

Gadamer's Return to Parmenides

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Abstract

According to Gadamer's hermeneutical "principle of the history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*)," in order to understand Parmenides' thought, it is necessary to examine not only the traces left by the historical impact of his poem, but also the unrealized possibilities of development that did not influence the subsequent history of philosophical thought. Gadamer himself explored one of these unexplored "lines of effects" when he revisited the poem during a conference dedicated to Parmenides held in Velia in 1988. He did so by analyzing the role and function of the "nameless goddess." This study examines how the German philosopher developed this "line of effects."

Keywords: Being, Nameless goddess, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, *Aletheia* of being, *Aletheia* of appearing, Gadamer, Parmenides

As a scholar of Parmenides, I cannot help but notice that, within studies of ancient philosophy, Gadamer's reflections on his didactic poem¹ have not yet received the attention

¹ Over a period of more than half a century, Gadamer devoted the following studies to the thought of Parmenides: "Zur Vorgeschichte der Metaphysik," (Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), 51–79; three essays republished in the sixth volume of the complete edition of his works (*Gesammelte Werke*, hereinafter *GW*) under the title *Das Lehrgedicht des Parmenides*: (1) "Review of K. Riezler, *Parmenides*" *Gnomon* 2, (1934), 77–86; (2) "Retraktationen zum Lehrgedicht des Parmenides," in *Varia Variorum: Festgabe für K. Reinhardt*, (Böhlau–Verlag, 1952), 58–68; and (3) "Afterword to K. Riezler, in *Parmenides*" (Klostermann, 1970, 2nd ed.), 92–102. In addition, we have the following: "Aus dem Lehrgedicht des Parmenides," in

they deserve. One reason for this neglect may be that not all scholars in the field of pre-Socratic studies have a solid background in philosophy (for example, many are “pure” Greek scholars), while those who do often strive not to let philosophical concerns unduly influence their interpretations.²

A further reason lies in the fact that Gadamer—following Reinhardt, Riezler, and Heidegger—challenged Zeller’s interpretative “theorem” concerning Parmenides’ poem.³ Since 1892, Zeller, in *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*—a work long regarded as the standard historiographical account of ancient philosophy—had presented Parmenides’ philosophy according to a schema in which the poem is divided into two distinctive parts.⁴

Philosophisches Lesebuch, ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 18–20, 23–26 (a text in which Gadamer provides his translation of Parmenides’ poem, along with a brief introduction); “Parmenides oder das Diesseits des Seins,” *La Parola del Passato XLIII* (1988), 143–176; and lastly, *The Beginning of Philosophy*, trans. Rod Colman (Continuum, 1998), 94–125; hereafter, *BK*. In accordance with the interpretive perspective set out in this essay, the present study will focus on the English translation of the lecture delivered at the 1988 congress in Velia and published in *La Parola del Passato XLIII*: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Parmenides or Why Being Pertains to This World (1988),” trans. Pol Vandeveld and Arun Iyer (Bloomsbury Academic, 2025), 43–66. For the text of Parmenides’ fragments and *testimonia* I refer to DK vol. 1, 217ff. I would like to thank the anonymous referees for offering useful suggestions concerning the clarification and organization of my arguments.

² See Livio Rossetti, *Verso la filosofia: Nuove prospettive su Parmenide, Zenone e Melisso*, ed. N.S. Galgano, S. Giombini, and F. Marcacci. *Eleatica* 8 (Akademia Verlag, 2020), 98–99.

³ Gadamer defines Zeller’s exegesis as “heavy dogmatism” resulting from “constructive arbitrariness,” Hans-Georg Gadamer, “I presocratici,” in *Questioni di storiografia filosofica: Dalle origini all’ottocento*, vol. 1, ed. V. Mathieu (La Scuola, 1975), 40.

⁴ The first section, according to this interpretation, contains the authentic philosophy of Parmenides, while the latter presents an exposition of erroneous and illusory worldviews held by other thinkers—or, at best, what Parmenides might have regarded as a plausible, albeit fallacious, account of how the world of phenomena should be conceived, if one were to consider them real. This exegesis was not particularly innovative, as it echoed interpretations already advanced by certain ancient commentators—interpretations so influential that Plutarch (cf. *Adversus Colotem*) felt compelled to intervene in defense of those who accused Parmenides of denying the reality of the world around us. Nevertheless, Zeller’s exegesis continues to receive extraordinary acclaim and, more than a century and a half later, remains the standard point of reference for Parmenides’ studies, albeit with an infinite range of reformulations, as Rossetti notes, Rossetti, *Verso la filosofia*, 72.

Even scholars who have engaged with Gadamer's reflections on Parmenides' poem⁵ have tended to focus on the essays collected under the title *Das Lehrgedicht des Parmenides*, while overlooking what I consider to be his most pioneering hermeneutic insight: that in order to reflect on Parmenides' thought, it is necessary not only to examine the "lines of effects"⁶ traced by the historical impact of his poem, but also the possibilities of development that left no mark on the history of philosophical thought. Gadamer himself proposed to investigate one of these unexplored "lines of effects" during a conference dedicated to the study of Parmenides, held in Velia in 1988. It is precisely this insight that will be the focus of the present article.

