

On the Parmenidean Misconception

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Parmenides did not write as a cosmologist. He wrote as a philosophical pioneer of the first water, and any attempt to put him back into the tradition that he aimed to demolish is a surrender to the diadoche-writers, a failure to take him at his word [...]

G. E. L. Owen¹

§1. The work of Parmenides posed a difficult philosophical challenge to those not willing to accept its conclusions. Even to those who could be tempted to consider the conclusions of Parmenides a *reductio ad absurdum* of his views, it would not have been sufficient to dismiss them without further ado. Consider, for instance, the dialogue between the unguarded Ctesippus and the sophisticated eleatic Euthydemus in Plato's homonymous piece:

Euthydemus Well then, Ctesippus, do you think it is possible to tell a lie?

Ctesippus By Zeus I do, unless I've gone mad.

Euthydemus If one lies, does one speak of the subject matter that one's speech is about, or does one not speak of it?

Ctesippus One does speak of it.

Euthydemus So if one speaks of this, does one speak of anything else among the things that are, apart from the very thing of which one speaks?

Ctesippus How could one do that?

Euthydemus Now the very thing of which one speaks is itself among the things that are, distinct from the rest of them.

Ctesippus Absolutely.

Euthydemus So someone who speaks of that thing, speaks of a thing that is?

Ctesippus Yes.

¹ In Owen, 1960, p. 101.

Euthydemus But someone who speaks of a thing that is, or of things that are, speaks of truths. [...]²

Commonsensical Ctesippus is soundly defeated in this exchange. According to Plato, the inability to make sense of falsehoods - an inability which can be traced to Parmenides' work - is an outstanding philosophical problem, and a very difficult one to contend with. In the *Sophist*, Plato writes the following forceful words:

[...] we are really engaged in an altogether difficult investigation, for to appear and to seem, but not to be, and to say something, but not what is true; all this has always been very perplexing, in former times as well as now. It is altogether difficult, Theaetetus, to see how one must speak in order to say or to have an opinion that what is false really is and in uttering this not be involved in a contradiction.³

Plato wrestled with the *problem of falsehood* on several occasions. His mature position on this issue appears in the *Sophist*. In this paper, I do not propose to analyse Plato's work on the problem of falsity. However, I do find that Plato's *Sophist* is an important tool, even a reasonably accurate guide, for understanding Parmenides and the sources of his misconception. I make two main claims in this paper. Firstly, I claim that Parmenides had an erroneous conception of the meaning of sentences, a conception that in Parmenides' hands took the strong form not only of being unable to make sense of falsehoods but also of being unable to make sense of true negative predications. I call such a conception a referential theory of the meaning of sentences (henceforth, an RTMS). Secondly, I claim that Plato's *double-theory* of "limited mixing" plus "negation as otherness" - as expounded in the *Sophist* (251a-259d) - is still a form of an RTMS, even though of a weaker kind than that of Parmenides.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I focus on the weaker gradation of an RTMS and I argue that this gradation, while still unable to make sense of falsehoods, nevertheless enlarges greatly the scope of significant sentences (albeit at an ontological price) and is able to make sense of true negative predications. The relation between a weak RTMS and Plato's above mentioned double-theory is suggested in the text via what I call *Plato's maneuver*. However, this relation is not fully discussed in this article since I believe that a proper treatment of such an issue requires a discussion that is

² *Euthydemus*, 283e-284b. See also 285d-286e.

³ *Sophist*, 236e.

beyond the scope of the present paper. In my view, this discussion must include an account of the *finale* of the *Sophist* (after 259e), in which Plato tries to make sense of falsehoods. I plan such an undertaking at a latter date. In the third section, I discuss the first part of Parmenides' poem in light of a strong RTMS. In the course of this discussion, I propose a rather strong correlation between verses 3-4 and verses 40-41 of fragment 8 of the poem. This correlation is, to my knowledge, new in the literature. Finally, in the last section, I briefly consider an objection to the interpretation of the poem of Parmenides proposed in this article.

