

Plato's *Parmenides* and its Influence

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If we consider that the influence of Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* in later antiquity was completely different from what we recognize in it today, we are faced with a genuine puzzle. It is not that we really know today what the true significance of this dialogue is. The interpretation of the *Parmenides* wavers between the extremes of the highest recognition of the dialectical art which is exhibited in the dialogue and a certain helplessness in relation to its intended philosophical content. The first part of the dialogue in particular, that is, the catechizing of the young Socrates by the old Parmenides, has misled the historical thinking of our times to understand the whole dialogue as a kind of self-criticism on Plato's part and a turning point in his theory of forms. This is not the place to criticize the short-sightedness of this interpretation. It could be demonstrated that the object of Aristotle's criticism, that is, the separation of the ideas from the appearances or the so-called *chorismos*, is in fact denied in the *Parmenides*. Moreover, it could be shown that the Neoplatonic theories of the two worlds and of the relation of *mimesis* and *eikon*, which Plotinus develops, can only be regarded as a further development of Plato because Plotinus, as a result of the transcendental view of his time, understands the *chorismos* of the ideas all too literally. I would be repeating myself, if I wished to demonstrate that on this question the Neoplatonists are bad Platonists.¹ Indeed, the later Platonism received its essential inspiration not from this critical aspect which is presented in the first part of the dialogue, but from the dialectical passages which constitute the main part of the whole. The dialogue has occasionally been read as the handbook of a negative theology; that is to say, the proof of the absolute transcendence of the One, i.e., the divine, was primarily derived from it and the hierarchy of the hypostases was subsequently read into the text of the *Parmenides*.

In contrast to this, recent scholarship has taken very different directions. With the rise of a historical mode of thinking the unified tradition of Platonism was dissolved and the original Plato was sought behind his historical influence. Thus this later Platonism received a clear outline of its own for the first time. This was expressed by the new name, 'Neoplatonism'. Hegel, the true ances-

1. Cp. *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*, Heidelberg, 1978.

tor of a philosophical historiography and a philosophical admirer of the late Platonists of antiquity, was already familiar with this term, but he did not find anything unsuitable in the theological interpretation of the *Parmenides* by the Neoplatonists. Rather he saw therein the real import of the dialogue: 'it is in truth simply not expressed explicitly, for the subject is certainly present' — with the limitation, 'that the simple substances and their relation and movement only express moments of the objective, not its spirit'. Hegel's philosophical energy and his power of construction succeeded in rediscovering the speculative principle of the Platonic as well as of his own dialectic in the Platonic theology of later times. Thus he succeeded in giving the *Parmenides* a meaningful place in Plato's work. Neokantianism (Natorp, Hartmann) has only partially followed him in this, when it declares not the first negative, but the second, positive argument to be the true meaning of the whole: the second argument develops the system of all fundamental concepts.

The situation is more difficult for us. The distinction of Plato from Neoplatonism is full of problems for us. Even if we recognize that the Platonic philosophy is closely and fruitfully associated with the religious tradition of the Greek world, no one can overlook the completely new meaning of religious transcendence which developed in later antiquity and brought about the new link with Plato. No one will therefore be able to accept immediately this 'theological' claim of Plato's work. With Plato, in spite of all solemnity of speech, it is the movement of philosophical thinking itself and the persistence of the Socratic demand for justice that point in a speculative manner beyond all traditional religious forms, even if Plato at the same time consciously opposes the trend towards enlightenment in Greek thought and sanctions the traditional forms of the Greek cult. Both are very different from the religious fervour of later antiquity — so different, that the direct reference of Neoplatonism to Plato, poses its own problems.