I. A Third "Line of Effects" ("Linie von Wirkungen")

In analyzing the "lines of effects" of Parmenidean thought that developed historically (what the philosopher calls *Wirkungsgeschichte*), Gadamer emphasizes that they followed two distinct "trajectories," which were "as different as the corpuscular theory of the fifth century and the philosophy of the *logos*, arising at the same time towards the end of the fourth century and coming to its fruition in the dialectic of Plato and Aristotle." In particular, through the latter historical "line," "the Eleatic question in fact inaugurates the tradition of metaphysics and we find the didactic poem received by the ancient commentators who belong to this tradition quite obviously in terms of the distinction between 'noetic' and 'aesthetic' being, the intelligible and sensible world."⁷

Gadamer argues that the distinction between *noesis* (thought) and *aesthesia* (perception) is primarily a Platonic concept and that a comprehensive understanding of Parmenides requires recognizing the absence of this opposition in the ancient philosopher's work.⁸ Aristotle's concern, by contrast, was not with the discussion of Parmenides, but rather with the Platonic-Academic revival of his thought. His treatment of Parmenides' ontology in the *Physics*, Gadamer observes, "turns out to be nothing but a highly ceremonial execution."⁹ In summary,

⁵ See Manfred Kraus, "Parmenides" (Schwabe Verlag, 2013); Alexander P.D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides*, rev. and expanded ed. (Parmenides Publishing, 2008); Luigi Ruggiu, *Parmenide. Nostos. L'essere e gli enti* (Mimesis Edizioni, 2014); Mario Untersteiner, *Parmenide: Testimonianze e frammenti* (La Nuova Italia, 1958).

⁶ The expression "lines of effects" is my own rendering of the plural form of Gadamer's *Linie von Wirkungen*.

⁷ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 52.

⁸ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 52.

⁹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 46. Gadamer observes that in the two chapters of Book I of *Physics*—which "are completely at cross-purposes to the subject matter of physics," and in which Aristotle criticizes Parmenides' doctrine of "Being"—"not once is there a mention of the second part of the didactic poem,

according to Gadamer, Parmenides' poem was probably considered largely irrelevant to the topics debated in Athenian schools. Consequently, the text was not intended to be understood in its entirety; rather, it was meant to provide specific content to be used in academic disputes or between different schools of thought, as the Sophists likely did before the contributions of Plato and Aristotle. Proof of the irrelevance of the original meanings conveyed by the poem is that "only the first part, the introductory part, of Parmenides' didactic poem"—that is, the portion that most interested Athenian philosophers and intellectuals—"came to us along these paths."¹⁰

From this perspective, Gadamer asks whether we can do justice to Parmenides' "inceptual thinking"—and thereby also to ourselves—"if we only see it in the light of the history of its effects, which begins with Plato and Aristotle, and not rather in the light of possibilities which have not come into effect."¹¹ Indeed, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* initiated by the Athenian reinterpretation of Parmenides' doctrine and permeating the entire history of philosophy, Gadamer argues, has obscured a fundamental fact: the poem unfolds within the framework of Ionian physics precisely because it is spoken by a "nameless goddess," who reflects on mortals in their concerns, addressing their perspectives and seeking to show that these ultimately belong to the "way of truth" and can lead us toward it.¹²

The role and function of the anonymous goddess to whom Parmenides entrusts the revelation of the poem's truth and of Being (*tò eón*; *τὸ ἐόν*) constitute the most enigmatic and debated themes of the Parmenidean poem—second only to the notion of Being itself. Her identity has been analyzed and interpreted in various ways by readers and commentators since antiquity, resulting in a plethora of divergent conclusions.¹³

Gadamer argues that we must ask why Parmenides chose to place "what he himself has to say in the mouth of the goddess as a literary fiction," since this choice must surely have

which was, after all a cosmology." This, Gadamer suggests, indicates that Aristotle was more concerned with criticizing the Platonic interpretation of Eleaticism than Eleaticism itself (53).

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *BK*, 14.

¹¹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 52.

¹² Gadamer, "Parmenides," 48. Gadamer first explores the figure of Parmenides' goddess in his contribution to the *Festschrift* dedicated to Martin Heidegger on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday (Gadamer, "Zur Vorgeschichte der Metaphysik," in *Griechische Philosophie II*, vol. 6 of *Gesammelte Werke*, 9–29 (Mohr Siebeck, 1985).

¹³ See Marco Montagnino, "When God Was a Woman: From the Phocaean Cult of Athena to Parmenides' Ontology," *Open Theology* 11, no. 1 (2025): Article 20250036, <https://doi.org/10.1515/oph-2025-0036>

carried particular significance—or, as Gadamer puts it, a certain “weight”¹⁴—arising from the “the mythical form of discourse according to which the divine mouth makes disclosures about mortals and their points of view.”¹⁵

2. The Goddess's Teachings

One of the factors that leads Gadamer to underscore the mythopoetic dimension of Parmenides' doctrine—and, consequently, the figure of the goddess—is the fact that Parmenides was not a rhapsode. Unlike the compositions of professional rhapsodes, who produced poetic elaborations on doctrines not of their own authorship and thus lacked intellectual autonomy, Parmenides' poem “stands on solid ground” and is wholly original.

