DIALECTIC IN PLATO’S PARMENIDES

by

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Dialectic in Plato’s *Parmenides*

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by

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Bachelor of Arts
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Melody, Max, and Mickey.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my family and friends who have support me as I have devoted my time to philosophy. Thanks to my past and present teachers both in and outside of the classroom.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Dialectic, Dialogue and Philosophy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1. The Problem of Dialectic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§2. Interpretation of Philosophical Dialogues</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§3. Dialectic in the <em>Parmenides</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: What is meant by ‘Dialectic’ in the <em>Parmenides</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1. Dramatic Setting</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§2. The First Occurrence of the Term</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§3. The Second Occurrence of the Term</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§4. The <em>Parmenides</em> and Plato’s ‘Technical’ Sense of Dialectic</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: What is Said about ‘Dialectic’ in the <em>Parmenides</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1. Dialectic and Idle Talk</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§2. The Suitability of Carrying out Dialectical Discussion in Public</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§3. Dialectical Exercise and Knowledge of Ideas</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§4. Review of What is Said about Dialectic</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: How Dialectic is Portrayed in the <em>Parmenides</em>: Zeno and Socrates</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1. Three Main Discussions</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§2. Zeno’s Treatise: The Hypothesis of ‘The Many’</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§3. Zeno’s Argumentative Strategy</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§4. The First Hypothesis of the First Argument of Zeno’s Treatise</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§5. Philosophical Cross-Examination</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§7. The Portrayal of Dialectic in the Conversation between Zeno and Socrates</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: How Dialectic is Portrayed in the <em>Parmenides</em>: Socrates and Parmenides</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1. Socrates’ Hypothesis of Ideas</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§2. Problems with Participation</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§3. The Importance of Ideas</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§4. The Portrayal of Dialectic in the First Two Discussions</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5. How Dialectic is Portrayed in the <em>Parmenides</em>: The Dialectical Exercise</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1. Synopsis of the Exercise</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§2. Examination of the <em>To Hen</em> Hypothesis</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§3. An Uncritical Interlocutor</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§4. Overview of the Conclusions</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Modern Interpretations</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1. Modern Interpretations of Plato’s <em>Dialectic</em></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§2. “Pedagogical Provocation” ..................................................................................... 61
§3. The Pros Distinction ............................................................................................. 66
§4. The Co-Existence of Opposites .......................................................................... 72
§5. Several ‘Ones’ ..................................................................................................... 76
§6. The Limits of Logos ............................................................................................. 80
§7. Philosophical Knowledge and Dialectic ............................................................. 82
Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 84
References .................................................................................................................. 91
ABSTRACT

DIALECTIC IN PLATO’S PARMENIDES

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George Mason University, 2013
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This study will explore the role of dialectic in the dramatic portrayal of philosophy presented in Plato’s dialogue the Parmenides. Dialectic, an important concept in many of Plato’s dialogues, is not clearly defined and it is difficult to determine exactly what Plato means when he uses the term. Understanding what “dialectic” means in the Parmenides is therefore important for an understanding of the philosophical views expressed in that dialogue. In the Parmenides, discussion of dialectic arises in connection with philosophical knowledge which, for Plato’s character Socrates in that and many dialogues, has to do with eide, ideai (ideas). Due to the connection we find between knowledge of ideas and dialectic, in this study we will try to see how and if dialectic can lead to knowledge of ideas and what role it plays in the conception of philosophy portrayed in the Parmenides.
INTRODUCTION: DIALECTIC, DIALOGUE AND PHILOSOPHY

This study will examine the significance and portrayal of dialectic in Plato’s *Parmenides*. While dialectic is an important concept in many of Plato’s dialogues, it is not clear exactly what Plato (through the voices of his characters) means by the term. The clarification of the activity of dialectic is therefore important for an understanding of the philosophical views expressed in Plato’s dialogues. In the *Parmenides* discussion of dialectic arises in connection with philosophical knowledge which, for Plato’s character Socrates in that and many dialogues, has to do with *eide, ideai* (ideas). This study will explore how the role of dialectic in the dramatic portrayal of philosophy presented in the *Parmenides*. We will try to see how and if dialectic can lead to knowledge of ideas and how the dialectician might make practical use of this knowledge. The following four general questions will guide the study: 1) What is meant by *to dialegesthai* (dialectic) and its cognates in the dialogue? 2) What do the interlocutors say about dialectic in the dialogue, i.e., what is it said to do and how is it said to benefit the dialectician? 3) How is dialectic portrayed in the dialogue and does this portrayal match what is meant (1) and said (2) about dialectic?; 4) Is dialectic synonymous with philosophy or the search for and acquisition of truth in this dialogue, is dialectic alone what is needed to have knowledge of ideas, or is there another quality or ability that the philosopher has which is needed to obtain this knowledge? The bulk of this paper will be an attempt to answer these questions through a close reading of the *Parmenides*. A review of modern
interpretations of the *Parmenides* will also help elucidate some of the more complex aspects of the conception of dialectic in the dialogue.

§1. The Problem of Dialectic

In Plato’s works philosophical discussions are often described as being ‘dialectical’ and philosophers called ‘dialecticians.’ However, the ancient Greek word *dialegesthai* and related terms have a variety of connotations. Before, during and after Plato’s day the meaning of the term had already begun to evolve. But Plato’s adoption and incorporation of *dialegesthai* as part of his technical philosophical vocabulary is one of the chief reasons that various versions of ‘dialectic’ can be found throughout the history of philosophy. Hence the importance of understanding what *Plato* meant when describing an activity as ‘dialectic.’ In the ancient Greek language *dialegesthai* primarily meant ‘to discuss,’ ‘to converse,’ or simply ‘to talk with/to.’ But, as far back as Homer, Emile Janssens notes, “the verb… [also] signified something like ‘to converse with oneself’ or ‘to deliberate.’”¹ Thus, *dialegesthai* carried at least two senses before Plato: one sense had to do with interpersonal discussion, the other with ‘deliberation’ or critical thinking for which ‘conversing with oneself’ was used metaphorically. With Plato the concept of ‘dialectic’ took on an additional meaning pertaining to philosophical activity. In the *Parmenides*, a dialogue which deals both with 1) how one might ‘exercise’ one’s cognitive faculties and 2) the nature of philosophical knowledge, ‘dialectic’ is used to describe the activity of asking and answering questions dealing in some way with the

manner in which things exist. It would appear that ‘philosophy’ and ‘dialectic’ are near synonyms in the dialogue but, considering the fact that none of Plato’s characters ever specifically say that dialectic is the same thing as philosophy, we must try to see whether there is something other than being a master of dialectic needed to discover philosophical truth.

Herman Sinaiko remarks that “dialectic… [is used by Socrates (Plato)]… in a semitechnical sense to refer to the unique activity characteristic of true philosophers,” however, he adds, “although the significance of dialectic for Plato is hardly debatable, there are almost as many differing interpretations of the precise meaning of dialectic as there are writers on Plato.” Sinaiko attributes the variety of interpretations to the “several peculiarities of the way Plato treats the term in his works.” We will limit our study to ‘dialectic’ in the Parmenides but, as will be seen, the many interpretations of the dialogue also produce ‘many differing interpretations’ of dialectic. We should note an additional difficulty encountered in the interpretation of dialectic in Plato: Hugh Benson points out that “to dialegesthai… can sometimes carry a technical sense” as well as a non-technical sense in Plato and, “it is often difficult to determine when the technical sense is being employed.” As discussed above, dialegesthai already had a variety of meanings and, depending on the context in which it was used, could be translated a number of ways equally well. So an interpretation of the meaning of dialectic in one of Plato’s dialogues

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3 Ibid.
must also discriminate between uses of the philosophical and the ordinary sense of the word.

Though passages in Plato’s work which discuss dialectic specifically are short and do not provide complete accounts of *dialegesthai*, we should not assume that Plato wanted the meaning of dialectic to be “shrouded in mystery”\(^5\) or that he was being purposely obscure. As those who first heard or read Plato’s works would have likely been more familiar with Plato’s terminology, way of thinking, and his conception of proper philosophical discussion,\(^6\) it may not have been necessary for Plato to have his characters spend time discussing topics already familiar to the audience. Had Plato known that two and a half millennia later his works would be read around the world, he might have been motivated to provide more detail. The aim of this paper is to attempt to elicit more details about Plato’s conception of dialectic by a close examination of the *Parmenides*.

§2. Interpretation of Philosophical Dialogues

Unlike the majority of philosophers before and since, Plato chose the dialogue as his primary medium to convey philosophical thought in writing. There are over two dozen of Plato’s works that have been preserved over the past two and a half millennia and scholars have several strategies with which they hope to better understand Plato’s thought. Some have looked for meaning in the ordering and arrangement of the dialogues. Plato did not provide a chronology of his writings nor did he specify an order

in which the dialogues are supposed to be read however throughout the millennia scholars and commentators have ordered, grouped together, and arranged the dialogues in many ways. Amongst those who try to arrange the dialogues chronologically, the _Parmenides_ is generally considered a ‘middle’ or ‘middle-late’ dialogue of Plato’s. That is, some scholars believe that this dialogue was written by Plato toward the middle or end of his writing career.\(^7\) Depending on at what point in Plato’s life a given dialogue was written, these scholars believe, we should expect different views espoused about topics which arise in writings from all ‘periods’ of Plato’s life. According to ‘Developmentalist’ and other ‘schools’ of Platonic interpretation, certain important attributes of Plato’s thought changed over time and the dialogues reflect these changes.\(^8\) Julius Stenzel argues that Socrates’ presence or lack thereof in a given dialogue is a reflection of the subject matter. Dialogues that focus on moral issues feature Socrates as the main interlocutor and these, he finds, are mostly ‘early’ dialogues, but, “next” Plato wrote “a series of intensively dialectical writings – the _Parmenides, Sophist, Statesman_ – in which Plato employs a new procedure of synthesis and division.”\(^9\) According to the Developmentalist view, being a middle dialogue, the _Parmenides_ reflects Plato’s distancing himself from his earlier thought in general (not just a change in subject matter), specifically, the _Parmenides_ is thought to represent Plato’s critique and modification of the ‘theory of ideas’ found in his ‘early’ dialogues. Both Stenzel’s and the Developmentalist’s

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\(^{8}\) An overview of the numerous approaches to the interpretation of Plato's work can be found in the introduction to Gonzalez's _Dialogue and Dialectic_. Francisco Gonzalez, _Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry_ (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1998), 3 ff.

interpretations make use of evidence external to the Parmenides dialogue itself. However, the contentious issue of the chronological order of the dialogues is not our concern here, nor is speculation about why Plato chose to include or exclude the character Socrates from this or that discussion. Following Griswold, this study will take “the individual dialogues” as “the primary unit of interpretation.” While the arrangement, ‘historical’ and ‘fictive’ chronology, and connection between various dialogues certainly merit exploration, one first needs a solid interpretation of the individual dialogues.

Since Plato never makes direct statements in his own voice in the dialogues, what are we entitled to say about his views? And why should we ascribe the philosophical views presented in the dialogues to Plato if he never appears as an interlocutor? Plato is only said to be present in one work, the Apology, but there he does not speak. In the Phaedo, Plato makes sure that his characters provide an explanation for his not being with Socrates on the day of his execution and he thereby emphasizes the distance between himself, as author, and his works. In other words, Plato’s indirect expression of philosophical views forces his readers to confront the problem of the separation of his philosophical beliefs from those of the characters in his dialogues. Herman Sinaiko notes that “It is the Platonic character Socrates, not Plato himself, who defines justice as minding one’s own business in Book IV of the Republic.” Similarly, it is the Platonic

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11 ‘Historical’ chronology refers to the order in which Plato wrote the dialogues, ‘fictive’ chronology refers to the dramatic dates in which the dialogues are set.

12 Sinaiko, Love, Knowledge, and Discourse, 4.
Socrates, Parmenides, and Zeno who appear in the *Parmenides.*\(^{13}\) While these characters are based on men who actually lived and did philosophy, it is doubtful that Plato would have had such a detailed account of the portrayed conversation even if it was an actual historical event. It is likely that Plato’s own philosophical views are present in the dialogues, however, we cannot rule out the possibility of Plato’s characters espousing the views of other philosophers and since he did not write down any ‘doctrine’ or theory in treatise form, it is difficult to find ‘Plato’s mouthpiece.’ But does it matter whether a young Socrates actually met Parmenides and Zeno and discussed ideas and dialectic? It seems more likely that, rather than committing actual conversations to writing, Plato chose his characters and settings carefully in order to better convey the primary aim of the dialogue. In the following chapters we will see how the choice of interlocutors and the dramatic setting contribute to our interpretation.

§3. Dialectic in the *Parmenides*

The details of what dialectic is and how it works in the *Parmenides* are by no means clear. Sinaiko writes “Plato seems to have kept the activity of dialectic rather carefully shrouded in mystery throughout his writing,” adding, “Socrates and the other leaders of discussions always speak of dialectic with the greatest seriousness and respect.”\(^{14}\) As we will see, dialectic for Plato retains its general meaning of conversation however, in the dialogue there is an emphasis on dialectical exercise and the importance of being an experienced dialectician if one is to find philosophical truth. The accolades

\(^{13}\) Unless otherwise noted, references will be made to the characters in Plato’s dialogues rather than historical figures.

Plato gives to dialectic indicate that his technical use of the word refers to something more than mere ‘talk.’ A young Socrates is told that his “impulse toward dialectic is noble and divine,”\textsuperscript{15} but, Parmenides adds, he is still young and ought to exercise his cognitive faculties in order to hone his capacity for philosophical discovery. For, “otherwise the truth will escape [him].”\textsuperscript{16} The transition from ‘impulse toward dialectic’ to being able to find truth strongly suggests that dialectic is conceived as playing an important role in the obtainment of philosophical knowledge. The discussion of dialectic in the \textit{Parmenides} arises toward the end of Parmenides’ criticism of a young Socrates’\textsuperscript{17} conception of ‘ideas.’ The criticism brings to light the difficulties of describing certain characteristics of ideas and their relation to ‘things’ that we perceive empirically, i.e., the relationship of ‘participation.’ Parmenides warns that, if one does not believe the ideas to be real, the foundations of both \textit{dialegesthai} and \textit{philosophia} are put in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{18} We thus see the importance of ideas for dialectic and philosophy. Additionally, we learn that ideas (or at least the belief or acceptance of a ‘theory’ of ideas) are in some way prior to dialectic and philosophy because according to Parmenides, without the former, the power of the latter would be destroyed.

While non-doctrinal readings of Plato find that in no dialogue is there ever a sufficiently detailed ‘theory of ideas,’ in the \textit{Parmenides} the characters speak as if Socrates \textit{had} held certain explanatory hypotheses regarding the relation between the

\textsuperscript{15} Plato, “Parmenides,” in \textit{Cratylus; Parmenides; Greater Hippias; Lesser Hippias}, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Harvard University Press, 1970), 135d.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} In this paper, unless otherwise noted, the ‘young’ Socrates will always refer to the son of Sophroniscus and the husband of Xanthippe, not the ‘young Socrates’ who appears in the \textit{Sophist} or the \textit{Statesman}.

\textsuperscript{18} Plato, “Parmenides,” 135c.
many particular things we encounter empirically and the unchanging realities that somehow cause these many transient things to have certain characteristics, i.e. ideas. In other words, Socrates seems to hold a rudimentary ‘theory of ideas’ that in a dense passage of decent length is scrutinized to the point of aporia. With this scrutinization, it becomes clear that views once firmly held would have to be re-examined. The damaging critique of the conception of ideas put forth by Socrates supports the view that Plato found the theory inadequate. But we will see how Socrates’ inability to articulate and clearly explain certain aspects of the theory contribute to the aporia. Just because the inexperienced, young Socrates cannot give satisfactory answers to Parmenides’ questions, we are not justified to reject the theory for that reason alone.

