific syllogisms, under the influence of Aristotelian philosophy¹².

Proclus considers that the hypotheses in the second part of *Parmenides* are nine. The number nine is also preserved by the rest of the Neoplatonists, except for Amelius, who divides the hypotheses into eight (see Proclus, *Commentary*, VI.1052.32–1053.33), and Theodore, who divides them into ten (see Proclus, *Commentary*, VI. 1057.6–1058.21). The nine hypotheses in Proclus' division are as follows¹³:

“Ἐν εἰ ἔστιν: We examine 5 hypotheses about the varied reality-existence (καθ' ὑπαρξιν) of the one (the principles of reality):

[1] If the one is, then a number of negative conclusions follow about the one: the one beyond the essence and the intelligibles.

[2] If the one is, then a number of affirmative conclusions follow about the one: the divine adornments, counterparts of being, and their affirmative characteristics.

[3] If the one is, then a number of affirmative and negative conclusions follow about the one: souls, except the divine ones belonging to the second hypothesis, as inferior to the intelligibles.

[4] If the one is, then a number of affirmative conclusions follow about the others: the others as participants in the one, i.e., the material species.

[5] If the one is, then a number of negative conclusions follow about the others: the others as not participating in the one, i.e., the matter.

“Ἐν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν: We examine 4 hypotheses, which confirm the impossibility of this case, when we think of the non-being, both as relatively non-being and as absolute non-

¹¹ Garda, T. A.; Honea, S. M.; Stinger, P. M.; Umholtz G. (edit., transl.) & Westerink, L.G. (Introd.), *George Pachymeres Commentary on Plato's Parmenides [Anonymous Sequel to Proclus' Commentary]*, 1989.

¹² Savoidakis, 2021, p. 6.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 27-8.

being. In other words, when we negate a cause, we inevitably negate all its offspring as well.

[6] If the one is not, then a number of affirmative conclusions follow about the one: the one as relatively non-being.

[7] If the one is not, then a number of negative conclusions follow about the one: the one as absolutely non-being.

[8] If the one is not, then a number of affirmative conclusions follow about the others: the others as relatively non-beings.

[9] If the one is not, then a number of negative conclusions follow about the others: the others as absolutely non-beings.

According to the Neoplatonic exponents Theodore, Plutarch, Syrianus and Proclus, hypotheses 1-5 can be used to deduce truths corresponding to distinct natures and principles of reality, while the falsehoods and paradoxes, which are produced by the assumption that the one is not within the negative hypotheses 6-9, lead us to the opposite proposition that the one is, thus essentially confirming the first affirmative hypotheses 1-5¹⁴. Therefore, 6-9 should not be assigned to specific principles, but rather they complete the dialectic, since, with the inconsistent and impossible inferences deduced, they show that we must abandon the assumption "the one is not" and accept the opposite one "the one is". According to Proclus, the purpose of *Parmenides* is to show how from the "being" of the one all beings are born, and how, if the one is not, all are eliminated and do not exist

¹⁴ "But there are four other hypotheses besides these, which by taking away the one, evince that all things must be entirely subverted, both beings and things in generation, and that no being can any longer have any subsistence; and this, in order that he may demonstrate the one to be the cause of being and preservation, that through it all things participate of the nature of being, and that each has its *hyparxis* suspended from the one. And in short, we syllogistically collect this through all beings, that if the one is, all things subsist as far as to the last hypostasis, and if it is not, no being has any subsistence. The one, therefore, is both the hypostatic and preservative cause of all things; which *Parmenides* also himself collects at the end of the dialogue" (Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, Ch.XII).

in any way. The interpretation of Proclus regarding the negative hypotheses is not accepted fully by Damascius who insists on a pragmatic interpretation of hypotheses 6 and 8, unlike the seventh and ninth, which lead indeed to incompatibilities (Damascius. *Commentaire du Parménide de Platon*, t.IV, p. 81.7-19, 83.12-84.5, 122.6-123.8)¹⁵.