It is most confusing that we do not understand clearly the origins of Neoplatonism nor, therefore, the theological interpretation of Plato in the sense of a radical transcendence. The historiography of Greek thought introduced by Aristotle and his successors certainly does not view Plato in the light of his religious antecedents or future influence even if the later commentators, to whom we owe our most valuable knowledge of the history of Greek thought, again and again reveal the influence of Neoplatonic thoughts. Nevertheless, more recent scholarship (Dodds, Theiler, Merlan, Dörrie, Krämer) has shown that the trend which we first notice in the writings of Plotinus has a long previous history. The most important aspect is found in Simplicius (in *Phys.* 181, 10), where Moderatos is men-

tioned, who finally goes back to Speusippus. It can scarcely be disputed that among the immediate successors of Plato, at any rate with Xenokrates, dogmatic, religious tendencies emerge, which would make it seem reasonable to date the origins of Neoplatonism back to the Academy. At any rate, the later transposition of the ideas into *nous*, which constitutes the decisive transition to Neoplatonism, was already prefigured there, in so far as Plato's successors in the Academy, Speusippus and Xenokrates, place the mathematical forms in *nous*. Finally the influence of the Aristotelian doctrine of *nous* is quite clear in the writings of Plotinus — so much so, that the 'it' of the One sometimes becomes 'he', the neuter becomes masculine, which is, however, not to be understood as an anticipation of the personal God of the Judeo-Christian religion.

In any case the *Parmenides* hardly affords a pretext for such interests. The case is different in the *Timaeus* in so far as the myth of the demiurge after all permitted such an internalizing of the ideas — although not without thereby doing some violence to the text. It is entirely in keeping with this state of affairs that Plotinus holds more to Plato's myths and rarely mentions the *Parmenides*. It is first explicitly referred to by Porphyry. But Proclus also confirms, that the dialogue had already been understood as a theological tractate for some time, as we know from Simplicius.

It is really astonishing, that modern scholars too continue to attempt a theological interpretation of the *Parmenides* (Jean Wahl, Max Wundt, Hardie, Speiser, Enzo Paci). This can probably be explained by the fact that a serious philosophical explanation of the dialectical content of the dialogue, which would really explain the whole of this skillful composition, is not entirely successful. Even Cornford's perceptive work, which is oriented more strongly backwards, that is, back towards the didactic poem of Parmenides and to the Pythagorean doctrine of numbers, did not provide a solution to the real problem, although it did clarify the logical conclusiveness of many of the steps of this chain of argument. That we no longer see in the *Parmenides* simply a comedy of concepts, but recognize the seriousness of the logical exercise in which the dialectical complexities of the Eleatic doctrine are demonstrated, is admittedly a sign of progress, but does not, nevertheless, provide a satisfactory answer to the question of the positive purpose of these arguments. At the same time it is indisputable that in this dialogue Parmenides is portrayed as a man who has attained a real discretion over himself.

Now we do possess a detailed commentary by Proclus, which, among other things, provides us with all kinds of information about the precursors of his own theological interpretation of the

Parmenides. This commentary, however, which has come down to us, does not treat the whole of the dialogue and never did treat the whole.

Since Klibansky's discovery of the conclusion of the Proclus commentary preserved in Latin, we know with certainty that it only dealt with the so-called first hypothesis of the second part of the dialogue. This is significant enough. Whoever looks for the divine things in this dialogue would have to confine himself to the first argument, which abstracts the One Being from all conceivable predicates. This could be read as an example of negative theology. But even Proclus' main work, the *Theologia Platonica*, does not help us any further. It is true that the theological interpretation of the *Parmenides* is there discussed at considerable length (with a rejection of its interpretation as a purely logical exercise). Yet there is something puzzling — and disappointing — about the presumption with which the Plotinian model of the hypostatic hierarchy is read into the sequence of dialectical stages in the dialogue. Not even the slightest attempt is made to find a basis in the text of these arguments for the 'theological' interpretation. Consequently it appears quite absurd to us today to justify the theological interpretation of the *Parmenides*, as Proclus did, on the basis of Plato's *Theatetus* and its reverential references to the dark depths of Parmenides' thought.