Despite his bringing Socrates to a state of confusion about ideas, Parmenides remarks that “if anyone, with his mind fixed on all [the criticisms of ideas raised in his discussion with Socrates], denies the existence of ideas of things, and does not assume an idea under which each individual thing is classed, he will be quite at a loss, since he denies that the idea of each thing is always the same, and in this way he will utterly destroy the power of carrying on discussion [dialegesthai dunamin],” he then asks Socrates, “what will become of philosophy? To what can you turn, if these things are unknown?” Thus Parmenides and Socrates both presuppose a connection between ideas that are “always the same,” truth, dialectic and philosophy. We will examine these issues in more detail later, for now, we should note that the discussion of ideas and participation ends in aporia but, rather than counting this as a reason to reject the theory, the

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19 Ibid., 135b – c.
importance of ideas is emphasized. The _Parmenides_ illustrates the difficulties of expressing philosophical knowledge in discussion while at the same time Parmenides says that this knowledge is necessary for discussion (dialectic) itself, as well as for thinking and philosophy. But philosophy in the dialogue seems to require another skill besides mere conversation. In the following chapters, I will argue that conversation, even serious, thoughtful conversation, is not sufficient for obtaining knowledge of truth and ideas. Thus, _dialegesthai_ in the technical sense can only be performed by the philosopher however, it is not dialectic alone that makes one a philosopher. The next chapters will examine the _Parmenides_ using the four questions explained above to guide the study.
CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS MEANT BY ‘DIALECTIC’ IN THE PARMENIDES

§1. Dramatic Setting

The *Parmenides* is narrated by Cephalus who tells of his trip to Athens and of a discussion between Socrates, Zeno and Parmenides. In the long introduction we learn that Cephalus had led a group of men from Clazomenae to Athens to find someone who could tell them about a conversation that took place decades earlier. For Cephalus and his group, this conversation holds considerable value, as is evidenced by their journey across the Aegean to ask various acquaintances to lead them to the man who has memorized the events in question. In Athens they are guided by Plato’s brothers, Adeimantus and Glaucon, to the man, named Antiphon, with the sought-after information. Antiphon, however, was not actually present for the conversation. Earlier in life when he was interested in philosophy, Antiphon had carefully memorized the story as it was told to him by an eye witness, Pythodorus. The story that Antiphon had committed to memory and that Cephalus had traveled to Athens from Clazomenae to hear turns out to be a series of conversations between Socrates, Parmenides and Zeno.

The dramatic dialogue that we read is at least three times removed from the events that the characters in the dialogue value so much. The discussions between Socrates, Zeno and Parmenides supposedly occurred about 50 years before Plato’s birth, so it is
unlikely that the philosophical discussions of the Parmenides actually occurred. Kenneth Sayre notes, “the fact that all three narrators… are represented as having passed on the details of the conversation by memory, coupled with the length and logical complexity of the dialogue that make accurate memorization appear next to impossible, indicates quite pointedly that the Parmenides is not to be read as an historical account.”\(^{20}\) But does the historical accuracy of the dialogue really matter to those studying the work for its philosophical value?

I hold that it does not matter if the dialogue is historically true but rather the significance of the introduction is the portrayal of the journey taken in pursuit of knowledge, i.e., the act of doing philosophy. The journey motif also alludes to the historical Parmenides’ poem which tells of a young man who is taken on a mythical journey to learn about truth and existence from a goddess.\(^{21}\) However, beyond the allusions and the search for knowledge portrayed as a journey, the substance of the Parmenides is in the majority rather Platonic. In fact, even the hypothesis of ‘ideas’ that the character Socrates holds in the Parmenides is generally recognized as one of Plato’s innovations. Although it is possible that Socrates really did meet Zeno and Parmenides, and although the portrayal of the philosophers and their arguments have commonalities with the historical figures, our interpretation of the dialogue will be concerned with the philosophy put forth in the work itself.


§2. The First Occurrence of the Term

Variations of the term translated as ‘dialectic’ appear only twice in the Parmenides. The first instance is when Parmenides tells Socrates that one who “will not concede that there are Forms of ‘the things that are’ [eide ton onton einai] and will not define [horieitai] a Form for each one [of them], he will not have anything to turn his thought to, since he won’t allow that for each of ‘the things that are’, there is a concept that is always the same [idean ton onton hekastou ten auten aei einai]. And by doing this he will completely destroy the power of discourse [dialegesthai dunamin].”22 With these words, Parmenides makes a close connection between the ability to ‘define,’ the ‘power of dialectic’ and ‘ideas’ which are entities that have a great deal of significance in this work and most of Plato’s dialogues and to which we will now direct our attention.

Robert Turnbull explains that, the “terms [eidos and idea] are [both] participial nouns from the verb eido, a verb… whose second aorist means ‘see’ or ‘look at’ and whose perfect means ‘know.’”23 In their translation, Hermann and Chrysakopoulou render eidos as ‘Form.’ Idea, in the passage at 135b –c , is translated with the term ‘concept.’ By translating thusly their version eliminates a great deal of the ambiguity of the original Greek. However, although Plato and other ancient Greek philosophers contributed to the evolution and eventual solidification of the meanings of terms still part of the vocabulary of philosophy, when reading the dialogue we should not lose sight of the ambiguity of the Greek which was present in Plato’s day. By using ‘concept’ the

translators do away with connotations of sight and sensation, however, while translators occasionally make use of ‘concept,’ ‘type,’ ‘kind’ and various other terms, the convention used in Plato scholarship is to translate *idea* and *eidos* with either ‘form’ or ‘idea.’ The English word ‘form,’ though, has a strong association with ‘geometrical shape,’ ‘physical appearance,’ and other empirically observable characteristics of objects. While *idea* and *eidos* could be used to refer to something that is sensible, by translating with the word ‘form,’ the sense of ‘something known through thought’ is not as strong and at *(Parm. 135)* Parmenides ostensibly defines the object of the dialectical exercise as that which is perceived with the intellect. 24 Since Plato must have had a technical meaning for the terms *eidos* and *idea* due to their being nounal forms of the verb *eido/oida* meaning ‘to know,’ and ‘form’ conjures ‘shape,’ ‘arrangement,’ and other sensible characteristics which can be misleading at times (i.e., ‘form of triangle’ brings to mind shape much more than ‘idea of triangle’), when I make use of these terms in the technical sense, I will use ‘idea.’ 25

According to Parmenides, one must try to ‘define’ [horizo] an idea [eidos/idea] for each of the ‘things that really exist’ [onton einai] and in doing so one will secure a foundation for thought and dialectic. For, in the act of finding the ‘definitions’ of ideas of the things that are ‘always the same,’ one gains knowledge of objective, unchanging truth. Without something permanent and stable with which to refer our thoughts and words they would have no fixed meaning. We should note here that the term Plato uses

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24 Also, cf. *Parmenides*. 130a
25 I will use the English word ‘idea’ to refer to the Greek *eidos* and *idea*. Other scholars cited in this paper use different conventions and their words will be quoted verbatim.
which is rendered as “define” originally was applied to spatial objects, such as land or shapes. R. M. Dancy explains that “horos” and “the associated verb horizein have to do originally with (spatial) boundaries.”26 The translation of horos in the so-called ‘early’ dialogues, Dancy says, “in almost all cases, [as] “definition” is plainly wrong. Similarly the verb… is most often better translated as ‘mark off,’ ‘separate,’ or ‘bound’ than as ‘define.’”27 In Plato’s time horos was understood metaphorically and can be translated as ‘definition,’ however, there was also a sense of spatial demarcation that ‘definition,’ today, might not fully capture.

To horizein a thing (be it one’s personal property, a polis, or a moral value) is to indicate its limits so that it is clearly distinguished from other things. One might plant trees along the property lines of one’s land or citizens might erect walls around a polis’ border to make known the horos of an object. But moral values and other ideas do not have spatial or temporal limits. In order to know what, for example, ‘justice’ is one must discover its ‘limits’ or ‘boundaries.’ To be more precise, one must discover the horos of the idea of justice, according to Parmenides, in order to ‘have something that is always the same’ on which ‘one can fix his thoughts.’ With knowledge of the idea of justice, one can determine whether a particular situation or action is in conformity with the idea. While it is true that ‘define’ is also a spatial-temporal metaphor (albeit of Latin etymology), the current English use of this term often does not retain its original sense of de (of, concerning) the finis (end, limit, boundary). It is common to read of Socrates searching for ‘definitions,’ but we should not think that he is in want of a dictionary.

27 Ibid., 24.
When he tries to ‘define’ a thing he is trying to find that which *separates* or *marks it off* from any and all other things but not in a spatial-temporal sense. He is searching for knowledge of the unchanging ideas, how each one is unique, and how to correctly identify immanent manifestations of these non-spatial, non-temporal ideas in the fleeting world in which we live. For if one does not acknowledge the existence of unchanging truth to which our thoughts and words refer, there would be no way to determine whether the objects of our thinking and conversing are determinate or whether they are in constant fluctuation in which case all thinking and conversing would be futile, unproductive and meaningless. Thus we find that in this dialogue ‘dialectic’ has to do with the philosophical task of defining and distinguishing ideas and correctly employing this knowledge of unchanging truth so that our thoughts and words have fixed, stable meanings.

§3. The Second Occurrence of the Term

The second occurrence of *dialegesthai* is when Parmenides recommends that Socrates improve his dialectical skills by undergoing some sort of mental ‘training’ (*gumnasthenai*). Parmenides shows how much he values dialectic by praising Socrates’ ‘impulse’ to engage in the activity. However, he explains to Socrates:

> you are trying to define [*horizesthai*] prematurely what is ‘beautiful’, and ‘just’ and ‘good’, and each one of the Forms... before you are properly trained. I realized that the other day too, when I heard you conversing with Aristoteles here. Be assured, the impulse you bring to discourse [*dialegomenou*] is noble and divine. But train yourself while you are still young; drag yourself through what is
commonly considered useless [achrestos], which most call idle talk [adoleschia].

Otherwise, the truth will escape you.\(^\text{28}\)

Again Parmenides’ words indicate that dialectic involves or is in some way connected to obtaining knowledge of and defining ideas. However, Parmenides now says that it is not enough to merely desire knowledge of ideas and to engage in dialectic. Unless Socrates is willing to work hard at something most people will look down upon, he will not have the ability to obtain the knowledge he is seeking. Knowledge of philosophical truth, therefore, requires one to exercise or train certain cognitive faculties, in particular, it seems, the type of thinking one does when distinguishing ideas.

\section*{§4. The Parmenides and Plato’s ‘Technical’ Sense of Dialectic}

The various forms of the Greek term \textit{dialegesthai} found in the above two quotes could be translated with the non-technical, ordinary sense of ‘discussion.’ However ‘the ideas’ to which Parmenides refers are of crucial importance for the dialogue, being the unchanging objects of philosophical knowledge. Therefore, if we understand Parmenides as wanting to emphasize the importance of being able to communicate what one knows of the ideas, it makes more sense for him to be arguing that ‘philosophical discussion’ rather than normal, everyday small-talk is at stake. In fact, after Parmenides says that the power of \textit{dialegesthai} would be destroyed he asks “What, then, will you do about philosophy? Where will you turn, if these things remain unknown to you?”\(^\text{29}\) In these few, important statements we see that Parmenides is linking the ideas with dialectic and dialectic, in turn,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\(^{28}\)] Plato, \textit{Parmenides}, 2010, 135d.
\item[\(^{29}\)] Ibid., 135c.
\end{itemize}
with philosophy. As obviously not all conversation is philosophical conversation concerned with knowledge of ideas, when Parmenides talks about ‘dialectic’ he is likely using the term in a narrow, technical sense. For Parmenides, *dialegesthai* seems to be a crucial part of philosophical activity because a practiced dialectician will be in a position to adequately distinguish and discuss the objects of philosophical discussion. The young Socrates, not yet as capable a thinker as he is in Plato’s other dialogues, is said to have a zeal for dialectic which impresses Parmenides, however, as we will see, he holds incoherent views about particular aspects of ideas and is not yet able to “define” objects such as justice, beauty, the good, etc. In the *Parmenides*, then, *dialegesthai* is the term used when referring to a sort of philosophical conversation that rises above ordinary conversation, small-talk, gossip and the word games employed by sophists and rhetoricians.
CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS SAID ABOUT ‘DIALECTIC’ IN THE

PARMENIDES

§1. Dialectic and Idle Talk

Parmenides says that he is impressed with Socrates’ enthusiasm for dialectic but, he thinks that Socrates is “trying to define prematurely what is ‘beautiful’, and ‘just’ and ‘good’, and each one of the Forms [kai hekaston ton eidon].”\textsuperscript{30} This indicates that dialectic is something Parmenides believes could help lead a skilled philosopher to better define ideas. While Parmenides sees the value in ‘dialegesthai,’ he also recognizes that there is a sort of discussion that “most call idle talk [adoleschia]”\textsuperscript{31} which, to the inexperienced listener, might resemble or sound like dialectic in certain ways. In order to better understand what is said about \textit{dialegesthai} in this dialogue, it will help to look at the sort of speech which it is mistaken for by the undiscerning masses, namely, \textit{adoleschia} (idle talk, prating, garrulity). To understand the concept of \textit{adoleschia} there is an illuminating passage in Isocrates’ work \textit{Against the Sophists}, written about 390 BCE\textsuperscript{32}, a time when Plato was writing his philosophical dialogues, that reads as follows:\textsuperscript{33}

When, therefore, the layman… observes that the teachers of wisdom [\textit{sophian didaskontas}] … are (1) on the watch for contradictions in words but are blind to

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 135c.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 135d.
\textsuperscript{33} I have added the numbers in parentheses to facilitate future reference
inconsistencies in deeds, and that, furthermore, (2) they pretend to have knowledge of the future but are (3) incapable either of saying anything pertinent or of giving any counsel regarding the present, and when he observes that those who follow their judgments are more consistent and more successful than those who profess to have exact knowledge, then he has, I think, good reason to… regard them as stuff and nonsense [kai nomizousin adoleschian kai mikrologion]^{34}

If we take dialogesthai and adoleschia as sorts of speech or discussion which have a resemblance but which differ in their motivations and outcomes (just as we think of sophists as resembling real philosophers but differing in their motives), using Isocrates’ characterization of the sort of speech practiced by sophists as adoleschia as a starting point from which to understand that which it is not, we find that dialectic: 1) takes note of both words and deeds; 2) does not attempt to address topics about which the conversers are not knowledgeable or, further, topics which cannot possibly be known by human beings; 3) can provide practical knowledge. According to Isocrates’ views, sophistry is an activity that involves unproductive speech delivered in the guise of ‘instruction.’ The nature of sophistry, according to Isocrates, gives even a ‘layman’ observer ‘good reason’ to find it useless adoleschia, and from his description of the activity, the reason for this is because the so-called ‘teachers of wisdom’ have no regard for the truth. In the Parmenides however, we read that ‘most people’ are not able to distinguish adoleschia and dialectic.\textsuperscript{35} As will be seen below, the thorough dialectical analysis demonstrated by

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\textsuperscript{35} cf. The Apology
Parmenides involves many long, complex chains of reasoning. Like Isocrates’ description of ‘idle talk,’ many seemingly contradictory statements are produced (1) and it does not seem that the results have any practical application (3). Part of our job in this study is to see how dialectic might produce positive results that have practical value.

