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RHETORISCHE STRATEGIEN UND STRUKTUREN  
IN PHILOSOPHISCHER LITERATUR

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# A Rhetorical Reading of Plato's *Parmenides*

CARLOS STEEL

In the introduction of his commentary on the *Parmenides* Proclus surveys the interpretation of this dialogue in the Platonic tradition.<sup>1</sup> He distinguishes two types of interpretation, one called *logikos*, another *pragmateiôdês*. The latter, which he favours, assumes that the dialogue, and in particular the dialectical discussion on the One, discusses *pragmata* – realities – whether they be the Forms (as some thought), or the first principles, or the gods. The former type of interpretation is called *logikos* because it focuses on the literary form and method of the dialogue, rather than on its presumed metaphysical doctrine. In fact, as these interpreters argue, it is not possible to discover a definite doctrine in the *Parmenides*, since the dialogue ends with a host of contradictions. Within this ‘logical’ genre Proclus distinguishes two distinct approaches to the dialogue which are nevertheless related to one another.<sup>2</sup> In the present contribution, I will focus on the first of these approaches, which – in my view – should be understood as a rhetorical interpretation of the dialogue. This rhetorical

<sup>1</sup> See on this survey Carlos Steel: Une histoire de l'interprétation du *Parménide* dans l'antiquité, in: Maria Brabanti, Francesco Romano (a cura di): *Il Parmenide di Platone e la sua tradizione*. Atti del III Colloquio Internazionale del Centro di Ricerca sul Neoplatonismo (Catania 2002) 11–40; Luc Brisson: The Reception of the *Parmenides* before Proclus, in: ZAC 12 (2008) 99–113.

<sup>2</sup> On this logical interpretation see Carlos Steel: Proclus et l'interprétation logique du *Parménide*, in: Linos G. Benakis (éd.): *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale*. Actes du Colloque international de Corfou, 6–8 octobre 1995 (Turnhout 1997) 69–92; Luc Brisson: Columns VII–VIII of the Anonymous Commentary on the *Parmenides*. Vestiges of a Logical Interpretation, in: Kevin Corrigan, John D. Turner (eds.): *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage*. Volume 2: Its Reception in Neoplatonic, Jewish and Christian Texts (Atlanta 2011) 111–117.

reading of the *Parmenides*, which was adopted by some Platonists before Plotinus, has not been sufficiently noticed by scholars, since it is easily classified – and dismissed – under the heading ‘logical’. My analysis will be based upon Proclus’ summary of this interpretation in 631, 4–633, 9, a summary that he (or already Syrianus) probably took up from an earlier commentary on the *Parmenides*.<sup>3</sup> There are certain editorial problems affecting the organisation of this text, which I shall discuss in a concluding philological note.

### *A threefold division of dialogues*

According to some interpreters, says Proclus, Plato composed the *Parmenides*, and particularly its second part – the dialectical exercise on the One – as an *antigraphê* (ἀντιγραφὴ) against Zeno’s *logos*, which set out to demonstrate that contradictions follow from the supposition of many things. The term ἀντιγραφὴ is mostly used in a juridical sense, as when, for example, one citizen brings an indictment against another, as the celebrated *antigraphê* against Socrates (see Apol. 27c), or one party to a lawsuit makes a counterplea. Here, however, the term is used to designate a particular literary genre, namely, a type of writing that ‘counters’ another written work. This can of course involve refuting a doctrine expressed by some author in a *logos*. And this is, in fact, the standard meaning of ἀντίρρησις, a term which is here (631, 13) used as an equivalent of ἀντιγραφὴ. However, as we shall see, not all counter-writings are refutations: some are *emulations* of the rival writing. Moreover, even when they *are* refutations, they tend to refute by ‘replicating’ a method which is exemplified by the rival writing: thus, for example, Plato uses the Eleatic method against Zeno. In fact, as these interpreters say, among the dialogues that

<sup>3</sup> All references are to my edition in the Oxford Classical Text series (Carlos Steel: Procli In Platonis *Parmenidem* Commentaria. Tomus I libros I–III continens [Oxford 2007]). In my notes I make use of my annotations in the Budé edition (Concetta Luna, Alain-Philippe Segonds: Proclus. Commentaire sur le *Parménide* de Platon [Paris 2007]), which are not acknowledged by the editors. For my translations and paraphrases of Proclus’ text I freely use the translation of Glenn R. Morrow, John M. Dillon: Proclus’ Commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* (Princeton 1987).

Plato composed as an *antigraphê*, three sub-types can be distinguished. Some are written by way of imitation (κατὰ μίμησιν); some by way of opposition (κατ' ἐναντίωσιν); and some Platonic dialogues combine these rhetorical strategies: they both imitate *and* oppose the rival speech.