Furthermore, Parmenides blends “mythical forms and cosmological contents . . . with logical rationality to produce a new impactful unity.” The German philosopher observes that, with respect to the nomenclature of the deities depicted in the poem—Dike (“Justice”), Moira (“Destiny”), Ananke (“Necessity”), and perhaps even Aletheia (“Truth”)—the conceptual amalgamation formulated by Parmenides intertwines with established mythological traditions in such a way that they become indistinguishable from them. By contrast, in the case of the “nameless goddess,” Parmenides conceives of her as “something totally different from a god encountered in cultic life with all its mythical background.”¹⁶

The journey that leads Parmenides to the goddess' dwelling in the prologue to the poem has no “religious undertones.” Otherwise, the poem would present “a doctrine of salvation and something like a revelation.”¹⁷ Instead, Gadamer argues, “what is at stake in the message

¹⁴ Gadamer, “Parmenides,” 60.

¹⁵ Gadamer, “Parmenides,” 52.

¹⁶ Gadamer, “Parmenides,” 47. In his lectures on the origins of philosophy, delivered in Italy in 1988 and based on a course he taught on Presocratic philosophy in late 1967 (see Gadamer, BK, 7–8), Gadamer makes explicit his view regarding the identity of Parmenides' goddess: “I believe I know quite well who the goddess is who speaks to the thinker. It is Mnemosyne, the goddess of *mneme*.” During this period, Gadamer held that Parmenides' doctrine of light and night represented a development of the traditional idea that truth and falsehood are always intertwined in intellectual activity (BK, 96), and that “knowledge is based on the unifying power and carrying capacity of memory” (KP, 98). However, in his later analysis of Parmenides' poem, as we will see, Gadamer revisited this view and chose to leave the identity of the goddess undisclosed, seeing her instead as something “totally different” from any deity belonging to traditional Greek cult.

¹⁷ Gadamer, “Parmenides,” 47. Gadamer appears to consider only mystery-cult contexts, with which he disagrees, while neglecting religious myths and cultic legends with astronomical dimensions that refer to

of the goddess is not religious revelation but logical consistency." This distinctive form of "logical consistency," however, is marked by such "paradoxical rigour" that one might reasonably suppose no mortal could abide by it without divine authorization.¹⁸

Indeed, the goddess knows that humans "are not capable of thinking the one in all being." The fact that "there is only being, the one being, in which there is no nothing ... is for mortals a superhuman truth." Consequently, "they have accepted a duality of opposing forms, which are mutually opposed to and mixed with one another," associating the multitude of things that appear in the light and vanish in the night with being and non-being.¹⁹

The goddess is therefore aware that mortals cannot avoid the deviation from the truth, even though they are otherwise capable of thinking consistently. Yet, "this is how being looks to us,"²⁰ "even if mortals otherwise let themselves be guided by what appears to the eye, which offers them their point of view about the really experienced world," since their reasoning remains essential to the comprehension of the whole—a fact the goddess must necessarily take it into account.²¹

This is why, with regard to the "mortal points of view," the goddess employs the Greek word *chrēn* (χρῆν), which means "not so much 'it is necessary' but rather 'it is to be considered necessary': it is in order and correct, given how mortals are."²² This "ontological confusion," as

theorems which, for their time, could be defined as "scientific" (Cf. Marco Montagnino, "L'ἀληθεία dell' "essere" nel cielo del proemio parmenideo (28, B1 D.-K.)," *Sileno* 44 (2018): 249–293).

¹⁸ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 48.

¹⁹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 50.

²⁰ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 51.

²¹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 48. "Parmenides has in fact described *das Sein* as this 'being as a whole,' the German philosopher argues, "as everywhere proportionally filling up everything—every determinate being, the many—like a single huge Ball. The concept of the whole is implicit in the Parmenidean doctrine like the concept of the one. Nowhere do you find nothing." According to Gadamer, the fundamental meaning of Parmenides' concept of *tò eón* is therefore encapsulated in Heidegger's expression "beings as a whole [*das Seiende im Ganzen*]" (Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* [Northwestern University Press, 2007], 359; hereafter, *GR*). As Gadamer explains, "Heidegger's term *das Seiende im Ganzen* [beings in general, beings as a whole]," "described in a striking way exactly what Parmenides' poem was presenting. It was not inquiring there into what the many [specific] beings were, whether water or air or whatever, and how all this was held together in some kind of equilibrium. He was no longer dealing with the processes of rising and decay that mutually limited each other like the changing of day and night, the interaction of water and land, and all that a seafaring nation like Greece could immediately visualize" (*GR*, 359).

²² Gadamer, "Parmenides," 49.

