Does Plato refute Parmenides?

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One thing I learned from Wittgenstein, in part from the Tractatus *but still more from personal contact, is that philosophical mistakes are often not refutable falsehoods but confusions.*[1]

I have a couple of times ventured to suggest that in the *Sophist* Plato does not refute Parmenides.[2] The reaction has been, to say the least, hostile.[3] Hostile, with more than a touch of disapproval. You might have thought I had suggested that the Queen of England was a man. The suggestion was not only false, but foolish. A mere eye-catcher. Absurd, and unseemly.

I

I can of course see why. If Plato hasn't refuted Parmenides, then who has? And if Parmenides hasn't been refuted, then we are living in a very strange world indeed. The persons you see around you, the light coming in from the windows, the very words you hear, are all an illusion. They are nothing but a 'name'. For that is what Parmenides claims to show.

> τῷ πάντ' ὄνομ' ἔσται
> ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο, πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ,
> γίγνεσθαί τε καὶ ὄλλυσθαι, εἶναί τε καὶ οὐχί,
> καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διά τε χρόα φανὸν ἀμείβειν.
>
> 'They will therefore be no more than a name, all things soever that mortals, convinced they were true, laid down as coming into being and passing

1 Geach (1991) 13.
2 O'Brien (1995) 87–88, (2000) 94–98.
3 Dixsaut (2000) 269 n. 2. Notomi (2007) 167–187.

away, as being and not being, and as changing place and as altering their bright colour'.[4]

'No more than a name…' The claim is, on the face of it, so outrageous that there is an obvious temptation to try and give the words a different and less radical meaning. The things that mortals see and believe in, 'convinced they are true', are 'a name for the whole'. With this reading, we have to understand παντί, a dative, instead of πάντα, a nominative, while τῷ has to be taken, not as an independent use of the pronoun ('therefore'), the meaning it frequently has in Homer, but as tied to the word that follows (τῷ παντί, 'for the whole'). But there is no good parallel for an elision of the final vowel of the dative, the relative pronoun that follows (ὅσσα) calls out for a plural antecedent, and the sentence as a whole reads very oddly if it has no syntactical connection with the words that precede.

No: I am afraid that Parmenides really does say that everything we see around us, convinced it is true, is but a 'name'. With the result that Plato had every reason for wanting to refute Parmenides, and that we have every reason for hoping that he succeeded.[5]

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4 Fr. 8.38–41. The text and translation of Parmenides' verses quoted here and below are taken from O'Brien (1987). Disputed details are dealt with at more length in O'Brien (2000). In adding 'no more than' (cf. fr. 8.38), I translate *ad sensum*. See the Additional Note at the end of this article.

5 To return, however briefly, to the translation. The very expression τὸ πᾶν ('the all', 'the universe') I believe would be an anachronism in the verses of Parmenides, despite Young Socrates' use of the expression in words addressed to Parmenides in Plato's dialogue of that name (128a8–b1: ἓν φῂς εἶναι τὸ πᾶν, 'the all you say is one'). Luc Brisson is merely kicking against the goad when he persists in taking the two words as a direct quotation from some otherwise unrecorded part of the poem. See his 'reply', (2005), to O'Brien (2005). An alternative to the syntax adopted above would be to take the dative (v. 38: τῷ) as a repetition of the demonstrative pronoun in the verse preceding (v. 37: τό γε), both words referring to 'what is', with the meaning therefore 'all things are a name *for it* (τῷ)'. Such a construction is not impossible, and the meaning that results is perhaps not too far a cry from the Stranger's summary of the Eleatic thesis in the *Sophist* (242d5–6: ἑνὸς ὄντος τῶν πάντων καλουμένων, 'what we call all things are one'). A consecutive use of the pronoun, here as earlier in the same fragment (v. 25: τῷ, 'therefore'), nonetheless seems to me fit the context better. The four verses (vv. 38–41) mark the consequence to be drawn from the long stretch of argument that precedes (vv. 6–38), while the verses that follow (vv. 42–49) conclude the goddess' account of the first Way by spelling out what it is that is not a mere 'name', and therefore the description of 'what is' as a homogeneous sphere.

II

Not only is it obvious why Plato should want to refute Parmenides; it also seems clear enough, to many readers of Plato's *Sophist*, that he no less obviously claims to do so. When the Stranger of Plato's dialogue introduces Parmenides (237a3–b3), he quotes a pair of verses giving voice to what are called elsewhere in the poem the 'opinions of mortals' (fr. 1.30 and 8.51–52), summarised in the pithy sentence 'things that are not, are' (237a8 = fr. 7.1: εἶναι μὴ ἐόντα). Those words are explained by the words quoted above. Mortals believe that the things they see around them both 'are' and 'are not' (fr. 8.40: εἶναί τε καὶ οὐχί), since they see them 'coming into being', emerging therefore from *non-being* into *being*, and 'passing away', disappearing therefore from *being* into *non-being*. It is that (false) belief, so Parmenides claims, that leads them to say, of 'things that are not', that they 'are'.

Parmenides himself condemns such an obvious contradiction. The verses the Stranger has quoted (fr. 7.1–2: 'things that are not, are') are therefore introduced to illustrate Parmenides' firm *repudiation* of the so-called 'opinions of mortals'. Parmenides, so the Stranger tells us, in introducing his quotation, 'bore witness *against*' the claim that 'things that are not, are' (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο).

If I italicise the preposition, it is to emphasise that the prefix of the verb (ἀπο-) has here a negative meaning (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο, 'bore witness *against*'). Current dictionaries give Plato's use of the prefix, in our text, a positive meaning, 'maintained stoutly'.[6] But that cannot be the meaning here. The verb, in the *Sophist*, is preceded by, and governs, a demonstrative pronoun (237a6: τοῦτο), which both looks back to the words 'what is not, is' in the sentence but one preceding (237a3–4: τὸ μὴ ὂν εἶναι), and looks forward to those same words, cast as a plural, in the first of the two verses quoted from Parmenides, 'things that are not, are' (237a8 = fr. 7.1: εἶναι μὴ ἐόντα).[7] With such words 'understood' as the object of the verb that introduces the quotation, the meaning can-

6 LSJ, *s.v.* (p. 209). There has been no correction in either the *Supplement* (1968) or the *Revised Supplement* (1996). See also Adrados (1991), *s.v.*, 'mantener firmemente'.

7 For this 'double' use of the pronoun (summarising what goes before, anticipating what follows), see Riddell (1877) 126–127 (§18), with a close parallel in *Theaetetus* 189e6–190a2.

not but be the meaning adopted here (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο, 'bore witness *against*').

After a long and complex argument, the Stranger of Plato's dialogue quotes the same pair of verses a second time (258d2–3), but now to flaunt his disagreement with Parmenides (258d5–e3). The Stranger now thoroughly approves of the form of words quoted as illustrating the 'opinions of mortals'. Rightly understood, so he tells us, the words 'things that are not, are', far from stating a contradiction, express a necessary and universal truth (258e6–259b6). The Stranger therefore *disagrees* with Parmenides' *repudiation* of the words 'things that are not, are'.

In this context, so I shall be told, disagreement cannot but imply refutation. If one and the same form of words ('things that are not, are') is *false* for Parmenides and held to be *true* by Plato, then this can imply only that Plato claims to have refuted Parmenides. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

III

The case against me begins to look black. It can easily be made to look even blacker. Not only, so my adversaries will insist, does Plato claim to refute Parmenides; he tells us in advance that this is what he plans to do. Such is the clear implication, so I shall be told, when the Stranger warns of the crime of 'parricide'.[8] He will be constrained, so he tells Theaetetus, to lay violent hands on the paternal *logos* (241d1–6; cf. 242a1–3), in order to show (241d6–7) that 'what *is not*' (τὸ μὴ ὄν) '*is*, to a certain extent' (ἔστι κατά τι), and that 'what *is*' (τὸ ὄν), conversely, '*is not*, in a way' (οὐκ ἔστι πῃ).

Parmenides' opening declaration of two 'Ways of enquiry', not quoted by Plato, but recorded by both Simplicius and Proclus (fr. 2), excludes either qualification. The first Way states both 'is' and 'cannot not be' (cf. v. 3: ἡ μὲν [*sc.* ὁδός] ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι), and therefore excludes the possibility that what *is* might *not be*. The second Way states that 'is not' and 'it is necessary not to be' (v. 5: ἡ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεών ἐστι μὴ εἶναι), and therefore excludes the possibility that what *is not* might *be*.

By showing that, on the contrary, being and non-being are not mutually exclusive—that what *is, is not* 'in a way' and that what *is not, is* 'to a

8 'Parricide' (241d3: πατραλοίαν) or, as I am reminded, any lesser act of violence against one's parent. See LSJ, *s.v.*, 'one who slays or strikes his father' (p. 1348).

certain extent'—the Stranger will adopt a position diametrically opposed to that of Parmenides. That is why he warns Theaetetus that he will have to 'lay violent hands' on the paternal *logos* (242a1–3), and that is what, in effect, he claims to have done when, in the later passage, he repeats, with approval, the verses summarising the 'opinions of mortals' (258d1–e3).

If it is true that 'things that are not, are', so he explains at some length, following his second quotation (258e6–259b6), it is because what is 'other than being', is at one and the same time 'being' (ὄν), since it participates in being, 'non-being' (μὴ ὄν), since it is other than being (cf. 259a6–b1), whereas 'being' itself, since it is other than all the other forms, is not any one of them, and therefore 'time and again is not' (259b1–5: μυρία ἐπὶ μυρίοις οὐκ ἔστι).

'Plain enough for a blind man to see', as the Stranger remarked when he initially warned of the possibility of parricide (241d9–e1). In the lines that follow his warning, the words 'refute' and 'refutation' are thick on the ground (241d9–242b5: no less than five occurrences of noun or verb in no more than twenty-three lines of text). In this context, so I will be sharply told, 'parricide' cannot but imply 'refutation'. Again therefore, *Quod erat demonstrandum*. The Stranger, so I shall be told, warns of a parricide, and commits a parricide. Plato says he will refute Parmenides, and he does so.