(1) Let us first consider a dialogue – or at least, a section of a dialogue – that is written in imitation of a rival speech. In such a dialogue, Plato does not simply set out to imitate but to achieve a greater perfection in his imitation by adding what was lacking in his rival's original arguments (ἐπὶ τὸ τελειότερον προάγοντα τὴν μίμησιν καὶ τὰ ἐλλείποντα προστιθέντα τοῖς ἐκείνων λόγοις). The obvious example, here, is the *Menexenus*. Why did Plato write this dialogue, which mainly consists in a funeral discourse in honour of the Athenian soldiers fallen in war (236d4–249d2)? According to the anonymous interpreters, Plato composed this dialogue 'in rivalry with Thucydides' (πρὸς Θουκυδίδην ἀγωνιζόμενος), imitating and improving the celebrated *epitaphios* of Pericles (II 35–46). Dionysius of Halicarnassus made a similar analysis of the *Menexenus*, but to the detriment of Plato. As he says in his *Demosthenes*, 23, 10: 'The most important of all Plato's political discourses is the *Menexenus*, in which he gives a complete funeral speech, taking Thucydides as his model in my opinion, but according to himself Archinus and Dio' (transl. St. Usher). Dionysius offers a literary and rhetorical analysis of Plato's *epitaphios* and afterwards compares it, not with Thucydides' speech, but rather with Demosthenes' *De corona*. As he shows in his lengthy analysis, Demosthenes is much superior to Plato in writing (23, 10–32, 4). One might object, as does St. Usher in his Loeb translation,<sup>4</sup> that it is unfair to compare on the one hand the finest passage in the whole of Demosthenes' corpus, on the other hand a passage from the *Menexenus*, 'a work which even few of his contemporaries can have read as a representative example of Plato's style, or even as a dialogue of serious content' (234). 'It seems not to have occurred to Dionysius that Plato may have composed the *Menexenus* as a parodic pastiche of existing *epitaphioi*' (328–329 n. 1).<sup>5</sup> The anonymous commentator quoted

<sup>4</sup> Stephan Usher: Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The Critical Essays, I (Cambridge, London 1974).

<sup>5</sup> On the purpose of the *Menexenus* see Nicole Loraux: Socrate contrepoison de l'oraison funèbre. Enjeu et signification du *Ménexène*, in: AC 43 (1974) 172–211 and Lucinda Coventry: Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*, in: JHS 109 (1989) 1–15.

by Proclus defends Plato against the sort of criticism one finds in Dionysius. Plato's *epitaphios*, he says, marks a great improvement when it is compared to Thucydides' speech. Plato does much better than his rival on three points: (1) the arrangement of the subjects (τῆ τάξει τῶν κεφαλαίων), (2) the invention of the arguments (τῆ εὐρέσει τῶν ἐπιχειρήσεων), and (3) the clarity of the exposition (τῆ σαφηνείᾳ τῆς ἐρμηνείας). The three points on which Plato improves Thucydides' discourse correspond to the classic division of rhetoric into (1) invention, or the finding of arguments; (2) disposition of arguments, sometimes called οἰκονομία; and (3) exposition (φράσις), where a sub-division can be made between the choice of vocabulary and the syntactic composition.<sup>6</sup> Dionysius, for instance, uses these criteria when he compares the style of Dinarchus to Demosthenes. As he argues, Demosthenes is superior to Dinarchus on four points: (1) κατὰ <μὲν> τὴν ἐκλογὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων τῆ δεινότητι, (2) κατὰ δὲ τὴν σύνθεσιν τῆ ποικιλίᾳ τῶν σχημάτων καὶ τῆ ἐξαλλαγῇ, (3) κατὰ δὲ τὴν εὐρεσιν τῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων [...], (4) κατὰ δὲ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆ τάξει (*Din.* 8, 21). Whether Plato's *Menexenus* would ever win the contest against Thucydides is doubtful. It is, however, interesting to see a Platonist defending Plato's rhetorical art against the critique we find in authors such as Dionysius. In the fourth century, the Platonist Synesius again feels the need to defend the *Menexenus*. As he says, if one reads 'with intelligence' the *epitaphios* of Thucydides and that composed by Plato, one will see 'that each of the two is much more beautiful than the other, if evaluated by its own standards' (ὡν ἑκάτερος θατέρου παρὰ πολὺ καλλίων ἐστὶ, τοῖς οἰκείοις κανόσι κρινόμενος, *Dion* 1, 37d p. 237, 14–15 Terzaghi). Synesius does not specify what these 'standards' were, but he may have thought that it was illegitimate to compare Thucydides and Plato by using merely rhetorical standards (for then, Plato might prove to be inferior). Plato will necessarily prove the better rhetor if one brings in the philosophical con-

<sup>6</sup> See *Dion. Hal. Dem.* 51, 20–30: ὅτι τοῦ λέγειν εὐ διττὴ ἢ διαίρεσις ἐστίν, εἰς τε τὸν πραγματικὸν τόπον καὶ εἰς τὸν λεκτικόν, καὶ τούτων πάλιν ἀμφοτέρων εἰς τὰς ἴσας διαιρεθέντων τομάς, τοῦ πραγματικοῦ μὲν εἰς τε τὴν παρασκευὴν, ἣν οἱ παλαιοὶ καλοῦσιν εὐρεσιν, καὶ εἰς τὴν χρῆσιν τῶν παρεσκευασμένων, ἣν προσαγορεύουσιν οἰκονομίαν, τοῦ λεκτικοῦ δὲ εἰς τε τὴν ἐκλογὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ εἰς τὴν σύνθεσιν τῶν ἐκλεγέντων, ἐν ἑκατέρῳ τούτων πλείω μοῖραν ἔχει τὰ δευτέρα τῶν προτέρων· τὸ μὲν οἰκονομικὸν ἐν τῷ πραγματικῷ, τὸ δὲ συνθετικὸν ἐν τῷ λεκτικῷ.

tent of his speech. That the *Menexenus* was considered a special case is also clear from a comment Proclus makes in his commentary on Tim. 19c–d, where Socrates confesses that he is incapable of adequately praising Atlantis. According to some interpreters, Socrates avoids encomia because he is not equal to this solemn and grand style of speech, for the Socratic manner of speech is the opposite: ‘lean, precise, and dialectical’. Proclus, however, refuses this interpretation. Socrates, he says, occasionally uses the grand style, as in the *Menexenus* – unless one finds in this a basis to question the authenticity of this dialogue, but then, there is also the grandiloquence of the indubitably Platonic *Phaedrus*.<sup>7</sup>