§2. A referential theory of the meaning of sentences (an RTMS) is a theory which claims that sentences are names of facts, and that the meaning of sentences results from these facts. I will assume that in an RTMS a given sentence *S* refers to the fact that *S*, and that sentences referring to the same facts as *S*, have the same meaning. This latter assumption is equivalent to saying that the “mechanism” for the meaning-endowment of sentences depends *solely* on the *facts* to which those sentences refer.

According to an RTMS view, the meaning of “Caesar crossed the Rubicon” is (results from) the historical fact of the crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar. Such a referential theory of the meaning of sentences presupposes an ontology of facts (which may, or may not, live along with an ontology of objects) and deflects the problem of the meaning of sentences to a *prima facie* problem of reference. I am not interested in this problem nor in the purported mechanism that would account for the meaning-endowment of sentences from the facts to which they refer. Quite independently from this mechanism, an RTMS necessarily fails to give meanings to falsehoods. For instance, Othello falsely believes that Desdemona loves Cassio, but “Desdemona loves Cassio” is a meaningless sentence since the love of Desdemona for Cassio does not exist.

There are languages which partition their sentences into two mutually exclusive classes: the class of affirmative sentences and the class of negative sentences. A typical example comes from traditional logic, where the sentences of the syllogistic calculus are partitioned into four classes, two of which are affirmative, the other two being negative. Let us suppose that we are working within an RTMS that is successful in accounting for the meaning of the true affirmative sentences (but not necessarily for the meaning of the

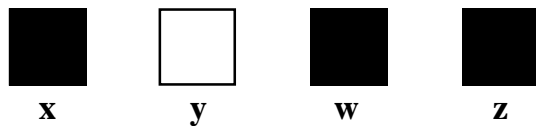
true negative sentences). Can a suitable modification of such a theory account for the meaning of the true negative sentences? This is what I call the *problem of negativity*. Contrary to the problem of falsehood, an RTMS does not prevent (by itself) a solution to the problem of negativity. However, such a solution usually comes at definite ontological price.⁴

I will discuss these matters in the process of presenting some examples.

First example.

Syntax. There are sixteen sentences: **xW**, **xB**, **yW**, **yB**, **wW**, **wB**, **zW**, **zB**, **~xW**, **~xB**, **~yW**, **~yB**, **~wW**, **~wB**, **~zW** and **~zB**. The first eight sentences are affirmative, while the others are their (respective) negative counterparts.

Ontology. There are precisely four facts,



Discussion. If we think of **x**, **y**, **w** and **z** as names for the squares, and of **W** and **B** as standing for ‘white’ and ‘black’, respectively, we have a natural assignment of facts to sentences. In this setting, the true affirmative sentences **xB**, **yW**, **wB**, **zB** are meaningful and their meanings are (result from) the above facts (from left to right, respectively). The other four affirmative sentences fail to refer and, as a consequence, are meaningless. What are the meanings of the four negative true sentences **~xW**, **~yB**, **~wW** and **~zW**? An RTMS could just dismiss them as meaningless. A less extreme possibility would be to say that they refer to the very same facts as do the sentences **xB**, **yW**, **wB**, and **zB** (respectively). This latter reading entails that the sentences **~xW**, **~yB**, **~wW**, and **~zW** have the same meanings as **xB**, **yW**, **wB**, and **zB** (respectively). Thus, according to this

⁴ There are more reasonable RTMSs than the ones discussed in this paper. In such more reasonable versions, referents of sentences are *states of affairs*, some of which obtain (facts) and some of which do not obtain (non-facts); a sentence is true or false depending on whether the state of affairs it refers to is obtaining, or not obtaining. However, they have a definite ontological cost: one has to countenance non-obtaining states of affairs. (I thank João Branquinho and Uwe Meixner for calling my attention to these more reasonable RTMSs.) For a modern treatment of states of affairs - obtaining and not obtaining - as things in the world see, for instance, “States of Affairs” in Taylor, 1985, p. 28-50.