IV

So far, there is just one fly in the ointment. The words 'refute' and 'refutation' crop up a couple of pages before the allusion to parricide (238d4–7 and 239b1–5). Presumably—so at least it is devoutly to be hoped by those who like a simple life—the person who does the refuting, here too, is Plato, and the person who gets refuted, here too, is Parmenides. That is indeed the firm conviction of my most recent and most vociferous critic, Noburu Notomi. Plato's Stranger, so he concludes, has already 'refuted' Parmenides, even before the famous passage where Plato warns of parricide.[9] But that is not quite how things work out.[10]

9 Notomi (2007) 180–181.

10 A more detailed examination of the textual basis claimed for Notomi's thesis is included in a separate and longer piece (as yet unpublished). In the present article, I attempt to isolate the conceptual issue at stake, the purpose of Plato's criticism in relation to what Parmenides says, and implies, of the 'opinions of

Immediately following his first quotation from Parmenides, the Stranger asks Theaetetus: 'We do, I suppose, dare give utterance to what is not in any way at all?' (237b7–8: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὂν τολμῶμέν που φθέγγεσθαι;) Theaetetus instinctively replies: 'Why on earth not?' (237b9: πῶς γὰρ οὔ;) But he is soon forced to change his tune (237b10–e7). The Stranger soon brings home to him that, if we really think about what we mean, when we speak of 'what is not in any way at all', then we have to admit that we don't, and can't, speak of it, if only because, in speaking of it, we have to choose between singular and dual or plural (cf. 237d9–10), despite the fact that, since there isn't any of it (since 'what is not' is here specifically said to be 'not in any way at all'), it can't be any one of the three.

The argument is then given an extra twist (238a1–239c3). If your interlocutor can't speak of 'what is not, in and by itself' (238c9: τὸ μὴ ὂν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτό), then you yourself can't speak of it either, not even in order to say you can't speak of it. If 'what is not, in and by itself' is 'unutterable', then you contradict yourself as soon as you attempt to 'utter' what you have argued to be 'unutterable' (238c8–10: φθέγξασθαι, ἄφθεγκτον).

So it is that non-being has the last laugh. It reduces the person who seeks to 'refute' it (τὸν ἐλέγχοντα) to *aporia*, because, whenever somebody tries to 'refute' it (ἐλέγχειν), he is forced to contradict himself, even as he does so (238d4–7). Instead of you reducing your opponent to contradiction, which is what you naturally try to do when you set out to refute someone, you are reduced to contradiction yourself. Hoist with your own petard. *L'arroseur arrosé.* The would-be refuter self-refuted.

All great fun. We (the readers) are obviously intended to share the author's glee at such a pretty paradox, and to revel (however discreetly) in Theaetetus' bewilderment, until the Stranger provisionally lets him off the hook by a change of tack (239c4–8). But where has all this

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mortals', in the words that are twice quoted from his poem (fr. 7.1–2, quoted at 237a8–9 and 258d2–3). The place of the Stranger's criticism of Parmenides in the structure of the dialogue as a whole (how it is that Parmenides comes to be quoted in defence of the Sophist, the relation of the 'opinions of mortals' to the false *logos*, and the Stranger's own analysis of falsity in thought and speech) is not part of my present project. For a detailed study, see the two publications quoted in n. 2 above. (A word of encouragement for those who may need it: the work in French has a fifteen-page summary in English, *Le Non-Être, Deux études sur le 'Sophiste' de Platon,* 167–181.)

left us with regard to Plato and Parmenides and the 'opinions of mortals'? With such fun and games, it is all too easy to lose track of the context, and to forget who is doing the refuting and who is being refuted.

V

When Theaetetus started off, so glibly and so naïvely, by agreeing that of course we 'dare' speak of 'what is not in any way at all' (237b9: 'Why on earth not?'), he was answering as the 'mortals' of Parmenides' poem would have been expected to answer, in so far as it was they who had said, of 'things that are not', that they 'are', and who may therefore be supposed to have no objection to 'daring' to speak of 'what is not in any way at all'.

For that is what, by implication, they 'dare' to do in Parmenides' poem. Taking no account of the modal incompatibility of the two Ways (fr. 2.3 and 5: '…cannot not be', '…must not be'), 'two-headed' mortals (fr. 6.5) add the 'being' of the first Way to the 'non-being' of the second Way, when they speak of all the many things that they see and feel around them as so many 'things that are not', and yet continue to assert, of those same 'things that are not', that they 'are' (fr. 7.1–2).[11] When Theaetetus is brought up short by the Stranger, on the following pages of the dialogue (237b10–239c3), and is forced to admit that no, you can't speak, nor even think, of 'what is not in any way at all', it is therefore the mortals of Parmenides' poem who are refuted, and it is the Stranger, on Parmenides' behalf, who does the refuting.

That conclusion will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the fragments of Parmenides' poem. When Parmenides introduces the second Way, he follows this at once with: 'You could hardly come to know what is not, nor could you tell it to others' (fr. 2.7–8: οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἐόν […] οὔτε φράσαις). That too is exactly the point he insists on in his refutation of mortals, who are tempted to look for an origin of 'what is' and who may think to find it in 'what is not' (fr. 8.6–7). To which the sharp rejoinder is (fr. 8.7–9):

> οὔτ' ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐάσω
> φάσθαι σ' οὐδὲ νοεῖν· οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητόν
> ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι.

11 See the opening paragraph of §II above.

> 'I shall not let you say nor think that it comes out of not-being; for it cannot be said, nor thought, that "is not"'.[12]

When Theaetetus is brought to his knees and forced to admit that you can't 'think' or 'speak' of 'what is not in any way at all' (cf. 237b7–239c3), he is therefore *confirming* what Parmenides had said of the non-being of the second Way, and *repudiating*, as Parmenides himself had done, the claim made by mortals to speak of 'things that are not' and to say, of those same 'things that are not', that they 'are'.

The 'refutation' that is in question here (238d4–7), the 'refutation' that the Stranger speaks of as a gleeful turning-of-the-tables by non-being itself, rejoicing in the discomfiture of those who claim to speak of 'what is not in any way at all' (237b7–8), is therefore, in the context, at one and the same time, a 'refutation' by Parmenides of the mortals of Parmenides' poem and a 'refutation' by the Stranger of Theaetetus. A refutation by the Stranger, repeating and reinforcing Parmenides' own argument that the non-being of the second Way is both unspeakable and unthinkable. A refutation of the youthful Theaetetus when he answers, all unthinkingly, so obviously unaware of the deep and dangerous

12 The words quoted, here as earlier, are of course, in Parmenides' poem, given as the words of a goddess living beyond the portals of Night and Day (fr. 1.11), and the 'you' she is talking to is Parmenides, who speaks of himself in the first person in the opening verses of the Proem (fr. 1.1–23) and whom the goddess addresses as a 'young man' (a κοῦρος, fr. 1.24). In attributing to the author of the poem the words of the goddess, I am merely repeating Plato's own assumption, when he has the Stranger of the *Sophist* treat the words of the goddess (fr. 7.1–2) as Parmenides' personal 'testimony' (237b1). At the same time, I maintain the fiction that, within the poem, the youthful Parmenides, addressed by the goddess as 'you', is assigned the role of an as yet unconverted 'mortal', and therefore as someone who has to be firmly reminded of the initial statement of the two Ways, voiced at the beginning of the argument (fr. 2). The reader moved to complain that this is playing fast-and-loose with the text of the poem may also like to complain of my speaking, as I do occasionally, of 'Plato' when strictly I should refer to the Stranger of Plato's dialogue. As the author of the *Seventh letter* reminds his contemporaries, with not a little acerbity, no-one can claim to know what Plato himself thought (cf. 341b7–d2), if only because Plato never appears as a speaker in one of his own dialogues. In either case, in looking through the fiction of Parmenides' poem (and therefore taking Parmenides' goddess to be a spokeswoman for Parmenides) as in looking through the fiction of Plato's dialogue (and therefore taking Plato's Stranger to be a spokesman for Plato), my only aim is to make the argument less cumbersome for my reader.

waters lying ahead, that yes, of course we 'dare utter' the words 'what is not in any way at all'. Why on earth not? We have just done so.

Such is the complexity of Plato's dialogue. When the word 'refute' first appears in the text, following the initial quotation from the poem (238d4–7), the 'refutation' in question is not the Stranger's refutation of Parmenides, as an all too simplistic reading of the text may lead a careless reader to suppose. No, not at all. The 'refutation' is a repetition, by the Stranger, of Parmenides' refutation of the 'opinions of mortals'. It is a refutation of their thoughtless assumption, shared at this point in the dialogue by Theaetetus, that we can think and speak of 'what is not in any way at all'.

VI

It is true that in the *Sophist*, in the second part of the argument designed to refute the 'opinions of mortals' (238a1–239c3), the refuter is reduced to *aporia* and to self-contradiction (238d4–7), and is in that sense, so we may like to say, himself refuted. Does that mean that Parmenides is refuted—refuted because he cannot but contradict himself in attempting to refute those who would 'dare' speak of the unspeakable?

If you like. But Plato's Stranger is in the same fix. The Stranger goes out of his way to emphasise that he is himself caught in the snares of self-contradiction and self-refutation. 'It's no use looking to me', he says, 'for the right way to talk about "what is not"' (cf. 239b3–5). 'I gave up the struggle long ago when faced with the refutation of what is not' (cf. 239b1–3: …περὶ τὸν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἔλεγχον).

That admission of helplessness is of course all part of the fun and games. The person—young Theaetetus—who starts off by claiming, all unthinkingly, that you can speak of 'what is not in any way at all' is easily refuted, but then the refuter himself is necessarily refuted by the same argument. If the person you are trying to refute can't utter the words 'what is not in any way at all' without contradiction (since he has to speak of it as a singular, a dual or a plural, when the whole point is that there isn't any of it, so that it can't be any one of the three), then you, in attempting to refute him, can't do so either—you can't speak of 'what is not in any way at all', not even to convince of his error the person who claims that you can do so. With all the exhilarating tangles that ensue. To prove your adversary wrong, you have to

prove him right, since in saying that he can't do what he claims to do (speak of 'what is not in any way at all'), you have to do it yourself…

But before you—the reader and the critic of Plato's dialogue—lose yourself in that intoxicating tangle, please pause to note that, however much you entangle the tangle, it can hardly count as Plato's refutation of Parmenides. For Parmenides and Plato's Stranger are in the same boat. Both are out to persuade an uncomprehending interlocutor—the mortals of Parmenides' poem, the Theaetetus of the dialogue—that you cannot think or speak of what simply 'is not', of 'what is not in any way at all'. When Plato's Stranger revels in the point that to deny that you can think or speak of 'what is not' is already a confession of failure, since, by the very denial that you can speak of what is not, you have already spoken of what is not… he is no more than repeating, with baroque curlicues, Parmenides' own condemnation, in his poem, of the 'opinions' of mortals, who assume, as Theaetetus will do, that you can speak of what 'is not', construed as 'what is not in any way at all'.

VII

That is the minimal context for understanding the second reference to 'refutation' in the text of the *Sophist*, the Stranger's admission, as quoted above (239b1–5, looking back to 238d4–7), that he 'gave up the struggle long ago when faced with the refutation of what is not'. The Stranger's confession of impotence leaves Notomi's thesis in the doldrums.[13] Even at this point in the dialogue, the 'refutation' in question, so Notomi claims, is Plato's refutation of Parmenides… Such a reading of the dialogue is hopelessly simplistic. Yes, Parmenides may have been 'refuted'. But no, not by Plato. For Plato's Stranger, no less than Parmenides, is a victim of the paradox that you cannot refute what is not, without refuting yourself as you do so. That is the whole point of the argument.