§2. The Suitability of Carrying out Dialectical Discussion in Public

The difference in the work of Isocrates from that of Plato has more to do with the opinions of ‘the many’ than it does with the meaning of the term *adoleschia* itself. Parmenides says that ‘the many’ wrongly mistake the serious activity of dialectic with idle talk, but some scholars believe that Isocrates would even characterize the legitimate search for knowledge as *adoleschia*. In a study of *adoleschia* in ancient Greece, Carlo Natali notes that “both Isocrates and Plato associated the term… with the sciences. Isocrates took this connection seriously and Plato ironically; for the former geometry and astronomy were really abstruse and useless sciences, while for the latter mathematical sciences were extremely important in order to reach a knowledge of the First Principles, from which correct behaviour must derive. Plato gave to astronomy and geometry the name of *adoleschia* only as a way of polemicizing against public opinion.”36 In the *Parmenides* it is not said that conversations about geometry and astronomy are useless, but rather, Parmenides says that when most people hear the sort of philosophical discourse that he will demonstrate, they will call it *adoleschia*. Thus, while Parmenides praises dialectic he holds, *contra* Isocrates, that most will not see its value and will consider it worthless. As Natali points out, it is not Parmenides or Socrates who thinks

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the exercise is idle talk, the comment is made to emphasize the distinction between the uncritical masses and the discerning philosopher. “In Plato's opinion,” Natali says, “if the city finds the arguments of the philosophers empty, useless and oversubtle, it merely demonstrates that it [i.e., the city] is in a bad condition. It is public opinion and not philosophy that must change in order to avoid these conflicts.”37 But, with that said, it seems that Parmenides and Zeno are still aware of how the public perceives their actions and neither is concerned with changing ‘public opinion.’ Both Parmenides and Zeno make clear that the dialectical exercise would not be appropriate to demonstrate if there was a larger crowd. Zeno states that, “it would not be proper to ask [Parmenides to give a demonstration of the exercise]” for “it is not suitable, especially at his age, to speak of such matters when many are present.”38 He goes on to explain that the exercise will be an arduous task which most will not be able to follow. While the interlocutors in the dialogue do not indicate that the demonstration contains teaching which is esoteric or that needs to be kept secret, they do acknowledge that if a larger group was listening, the conditions for giving the demonstration would be less than ideal. The reason for this may be that Parmenides would not be able to maintain the level of concentration needed to demonstrate the exercise, but Parmenides is portrayed as intellectually formidable despite his being about 20 years older than Zeno. It is also possible that the group is concerned with public opinion. While the teaching might not be esoteric, Plato may be warning his readers to be cognizant of who is listening to the sort of discussion that Parmenides is about to demonstrate. The historical Socrates was mocked and satirized in the comedies

37 Ibid., 236.
of Aristophanes. But in addition to sounding disrespectful or foolish, thinkers such as the historical Protagoras, Anaxagoras and Socrates were persecuted by the citizens of Athens, a city known in antiquity for its tolerance for free speech and exchange of ideas.

§3. Dialectical Exercise and Knowledge of Ideas

As the mention of ‘training’ occurs in the context of Socrates’ noticeable zeal for dialectic, it is likely that Parmenides is advocating either a sort of exercise in dialectic itself or something that will aid dialectical discussion. Parmenides believes that the exercise will help Socrates think clearly and hold more coherent hypotheses when he matures philosophically. But, as Turnbull notes, it is not simply on account of Socrates’ youth that Parmenides suggests the training, for, “[Socrates] cannot countenance forms for ‘undignified’ things like hair and mud, though he has no rationale for their exclusion other than the presumed honorific character of the forms. And he cannot provide a defensible account of what it is for something to have a share of a form.”

Turnbull argues that the ‘theory of ideas’ held by the young Socrates is deficient for, while it might be attractive to hold that there exist eternal, unchanging objects which correspond to our language and thoughts of beauty and justice, Socrates can offer no reason why knowledge of a mundane object such as mud is not also informed or made possible by a corresponding idea of its own. Furthermore, Socrates is not able to articulate the relationship between the idea and the things which ‘participate in’ the idea. Considering Parmenides’ comments, we should expect that a better, i.e., a sufficiently trained, dialectician would have a better understanding of the objects about which he or she

39 Turnbull, The Parmenides and Plato’s Late Philosophy, 39.
hypothesizes. The exercise should help the dialectician ground hypotheses in sound logic and a sufficiently coherent rational foundation. Parmenides sees in Socrates the potential for this clarity of understanding and with it the ability to articulate his hypothesis of ideas.

Parmenides and Socrates, as evidenced by Socrates’ increasing insecurity and confusion, appear to find the inability to sufficiently articulate the relationship of ‘participation’\(^\text{40}\) that holds between ideas and things to be a major problem for the hypothesis. Yet, Parmenides does not reject the theory. Instead, he seems just as determined as Socrates (if not more determined) to show that the ideas are real and knowable. “[T]he greatest [difficulty with the hypothesis of ideas] is this,” Parmenides remarks, “if someone were to say that the Forms – such as we claim they must be – are not even fit to be known, one would be unable to prove him wrong, unless the disputer happened to be widely experienced and not unintelligent, and also willing to follow the proof through numerous remote arguments. Otherwise, the person who requires that they be unknowable would remain unconvinced.”\(^\text{41}\) This comment is noteworthy for it seems to follow from this and other remarks of Parmenides that the majority of people are not capable of the sort of thinking required to have knowledge of ideas, or are unwilling to exert the effort needed to engage in such thinking. Even if they are ‘fit to be known,’ an ignorant and stubborn interlocutor could not be led to knowledge of ideas. One has to be ‘willing’ to actively take part in ‘numerous remote arguments’ in order to accept the existence of ideas. So, while the majority of the public may not be \textit{unwilling} to learn, it is

\(^{40}\) The problem of ‘participation’ in the \textit{Parmenides} will be discussed with more detail below.

\(^{41}\) Plato, \textit{Parmenides}, 2010, 133b.
reasonable to suppose that they do not have the intellect which would allow them to follow the complex reasoning involved in the proof of the existence of ideas.

There are a couple points that we should keep in mind about the distinction between the dialectician and the layman. First, active attention to ‘numerous remote arguments’ is required to lead one to knowledge of ideas, and, secondly, most people will consider the dialectical ‘exercise’ *adoleschia*. Dialectic, then, must be a discussion in which the participants are willing to accept certain premisses which the non-philosopher might reject. Furthermore, those engaged in dialectic must have the mental strength to follow long and complex arguments. As we will see in the examination of Parmenides’ discussion with Aristoteles (below), it is not clear whether this discussion is truly dialectical. The description of ‘the disputer,’ in the quote above, is one who is ‘experienced’ and ‘intelligent,’ however Aristoteles is portrayed as inexperienced and neither says nor does anything to indicate that he is intelligent.

As Parmenides recommends the exercise after bringing out various problems in the hypothesis of ideas (which we will examine when we look at how dialectic is *portrayed*), one might understand the exercise as preparing the way to answer some of those difficulties. Sinaiko argues that, since “the training or exercise (*gumnasia*) he requires takes the form of talk or discourse… [and] he will be training himself in a certain kind of discourse, it seems reasonably clear that his activity as a trained and mature philosopher will also consist essentially of engaging in discourse. Discourse or conversation, then, is to be understood as the appropriate form of philosophic activity.”

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Discourse, or dialectic, according to Sinaiko’s interpretation of the *Parmenides* is inseparable from philosophy. Yet while Parmenides may recommend a dialectical exercise as an aid which will help Socrates in his search for knowledge of ideas by means of dialectic, and while the demonstration of this exercise may take the form of a discussion, this does not indicate *that* or *how* philosophical insight can be found via a dialectical discussion. We will have to look to how dialectic is portrayed in the *Parmenides* to see what it actually accomplishes there. Does the exercise really aid in the search for definitions and knowledge of ideas? If so, is the exercise supposed to serve as a propaedeutic to philosophical discussion proper, or is it an example of Parmenides’ conception of true philosophical analysis?

§4. Review of What is Said about Dialectic

From our analysis of how the term *dialegesthai* is used in the *Parmenides* and what is said about dialectic in that dialogue, we found the following:

1) In the *Parmenides*, the term ‘dialectic’ could mean normal, everyday ‘conversation,’ or it could have a more technical sense for the philosopher. Sinaiko holds that Plato uses *dialegesthai* in both senses simultaneously. “Discourse,” he says, “is used in diverse contexts… Parmenides, however, suggests that the philosopher uses it for a unique purpose; it is for him the only means available to discover the truth.”

Sinaiko holds the plausible view that what Parmenides means by dialectic is philosophically oriented discourse; that all proper dialectic (or discourse) is philosophical and therefore a ‘means’ by which ‘to discover the truth.’ By arguing that all discourse is philosophical,

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43 Ibid.
however, it follows from Sinaiko’s view that any non-philosophical ‘speech’ is not really ‘speech’ at all.

However, 2) we find in the Parmenides that not all sorts of conversation are productive like dialectic. There is rhetoric, eristic and also polemic discourse, such as that found in Zeno’s treatise. Dialectic is often mistaken for one of these forms of discourse. ‘Most people,’ according to Parmenides, think that dialectic is nothing but idle talk and they do not recognize its value.

3) On the other hand, the young Socrates is unable to distinguish the polemical spirit of Zeno’s treatise from argumentation the aim of which is solely to discover truth. Socrates believed Zeno’s treatise was intended to be a positive contribution to philosophy (although, he accused Zeno of presenting Parmenides hypothesis in different terms). He did not realize that Zeno never intended to present new philosophical discoveries. The naïve Socrates was unable to distinguish philosophical discourse from words written in a ‘controversial spirit.’

4) While Parmenides finds Socrates’ passion for dialectic admirable, it is not enough to merely be passionate in one’s philosophical endeavors. To supplement Socrates’ ‘divine and noble’ impulse toward dialectic, he must train himself with a very specific exercise in order to discover the truth about philosophical matters. Socrates has not thoroughly examined his hypothesis and Parmenides is able to get him to affirm contradictory claims about ideas. The dialectical exercise should therefore help Socrates overcome these obstacles in some way.
Thus far we have looked at the meaning of *dialegesthai* in the *Parmenides* as well as what is said *about* dialectic in that dialogue. But there are still many questions to be answered, for example, what exactly is the relationship between the ideas, dialectic and philosophy, and does the sort of philosophical discourse which Parmenides demonstrates really help one ‘hold on to the truth’? In what follows we will examine how dialectic is portrayed to see what Parmenides’ exercise entails; if and how it allows one to have true knowledge and what it might actually accomplish.
CHAPTER 3: HOW DIALECTIC IS PORTRAYED IN THE
PARMENIDES: ZENO AND SOCRATES

§1. Three Main Discussions

It can be argued that most of the conversations in Plato’s dialogues are portrayals of dialectic, and the *Parmenides* is not an exception. After the dramatic setting is established in the introduction, there are three main discussions. First, Socrates examines Zeno on a treatise he has just finished presenting to a group of listeners (127d – 130a). Next, Parmenides asks Socrates for clarification of the hypothesis of ideas (130b – 135c). After a brief interlude in which Parmenides explains the importance of dialectic and the need to exercise one’s mind according to a specific sort of mental ‘gymnastic’ (135d – 137a), the final discussion in the dialogue is between Parmenides and Aristoteles (137b – 166c). This last discussion is Parmenides’ demonstration of the dialectical gymnastic that he prescribes for Socrates. The exercise, he claims, will help in the search for truth and will aid Socrates in his philosophical endeavor to find ‘definitions’ and knowledge of ideas. Therefore, close attention needs to be paid to the last discussion of the dialogue. However, Parmenides remarks that the exercise has commonalities with the method of Zeno’s treatise\(^44\) (the topic of the first discussion in the dialogue) and that the subject matter should be that which is grasped by the mind alone, e.g. ideas\(^45\) (the topic of the

\(^{44}\) Plato, *Parmenides*, 2010, 135d.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 135e.
second discussion in the dialogue). Therefore, while the last discussion is the only one explicitly said to be a demonstration of a philosophical exercise that will aid in dialectic, it borrows features of the preceding two discussions. We must examine all three exchanges, then, if we are to thoroughly understand dialectic in the *Parmenides*. We will first look to Socrates’ reaction to Zeno’s treatise.

§2. Zeno’s Treatise: The Hypothesis of ‘The Many’

Conversations in the *Parmenides* are examinations of ‘hypotheses’ (*hupotheseis*), which are views, suppositions or premisses put forth as topics to be discussed. These hypotheses are scrutinized as one interlocutor interrogates the other using a methodical line of questioning to try to see if any logical contradictions are implied by the hypothesis in question. In his treatise, Zeno investigates the hypothesis ‘if there are many’\(^46\) and he tries to show that if this is affirmed, it implies contradictions.\(^47\) Socrates, who had just listened to Zeno recite the treatise, attempts to embarrass him by accusing him of presenting Parmenides’ views in different terms. While doing so, Socrates hints at a past amorous relationship Zeno might have once had with his teacher Parmenides.\(^48\) Intimate and even sexual relationships between mature men and adolescent boys were not uncommon in ancient Greece, so Socrates’ taunt was more of an accusation that Zeno had not said anything substantively new but had merely rephrased his close friend’s and mentor’s words. However Zeno is unprovoked by Socrates’ remarks. His *motive* in

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 127e – 128a, 136a.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 128d.

\(^{48}\) Plato, *Parmenides*. At 127b Cephalus tells us the description of Zeno that Pythodorus told to Antiphon, including that “it was said he had been Parmenides’ favorite pupil [*paidike*].” This term can carry sexual connotations. At 128a Socrates tells Parmenides, mockingly, that he “understand[s] that Zeno here wants to associate himself with you not only in friendship but also otherwise with his writings.”
writing the treatise was not to present a new philosophical view. Zeno explains that he had not intended to restate Parmenides’ view in different terms in order to pass them off as something original, rather, he wrote the treatise in support of Parmenides hypothesis that ‘it is one’ and to defend this hypothesis from criticism.

Zeno tells Socrates that he wrote the treatise when he was younger and was seeking to make Parmenides’ critics views look ridiculous. “That the work,” he claims, “provides support for Parmenides’ argument against those who try to make fun of it by claiming that ‘if it is one’, many absurdities and contradictions follow... [Zeno’s] work... aims to show that their [i.e., Parmenides’ critics’] hypothesis, ‘if it is many’, would, if someone examined it thoroughly, suffer even more absurdities... It was out of such love of combat, while I was still young, that I wrote it.”\(^{49}\) The arguments in the treatise support the hypothesis ‘if it is one’ by showing that the opposing hypothesis entails more unacceptable conclusions. But, while the treatise may be effective in persuading his audience to accept the hypothesis of Parmenides, Zeno explains that he was not motivated by a desire to discover or teach philosophical truth. These comments of Zeno’s are important, for Parmenides refers back to Zeno’s treatise when describing his recommended exercise.

\section*{§3. Zeno’s Argumentative Strategy}

Instead of putting forth new arguments that support Parmenides’ view, Zeno takes aim at the opposite hypothesis. By attacking the opposite view point, Zeno tries to show that the hypothesis ‘if it is many’ is even more problematic. He says that his arguments

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 128c – e.
are meant to show the absurdities in the hypotheses of others. It is odd that Parmenides says that following a method like Zeno’s will help Socrates become a better dialectician and philosopher when the aim of the later is to gain knowledge. It may be that Zeno’s motives are not what Parmenides finds important when he later refers back to the treatise, but rather it is some other aspect of Zeno’s arguments that the dialectical exercise shares. The testing of an hypothesis by examining the opposite hypothesis, as we will see, is an important aspect of what Parmenides describes as intellectual ‘training’ or ‘exercise,’ which he tells us is prerequisite for productive philosophical discussion.

§4. The First Hypothesis of the First Argument of Zeno’s Treatise

We are not given an exact account of what Zeno’s treatise actually said. We are told that Socrates’ questions refer back to “the first hypothesis” of Zeno’s “first argument.”50 Turnbull remarks that “Plato would have helped subsequent scholarship a great deal if he had reproduced Zeno’s book… We must assume, however, that Socrates produces a reasonably accurate statement either of one of the book’s arguments or of the general thrust of all of them.”51 However, the question of whether or not Plato accurately reproduced the historical Zeno’s thought (or even intended to do so) is a matter of debate. For this paper, we will focus on what Plato chose to include in the dialogue. But, with Turnbull, we should take Socrates’ summary of Zeno’s arguments as accurate in relation to the fictive treatise of the dialogue.