form of meaning-endowment, the sentences \mathbf{xB} (“x is black”) and $\sim\mathbf{xW}$ (“x is not white”) have the same meaning. In a world in black and white this may be defensible. However, in a colorful world with color-words this is hardly so. Imagine that the last square above is green (I use the letter \mathbf{G} for this color). What is the meaning of $\sim\mathbf{xG}$? Does it have the same meaning as $\sim\mathbf{xW}$? Do \mathbf{zG} and $\sim\mathbf{zW}$ have the same meaning? I will revisit these questions later.

Second example.

Syntax. Let us work with a formal language whose alphabet consists of nine constants $\mathbf{1}$, $\mathbf{2}$, $\mathbf{3}$, $\mathbf{4}$, $\mathbf{5}$, $\mathbf{6}$, $\mathbf{7}$, $\mathbf{8}$ and $\mathbf{9}$; three special signs “,” (comma), “{” (left brace), and “}” (right brace); and two copulas, “ $\mathbf{\in}$ ” and “ $\mathbf{\notin}$ ”. The *kernel of a term* is a word with an odd number of characters in which the even positions are filled with commas and the odd positions are filled with constants. As a matter of convenience, I keep the number of kernels of terms finite by assuming that there are no repeated constants. I also count the empty word (i.e., the word of length zero) as a kernel of a term. A *term* is the concatenation of a left brace with the kernel of a term with a right brace (in that order): $\{\mathbf{4,6,7}\}$, $\{\mathbf{5}\}$, $\{\}$ and $\{\mathbf{6,4,7}\}$ are examples of terms. A *sentence* is the concatenation of a constant with a copula with a term (in that order): $\mathbf{5\in\{4,6,7\}}$ and $\mathbf{4\notin\{7,9\}}$ are sentences. A sentence is affirmative or negative according to whether one uses the copula $\mathbf{\in}$ or the copula $\mathbf{\notin}$. There are 17,755,380 sentences.

Ontology. Facts are of the form $n\in X$ (n is a member of X), where n is a positive natural number less than ten and X is a subset $\{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9\}$ (of which n is an element).⁵ There are 2,304 facts in this ontology.

Discussion. The above notation suggests a natural way of assigning facts to sentences. Thus, the meaning of $\mathbf{6\in\{4,6,7\}}$ is (results from) the fact that $6\in\{4,6,7\}$. The meaning of the (different) sentence $\mathbf{6\in\{6,4,7\}}$ is exactly the same, and this seems as it should be.

⁵ The parenthetic remark requires some comments. We are describing an ontology of facts. We always can fabricate a rigorous RTMS for a formalized language by, for instance, identifying ‘facts’ with true sentences (in the sense of Tarski) or with suitable modifications thereof - one such modification is used for the present example (see the next note). It is this proviso on *true* sentences that motivates the parenthetic remark in the text. In the sequel, I abstain from similar remarks.

There is a natural way of extending the previous assignment of facts to negative true sentences. For instance, we can say that the meaning of $2\notin\{4,6,7\}$ is (results from) the fact that $2\in\{1,2,3,5,8,9\}$. In general, we could say that the meaning of a true sentence of the form $n\notin X$ is (results from) the fact that $n\in X^c$, where X^c is the complement of the set X relative to the set $\{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9\}$.⁶ This is not a very problematic notion, even though it gives the same meaning to both $2\notin\{4,6,7\}$ and $2\in\{1,2,3,5,8,9\}$.

Third example.

This example differs from the previous one by permitting an infinite number of constants, one for each positive natural number.⁷ The syntax is similar, while the ontology now consists of all of the facts of the form $n\in X$, where n is a natural number and X is a finite subset of the set of positive natural numbers \mathbb{N} . There are \aleph_0 many sentences and \aleph_0 many facts.