At this point my critic hurries forward, a little flushed and out of breath (at least I would be, if I were in his shoes). The difference between Plato and Parmenides, so he tells us, is a difference of self-awareness. Both Plato and Parmenides contradict themselves in uttering the unutterable. But at least Plato's Stranger is aware that he is contradicting himself. Parmenides contradicts himself, but without realising that he is

13 'Notomi's thesis': see above §IV, and the footnote at the end of this section.

doing so. Therefore (a little gulp) the 'refutation of non-being' (cf. 239b2–3) is to be read as a refutation of Parmenides. Plato's Stranger knows that he is contradicting himself. Parmenides doesn't. By drawing that distinction, Plato has therefore refuted Parmenides. Once again (perhaps a little less confidently), *Quod erat demonstrandum*…[14]

VIII

But is that so? Is it true that Parmenides has no knowledge of self-contradiction and self-refutation? When he first introduces the two Ways, of 'being' and 'non-being', he says (fr. 2.1–2):

> εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσας,
> αἵπερ ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι.

If, unlike many a recent commentator, you give his words the meaning they would obviously have for anyone who reads Parmenides, as he should, with the metre and the syntax of Homer ringing in his ears (and therefore with the adjective, μοῦναι, followed by the pause of the caesura, governing the infinitive, νοῆσαι, placed at the end of the verse), then the meaning will be:

> 'Come now, I shall tell—and do you listen to my tale and take it well to heart—just what ways of enquiry there are, the only ones that can be thought of.'

'The only ones that can be thought of' (νοῆσαι). Clear enough. But later on Parmenides says, of the second Way ('is not'), that it can't be thought of, that it is 'unthinkable' (fr. 8.17: ἀνόητον). The play on words, the seeming contradiction, is surely deliberate. There are only two Ways you can 'think of' (fr. 2.2: νοῆσαι), and one of the two proves to be 'unthinkable' (fr. 8.17: ἀνόητον). You start off by 'thinking' of two ways, because you start off with 'is' (fr. 2.3), and then add a negation: 'is not' (fr. 2.5). But you are soon brought to realise that there is only one 'real' Way (fr. 8.18: ἐτήτυμον), the Way that says 'is' (fr. 8.16–

14 See again Notomi (2007) 180–181. If I present Notomi's thesis in this semi-fictional (and, I fear, slightly disrespectful) form, it is because, even after reading Notomi's pages several times, I am not at all sure that I have grasped quite what it is that the author thinks he is saying. The argument outlined above is the best I have been able to do by way of extracting from Notomi's jumbled sentences the clear statement of a rational argument, however fallible.

18), because the second of the two Ways, 'the only ones that can be *thought of*' (fr. 2.2), is '*unthinkable*' (fr. 8.17), not a 'true' Way at all (fr. 8.17–18: ἀληθής).

Νοῆσαι (fr. 2.2), ἀνόητον (fr. 8.17). A deliberately contrived contradiction. You start off by 'thinking' of two Ways, only to be brought to realise that one of the two can't be thought of, is 'unthinkable'. That may not be quite what the Stranger of Plato's dialogue has said, but it comes dangerously close to it. Far too close, surely, for 'self-contradiction' or 'self-refutation' to count as Plato's 'refutation' of Parmenides. Parmenides recognises that non-being, construed as 'what is necessarily not' (cf. fr. 2.5–8), although it may start off as one of the only two Ways that can be 'thought of' (fr. 2.2), nonetheless, taken in isolation from the first, is not in fact 'thinkable' (fr. 8.17). Plato's Stranger does, if you like, go one better (238a1–239c3), in saying that, since what you claim to speak of can't even be spoken of, therefore, even in denying that you can speak of it, you contradict yourself in the very act of attempting to put your denial into words.

But if Parmenides has perhaps been upstaged, he has hardly been refuted. Parmenides never said that you could speak of 'what is not'. He does of course speak of it, as does Plato. But, like Plato, he does so, only to say that you can't speak of it, that it is 'unspeakable' (fr. 8.7–9: οὐ γὰρ φατόν…).[15]

IX

The distinction, if there is one, is surely far too finely drawn to count as Plato's much vaunted 'refutation' of Parmenides. Far from seeing Plato as 'refuting' Parmenides on this point, I can hardly see them as even disagreeing. For even if we allow that the Stranger, with his paradox of self-refutation, has gone one better than Parmenides, what difference does that make to the substantive issue? If your opponent says, of 'is not' or 'what is not', as Parmenides so clearly does (fr. 8.7–9), that you can't think of it or speak of it, have you 'refuted' him by insisting that no, you can't even utter the words without contradicting yourself?

Both Plato and Parmenides agree that you cannot speak of what is not, construed as what 'necessarily' is not (Parmenides), as 'what is not in any way at all' (Plato's Stranger). Plato adds the rider that you

15 For the quotation, see §V above.

can't even speak of 'what is not', construed as 'what is not, in and by itself', without contradiction. But what is the conclusion of either argument? Parmenides claims that you can't think or speak of 'what is not' (cf. fr. 2.5–7), simply because there is nothing there to 'know' (fr. 2.7–8), nothing therefore to 'speak' of or to 'think' of (fr. 8.7–9). When Plato says that you can't even utter the expression without contradiction, is the conclusion that he draws any different?

Does Plato possibly intend that, although you can't think of it, speak of it, or even utter the expression without contradiction, nonetheless 'what is not in any way at all' might, even so, exist? Surely not. But in that case Parmenides and Plato are in agreement. 'What is not in any way at all' (Plato), what 'necessarily' is not (Parmenides), is a mere *flatus vocis*, a *vox nihili*, hardly even a sheer blank, just nothing.

X

But if self-contradiction is not how Plato 'refutes' Parmenides, then how does he do it? It is at this point, I would dare to suggest, that the modern critic has to think the unthinkable. In the pages of the dialogue following the first quotation from Parmenides (237b10–239c3), the Stranger does not 'refute' Parmenides at all. The repeated allusions to 'refuting' and to 'refutation' in these pages of the dialogue (238d4–7: ἐλέγχοντα, ἐλέγχειν, 239b3: ἔλεγχον), following the first quotation from Parmenides (237a8–9, fr. 7.1–2), are not for one moment to be heard as the Stranger's 'refutation' of Parmenides.

Plato entirely agrees with Parmenides that 'what is not', if taken to mean 'what is necessarily not', 'what is not in any way at all', can't be thought of and can't be spoken of. If, as Plato's Stranger claims, the very expression can't be uttered without contradiction, then that is all to the good. Self-contradiction is all grist to a Parmenidean mill. What is not, construed either as what is necessarily not (the implication of Parmenides' statement of the second Way) or as 'what is not in any way at all' (the form of words with which the Stranger challenges Theaetetus), is just that. You can't think of it and you can't speak of it, simply because there is nothing there to think of or to speak of. The non-being of Parmenides' second Way is… except that now, of course, I can't complete the sentence. Because all it 'is'—*sit venia verbo!*—is sheer nothingness. There isn't any of it.

Where Plato's Stranger differs from Parmenides is in his analysis of the consequences that such a conclusion must entail. Plato's Stranger does not try to show that the non-being of the second Way, the non-being that Parmenides himself insists is 'unthinkable' and 'unspeakable', is anything other than… unthinkable and unspeakable, and even unutterable. What Plato—what Plato's Stranger—will aim to show is that the non-being that is unthinkable and unspeakable is not the non-being that is part of our daily discourse when, like the mortals of Parmenides' poem, we talk quite gaily and glibly, as we commonly do, of things that 'change their place and alter their bright colour', and indeed 'come into being and pass away, are and are not' (cf. fr. 8.40–41). That non-being, the non-being of our daily lives and our everyday discourse, Plato will define as the form of non-being, a form that, like any other, is instantiated in the world of becoming.

XI

The form of non-being, so the Stranger will argue, is that part of otherness that is opposed both to 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3) and to 'the being of each thing' (258d7–e3).[16] It is therefore, so the Stranger tells us, a 'form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (cf. 258d6–7). A form that 'there turns out to *be*' because, like otherness and all the parts of otherness, it participates in being, and a form of 'what *is not*' because it is that one and only part of otherness that stands in opposition to being, both to being as form ('the nature of being') and to being as participated ('the being of each thing').

The part of otherness that is opposed to beauty or to justice is 'non-beautiful' or 'non-just'. The part of otherness that is opposed to being is therefore, likewise, 'non-being'. But with the inevitable difference that the part of otherness that is opposed to beauty, and that is therefore the 'non-beautiful' (one of an endless number of negative forms), does not participate in beauty, whereas the same cannot be said of the part of otherness opposed to being. Like all the parts of otherness, the very part of otherness that is opposed to being has, nonetheless, to participate in being, with the paradoxical consequence, essential to the Stranger's

16 'The being of each thing' (258e2: τὸ ὂν ἑκάστου). For the reading, see §XV below.

whole concept of negation, that it is a form of 'what is not', but a form that 'is' (see again 258d6–7).

Negation, for Plato's Stranger, is the result of participation in otherness, in whatever 'part' of otherness is specified by the quality or thing negated (non-just, non-beautiful…), including the very 'part' of otherness that is opposed to being, and that is therefore 'non-being'. But otherness, like all the forms, participates in being, and therefore 'is'. The part of otherness that is opposed to being cannot therefore not participate in being. Hence the paradox: the very part of otherness that is 'other' than being, and therefore 'non-being', participates in being, and therefore, like any and every other 'part' of otherness, 'is'.[17]

XII

Like everything else, the form of non-being has to 'be'. Like everything else, with, of course, the one exception of 'what is not in any way at all'. Except of course that that one exception is not an exception, because… it isn't anything at all. 'What is not in any way at all', if *per impossibile* there were any of it, would obviously not participate in being. Which is just why there isn't any of it. What is not in any way at all is not… in any way at all. Therefore it isn't the part of otherness that is non-being in so far as it is opposed to being. For the non-being that is opposed to being participates in being. What is not at all doesn't participate in being, because, if it did, it wouldn't be what it was, or rather what it isn't, which is… well, just nothing at all.

I hope that (deliberate) little tangle will remind you of something. Self-contradiction. When Plato defines non-being as a 'form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (258d6–7), he is not out to prove that we can, after all, think and speak of 'what is not in any

17 'Otherness' (255d9–e1), and all the 'parts' of otherness (258a7–9), participate in being, including the very 'part' of otherness that is opposed to being (258a11–b7) and that is therefore 'the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (cf. 258d6: τὸ εἶδος ὃ τυγχάνει ὂν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος). For the general theory of 'the parts of otherness', summarised all too briefly in the preceding paragraphs, see 257c5–258c5. The underlying principle, introduced in the course of the Stranger's analysis of the five 'very great kinds' (255e4–6), is that: 'Each single thing is different from the rest, not in virtue of its own nature, but by reason of its participating in the form of otherness (τῆς ἰδέας τῆς θατέρου).'

way at all'. 'What is not in any way at all' is just that—what is not in any way at all. But the Stranger has now a new term and a new explanation of why we cannot think of it or speak of it: 'what is not in any way at all' would be, impossibly and inconceivably, a 'contrary' of being.