After Damascius and Pachymeres, Marsilio Ficino¹⁶, the founder of the revived Platonic Academy in Florence, was the first in the Renaissance to attempt to comment on and decipher the densely meaningful text of Plato's *Parmenides*. Ficino, convinced of the central importance of *Parmenides* in Plato's works, was determined to explore it in depth. He was primarily based on the Proclus' *Commentary* both in the medieval translation of William of Moerbeke and in the Greek original text. Due to the lack of the full work of Proclus's comments, he had to rely on his own interpretation, supported by what additional clues he could draw from Proclus' *Platonic Theology*. Ficino's full-length commentary was begun in 1492 and completed by 1494, but it was first published in 1496.

2. Ficino vs Proclus: convergent and divergent views in their Commentaries on Plato's *Parmenides*

Ficino retained Proclus' division of Parmenidean hypotheses into nine sections (five affirmative and four negative hypotheses) as well as his orientation regarding the

¹⁵ Westerink, L.G. (texte établi), Combès, J. (introd., trad., annoté), Segonds, A. Ph. (collaboration), *Damascius. Commentaire du Parménide de Platon*, t.I-II: 1997, t.III: 2002, t.IV: 2003, in Savoidakis, 2021, pp.28-9.

¹⁶ Voss, 2006, provides a substantial historical and philosophical context for Marsilio Ficino and explains his astrology in relation to his Christian Platonic convictions; Cassirer, et al, 1954, present three major currents of thought dominant in the earlier Italian Renaissance: classical humanism (Petrarch and Valla), Platonism (Ficino and Pico), and Aristotelianism (Pomponazzi); Walker, 2002, takes readers through the magical concerns of some of the greatest thinkers of the Renaissance, from Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples to Jean Bodin, Francis Bacon, and Tommaso Campanella.

inconsistency of the results of the negative hypotheses produced by the assumption that "the one is not", leading to its refutation. However, there are some notable differences, some major and others minor, in Ficino's interpretation compared to Proclus' consideration, as discussed below.

An important point of differentiation between Ficino and the ancient commentators, especially Syrianus and Proclus, is Ficino's unwillingness to follow their detailed correspondence of the characteristics described in *Parmenides* to specific orders of gods. Syrianus and Proclus argue that each characteristic denied of the one (in the first hypothesis) or asserted of it (in the second hypothesis), such as whole, part, shape, corresponds to a distinct class of gods (intelligible, intellectual, ultra-cosmic and so on). In this way, by denying these characteristics of the one, the first hypothesis indicates that the first principle transcends all the divine orders and their attributes; on the other hand, by asserting them of the one being, the second hypothesis presents the whole hierarchy of the gods and the souls that are created by the one and compose the universe¹⁷. Ficino admits that the way of correspondence of the various divine orders to certain features observed by Proclus in the frame of the second hypothesis is, in fact, extremely difficult to observe. In the same context, Ficino seems reluctant to accept another strange Proclean correspondence of each conclusion to a single order of gods. Moreover, Ficino implies that Proclus places the divine minds and the goddess soul in the frame of the second hypothesis and the soul that is divine but not a goddess in the frame of the third hypothesis. We must also underline Ficino's irony in the same passage about the existence of such a goddess. Furthermore, such a distinction between a goddess soul and the divine souls does not exactly correspond with what Proclus really says: Proclus establishes a distinction between the whole divine soul, described in the second hypothesis by the presence of time, and the souls that derive from the whole soul, described in the third hypothesis¹⁸ (Ficino, LII.3). In another related passage,

¹⁷ Ficino, 2012, p.351, note 13.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.352, note 16.

Ficino argues that the third hypothesis does not concern only particular souls, but all the souls that are utterly divine and he elucidates that by 'divine' he does not mean a soul that is a goddess but the soul that possesses a certain likeness with the gods. Additionally, Ficino notes that the various opinions presented in his Commentary are not necessarily adopted by him. In this context, Ficino explicitly rejects what he understands to be Proclus' distinction between the goddess soul and the divine souls; but we must bear in mind that possibly here Ficino misunderstands Proclus, since what Proclus exactly says is that the divine soul is described in the second hypothesis, while the souls that derive from the divine soul are discussed in the third hypothesis¹⁹ (Ficino, XCVI.1).