In this context, there is no natural way of assigning a fact to the sentence $2\notin\{4,6,7\}$. It would be *incorrect* to retain the assignment of the last example, viz. assigning to this sentence the fact that $2\in\{1,2,3,5,8,9\}$. In fact, any assignment along these lines is wrong since a proper treatment of negation should be such that a sentence and its negation exhaust the logical space. The natural thing to do would be to assign to the sentence $2\notin\{4,6,7\}$ the fact that $2\in\{4,6,7\}^c$ - where the operation of complementation here is taken relative to \mathbb{N} - were it not for the simple reason that our ontology does not support a fact in which an infinite set intrudes. Nevertheless, this remark has the merit of pointing out a

⁶ The phrasing of this passage is not quite correct. A rigorous semantic treatment of the present example can be accomplished by defining *facts* as ordered pairs (n,X) , where n is a positive natural number less than ten and X is a subset of $\{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9\}$ of which n is an element. To each constant k of the language we associate its intended number $n(k)$, i.e., $n(1) = 1$, $n(2) = 2$, etc. Similarly, to each term T of the formal language we associate its intended subset $X(T)$ of $\{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9\}$. E.g., $X(\{4,6,7\}) = \{4,6,7\}$. We can now rephrase the sentence in the text as follows: "Given any term T and any constant k of the formal language, the meaning of the true sentence formed by the constant k concatenated with the copula ' \notin ' concatenated with the term T is the ordered pair $(n(k),X(T)^c)$ ".

⁷ The idea of an infinite alphabet goes beyond a purely syntactic view. However, it is well-known that in cases such as the above, the formal apparatus can be reformulated suitably by rewriting each numeral n as n consecutive vertical strokes '|', where the vertical stroke is a new notation.

way for coping with the problem of negativity. Let us *extend* the ontology of facts and permit by *fiat* all the facts of the form $n \in X$, where n is a positive natural number and X is a (finite or infinite) subset of N . This move lends legitimacy to the natural assignment of facts to true sentences sketched above and, contrary to the assignment of the second example, has the bonus of never giving the same meaning to affirmative and negative sentences. However, this extension is exaggerated. It extends an ontology of \aleph_0 many facts to an ontology of *continuum* many facts for the sake of only \aleph_0 many sentences. We do not need to be *that* extravagant. It is enough to consider the (sub)ontology whose facts are of the form $n \in X$, where n is a positive natural number and X is a finite or co-finite (i.e., whose complement is finite) subset of N . Notice that this latter ontology has only \aleph_0 many facts.

An alternative approach for accomplishing the same result is by performing what I call *Plato's maneuver*. This maneuver extends the ontology of *objects* with a new being called "thateron" which, in turn, generates facts according to the following specifications. They are of the form $n \varepsilon X$, where n is a positive natural number and X is a finite subset of $N \cup \{\text{thateron}\}$, and where:

$$n \varepsilon X \quad \text{if, and only if,} \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{either } n \in X \text{ and } \text{thateron} \notin X \\ \text{or } n \notin X \text{ and } \text{thateron} \in X. \end{array}$$

For instance, the meaning of $6 \varepsilon \{4,6,7\}$ is (results from) the fact that $6 \varepsilon \{4,6,7\}$, and the meaning of $2 \notin \{4,6,7\}$ is (results from) the fact that $2 \varepsilon \{4,6,7, \text{thateron}\}$. This ontology is *isomorphic* to the previous one since we may associate to each fact of the form $n \varepsilon X$ - with X a finite subset of N - the fact that $n \varepsilon X$, and to each fact of the form $n \varepsilon X$ - with X a co-finite subset of N - the fact that $n \varepsilon X^c \cup \{\text{thateron}\}$.

First example (revisited).