50 Ibid., 127d.
51 Turnbull, The Parmenides and Plato’s Late Philosophy, 13.
Mention of a ‘first hypothesis’ and a ‘first argument’ suggests that Zeno’s work consisted of more than one and likely several arguments and hypotheses. If we examine the exchange between Socrates and Zeno it is possible to reconstruct at least part of Zeno’s treatise. Socrates asks Zeno if the following is an accurate account of his first argument:

Zeno, what do you mean by this: ‘if the ‘things that are’ are many, they must then be both like and unlike, but that is impossible; for neither can what is unlike be like nor what is like be unlike’? Isn’t that what you are saying?’ [Zeno responds in the affirmative] So, if it is impossible for the unlike to be like and the like to be unlike, then, is it not also impossible for either of them to be many? For if they were many, they would be subjected to many impossibilities. Is this the gist of your arguments, to maintain – despite everything that is [commonly] said – that the ‘many are not’? And do you think that each of your arguments is a proof for just that, so that you suppose you have provided as many proofs that ‘the many are not’, as you have written down arguments? Is this what you are saying – or did I misunderstand?”

“No,” Zeno replied. “Quite the contrary, you have grasped well the general intent of the work.”

From this summary we see that Zeno’s examination of an hypothesis consists in exploring the consequences entailed if the hypothesis is held to be true. Zeno intends to show that if the hypothesis is affirmed then many absurd conclusions will have to be

accepted. The absence of contradictions in an hypothesis seems to be an implicit criterion for Zeno and his audience to accept one hypothesis over another. Zeno’s tries to show that the hypothesis of Parmenides’ critics entails more contradictions than Parmenides’ hypothesis. He even claims that every argument in the treatise is intended to show the absurdity of the hypothesis ‘if it is many.’ Miller states that “the general force of the Zenonian reductive argument… is to drive the interlocutor back to a reconsideration of the premises.” The treatise aims to move listeners to reconsider the ‘if it is many’ hypothesis, accordingly some of the audience may find Parmenides’ hypothesis, ‘that the one is,’ less absurd.

§5. Philosophical Cross-Examination

Unlike other confrontations between Socrates and a visitor to Athens speaking in front of a crowd, Zeno does not mind having his arguments examined. While characters in Plato’s other dialogues are often portrayed as either over-confident in the truth of their theories or totally unconcerned with the truth of their arguments, the seemingly paradoxical results that Zeno produces are not defended dogmatically. Zeno does not mind being challenged and is not embarrassed or defensive when confronted with a possible solution to the paradoxes found in his treatise. The interlocutors in the Parmenides, at least Socrates, Zeno and Parmenides, are open to critique and further discussion. Although Zeno had prepared his treatise and recited it to a group of listeners, he nonetheless accepted questions and challenges from a somewhat insolent Socrates.

Socrates, a young man who had not yet become a proficient dialectician, answers the problem Zeno raised by explaining how something that is ‘like’ can also be ‘unlike.’ Socrates asks Zeno if he accepts the following premisses about the source of ‘likeness’ and ‘unlike’ in the ‘things we call many’:

do you not think that there is a Form, itself by itself, of ‘likeness’, and in the same way, another Form opposite of it that is ‘unlike’, and that in these two, you and I and the other things we call many, participate? And do things that participate in likeness become like in the manner and to the extent that they participate in [likeness], whereas those that participate in unlikeness become unlike, and those that participate in both become both?

The tone of Socrates’ questioning in this extended passage indicates that he assumes Zeno will reply affirmatively. The narrator tells us that Zeno does not respond but rather he and Parmenides “both paid close attention to Socrates and frequently exchanged glances and smiled as though they admired him.”54 After Socrates has put forth his questions it is Parmenides, not Zeno, who takes his turn examining what has been said about ideas and participation. We will get to that part of the dialogue later, but here it is worth noting that by his silence, his ‘smiling,’ and his apparent ‘admiration’ of Socrates’ questions, if Zeno does not accept Socrates’ premises, he at least sees no reason to interrupt, question or correct Socrates at this point. Zeno lets Socrates present his argument unimpeded despite the fact that Socrates was introducing new explanatory

54 Plato, Parmenides, 2010, 130a.
entities, i.e., ideas, into the argument and this introduction of ideas could have easily been rejected.

§6. Things, Ideas and Participation

Socrates introduces the opposite ideas (eide) of ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ in order to show that ‘what is like’ can also be ‘unlike.’ If ‘the things we call many’ are able to ‘participate’ in the ideas of both ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ at the same time then there is no contradiction when one says that ‘what is like’ is also ‘unlike.’ The ideas, according to Socrates, are that with which ‘the things we call many’ participate. Because of the relationship of participation, things come to be called by the name of the corresponding idea. Since things can participate in various, even opposite, ideas at the same time there is no contradiction in saying that a thing $x$, which is ‘like’ (because $x$ participates in ‘likeness’), is also ‘unlike’ (because $x$ also participates in ‘unlikeness’). Socrates’ hypothesis of ideas provides the explanatory framework needed to demonstrate that Zeno’s argument did not necessarily show absurdities. We might call the things we observe by names such as ‘like’ or ‘unlike’ but these appellations describe characteristics the things possess and should not be confused with ‘likeness’ itself. Many things can accurately be called ‘like,’ but there is only one idea of ‘likeness.’

Socrates incorporates both what Zeno had argued about sensible things and his own arguments about ideas in order to formulate what he would consider a genuine philosophical problem:

if someone first distinguishes the Forms, themselves by themselves, separately from the things I have just mentioned [sensible things, i.e., stones, sticks] – such
as ‘likeness’ and ‘unlikeness’, ‘multitude’ and ‘oneness’, ‘rest’ and ‘motion’, and everything of this kind – and afterwards shows that in themselves these can be combined and separated, then… I for one would be very much astonished… I would be much more amazed if someone were able to demonstrate that this very same difficulty – which you and Parmenides went through on behalf of the visible things – is also interwoven in omnifarious ways in the Forms themselves, and thus in things that are grasped by reasoning.55

It is no feat to argue that an arrangement of stones is a unity in that it is a single pile and also a multitude in that there are multiple stones. This is because, according to Socrates’ view, when we say that the pile of stones is both one and many, we are referring to two different ideas in which the pile participates. ‘The pile is one’ means ‘the pile participates in the idea of unity,’ it does not mean that the pile is ‘unity itself. ‘Unity,’ ‘multitude’ and the other ideas are not objects that we can experience with our senses rather they are ‘things that are grasped by reasoning.’ The portrayal of ideas here is such that if one were to ‘define,’ i.e., separate, each member of a pair of opposing ideas, when one member of the pair is considered it can have no relationship of participation with the other member. In other words, opposite ideas cannot participate in the idea of their opposites, despite the fact that opposite ideas can co-exist in the same thing the knowledge of which we gain through sense perception.

55 Ibid., 129d – 130a.
The portrayal Socrates gives of ideas is such that they are the source of specific attributes and qualities in the things we observe in the world.\(^{56}\) Socrates finds that Parmenides’ and Zeno’s treatment of ‘visible things’ does not pose any serious problems, but if someone could show that the so-called ‘absurdities’ of Zeno’s treatise held for ideas, that is, non-sensible things ‘that are grasped by reasoning,’ then he would be impressed. That Socrates would be astonished indicates he is confident in his theory however, when faced with Parmenides’ questions, Socrates openly admits some of the difficulties his view implies. We will see how, like Zeno, he does not become irate when facing criticism. But, before moving on to the conversation between Socrates and Parmenides, we should reflect on what the exchange between Socrates and Zeno shows us about how dialectic is portrayed in the *Parmenides*.

\textbf{§7. The Portrayal of Dialectic in the Conversation between Zeno and Socrates}

Socrates’ use of ideas to show the weakness of Zeno’s argument indicates that the results of Zeno’s reasoning are not considered to be incorrigible. When more advanced theories or hypotheses are introduced the ‘conclusions’ of a dialectical discussion can and at times must be revised if the new views are mutually accepted. The rebuttal of Zeno’s argument shows that dialectical discussion is only productive when terms are clearly defined and understood by all parties and the hypotheses being employed have sufficiently robust explanatory capabilities. In Zeno’s treatise there is an ambiguous use

\(^{56}\) Take one of Socrates’ premisses (cited above) as support for this characterization of ideas: “things that participate in likeness become like in the manner and to the extent that they participate in [likeness]” 129a. Although Socrates offers several explanations of what ‘participation’ means, none seem to alter this statement about ideas.
of characterizing terms such as ‘like’ and ‘unlike.’ At times Zeno seems to refer to the idea ‘like’ while at other times he refers to the attribute or characteristic of some thing that is ‘like.’ This left open objections about how or in what way things can be characterized as being either ‘like’ or ‘unlike.’ If one has an hypothesis that can explain how this ‘paradox’ is illusory, and that new hypothesis is accepted by all parties in the discussion, a fuller understanding of what is being discussed will be realized. It turns out, with the introduction of Socrates’ hypothesis of ideas, that things which are alike in some way can be unlike in other ways, and this does not entail a contradiction. Instead of leaving Zeno’s arguments in a state of aporia, Socrates’ contribution helped the discussion progress.

It is not explicitly clear whether Zeno accepted Socrates’ premisses, however, it does appear that he welcomed the challenge Socrates offered. The introduction of ideas helped clarify the terms and concepts being discussed and provided an explanation of why what had at first looked like a paradox was merely a confusion. However, by introducing a new hypothesis, Socrates is now open to questioning. In his discussion with Parmenides to which we now turn, Socrates realizes that even his most firmly held beliefs can be put in jeopardy since he has not taken the time to critically examine some of the crucial aspects of the hypothesis of ideas.
CHAPTER 4: HOW DIALECTIC IS PORTRAYED IN THE
PARMENIDES: SOCRATES AND PARMENIDES

§1. Socrates’ Hypothesis of Ideas

Impressed by Socrates’ questions to Zeno, Parmenides submits the young philosopher’s hypothesis to scrutiny of its own. He asks Socrates whether he in fact holds the hypothesis of ideas to be true, whether he separates the ideas from “the things that partake of them,” and if he holds, “that ‘likeness’ itself is something [entirely] separate from the likeness that we share? And also ‘one’ and ‘many’ and all the [other] things [Zeno speaks of] … [and if] there is a Form, itself by itself, of ‘just’ and ‘beautiful’ and ‘good’ and everything of that kind?” Socrates agrees that this summary of his conception of ideas is accurate. That Parmenides first outlines the account he is going to investigate and then secures Socrates’ agreement that the outline is accurate is important because it shows that he is not merely concerned with making Socrates’ hypothesis appear absurd. He truly wants to examine Socrates’ account and when beginning each line of questions he makes sure to confirm that Socrates actually holds the view he is about to address. While Zeno had delivered a pre-written treatise, essentially a monologue, to critique the hypothesis that ‘things are many,’ Parmenides’ arguments depend upon his interlocutor’s acceptance and belief in the premisses.

57 Ibid., 130a – b.
Parmenides questions bring out the fact that Socrates’ philosophical inquiries have not yet allowed him to explain the relationship between ideas and sensible things that we observe. First of all, it is not clear exactly what things have corresponding ideas. Socrates’ inquiries involved moral ideas such as ‘justice,’ ‘beauty,’ and the ‘good.’ But if ideas are supposed to provide some sort of explanation for all that that we know to exist, then, Parmenides wonders, are there ideas corresponding to “things that might appear ludicrous, like ‘hair’ and ‘mud’ and ‘dirt’, or anything else altogether worthless and base”?58 Socrates says that when he reflects on this question he has difficulty using the same hypothesis to explain things with moral value such as ‘justice’ to explain things that seem unimportant like ‘mud’ and ‘hair,’ when the difficulty becomes too great he simply focuses on the moral ideas.59 Parmenides ascribes Socrates’ difficulties to his still being young and his putting too much weight in the commonly accepted opinions of the many.60

§2. Problems with Participation

The next aspect of the hypothesis of ideas that Parmenides examines is what Socrates means by ‘participation.’ Socrates’ hypothesis holds that things ‘participate’ or ‘partake’ in ideas. The Greek words being translated as ‘participation,’ Sayre explains, are “metecho, meaning literally ‘partake of’ or ‘take part in’… [and] metalambano, with the common meaning of ‘come to share in’ or ‘have part in.’”61 On Socrates’ view, things

58 Ibid., 130c.
59 Ibid., 130d.
60 Ibid., 130d – e.
61 Sayre, Parmenides’ Lesson, 75.
that participate or partake in an idea can be referred to by the name of the idea. For example, when we judge two items to be of the same length we call them ‘equal’ and this means that they participate in the idea of equality. Parmenides, however, wants the relationship of participation clarified. He asks “does each thing that partakes of a Form partake of the whole [Form] or [only] of part of it? Or could there be some other means of partaking aside from these?”62 Socrates does not see another alternative so, since Parmenides has obtained Socrates’ agreement, he continues to ask for an account of ‘partaking’ in which a thing partakes of either the whole idea or a ‘part’ of the idea.

Although Socrates had previously recognized that ideas are ‘grasped by the intellect,’ he apparently does not realize what this implies. He allows Parmenides to characterize the relationship of participation between ideas and things in physical terms. The unclear conception of participation shows a lack of coherence in the hypothesis of ideas espoused by Socrates in the Parmenides. That ideas are taken as either ‘wholes’ or ‘parts of wholes’ allows Parmenides and Socrates to discuss the division, composition, location and other properties of ideas as if they were spatial or physical objects. Accordingly, Parmenides asks how an idea could be ‘one’ and ‘whole’ and at the same time be ‘in,’ many separate things. If it could, Parmenides argues, there follows an absurd consequence: an idea “being one and the same, it will be, as a whole, simultaneously in things that are many and separate, and consequently, [the idea] would be separate from itself.”63 The sense of ‘in’ being used here is a physical sense because one idea is said to be ‘in’ physically distinct things. It follows, according to Parmenides, that if the idea is an

63 Ibid., 131a – b.
undivided whole, the idea must be distinct or separate from itself since it is physically ‘in’ many things other than itself. Instead of re-examining some of the premisses in this argument, Socrates attempts to find an example in the physical world of how something can participate in several things at the same time and still maintain its unity. He winds up with a conception of participation that requires ideas to be physically divisible.

§3. The Importance of Ideas

We do not have the space here to analyze each of Parmenides’ arguments; our focus, in this section, is on the portrayal of dialectic and not per se the specific results of each dialectical discussion. However, it is important to note that, after exposing numerous apparent contradictions and paradoxes in the hypothesis of ideas, Parmenides emphasizes the importance of a coherent theory. He tells Socrates that, if one will not acknowledge the existence of ideas one “will not have anything to turn his thought to… [and] will completely destroy the power of discourse [dialegesthai].”64 Thus, Parmenides’ critique is not intended to make Socrates abandon the ideas, it merely shows that Socrates’ defense of the theory is inadequate when examined by an acute and subtle thinker such as Parmenides. The absurdities in the hypothesis of ideas brought out by Parmenides do not seem to him sufficient grounds for rejecting the hypothesis. Instead of conducting a purely contentious rebuke of Socrates’ hypothesis, Parmenides seems truly concerned with truth. As Miller explains, “Evidently [Parmenides] wants to save the forms from his own objections. If this is so, then… the objections must be intended to expose limitations not in the theory of forms as such but rather in Socrates’ present

64 Ibid., 135b – c.
understanding of it.⁶⁵ The limitations of Socrates’ presentation of ideas might be the result of something other than his insufficient understanding of the hypothesis. Perhaps the paradoxes and contradictions that Parmenides brings out in Plato’s hypothesis expose the limitation of language and discourse itself as a medium by which to express and discover true philosophical knowledge. For example, it is difficult to see how an object with no physical existence could be ‘in’ a thing, yet we say that thoughts are ‘in’ minds and that desire is ‘in’ the heart and other statements in which the term ‘in’ cannot refer to a physical place. The language used in these example statements must be metaphorical. Before turning to the third and final discussion of the Parmenides, it will be beneficial to review what we have seen thus far of the portrayal of dialectic in this dialogue.