Of greater significance is Porphyry, especially if the *Parmenides* commentary discovered in 1898 in the Turin palimpsest is from his hand, as Hadot has shown to be probable. There the simple and isolated One, which is treated in the first passage, is understood as 'spirit', that is, as *nous*. This is interesting enough. Our main interest, however, would of course be to know how the greatest Platonist of later antiquity, how Plotinus himself understood the *Parmenides* and especially what he made of this first train of thought.

Now in the case of Plotinus we stand on firm ground in so far as his entire work has come down to us. Consequently we can say with certainty that his self-forged link with Plato does not mean that he was satisfied with a secondary explication of Platonic thought. On the contrary, Plotinus builds entirely upon his own perceptions and when he refers to Plato it serves him rather as a confirmation of his own thoughts, than as their starting point. Furthermore, it is clear that he still approaches Plato with his own questions even when he explicitly refers to him. In so doing, he frequently employs as proof that which we cannot recognize as such. Neither the famous *epekeina* of the *Republic*, nor the mythical language which appears in the *Phaedrus* and above all in the *Timaeus* — and particularly the translation of the ideas into *nous* (for which he refers to *Timaeus* 39e7!) in the latter dialogue — can in our eyes really make Plato a witness of the

Plotinian teaching. Now my thesis is as follows: Plotinus' confessed link with Plato is nevertheless not simply forced — it extends far beyond every explicit reference and lets Plato himself appear in a new light, and in different relations drawn in new directions.

Unfortunately, however, the *Parmenides* hardly plays any role at all in this. It is true that Plotinus repeatedly refers to the introductory conversation and more recent scholarship has turned its attention to this.² To the question which we would ask him concerning his understanding of the dialectic expounded by Parmenides, there is, however, only a schematic and imprecise answer, which was nevertheless of tremendous influence. It is to be found in the writing about the three hypostases.

There Plotinus cites the *Parmenides* as proof of his own hypostatic doctrine (in addition to Plato's second letter, sixth letter and the *Timaeus*). It is claimed of Plato that, in comparison to the identification of *on* and *nous*, which Parmenides proposed in his didactic poem, Plato proceeded more precisely, in so far as he distinguished three things, the One, the One-Many and the One and the Many. This clearly goes back to the first two stages in the dialectic of the *Parmenides*, which thus Plotinus already, like his later followers, understood as three stages, in so far as he interprets the corollary of the second argument as a third, independent argument and understands the third hypostasis as that of the *psyche* (145e). This is how Plotinus, guided by his 'trinitarian' question, understood it.

It must be admitted, that such concentration on the first two stages and the counting of them as three stages is not entirely without foundation. There is in fact certain formal evidence for it and for this reason it has found followers to this day. For Plato's text explicitly states: 'And in the third place we wish to say. . .' This is peculiar enough and at any rate gives the following passage a strong emphasis. τὸ δὲ τρίτον can even be read here as an exclamation mark, on the level of the colloquial 'thirdly'. Furthermore, the positive argument, which is put forward as the second stage, as well as the negative argument developed in the first stage, are mentioned in connection with this statement in such a way as to imply that they are presuppositions of this third argument (*Parm.* 155e). One cannot, however, understand the text in this way. As to its content, the new third argument can only belong to the second stage and, like it, again deals with participation in time. That the One is Many and at the same time is not Many in so far as it participates in time, is taken

2. Cp. for example the new essay by F. M. Schröder, 'The Platonic *Parmenides* and Imitation in Plotinus', *Dionysus* 2 (1978), which confines itself entirely to the opening conversation and does not treat the dialectical passages with which we are concerned at all.

as the theme and as a result new dialectical entanglements become apparent. In the dialectical stages through which Parmenides passes there is not the slightest suggestion that this 'third', which is to form the third hypostasis after the One and *nous*, is *psyche*, as it would have to be according to Plotinus' explanation. These stages of course by no means end with this 'third' as a conclusion or turning point. It can, moreover, be said of the whole of Plotinus' work on the three hypostases, that its title does not properly correspond to its content and that in the end only the third hypostasis, *psyche*, represents his view and his peculiar interpretation. For this very reason the reference to the *Parmenides* remains scanty and unproductive. It is rather the didactic poem of Parmenides himself, which Plotinus really calls on here, and that for the second hypostasis, for *nous*.