Plato's maneuver is a solution to the problem of negativity. Let us revisit the first example and, for the sake of argument, assume that we have an ontology of seven *objects* (the four squares x , y , z , and w , *plus* the three colours white, black and green), and that each of the four *facts* is a "mixing together" of a square with a colour. In conformity with Plato's maneuver, we add to the ontology of objects a new being called "thateron" and we

extend the ontology of facts by allowing this new being to “mix together” with squares and colours. The original facts are:

- 1) the mixing together of the square x with the colour black,
- 2) the mixing together of the square y with the colour white,
- 3) the mixing together of the square w with the colour black,
- 4) the mixing together of the square z with the colour green,

and the new facts are,

- 5) the mixing together of the square x with the colour white and with the being *thateron*,
- 6) the mixing together of the square x with the colour green and with the being *thateron*,
- 7) the mixing together of the square y with the colour black and with the being *thateron*,
- 8) the mixing together of the square y with the colour green and with the being *thateron*,
- 9) the mixing together of the square w with the colour white and with the being *thateron*,
- 10) the mixing together of the square w with the colour green and with the being *thateron*,
- 11) the mixing together of the square z with the colour white and with the being *thateron*,
- 12) the mixing together of the square x with the colour black and with the being *thateron*.

This new ontology of facts is able to account for the relevant distinctions of meaning. For instance, the meaning of $\sim\mathbf{xG}$ is (or results from) the sixth “mixing together”, the meaning of $\sim\mathbf{xW}$ from the fifth, and the meaning of $\sim\mathbf{zW}$ from the eleventh.

These examples show that a referential theory of the meaning of sentences is no obstacle to dealing successfully with the problem of negativity, albeit at a certain ontological cost. This cost is unavoidable in certain cases. In the first example - with four squares and three colours - there are twenty-four sentences, half of which (the true ones)

we would like to endow with a meaning. However, the original ontology has a mere four facts. Thus, if we keep this ontology, different sentences must be endowed with the same meaning, in which case certain distinctions of meaning are barred. There is a more perspicacious way of making the same point for examples such as this: if we want to make relevant distinctions of meaning, sheer combinatorial analysis shows that a solution to the problem of negativity within the framework of an RTMS involves (in general) an extension of the original ontology.

§3. In the present section, I will focus on the (radical) version of an RTMS, according to which negativity is always meaningless. Therefore, in this version, only affirmative sentences have a chance of being meaningful. I will interpret Parmenides' poem⁸ in this light. I begin with a rendering of fragment 2 of the poem:

Come, I shall tell you, and do you listen and convey the story,
What routes of inquiry alone there are for thinking⁹:
The one, that "is" and that is not for not being,
Is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon truth);
The other, that "is not" and that necessarily is for not being,
That, I point to you to be a path from which no tidings ever come,
For you could not know that what is not (for that is not feasible),
Nor could you point it out [...]

In the above fragment, Parmenides describes the two unique routes of inquiry: the route of the *estin* ("is") and the route of the *ouk estin* ("is not"). Following an idea of Alexander Mourelatos, I envisage a journey in this imagery of routes. Accordingly, the routes should be distinguished carefully from the peculiarities (and, in the limit, the possibility) of travelling on them. The routes represent the two unique *types of propositions or sentence frames* able to support proper inquiry and investigation.¹⁰ In modern jargon, the routes

⁸ I will only be concerned with the first part of Parmenides' poem, commonly known as the "Way of Truth". Disregarding an introduction, this consists of fragments 2 through 8 (line 50) in the orthodox doxography of Diels-Kranz.

⁹ I translate phrases of the form "*esti [mê] + infinitive* φ" by "is (are) for [not] φing" (see the second hemistichs of lines 3 and 5). Barnes, 1982, p. 159 and Coxon, 1986, p. 173-176 defend this rendering.