Gadamer calls it in another essay, "is, however, an illusion that is always given with being-in-the-world."²³

From this perspective, the naivety of mortals—their error (cf. B8:53–59)—lies in conceiving of night as the absence of day and vice versa; yet, although they appear to the eye as the most radical of opposites, "day and night are truly the same," as stated in Frag. B9. The goddess therefore teaches Parmenides—and, through him, all human beings—that "becoming invisible does not simply mean becoming nothing."²⁴

Gadamer emphasizes that the goddess does not claim that what we see corresponds to nothingness; rather, she teaches that even if our perception may lead us to think that things absent from sight fall into nothingness—and thus that nothingness might exist—we can nonetheless arrive at a worldview consistent with the immutable truth of a single being, in which nothingness neither is nor can be. This is "the great truth of being" announced and grounded through the goddess' voice: "the complete nothingness of the nothing."²⁵

Accordingly, "the elaborate depiction of the world-picture of the mortals," i.e., the second part of the poem, "is not some kind of supplement, a modification or a retrospective adaptation to fit human experience." In this section, the goddess functions as a conduit, articulating the perspectives of mortals on behalf of the "chosen one," Parmenides, with the

²³ Gadamer, "Zur Vorgeschichte," 35, here and henceforth my translation. I find Gadamer's translation of the final verses of the Proem particularly illuminating in relation to this theme. In verses B1, 29–30, the goddess states that she will teach Parmenides everything—from the truth of Being to the untrustworthy opinions of mortals. However, immediately afterwards (vv. 31–32), she says that "one must grasp opinions in such a way that they present themselves with their self-evident plausibility and irrefutability" (Gadamer, *BK*, 99). Gadamer's rendering differs markedly from all other translations, as it highlights the idea that what we learn about reality is not false in itself, but only in the way we comprehend it. He contends that the truth is inseparable from the multiplicity of opinions; thus, we must learn to explain in thought and language—even though both can deceive, they are our only means of understanding—"how everything forms one cosmos, one order" (*BK*, 100). This, ultimately, is what the goddess teaches Parmenides in the second part of the poem. Gadamer's translation of vv. B1, 31–32 should therefore be considered alongside the other major versions. For a concise yet comprehensive survey of the main interpretations of these verses, see Stefano Maso, "La Dea accoglie e parla," in *Ontologia scienza mito: Per una nuova lettura di Parmenide*, ed. L. Ruggiu and C. Natali (Mimesis, 2011), 247–56.

²⁴ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 48. In a previous work, Gadamer speaks of "the original sin [Erbsünde] of human existence, which clings to the things of the world (and to its own individual existence) and, in view of their transience, is persuaded by the reality of nothingness" (Gadamer, "Zur Vorgeschichte," 35).

²⁵ Gadamer, *BK*, 14 (see also Gadamer "Zur Vorgeschichte," 56).

aim of enabling him to attain a comprehensive understanding "of the points of view of the mortals in such a way that he is not led astray into the nothing."²⁶

In this context, it is essential to acknowledge that "the steady truth of being and the world-picture grounded in appearance . . . must in a certain sense both hold to be true," because "both adhere to the consistency of reason to exclude the nothing as totally unthinkable and unsayable."²⁷ The "nameless goddess" is thus poised to present "something entirely new": a "plausible world-picture of the mortals founded on the opposition of day and night."²⁸

According to Gadamer, the goddess asserts that light and night, along with all other opposites, are merely "names" of Being (cf. B8:38-41), and that their antitheses—always conceived in conjunction with them—are "at the same time [themselves] existing [seiend] and not nothing."²⁹ The interplay between light and night does not signify a loss between being and nothingness; rather, it marks the appearing of being, as evidenced by the phenomena perceptible to the eyes, which are undeniable.³⁰ Light and night are not differentiated in the way human believe. The truth of Being is revealed through the constant and omnipresent intertwining of all beings: in their commingling, there is neither emptiness nor nothingness.

What is "hammered over and over again into the head of the listener of the poem" by the goddess is that "the highlighted opposition between two and one suggests that we must precisely understand that 'out of the two comes one,' and this then would be the one, the sphere of being."³¹

Gadamer thus shows that even if we take seriously Aristotle's assertion that Parmenides "had seen himself constrained by the vehemence of the facts to modify his theory of the steady sphere of being by making it fit the reality of movement . . . , we are still dealing with the

²⁶ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 48.

²⁷ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 48.

²⁸ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 50.

²⁹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 54. Although Gadamer here presents light and darkness as constituting the same ontological reality, he had earlier maintained that, for Parmenides, "light and darkness are 'positive' and 'negative'" not as realities in themselves, but in relation to knowledge: "Light is something positive for the appearance of being, while night has a negative effect on this appearance" (Gadamer, BK, 102). He expressed the same idea elsewhere, stating, "This light is the light of knowledge" (108).

³⁰ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 59.

³¹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 52. This "sphere . . . is only the extrapolation of presence [Anwesenheit] in general" (59).

goddess' teaching and if it is an adaptation, then it is the goddess adapting to the human capacity to make judgements, a fact which cannot be circumvented.”³²

In his essay *Natural Science and the Concept of Nature*, Gadamer revisits this argument, reiterating his idea that the section following fragment B8 constitutes primarily the development of a physics for mortals—a physics that the goddess entrusts to them. Although only a few fragments of this later portion survive, Gadamer argues that we must free ourselves from the impression that only the first part is significant, simply because Plato and Aristotle focused on it,³³ and that it alone enables us to reconstruct Parmenides' thought in its entirety.