(2) The second form of Platonic counter-writing means to *oppose* another *logos* (κατ’ ἐναντίωσιν). The essential difference with the first form is the fact that now the author, although he uses and exploits the method and arguments of his rival and brings them to perfection, argues for a position that is exactly opposed to his rival’s. The example given by the anonymous commentator for this form is the *Theaetetus*. In this dialogue, he says, Plato writes against (ἀντέγραψε) Protagoras, who claimed that ‘man is the measure of all things’, and he argues against him that, following his reasoning, one may as well conclude that ‘a pig or a dog-faced baboon is the measure of all things’. One may be surprised to find this passage used to determine the purpose of the *Theaetetus*. After all, this is a rhetorical *ad hominem* argument, not the most subtle in the whole discussion with Protagoras. However, when one considers the context of this refutation, one may understand why some commentators considered the *Theaetetus*, or at least some part of it, as an *antigraphê* against Protagoras’ *logos* in which he made his *homo mensura* claim. The refutation of Protagoras’ thesis is found in the midst of Theaetetus’ attempt to define knowledge as perception. As Socrates remarks, what Theaetetus is putting forward in this definition is not different from what Protagoras said in his *logos* on Truth, namely that ‘man is the measure of all things’, though Pro-

<sup>7</sup> Prokl. In Plat. Tim. I 62, 6–15: ἤδη γὰρ καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τινὲς εἰρήκασιν, ὅτι τὸ ἐγκωμιστικὸν εἶδος ἀδρόν ἐστι καὶ γαῦρον καὶ μεγαλοπρεπές, ὃ δὲ Σωκρατικὸς χαρακτήρ τῶν λόγων ἰσχνὸς καὶ ἀκριβὴς καὶ διαλεκτικὸς. ἔχει δὴ οὖν ἀπ’ ἐναντίας πρὸς ἐκεῖνον. διὸ καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης ἀποφεύγει τὸ ἐγκωμιάζειν, εἰδὼς τὴν παρ’ ἑαυτῷ δύναμιν πρὸς ἃ πέφυκεν. οἱ δὲ τοῦτο λέγοντες πρὸς τῷ τὸν Μενέξενον ἀντικρυς ἀθετεῖν δοκοῦσι μοι μηδὲ τῆς ἐν Φαίδρῳ τοῦ Σωκράτους ἐπισηθῆσθαι μεγαλοφονίας.

tagoras ‘put the same thing in a different way’ (152a). The definition proposed by Theaetetus thus gives Socrates an opportunity to ‘contradict’ Protagoras. Before starting his critique, Socrates presents Protagoras’ doctrine in all its implications. Protagoras not only openly defends relativism, but also adheres to a ‘secret doctrine’, which maintains that all things are in constant flux (152c–160e). Having first construed Protagoras’ position, Socrates begins criticizing it from 161b on. This refutation of Protagoras begins with a rhetorical reversal of his position: pigs and baboons are just as much ‘measures’ of what appears to them as humans are. This may be a childish argument, as Protagoras protests, but this is why Socrates allows Protagoras to defend himself in a long counter-speech: ‘I certainly do not equate wise people with frogs’ (167b). Socrates is not convinced, and maintains that Protagoras’ relativism undermines his claim that he has superior wisdom, and is therefore self-defeating; we thus return to Socrates’ opening point. To consider the whole of *Theaetetus* as an *antigraphè* may be exaggerated. However, it makes sense to interpret the long section 152a–183c in this way: Socrates first presents Protagoras’ position, then offers a counter-argument which is followed by a Protagorean defence, which is again countered by Socrates. The rhetorical construction of this lively discussion, in which Protagoras is given a prominent role, is evident. Moreover, the famous digression opposing the rhetor and the philosopher offers a perspective for a rhetorical analysis of the argumentation.

(3) Finally, Plato composed some dialogues both in imitation *and* in opposition to other writings. The obvious example here is the *Phaedrus*, which in its first part is a counter-writing by imitation, and in the second part is a counter-writing by opposition. Phaedrus starts by reading a *logos* of Lysias to the effect that one should rather yield to a non-lover than to a lover. Irritated by Phaedrus’ admiration for Lysias’ speech, Socrates delivers his own speech which argues for the same controversial thesis (εἰς ταῦτόν ἐπιχειρῶν) as Lysias, but tries to get the better of Lysias – thus emulating him and bringing his speech to perfection, as was the case with the *epitaphios* of Plato’s *Menexenus*, which competes with Thucydides. According to the anonymous commentator, Socrates’ *Phaedrus* speech is indeed much better than Lysias’ for the following reasons:

(1) instead of 'throwing arguments haphazardly' (χύδην βεβλημένων ἐν-θυμημάτων), as Lysias had, Socrates introduces a 'necessary order' (τάξιν ἀναγκαίαν) to make 'the discourse like a living being'.

(2) instead of proceeding without a method (ἀμεθόδω), Socrates sets out in a scientific way from definitions and moves in his enquiry 'from what sort of thing a thing is, to what it is'.

(3) instead of ornamenting his discourse with a multitude of verbs and nouns that mean the same thing, Socrates adds variation (ποικιλίαν) and alteration (ἐξαλλαγὴν) of thought. All this shows how the sophist, Lysias, should have handled this discourse on behalf of the non-lover (632, 20–26).