No form and no particular can participate in its contrary (cf. 257b1–c4). Take 'ugly' and 'beautiful' (my example). If what is not beautiful is ugly, then it participates in otherness in relation to beauty, both by not being identical to beauty and by not participating in beauty. Take 'small' and 'large' (the Stranger's example). If the small is the contrary of large, then it participates in otherness in relation to largeness, both by not being identical to largeness and by not participating in largeness.

It does not follow that lack of participation is a sufficient condition of contrariety. The equal (again the Stranger's example) does not participate in largeness, any more than does the small. But the equal, unlike the small, is not therefore the contrary of large. Although not a sufficient condition, lack of participation is nonetheless a necessary condition of contrariety. The small would not be the contrary of large were it to participate in largeness.

But the non-being that is the form of non-being does participate in being (see above). It cannot therefore be the contrary of being. The form of non-being is other than being, and is in that sense a negation of being, but we are specifically told that it is not therefore a contrary of being (258b2–3). There is no contrary of being, precisely because the contrary of being would have to 'be', impossibly, what did not participate in being—and there isn't anything that doesn't participate in being.[18]

18 The Stranger's emphatic denial that the part of otherness that is opposed to being is the contrary of being (258b2–3) will be repeated no less emphatically (see §XVII below) when he bids 'farewell' to the contrary of being (258e6–259a1), following his triumphant discovery of 'the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (258d5–e3). For lack of participation as a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of contrariety, see O'Brien (1995) 57–59. This is how I understand the implication of the Stranger's detailed descriptions of 'movement' and 'rest' (see esp. 250a8–10 coupled with 254d7–8, and the long account that runs from 255a4 to 256e4), together with his remarks on 'the large', 'the small' and 'the equal' (257b1–c4).

XIII

If I so labour the distinction between negation and contrariety, between the negation of being that is the 'form of non-being' and an impossible and inconceivable 'contrary' of being, it is because Plato's theory of 'the parts of otherness' (257c5–258c5), and the account of contrariety that precedes it (257b1–c4), have so often and for so long been misunderstood. I pause to take account, very briefly, of only two examples, Owen's misunderstanding of contrariety and Frede's misunderstanding of negation.

Owen's error is plain enough. In the preliminaries to his account of the 'parts of otherness' (257b1–c4), the Stranger speaks of both 'equal' and 'small' as a *negation* of large, since neither of the two participates in largeness, although only one of the two (the 'small') is the *contrary* of large. He does so, in order to prepare the way for the form of non-being which, like the 'equal', will prove to be a *negation* that is not a *contrary*.

Commenting on the passage, Owen totally subverts the Stranger's purpose by writing of what is equal as 'having in it something, in a broad sense some proportion, of both large and small'.[19] Owen's curious conception of 'what is equal' has no foundation in the text, and makes nonsense of Plato's theory. Plato's point is that what is equal does not participate at all in largeness (nor, for that matter, in smallness).

Two equal terms may, of course, be larger or smaller than some third thing; neither can be larger or smaller than the other. But although neither one of two equal terms participates in largeness (in relation to its pair), 'the equal' is not therefore the contrary of large, as distinct from what is small, which likewise does not participate in largeness, but differs from what is equal in being the contrary of large. The equal (as distinct from what is small) therefore provides an analogue for the form of non-being, in so far as, for non-being as for non-large (when exemplified by equality), negation does not imply contrariety.

There is, of course, the difference that the negation, for what is 'equal', excludes participation, whereas the negation for the form of non-being cannot exclude participation in the form that is negated (the form of being). But that is simply because any analogy has its limits. The Stranger's immediate purpose, in introducing 'large', 'small' and 'equal', is simply to establish the general principle, that negation is not

19 Owen (1971) 235–236. Reprinted in Owen (1986) 112–113.

necessarily a contrariety, so preparing the way for his definition of the 'form of non-being'. The 'form of non-being' is a *negation* of being. It is not an impossible and inconceivable *contrary* of being.[20]

XIV

Frede's misconception is a trifle more complex. Frede wrongly supposes that the non-beautiful is so in virtue of its opposition to whatever participates in beauty, and not in virtue of its opposition to the form of beauty.[21] The text is against him. 'Non-beautiful' is the part of otherness opposed to 'the nature of the beautiful' (257d10–11: τῆς τοῦ καλοῦ φύσεως). 'Non-being' is the part of otherness opposed to 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3: τῆς τοῦ ὄντος [*sc.* φύσεως]). In either case, the reference can hardly be other than to a form, respectively the form of beauty and the form of being.

So much is clear enough when, in the lines following the definition of 'non-beautiful' (257d4–e11), and immediately preceding his definition of 'non-being' (258a11–b3), the Stranger speaks of 'the nature of otherness' (ἡ θατέρου φύσις) as having already 'made its appearance' (cf. ἐφάνη) among 'things that are' (258a7–8). The Stranger is here looking back to the passage where the same 'nature of otherness' (τὴν θατέρου φύσιν) was included among the five major forms (255d9–e1) and where it is specifically referred to, in the sentence following, as 'the form of otherness' (255e5–6: τῆς ἰδέας τῆς θατέρου).

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20 To illustrate his point (257b1–c4), the Stranger deliberately chooses something that is 'not large' in an everyday sense. 'The equal' is by common consent 'not large', in so far as neither one of the two equal terms can be larger than the other. The implication, *pace* Owen, is that the equal (*qua* equal) does not therefore participate in largeness. It is true that even whatever is 'large' because it participates in largeness is at the same time 'not large' in so far as it is not identical to largeness. But that is not the everyday meaning of 'not large'. The difference between two things neither of which participates in largeness ('small' and 'equal') brings out more clearly the difference between negation and contrariety. Neither the small nor the equal participates in largeness. Both are therefore 'not large' in an everyday sense. But only one of the two is the contrary of large. For the emphatic denial that the form of non-being, although it designates a negation of being, is a contrary of being, see 248b2–3 (§XII above) and 258e6–259a1 (the Stranger's 'farewell', §XVII below).

21 Frede (1967) 85–89 (§C.II.4.b]).

The same expression ('the nature of…') is hardly likely to change its meaning within the space of a continuous, tightly worded stretch of argument. The successive references, by the Stranger and by Theaetetus, to 'the nature of the beautiful', 'the nature of otherness' and 'the nature of being', all three expressions relating to the new theory of the 'parts' of otherness (257c5–258c5), will be, in all three instances, a reference to the form.[22]

It is true that, when Theaetetus is asked to find a 'name' for the part of otherness opposed to the beautiful, he appeals to what we call not beautiful 'in an everyday sense' (cf. 257d10: ἑκάστοτε), and therefore, so we may suppose, to what does not participate in beauty. But how could he do otherwise? The 'name' given to any form, positive or negative, can only ever be an extrapolation from the way we speak of all the many things around us. Theaetetus' appeal to our 'everyday' use of words is no indication at all, as Frede would appear to think it is, that the negative form now covers only lack of participation, and that what is 'non-beautiful' is therefore now restricted to whatever does not participate in beauty.

On the contrary, it will presumably be as true for 'beauty' as it was for 'sameness' (256a10–b4) and for 'otherness' itself (256c8–10) that even what participates in beauty, and is therefore beautiful, is nonetheless not identical to beauty, and therefore participates in otherness in relation to the form of beauty.

XV

Frede is not only mistaken in his reading of the text. He compounds his error by starting from a false premiss, by supposing that we have to choose between opposition to the form and opposition to the form as predicated of whatever it is that participates in the form. Does the one opposition exclude the other? Surely not. The Stranger initially describes the form of non-being as an opposition between a part of otherness and 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3). But when he returns to the definition of his newly discovered 'form that there turns out to *be*, of

22 'The nature of the beautiful': 257d11. 'The nature of otherness': 258a7–8. 'The nature of being': 258b1. The expression 'the nature of otherness' is used twice in the opening moves to the Stranger's account of 'parts' of otherness (257c7 and d4), and is repeated in his summary of the theory (258d7).

what *is not*', he speaks of the part of otherness that is opposed to 'the being of each thing' (258e2: τὸ ὂν ἑκάστου).

Admittedly, that form of words is not to be found in modern editions of the dialogue. It is nonetheless the unanimous reading of the manuscripts, and it is also the reading recorded by Simplicius when he first quotes this passage from the *Sophist* in his commentary on the *Physics*.[23] In a later passage of the same commentary, Simplicius writes, not 'the being of each thing', but 'each being', and it is this reading that is adopted in successive Oxford editions of the dialogue.[24] The variant recorded by Simplicius, in the later passage of his commentary, is however nothing more than a Neoplatonic adaptation of the text, designed to bring Plato's theory of non-being into line with Plotinus' theory of the 'non-being' that is matter.[25]

If, as we obviously should do, we keep to the unanimous reading of the manuscripts and to the text of Simplicius' first quotation, the form of non-being will be the part of otherness opposed both to 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3: τῆς τοῦ ὄντος [*sc.* φύσεως]) and to 'the being of each thing' (258e2: τὸ ὂν ἑκάστου). Is the same 'double' opposition true of other negative forms? If it is, then Frede's interpretation no longer has point or purpose. The 'non-beautiful' will be a part of otherness opposed both to beauty as form (257d10–11: 'the nature of the beautiful') and to beauty as participated ('the beauty of each thing'), in the same way that 'non-being' is a part of otherness opposed both to being as form (258a11–b3: 'the nature of being') and to being as participated (258e2: 'the being of each thing').[26]

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23 Simplicius, *Phys*. 135.26, repeats the unanimous reading of the manuscripts, 258e2: τὸ ὂν ἑκάστου.

24 Simplicius, *Phys*. 238.26, writes τὸ ὂν ἕκαστον. This is the reading adopted for Plato's *Sophist* by Burnet (1900) and (1905), and by E. A. Duke *et alii* (1995). This is also the reading adopted by the editor of the Aldine edition (1526) for the earlier passage of Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics* (135.26).

25 Plotinus, *Enn*. ii 4 [12] 16.1–3. For the Neoplatonic variant, see O'Brien (1991), and (1995) 67–71.

26 Frede, in the continuation of his study, (1967), 90–92 (§C.II.4.d]), does not even pause to take account of the unanimous reading of the manuscripts (258d7: τὸ ὂν ἑκάστου). He also misunderstands, as so many others have done, the definition of non-being in relation to the form of being (258a11–b3): the opposition lies between 'the nature of a part of otherness' and 'the nature of being', not 'the nature of a part of being', nor 'a part of the nature of being'. For the syntax of the sentence, see O'Brien (2009), esp. 64–67. If Frede had deciphered correctly the double definition of non-

XVI

But there the resemblance ends. The 'non-beautiful', in being opposed to the form of beauty, does not therefore participate in the form to which it is opposed, whereas 'non-being' cannot but participate in the form to which it is opposed, for the simple and incontrovertible reason that the form in question ('being') is universally participated.