¹⁰ In Mourelatos, 1979, p. 3, Alexander Mourelatos credits Guido Calogero (in *Studi sull' Eleatismo*,

represent the syntactic forms which partition the sentences into two mutually exclusive classes: the affirmative sentences and the negative sentences. Research and inquiry must follow a strategy that uses one, or both, of these types of sentences. That notwithstanding, in the second hemistichs of lines 3 and 5, I no longer attribute a syntactic (framing) role to the infinitive forms of the verb *einai* (“to be”). In these cases ‘*einai*’ has a *veridical*¹¹ role of a semantic character. In modern jargon, we would say that, at the end of lines 3 and 5, Parmenides provides the semantic role of the two syntactic frames (the routes): the first route is tailored for inquiring into what-is-the-case; the second route is tailored for inquiring into what-is-not-the-case. This explanation is on a par with the radical version of an RTMS: the first route corresponds to the affirmative sentences, the second route corresponds to the negative sentences, what-is-the-case corresponds to facts, and what-is-not-the-case does not correspond to anything. Thus, lines 3 and 5 of the above fragment can be restated in the following manner:

*the one, the affirmative route, which is not for inquiring into what-is-not-the-case;
the other, the negative route, which necessarily is for inquiring into what-is-not-the-case.*

It is this relationship between syntactic forms (the routes) and corresponding semantic roles (to be or not to be the case) that enables Parmenides to attack the cosmologies of his time, not by criticising their particular details, but by way of rejecting the syntactic forms used to expound them. Thus, Parmenides' attack on the cosmologies of his time is the corollary of a much broader attack against natural language as a whole. It is this revolutionary move that makes Parmenides a philosophical pioneer of the first water.

Parmenides makes two different claims in lines 5-8 of fragment 2. Firstly, he claims that the object of inquiry of the negative route is necessarily what-is-not-the-case.¹²

Tipografia del Senato, Rome, 1932) with the idea that the two Parmenidian routes represent “sentence frames” or “types of propositions”.

¹¹ The veridical role of the verb *einai* in Ancient Greek was propounded by Charles Kahn in Kahn, 1966, p. 245-265. The same author also defended the statement that some occurrences of the verb *einai* in Parmenides' poem have this role. *Vide* Kahn, 1969, p. 700-724.

¹² I see the second hemistich of the first line of fragment 7 as a restatement of this claim: *For never shall this prevail, that “are not” be*. Indeed, if the locution “are not” indicates travellings on the second route and

Secondly, he claims that it is not feasible to know what-is-not-the-case. Conjoined, these two claims entail that the second route is nothing but a mere formal possibility for undertaking inquiry.¹³ This is the mark of the radical version of an RTMS, where negative sentences are always meaningless. “No tidings ever come” from the *via negativa*, and Parmenides rejects it as “no true route.”¹⁴ On the other hand, the path of Persuasion “attends upon truth” and aims at reporting what-is-the-case. Fragment 3, which some scholars consider the second hemistich of verse 2.8, concludes that “the same is for thinking and for being”, thus arriving at the identification of the denotation of meaningful - necessarily affirmative - sentences (what is there for thinking) with facts (what is the case). The following table summarizes these discussions:

	<i>Sentence Frame</i>	<i>Object of Inquiry</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
First Route	is	what is the case	true reports
Second Route	is not	what is not the case	meaningless words

In the remaining part of this section, I compare and draw attention to two particular passages of fragment 8. It is in this fragment that Parmenides undertakes the task of laying down the distinctiveness of travelling on the first route. Its first four verses are (my underlinings):

[...] One path only is left for us to speak of,
 Namely, that “is”; on this path there are signs

if the objects of inquiry are either what-is-the-case or what-is-not-the-case, then the preclusion of what-is-the-case as the object of inquiry yields the necessity of what-is-not-the-case.