We may refer to the first part—which Gadamer, probably echoing Riezler, defines as an introduction to the second—as either “logic” or “ontology,” and, as he concedes, we may perhaps regard what follows as a kind of cosmology. However, Gadamer insists that what matters here is precisely what the goddess puts into the mouths of mortals, thereby distinguishing Parmenides from the other great thinkers who were formulating their new worldview in Miletus at the time.³⁴

Parmenides' doctrine is original precisely insofar as it affirms the possibility of holding together the doctrine of pure truth (*aletheia*) and the inescapable evidence of our everyday sensory experience. It posits that the world is not only a unity but also a multiplicity, and that order arises and endures within the constant fluctuation of the appearing of appearances.³⁵

The discourse in the poem is not solely about divine wisdom that rejects all non-being as absurd. It is not merely concerned with the critique of becoming and passing away, nor with the indestructible presence of the well-defined sphere of being. Rather, as Gadamer points out, the goddess's discourse addresses “the only possible way to conceive of the many,” which does not arise from “the idea that we must conceive of either a self-changing being or a non-being,” but rather “from the opposition of day and night, of light and dark, which constitutes the multiplicity of appearances”: “Things appear to be different in the sheer difference between daylight and nightly darkness.” According to Gadamer, this fits precisely with what is stated in Frag. B16: it is “the great vision that was placed in Parmenides' mouth by ‘the

³² Gadamer, “Parmenides,” 50–51.

³³ Gadamer accepts the hypothesis that the image of the world developed by Parmenides in the second part of the poem was probably superseded “by the progress achieved by science, and this is why, from the perspectives of Plato and Aristotle, it was to be neglected” (Gadamer, *BK*, 14–15).

³⁴ Gadamer, *BK*, 132.

³⁵ Gadamer, “Lehrgedicht,” 26.

goddess.'.³⁶ "Therein lies the superiority of the divine teaching about 'being' over the Ionian thinkers," Gadamer adds, "who think in pairs of oppositions."³⁷

3. "Taking in" Being

Gadamer's exegesis has significant implications for the interpretation of Parmenides' philosophy—implications that have also been noted, from different perspectives, in recent studies of the poem.³⁸ The language used by the goddess is not a mere juxtaposition of subject and predicate. It becomes evident that if the goddess's words never refer to nothingness in the poem,³⁹ it is

totally beyond doubt that *esti* (ἐστι ['is']) in the didactic poem can hardly have the meaning of the copula and that *mē eon* (μὴ εόν ['non-being']) does not have the meaning of negation. That is why Parmenides is not kept from constantly making negative statements, despite the rejection of the 'nothing'⁴⁰ . . . *Esti* and mostly also to *eon* carry the very heavy semantic burden of being-true and being-actual.⁴¹

Furthermore, "the singular *tò eón* never appears in real speech; it is a step towards the concept."⁴² In his 1967 lecture course on the Presocratics, Gadamer proposed that Parmenides' "step forward to the concept" reveals, for the first time, the "ontological

³⁶ Gadamer, *BK*, 132–33.

³⁷ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 51. This represents an interesting development in relation to Gadamer's earlier interpretation of Parmenides' doctrine, according to which he maintained that "Parmenides surpasses the Ionic tradition" because "in place of the many different oppositions between wet and dry, warm and cold, and so on, [he] inserts a single oppositional pair, namely the contrast between light and darkness" (Gadamer, *BK*, 108).

³⁸ See Alberto Bernabé, *Parmenide: tra linguistica, letteratura e filosofia*. *Eleatica* 7 (Akademia Verlag, 2019), 72–113.

³⁹ This perspective resonates with the interpretations proposed by Reinhardt, who maintains that no error can issue from the goddess's mouth (see Karl Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* [Friedrich Cohen, 1916]); Riezler, who vigorously pursued the unification of truth and appearance in Parmenides' poem, ontologically radicalizing Reinhardt's proposed interconnection between its parts (see Kurt Riezler, *Parmenides. Übersetzung, Einführung und Interpretation von Kurt Riezler* [Klosterman, 1970]) –, and Heidegger, who identifies the anonymous goddess with truth itself (see Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides* [Indiana University Press, 1992]).

⁴⁰ Parmenides' use of negation is not "conjunctural," signifying predication, but rather "absolute," denoting impossibility, as Bernabé emphasizes (*Parmenide*, 113).

⁴¹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 53.

⁴² Gadamer, "Parmenides," 65.

difference" (a term coined by Heidegger) between being and everything that exists.⁴³ Indeed, in Parmenides' poem, when "Sein [Being] shows itself 'in' existing things, . . . this already raises the question of what it means that 'there are' beings [Seiendes]." As Gadamer suggests, after Parmenides' poem we not only "experience and name many beings," but also come to "name and think the being of beings" [das Sein des Seienden]."⁴⁴

As Gadamer explains, "Heidegger developed this concept in the sense of the difference between being and beings, between *ousía* and *on*,"⁴⁵ which is ultimately "the being of beings."⁴⁶ As we can see, this difference does not imply that, on the one hand, there is Being and, on the other, all the things that are. The "ontological difference" should not be interpreted as an ontological duality.⁴⁷

According to Gadamer's 1967 lecture course, the question of the "ontological difference" arises from Parmenides' claim about the inseparability of being and *noeīn*: "there is something only to the extent that evidentness – that is, perception in its broadest sense – is present in *noeīn*; only to this extent is 'being' there."⁴⁸ However, in his 1988 lecture at the Velia congress, Gadamer states that "the text teaches us — and all interpreters agree on this — that in the didactic poem, being is depicted as a being [Seiendes]. There is no ontological difference to be found."⁴⁹

⁴³ "As a matter of fact, in the didactic poem there is a back and forth between that which is, in its totality, and being. The ontological difference is not yet named here, but in a certain sense it is already operative" (Gadamer, *BK*, 123).