That is presumably not so for the form of the beautiful. If it were so, if 'beauty' were participated universally, then there would be no contrary to beauty, nothing therefore that is ugly (assuming that what is ugly is the contrary of what is beautiful). For if the part of otherness that is opposed to beauty were itself to participate in beauty, then presumably whatever participated in the negative form 'non-beautiful' would also participate, albeit vicariously, in beauty and would therefore be unable to fulfil the necessary condition of contrariety, which is precisely lack of participation.[27]

Hence the difference, the radical difference, between 'non-being' and 'non-beautiful'. 'Non-beautiful', since it does not participate in beauty, may include the contrary of 'beauty' (what is ugly). 'Non-being', since it participates in being, cannot include a contrary to 'being'. Owen, Frede and so many others have failed to follow the Stranger's argument at this point (257b1–c4), and have therefore failed to grasp his distinction between negation as lack of identity (whatever participates in being or in beauty, participates also in otherness in rela-

being (256a11–b3 and 258e2–3), his analysis of the dialogue would have to have been very different. But by this point in his argument Frede has already been led hopelessly astray by his wholly impossible attempt, (1967) 55–59, to assimilate the Stranger's use of ἔστι at 256a1 to a copulative use of the verb. When Theaetetus agrees (256a2), without hesitation, to the Stranger's assertion that movement 'is' because of its participation in 'being' (256a1), the meaning is, as plainly as ever it could be, existential. The Stranger asserts of movement, in virtue of its participating in being, nothing more than that it 'is'. However, all that concerns us for the moment is the more particular point that, for being as for beauty, the structure of the negative form should be determined by the opposition between a part of otherness and the appropriate positive form, whether the form of being or the form of beauty.

27 The reader who scruples to follow my example of contrariety in relation to beauty may like to rest content with the Stranger's own example of 'large', 'small' and 'equal' (cf. 257b1–c4). If the part of otherness that is opposed to largeness were to participate in largeness, then there could be nothing that was contrary to the large, and therefore nothing that would count as 'small'.

tion to either form, and is, in that sense, 'non-being' and 'non-beautiful') and negation not only as lack of identity, but as lack of participation, with its crucial corollary, lack of participation as a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition of contrariety.

XVII

This is the distinction that the Stranger strives to bring out in the lines following his triumphant announcement of the discovery of a 'form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (258e6–259a1).

> 'Do not let anyone tell us therefore that we declare that *what is not* is the *contrary* of being, and that we dare say of that, that it is. So far as any *contrary* of being goes, we have long ago said good-bye to any question of its being or of its not being, of its having a *logos* or indeed of its being altogether without a *logos*…'

When the Stranger speaks of contrariety, he does of course still have in mind what had been said of contrariety only a few moments previously (257b1–c4: 'non-being' and the distinction between negation and contrariety; 258b2–3: the denial that the form of non-being is a 'contrary' of being). But that is not the passage that his 'farewell' alludes to. When the Stranger says, of the contrary of being, 'we have long ago said goodbye to any question of its being or of its not being' (259a1: εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μή), 'of its having a *logos* or indeed of its being altogether without a *logos*' (λόγον ἔχον ἢ καὶ παντάπασιν ἄλογον), he is looking back to those troubled times when Theaetetus did seriously try to work out whether we could 'speak' (237e5: λέγειν) of 'what is not in any way at all', or whether it was 'unspeakable', 'without a *logos*' (238c10, e6, 239a5: ἄλογον), whether, even in trying to speak of it, we were condemned to inconsistency, in speaking of it as a 'something' (τι), a something therefore that 'is' (cf. 237d1–5), when all we were trying to say of it was that it 'isn't' (237d6–e6).

Those troubles are now long past, thanks to the Stranger's brilliant new discovery of a 'form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*', which allows us to speak of 'things that are not', meaning by that expression, not things that do not exist at all, but things that participate in being, and therefore 'are', but that also participate in otherness in relation to being ('the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*') and are therefore not identical to being.

That is the new and different meaning now given to the words 'things that are not, are'. It is a necessary and universal truth that all the things that participate in being (and there is nothing, other of course than the form of being itself, that does not participate in being) and therefore 'are', should be at the same time 'things that are not', in so far as, although they participate in being, they also necessarily participate in otherness in relation to being, and are therefore not identical to being.

What is excluded from that analysis, the non-being that the Stranger and Theaetetus have 'long ago said good-bye to' (perhaps, in colloquial English, have 'long ago seen off'), is the non-being that Theaetetus had been forced to admit was 'unspeakable' and 'unthinkable' (237b7–239c3), 'what is not in any way at all' (237b7–8: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν), 'non-being, in and by itself' (238c9: τὸ μὴ ὂν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτό), now dismissed as a 'contrary' of being, precisely because a 'contrary' of being, in order to be a 'contrary', would have to 'be', impossibly and inconceivably, what did not participate in being, and could not therefore even 'be'… a contrary of being.

XVIII

But alas and alack, the Stranger's little joke about saying 'good-bye' has badly misfired. The 'farewell' to a 'contrary' of being, to the question whether it 'is' or whether it 'isn't', has been taken to mean that the Stranger—that Plato—seriously 'leaves open' the question of whether it 'is' or whether it 'is not'. That egregious error is to be found in Plato's latest commentator, Noburu Notomi, who solemnly informs his reader that, in referring to a 'contrary' of being (258e6–259a1), Plato 'deliberately leaves open the question about the *being* of *what in no way is*'.[28]

The words 'what in no way is' (given in italics in the original) are Notomi's word-for-word rendering of τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν (237b7–8), translated in this article as 'what is not in any way at all'. The Stranger therefore, with this impossibly club-footed reading of the text, 'leaves open', the possibility that 'what is not in any way at all' might, nonetheless, just possibly, somehow, 'be'.

The whole dialogue collapses in a heap of ruins. We are back in the impossible conundrum from which the Stranger's careful account of

28 Notomi (2007) 184.

'otherness' and 'non-being' was designed to deliver us. With Notomi's understanding of the 'farewell' scene (258e6–259b6), 'being' has to be reconciled, not with the Stranger's *negation* of being (a part of otherness that is opposed to being, and yet nonetheless participates in being), but with an impossible and inconceivable *contrary* of being. We are asked to suppose that Plato has left open the possibility that 'what is not in any way at all' might 'be', the possibility therefore that what does not exist, does exist.

That is the price, the impossible price, that Plato's most recent commentator is prepared to pay in order to maintain his conclusion that Plato 'refutes' Parmenides. It is true enough that, if the Stranger of Plato's dialogue had indeed maintained that 'what is not in any way at all' might nonetheless, just possibly, 'be', then his thesis would indeed have been (or could have been claimed as) a 'refutation' of Parmenides. But it would have been a 'refutation' won only at the cost of foregoing the principle of contradiction. For that is the position, the impossible position, that the Stranger would find himself in were he to 'leave open' the possibility that 'what is not in any way at all' might, nonetheless, 'be'.

Rest assured, dear reader, that Plato's Stranger does not contradict what Aristotle calls 'the very firmest of all principles'.[29] The non-being that 'combines' with being (cf. 259a4: συμμείγνυται) and that 'is', is the non-being constituted by a 'part' of otherness, the form of non-being. The whole point and purpose of the Stranger's analysis is to distinguish the form of non-being, 'the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (cf. 258d6: τὸ εἶδος ὃ τυγχάνει ὂν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος), from what had earlier been spoken of as 'what is not in any way at all' (237b7–8: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν).

'What is not in any way at all', for Plato as for Parmenides, is… what is not in any way at all. The Stranger's innovation does not lie in his attempting to prove, or even to 'leave open' the possibility, that 'what is not in any way at all' might nevertheless, somehow, just possibly, 'be'. His innovation is at once more robust, and more subtle.

The Stranger has drawn a distinction, between an impossible and inconceivable *contrary* of being and a *negation* of being. A *contrary* of being would 'be'—*sit venia verbo!*—what does not participate in being, and therefore 'what is not in any way at all', sheer nothingness. A *negation* of being is 'non-being' only in so far as it is 'other than being'; it is the 'non-being' by which everything that participates in being, includ-

29 Aristotle, *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b17–18.

ing the form of non-being itself, although participating in being, is not identical to being.[30]

XIX

The Stranger's new form of non-being, non-being as lack of identity with being, does allow us, indeed requires us, to say, of all the things that we see, hear and feel around us, that they 'are not', not however in the sense that they have no participation in being, but only in so far as they are not identical to being. In the light of that distinction, the Stranger does therefore assert the right to speak of all the things that we see and feel around us as so many 'things that are not', even while asserting, of those same things, that they 'are'.

Parmenides had seen, in the conjunction of 'being' and 'non-being', a contradiction. How could he not have done? 'Non-being', for Parmenides, had been defined as 'what is not' in the sense of what is 'necessarily' not (cf. fr. 2.5–8). For Parmenides to say, of things that 'are not', that they 'are', was therefore as contradictory as it would be to say, of 'what is not in any way at all', that it 'is' (or even that it 'may be'). That is why Parmenides 'bore witness *against*' the 'opinions of

30 Please note that I am again (see n. 10 above) limiting myself, in this article, to the Stranger's criticism of Parmenides and to his 'rehabilitation' of the verses quoted from the poem (at 237a8–9 and 258d2–3). When, in his initial puzzles, the Stranger turns more specifically to criticism of the Sophist, and to the question of falsity in thought and speech (239c9–241a2), the talk is of 'contraries' (240d6 and 8: τἀναντία) and of the seemingly impossible conundrum of how we come to suppose that 'things that are not in any way at all' (240e1–2: τὰ μηδαμῶς ὄντα) should nonetheless 'somehow be' (πως εἶναι). The solution to these puzzles will be found in the Stranger's analysis of the *logos* that is false (260a5–263d5). The Stranger will maintain a contrariety of truth and falsity, but no longer as dependent upon a contrariety of being and non-being. In this context, the context of the false *logos* ('Theaetetus flies'), the meaning that will ultimately be given to our speaking of 'things that are not as things that are' (263d2: μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα) will be significantly different from the meaning given to the verses taken from Parmenides' poem, earlier in the dialogue (258c6–259b6), where the point is to establish that what 'is' (by participation in being) also 'is not' (by participating in the form of non-being), independently of the part that such a thing, whatever it may be, has to play in the formation of a *logos,* true or false. But it would be hopeless to attempt to summarise that difference here. I have been into the point at some length in the publications already referred to.

mortals' (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο). Their claim that 'things that are not, are', if those words are heard within the context of the poem, was simply contradictory.