The two first criteria to praise Socrates' speech as an improvement of Lysias' have been taken from Socrates' own considerations in the second part of the dialogue on what the true art of rhetoric should be, and this is not surprising. After all, ever since the Thrasyllean classification, the *Phaedrus* had been regarded as the Platonic dialogue on rhetoric. (1) That one should not 'throw arguments haphazardly' but rather introduce a coherent, logical order in the argument so as to make the discourse 'like a living being' is a rule taken from *Phaedrus* 264b3 and 264c2–5. A similar critique of Lysias' speech is made in Hermias' commentary (which may draw on the same source as Proclus' commentary): καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει ἀναγκαίαν τάξιν τὰ εἰρημένα οὐδὲ ἕνα εἰρμόν καὶ ἐν σώμα, ὡς τότε μετὰ τότε κεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ χύδην βέβληται.<sup>8</sup> (2) To make a good speech, one should apply the right method (see *Phaidr.* 270c4: ἄνευ τῆς μεθόδου ταύτης).<sup>9</sup> This means, in particular, the dialectical method which makes it possible to define what the subject is about which one is speaking. For, as Socrates insists, it is not possible to speak well of something if one does not know the truth about the subject one is dealing with. A speech on love should

<sup>8</sup> See Herm. In Plat. *Phaidr.* 2 p. 2, 11–13. I do not understand why the editors (Carlo M. Lucarini, Claudio Moreschini: Hermias Alexandrinus. In *Platonis Phaedrum scholia* [Berlin, New York 2010]) consider the whole passage 2, 8–16 as suspect: 'haec hic legi stupemus, cum ex 263d–264c sumpta sint, summariumque *Phaedri* molestissime inter-rumpant (hic enim de 234–235 agitur)'. However, Hermias applies here the rules that are later formulated to explain why Socrates criticizes Lysias' speech, as does the anonymous commentator quoted by Proclus.

<sup>9</sup> Hermias too criticized Lysias for having made a speech without method: ὅτι ἀμεθόδω καὶ ἀνηρητημένως ἔγραψεν (212 p. 222, 4).

start from a definition of love (see 265d4, 277b6–8). This is what Socrates had already said at the beginning of his first speech: ‘in every discourse there is one and only one way of beginning if one is to come to a sound conclusion, that is to know what it is that one is discussing; otherwise one is bound entirely to miss the mark’ (237b7–c2; transl. W. Hamilton). This is what the anonymous commentator means when he insists on the necessity of passing from the investigation of the ‘what sort a thing is’ to ‘what it is’ (τὴν τοῦ ποιῶν ζητήσιν εἰς τὸ τί ἐστὶν ἀνάγουσαν). At first this sounds like an Aristotelian phrase.<sup>10</sup> However, Hermias’ commentary on lemma 237b7–c2 shows that this passage in the *Phaedrus* was interpreted in this sense in the Platonic school. What is more, it was used to show how much Aristotle depends on Plato.<sup>11</sup> As Hermias says,

before investigating what sort of thing it is, one must investigate what it is (πρὸ γὰρ τοῦ ποιῶν τί ἐστὶ τὸ τί ἐστὶ ζητητέον). One must therefore first define the subject which one intends to discuss, and then take demonstrations from one’s definition, just as one must consider, before giving a definition, the method of division through which the definition is tracked down.<sup>12</sup>

(3) The third critique reminds us of Socrates’ ironical comment at *Phaedrus* 235a2–6:

it seems to me that Lysias has said the same things two or three times over, either because he could not find sufficient matter to produce variety on a single topic (ὡς οὐ πάνυ εὐπορῶν τοῦ πολλὰ λέγειν περὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ), or perhaps from sheer lack of interest in the subject (transl. W. Hamilton).

This comment will become a standard argument against bad rhetoric: some speakers seek a variation in vocabulary and figures to embellish

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Aristot. Phys. II 6, 198a16, 32.

<sup>11</sup> See Prokl. Prov. 5, 8–10 who connects to this passage the view of ‘the ingenious Aristotle’ who teaches that one must ‘after investigating whether something exists examine next what it is’ (see Aristot. An. post. II 1, 89b24–5 and 89b34). Proclus praises Aristotle for the same reason in In Plat. Alc. 274, 32–275, 7. See also Simpl. In Aristot. Phys. 75, 4; Philop. In Aristot. An. 43, 8–10; Anon. Prol. Plat. Phil. 21, 2–6 (with other parallels in the note of Westerink). See Carlos Steel: Proclus. On Providence (London 2007) 43 n. 24–26.

<sup>12</sup> Herm. In Plat. Phaedr. 50 p. 54, 9–12.



their speech, using many words to say the same things, instead of articulating the subject and making a variety of words correspond to a variation in thought (ποικιλίαν νοημάτων), as in philosophical rhetoric.

For all of these reasons, Socrates did not merely imitate Lysias' *logos*, but rather brought it to greater perfection, though he argued for the same position as Lysias. Still, when Socrates goes over to the defence of the opposite thesis (πρόβλημα),<sup>13</sup> arguing that one should only yield to the passionate lover, and enters into competition (ἀγῶνα) with Lysias in his pleading for the lover, he resorts to an abundance of refutations (ὑπερβολὴν τῶν ἐλέγχων), using definitions, divisions, demonstrations, and every sort of means to counter his rival, choosing even a type of exposition (τὸν τῆς ἐρμηνείας τύπον) beyond what is usual, so that by the style of his speech (τῷ χαρακτήρι τοῦ λόγου), i.e. by its grandeur (τῷ ἀδρῶ), he overthrows the style of the speeches of his rival, their leanness (τὸ ἰσχνόν), and by attributing the change (ἐξαλλαγὴν 265a10) in style to divine inspiration (εἰς ἔνθεον κατακωχὴν 245a2), he conceals the cause from the ordinary (πολὺς) hearer (633, 3–9).