§4. The Portrayal of Dialectic in the First Two Discussions

Zeno, as we saw, wrote arguments intending to show that Parmenides’ critics held absurd views. After Socrates criticizes Zeno, it is Parmenides’ turn to question Socrates about his notion of ideas. Zeno’s treatise, while admittedly written in a spirit of contention, in fact demonstrates that one can argue that absurdities exist in both of two opposing hypotheses. If both hypotheses imply contradiction and the denial of both is at odds with experience then we have evidence of major difficulties in the way we think and talk about the world. This situation calls into question the suitability of language as a tool for articulating reality. But, with the addition of Socrates’ more advanced hypothesis of ideas and the distinction of ideas and sensible things we have the ability to dissolve some of the contradictions that arose from the confusion of the former and the latter.

⁶⁵ Miller, Conversion, 30.
In fact, this is an illustration of what Parmenides will say about ideas later in the dialogue. If Zeno had gone unchallenged, we would have been left with two opposing, equally ambiguous hypotheses both of which have paradoxical implications. On the one hand there is Parmenides’ hypothesis, ‘if it is one,’ on the other ‘if it is many.’ By denying plurality without qualification, Parmenides hypothesis would have seemed utterly absurd when we consider the multitude of distinct entities that we experience empirically. For example, more astute listeners would surely realize that arguments for monism are self-refuting since even the phrase ‘all is one’ contains multiple words and letters so is therefore in some sense “many.” Zeno makes use of relatively sophisticated arguments to show that ‘multiplicity,’ too, implies absurdities. Intuitively, Zeno’s criticisms must have sounded fallacious to his ancient listeners, however, since the ancient Greeks at that time did not have the benefit of the logical laws and distinctions that we recognize today, it would have been extremely difficult to pin-point the problems with Zeno’s arguments. Discussions would have ended in aporia.

Socrates’ hypothesis of ideas revitalizes the power of dialectic because, as we find in the Parmenides, it provides a way for the discussion to move past the immediate point of aporia. But, while the introduction of ideas might have saved the discussion, Parmenides makes the nature of ideas the explicit subject of philosophical examination. It soon becomes clear that Socrates cannot give an account of ideas that is free from contradiction. Parmenides must find it important for Socrates to recognize the inadequacy

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66 This is not to say that the account of ideas presented here is problem free. I simply want to note that the introduction of ideas and the distinction made between ideas and ‘things,’ at this point of the dialogue, allows the discussion to continue without constantly producing paradoxical results.
of his conception of ideas. We will find that the training Parmenides recommends to help
Socrates become a better dialectician involves a series of arguments that apparently show
that equally true but contradictory assertions can be made about an object of
philosophical inquiry. More than anything these apparent contradictions will show the
importance of careful definition, qualification of terms and the consistent usage of
language.
CHAPTER 5. HOW DIALECTIC IS PORTRAYED IN THE PARMENIDES: THE DIALECTICAL EXERCISE

§1. Synopsis of the Exercise

In order for Socrates to improve his skill in carrying out dialectic and in order for his searches for definitions to be fruitful, Parmenides tells him, he must engage in a sort of mental exercise (gumnasia).\(^{67}\) Parmenides says that his recommended exercise does not merely deal with statements of observation or empirical data but should rather concern itself with ideas.\(^{68}\) Furthermore, Parmenides continues:

[do] not only hypothesize ‘if a thing is’ but also [hypothesize] ‘if that same thing is not’ … [for example, consider] Zeno’s hypothesis, according to which ‘if it is many’, what consequences ensue both for the many in relation to themselves, and in relation to the one, and for the one in relation to itself, and in relation to the many. And conversely, ‘if it is not many’, you must again examine what consequences follow for both the one and the many, in relation to themselves and in relation to each other… In short, for whatever you hypothesize as being or not being, and as subjected to any other qualification, you must examine the consequences [that will follow] in relation to itself and in relation to each and every one of the others – whichever you may choose – and in relation to more

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\(^{67}\) Plato, \textit{Parmenides}, 2010, 135d.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 135e.
than one, and in relation to all in the same way. In turn, you must examine the others, both in relation to themselves, and to anything else you may choose, whether what you have hypothesized you assume as being or not being. All this you must do, if, after completing your training, you are to discern the truth with authority. 69

Parmenides begins by saying that the exercise involves studying what follows when one hypothesizes ‘if a thing is’ and ‘if that same thing is not.’ With this statement Plato has the character Parmenides inform listeners and readers that hypotheses deal with the existence or non-existence of entities, i.e., ‘things,’ and/or the manners in which things exist, i.e., ‘qualifications.’ Hypotheses that are suited for Parmenides’ exercise could take the forms of ‘a thing ‘x’ is’ and ‘a thing ‘x’ is ‘y’’ where ‘y’ is some quality or characteristic predicated of ‘x.’

§2. Examination of the To Hen Hypothesis

The ancient Greek word hypothesis means, literally, something that is ‘placed under’ or ‘put before’ something else. As the word is used in Plato’s Parmenides, when one ‘hypothesizes’ one ‘puts forth’ a belief, view, or theory and that is how we will understand the term in this study. Zeno’s treatise deals with an hypothesis concerning ‘the many,’ Parmenides’ hypothesis deals with ‘the one’ and Socrates hypothesizes about ‘ideas.’ Parmenides modifies Zeno’s method of argument and insists that the exercise involves things that are ‘grasped by reason,’ and can be considered ‘Forms,’ or ideas. It is an examination of Parmenides’ hypothesis of to hen, ‘the one,’ that is used to illustrate

69 Ibid., 135e – 136d.
the exercise, which will provide insight into the conception of dialectic in the dialogue, so
given Parmenides’ instruction that the exercise deals with things grasped by reason, we
should understand to hen as an object of the mind, i.e., an idea.

Parmenides will demonstrate the exercise by examining what he calls his
hypothesis of ‘the one.’ First ‘the one’ will be assumed to exist and the exercise will
examine what follows a) for the one in relation to itself, b) for the one in relation to ‘the
others,’ c) for the others in relation to the one, and d) for the others in relation to the
themselves. Next, Parmenides assumes that the one ‘is not’ or does not exist and what
follows from this premiss for a) the one in relation to the others, b) the one in relation to
itself, c) the others in relation to the one, and d) the others in relation to themselves.
Although he has given a general outline of the dialectical exercise, Parmenides’
demonstration sheds light on some of the obscure parts of his description and at the same
time raises more difficulties. He begins by asking what would follow if his hypothesis is
affirmed: “if it is one, would not the one be something other than the many?” Here we
see the contrast of the hypothesis “it is one” with the hypothesis of Zeno’s treatise, “if it
is many.” Parmenides continues to argue that being one means the exclusion of plurality
and anything having to do with plurality: “[if it is one] there must not be a part of it, nor
can it be a whole… For a part is presumably a part of a whole… But what is the whole?
Wouldn’t that from which no part is missing be a whole? … In both cases, then, the one
would consist of parts, since it would be whole and would have parts… In that way, in

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70 Ibid., 137b.
71 Ibid., 137c.
both cases the one would be many, rather than one.”72 This first argument investigates the nature of to hen by looking at what something’s being to hen entails. To hen, according to Parmenides’ argument, can in no way have characteristics of ‘the many.’ There cannot be ‘parts’ of to hen because then it would be a multiplicity, and it cannot be a whole because Parmenides stipulates that to be a whole is to be a complete constitution of many parts.

The arguments Parmenides puts forth in the first stage of the investigation are aimed at showing that to hen cannot exist in any manner there considered. For instance, since to hen, having no parts, has no beginning, middle, or end, for these are parts,73 it must have no limits, and therefore no shape. Because having shape is to be bound by spatial or geometrical limits.74 Having no shape, Parmenides finds that it could not be ‘in’ anything. For, to being ‘in’ something “it would presumably be surrounded all around by that in which it would be contained, and it would be in contact with this thing in many places with many parts.”75 If one were to suggest that to hen was somehow contained ‘in’ itself, Parmenides argues that if it were, then it would be both that which contains and that which is contained and would not therefore be one but two.76 Therefore, to hen, not having parts, shape or place, would be nowhere. Having the aforementioned attributes are ways or manners of existing and these arguments show that the thing that Parmenides calls ‘one,’ cannot have any of these attributes. Therefore, the unqualified to hen of the discussion is something much different from the particular things that people call ‘one.’

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 137d.
74 Ibid., 137d – 138a.
75 Ibid., 138a.
76 Ibid., 138b.
Next, we find that *to hen* cannot be in motion for a) it has no parts so there can be no internal movement within *to hen*, and further b) *to hen* does not have place so it cannot change place.\(^{77}\) *To hen*, it seems, is motionless and immovable, but Parmenides next argues that it cannot be at rest either. This is because, he says, to be immovable is the same thing as always being ‘in the same.’\(^{78}\) But it cannot be in anything at all, so it cannot be ‘in the same,’ i.e., it cannot be in the same spatial position or state of being for any length of time.\(^{79}\) Therefore, if we suppose that *to hen* exists in time (an issue which as of yet has not been explicitly addressed in the demonstration), it cannot be in motion or at rest. The next step tries to show that the one cannot be the same or different from itself or from other things. Parmenides goes through the various manners or states in which a thing can *be*, using the results from the earlier arguments as premisses from which the conclusions of the latter arguments follow. Despite Parmenides’ pre-stated plan to investigate what followed in regard to these sorts of existence when the hypothesis is affirmed and when it is denied, the portrayal of the arguments show how the affirmation of a simple premiss, namely, ‘if it is one it cannot be many,’ leads to the affirmation of several other permisses.

For example, the one cannot be like or unlike anything “Because ‘the like’ is that which is affected somehow in the same way”\(^{80}\) and, Parmenides argues, the one cannot be ‘the same’ as anything in any way.\(^{81}\) It cannot be equal, smaller or larger than anything because to be equal is another way of being the same, and this has been ruled out. Being

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 138b – e. 
\(^{78}\) Ibid., 139a. 
\(^{79}\) Ibid., 139a – b. 
\(^{80}\) Ibid., 139e. 
\(^{81}\) Ibid., 139d.
smaller or larger than something means to be measurably less or more than something else and being of less and more measures the one would have to have parts and this too has been rejected.\textsuperscript{82} Finally, since time is measurable, the one cannot have existed for the same amount of time as anything, it cannot have existed for less amount of time and it cannot have existed for more amount of time. For, as the argument goes, the one cannot be measured in any way nor can it have ‘parts’ and units of time are measurable parts. Parmenides and Aristoteles conclude the first part of the investigation by reflecting on what the results imply:

Is it possible that anything could partake of being in any other way than in one of these? [Aristoteles responds: No] … Therefore, the one does not partake of being in any way… the one in no way \textit{is}… it is not even in such a way as to be \textit{one}, for if it were, it would already be that which \textit{is} and would partake of being. But, as it appears, the one neither \textit{is} ‘one’ nor \textit{is’}, if we are to trust this sort of argument.\textsuperscript{83}

‘Partaking of being,’ refers to any of the following predicates that were denied of the one in the preceding argument: having parts, limit, place, being in motion or rest, being the same or different, having temporality, etc. Aristoteles agrees that he and Parmenides have examined all the various manners in which something can be and they conclude that none of these apply to \textit{to hen}. We have already noted that Aristoteles uncritically accepts many of the arguments that Parmenides makes, however, he cannot accept the conclusion of the investigation of the first hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 140b – c.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 141e.
§3. An Uncritical Interlocutor

It is important to note that Aristoteles never questioned the arguments even when Parmenides explains that the paradoxical results could be avoided if it could be shown that the reasoning did not hold. That the demonstration provides the opportunity to revisit and revise arguments which produce unacceptable results shows that Parmenides’ recommended exercise is not part of some dogmatic philosophical system. The exercise does not guarantee that those engaged in philosophical conversation will discover truth, rather, the results seem to depend on the philosophical acumen of the interlocutors. The fact that Parmenides’ interlocutor, Aristoteles, fails to re-examine the arguments shows that without something else present in the mind of the dialectician, the exercise can produce paradoxical results. This something else might be the zeal that Parmenides had previously noticed in Socrates but which Aristoteles lacks, i.e. motivation to seek the truth, or it might be having a deeper insight or understanding of the subject at hand. For whatever reason, though, the uncritical Aristoteles being the interlocutor is one of the reasons the demonstration produces such bizarre results. Zeno’s strategy for showing that believing in multiplicity is absurd was to argue that if things were many then they would be both alike and unlike each other and this is unacceptable. Parmenides’ results are that no matter if one’s hypothesis is affirmed or rejected it both ‘is’ and ‘is not’ everything that can be predicated including existence. ‘The others,’ too, both ‘are’ and ‘are not’ everything.

84 As quoted above, Parmenides makes comments like “as it appears, the one neither is ‘one’ nor ‘is’, if we are to trust this sort of argument.” (my emphasis). He gives his interlocutor the opportunity to re-examine the arguments but Aristoteles simply accepts the results.
§4. Overview of the Conclusions

We do not have the space here to closely examine the entire demonstration. However, our study of dialectic in the *Parmenides* aims not only to discover what Plato means by ‘dialectic,’ but also what dialectic can do. So, in order to see what the dialectical exercise achieves we must at least take note of the results. As the demonstration considers four affirmative hypotheses and four negative hypotheses and is more or less naturally divided into eight stages of the investigation, we will look at the conclusion of each of the eight stages to help better understand what the exercise accomplishes.

Starting from the hypothesis ‘it is one,’ Parmenides puts forth arguments showing that, if this is true, then ‘the one’ *is not*; it cannot *be* in any way; it has no predicates, characteristics or properties. Additionally, nothing can even be said of that which is not, it has no account (*logos*), there can be no ‘knowledge’ (*episteme*) of it, nor can there be ‘perception’ (*aisthesis*):

If something is not, could anything belong to it, or be of it? [How could it?] So no name belongs to it, nor is there an account, nor any knowledge, nor perception, nor opinion of it. [Evidently not] ….Therefore, it is neither named nor spoken of, nor is it the object of opinion or knowledge, nor does anything among the ‘things that are’ perceive it.\(^{85}\)

These results are problematic for several reasons. First of all, the entire demonstration is about ‘the one,’ so it clearly has a name. Secondly, both Aristoteles and Parmenides

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evaluate arguments, ask, and answer questions, so ‘the one’ is an object of opinion or knowledge (even if everything said about ‘the one’ is false, it is still an object about which one can have an opinion). But the most glaring problem with the argument is that it is internally contradictory, i.e., the conclusion contradicts the premiss from which it was derived. If the existence of ‘the one’ entails the non-existence of ‘the one,’ then, unless we are willing to disregard basic logical principles, we should not, in Parmenides’ words, “trust this sort of argument.” But although the conclusion is clearly problematic, it is difficult to identify what it is about the argument that should not be trusted. There could be invalid logical inferences. The significance of some terms might not be clear enough for a meaningful discussion. Also, the interlocutors might be confusing objects of thought (i.e., that are ‘grasped by thought alone’) and objects of sense, for example, treating an idea as if it were a spatial-temporal object. The improper application of spatial predicates to ideas might arise when those involved in dialectical discussion lack the right kind of knowledge or cognitive capacities to productively investigate the topic at hand. The exercise could therefore benefit the participants, by making this lack of insight apparent. It could force the interlocutors to think more carefully about ideas and perhaps make an attempt in their discussion to transcend the sort of thinking and language used to describe objects of the senses.

The first hypothesis looked at “what the consequences must be ‘if one [is] one’” the next investigation will seek “what the consequences are ‘if one is.’”86 While this phrasing is similar to the first hypothesis’ phrasing in both English and the original

86 Ibid., 142c.
Greek, the argument that Parmenides develops makes it seem that there are two different conceptions of to hen being considered. It turns out that this second hypothesis produces the opposite results from the first. This shows that in order for productive discussion, ambiguous terms and phrases need to have a fixed significance which is agreed upon by both interlocutors. With a minute change in phrasing, like that of the second hypothesis, vastly different results can be derived in the investigation of the same object. Like the investigation of the first hypothesis, Parmenides starts by seeing if ‘the one that is’ has parts, and he continues with the other ‘ways in which a thing can be.’