⁴⁴ Gadamer, *GR*, 360. "Basically, no human being knows what the concept *das Sein* means, and yet we all have a first pre-understanding, when we hear the word, and we understand that here [in Parmenides' poem] the being that belongs to all beings has now been raised to the level of a concept [*das Seiende*]. And so now it is different from all beings" (359).

⁴⁵ Gadamer, *GR*, 360.

⁴⁶ Gadamer, *GR*, 359.

⁴⁷ Indeed, we can agree with Gadamer that the "ontological difference" is rather "obscure" (Gadamer, *GR*, 359). However, since the term *ousía* (*οὐσία*; used by Aristotle to mean "substance") is simply a feminine noun derived from the feminine form *oûsa* (*οὐσά*) of the same present participle of the verb *eimí* (*εἰμι*), of which Parmenides' *eón* (*έόν*) is the neuter, uncontracted, and substantivized form (see Giovanni Cerri, *Dall'universo-blocco all'atomo nella scuola di Elea: Parmenide, Zenone, Leucippo. Eleatica 6*. [Akademia Verlag, 2018], 62; my translation), we can probably rule out the idea that the "ontological difference" posits or presupposes a dualistic ontology—either in general or in Parmenides' doctrine. This does not, of course, mean that it is an epistemological issue.

⁴⁸ Gadamer, *BK*, 108.

⁴⁹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 62.

Noein "is most certainly not 'thinking,' not even thinking in contrast to seeing 'what is given in person' [*leibhaft*]. It is not about what can be thought. The didactic poem cannot refer to mere thinkability." For Parmenides, *noeīn* is rather "'recognising' [*Erkennen*] . . . [that] the being of what is recognized, its being actual and true, is always present."⁵⁰

The German philosopher then concludes, in terms he considers indisputable, that Parmenides' use of *noeīn*, far from signifying "something like the essence of identity," expresses "the identity of taking in [*Vernehmen*] and being" of something.⁵¹ "Being is only where *noeīn* stumbles upon something."⁵² In his view, "where something is taken in [by *noeīn*], something is there, being and not nothing."⁵³ *Noeīn* is the only sign of being that Parmenides distinguishes so explicitly.⁵⁴

From this perspective, since "being is the there and 'there' [*Da*] means the appearing of appearances," the fact that something is 'there' [*Da*] and we can "take [it] in"—*noeīn* it, as it were—is the only appearance of being.⁵⁵ Accordingly, the doctrine articulated in the latter portion of the poem diverges from the perspective of "mortals who know nothing"—whose recognition of phenomena is not informed by *noeīn*—insofar as it postulates that what appears to the eye is the very appearing of being.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 54. Gadamer understands *noeīn* as resembling a kind of sixth sense—a sense of being, as it were. According to "its original lexical use," Gadamer argues, "*noeīn* seems to be something like the sense of smell possessed by deer which 'makes out' something in the sense of 'something is there.' This is the way wild animals locate danger and thereby certainly do not recognize what it is while yet sensing that something 'is' there. It is a very sensitive taking in [*Vernehmen*] so that it is totally hidden from the others" (54). Consequently, as Gadamer explains elsewhere, "'noema' does not, of course, have the same meaning that it will have later in Aristotle. Here [in B8:34–36], it is synonymous with 'noesis.' It is that which is felt, that which is touched, and cannot be separated at all from feeling, from touching. The important thing, as we have already mentioned, lies exactly in this lack of a differentiation" between being that appears and being itself (Gadamer, *BP*, 120).

⁵¹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 57.

⁵² Gadamer, "Parmenides," 55 (see also Gadamer, *BK*, 120).

⁵³ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 56; cf. 56–59; see also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Bloomsbury, 2013), 476; hereafter *TM*.

⁵⁴ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 58 (see also Gadamer, *TM*, 476; Gadamer, *BK*, 103).

⁵⁵ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 59.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 59. It is interesting to note the evolution of Gadamer's interpretation of the notion of *noeīn* in Parmenides' doctrine as it moves toward his hermeneutics, compared with the exegesis he presented in his lectures on the Presocratics. In those lectures, *noūs* was already understood as "observing that there is something there" (Gadamer, *BP*, 103), but this "there" does not yet signify "being."

Parmenides' goddess depicts Being as "a being [Seiendes]" and posits that there is no ontological distinction between "Being" and every "this determinate being."⁵⁷ In the duality of being and *noeīn* "is meant ultimately the 'there' of being" and not this or that correctness [*Richtigkeit*]" about the things.⁵⁸

Gadamer asserts that the poem is constructed upon the sameness of being and beings, "on this duality which elevates being and taking [i.e. *noeīn*] into an inseparable unity." From this perspective, he takes up Heidegger's exegesis of the poem, explaining that thinking the truth of beings does not lapse into the empty, vacuous thought of nothing because through *noeīn* we understand that "to be nothing for oneself" (for every determinate being) is nothing" other than just the openness for that which is"—that is, for "Being."⁵⁹