Elsewhere, Ficino states that Syrianus and Proclus assign each predicate, such as 'multitude', 'part', 'whole', 'straight', 'spherical', 'younger' and 'older', 'similitude' and 'dissimilitude', to a different divinity, but Ficino remarks that this contrivance seems more poetic than philosophical (Ficino, LVI.3). He also states, coming closer to the modern perspective, that it is extremely difficult for him to follow this reasoning of his predecessors, considering it rather arbitrary or exaggerated (Ficino, LII.3). However, he accepts that different predicates do indeed correspond to different qualitative levels of the world of intelligibles, associating identity, attitude, similarity, and equality with higher intelligibles, while their opposites are associated to lower ones. He further emphasizes that he does not agree with the over-matching of each predicate with a particular deity, as Proclus does, who goes so far as to match the temporal predicates 'is, becomes, was, became, will be, will become, and has been done' with eight gods (Ficino, LXXXX.3). Generally, Ficino tries to analyze the propositions and conclusions of the Parmenidean discourse, following the Socratic/ Platonic dialectic and the principles of formal logic more rigidly than the late Neoplatonists, who seem to take some matters for granted, considering them not in need of proof, and they often deviate onto paths of specialized

¹⁹ Ibid, p.370, note 231.

ontological descriptions, moving away from the original subject.

Let see now the subtle differences in the presentation of hypercosmic and cosmic gods between Ficino and Proclus. Ficino offers a simpler image of these hierarchies: (a) the hypercosmic gods are divided into those closer to the intelligible world, others as close as possible to the sensible world and others in the middle. These are the gods who in Syrianus and Proclus are called intelligible, intellectual, both intelligible and intellectual respectively, but Ficino prefers to call them simply superior, inferior and intermediary gods (b) the cosmic gods are also divided into superior (souls of the greater spheres), intermediary (souls of the stars) and inferior gods (the indivisible divinities contained within the spheres). He leaves aside the more detailed distinctions established by Syrianus and Proclus concerning the hierarchies between the hypercosmic and cosmic gods (ruling and liberating gods), the four classes of cosmic gods mentioned in Proclus' *Platonic Theology* 6, as well as the cosmic gods, universal souls and 'higher beings' (angels, demons and heroes) mentioned in Proclus' *Commentary on Parmenides* (VII.1201.22-1239.21)²⁰ (Ficino, XCIV.2). Ficino adds that it is correct to connect the propositions of the second hypothesis with divine ideas, i.e., gods, but one should not consider that any separate class of gods is hidden in each proposition of the text (Ficino, XCIV.4).

The disciples of Syrianus take the fact that the propositions of the *Parmenides* vary in their degree of extension as an opportunity to introduce similar degrees of gods. In this context, they attribute the terms 'whole' and 'continuous multitude' to the intelligible substance that is superior, while 'separate multitude' is attributed to the intellectual substance that is inferior. Ficino accepts that the first two terms refer more to the higher gods and the third to the lower ones, but generally, all these terms refer to both orders of gods. He also contends that we cannot distinguish the intelligible order from the intellectual in substance, but only according to reason, based possibly on Plotinus (Ficino, XCV.2).

²⁰ Ibid, p.338, note 207.

There is a numerical efficacy in the divine mind, and each number that proceeds from it is destined for a particular nature. The Magi (Babylonian astronomers), who observed the solar and lunar numbers and applied them to various things, connected the solar and lunar qualities through the numbers to these things, in the context of a sympathy that harmonizes everything. Proclus writes that the ancient priests used to employ certain numbers, which possessed an ineffable power, in order to accomplish the most important operations of sacred ceremonies. At this point, however, Ficino does not take a position, as magical numbers and astrological effects were, in his time, a dangerous issue to mention. But then, he turns to safer and more acceptable figures, such as Plato and Pythagoras. Plato holds that the cycles of souls and political communities are related to certain numbers, while the universal circular motion of the world is contained in a perfect number (*Rep.*, 8.546b-e). Also, Pythagoras defines two principles of numbers: the paternal and the maternal; that is, the unity and the dyad, the limit and the infinite, the first number being the number three, as a mixture of limit and infinite. The unity relates to the absolute one, the dyad to essence, and the trinity to the first being and intelligible. Thus, all things are organized through numbers: by virtue of even numbers, the processions, divisions and separable compositions; by virtue of odd numbers, the simpler, superior and inseparable powers and the gatherings into unity (Ficino, XCV.5).