¹³ In fragments 6 and 7, Parmenides seems to be specially worried with the rather common view that *both* routes are suitable for inquiring into what is the case. I believe that Parmenides is describing such a view in the rather difficult passage 8-9 of fragment 6: “By whom [the upholders of the common view] it is thought both to be and not to be, both to be the same and not to be the same” (this rendering is discussed in Barnes, 1982, p. 168-170). The claims in the text preclude such a binary possibility. On this view, the second hemistich of verse 9 of the same fragment, viz. “and the path of all is backward turning” does not say *per se* that the upholders of the common view engage in contradiction (as Barnes suggests in Barnes, 1982, p. 168). It merely says that they turn back on a route to pursue the other, i.e., they use both affirmative and negative sentences in their inquiries. Of course, the simultaneous presence of affirmative and negative sentences paves the way to the possibility of (logical) contradiction.

¹⁴ *Vide* fragment 8.17-8.

Very numerous: that being is ungenerated and unperishable,
whole of a single kind, immovable and complete.

Later, lines 38-41 say:

[...] Therefore all these are mere names
 That mortals have established, trusting them to be true,
To come-to-be and to perish, to be and not to be,
 And to change place and to alter in bright colour.

I see a conspicuous parallel between these two verses. This parallel suggests that the five (underlined) properties in lines 3-4 are somehow related to the critiques of the corresponding five (underlined) verbal forms in 40-41. I see in this parallel and in the discussions in the intermediate verses 5-37 a kind of *regimentation* argument at work. Let us see how this argument works for the first pair of property *cum* verbal form. Firstly, a proviso: it seems reasonable to assume that the preclusion of the verbal form “to come-to-be” (*gignesthai*) is equivalent to saying that, whatever is the case with any thing, that “thing” is ungenerated. Now, there are only two syntactic frames (roads) available (for thinking): the affirmative “is” frame and the negative “is not” frame. The regimentation of the verb form “to come-to-be” within the framework of the above two roads requires the negative frame. For instance, if heaven and earth have an origin (come-to-be)¹⁵, then this statement involves saying both that at a certain point in time it was the case that “there is no heaven and no earth” and that at a latter point in time it was the case that “there is heaven and earth”. Hence, reports using the verbal form “to come-to-be” are not acceptable. This seems to account for the claim that “being is ungenerated”. Similar remarks apply to the other properties and verbal forms. The following table gives some informal examples:

<i>Properties</i>	<i>Unacceptable Verbal Form</i>	<i>Report: Earlier Point of Time</i>	<i>Report: Latter Point of Time</i>
ungenerated	fire <u>comes-to-be</u> in the forest	there <u>is not</u> fire in the forest	there <u>is</u> fire in the forest
unperishable	Odysseus <u>perished</u>	Odysseus <u>is</u> alive	Odysseus <u>is not</u> alive

¹⁵ The allusion to Anaximander (DK 12 A 9) is not innocent!

immovable	the moon <u>changes</u> <u>place</u>	the moon <u>is</u> there	the moon <u>is not</u> there
complete	the leaf <u>altered in</u> <u>bright color</u>	[the leaf <u>is</u> green] (the leaf <u>is not</u> yellow)	[the leaf <u>is not</u> green] (the leaf <u>is</u> yellow) ¹⁶

The four properties in the left column preclude several kinds of change in the truth reports. Having the first two properties prevents the most extreme changes: generation and destruction. A more moderate sort of change is also precluded by the poem - the transformation of a thing into another: “nor ever from what is will the strength of trust allow it to become something apart from itself.”¹⁷ Having the last two properties prevents changes of place (movement) and changes of quality (i.e., predicative alterations).