Thus, the ontological recognition of what the eye perceives, which even the goddess acknowledges as undeniable, is already anchored in the being of the many: "In the one there already lies the many but in such a way that everything many is *tò eón*."⁶⁰ This is precisely what Gadamer invites us to discern in Parmenides' Frag. B4. In particular, he explains that

we are supposed to take in [*noeīn* it, as it were] 'what is absent' as present⁶¹ so that a specific being [*das Seiende*] is inseparable from that which is [*vom Seienden*] and is present [*anwesend*] in the while of time [*in der Weile der Zeit*] as well as in the extension to all limits. ('To all limits', this is Parmenides;⁶² 'into the limitless,' this is

⁵⁷ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 62. In this statement, too, we can observe an evolution from the earlier course on the Presocratics. In those lectures, Gadamer posits that "the unity and the self-sameness of *noeīn* lead to the self-sameness, the homogeneity, in the end, to the identity of being"; and that the *noeīn* "announces the stability of being in the relativity of perception," because it constitutes the unity of light and darkness (Gadamer, *BP*, 106). In the conference held at Velia, which we are examining here, light and darkness are one and the same—they are the two from which the one emerges: the being of beings.

⁵⁸ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 64.

⁵⁹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 63.

⁶⁰ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 64. This marks another development from Gadamer's earlier examination of this aspect of Parmenides' doctrine, in which he maintained that the "unity of opposites" "is not the truth of being itself, as the goddess teaches in the first part of the poem, but rather the truth of appearance, which the goddess had also promised to represent credibly" (Gadamer "Zur Vorgeschichte," 57).

⁶¹ Elsewhere, Gadamer had already observed that *noeīn* is "the presence that is essential to all beings, which applies just as much to what is absent as to what is present" (Gadamer, "Zur Vorgeschichte," 56).

⁶² In his lecture course on the Presocratics, Gadamer explains that "if in line 42 of the eighth fragment Parmenides says that the universe is *tetelesmenon*, then that means that the universe is complete in

Melissus . . .). *Tò eón*, a being [das *Seiende*], is not [as] an entity [*ein Seiendes*], but as a being 'that which unfolds' [das *Wesende*] (as our language whispers to us). *Tò eón* knows no never and no nowhere.⁶³

As we have noted, according to Gadamer, the goddess acknowledges that for humans, "going astray" from the way of *aletheia* "is an ever-recurring danger"⁶⁴ and that they "need specific assistance for finding it."⁶⁵ In response, she offers a comprehensive cosmological exposition, delineating the trajectory toward *aletheia* and enumerating the signposts that *noeīn* can identify, thereby guiding mortals back to the path of truth. Indeed, since "*noeīn* is always with being, with *eon*," it is possible to "avoid going astray into the vacuous thought of the nothing, when we keep *noeīn* in sight as a signpost."⁶⁶

The "nameless goddess" thus articulates the only "way of thinking" (the *hodòs noēsai* [ὁδὸς νοῆσαι] introduced in v. B2:3 of Parmenides' poem) that leads to the truth—namely the "way" of "the *aletheia* of being," expounded in the poem's initial section—and the way of "the *aletheia* of appearing," elucidated in the subsequent one.⁶⁷

4. What "Step Back" Should be Taken?

Gadamer's return to Parmenides' thought is motivated by his desire to overcome the impasse that Heidegger encountered in attempting to "take a step back" from Plato to Parmenides' poem, that is, to go beyond the ontological difference between "Being" and "beings."

itself, that it is a whole and leaves nothing outside itself ... and yet this means 'finite'" (Gadamer, *BP*, 122).

⁶³ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 65. As Parmenides explicitly states in Fragment B8.5, *tò eón* is "now, all together, a whole." Furthermore, *tò eón* cannot have limits, even though it must be complete (cf. Frag. B8:32). It must therefore be unending yet non-endless. This question cannot be explored in detail here (interested readers are referred to Marco Montagnino, "How can Parmenides' *Tò Êòv* be Unending but Non-endless?" *Ancient Philosophy* 43:2 (2023), 299–314), but we can examine how Gadamer addressed it. According to Gadamer, if beings are determinations of *tò eón*, then any determinate being taken in isolation would constitute a limit for *tò eón* and would 'end' it. Conversely, all determinate beings taken together would constitute the totality of *tò eón*'s limits. Therefore, to say that *tò eón* has all limits is to say that it has no limits. From this perspective, every particular being exists only as an unfolding of what is (*tò eón*) and, as such, is always present—even when absent—"in the while of time as well as in the extension to all limits."

⁶⁴ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 101 n. 34.

⁶⁵ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 61.

⁶⁶ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 63.

⁶⁷ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 66.

Heidegger's approach consisted in taking this "step back" from the end of the history of the effects of Parmenides' poem—that is, from the metaphysical tradition that began with the oblivion of the thought of the "inceptual thinkers" (Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides) commencing with Plato's philosophy.⁶⁸

As we have seen, Gadamer works out the hermeneutical situation of Parmenides' doctrine by acquiring the appropriate horizon of inquiry for the questions raised in dialogue with its tradition. He places himself within that situation, bringing his own horizon into play in order to view it within a larger whole and in truer proportion, and to listen to tradition in a way that allows its meaning to be heard anew.