The second part of the *Phaedrus* is clearly an example of counter-writing by opposition, since it not only refutes the views of Plato's opponent, but also surpasses the opponent's writing in the richness of its arguments and its stylistic expression. Instead of using the 'simple genre', Socrates gives a brilliant performance in the 'grand style' while speaking under 'divine inspiration'. Such praise for the style of the *Phaedrus*, however, was not shared by literary critics in antiquity. Hermias informs us that some scholars had criticized Plato's composition. First, they said, to write against (ἀντιγράφειν) Lysias' speech and to emulate him is rather proper to a slanderous and contentious young person (φιλοτιμουμένον), who wants to make fool of the rhetor and expose his ignorance in the art of rhetoric (9 p. 10, 14–16). Why should a dignified philosopher such as Plato want to show that he could do better than the rhetor Lysias? Further, it is not agreed that Plato succeeded in bettering Lysias. The critics disapprove of Plato's style 'which is excessively beautiful (ἀπειροκάλω) and puffed up and bombastic and rather poetical' (17–18). Hermias defends Plato against these objections. To explain why Plato composed a dialogue

<sup>13</sup> The term is used in a rhetorical sense for a debated question.

to counter (ἀντιγράφειν) Lysias, he refers to what Plato says in the *Republic* about the theoretical philosopher who is forced to come down to bring order in the city, and to become a politician for the benefit of all citizens. For the same reason, Socrates is compelled to come down and enter into a competition with Lysias, when he sees how Phaedrüs, a young man with a talent for philosophy, has been deceived by his admiration for Lysias. He thus extricates the young man from the influence of merely apparent beauty, and helps him discover true beauty in the soul and mind (10 p. 10, 29–11, 10). Hermias also rejects the criticism of Plato's style. Plato, Hermias says, always uses a style that corresponds to his subject. As the style of Lysias' *logos* was 'light and lean' (λεπτός καὶ ἰσχνός), 'Plato wanted to use the opposite style, the more noble, to impress and subdue the young man'. Moreover, as he was dealing with invisible and unknown beings, such as the Forms, Plato had to use a sublime language that denied entry to demagogues and ordinary people (p. 11, 11–20).<sup>14</sup>

### *The case of the Parmenides*

After having explained the three forms of counter-writing using three Platonic examples, let us now examine where *Parmenides* fits into this formal scheme. That the *Parmenides* can be interpreted as an *antigraphê* is evident from its general structure. Socrates comes to see Zeno 'because he was eager to hear Zeno read his book (γραμμάτων)' (127c1–3). Zeno argues against the supposition that there are many things. If things are many, then they must be both like and unlike; but this is impossible, and this impossibility refutes the assumption of a multiplicity of beings. 'If I understand Zeno's argument correctly', Socrates says to Parmenides, 'Zeno has written the same thing as you but by changing it round he tries to fool us into thinking he is saying something different' (128a6–8, transl. Gill–Ryan). Zeno then agrees that his book has been composed 'in defence of Parmenides' *logos*'. Socrates is not surprised to hear that perceptible things partake in opposite attributes, but what is more difficult is the

<sup>14</sup> On this section in Hermias see Irmgard Männlein-Robert: Longin. Philologe und Philosoph. Eine Interpretation der erhaltenen Zeugnisse (München, Leipzig 2001) 398–406.

question of whether the Forms themselves may have opposite attributes. Parmenides agrees to undertake the examination of this question and to apply in a dialectical exercise 'the method that Socrates just heard from Zeno' – that is to say, Parmenides will start from an hypothesis and then see what follows from it. He makes, however, two improvements to this method. First, as Socrates asked, Parmenides will not 'only remain among perceptible things', but will also examine the opposites among intelligible forms; and second, he will not only examine the consequences of an hypothesis, but also of its denial (135d–136c). The subject that Parmenides takes for his examination is not the multiple – which was Zeno's starting point – but rather his own hypothesis, the One. The foregoing should indicate that the *Parmenides* is a multifaceted *antigraphê*: young Zeno writes in indirect defence of Parmenides, Parmenides takes Zeno's method and improves it. But what *kind* of a counter-writing is this dialogue – an imitation, or an opposition?

In the transmitted text of Proclus' commentary, the *Parmenides* is clearly classified under the heading 'counter-writing by opposition'. The editors of the Budé edition, however, find this classification problematic. In their view the *Parmenides* must be treated as a counter-writing by imitation. They therefore transposed the section of the text dealing with the *Parmenides*, and placed it under the same heading as the *Menexenus*.<sup>15</sup> To justify this editorial intervention they refer to what Proclus says in his summary of these interpreters' position.

Plato wrote the *Parmenides* against (ἀντιγράφειν) Zeno in an attempt to show on a more difficult hypothesis, that of the intelligibles, manifold inventions (ποικίλας εὐρέσεις), which Zeno, they said, had left aside, as he was occupied with sense-objects and showed in them the clash of opposites (631, 8–633, 9).

According to the Budé editors, Plato's purpose in writing the *Parmenides* is said to be similar to what he attempts in the *Menexenus*, namely to imitate a model by improving it and bringing it to perfection.<sup>16</sup> However,

<sup>15</sup> See on this transposition the philological note at the end of this essay.

<sup>16</sup> C. Luna, A.-Ph. Segonds: Proclus, 195: 'En effet, la description du *Parménide* répond parfaitement aux caractères de l'ἀντιγραφή par imitation: (i) [dans le *Parménide*] Platon imite son modèle [le discours de Zénon]; (ii) Platon ajoute ce qui manque à son

even if one must agree that the method of training in the *Parmenides* is *formally* the same as the Eleatic method applied by Zeno in his *logos* (with the two improvements just noted), the purpose of both discourses is quite different. In fact, Zeno takes ‘the many’ as his hypothesis, and shows that all manner of absurdities follow from this hypothesis: the many are similar and dissimilar, etc. (which indirectly confirms the truth of his master’s claim that all is One). Parmenides, however, examines his own hypothesis in the second part of the dialogue, namely that the One is. After his examination of all the implications both of the assertion and the denial of the One, Parmenides comes to the conclusion that ‘whether the One is or is not, both itself and the others, both in relation to themselves and to each other, all in all ways are and are not, and appear and do not appear to be’ (166c). This is an accumulation of opposites, which seems to reduce the hypothesis of the One to an absurdity no less than the hypothesis of the multiple, which was examined by Zeno. Both hypotheses, of the One and the multiple, lead to absurdities. When read in this way, the *Parmenides* is seen to be a counter-writing by opposition, for what distinguishes this type from a counter-writing by imitation is precisely that the *purpose* of the two *logoi* is *different*. And this is exactly what the anonymous commentator says:

For while Zeno attempted with multiple arguments (πολλαχῶς ἐγχειρήσαντος) to catch out those who posit that beings are **multiple**, so that his refutation brought forth no less than forty arguments striking together contradictions, [Plato<sup>17</sup>], they say, produced this varied show of arguments (τὴν παντοδαπὴν ταύτην τῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων ἐπίδειξιν) with reference to the **One**, and in rivalry with the man who was struggling with the multitude of beings, he showed in the same way as he did, contradictions about a same subject. As Zeno refuted the **many** by showing that they are both alike and unlike, the same and not the same, different and not different, so in the same way [Plato] showed that the **One** is like and unlike, the same and not the same, different and not different and so for all other contradictory attributes, both affirming and denying what is mutually opposed, and not like [Zeno] only affirming. In this way he exhibited a far more varied wealth of arguments (τὸν πλοῦτον τῶν ἐπιχειρήσεων πολλῶ ποικιλώτερον δεῖξαι) than did Zeno, whose [wealth of arguments] had so amazed (ἐκπλήξαντος)

modèle [...] (dans le *Parménide*, Platon ne se contente pas d’affirmer les contraires, comme l’a fait Zénon, mais il ajoute aussi leur négation); (iii) Platon dépasse son modèle.’

<sup>17</sup> In the dramatic structure it is Parmenides, not Plato speaking.

other people that the sillographer<sup>18</sup> called him 'double-tongued' (ἀμφοτερό-  
γλωσσον) and in admiration of the ability of this man spoke of 'the great and un-  
wearied force of Zeno'. If he called Zeno double-tongued, what would he have  
called the man [sc. Plato] who increased many-fold the methods of inventions  
(τοῦ πολλαπλασιάσαντος τὰς μεθόδους τῶν εὐρέσεων)? (631, 25–632, 17)

It seems as though Plato, in this last part of the *Parmenides*, let Parmenides himself give a grandiose performance of the Eleatic method so brilliantly displayed by Zeno – but now to demonstrate exactly the opposite thesis as that defended by Zeno, namely to show that the hypothesis of an absolute unity involves as many contradictions as the hypothesis of an absolute multiplicity. Plato's exploit in this dialogue is so formidable that he would deserve the ironic praises of 'the sillographer', Timon of Phlius. It almost seems as if Plato produced a parody, a pastiche of the Eleatic method, showing that he could do much better while arguing in exactly the opposite direction. He may have thus prepared the terrain for a new understanding of the thesis that all is One, as is evident in the doctrine of the Forms discussed in the first part of the dialogue.

That the anonymous interpreter considered the *Parmenides* to be a counter-writing in *opposition* is also clear from the critique brought forward against this interpretation by later commentators, as Proclus informs us. To put Zeno and Parmenides in contradiction, they say, goes against the whole dramatic setting of the dialogue:

It is most incongruous to describe Parmenides and Zeno as lover and beloved, the one the teacher and the other the disciple perfected by him, and then make the lover and the teacher 'swim through such a sea of arguments' against his beloved, the person whom he has brought to perfection. And it is also outrageous (as one can truly call it) to say that the one (Zeno) has prepared the book he wrote as an aid to Parmenides' *logos*, while the other (Parmenides) is arguing against this aid that the former had given by working out these numerous arguments (ἐπιχειρήσεις) (633, 20–634, 4).

Syrianus, on whom Proclus depends for his historical survey, shares their criticism. He calls the ἀντιγραφὴ interpretation not only 'implausible' but 'stupid' (ἀηρώδης). As Syrianus says, it is Zeno himself who asks his master

<sup>18</sup> Timon of Phlius, sceptical philosopher (ca. 325–235 BC) and author of *Silloi*, satirical verses against dogmatic philosophers.

Parmenides to practise the dialectical method, and Parmenides would have used this opportunity to attack Zeno's work: ridiculous! (640, 17–22). Parmenides and Zeno defend the same thesis, that all is One, and even Socrates – though formulating his critical remarks – shares the same view.

In the *Parmenides*, Plato undeniably uses the Eleatic method. To say, however, that Plato wrote this dialogue as a refutation and parody of Zeno's *logos* is less plausible. Still, this is not the main point of the anonymous interpretation, whose stress rather falls on the need for a rhetorical reading of the dialogue (this was also evident, as we have seen, in the interpretation of other dialogues). But what could be the special contribution of the *Parmenides* to rhetoric? After all, this dialogue – and in particular the dialectical exercise in the last part – could not be commended for its stylistic qualities, in contrast to the *Menexenus* or *Phaedrus*. We know from Proclus that Platonic commentators had been at great pains to defend the poor style of the *Parmenides* against criticism.<sup>19</sup> But what about its contribution to rhetoric? As is clear from the texts quoted above, the *Parmenides* is praised above all for its 'invention of arguments': ποικίλας εὔρέσεις (631,10), τοῦ πολλαπλασιάσαντος τὰς μεθόδους τῶν εὔρέσεων (632,16–17), τὸν πλοῦτον τῶν ἐπιχειρήσεων πολλῶ ποικιλώτερον δεῖξαι (632,11–12).<sup>20</sup> See also Theol. Plat. I 9 p. 38, 12–13 Saffrey–Westrink: τὴν τοιαύτην εὔρεσιν τῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων. And in fact, as we have already observed, invention is one of the major parts of rhetoric. Syrianus defines invention in his commentary on Hermogenes as 'a discourse displaying an abundance of thoughts and arguments' (λόγος νοημάτων καὶ ἐπιχειρημάτων εὐπορίαν περιέχων 13, 20), which is exactly what is praised in the *Parmenides*. One should also notice the term ἐπιχείρημα, which is