In the frame of the 6th hypothesis, Parmenides places 'difference' ('ἐτερότης') as the condition by which the one is distinguished from the others, then he passes from the relation 'ἐτέρων' (different things) to the relation 'ἐτεροίων' (nearly different things), then to the relation 'ἄλλοίων' (nearly other things) and then to the relation 'ἀνομοίων' (unlike things). In this way, he proves that the one is unlike the others, while the one is obviously like itself. Ficino does not follow the same line of reasoning for proving unlikeness. He is based on the concept of motion. The state of the soul with regard to motion is quite different from the state of all other entities. It is different from beings at rest, because the

soul moves, but it is also different from the other beings in motion, because they are moved by some other factor, while the soul is moved by itself. So, we can say that the soul (one) is unlike the others because of the unlikeness concerning its motion. On the other hand, it is in accordance with, and like, itself; otherwise it would lack its very own property. Ficino continues with the question of inequality and equality, again based on the mobility of the soul. He, therefore, proves the inequality between the soul (one) and the others based on the fact that the soul's mobility is not equal, that is it does not come about by virtue of true equality, which is completely at rest and eternal. The soul (one) is not equal to the others that are eternal substances, which are truly considered equal, given that they are always equally disposed. Besides, the soul (one) is not equal to the other temporal substances, since by nature it is far superior to them. Therefore, since it is not equal to the others, it is said to be greater or smaller. The greater and the smaller, however, are opposed, and a mean is required, that is, an equality. This equality is not a true and permanent one, but it is of a flowing kind, comparable to some flux or part of flux alike. Therefore, inequality, equality, smallness, greatness, likeness, unlikeness and otherness pertain to the one at the level of the soul, which is non-being in the sense that it is flowing (Ficino, CVI.1-2).

In the last paragraph of his comments on the 7th hypothesis, Ficino repeats his position on the refutation of the antecedent propositions in the negative hypotheses, as it follows from the falsity of the contradictory conclusions. Ficino even goes so far as to say that not only in the last four negative hypotheses, but also in the five affirmative hypotheses, a number of contradictory propositions appear. Because of this, he tries to defend Parmenides, offering interpretations through which he removes the suspicion of contradiction (Ficino, CVIII. 4). With such a position, in my opinion, Ficino deviates considerably from the traditional line of the Neoplatonists, who consider the positive hypotheses to be clearly consistent and coherent, in contrast to the negative

ones, where a false antecedent is posited, the falsity of which is demonstrated through arriving at false conclusions.

3. The dialectical schema in *Parmenides*: a challenge for ontological studies of scholars across various periods

Proclus contends that the dialogue *Parmenides* stands as the model for the integrated Platonic dialectic. The accurate full model is suggested by Proclus as a set of 24 dialectical modes produced through the combination of three distinct categories, and it is applied analytically in the case of the one²¹:

1st category (2 possible cases). The antecedent of the hypothesis concerning a thing is set to be or not to be: i) if the one is, ii) if the one is not.

2nd category (3 possible cases). Affirmative or negative character of an inference: i) affirmative, ii) negative, iii) affirmative and negative together (affirmative under one view and negative under another one).

3rd category (4 possible cases). The thing under consideration is examined in relation to both itself and the others, and the others in relation to both themselves and the thing: i) the one in relation to itself, ii) the one in relation to the others, iii) the others in relation to themselves, iv) the others in relation to the one.

An exhaustive combination of the above cases gives $2 \times 3 \times 4 = 24$ distinct reasonings, which are presented in the form of the following 4 sextets:

1st sextet

[1] If the one is, then what is valid for the relation of the one to itself can be concluded.

[2] If the one is, then what is not valid for the relation of the one to itself can be concluded.

[3] If the one is, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the one to itself can be concluded.

[4] If the one is, then what is valid for the relation of the one to the others can be concluded.

²¹ Savoidakis, 2021, pp.41-2.

[5] If the one is, then what is not valid for the relation of the one to the others can be concluded.

[6] If the one is, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the one to the others can be concluded.

2nd sextet

[1] If the one is, then what is valid for the relation of the others to themselves can be concluded.

[2] If the one is, then what is not valid for the relation of the others to themselves can be concluded.

[3] If the one is, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the others to themselves can be concluded.

[4] If the one is, then what is valid for the relation of the others to the one can be concluded.