I intentionally chose to close this discussion with the study of the property *houlon mounogenes* (“whole of a single kind”) and the corresponding verbal form *einai te kai ouchi* (“to be and not to be”). If we follow the same sort of analysis as before, then the preclusion of the verbal form *einai te kai ouchi* should shed some light on the property *houlon mounogenes* (and vice-versa!). Such an analysis is not as straightforward as with the other cases because - unlike the other four verbal forms - *einai te kai ouchi* has no temporal import. I do not find it plausible that Parmenides is simply stating a form of the principle of no contradiction, e.g., that he is asserting that “X is Y” and “X is not Y” cannot hold simultaneously. Rather, I suggest that Parmenides intended to criticize statements similar to “the air is hot inside, but cold outside” (thus, “the air is hot inside and it is not hot outside”) or similar to “the air is warmer inside than outside”, where multiple or gradatory predications are possible due to a division of the subject. This interpretation squares nicely with the property *houlon mounogenes* and with the lines 22-24 of fragment 8:

Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike,

¹⁶ I chose to present the reports of this example in this manner to stress that if leaves are yellow then they lack greenness (and vice-versa). *Vide* fragment 8.33.

¹⁷ *Vide* fragment 8.12-3. We follow the translation of Barnes, 1982, p. 178.

And there is no more of it in one place than in another, to hinder it from holding together,
Nor less of it, but everything is full of what is.¹⁸

§4. There is a rather embarrassing problem with the interpretation of the poem of Parmenides put forward in the previous section. The poem precludes the *via negativa*. That preclusion forbids the use of sentences framed in the locution “is not”. Parmenides does not provide an analysis of what these sentences are, precisely. I have advanced a frame interpretation with a copulative reading of “is not”. It is natural to assume that this copulative reading includes negative predications. In particular, the interpretation given in the previous section reveals a Parmenides who abjures negative predications. However, Parmenides *does* use negative predications in the poem - see, most conspicuously, line 22 of fragment 8 quoted above. This poses a problem that cannot be lightly dismissed (still, Parmenides is *not* contradicting himself - he is just not practicing what he preaches).

In the introductory section of this article, I considered Plato’s *Sophist* an important tool, even a reasonably accurate guide, for understanding Parmenides and the sources of his misconception. The main speaker in the dialogue is a visitor from Elea (Parmenides’ own city) who raises a variety of problems about not being. At a certain point in the dialogue (241d), the visitor promises to solve these problems by tackling Parmenides head on. Later in the dialogue (258d), he claims to have done just that. In between, there is strong evidence that the visitor is trying to address the problem of (true) negative predications. See, most conspicuously, the following passage of Plato’s *Sophist*:

Visitor Let us look at the following.

Theaetetus What is that?

Visitor When we state what is not, it seems, we do not state something contrary to what is, but only something other.

Theaetetus How so?

Visitor For example, when we say that something (is) not large, do we appear to you by that expression to be making something manifest as something that is small rather than as middle-sized?

Theaetetus How could we?

Visitor Then when the negative is said to signify the contrary, we’ll not concede that, but only this, that the “not” that is placed before the words reveals something about different things than the

¹⁸ I hold the view that these lines are examining the qualification "houlon mounogenes".

names that follow it, or rather, than whatever things are designated by the names uttered after the negative.¹⁹

In this passage, Plato is manifestly concerned with (true) negative predications. In order to make sense of them, Plato is trying hard to steer a course - the “otherness” thesis - which avoids Parmenides’ problems about not being concerning true negative predications. Thus, Plato’s *Sophist* suggests that Parmenides abjured true negative predications or, at least, that Plato thought that Parmenides abjured them. In this paper, I have followed this line of interpretation.²⁰

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¹⁹ *Sophist*, 257b.

²⁰ I owe some thanks. First and foremost, to J. Trindade dos Santos, with whom I discussed earlier versions of this article. His forthright criticisms certainly made this a better work than it otherwise would have been. Secondly, to Uwe Meixner, who read this paper throughout and brought to my attention some passages in want of clarification or argument. I also profited from discussions at two presentations of this work: one, at Sociedade Portuguesa de Filosofia; the other, at Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa. Lastly, Charles Travis and Matthew Coleman read an advanced version of the paper and suggested some changes (thanks Matt for the thorough job in correcting my English). Needless to say, any flaws in this paper are my sole responsibility.