From this reference to the dialogue *Parmenides* hardly anything can be learned of the deeper connection which links Plotinus with Platonic thought. This method reveals even less about the true intention of Plato's *Parmenides*. Both questions require a different approach. It will turn out that the same path leads to both goals. There is no question about it — aside from the use of the metaphysical metaphors of the demiurge in the *Timaeus* and of the journey of the soul in the *Phaedrus*, it is above all Plato's *Sophist*, whose doctrine of the five genera finds a precise and productive development in Plotinus.

It can now certainly be said, that the great treatise on the genera of being, in which Plotinus takes issue above all with the Aristotelian and Stoic doctrine of categories and for which he depends on the doctrine of genera in the *Sophist*, is not only most difficult and scholastic, but also in general lacks the inimitable tone which otherwise characterizes Plotinus' references to the teachings of the great thinkers and above all to Plato. On the other hand it must be said that here, in a way the suitability of which cannot on the whole be disputed, Plotinus follows the argument of the *Sophist* and shows hardly anything of the forced and vague references to Plato, which are otherwise to be found in his writings. Here he really follows Plato. Nevertheless it is purest Plotinus when here, as everywhere else, he chooses the mystery of *psyche* as the starting point for his own taking up of Plato. However much he follows Plato in this, Plotinus at the same time goes his own ways. For him the soul is unity and plurality. As unity it is separated from the dividedness of the corporeal and clearly distinguished by a new undividedness. But over against the One itself, the soul is distinguishably many. Thus the question becomes possible: what and how? — is plurality that which is to be seen in the soul? That 'being' is to be found in the soul is evident. Being and life are something common to the entire

soul; they constitute the community of the soul itself. The category of being is thus to be found in the soul. This is easy for us to understand: animation — and that is *psyche* — appertains to the living thing as a whole; it belongs to his whole 'being'.

Kinesis, however, is given prominence as the first thing which, besides being and life, appears to the existing life of the soul as its own genus. The argument proceeds with general reference to Plato's *Sophist* in such a way, that *kinesis* and *stasis* and identity and otherness and only these are distinguished as separate genera alongside *ousia*. It might be thought that the resulting interpretation of *kinesis* and *stasis* as thinking and that which is thought is no longer Plato, but already an expression of that internalization and transformation into the psychic with which Plotinus colours the entire ontology of Plato and Aristotle. In particular, it might be thought that, with *psyche* as the starting point, the Eleatic and Heraclitean contraposition of *stasis* and *kinesis* is falsely transformed into the mediation of thinking and that which is thought.

Is this suspicion really justified? Let us approach the Platonic text with this question in mind and test it anew. I wonder: if in the dialogue *Parmenides* as well a theological interpretation of Plato breaks down, was he not perhaps already the discoverer of the ontology of the *psyche*? It is basically an old question which has been asked of the *Sophist* again and again; namely how the so incongruous group of highest genera which is treated in it is to be explained. On, *kinesis*, *stasis*, identity, otherness: what have two so mutually exclusive genera as motion and rest (i.e. standing still) to do with being, identity, otherness and not-being? How are the former to participate in the universal, dialectical interweaving of the latter? Without doubt *kinesis* and *stasis* are of fundamental significance for Plato. In the *Theaetetus* he develops a universal theory of flux, an ontology of process, in order to point indirectly from its untenability to the true concept of knowledge and to the opposed Eleatic position as a corrective. In the same way he prepares for the dialectic of the highest genera of being which he unfolds in the *Sophist* with the remark that neither the materialists nor the supporters of the ideas can defend the onesidedness of their position. Neither the denial of motionless being nor the denial of motion is thinkable. The dialectic of the ideas, which is then introduced, nevertheless deals with *kinesis* and *stasis* as two mutually exclusive opposites and this treatment only indirectly serves the interweaving of being, identity and otherness and thus the recognition of not-being. There is no mention of a corresponding interweaving of *kinesis* and *stasis* with one another (*Soph.* 250a8; 254d7; 255a10 ff.).