[5] If the one is, then what is not valid for the relation of the others to the one can be concluded.

[6] If the one is, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the others to the one can be concluded.

3rd sextet

[1] If the one is not, then what is valid for the relation of the one to itself can be concluded.

[2] If the one is not, then what is not valid for the relation of the one to itself can be concluded.

[3] If the one is not, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the one to itself can be concluded.

[4] If the one is not, then what is valid for the relation of the one to the others can be concluded.

[5] If the one is not, then what is not valid for the relation of the one to the others can be concluded.

[6] If the one is not, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the one to the others can be concluded.

4th sextet

[1] If the one is not, then what is valid for the relation of the others to themselves can be concluded.

[2] If the one is not, then what is not valid for the relation of the others to themselves can be concluded.

[3] If the one is not, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the others to themselves can be concluded.

[4] If the one is not, then what is valid for the relation of the others to the one can be concluded.

[5] If the one is not, then what is not valid for the relation of the others to the one can be concluded.

[6] If the one is not, then what is valid and is not valid for the relation of the others to the one can be concluded.

According to Proclus (*Commentary*, V.1006.24-26), the investigation of all the above 24 reasonings leads to the purpose of the whole dialectical method, that is to find the nature of the thing being examined (in the above case: the one) and how many and what are the properties it provides (as a cause) to itself and to the other things. The aforementioned 4 sextets are applied in the frame of the 9 Parmenidean hypotheses as follows (Proclus, *Commentary*, V.1000.32-1003.2):

1st sextet in hypotheses 1-3; 2nd sextet in hypotheses 4-5; 3rd sextet in hypotheses 6-7; 4th sextet in hypotheses 8-9.

Proclus explains the integrated model of the 24 reasonings in 4 sextets in detail by applying it to the following examples²²:

- if the soul is / if the soul is not → what happens to the soul in relation to itself and to the bodies and what happens to the bodies in relation to themselves and to the soul (Proclus, *Commentary*, V.1004.11-1006.26).

- if the many are / if the many are not → what happens to the many in relation to themselves and to the one, and what happens to the one in relation to itself and to the many (Proclus, *Commentary*, V.1008.17-37).

- if the similar is / if the similar is not → what happens to the similar in relation to itself and to the others (the sensibles), and what happens to the others in relation to themselves and to the similar.

- if the dissimilar is / if the dissimilar is not → what happens to the dissimilar in relation to itself and to the others (the sensibles), and what happens to the others in relation to themselves and to the dissimilar (Proclus, *Commentary*, V.1009.19-1010.25).

- if the motion is (as self-motion) / if the motion is not → what happens to the motion in relation to itself and to the

²² Ibid. p.43.

others, and what happens to the others in relation to themselves and to the motion.

- if the rest is (as self-rest) / if the rest is not → what happens to the rest in relation to itself and to the others, and what happens to the others in relation to themselves and to the rest (Proclus, *Commentary*, V.1010.29-1011.32).

Contemporary historians of philosophy take a different approach to the structure of the Parmenidean dialectical schema.

Taylor²³, Cornford²⁴, Ryle²⁵ and Allen²⁶ consider that the number of hypotheses is eight, a number followed also in contemporary studies²⁷.

The formal arrangement of the hypotheses according to Taylor²⁸ is as follows:

[I] If the real is one, nothing whatever can be asserted of it (137c-142a).

[II] If the real is one, everything can be asserted of it (142b-157c).

[III] If the real is one, everything can be asserted of "things other than the one" (157b-159b).

[IV] If the real is one nothing can be asserted of "things other than the one" (159b-160b).

[V] If the one is unreal, everything can be asserted of it (160b-163b).

[VI] If the one is unreal, nothing at all can be asserted of it (163b-164b).

[VII] If the one is unreal, everything can be asserted about "things other than the one" (164b-165e)

[VIII] If the one is unreal, nothing can be asserted about anything (165e-166c).

Allen²⁹ has a different viewpoint:

²³ Taylor, A.E., *Plato, the man and his work*, Internet Archive.

²⁴ Conford, F.M., *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides*, 1951.

²⁵ Ryle, G., "Plato's 'Parmenides' ", 1971, and also, Ryle, G., "Review of F.M.Cornford, 'Plato and Parmenides' ", 1971.