The ‘one that is’ turns out to be an “unlimited multitude,” because to say that something ‘is’ is to say that it ‘has being.’ Now, when considering the hypothesis ‘the one is,’ Parmenides argues that both ‘the one’ and ‘being’ are posited. But if the one has being then there are two, namely, one and being, and this means the one has parts and is a whole. Since the parts are a ‘one-part’ and a ‘being-part’ there will, in fact, be an infinite number of parts because each ‘one-part’ of the one will itself be constituted of a ‘one-part’ and a ‘being-part’ and so forth for each part ad infinitum.87 Furthermore, if the one-part and the being-part of ‘the one that is’ are considered by themselves “in thought,”88 each will be thought as ‘different’ from the other, and this introduces a new entity, namely ‘difference.’ Parmenides argues that the one that is involves three separate objects: one, being and now difference. So ‘the one that is,’ according to the sketch being outlined, has the characteristic of being an ‘unlimited’ (apeiron) multitude of parts and provides the foundation for the existence of discrete numbers, since each part can be

87 Ibid., 142c – 143a.
88 Ibid., 142a.
counted, added, multiplied, etc., and the products of these functions can be given a corresponding number.\textsuperscript{89} Parmenides summarizes by saying, “the ‘one being’ is somehow both one and many, both whole and parts, both limited and unlimited in multitude.”\textsuperscript{90} But he continues to argue that since ‘the one that is’ has parts, is a whole, and has limits, it must have shape as well. Being ‘whole’ means to be complete and be missing no part. Parmenides notes that ‘beginning,’ ‘middle,’ and ‘end’ are parts of a whole and Aristoteles consents to the proposition that ‘the one that is’ could not be a whole unless it too had a beginning, middle, and end.\textsuperscript{91} Hence, the argument has taken an idea and considered it as if it were something that exists in time and space.

The ‘parts’ of the whole ‘one that is’ were not spatial-temporal at the start of the argument. ‘The one that is’ had parts of ‘oneness’ and ‘being,’ so a more critical thinker may not have been so willing to accept the premiss that ‘if a thing has parts,’ then that thing has spatial-temporal parts, e.g. ‘beginning, middle, and end.’ Yet Aristoteles does not object so Parmenides continues to talk about ‘the one that is’ as if it were a spatial-temporal object. “[T]he middle” of a thing, Parmenides says, “is equidistant from the extremities; otherwise, it would not be ‘middle’… Being of such a sort, the one, it seems, would partake of some shape, either straight, or round, or some combination of both.”\textsuperscript{92} Without an objection to this characterization of ‘parts’ of the one, Parmenides can use the same sort of reasoning that Zeno used in his treatise, which Socrates had criticized because it dealt with objects of the senses about which two contradictory predicates can

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 143 – 144.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 145a.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 145b.
be applied without violating logical consistency. So, while Parmenides had said that the dialectical exercise should take as its object ‘things grasped by reason,’ here he is shown introducing physical and temporal concepts in the discussion.

The majority of the arguments that follow in the examination of the second hypothesis ascribe both of two contradictory predicates to the one. Thus “insofar as the one is a whole,” Parmenides says, “it is in another, but insofar as it consists of all the parts, it is in itself. And thus the one must be both in itself and in another.” Clearly two different aspects of a spatial-temporal ‘one’ are being investigated, namely ‘the one as a whole’ and ‘the one as a totality of parts.’ The reasoning that shows that the one is contained in something other than itself is developed from the view that the one is a whole. But, when the one is considered as a totality of parts, it is ‘in itself.’ However, these qualifications are not mentioned when Parmenides draws his conclusion that ‘the one must be both in itself and in another.’ Without a sharp interlocutor who could recognize these implicit qualifications, it would appear that genuine paradoxes followed from the argument. If we set aside the question of the suitability of talking about ‘the one’ in physical terms, there is still an important problem that arises from this discussion. The exercise is supposed to aid in productive discussion and in the definition of ideas, but ‘the one’ as used here is so ambiguous that depending on how it is interpreted, two opposing statements can be found true.

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93 Ibid., 145e.
The first half of the demonstration, that is, the first four stages of the investigation, in which each hypothesis considers what follows if ‘the one is,’ shows that logic and rational discussion can produce arguments that support opposing conclusions from the investigation of one hypothesis. An interlocutor such as Aristoteles might even find both opposing arguments equally convincing. Parmenides summarizes the conclusion of the first half of the exercise as follows: “Therefore, ‘if one is’, the one both is all things and is not even one thing, both in relation to itself and, likewise, in relation to the others.” Whereas we found the conception of *to hen* in the second set of arguments to vary from that of the first, Parmenides’ statement here takes the object of both as being identical. Zeno’s treatise had produced analogous results for the hypothesis of ‘the many’ and their being both ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ at the same time, but unlike Zeno, Parmenides gives no impression that the apparent contractions are grounds for rejecting the hypothesis. So the dialectical exercise must be aimed at a goal other than persuading listeners to reject the hypothesis. Further evidence of this can be found in the second half of the exercise, where the hypotheses investigate what follows ‘if the one is-not.’ There, apparent contradictions are also found. When taken with the first half, we find that the same conclusions can be derived from the hypothesis ‘if it is one’ and the hypothesis ‘if the one is-not.’ “It seems,” Parmenides says, “if ‘one is’ or if ‘[one] is not’, [then] it and the others both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear to be all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other.” Based off the results

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94 Or some variant of these phrasing.
96 Ibid., 166c.
of the exercise, Parmenides’ ostensible aim is to show that arguments with logically
contradictory conclusions can be made about the same subject.

With an exercise that produces such paradoxical conclusions, it is unlikely that
Parmenides is endorsing either the hypothesis that ‘it is one’ or the hypothesis ‘it is not
one,’ so it is unlikely that his intent is to propagate a particular theory. This means that
the dialectical exercise is not necessarily a tool or method which will directly lead one to
conclusive results. The portrayal of dialectic here is a structured series of questions which
produce a series of contradictory assertions about an hypothesis and it’s opposite. But we
are left with an important question: if the exercise is intended to show that both an
hypothesis and its opposite lead to contradiction, then how is it supposed to help one find
truth, prepare one for the search for definitions and help one develop and clearly
explicate coherent theories?
CHAPTER 6: MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

§1. Modern Interpretations of Plato’s Dialectic

The answers to questions raised so far in our examination of dialectic in the Parmenides are not clearly presented in the text. While dialectic, philosophy and ideas are topics which, in this text, are closely associated with each other, reading through the dialectical demonstration does not, on its face, explain or show how such a method could lead one to philosophical knowledge. Parmenides has said that a skilled dialectician will be in a better position to examine philosophical issues, to find definitions, and to gain knowledge of ideas, but his dialectical demonstration showed that contradictory results can be derived from arguments starting from the same premiss, e.g. ‘if one is.’ How does the production of contradictory results help one become a better thinker? In order to further develop our understanding of dialectic in the Parmenides and attempt to answer the questions raised above, in this chapter we will see how modern scholars have interpreted dialectic in this dialogue.

§2. “Pedagogical Provocation”

There are a number of competing views that offer explanations as to why the demonstration in the Parmenides seems to lead to nonsense but actually provides positive results. Mitchell Miller argues that the dialectical demonstration is intended to challenge
listeners and readers in order to stimulate philosophical thinking. “Parmenides’ contradictions,” he says, “appear as calculated pedagogical provocation. Parmenides knows that Socrates – or, to step back from the dramatic context, Plato knows that his most promising hearers, those who survive the test of their own impatience and become capable of conceptual thinking – will feel the contradictions as a challenge and will seek to undercut them by distinctions.”97 This is exactly what Socrates did when challenging the argument of Zeno’s treatise. He introduced the distinction between the ‘idea’ and the many perceived things which ‘participate’ in an idea. The paradoxical conclusion of Zeno’s argument regarding ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ arose from the mistake of identifying an object with one of its predicates. By distinguishing the various senses in which a term is used, Socrates was able to explain how two things can be both ‘like’ and ‘unlike,’ depending on how these terms are qualified. So, just as Zeno’s treatise seemed to ‘provoke’ Socrates and eventually led him to put forth the aforementioned distinction, Miller argues that Parmenides’ demonstration has a similar purpose. It is certainly true that those studying the Parmenides face the challenge of interpreting the paradoxical conclusions and may feel a personal challenge to do what Aristoteles had not been able to do, that is, make distinctions which explain how and why the contradictions are only apparent. If this is accomplished, it tells us more about the way we think and use language than it does about the idea of to hen. The dialectical exercise then, on this view, would not directly provide knowledge of the object being examined, rather, at the least it would tell us about conventions and usage of language and at most it would show where

97 Miller, Conversion, 76.
distinctions need to be made. But these distinctions do not provide direct knowledge of the idea since in most cases we are told what the idea is not and what cannot be said of an idea. According to Miller’s interpretation of the benefit of the dialectical exercise, ‘pedagogical provocation’ is not the only result of going through the arguments.

Miller explains that in the description of ‘the one’ there are no “particular things ever cited as concretizing instances of the One.” As a result, it is necessary at every step to think indefinite generalities, without fixing on determinate particulars. Thus, following both the methodological motivation of the hypotheses and their every particular step requires one to think universally and abstractly. And this means, in turn, that one must proceed by means of concepts rather than percepts, dianoetically rather than imagistically. Hence the student who immerses himself in the hypotheses will find himself that much further advanced in the ‘conversion’ from particulars to forms.

The subtitle to Miller’s work on Plato’s Parmenides is ‘the conversion of the soul,’ and it is so named because Miller finds that the dialectical exercise is intended to turn (or ‘convert’) the thinking part of the soul away from the many perceptible things we encounter and toward the unchanging ideas. He draws parallels with Plato’s Republic which, in the famous Allegory of the Cave, portrays the search for philosophical knowledge as a turning away from images and representations in order to find the real things themselves. Miller holds that the Parmenides does what is allegorically described in the Republic and that the benefit of the dialectical exercise is that it

98 For example, “Being,” “God” or “the one” attributed to Pythagorean mysticism.
99 Miller, Conversion, 73.
encourages the philosopher to think beyond the empirical world and beyond the opinions of others.

Miller calls the type of thinking involved here ‘dianoetic,’ from the Greek term *dianoia*, which in Plato’s work often has a meaning of higher level cognition and thought. Miller’s use of ‘dianoetic,’ developed from his analysis of its use in the *Republic*, describes thought which is directed at ‘universal’ or ‘abstract’ objects which cannot be perceived with the senses. By focusing the mind on objects conceivable only with dianoetic thinking, the exercise helps the philosopher develop the higher level cognitive faculties needed to contemplate ideas. As Mitchell says, the thoughts of the philosophical thinker will be ‘converted’ from a focus on particular manifestations of ideas to a focus on the ideas themselves. In Miller’s examination of the first two hypotheses, he argues that Plato presents an “implicit challenge… [to dissolve] the contradictions in [hypotheses] I and II,” and when the reader has taken up and completed this task “he will have purged himself of Socrates’ basic error, the thinking of the forms on the model of composite, singular things.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Miller, *Conversion*, 111 – 112.
In only the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedrus* do we find Socrates venturing outside the main walls of Athens. Catherine Zuckert finds this significant and she argues that the dramatic setting has considerable significance. She notes that, both in the *Parmenides* and in the *Phaedrus* (where Socrates gives his famous critique of writing), Plato shows that the written word has considerable power, even over Socrates himself. For in the only two dialogues in which Plato shows Socrates voluntarily leaving the city… [Socrates] is drawn out of Athens by a desire to hear what another has written… [In the *Parmenides*] as in the *Phaedrus*, the reading is not merely followed but is supplanted by what is clearly a superior live exchange. The function of writing, Plato suggests, is not so much the direct communication or inscribing of the thoughts of one into the mind of another, a substitute as it were for memorization, but the eliciting of questions that provoke further thought on the part of listeners or readers."\(^{102}\)

According to Zuckert’s interpretation, the reader becomes an active participant in the search for knowledge portrayed in the dialogue being read. A critical reader will be cognizant of underlying problems and questions implicit in the discussions portrayed which may not be given sufficient treatment in the written work itself. This will ‘provoke further thought’ and, in a sense, engage the reader in the same search as the characters portrayed in the dialogue. If one were to combine aspects of Miller’s interpretation of dialectic with Zuckert’s views, one could argue that a thoughtful reading of one of Plato’s philosophical dialogues will incite the reader to search for knowledge not directly

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provided in the texts themselves, it will ‘provoke’ a continuation of the task of the dialogue and lead one to think past the words written in the text. Therefore, it might be possible that some sort of philosophical knowledge can be obtained from a written work by a critical reader who engages with the writing in the proper way and is able to continue thinking about the problems raised in the dialogue even when the dramatic dialogue has been completed.

§3. The Pros Distinction

Constance Meinwald, too, finds that the dialectical exercise plays a positive role in helping us understand philosophical distinctions. However, unlike Miller, Meinwald holds that the crucial distinction is stated by Parmenides himself in his outline of the recommended method (Parm. 135e – 136d, quoted above). Meinwald’s study of the Parmenides is nuanced and important, so close attention to her interpretation is appropriate here. The “key innovation” introduced by way of dialectical exercise in the Parmenides, according to Meinwald, is found in Parmenides’ instruction to find what follows for the hypothesis “in relation to itself” and “in relation to others.” She finds great import in this distinction between pros heauto and pros ta alla predication and holds that the distinction resolves difficulties in Socrates’ initial explanation of ideas in Parmenides part I.103 While some scholars argue that the Parmenides contains confused and fallacious arguments and see little connection between Parmenides’ criticism of ideas and the dialectical exercise, Meinwald wants to argue, “both that the exercise does have coherent positive results and that their application to the problems of the immature

Socrates is fairly straightforward… I think it is fair,” she says, “to say this: simply by employing the *pros heauto/pros ta alla* distinction, we resolved the Third Man, the Greatest Difficulty, and the lengthy second of the two objections to the ‘part’ alternative from the Whole/Part discussion… Thus there is a meaningful sense in which achieving understanding of the distinction enables an aspiring Platonist to handle the difficulties of the first part of the dialogue.”¹⁰⁴ In short, Meinwald holds that knowing the difference between hypotheses that consider ‘what follows for something in relation to itself (*pros heauto*)’ and hypotheses that consider ‘what follows for something in relation to others (*pros ta alla*)’ is the key to solving most if not all of the problems in Socrates’ initial presentation of the hypothesis of ideas.

Meinwald is right to point out that philosophical distinctions play a crucial role in the *Parmenides*. It is the distinction between ideas and particular things which Socrates uses to dissolve the seemingly contradictory results of Zeno’s treatise. However, although Parmenides draws a distinction and explains that various arguments will be *pros heauto* and others *pros ta alla*, he does not explicitly say that he is introducing a novel distinction in predication. He merely explains that the exercise involves finding the consequences for the object of the hypothesis and ‘the others,’ in relation to itself (or themselves) and in relation to the other. In fact, as he explains the dialectical exercise to Socrates, no further explanation is asked for or needed when he says that hypotheses should be examined *pros heauto* and *pros ta alla*. So, while Parmenides does make the distinction, he does not emphasize its importance quite as enthusiastically as Meinwald:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 162 – 163.
We can now appreciate the interest of the [question:]… What is the force of the in-relation-to qualifications? Answering this question will go a long way in helping us to understand Parmenides’ new kind of dialectic. Indeed, looking at the matter from a slightly different angle, we might think that Plato’s purpose in describing the exercise in terms that stress these mysterious qualifications so laboriously is actually to draw our attention to the importance of working out the distinction they indeed mark.\textsuperscript{105}

If this distinction is the key to understanding the dialectical exercise, as Meinwald maintains, one would expect her to present a clear explication of the two types of predication. However, while her description of \textit{pro heauto} statements is relatively straight-forward, it is difficult to see how the interpretation of \textit{pros ta alla} predication is derived from the dialogue.