However, what Plato asserts is not what Parmenides denies. When Plato's Stranger asserts that 'things that are not, are', he does not assert that things that do not exist, do exist. He may utter, he does utter, the same form of words (fr. 7.1: 'things that are not, are'). But the meaning attaching to those words is no longer the same. When Parmenides 'bore witness *against*' the 'opinions of mortals' (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο), he refused to endorse a contradiction. Plato's Stranger is not led to assert that same contradiction in a desperate attempt to consummate his alleged 'refutation' of Parmenides.

Plato does not, as it were, ask Parmenides to turn tail and to assert, of things that do not exist, that they do exist. The meaning he has given to the words that, for Parmenides, encapsulated the 'opinions of mortals' is no longer the meaning that Parmenides had given them. The negation is no longer a denial of existence, but a denial of identity, a denial that whatever participates in being is identical to being. In denying that whatever participates in being is identical to being, the Stranger is not asserting, of things that do not exist, that they do (nor even that they may) exist.

XX

The Stranger's 'good-bye' to a contrary of being (258e6–259a1) is therefore also a good-bye to Parmenides. But a 'good-bye' is not quite the same—indeed it is not at all the same—as a 'refutation'. The opposition between the 'being' and the 'non-being' of the two Ways, as voiced by Parmenides himself in his poem (fr. 2), takes no account of the distinction between a 'what is not' that cannot be 'thought of' and cannot be 'spoken of' (the Stranger's impossible and inconceivable contrary of being), and a non-being that is 'other' than being only in the sense that it is not identical to being (the Stranger's form of non-being).

Is your point then, I may be asked a trifle frostily, that Plato has not 'refuted' Parmenides, simply because he agrees with Parmenides that we cannot think or speak of a contrary of being, even though he then sets out to demonstrate, against Parmenides, that there can nonetheless 'be' a

negation of being, provided that negation is defined as an expression of otherness?

Plato and Parmenides, so my hostile questioner may perhaps allow, have agreed that we cannot think, or speak, of 'what is not in any way at all' (Plato's form of words), of what is 'necessarily' not (an implication of Parmenides' statement of the second Way), so that they have agreed on at least one arm of Plato's distinction. Is your point, I may be asked, that such partial agreement excludes 'refutation'?

Not quite. 'Partial agreement' is admittedly something of an improvement on 'refutation'. But no, my purpose here is not merely to apportion 'agreement' and 'disagreement' (or 'partial agreement'), in order to see whether or not there is, as it were, enough room left for 'refutation'. My aim is not to conclude, in the light of the Stranger's distinction, that Plato half agrees with Parmenides, still less that Parmenides half agrees with Plato. For Parmenides can hardly be said to have 'agreed' with Plato in denying (as 'unthinkable' and 'unspeakable') one arm of a distinction, when he shows no awareness of the other arm.

XXI

The language of 'agreement' and 'disagreement' is no doubt inevitable as a *façon de parler* when attempting to bring out some philosophical point; I have myself used the words in that way in the course of this essay, and no doubt often enough elsewhere. But the words 'agreement' and 'disagreement' may all too easily be bandied about in a way that is false to the facts of history, in so far as such talk may all too easily be taken to suggest a conscious choice.

In a debate between contemporaries, whoever agrees, or disagrees, knows, or may be supposed to know, what it is that he is agreeing, or disagreeing, with, and in the light of that knowledge chooses… to agree or to disagree. But Plato and Parmenides were not contemporaries, and it is pointless to pretend that they were. Plato's reader cannot force upon Parmenides, retrospectively, a choice that Parmenides himself never knew. Parmenides cannot be made to choose one sense of non-being (Plato's contrariety), and not choose the other (a simple negation of being), denying the one (contrariety) and deliberately leaving the other (a simple negation) in abeyance, when it is that very choice that is not open to him. It is that very distinction that is absent from Parmenides' account of 'what is' and of 'what is not'.

'The same' and 'not the same' do, as it happens, appear in the poem, but only as part of what the goddess calls 'the deceitful ordering of my words' (fr. 8.52), when she takes upon herself to spell out the consequences of the 'opinions of mortals' by constructing a cosmology, and does so by introducing two 'forms', one of which is 'the same as itself' and 'not the same as the other' (fr. 8.57–58: ἑωυτῷ πάντοσε τωὐτόν, at the end of one verse, matching τῷ δ' ἑτέρῳ μὴ τωὐτόν, at the beginning of the next).

Parmenides' use of 'the same' and 'not the same', in these two verses, may well be seen as an anticipation of the distinction that will prove essential to the Stranger's account of 'the very great kinds'. 'That movement is both "the same" and "not the same",' so the Stranger tells us in his analysis of 'the very great kinds', 'is something we have to come to terms with, not something to screw up our noses at' (256a10–11: τὴν κίνησιν δὴ ταὐτόν τ' εἶναι καὶ μὴ ταὐτὸν ὁμολογητέον καὶ οὐ δυσχεραντέον). But the distinction that will prove to be an essential feature of the analysis of *gene* in the *Sophist*, and that may well owe something to Parmenides' description of the two 'forms' of 'fire' and 'night', finds no foothold in Parmenides' account of the two Ways (fr. 2).

It is because that distinction has no part to play in Parmenides' account of the opposition between 'is' and 'is not' that he thinks as he does. To insist that that same distinction, as formulated by Plato's Stranger, is therefore a 'refutation' of Parmenides is to attempt to rewrite the course of history, to insist that Parmenides should, as it were, be made conscious of Plato's distinction, and at the same time continue thinking as he does, and therefore 'refuse' the distinction that, by the reader's reversal of the arrow of time, he has somehow been made aware of, but that in truth he never knew.[31]

31 The distinction between 'the same' and 'not the same' (fr. 8.52) is absent from Parmenides' account of the two Ways precisely because it is a distinction that comes into play only when there is more than one item in question: fire is 'the same as itself' and 'not the same' as night. In the first part of the poem, there is nothing other than being, and nothing therefore that could give meaning to the second term of a negation ('not the same as…'). In suggesting that Parmenides' distinction may be seen as an anticipation of the Stranger's use of the same form of words ('the same' and 'not the same'), I do not therefore mean that Plato simply repeats Parmenides' distinction. Parmenides' 'not the same' marks the reciprocal lack of identity between two items, consequent upon each item being 'the same as itself': fire is 'not the same as' night, night is 'not the same as' fire. The Stranger's 'not the same' marks the lack of identity accompanying participation in 'sameness'. The repetition of the

XXII

When Theaetetus answers the question, 'We do, I suppose, dare give utterance to what is not in any way at all?' (237b7–8), with a guileless, 'Why on earth not?' (237b9), he answers as the mortals of Parmenides' poem would no doubt have answered. When he is brought to realise that no, you can't think or speak of 'what is not in any way at all', he shares in Parmenides' condemnation of 'the opinions of mortals' (237b7–239c3). When at last he is brought to recognise the Stranger's distinction between negation and contrariety, will he think that Parmenides' mortals were right all along, and that Parmenides has therefore been 'refuted'?

Or will he appreciate that the choice was a false one, that, if the 'opinions of mortals' were presented as a contradiction, it was because Parmenides' 'two-headed' mortals were made to share the presupposition that governed Parmenides' own statement of the two Ways, in so far as they supposedly take up and repeat (cf. fr. 8.40) an unqualified opposition of 'is' and 'is not', even while failing to recognise the modal incompatibility that Parmenides' own statement of the two Ways was intended to establish?

When Parmenides' mortals are made to assert, of 'things that are not', that they 'are', they do not recognise the modal opposition underlying the negation in Parmenides' own statement of the two Ways, with the result that the expression of their belief, as formulated by Parmenides ('things that are not, are'), and from Parmenides' point of view, is a contradiction, and cannot be other than a contradiction so long as the opposition between 'is' and 'is not', as stated by Parmenides, goes unchallenged. Once that opposition no longer goes unquestioned, once we take account of the Stranger's distinction between negation and contrariety, we see that we no longer have to acquiesce, as it were, in Parmenides' condemnation of 'the opinions of mortals'.

But the conclusion does not therefore have to be that the mortals of Parmenides' poem were 'right' and that Parmenides was 'wrong'. The choice itself, 'for' or 'against' the opinions of mortals, is seen to be a

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same form of words ('the same' and 'not the same') is still striking enough to suggest influence. But, if so, Plato has taken over only the positive use (fire is 'the same as itself'), as an expression of self-identity. The matching negation ('and not the same as the other') has been adapted to the needs of the *Sophist* (the relation between form and the instantiation of a form).

false one, once we distinguish negation and contrariety. The question 'Is it true that things that are not, are?', once we have been made aware of the Stranger's distinction, cannot be answered by a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

If 'things that are not' are things that do not participate in being, and are therefore 'not in any way at all', then it is obviously *false*, indeed contradictory, to assert of such things that they 'are', and therefore that they participate in being. If 'things that are not' are things that, although they participate in being, are not therefore identical to being, then it is no less obviously *true* that 'things that are not', in so far as they are not identical to being, nonetheless 'are', in so far as they participate in being.

Now try answering the question 'Is it true that things that *things that are not, are?*', if your questioner has no knowledge of the Stranger's distinction, and without yourself appealing to that distinction. Will you answer 'yes' or 'no'?

XXIII

'Have you stopped beating your wife?' I know that you started beating your wife some time ago. What I want to know is: 'Have you stopped?' The presupposition to my question (my assumption that you started beating your wife some time ago) does not allow you to protest that you haven't stopped because you never even started. You have to answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. 'Yes, I have stopped.' 'No, I haven't.' You can't say both 'Yes, I have' (because, after all, you are not, and never have been, given to beating her), and at the same time 'No, I haven't' (because, if you never even started, you can't now 'stop').[32]

Mutatis mutandis, the same is true of Parmenides' opposition between being and non-being. Parmenides has a seemingly incontrovertible opposition between being and non-being, between what *is* and *cannot not be* and what *is not* and *necessarily is not*. If you say 'is', you have to say 'and cannot not be'. If you say 'is not', you have to say 'and is necessary not to be'. Therefore, in Parmenides' eyes, you merely contra-

32 'Wife-beating': I let out, for the briefest of brief airings, the tired old joke, conventionally given to illustrate Geach's point about multiple questions, taken over from Frege, and used by way of criticism of Russell's theory of descriptions. Geach's own example is 'Have you been happier since your wife died?', a question which presupposes both that you had a wife and that she is now dead. See Geach (1949–1950).

dict yourself if you say, of 'things that are not', that they 'are', since, whatever else those words may imply, they will have to mean that what necessarily is not (cf. fr. 2.5), cannot not be (cf. fr. 2.3).