<sup>19</sup> See Carlos Steel: Le jugement de Proclus sur le style du *Parménide*, in: John M. Dillon, Monique Dixsaut (eds.): *Agonistes. Essays in Honour of Denis O'Brien* (London 2005) 209–225; Friedrich Walsdorff: *Die antiken Urteile über Platons Stil* (Bonn 1927); Heinrich Dörrie, Matthias Baltes: *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, II (Stuttgart 1990) 110–149, 369–400.

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly the young Socrates is also praised later for his 'readiness for the method of invention' (τὴν προθυμίαν πρὸς τὴν τῆς μεθόδου εὔρεσιν, 712, 18–19). See on this passage, Carlos Steel: *De novis libris iudicia: Concetta Luna, Alain-Philippe Segonds* (eds.) 2007. Proclus. *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, in: *Mnemosyne* 63 (2010) 120–142, here: 140.

often used for 'attempted' (ἐπιχειρέω) reasoning, i.e. dialectical argument over against demonstrative syllogisms (see Aristot. Top. I 4, 111b16). This is what is needed in a discourse before a tribunal, where the speaker must search for arguments pro or contra a stated thesis. In his translation of the *Topics*, Brunschwig interprets the term as 'instrument d'attaque contre une thèse'.<sup>21</sup> The method that Parmenides proposes for his exercise is indeed extraordinarily productive for the 'invention' of dialectical arguments, in particular, the hypothetical method and the examination of the consequences that follow not only from a given position, but also from the denial of that position. This is exactly what we are doing in a dialectical exercise, as explained in the *Topics*. As Aristotle states in that work, 'if we have a method, we shall be able more easily to argue (ἐπιχειρεῖν) about the subject proposed' (I 2, 101a29–31).

In the philosophical schools, Aristotle's *Topics* was regarded as the standard handbook on invention. See Diogenes Laertius' classification of Aristotle's works: πρὸς τὴν εὕρεσιν τὰ τε Τοπικὰ καὶ Μεθοδικὰ παρέδωκε προτάσεων πλήθος, ἐξ ὧν πρὸς τὰ προβλήματα πιθανῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων οἷόν τε εὐπορεῖν (V 29). Here again we find the vocabulary the anonymous commentator used to praise Plato's *Parmenides*. In his commentary on the *Topics*, Alexander makes a point of saying that Aristotle's treatise is 'useful as [rhetorical] training' (Aristot. Top. I 2, 101a26–27). Alexander then explains that

when we have a method that helps us discover arguments (μέθοδον τινα εὐρετικὴν τῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων) – which is what we learn in the *Topics* – we shall be able to argue easily (ῥᾶον ἐπιχειρεῖν), just as those can argue easily who are trained by rhetorical exercises to distinguish the problems (τὰ προβλήματα) and comprehend the order of the chapters (τὴν τάξιν τῶν κεφαλαίων) (In Aristot. Top. 27, 19–23).

Even if we abandon the view that the *Parmenides* is an *antigraphê*, since it is not plausible to see Parmenides competing with his beloved disciple, we can still read the second part of the *Parmenides* as an extraordinary instance of a training in the method of invention of arguments by way of dialectical discussion. In fact, a Platonist can maintain that the *Parme-*

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Brunschwig: Aristote. *Topiques*, I: Livres I–IV (Paris 1967).

*nides* is much better at this – more ‘useful as [rhetorical] training’ – than Aristotle’s *Topics*:

They say that this dialectic differs from the method of Aristotle in the *Topics*, in that the latter divides problems into four kinds and devises modes of argumentation (εὐπορίαν ἐπιχειρήσεων) for each kind. [...] But the method described here develops for each of the problems a manifold invention of hypotheses, which, when examined, make the truth evident. So that a method of this sort does not fall beyond the compass of philosophy, as does the method of the *Topics*, but contributes to the quest of the truth itself (635, 1–14).

Whereas Aristotle’s *Topics* belongs to the ‘organon’ and is not a part of real philosophy, insofar as its only concern is a formal training in argumentation,<sup>22</sup> the dialectical discussion in the *Parmenides* ‘contributes to the quest for the truth’ (cf. *Parm.* 136c4–5). Therefore, the *Parmenides* is not simply a counter-writing, and is even less a parody of the Eleatic method. It is rather Plato’s introduction to a philosophical dialectic, and an introduction that in many ways surpasses Aristotle’s topical dialectic. The debate in the dialogue’s second part provides more than formal training: it helps to solve the many aporias surrounding the One and the multiple that are raised in *Parmenides*’ and Socrates’ discussion of the Forms in the first part of the work. Proclus too easily dismisses this interpretation as being ‘*logikos*’, and thus, as disinterested in ‘*pragmata*’. To be sure, the ‘*pragmata*’ these interpreters are interested in are not the sublime doctrines about the first divine principles, which Proclus believes he finds in this dialogue.