Meinwald argues that \textit{pro heauto} relations have to do with the subject’s essential nature, if the statement ‘A is B’ is considered \textit{pro heauto} then the relationship between A and B “reveals the structure of the subject’s [A’s] own nature.”\textsuperscript{106} The statement tells us, under \textit{pro heauto} predication, that to be B is part of A’s essential nature. While A and B are not identical, a thing cannot be A without having the characteristic ‘B.’ This interpretation works well for predication that is supposed to bear on a thing ‘in relation to itself.’ But Meinwald’s description of \textit{pros ta alla} predication is less clear, less convincing and it is not easy to see how she derives her interpretation from the text. Predication \textit{pros ta alla}, according to Meinwald, shows some sort of “conformability” a

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 74.
\end{footnotesize}
thing has for a certain predicate. For example a two pound stone can be said to be ‘equal’ in its relation to a two pound metal weight because the stone is conformable with the characteristic of ‘equality.’ But, Meinwald says, the description of the stone as ‘equal’ with the weight, if taken \textit{pro ta alla}, does not refer to a relation between the stone and the weight rather “we have identified here an occurrence of \textit{pros} in which it introduces a relation unnamed in the sentence.” So, with \textit{pros heauto} predication ‘A is B’ says something about A’s essential nature but, with \textit{pros ta alla} predication ‘A is B’ says both that A is such that it is ‘conformable’ to having ‘B’ as a characteristic or property and that A, in fact, does have B as a characteristic or property because of some unnamed relation.

Meinwald uses her interpretation of the \textit{pros} distinction to try to answer some of the questions left open in Parmenides’ interrogation of Socrates. For example, the so-called ‘Third Man’ problem, a version of which is raised by Parmenides at 132a – b taking ‘the large’ as its object instead of ‘man.’ In that passage, Parmenides asks Socrates if, when he notices several things each having the same characteristic or quality, he holds, according to his hypothesis of ideas, that there is one idea in which they participate and which makes the several instantiations of the characteristic possible. Socrates answers affirmatively, however, Parmenides argues that if this is true, then if one considers in the same way both the idea and the things which participate in the idea, for example, the idea of ‘large’ and all the things that are called ‘large,’ then there must be another idea ‘large’

\footnote{107 Meinwald is careful not to make the claim that being ‘conformable’ to a characteristic is the same as the ability to participate in an idea, though, she does occasionally hint at this possibility.} \footnote{108 Meinwald, \textit{Plato’s Parmenides}, 60.}
that accounts for the previous idea and causes it to have the characteristic of being large. This line of reasoning will lead to an infinite regress and produce an infinite number of the same idea. However, Meinwald uses the pros heauto/pros ta alla distinction to show how the infinite regress can be avoided.

“To begin with,” Meinwald states, “The Large itself and the original group of visible large things are treated as being large in the same way. This induces the notion that we have a new group of large things whose display of a common feature must now be analyzed in the same way the display of the common feature of the original group [of only visible/sensible things] was.” 109 But this will lead to an infinite regress and “Each form purports to be the single thing that grounds and explains the predications it is invoked in connection with and should therefore not yield to an unending series of further forms.” 110 The dialectical exercise, on Meinwald’s interpretation, has shown that when we call a group of large things ‘large’ and when we say that the idea of ‘large’ is large we are using two different types of predication. To say ‘those elephants are large’ is to say that the members of a group of visible things, i.e. those elephants, all have the same characteristic, i.e. largeness, and therefore this is a pros ta alla statement. However, a statement such as the idea ‘large’ is large, should be understood as pros heauto predication and “we are now clear that that predication does not claim that The Large itself is large in the same way that the original group of large things is. It therefore does not force on us a new group of large things whose display of a common feature requires

109 Ibid., 155.
110 Ibid., 156.
us to crank up our machinery again and produce a new form.”¹¹¹ Meinwald’s view is that the dialectical exercise leads one to realize the pros distinction which in turn can be utilized to solve the difficulties that arose in the aporetic discussion of participation between Socrates and Parmenides. One such difficulty being the ‘Third Man’ problem.

Meinwald notes that it was a mistake for Socrates to think of the idea as being large in the same way that the many sensible things were large, for this leads one to the view that the idea has the same characteristic which it makes possible in many sensible things, a view called ‘self-predication.’ The pros distinction shows that there is no self-predication of ideas and therefore, according to Meinwald, that line of argument cannot be used to produce a ‘Third Man.’ However, while the distinction might work for an idea such as ‘large,’ is this true for any idea? Two ideas found in multiple dialogues namely, the good and beauty, seem not to fit Meinwald’s argument. While surely we are meant to think of the idea of the good in a different way than we think of the various good things we perceive, it still seems that the good would be good pros ta alla, i.e. that it would have the characteristic of being good the same way that other things are said to be good. In other words, given the wide semantic range of the term “good,” I argue that, although not specifically discussed in the Parmenides, self-predication is at play for the idea of the good. Is the idea of the good not ‘good’ pros ta alla, in that it causes the other ‘good’ things to be ‘good”? And why wouldn’t the idea of beauty be beautiful in the same way that ‘beautiful’ is predicated of certain other things (obviously not beauty that is perceived with the sense, though)? The usage of these terms is broad, and it seems likely

¹¹¹ Ibid., 156.
to me that certain senses of these words can be predicated of the idea. To be clear, I am not arguing that the ‘Third Man’ is an inevitability and a fatal problem for Plato’s metaphysics. Nor do I think that the pros distinction is irrelevant and unimportant. I simply find that the distinction, while it might work in Meinwald’s examples, runs into problems when considered more generally and applied to instances not considered by Meinwald. Additionally, like many other scholars, Meinwald wants to show that the contradictions in the demonstration can be dissolved when her interpretational framework is applied to the arguments. It is not clear that Parmenides intend for the contradictions to be dissolved, rather, on the contrary, Parmenides’ summaries highlight the contradictions. While it is certainly tempting for philosophers and logicians to take it upon themselves to pin-point exactly where a fallacy may occur or to develop an interpretation of the dialogue which shows that no real contradictions are produced when to hen is properly qualified, these scholars all work under the assumption that the benefit of the exercise is found when its ‘problems’ are ‘solved.’

§4. The Co-Existence of Opposites

Hans-Georg Gadamer holds that “Dialectic in the Parmenides is certainly not a mere ‘exercise’; but one exaggerates its intention if one sees in it a ‘solution’ to the problem of methexis (participation) which was opened up at the beginning. Plato did not intend this as a proof that the Idea as a unity is and can be the plurality of what comes to be.”112 Gadamer’s view is that Parmenides’ demonstration does not directly address the

problem of participation discussed by Socrates and Parmenides earlier in the dialogue. There are no explicit solutions or positive results, on his view, that can be applied to the problems that Parmenides exposed in Socrates conception of ideas. Rather, Gadamer finds that the dialectical exercise provides insight into the nature of the object being discussed, in this case namely, to hen, and its relationship and connection with the counter-hypothesis i.e., ‘the many.’

Gadamer argues that dialectic as found in the Parmenides “shows that the idea of unity does not exclude, but posits together with itself, the idea of multiplicity… this is the positive intention of the dialectic, which seemed so lacking in direction: to show that the Ideas, as things in regard to which there is unity, do not need to be absolutely one but can embrace a multiplicity of things in regard to which there is unity.”113 It follows from Gadamer’s interpretation that ideas cannot be isolated from other ideas, which was a view that Socrates had held earlier in the dialogue. In fact, he says, the idea of unity ‘posits together with itself’ the idea of multiplicity. So while we do not find that the idea of the one can ‘mix’ with the idea of the many (which would have surprised Socrates), according to Gadamer, the knowledge that the exercise produces is the realization that it is necessary for these two opposing ideas to coexist. This means that we cannot think or speak of the idea of ‘one’ in total isolation. However, the demonstration of the co-existence of these ideas could be an artifact of our human language and the cognitive faculties at work when engaged in dialectic.

113 Ibid., 96–97.
The Gadamerian view of dialectic in the *Parmenides* does not take paradoxical conclusions such as ‘if *one* is, then it is unlimited and therefore *not one*’ (and others found in the second part of the dialogue), as evidence that the hypothesis posited is false. Instead, Gadamer sees the paradoxical results as evidence that dialectic as a means by which to obtain philosophical truth does not *directly* produce or provide access to the sort of knowledge being sought. Gadamer holds that dialectical investigation does not allow one to ‘see’ the ‘object itself,’ instead dialectic “seeks out what speaks for [the object] and what speaks against it; which is to say that it takes up its position not by explicating the seen object by progressively approaching it, while keeping it always in view, but rather by developing in itself all the sides of the explications through which it encounters the object and by embroiling them in contradictions, so that its distance from the object comes to the fore. In other words, it takes these explications as its point of departure; that is, it states a hypothesis and develops it into manifestly impossible consequences and then makes the opposite assumption and develops this, too, to the point where it cancels itself out.”¹¹⁴ Dialectical discussion makes our ‘distance from the object come to the fore,’ by producing contradictory results for the hypothesis and for its opposite. One consequence of this interpretation is that dialectic emphasizes that our thoughts and language are not the actual objects which they represent. When it comes to ideas, rational thought and discussion, such as dialectic, is not a viable method or path to follow when seeking direct knowledge. Human language uses terms such as ‘one’ and ‘many’ which can have a wide range of significations but, in order for meaningful discussion to be possible our thoughts

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 18.
and words must be directed at a fixed object. By showing the various contradictory conclusions that follow from both an hypothesis and its opposite, dialectic exposes the many senses which belong to seemingly simple terms as well as the limitations of discursive thinking and discourse as means by which to discover knowledge.

Gadamer’s own views at the time of his writing *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics* were heavily influenced by Heidegger’s phenomenology. Hence, Gadamer regards a *direct* ‘seeing’ of the object as a superior way to arrive at truth, ‘to gain access to the object’ than dialectic. But he finds that dialectic, nevertheless, “relates to a seeing of the object which is supposed to be prepared for precisely by unfolding *ta dokounta* [which Gadamer translates/interprets as “the appearances”] – that is, the forms in which we already encounter it in the public explications embodied in language – in order to dissolve them… through refutation [dialectic] succeeds in laying bare the object field, but in itself it does not have at its disposal any means by which to prove [statements and opinions] positively by reference to the object.”

It is only when, at the end of the dialectic exercise one has exposed all of the contradictions, according to Gadamer, that the way is cleared to have access to the object itself. The dialectical exercise, on this view, is intended to ‘prepare’ the way for philosophical knowledge by showing how our statements and opinions cannot represent the full significance of the idea. Focusing on the various facets of an idea can produce a wide range of results some of which are incompatible with others. Gadamer’s interpretation of dialectic in the *Parmenides* holds that going through the exhaustive dialectical analysis of the various facets of an object

115 Ibid., 19.
does not produce positive knowledge by itself, but does, in a way, prepare one for a ‘direct seeing’ of the object. But interpretations such as those of Gadamer, Meinwald and others hold that the object of each hypothesis and each argument in the dialectical demonstration is always the same. But, as we will see below, this assumption about the object or objects of the hypotheses is not universally held.

§5. Several ‘Ones’

There are numerous interpretations and a debate about to what Parmenides’ hypothesis of to hen, ‘the One,’ mentioned in the dialogue refers. Some, such as Miller, Kenneth Sayre, and Robert Turnbull, argue that in the various arguments, Parmenides refers to different conceptions of ‘the One.’ This, to use Meinwald’s terminology, ‘multi-subject’ view was even held by some of the earliest commentators on the Parmenides. R.E. Allen notes that the 5th century C.E. Neoplatonist Proclus “maintained that the word ‘one’ [in the dialectical exercise] is trebly ambiguous, as between a One which is superior to being, a One inferior to being, and a One of the same order as being.” 116 While few scholars subscribe to the Neoplatonist interpretation, the multi-subject view remains popular. Sayre, for instance, argues that ‘the One’ of the historical Parmenides is examined, as well as a various ‘Platonic’ conceptions of ‘One’ and finally, the ‘One’ of the Pythagoreans appears. On Sayre’s interpretation, Parmenides’ exercise is useful because the seemingly contradictory results stimulate critical thinking. However, Sayre is of the opinion that the various arguments deal with different senses of the term to hen and

this is the reason why the results merely ‘seem’ to be contradictory. When results from hypotheses that address varying senses of to hen are compared, the ostensible conclusion is that the hypothesis of to hen is problematic. “At first glance [Parmenides’ concluding statement in the dialogue] appears to be contradictory,” Sayre explains, “the truth Plato depicts Parmenides as having reached at this point concerns the inadequacies of both Eleatic ontology and the early theory of Forms as bases for an understanding of participation, and the promises of a revised Pythagoreanism in that same regard.”

By disregarding Parmenides’ contradictory concluding statements and, instead, matching the results of hypotheses which Sayre believes deal with the same conception of to hen, Sayre argues that there are no real contradictions in the dialectical exercise.

Turnbull, too, divides the hypotheses about to hen into “the Parmenidean Version” and “the Platonic Version.” He finds that “The Parmenidean Version yields for all four of its consequence sets neither/nor consequences of the form ‘The one is neither F nor G (where F and G are opposites of some sort)” and, according to Turnbull, “on the Parmenidean Version there simply can be no sentential predication at all.” In other words, when the “Parmenidean” sense of to hen is under discussion no predicates that indicate something observable with the senses is possible and this is why all spatial-temporal predicates are denied in these hypotheses. For the arguments that deal with the Platonic Version, the results are “both/and consequences of the form ‘The one is (or in supposition seven appears to be) both F and G (where F and G are opposites of some

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117 Sayre, Parmenides’ Lesson, 304 – 305.
118 Turnbull, The Parmenides and Plato’s Late Philosophy, 48.
sort).""\(^{119}\) Turnbull explains that the results of the Platonic Version “would seem to be unacceptable,” but, “Plato is at pains to distinguish senses or respects that mitigate the paradox or contradiction in saying that the one is both \(F\) and \(G\).”\(^{120}\) Turnbull and Sayre both hold that the philosophical benefit of the dialectical exercise is gained when the seemingly contradictory results are explained away with the dialectician’s discovery of the distinct conceptions of to hen at play in the several hypotheses.

In Meinwald’s valuable study, she reviews and assesses prominent interpretations of the dialectical exercise. She is not satisfied with most of the methods showing how the contradictions are illusory. Meinwald says that there is “one primary way” that most scholars show the contradictions to be apparent, namely, “by supposing that different sections of argument deal with different subjects.”\(^{121}\) For example, consider what Sayre says about the subject(s) of the arguments:

Parmenides’ exercise calls for examining the subject in question from various perspectives, and that different perspectives bring different features of the subject into view. A consequence is that while the subject of the hypotheses will not vary radically from point to point in the examination – shifting from unity, say, to likeness or motion – it very likely will appear to take on varying features from hypothesis to hypothesis, and even to align itself with the unities of different philosophic traditions.\(^{122}\)

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Meinwald, Plato’s Parmenides, 24.