Once you are caught in that form of words, there is no point in trying to circumvent the contradiction by 'leaving open' the possibility that what is necessarily not might, after all, just possibly be… If your interlocutor persists in asking whether or not you have stopped beating your wife, there is no point in protesting, weakly, that you have to leave the question open, that you really can't say whether, every now and then, you do perhaps after all, well never for very long, you know, and only now and then, she doesn't really mind all that much… give your wife just a bit of a beating. If that is what you say, you will confirm your questioner in his presupposition, just as much as if you answer boldly (but in either case, falsely), 'Yes, I have' or 'No, I haven't'.

Matters are made only worse if, as well he may, the questioner takes your refusal to come out with a straightforward 'yes' or 'no' as a sign of hesitation. You hesitate, so he may think, to tell the truth ('I haven't stopped, but I don't like to own up…'), or because you are not quite sure what a truthful answer would be ('I did promise I would stop, but if I ask her nicely, she may perhaps let me, just once or twice more, if only for old times' sake…'). It may take some while for your obdurate questioner to realise that the seeming hesitation on your part stems only from your wondering quite how best to get him (or her) to see the point, and to acknowledge the extent of his (or her) misconception.

When at last you get your questioner to see that you cannot say whether you have stopped, or not stopped, doing what you never even started doing (perhaps even that you don't have a wife…), will he think that you have 'refuted' him? You will certainly have made him change his way of thinking. You will certainly have made him see how wrong he was. But is that because you have 'refuted' him?[33]

33 If I call up the tired old joke (see above), it is because it still illustrates the insidious power of an unrecognised presupposition. Although Notomi maintains *mordicus* that Plato has 'refuted' Parmenides, he is in fact still himself a victim of the presupposition underlying Parmenides' statement of the two Ways, in so far as he thinks that, in order to 'refute' Parmenides, the Stranger is drawn into denying the principle of contradiction. (See again Notomi [2007] 184: the Stranger 'leaves open' the possibility that 'what is not in any way at all' might, nonetheless, 'be'.)

XXIV

Why not? Why not allow that your questioner has been 'refuted' when at last you get him to see that you cannot say either that you have stopped or that you haven't stopped beating your wife? Why not tell him that he has been 'refuted', when at last he realises that he cannot insist on being told that you have, or that your haven't, stopped beating your wife, simply because you don't have a wife?

Why not allow that someone is 'refuted' when he is led to see that he is no longer bound by a distinction that had, until then, seemed inviolable? Why not allow that Parmenides has been 'refuted' when Theaetetus is brought to see that, in the light of the Stranger's distinction, the meaning given to the words 'things that are not, are' need no longer be what it had been for Parmenides, when he is therefore brought to see that, in speaking of 'things that are' and of 'things that are not', you do not have to choose between 'is' and 'is not' as 'impossible not to be' and 'necessary not to be' (any more than you have to choose between 'I have' and 'I haven't' stopped beating my wife)?

Why be so pernickety over the use of a word? Plato's world, the Stranger's world, is no longer the world of Parmenides, and excludes that world. Is not this a form of 'refutation', the more so as Plato has spattered the passage on 'parricide' with talk of 'refutation' and 'refuting', and has repeated the same word at the very moment (cf. 259a2–4) when the Stranger says 'goodbye' to an impossible contrary of being?

XXV

But how does Plato use the word? Not to describe the outcome of the Stranger's relation to Parmenides. When the Stranger uses the word in the concluding lines of his account of self-contradiction and self-refutation, it is to say that he himself has long ago had to admit defeat in the struggle with 'the refutation of what is not' (239b1–3: τὸν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἔλεγχον).[34]

Following the warning of parricide, he very deliberately reminds Theaetetus of that defeat and of that avowal.

34 See §VI above.

> 'I did say, you know, just now, in so many words, that, so far as I am concerned, I always find myself ending up with nothing to say when faced with the question of refutation in such matters, and so it is too, today' (242a7–8: εἶπόν που νυνδὴ λέγων ὡς πρὸς τὸν περὶ ταῦτ' ἔλεγχον ἀεί τε ἀπειρηκὼς ἐγὼ τυγχάνω καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ νῦν).[35]

This is followed by:

> 'You see it's really for your sake that we are going to have a go at refuting the *logos*, if refute it we can' (242b1–2: σὴν γὰρ δὴ χάριν ἐλέγχειν τὸν λόγον ἐπιθησόμεθα, ἐάνπερ ἐλέγχωμεν).[36]

The *logos* in question (242b1) is the 'paternal *logos*' (cf. 242a1–2), namely Parmenides' condemnation of the formula encapsulating the 'opinions of mortals' (cf. fr. 7.1: 'things that are not, are'). This is the closest that Plato comes to having the Stranger speak of 'refuting' Parmenides. But is the closest close enough? Surely not. The precise meaning of the

35 'I did say, you know': the emphatic form of the verb ('I did'), coupled with 'you know', if given the right intonation in English, conveys the quietly deprecatory insistence of the particle (που). For the acquisition of this secondary meaning by a particle that otherwise tends to tone down the assertive force of the sentence, see Denniston (1966) 491 ('used ironically, with assumed diffidence, by a speaker who is quite sure of his ground'). 'In so many words': the addition is an attempt at translating the duplication of εἶπον followed by λέγων. For the apparent pleonasm, see LSJ, *s.v.* λέγω, III, 7 (p. 1034). 'So far as I am concerned' translates ἐγώ. The addition of the personal pronoun is not needed for the syntax of the sentence in Greek; its presence therefore gives deliberate emphasis to the personal attribution of the action of the verb. 'I always find myself…': for the use of τυγχάνω with the participle of another verb (here ἀπειρηκώς), see LSJ, *s.v.*, A, II, 1 (p. 1833). 'Ending up with nothing to say': the perfect tense (ἀπειρηκώς, from ἀπείρηκα), here as regularly, indicates a present state resulting from a past action, hence the state that one 'ends up in'. The compound verb (ἀπ-είρηκα from ἀπ-εῖπον), conventionally translated as '*renounce, disown, give up on*' (LSJ, *s.v.*, IV [p. 183]), here repeats the uncompounded verb at the beginning of the sentence (εἶπον). Hence the repetition in the translation: 'I did say' (εἶπον) followed by 'ending up with nothing to say' (ἀπειρηκώς). The paradox is presumably deliberate. 'Saying' that one 'has nothing to say' harks back to the impossible paradox of 'uttering' the 'unutterable'.

36 'You see' translates γάρ. 'Really' translates δή. The explanatory particle (γάρ) links the sentence to the words preceding (242a10–b1). Socrates is afraid he may seem 'out of his mind', 'obsessed' (μανικός), pursuing the argument at such length and in such detail. If he risks making a fool of himself, it is only because (cf. γάρ) he wants to do Theaetetus a favour (σὴν χάριν, for the use of the accusative singular in this adverbial sense, see LSJ, *s.v.* χάρις, VI, 1 [p. 1979]). For the meaning of the main verb (ἐπιθησόμεθα) and for the translation of the protasis (ἐάνπερ ἐλέγχωμεν), see the footnotes following.

sentence is all-important. The 'refutation' is no more than an 'attempted' refutation. The Stranger says only that 'we are going to have a go at' (ἐπιθησόμεθα, more colloquially: 'we are going to have a bash at') 'refuting' the paternal *logos*.[37]

Whether, and in what way, the attempt succeeds will not be apparent until much later in the dialogue, when the very notion of 'what is not' has been cast in a wholly new perspective by the Stranger's momentous discovery of 'a form of non-being' (258d5–e3). For the moment (242b1–2), the Stranger's 'favour' (cf. 242b1: σὴν γὰρ δὴ χάριν, 'it's really for your sake', 'to do you a favour') lies solely in his agreeing to make an 'attempt' at a refutation; how the 'attempt' will turn out is left wholly in abeyance.

So much is made abundantly clear by the addition, at the end of the sentence, of an emphatic protasis ('if refute it we can', ἐάνπερ ἐλέγχωμεν), marking 'distinctly and vividly' that the verbs in the sentence refer exclusively to a time in the future.[38] In such a context, and with such a form of expression, the outcome of the attempted refutation is anything but a foregone conclusion.[39]

It is true that Theaetetus waives aside the Stranger's hesitations by encouraging him to forge ahead with his 'refutation' and his 'demonstration' (τὸν ἔλεγχον τοῦτον καὶ τὴν ἀπόδειξιν, 242b3–5). But it is

37 For this use of the middle voice, see LSJ, *s.v.* ἐπιτίθημι, B, III, 1 (p. 666): 'cum infinitivo *attempt to*.'

38 'A supposed future case is stated distinctly and vividly.' This is Goodwin's definition of the force given to a conditional sentence by a future tense of the indicative of the apodosis (ἐπιθησόμεθα), coupled with the modal particle (ἄν) and a subjunctive mood for the verb in the protasis (ἐλέγχωμεν). See Goodwin (1897), §444 (p. 163–164). The modal particle is here fused with the conditional conjunction (ἐάνπερ is made up from εἰ, ἄν and -περ), the addition of the suffix (-περ) giving added emphasis to the hypothetical character of the dependent verb of the apodosis (ἐλέγχειν) when it is repeated as the leading verb in the protasis (ἐλέγχωμεν). For the difficulty of translating a future conditional sentence into English, see the footnote following.

39 Colloquial English cannot tolerate, easily or at all, a future tense in the protasis ('if we shall refute…'), and any attempt at matching the use of a dependent mood (ἐλέγχωμεν, 'if refutation there be…'), besides being awkwardly archaic, strikes a note of hesitant unreality, absent from the Greek. An impersonal construction would be possible: 'if there is to be a refutation.' The inversion and the use of an auxiliary verb, as in the translation adopted above ('if refute it we can'), maintain the personal construction and convey something of the warning tone given in Greek by the future conditional.

Theaetetus, not the Stranger, and a Theaetetus unaware of the complexities that lie ahead, who proffers those two words as virtual synonyms.

It is his own counter-thesis, at least as much as Parmenides' thesis, that is in question when the Stranger says that in general the problem of falsity can never be resolved 'for so long as such matters are neither refuted nor agreed to' (241e1: τούτων γὰρ μήτ' ἐλεγχθέντων μήτε ὁμολογηθέντων…). And it is indubitably his own thesis that is in question when, having established, against Parmenides, that 'being' and 'non-being', as now defined, are not incompatible, he says that he is going stick to his new thesis unless someone comes along who is able to 'refute' (ἐλέγξας) what he and Theaetetus have now so happily agreed upon (259a2–4).[40]

XXVI

Pinned down to their context, the places where the Stranger supposedly speaks of successfully 'refuting' Parmenides vanish like the morning dew on a summer's day. But if the Stranger doesn't claim to have 'refuted' Parmenides, does he then leave it to be understood that he therefore agrees with him?

Not at all. But at the crucial moment when he prepares to trumpet his discovery of 'the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*', the language he uses is not the language of 'refutation'.