Is it possible to identify the two groups of interpretation? The first, focusing on literary genre, comes from Platonists who are reacting against authors like Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Aristides. The second group seems to be defending Plato against Peripatetics, arguing that, even in questions of method – where Aristotle is held up as the master – Plato has important things to say. We find similar views in the handbook of Alcinous (5–6). Altogether, it is plausible to place these interpretations in the

<sup>22</sup> On the question whether the organon belongs to philosophy see Ilsetraut Hadot: *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories* (Leiden 1990) 161–168.



second century AD. Syrianus (Proclus) probably knew of their opinions by way of the commentaries of Porphyry and (or) Iamblichus.<sup>23</sup>

### *Philological note*

Both in the Greek manuscripts and in the Latin translation by William of Moerbeke, the text of *In Plat. Parm.* 630, 26–633, 9 is transmitted in a state of disorder.

(A) Εἰσὶ δέ τινες καὶ γεγόνασι τῶν ἔμπροσθεν, οἱ τὸν τοῦ διαλόγου τοῦδε σκοπὸν εἰς λογικὴν ἀνέπεμψαν γυμνασίαν, (B) (καθάπερ ἐν Θεαιτήτῳ πρὸς Πρωταγόραν ἀντέγραψε πάντων λέγοντα χρημάτων μέτρον τὸν ἄνθρωπον, δεικνὺς οὐ μᾶλλον ὄντα τοῦτον μέτρον πάντων χρημάτων ἢ ὓν καὶ κυνοκέφαλον), (C) καὶ χαίρειν ἀφέντες τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων θεωρίαν, ἰδόντες ἐφ' ἑκάτερα κρουομένους τοὺς λόγους, [...] καὶ ταῦτα περὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ διατρίβοντα, καὶ ἐν τούτοις ἀποφαίνοντα τὴν τῶν ἀντικειμένων συνδρομὴν. (D) Καὶ γὰρ εἰωθῆναι φασὶν οὗτοι τὸν Πλάτωνα ποιεῖσθαι τὰς ἀντιρρήσεις τὰς πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους τριχῶς· καὶ τὰς μὲν κατὰ μίμησιν ὧν ἐκεῖνοι γεγράφασιν, ἐπὶ τὸ τελειότερον μέντοι προάγοντα τὴν μίμησιν [...] ἀπειργασμένους· τὰς δὲ κατ' ἐναντίωσιν πρὸς οὓς ἀγωνίζεται· (E) τὴν δὲ ἐπιγραφὴν, καίτοι παμπάλαιον οὖσαν, τὴν Περὶ τῶν ἰδεῶν ἀτιμάσαντες, ὡς εἰς μικρὸν μέρος τοῦ διαλόγου βλέψασαν, καὶ εἰς ἀπορητικὸν, καὶ οὐχ ὑψηγητικόν. Εἰσὶ δ' οὖν τινες οἱ λογικὸν εἶναι τὸν σκοπὸν εἰρήκασιν τοῦδε τοῦ διαλόγου (F) *καθάπερ ἐνταῦθα πρὸς τὸν Ζήνωνα· πολλαχῶς γὰρ ἐκεῖνου καταλαβεῖν ἐγχειρήσαντος τοὺς πολλὰ τὰ ὄντα τιθεμένους, ὡς [...] ἀμφοτερόγλωσσον προσειπῶν;* (G) τὰς δὲ ἐκ τρίτων, ὁμοῦ μὲν κατὰ μίμησιν, ὁμοῦ δὲ κατ' ἐναντίωσιν προῖστασθαι τῶν ἀντιγράφων (τοῦτο γὰρ ὑπόλοιπον), ὥσπερ, φασὶν, ἐν τοῖς πρὸς Λυσίαν λόγοις τὸν σοφιστὴν εἰς ταῦτον ἐπιχειρῶν [...] τὸν πολὺν ἀκροατὴν

Cousin<sup>2</sup> already noticed that section E is not in its rightful place, and transposed it tacitly to follow section A, where it fits very well. There is, however, also a problem with section B, where the *Theaetetus* is given as an example of ἀντιγραφή, since the discussion of the three types of ἀντιγραφή only begins at section D. Therefore, this section cannot be in its rightful place, and should rather occupy the place where we now have section E in the text tradition, as an example illustrating the second type of ἀντιγραφή, namely that by opposition. For some reason, the two sections

<sup>23</sup> I thank David Dusenbury (Leuven) for editing my text.

– B and E – were interchanged in the early tradition of Proclus’ commentary. One might suppose that both sections were added in the margins of the original text and only integrated into the text at the time when a copy was made. The copyist, however, confused the reference signs and inserted one addition in the place of the other. Section E is clearly such an addition. One could easily read and understand the text without this addition. The *Theaetetus* example in section B is also somehow redundant, because if we transpose it to where it should be placed, we have two examples of Platonic ἀντιγραφή by opposition: the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*. It is possible that, in the original threefold division of antigraphic dialogues, the *Menexenus*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Phaedrus* were the only examples given. The addition of the *Parmenides* and the long development related to it may have displaced the example of the *Theaetetus* to the margins. The Budé editors, Luna–Segonds, reorganise the text more radically. They transpose the long *Parmenides* section (F) after ἀπειργασμένος in section D. These editors admit that such a complicated transposition is ‘difficile à expliquer’ (cf. p. 19 n. 2 with reference to p. 193–196 of the ‘notes complémentaires’). The only reason for this further complication is their conviction that the *Parmenides* cannot be an example of ἀντιγραφή by opposition, but should instead be classed under ἀντιγραφή by imitation. As we have seen above, this may well be Proclus’ own view of the matter, but it is not the view of the early commentators he criticizes.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For my arguments against the needless transposition proposed by Luna–Segonds see C. Steel: *De novis libris iudicia*, 129–131. See also David D. Butorac: ἀντιγραφή in Proclus’ *In Parmenidem*. A Correction of the Budé edition, in: CQ 65 (2015) 310–320.