Really not? It would surely be strange if the materialists were

forced to a recognition of *phronesis*, that is, to a partnership with the identical in itself, and if the formalists had to recognize motion, because being cannot be thought of without *nous*, life and soul. Is indeed in the end a universal participation also valid for *kinesis* and *stasis* so that a participation of *stasis* in *kinesis* and *kinesis* in *stasis* becomes conceivable? In the *Sophist* this is at any rate considered potentially (*Soph.* 256b6). Is there more behind this? That is the question which I would like to ask — whether and in what sense already in Plato's writings, and not first in the work of Plotinus, *kinesis* has something to do with thinking (and thus with *stasis*). The *Sophist* itself already points in this direction in so far as the reference to *phronesis* as against the materialists (247b9) and to *zoë* and *nous* as against the idealists (249a), on both sides implies the indivisibility of that which is thought and the movement of thinking. The obvious opposition and mutual exclusiveness which appertain to *kinesis* and *stasis* in common usage cannot be the final word. Nevertheless this is suggested in 256b7. Are there further intimations in this direction in Plato's work and can the Platonic *Parmenides* be numbered among them?

Let us begin with the latter. It seems beyond doubt to me that all interpretations of the dialogue which neglect the symmetrical construction of the dialectical steps which Parmenides expounds in favour of one side or the other, overlook the evidence of the composition.

The Neoplatonic preference for the first stage which demonstrates the absolute transcendence of the One, can no more be justified than the preference, based on Albinos, for the second stage which Hegel and the Neokantians follow in that they see in the *Parmenides* an anticipation of the Aristotelian doctrine of the categories and in the final instance of the ideal of Hegel's logic. Over and against this, it must be insisted that there is a balance here. The antithetical extremes of the complete dividedness and of the complete connectedness of the ideas, as set out in *Sophist* 251d, appear here. They aim for a mean which does not appear as such and which would be the true dialectic of the ideas.

This interpretation seems to correspond most with the symmetrical structure of Eleatic dialectic. Thus it is even more striking that there is nevertheless a conspicuous asymmetry in the development of this dialectic in the *Parmenides*. It is precisely that disputed section (155e-157b) which is at times understood as a synthesis of the first two stages, at times as the description of the hypostasis of *psyche*, at times as a simple corollary to the second stage and which conceives the temporality of all motion as a transition and places it in the 'exaifnes', in 'no time'. What is the point of this appendix? Such an

asymmetry cannot be considered accidental in such a structured work. It must have some significance.

It is no doubt true, that the argument presupposes the participation of the One in motion as in rest, and that in this, the alternating exclusion of motion or of rest is indirectly implied. This is determined by the very notion of participation in time. But it is precisely at this point that the new dialectical development comes into being, in so far as a participation in time follows from the partaking of time; a *metalambanein* follows from the *metechein*. This is carried through beginning with coming to be and passing away, that is, with participation in being, through participation in the One and the Many, in the like and the unlike, in the greater, the identical and the smaller and is thus demonstrated in its universal significance. Then, however, the argument towards which everything tends begins. It is reduced to its principle in the transition from motion to rest and from rest to motion. This seems significant to me. It is the concept of *metaballein* which is so familiar to us from the *Sophist* (255a and elsewhere) and from Aristotle. The word is a favourite expression in the Greek language since Homer. It expresses a sudden change from good fortune to bad, from good weather to bad, and so forth. It evidently expresses the Greek trust in and distrust of being and is related to the Eleatic concept of being as its negative. Now in the Platonic dialogue *Parmenides* reveals the temporal structure of this change as the 'instant', which is between rest and motion in no time (*Parmenides* 156e). This structure holds true for all *metabolai*, for all sorts of sudden change.³ All of these transitions from one to the other are in no time and this means that there is a 'between' for which neither the one determination nor the other is valid. This is strongly opposed to all recognized views of the mutually exclusive opposition of *kinesis* and *stasis*.