According to Gadamer's "principle of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*)," the "process of foregrounding" the past is "always reciprocal": "whatever is being foregrounded must be foregrounded from something else, which, in turn, must be foregrounded from it. Thus, all foregrounding also makes visible that from which something is foregrounded."⁶⁹

Gadamer's proposal, then, is that following Heidegger's foregrounding of Parmenides' doctrine at the conclusion of the history of metaphysics—understood by Heidegger as the philosophy of Hegel⁷⁰—there should be a corresponding foregrounding of this history itself in relation to the goddess's statements and ideas as presented in the poem.

Thus, to understand the implications of Parmenides' statement that "in the one there already lies the many"—that is, the world perceptible to the senses and which cannot be refuted—"but in such a way that everything many is to eon,"⁷¹ it is essential to ascend once more toward the "possibilities which have not come into effect." One of these possibilities, as we have shown, lies in exploring the role and function of the "nameless goddess" in his didactic poem.

When reconsidering Parmenides' doctrine, Gadamer maintains that we must place a different emphasis on it than Plato and Aristotle did.⁷² According to Gadamer,

[t]he beyond of being, which Plato proclaimed as 'the good' and from which the concept of transcendence was developed in the neo-Platonic appropriation of

⁶⁸ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 66.

⁶⁹ Gadamer, *TM*, 316.

⁷⁰ Gadamer, *BP*, 125.

⁷¹ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 64.

⁷² Gadamer, *BK*, 133.

Plato, truly means the fact pondered by Plato and Aristotle that being pertains to this world [*das Diesseits des Seins*]⁷³

Indeed, Plato's reformulation of the Eleatic doctrine, in turn, enables us to draw conclusions about the original Eleatic doctrine. As Gadamer argues,

the confrontation with Parmenides' doctrine of being that runs through all the Platonic dialogues shifts the emphasis from *on* to *hen*. But in this way the Eleatic rejection of the many transforms itself into the dialectical assimilation of the many within the very concepts of being and the one. For the one is always the one of the many.⁷⁴

According to the German philosopher, if we immerse ourselves in the "historical efficacy" of Parmenides' thought, we discover that the epic, fragmented narrative proposed by modern histories of philosophy still "resonates between the parts of the didactic poem in the primordial Eleatic wisdom of the *aletheia* of being and the *aletheia* of appearing" proffered by the "nameless goddess."

The difference between these two forms of *aletheia*, as well as the ontological difference between being and beings, is that within which all finite thinking—that is, the opinions of mortals, and, we might add, the metaphysics that began with Plato's philosophy—is embedded.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, according to Gadamer's exegesis, it is only through the "appearing of appearances" that we can grasp the "being of beings." This is why, in the second part of the poem, the goddess leads our thinking "to all limits," that is, toward knowledge of the universe.

As we have seen, when Gadamer first returned to Parmenides' poem in his course on the Presocratics, he appears to have been more influenced by Heidegger's search for the "ontological difference" in the didactic poem—even when he sought to critique it⁷⁶—than by his own hermeneutical perspective. Twenty years later, when he revisits the poem, he explores the role and function of the "nameless goddess," offering an exegesis consistent with his hermeneutical "principle of the history of effect." Indeed, this principle can already be seen at

⁷³ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 66. I prefer the Italian translation of this expression, which corresponds to the original title of the essay by Gadamer we have discussed: "l'aldiquà dell'essere."

⁷⁴ Gadamer, *BK*, 114.

⁷⁵ Gadamer, "Parmenides," 66.

⁷⁶ Gadamer, *BP*, 124–25.

work in his decision to foreground Parmenides' doctrine again after two decades, opening up a new fusion of horizons.⁷⁷

According to Gadamer, returning to the poem means beginning anew from it—especially through the rediscovery of the goddess' teachings. This is essential for achieving “a new proximity to what is to come,” that is, to “what Heidegger called the ‘overcoming’ or ‘transformation’ [Verwindung] of metaphysics or even the end of philosophy.”⁷⁸ It is evident that Gadamer's exegesis of Parmenides' doctrine presents a significant challenge to the prevailing interpretations of it—not only to what we have called Zeller's “theorem.” It is the contention of this paper that Gadamer's reflections continue to open meaningful new perspectives on how we might understand Parmenides' thought, that is—in Gadamer's words—further “fusions of horizons.” It is hoped that the present study has succeeded in demonstrating the potential of this challenge.

At the same time, it may be argued that his exegesis constitutes a foundational element within Gadamer's philosophical discourse. Indeed, even in his seminal work *Truth and Method*, he underscores that since his “hermeneutical theory seeks to show the interconnection of event and understanding, it sends us back to Parmenides as well as to Hegel.”⁷⁹ Returning to foreground the “horizon” of Parmenides' doctrine is, for Gadamer, an undertaking essential to the future of philosophy, for it continues to offer valuable insights into renewing the philosophical discourse on being and reality. This conviction is also shared by the author of the present article.

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⁷⁷ He would probably have agreed with this acknowledgment. After all, he states: “In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value,” and “every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present” (Gadamer, *TM*, 317). It is evident that a span of two decades can generate new “presents,” “tensions,” and thus new “horizons.”

⁷⁸ Gadamer, *TM*, 65.

⁷⁹ Gadamer, *TM*, 476.

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