PARMENIDES AND THE HORSE OF IBYCUS.
THE HIDDEN MEANING OF THE PERSONIFICATION AND ITS ROLE IN THE DIALOGUE OF THE *PARMENIDES*

EVANGELOS ROUSAKIS
Laboratory of Philosophy and Art,
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
evangelosfilosofia82@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. In this essay, the function of the personification of Parmenides himself with the horse of Ibycus in Plato's *Parmenides* will be elaborated. The analytical process of this reference by Parmenides will focus to demonstrate that the personification is an allegorical element of Plato whose role in the dialogue is crucial for the understanding of the author's objective about the second more extended part of the *Parmenides.*

KEYWORDS: allegory, Eleatics, Plato, parricide, metaphysics.

Introduction

The *Parmenides* import remains remarkably ambiguous for contemporary interpreters mainly due to its complicated structure. The connection between the two extended parts of the dialogue related to its philosophical content and Plato's fundamental aim represent the contemporary debate about reading. In this article a fundamental literary element is elaborated, which Plato introduces before the second, and more extensive, part of the dialogue. The aforementioned element, in my point of view, is very essential for i) the logical connection between the two parts of the dialogue, and ii) the interpretation of the Platonic objective upon the dialogue and his own metaphysical thought. This element is the personification of Parmenides himself with the horse of Ibycus (136e). The analytical process of the reference of the philosopher from Elea will focus: a) in the demonstration of the identification of the content of the personification that is exposed in the *Parmenides* via the tradition of the historical character of Parmenides, and more precisely, with the narrative characteristics and literary pieces of his own poem and b) with the impending dialectical failure of the Platonic Parmenides in the second longest

part of the dialogue. If these two premises are accepted as valid, it could be affirmed that the reference of personification is an allegorical element of Plato which role in the dialogue is crucial for the understanding of the author's objective, that is teaching a critique of the metaphysical Eleatic tradition.

Platonic perspective on Parmenides' position

In passage 135c7-137c3 of the *Parmenides* Plato introduces a reference to a literal-historical source, the horse of Ibycus[1] (136e-137a). More specifically, Parmenides mentions the following:

> "καίτοι δοκῶ μοι τὸ τοῦ Ἰβυκείου ἵππου πεπονθέναι, ᾧ ἐκεῖνος ἀθλητῇ ὄντι καὶ πρεσβυτέρῳ, ὑφ᾽ ἅρματι μέλλοντι ἀγωνιεῖσθαι καὶ δι᾽ ἐμπειρίαν τρέμοντι τὸ μέλλον, ἑαυτὸν ἀπεικάζων ἄκων ἔφη καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτω πρεσβύτης ὢν εἰς τὸν ἔρωτα ἀναγκάζεσθαι ἰέναι: κἀγώ μοι δοκῶ μεμνημένος μάλα φοβεῖσθαι πῶς χρὴ τηλικόνδε ὄντα διανεῦσαι τοιοῦτόν τε καὶ τοσοῦτον πέλαγος λόγων."

> "and yet I feel like I am suffering what Ibycus' horse suffered, that old fighter, who, at the start of a chariot race, trembled with fear of what was before him, because he knew it by experience. Ibycus says he is compelled to fall in love against his will in his old age, and compares himself to the horse. So I am filled with terror when I remember through what a fearful ocean of words I must swim, old man that I am."

What is observed in a first stage, according to Parmenides' own words, is that the philosopher from Elea, through exposing the importance of the dialectical method and its characteristics, expresses an extension of his own psychological situation in the present moment, the sense of *fear* (μάλα φοβεῖσθαι). The great philosopher and teacher of his current time expresses a great fear to realize the fundamental characteristics of the dialectical method in the subject of the debate. The reference that Plato uses, through the character of Parmenides, about the Ibycus horse includes some fundamental elements that have to be clarified, in order to demonstrate the hidden negative meaning that this personification contains and what is its allegorical meaning that this literary element includes. These fundamental elements that express the deficient part of the aforementioned personification are the following: i) Parmenides's own great fear (μάλα φοβεῖσθαι), ii) the great quantity of logical reasonings (πέλαγος λόγων), which Parmenides has to face

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[1] Ibycus was a Greek lyric poet, very given to love, according to Cicero. He was born in Rhegium of Southern Italy. Ibycus wrote a poem about love, which in this poem assimilates his own character with a horse. This horse, which was long ago victorious and now, after so long, became weak and old, is tuning into the idea of the competition of a new chariot race. Therefore, this is the horse that Parmenides assimilates with himself, in the face of the great difficulty of the philosophical contest that arises in the dialogue.

in the second part of the dialogue, iii) the senescence (old age), a common element that characterizes the horse of Ibycus and Parmenides (πρεσβυτέρῳ).

The "great fear", which Parmenides mentions in 136e, is the main cause of the use of this personification with the horse of Ibycus. Without the existence of Parmenides' own fear, the previously mentioned personification would be meaningless. This "great fear" is what motivates the present allegorical reference, which includes many indirect messages, that its proper interpretation can clarify the importance of the transitory passage of the dialogue (135c7-137c3). Plato by using the concept of fear, exposed by Parmenides, shows an insecurity of the acting subject, namely Parmenides. This insecurity is related to the process of searching the truth, which in this case is the premise "εἰ ἕν ἐστιν". This is the deep and basic theme of the entire dialectical process that is argued in the next part of the *Parmenides* reading. The insecurity of Parmenides expresses Parmenides' impending ignorance of the premise "if the One is". Furthermore, it is evident that the adverb "μάλα", which Parmenides mentions together with the infinitive "φοβεῖσθαι", shows that this fear is not only a simple ordinary concern, but a strong sense, that the appearance of the causes that produce it, can cause damage to his own prestige.