40 For simplicity's sake, I give the same translation for the verb in both passages (241e1: ἐλεγχθέντων, 259a3: ἐλέγξας), although one might possibly wonder whether, given the composite form of words in the earlier passage (241e1: τούτων γὰρ μήτ' ἐλεγχθέντων μήτε ὁμολογηθέντων), the meaning was not perhaps rather 'neither put to the test nor agreed to'. The word easily shifts from one meaning to the other. What is 'put to the test' may either *pass* or *fail*. It is only in the latter case that the 'test' turns out to be a 'refutation'. See LSJ, *s.v.* ἔλεγχος (B), I (p. 531): '*argument of disproof* or *refutation*', II: 'generally *cross-examining, testing, scrutiny*, esp. for the purposes of *refutation*.' Rather confusingly, the two meanings are put the other way round for the verb, *ibid.*, *s.v.* ἐλέγχω, II, 1: '*cross-examine, question*', II, 4: '*refute, confute*' (p. 531). The two meanings are not always easy to keep apart. So it is that, in our text (241e1–2), the meaning is probably that of a straightforward opposition: things have to be either rejected, because 'refuted', or 'agreed to'. But the implication could possibly be that, among things have been 'put to the test', some are 'accepted', and not others.

> The Stranger: 'So do you think we've been unfaithful to Parmenides, in taking up a position too far removed from his prohibition?' (258c6–7: οἶσθ' οὖν ὅτι Παρμενίδῃ μακροτέρως τῆς ἀπορρήσεως ἠπιστήκαμεν;)
>
> Theaetetus: 'What do you mean?' (258c8: τί δή;)
>
> The Stranger: 'By pushing on ahead with the search, what we've shown him goes beyond the point where he told us to stop looking' (cf. 258c9–10: πλεῖον ἢ 'κεῖνος ἀπεῖπε σκοπεῖν, ἡμεῖς εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν ἔτι ζητήσαντες ἀπεδείξαμεν αὐτῷ).

Just so. The metaphor of distance, of uncharted and forbidden territories, hits off the situation very neatly. The Stranger and Theaetetus have entered a new world, far removed from the world of Parmenides, and have survived to tell the tale. But that does not mean that they claim to have 'refuted' him in any simple sense. How could they have done? Refutation implies contradiction. No-one in his right mind would think to contradict Parmenides' denial that 'things that are not, are', in so far as those words are taken as meaning, or even as implying, that 'things that do not exist, do exist'.[41]

41 I return therefore, if only very briefly, to the two critics named in my opening sentences (see n. 3 above). Dixsaut (2000) 269 seeks to show how absurd it is to suppose that Plato has not 'refuted' Parmenides by appealing to the obvious difference between Plato and Parmenides on the question of *being*. A blatant *ignoratio elenchi*, since my thesis is entirely given over to the difference between Plato and Parmenides on the question of *non-being* (a question, moreover, which largely determines how either philosopher conceives of *being*). Noburu Notomi is in an even worse state. Before coming out with his own impossible conflation of 'being' and 'non-being' (his claim, [2007], 184, that Plato 'deliberately leaves open the question about the *being* of *what in no way is*'), he launches into a full-scale critique of an Aunt Sally that he graces with my name, but credits with statements that are nowhere to be found in anything I have written and that do not represent anything that I have ever said or even thought. I nowhere translate ὑποθέσθαι (237a3) as 'claim' or 'declare', as Notomi wrongly claims I do (p. 172 n. 14). I nowhere identify 'non-being' with falsehood, as Notomi wrongly claims I do (p. 172 n. 15). I nowhere take the simple utterance 'things that are not' (μὴ ἐόντα) as a sufficient indication of the opinions of mortals, as Notomi wrongly claims I do (p. 173 n. 16). Notomi has yet to learn the first lesson of a fledgling controversialist: never attribute to your chosen adversary things that he has not said. You can hardly expect your criticisms to be taken seriously if you do.

Additional Note

Gregory Vlastos on the '"Names" of Being in Parmenides'

In the opening pages of an article that has only recently found its way into print, nearly two decades after its author's death (in 1991), Gregory Vlastos calls into question the depreciative connotation commonly attached to the mention of a 'name' or 'naming' in verses drawn from the exploration of the first Way (fr. 8.38–40).[42]

The verses in question are quoted at the beginning of this essay (§I), where they are followed by a translation that unashamedly perpetuates the depreciative connotation that Vlastos seeks to set aside.

> 'They will therefore be *no more than* a name, all things soever that mortals, convinced they were true, laid down as coming into being and passing away, as being and not being…'[43]

If, braving Vlastos' posthumous disapproval, I persist in keeping to a depreciative connotation, it is in part because a no less depreciative attitude to 'names' or 'naming' is to be found in the fragments of Empedocles' *Peri physeos*.

In a short sequence of four verses (fr. 8), recorded by a number of authors including Plutarch (*Adversus Colotem* 10, 1111F), Empedocles explains birth and death as a result of mixture and separation (*sc.* of the four 'roots' or elements, earth, air, fire and water). This standard piece of Empedoclean doctrine is preceded by the emphatic insistence that 'there is no *physis* of any single one of all things that are mortal' (fr. 8.1–2: φύσις οὐδενός ἐστιν ἁπάντων/θνητῶν), and is followed by the no less emphatic statement that '*physis* is the name that has been given them by people' or perhaps, more idiomatically, '*physis* is the name that people have put on them' (fr. 8.4: φύσις δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνομάζεται ἀνθρώποισιν). The depreciative connotation is indubitable. 'Nam-

42 Vlastos (2008).

43 The words adding a depreciative tone to the mention of a 'name' are here printed in italics. In the volume from which the translation is taken (O'Brien [1987] 42), these words are enclosed in angular brackets, to indicate 'des mots ou des phrases qui n'ont aucune équivalence directe dans le texte grec, mais que nous jugeons nécessaires à l'intelligence du passage en question' (see the *Avertissment* to the volume, p. xvii). Vlastos singles out as the target of his criticism 'leerer Schall' (Diels), 'blosser Name' (Kranz), 'a mere word' (Cornford).

ing' does not correspond to the way things really are. There is no *physis* ('birth', 'growth', 'coming-to-be'…). What people call *physis*, what they think to indicate by the 'name', is nothing other than the mixing, and subsequent separation, of pre-existing elements.

Empedocles' attitude to 'naming' in the fragment quoted (fr. 8) is all of a piece with what we hear in a second set of verses (fr. 9), quoted by Plutarch in the same context (*Adversus Colotem* 11, 1113A–B) and very likely taken from the same part of the poem. Mixture and separation are here again given as the explanation of coming-into-being and dissolution (vv. 1–4), followed by the words (fr. 9.5): ἢ θέμις οὐ καλέουσι, νόμῳ δ' ἐπίφημι καὶ αὐτός. 'They have no right to call things as they do, but I, too, follow in my speech the call of convention.'[44]

Empedocles does not share Parmenides' belief that the world we see and feel around us is illusory. While Parmenides warns that his account of the world we see and feel is 'deceptive' (fr. 8.52: ἀπατηλόν), Empedocles goes out of his way to declare that the account he will give is 'not deceptive' (fr. 17.26: οὐκ ἀπατηλόν). The contradiction is clearly deliberate. But the disparagement of 'names' survives the contradiction. Empedocles believes that 'people' (fr. 8.4: ἀνθρώποισιν) are under a misapprehension in 'naming' (cf. ὀνομάζεται) a *physis* when in fact there is none. Contrary to what Vlastos would have us suppose, there

44 I quote the first half of the verse as printed by Diels, beginning with the Homeric formula ἢ θέμις, taken here as implying an ellipse of the verb and therefore with a possessive use of the dative (so Diels): ἢ θέμις οὐκ ἔστι τοῖς καλοῦσι. Literally: 'Rightness does not belong to…' More idiomatically, as above: 'They have no right…' For the accentuation of the so-called 'substantival' article (ἢ θέμις), see Allen's critical edition of the *Iliad*, (1931), 229–230. The negative particle (οὐ), absent from the manuscripts both in *Adversus Colotem* 11, 1111F, and when the same verse is quoted in *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 28, 820F, was added by Bachet de Méziriac, in the margin of a copy of Stephanus' edition of the *Moralia*, now held in the library of the University of Leiden. The manuscripts of Homer commonly have both ἢ θέμις and ἦ θέμις (e.g. *Iliad* ii 73). The latter reading, with Méziriac's correction, yields ἦ θέμις οὐ καλέουσι, a form of words which led Wilamowitz to abandon the Homeric parallel (whether read as ἢ θέμις or as ἦ θέμις) in favour of a supposedly more forthright version: οὐ θέμις ἦ καλέουσι. The general meaning is much the same whether we place the adverbial conjunction (ἦ) before θέμις (ἦ θέμις οὐ καλέουσι, 'they do not call things in the way that is right') or, as Wilamowitz preferred, before καλέουσι (οὐ θέμις ἦ καλέουσι, 'there is no rightness in the way that they call things). Attempts by more recent editors (Gallavotti, Van der Ben) to give a plausible meaning to the fragment without Méziriac's correction serve only to confirm the need for a negation.

is therefore nothing at all intrinsically untoward in thinking to find an equivalently depreciative connotation when Parmenides speaks of 'mortals' (βροτοί) and of a 'name' (ὄνομα) or 'naming' (ὀνόμασται, an alternative reading, preferred by Vlastos), in the verses quoted at the beginning of this article.[45]

Just as, for Empedocles (fr. 8.4), the connotation implied is that '*physis* is *merely* the name that has been given them by people' (or even '*physis* is *merely* the name that has been *put on them* by people'), so too, for Parmenides (fr. 8.38–40), the connotation implied may perfectly properly be taken to be that 'they will therefore be *no more than* a name, all things soever that mortals, convinced they were true, laid down as coming into being and passing away, as being and not being…'

Both Empedocles and Parmenides are understandably chary, though for different reasons, of the 'names' commonly applied to the phenomena of the visible world by those who know no better. Names commonly in use do not at all match what Empedocles believes to be the true explanation of such phenomena, the explanation inspired by his 'white-armed Muse' (cf. fr. 3.3). Still less do they match the message of Parmenides' goddess, dwelling beyond the Gates of Night and Day (fr. 1.11) and claiming to disprove the very possibility of anything whatever coming-into-being or passing-away (fr. 8.26–28). All the many things that we mortals think to see, 'coming into being and passing away, being and not being, changing place and altering their bright colour', so Parmenides would have us believe, are 'no more than a name' (cf. fr. 8.38–41).[46]

45 The multiple variant readings recorded in ancient authors for the concluding words of the verse (fr. 8.38) are listed in O'Brien (1987) 42.

46 *Acknowledgment.* I am most grateful to the organisers of our meeting in Benasque for the opportunity to study the text of the *Sophist* afresh in ideal surroundings. I learnt a great deal from the papers and the discussions. My warmest thanks are due to Beatriz Bossi for a critical reading of the written text of my own contribution.