\(^{122}\) Sayre, Parmenides’ Lesson, 107.
According to Sayre, Parmenides might be considering a ‘Platonic/Pythagorean’ concept of ‘the one’ in a particular argument only to then switch to a conception of ‘one’ that follows from ‘Eleatic’ traditions. Meinwald’s opposition to this common trend in interpretation is well-founded. She points out that the ‘multiple-subject’ view “conflicts with the fact that the hypothesis itself is supposed to be always the same. It could not be the same if it were not always about the same subject.”¹²³ The second major problem she sees is that “multiple-subject interpreters must explain why Plato wants to discuss the subjects they distinguish.”¹²⁴ The dialectical exercise in the second part of the Parmenides is so rich with philosophical material that it lends itself quite well to creative and thought-provoking exegeses. As such, scholars and interpreters have an abundance of material with which to argue why one hypothesis deals with a “Platonic” to hen and another focuses on a Pythagorean, Eleatic, etc. ‘one.’ Thus even the arguments of notable scholars, such as Sayre, seem arbitrary in regard to what evidence is used to determine which sense of to hen is the subject of a particular hypothesis. The view that the pairing of hypotheses should follow an arrangement other than the one given in the text can even seem somewhat forced and contrived. Thus, we will follow Meinwald’s argument against the ‘multi-subject’ view. Since Parmenides states that the exercise will deal with his hypothesis of ‘the one,’ we should not introduce our own preconceptions about so-called Eleatic monism or the significance of the number one in Pythagorean mysticism. With Meinwald, we find that taking the subject of the demonstration as remaining the same

¹²³ Meinwald, Plato’s Parmenides, 25.
¹²⁴ Ibid.
from one argument to the next stays true to the text and better facilitates an understanding of the benefits of the exercise than do the multi-subject interpretations.

§6. The Limits of Logos

The dialectical demonstration, according to Sinaiko, shows that to hen, the object of Parmenides’ hypothesis, cannot be truly conveyed with words (logoi). This is because the exercise aims “to explore as exhaustively as possible the essential properties of something that is not a thing at all, but an idea.”

Engaging in dialectical discourse, the “reification” of the idea to hen leads to contradictions because as we do our best to give complete explication of the idea we cannot help but treat it as a ‘thing.’ Sinaiko holds that “if an idea itself is not one of the many things, it cannot exist in the same way as the many things do. However, language itself, discourse, is pointed towards the articulation of the many things; we cannot make a statement without making it about some thing or things. Yet, since the ideas are not things, language is, in this respect, an inadequate tool for articulating an idea.”

But while this view holds that language and, by extension, dialectical discussion is not suited to the articulation of ideas, Sinaiko sees the utility of the exercise in its showing Socrates that “the only way out of his dilemma [i.e., his inability to give a sufficient account of ideas and participation] is systematically to purge his conception of the ideas of all elements of reification.” If this is to be done and a conception of ideas that in no way shares properties or characteristics of ‘things’ is found, it is hard to see how a dialectical discussion could lead one to this knowledge. So, while

125 Sinaiko, Love, Knowledge, and Discourse, 260.
126 Ibid., 242.
127 Ibid., 198 – 199.
dialectic might show at which point language becomes inadequate, some other means to access ideas is required.

According to a view held by Francisco Gonzalez, Sinaiko and others, true knowledge does not arise from the reading, hearing or memorizing of facts or propositions. On Gonzalez’s interpretation, knowledge is obtained in the act of seeking the knowledge sought after. So, for example, Gonzalez says the following regarding knowledge of the good:

The highest knowledge is not to be understood as discovering or producing a good external to itself. *In properly using and thus rendering good the products and discoveries of the arts and sciences it is itself a manifestation of the good.* [Gonzalez argues that certain dialogues he examines show that] the good is revealed not in the objects dialectic deals with, but in how it deals with them. Dialectic is in this sense a user’s art. However, because in this very use it instantiates or brings about the good, dialectic is also an art of production. Furthermore, because the good is not something it invents, but rather something it manifests, dialectic is also an art of discovery or ‘hunter’s art.’ … The fact that the good manifests itself and is instantiated in the very process of dialectic blurs the distinction between production and discovery.”¹²⁸

According to Gonzalez, then, the philosopher comes to know the good because of the unique character of the activity of dialectic which actually ‘produces’ the good for the philosopher engaged in the activity. Dialectic, on this view, is not a method which allows

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¹²⁸ Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 114.
the philosopher to discover and reveal hidden truths to anyone who will listen at some later time. Gonzalez argues that doing dialectic is what allows the philosopher to have knowledge of the good because the good ‘manifests itself’ when the philosopher is engaged in the activity.

While there are certainly indications in the *Parmenides* that Plato did not believe that knowledge of ideas was something that could be expressed directly, it is not as evident that Gonzalez’s interpretation of dialectic holds true for this work. The virtue of courage or self-control may manifest itself in discussions where Socrates and his interlocutors engage in dialectical investigations of these virtues, but a detailed argument would be required to explicate how ‘the one’ or ‘unity’ itself is made manifest by means of the dialectic in the *Parmenides*. Although Gonzalez’s interpretation of dialectic may not hold true for every dialogue, he does raise an important point when describing the knowledge obtained through dialectic as in someway connected to, that is, not ‘completely distinct’ from the activity itself.

§7. Philosophical Knowledge and Dialectic

Based on a close reading of the dialogue and consideration of the views of several prominent scholars, we found in this exploration of the *Parmenides* that contradictory conclusions and paradoxes can be attributed to the inadequacy of discursive thought and language (*logos*) to disclose the sort of knowledge which Socrates sought in his philosophical endeavors. While the dialectical exercise failed to produce a coherent, non-contradictory account of *to hen*, this failure alone is not enough evidence to infer that discursive thinking and dialectical discussion is always incapable of producing an
account of the sort of knowledge sought by Socrates. We found various contributing factors which seemed to impede the examination of to hen, for example the inexperience of Aristoteles. But this shows that, while it might be possible to disclose philosophical knowledge by means of dialectic, nonetheless, logic and rational argument are not sufficient tools to discover truth. Thus the long, complicated logical demonstration which comprises the second part of the dialogue produces no positive results which pertain directly to the object being discussed. In other words, we found no arguments that favor the original hypothesis over the opposite hypothesis or vice versa. If it is equally impossible to reject both hypotheses, then the philosopher must weigh evidence not found in the dialectical examination in order to determine which hypothesis is true, or at least stronger.

At the end of the exercise, without any additional information or introducing external assumptions, we have no reason to believe that 1) one hypothesis is better, i.e. closer to the truth, than the other, 2) that both hypotheses are false, or 3) that both hypotheses are true. The benefit of the dialectical exercise is that it leads Parmenides’ listeners (Plato’s readers) to realize that, since rational arguments can be used to support both sides of a discussion as well as embroil an arguably uncomplicated topic such as ‘one’ in innumerable contradictions, given that there is a true position being defended, the philosopher will have to determine the truth of the hypotheses by some other means, e.g., a grasping or perceiving of the idea with the mind.
CONCLUSION

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of dialectic in Plato’s *Parmenides*. The examination was guided by four questions: 1) What is meant by “dialectic” in the dialogue?; 2) What is said about dialectic?; 3) How is dialectic portrayed?; and 4) Is dialectic synonymous with philosophy in dialogue, or is there some other method or means by which philosophical knowledge is obtained? After an analysis of the dialogue which focused on the above four questions, the views of several knowledgeable and influential scholars were discussed. In this final chapter, we will review and assess the results of the preceding study.

Forms of the term *dialegesthai* appear only twice in the *Parmenides*, and despite the common meaning of the term in ancient Greek, the context in which it is used shows that the interlocutors in the dialogue considered it an important activity that helps one gain philosophical knowledge. Plato, of course, wrote the dialogue and it would be natural to assume that the views exposed in the *Parmenides* are Plato’s own views. But we noted literary and dramatic aspects of the dialogue which make it difficult to determine which beliefs were actually held by Plato. Scholars have a variety of interpretative tools used to aid in determining ‘who speaks for Plato,’ but in this study we looked to the *Parmenides* alone. Our examination of Plato’s dialectic is therefore limited in scope so the results here are not intended to apply to other dialogues *per se*. While
‘dialectic’ comes from a Greek term which literally means ‘the art (techne) of discourse,’ in Plato’s Parmenides the word has a technical sense and we endeavored to determine the
details of dialectical activity found in the dialogue.

The first part of our study focused on what the term ‘dialectic’ means in the
Parmenides. There are only two occurrences of the word in the dialogue, but when the
word is used we gain insight into the importance of the activity. The first time the term is
used, in a passage at 135b – c, Parmenides tells Socrates that the “power of dialegesthai”
will be “destroyed” if one does not “concede that there are Forms [eide] of ‘the things
that are’ and will not define a Form for each one [for] he will not have anything to turn
his thought to.”129 Thus eide, which we use ‘ideas’ to translate, are prior to dialectic.
Further, it is necessary to have a ‘definition’ horos of the ideas for dialectic to be
effective. We found that ideas are the objects of philosophical knowledge and that when
Socrates is described as searching for ‘definitions,’ he is looking for the horos of an idea.
In the Parmenides, Socrates is said to be primarily concerned with moral ideas such as
‘justice,’ ‘the good’ and ‘beauty.’ To find the horos of something is to determine its
scope and its limits. The word is used metaphorically when applied to ideas, which are
not physical and are understood with the mind alone, for the original significance of the
term horos in ancient Greek had to do with marking off physical boundaries.

When dialectic is next used, Parmenides explains to Socrates that being
enthusiastic about dialectic is admirable, but more is required if truth is to be found.130 It
is necessary to train oneself with a sort of mental exercise in order for dialectic to be

130 Ibid., 135d.
effective and the second half of the dialogue is devoted to a demonstration of the exercise. The activity of dialectic, from what has just been said, is not so much a method by means of which one can find truth. Rather, some knowledge, or at least the acceptance of the existence, of philosophical truth, i.e., ideas, is required before dialectic can be effective. Dialectic, then, seems to be a sort of discussion which has philosophical knowledge as its object but which does not discover that knowledge.

The importance of dialectic is clear by its being closely associated with knowing and defining ideas. But, Parmenides warns that his dialectical exercise will be viewed as ‘idle talk’ **adoleschia** by the majority of people. The concern for how people would view philosophy was understandable in ancient Greece as public opinion was mostly negative. Philosophers would be mistaken for sophists who were seen as utterly unconcerned with truth and morality. Isocrates described the speech and teaching of sophists as **adoleschia**, and contrasting his description of that type of speech with dialectic, as Parmenides does in the dialogue, we find that dialectic: 1) is concerned with both words and deeds; 2) does not attempt to address topics unknown to speakers or, further, topics which cannot possibly be known by humans; and 3) can provide practical knowledge or deals with the practical application of knowledge. While trained philosophers will see the value of dialectic, most will confuse it with idle talk and a reading of the dialectical exercise shows how this confusion might occur.

There are three main philosophical conversations in the *Parmenides* and we looked at each of these to see how dialectic is there portrayed. In the first conversation, between Zeno and Socrates, we noted that the discussion dealt with ‘hypotheses.’
Hypotheses, here, are philosophical views and beliefs that are examined methodically. Zeno’s strategy, in his defense of Parmenides’ hypothesis, was to show that the opposite hypothesis implied more paradoxical conclusions than that of his friend. The defense was, therefore, primarily polemical in nature and not necessarily concerned with the articulation of philosophical truth. We are not given a complete account of Zeno’s treatise but it may have been incidentally dialectical in that the hypothesis of ‘the many’ could have been exhaustively analyzed and thus the idea of ‘the many’ could have been articulated. Parmenides does say that the dialectical exercise has commonalities with the arguments in Zeno’s treatise.

Just as Zeno had argued that the hypothesis of the many led to contradictions when logically scrutinized, Parmenides’ interrogation of Socrates exposes problems with his hypothesis of ideas. The relationship of participation between ideas and the many things which are informed by ideas is not clear in Socrates account. The discussion ends in aporia because neither Parmenides nor Socrates acknowledge the problem that occurs when speaking about immaterial ideas “grasped by the mind alone” with language used to describe the sensible, transient world of experience. This raises doubts about the suitability of dialectic to do the job of articulating ideas with language. As Parmenides’ demonstration illustrates, a thorough dialectical analysis of the idea of to hen, the one, will produces a series of conclusions some of which not only contradict one another but even some that are internally contradictory.
We saw that Parmenides’ dialectical exercise deals with ideas rather than objects of empirical observation.\textsuperscript{131} According to the structure of the exercise, an hypothesis about an idea will be systematically analyzed. The hypothesis and its opposite will be considered; the analysis will consider what follows for the object of the hypotheses in relation to itself and “in relation to itself and in relation to each and every one of the others.”\textsuperscript{132} Furthermore, the exercise involves examining ‘the others,’ taking them to both exist and not exist, and what follows for the others in relation to themselves and the object of the original hypothesis. What Parmenides means by ‘the others’ is not quite clear, but what we should note is that the exercise involves an exhaustive analysis of an hypothesis whose object is an idea. The analysis will consider what follows if the idea exists and if it does not exist, how this affects ‘the others,’ as well as what follows if the others exist and do not exist and what follows for these hypotheses for the idea and the others themselves. The idea is therefore considered in its various facets and from many different perspectives and this activity, I propose, is supposed to be analogous to finding the \textit{horos} of a physical object. Just as a farmer might survey his property to learn about the soil, geographical features, and to put up a fence where his land borders his neighbor’s, the dialectical exercise metaphorically surveys an idea in order to gain knowledge of it and to distinguish it from other ideas and things.

After studying dialectic in the \textit{Parmenides} using the four questions to guide our work, we looked at modern scholarship on the dialogue. Influential and important works on Plato’s dialectic and the \textit{Parmenides} by Constance Meinwald, Kenneth Sayre,
Mitchell Miller and others were reviewed. While there were aspects of these interpretations with which we agreed and disagreed, here we will look at the interpretations which best matched our reading of the dialogue. Many scholars find that in one way or another, the contradictions that are produced in the exercise are intended to stimulate further thinking in the reader or listener. Miller called this “pedagogical provocation.” One of the remarkable features of Plato’s works is the way that critical readers are challenged and almost, it seems, invited to become actively engaged in the problems being discussed. The *Parmenides* is one of the most complex of Plato’s dialogues so the ‘pedagogical provocation’ would only be effective on readers who already possessed the intellectual power and concentration to follow the arguments.

The ‘provocation’ interpretation is compatible with our reading, for we found that language was not entirely suited to the articulation of ideas. By provoking the reader to think about the topic further than what is discussed in the dialogue, Miller and Gadamer find that a different type of thinking is involved. Miller describes this process as the ‘conversion of the soul’ from the consideration of sensible things to the beholding of ideas with the intellect. Gadamer finds that when contradictions are found for both the hypothesis and its opposite, the contradictions ‘cancel themselves out.’ That is, the philosopher is able to see past the contradictory propositions and move on to be in a better position to directly see the object itself.

Our study has shown that in Plato’s *Parmenides* the activity of ‘dialectic’ is closely associated with the conception of philosophy, ideas and the search for definitions.

133 Miller, *Conversion*, 76.
in the dialogue. Dialectic is an activity in which interlocutors discuss philosophical topics, however, knowledge of ideas is required if the dialectical discussion is to be productive. Therefore, the term ‘dialectic’ in this dialogue does not refer to the whole of philosophy. Philosophy and dialectic are not synonymous. The young Socrates’ dialectical investigations focused on finding the definitions of moral ideas such as ‘the good’ and ‘justice.’ But Parmenides finds that Socrates is attempting to define these topics too soon. Socrates does not yet have the philosophical acumen to engage in productive dialectic and his inability to explicate a coherent account of ideas is a reflection of his inexperience. However, Parmenides explains that power of dialectic depends upon at least some beliefs regarding ideas, for without stable, unchanging objects to which one can direct one’s thoughts and speech, one “will not have anything to turn his thought to.”135 The inadequacy of young Socrates’ dialectic, according to Parmenides, is due to his lack of dialectical training. But the demonstration of the dialectical exercise shows that logical arguments can be used to produce contradictions for both an hypothesis and its negation. This is an indication that in order to obtain philosophical knowledge, discursive thought and dialectical discussions are not enough. If one must have beliefs about ideas in order for dialectic to be effective, there must be some type of thinking or conceiving, other than that at play when one is engaged in dialectic, which leads one to hold these beliefs.136

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136 As this paper focuses on dialectic in the Parmenides, and I have argued that knowledge or beliefs about ideas, in this dialogue, must be prior to productive dialectical discussion, the question of how one comes to have knowledge of ideas falls outside the scope of our examination.
REFERENCES


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