Even in the *Sophist* it is — at first! — declared impossible for being to occur outside of these two opposites (*Soph.* 250d). Precisely this conclusion is now drawn here: being is neither in motion nor at rest. Now my question is: is this perhaps the negative counterpart of the stationary motion which the *Sophist* (256b) foretells? The question must be asked seriously and then takes the following form: is the

3. In more recent Plato scholarship particular attention has been paid to this expression, when for example it is used in the seventh letter or in the *Symposium* to describe a sudden flash of insight. But nowhere there is the problem of sudden change a temporal one as here in the *Parmenides*. Aside from a single completely trivial reference in Aulus Gellius, neither the ancients nor the medievals ever referred to this discussion in the *Parmenides* with regard to the problem of time. The first to place this passage emphatically in the foreground of the 'theological' discussion, appears to have been Kierkegaard in his *Concept of Anxiety*. If this is really true, it is remarkable.

entwining of *kinesis* and *stasis* with each other perhaps a general structural scheme in which Plato actually sees the distinction of *psyche* and *nous*? If this were true it would follow that in spite of all the self-will and independence with which he follows Plato, Plotinus has further developed genuine Platonic starting points. It would follow even if there is no basis for the false transformation of the dialectical stages of the dialogue into the hypostatic procession from the One. It is admittedly not the dialogue *Parmenides* which offers proof of this, even if and especially because the indivisibility of *ainai* and *noein* which Plotinus develops is already valid for the didactic poem. It is above all the *Sophist*. For Plato in the *Sophist* the conceivability of being forms the self-evident starting-point, from which he develops his dialectical differentiation of the doctrine of being.

At the same time it is noteworthy that not only in the *Sophist*, but also in the disputed appendix of the *Parmenides*, *kinesis* plays a leading role in the argument. This corresponds with the ontological construction whereby Plato limits the theory of flux in the *Theaetetus*, referring to the venerable Parmenides. The way in which the inflexibility of the idealists is broken down in the *Sophist* also fits in with this. In the *Theaetetus* the theory of flux finds its last barrier in that which the soul sees purely from itself (185d). Similarly in the *Sophist* the materialists find their limit in *psyche* and in the being which is presupposed in thinking (*phronesis*). The opposite term, at which the idealists fall apart, and which expresses the independent animation of *psyche*, is again *kinesis*. What is it? What is it for Plato the idealist? Really only the *me on*, over against which the *on* is true being? Is Plato really an anti-Heraclitean?

In the appendix of the *Parmenides* the structural formula of *metabole*, which Plato was probably the first to introduce into philosophical discussion, (all earlier examples are suspicious and appear to be simply reflections from Aristotle), is raised to the level of a true universal which clearly points beyond the simple nothingness of non-being. Indeed the abruptness, the suddenness of the transition always tells us something about a common element and a unity which does not so much separate the opposites from one another as tie them to each other. It is no simple becoming other — it is like a becoming other of itself, a reflection in itself. Now this seems to me in fact to be the secret of self-motion and thus of life and of the soul. In the argument of *Sophist* 249 this only appears very externally, as a simple argument for the recognition of the universal presence of motion in being. Does not this, however, point to implications which are hidden in the dialectical development of the Eleatic notion of being? Motion

is not simply, like a change in the weather, a negative sudden change which negates that which is present. Such a change can rather represent an appearance, a manifestation of being. It is especially a characteristic of the living to exist in such a way as to be 'capable' of this, of going over from rest to motion, completely of itself, not because of something else, which sets it in motion. It is the true essence of the living to possess self-motion.