²⁶ Allen, R.E., *Plato's Parmenides*, 1997.

²⁷ Dendrinos & Griva, 2021.

²⁸ Taylor, A.E., Internet Archive, p.361.

²⁹ Allen, 1997, pp.213-4.

Hypothesis I: if Unity is, what follows for Unity (137c-157b).

Hypothesis II: if Unity is, what follows for the others (157b-160b).

Hypothesis III: if Unity is not, what follows for Unity (160b-164b).

Hypothesis IV: if Unity is not, what follows for the others (164b-166c).

Thus, Allen introduces four main divisions in the exercise, with a number of deductions corresponding to each of them. The assumption that Unity is yields three deductions in respect to Unity (Hypothesis I) and two deductions in respect to the others (Hypothesis II); the assumption that Unity is not yields two deductions in respect to Unity (Hypothesis III) and two deductions in respect to the others (Hypothesis IV). The branches of the four main hypotheses are given below:

I.1 (137c-142b): εἰ ἔν ἐστιν.

I.2 (142b-155e): ἔν εἰ ἔστιν, 142b 3,5, εἰ ἔν ἐστιν 142c3, proceeding again from the beginning.

I.3 (155e-157b): τὸ ἔν εἰ ἔστιν, 155e4, proceeding for the third time.

III.1 (160b-163b): εἰ μὴ ἔστι τὸ ἔν, 160b5, εἰ ἔν μὴ ἔστιν, 160b7, ἔν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν, 160d3.

III.2 (163b-164b): ἔν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν, 163c1, returning once more to the beginning.

IV.1 (164b-165e): ἔν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν, 164b5, starting again.

IV.2 (165e-166c): ἔν εἰ μὴ ἔστιν, 165e2-3, returning once more to the beginning.

We can see from the above the basic difference in the approach taken by the ancient and the Renaissance commentators versus that taken by the contemporary historians of philosophy. The former approach places special weight on ontology and the connection with the Greek metaphysical tradition, while the latter focuses on consistency and dialectical power.

Few modern interpreters give particular weight to the Neoplatonic perspective, while the analytical commentary of Marsilio Ficino, a learned Platonist with significant access to

ancient texts and manuscripts, has been completely ignored. This approach is unjustified if one wants to make a reliable interpretation of the platonic works as close as possible to the Platonic spirit. Unfortunately, the truth that may be hidden in the comments of scholars who were the natural continuation of Platonism –and thus most likely related to both an oral tradition that is now lost and complementary sources that have not survived– has not been sufficiently exploited. The attitude of faith and respect of the Neoplatonists toward Platonic doctrines remains, despite some differences in analysis, in the texts of Ficino, who offered us many inspirations concerning the ontological and dialectical elements of *Parmenides*. Ficino also constitutes a bridge between the past and modern times, as he relies heavily on the view of the Neoplatonists but, at the same time, considers some of their individual positions to be exaggerated or overly sophisticated³⁰.

Some contemporary commentators³¹ follow a middle ground, based on the ancient tradition, while introducing a number of key innovative interpretations. Their interpretative framework is that *Parmenides* is an excellent piece of ontology, perhaps the most important and valuable ontological text we have at our disposal from ancient Greek tradition. *Parmenides* is indeed a marvelous structure that explores the relationship of unity (the nature of the one) with being, time and the remaining primary properties (limit-infinite, rest-motion, same-different, similar-dissimilar, etc.), arriving at conclusions that, despite their seeming contradiction, are characterized by unique beauty and symmetry, as always befits the true. We must take into account that once the pair of concepts “the one and the others” is defined, the possibility and consistency of their distinction become difficult to defend, since the one is supposed to be something that encompasses everything, without leaving anything outside its domain. This impossibility is overcome only if we abandon the conception of the one as a unique entity covering anything that is

³⁰ Dendrinis & Griva, 2021, pp. 685-6.

³¹ Dendrinis & Griva, 2021.

supposed to exist and consider it a certain being, characterized by unity and delimited by other beings. Furthermore, we are obliged to attribute a different meaning to each of the ‘ones’ mentioned in each hypothesis, an approach also followed by the Neoplatonists and Ficino³².

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³² Ibid, 2021, pp. 686-7.

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