Plato already hints at this earlier, when, in *Charmides* 168e, he finds such a *dynamis* which refers only to itself admittedly puzzling, but nevertheless undeniable if one considers how seeing, hearing, the motion which moves itself and the heat which enkindles a log are related to themselves. Socrates maintains that that knowing which knows itself could be added to this list. It is a peculiar list, in which the self-relatedness of motion and consciousness are seen as one and the same as the self-enkindling of the overheated wood. Indeed self-enkindling, self-motion, and self-consciousness all have the same puzzling characteristic, that they are *metabole*. As the flame bursts from the log, suddenly and without any transition period, so too, the self-motion of the living being appears without any mediating transition. There is, for example, no transition from sleep to waking, or from lurking rest to motion, when a cat springs.

With this interpretation of a *dynamis* which refers to itself, Plato points backwards as well as forwards, backwards to Heraclitus, as might be demonstrated, and forwards to the doctrine of the self-motion of the soul — from which he develops the great myth of the soul in the *Phaedrus* — and finally also to the doctrine of motion in the *Laws* and to the Aristotelian doctrine of *nous*. But does not this begin to approach the Plotinian doctrine of the three hypostases which seems to mix Platonic dialectic and the Aristotelian doctrine of *nous* in such a peculiar way? Does this not mean, that Plotinus develops a truth common to both?

That Plato himself refers the dialectic of the One and the Many back to Heraclitus is revealed above all by the explicit reference to him in *Sophist* 242e, which stands completely in opposition to Plato's own representation of Heraclitean teaching. After that the Ionic muses had considered it safer to weave the One and the Many together and to say that being is both One and Many. This is then illustrated by the clearly authentic quotation from Heraclitus: '*diaferomenon aei symferetai*'. Indeed, it could be demonstrated that this is the true Heraclitean doctrine of the One, which in its change into its opposite reveals itself as the true One, as the '*hen sophon*'. Not only are day and night one, which Hesiod did not know — but the fire and the wick which burns, sleeping and waking, being alive and being dead, war and peace, hunger and satisfaction pass over into one another without a transition and thereby demonstrate the

unity which they are. In the end the same thing is shown by that all-directing flash of lightning⁴ — it is the 'flash of lightning out of the absolute' in which the changes wrought by fire (*pyros tropai*) rise to their highest level, to the *pyr phronimon*, in which the enigma and secret of *psyche* become clear. The One divides and comes together! 'Hen te on kai polla kai méte hen méte polla'. As if Heraclitus were being articulated here, it says in the summary of the instant which is in no time: 'oute hen estin oute polla, oute diakrinetai oute synkrinetai'. Is the soul contained in the instant just like lightning? 'Psyches esti logos heauton auxon'.

It is a unifying moment for these remarkable coincidences that in the Platonic *Phaedrus* too, self-motion is distinguished not only as the essence of the soul, but in the final account also as the beginning of all motion, even that motion which is moved by another. Admittedly there is no reference to a dialectical paradox in the *apodeixis* of the *Phaedrus*, which emphasizes so strongly the beginning of motion, in which the transition from nothingness to being is necessarily implied. But it is evident that the dialectic of sudden change is implicit in the essence of the beginning. It is therefore not surprising that when, in the detailed theory of motion in the *Laws*, self-motion is portrayed as the highest and original motion, which constitutes the beginning of all motion, then the notion of *metabole* is given precedence: μῶν ἀρχή τις αὐτῶν ἔσται τῆς κινήσεως ἀτάσσης ἄλλη πλὴν ἢ τῆς αὐτῆς αὐτὴν κινήσεως μεταβολῆ (895a). The proof in the *Laws* tends towards the precedence of *psyche*, which is distinguished from the body by self-movement. The precedence of *psyche* thus stands in a context which, more than anything else, confirms the continuity of Greek thought from Parmenides to Plotinus. Certainly, Plato himself promoted the interpretation which later became so famous, namely that Socrates brought philosophy down from heaven and found it among men; this is shown particularly by his portrait of Socrates in the *Apology*. In the light of our considerations, however, the following becomes clear:

It is in truth a Platonic inheritance which Plotinus oversees when he views the drama of the soul as a cosmic event. In doing so he may take Plato's mythical mode of narrative dogmatically and turn it into psychology as often as he wants. It nevertheless remains true; Plato too arranges the human soul and its rationality into the rational order of the universe. This does not only happen in such a way that he carries through the great analogy of soul, city and world and

4. In his commentary on the *Parmenides* Jean Wahl has already (p. 170f.) pointed to this relation of the Platonic analysis to Heraclitus and especially to Heraclitus' use of this word. Cp. also N. Hartmann, *Platos Logik des Seins*, p. 360ff.

gives priority in all realms to the highest faculty of the soul, *nous*, which perceives the rational. It is always the whole of being which is under consideration in this order of command and government and it is therefore also the rationality of the mobile whole against which the rationality of the intellect reveals itself. It is the reliable circling of the stars, that is, circular motion, and in particular it is the uniting of the constancy of standing still and the movement of turning as it appertains to the motion of a top, which he regards as a metaphor of rational thought.

It is true that in Plato there is not quite the same division of thinking and that which is thought into *kinesis* and *stasis* as Plotinus undertakes. Nevertheless the circle of sameness which in the *Timaeus* is associated with understanding and true knowledge and is set over against the circle of otherness, of ever changing views and opinions, appears as the regular circle of the sun's daily course as against the irregular circle of its yearly path. In the *Laws* this is taken up again as an image of the essence of thought. At the same time it is the gradual broadening of the motion from the resting centre through the slow motion of the inner circles to the highest speed of the outermost periphery of the top which fascinates Plato. This togetherness of rest and motion which a spinning top exhibits, illustrates the enigmatic nature of thought, which for its part really is in no time.

As is well known, Plotinus speculated about the correspondence between thinking and circular motion all his life. He was able to find his starting points for this in Plato and Aristotle. He derived still more from the phenomenon so puzzling to the ancient doctrine of motion, that is, that this spinning top exhibits a coincidence of rest, slow and fast motion. It is clearly the self-division of motion over the whole, of which he perceived the ontological significance in so far as it is a sensible manifestation of the unity of life, soul and spirit.

The result of our investigation of Plato's *Parmenides* and of the question as to how far it may be considered as preparing the way for Neoplatonism is therefore not confined to the determination of reinterpretations and glosses of Platonic themes. The investigation of the 'Beginnings of Neoplatonism' which was published by Dodds in 1928 and which was carried through by Theiler, Merlan and Krämer brought them close to Plato, but did not really add anything to the *Parmenides*. At this point, it seems to me, my investigation goes further. Although they have been transplanted into a new medium, the impulses which are to be found in a more developed form in Plotinus, are nevertheless truly Platonic. One thing is certainly remarkable, however, and that is, that Plotinus obviously completely repressed the dialectical climax which is implicit in the

essence of sudden change. Even the notion of sudden change plays no part for him. Herein lies an important indication of what is really peculiar and new to Plotinus. Whoever speaks of sudden change, no matter how much hidden truth he attributes to the timeless wonder of the 'instant', nevertheless holds fast to the concept of being which Parmenides formulated: being is that which does not change. Plotinus' concept of the soul, on the other hand, has completely transformed the concept of being into the concept of a self-related power; a *dynamis* which thinks itself. With this he has for the first time given priority to reflection in the field of ontological questions. He stands at the threshold of a new age. This compels us to think. We too today stand at the threshold of a new age which we only see emerging gradually. It points in the opposite direction, towards a reformation of the sovereign self-consciousness of modernity and its grounding of all knowledge in subjectivity. Thus Plato might at times seem closer to us today than the modern subjective way of thinking and perhaps even closer than the Platonism of later antiquity, which inclines towards the Christian age of inwardness.

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