By extension, the phrase "πέλαγος λόγων" is observed later in the same sentence. The great variety of logical results (πέλαγος λόγων) that arise from the four antinomies, creates an epistemological confusion, which does not allow the establishment of a powerful and firm answer on the subject at hand. This epistemological confusion is the reason for Parmenides' 'fear'. This *πέλαγος λόγων* corresponds to the eight hypotheses of the second part of *Parmenides*, that is, a great attempt of logical justification, and constitutes the reason whose imminent failure in the subsequent dialectical process causes Parmenides' 'great fear'. The eight results that emerge from Parmenides' eight hypotheses in the dialectical process correspond to eight logical substances. However, none of these eight results manage to establish a firm and direct knowledge about the main topic of the dialectical process of the next part of the dialogue. In this way, Plato preaches the later part of the dialogue and prepares the reader for the insufficiency of the Eleatic tradition on the subject.

The synthesis of all the above shows the importance of the reference to old age (πρεσβυτέρῳ) of Parmenides. Although old age is a concept that expresses wisdom arising from the experiences that have accumulated based on the amount of time passage, at this point it represents the weakness and temporary decline that occurs naturally in specific entities. From my perspective, Parmenides' reference to his own old age teaches us an outdated and weak philosophical perception, which Plato will try to overcome with a set of readings (*Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*). Parmenides' 'monism' is a perception that Plato puts under question (ἀπορία) and

in philosophical dispute. The earlier and 'ancient' tradition, as is the tradition of the Elea school, is criticized by its own 'founder' through a literary and logical style invented by Plato.

The concept of horse as a guide

The previous interpretation of the three elements that are mentioned in the personification of Parmenides indicates that the personification that takes place in this passage of the reading has such deficient aspect offers to the subject who preaches a multiple and essential function for the dialogue of the *Parmenides*. However, in order to gain relevance this perspective of the personification of Parmenides with the horse of Ibycus, the allegorical meaning of this personification and its direct connection with the philosophical tradition of the historical Parmenides must be demonstrated. As a starting point, the concept of the horse will be analyzed along with the fundamental similarities resulting from the tradition of Parmenides, that is, the own poem of the philosopher of Elea.

At the beginning of the Parmenides' poem (frag. 1) the philosopher of Elea mentions:

> "Ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ᾽ ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἱκάνοι,
> πέμπον, ἐπεί μ᾽ ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι
> δαίμονες, ἣ κατὰ πάντ᾽ ἄστη φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·
> τῇ φερόμην· τῇ γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποι"

What is observed is that the first word that the Poem of Parmenides introduces is the word ἵπποι (horses).

This clue shows the emphasis that Parmenides places on the horse concept as a fundamental issue on the 'orientation' to knowledge. The horses are that lead the narrator on the famous path of knowledge. Consequently, the concept of horse, for Parmenides, has the role of a guide. However, this item is not that simple. The guide, that is represented by the concept of horse, is not a mere guide that only transports its load from one place to another. It is evident that the role of the horse that is fulfilled here is that of a conscious guide. The horses are presented with the proper conscience and the absolute certainty of bringing the narrator into the light; that is to say, to knowledge. This can be demonstrated for two reasons found in fragment 1 of the Poem, and in Parmenides' own words.

Primarily, horses are characterized, by Parmenides, as *πολύφραστοι*. The word *πολύφραστος* has the meaning of *too wise*.[2] What Parmenides dedicates to us is an adjective, which offers the word that defines a specific and permanent property.

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[2] See Liddell & Scott (1843) 1251, *πολύφραστος: ὁ συνετός*, (the prudent), (ἵπποι Παρμενίδ.).

Although, the wisdom it seems a literary exaggeration by Parmenides, expresses the author's intention about the importance and metaphorical value that the concept of the horse contains in the investigative path; that is to say, the logical-philosophical path. Horses, being strong, kind and pure animals, are strictly related to humans since ancient times, and represent at this point the author's adequate guide for the search for knowledge. Although divine maidens precede (κοῦραι ἡγεμόνευον, frag. 1.5) the chariot and horses, the author places more emphasis on the concept of horses, expressing by that way, their capacity for prudence (σύνεσις). This capacity for prudence consists in discerning and distinguishing what is appropriate and what is true according to human belief so that to follow it (what is true). Therefore, prudence, which means the wisdom of the guide, is necessary to penetrate everything (πάντα περῶντα, frag.1.33) that appears on this difficult path. This whole corresponds to the multitude of intellectual reasons and difficulties that will appear in this process. Therefore, Parmenides portrayed the investigation itself as a chariot on a path of knowledge and driven by horses, requiring orientation to reach the destination.

Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (2003, 230), in a comparison of similarities between the Poem of Parmenides and the dialogue of the *Phaedrus*, recognizes three fundamental elements that show a strict similarity between the two thinkers:

First, in Parmenides the charioteer is a young inexperienced philosopher-passenger guided by divine maidens to the realm of a deity who proclaims to him the philosophical truth he is seeking. In Plato, too, the charioteer has a philosophic purpose, the literary personification is part of an extended image that conveys (in the case of mortals) the control exercised by the relational part of the soul over its energetic and appetizing counterparts and (in the case of gods) the agreement between all parts of the soul. Second, in both authors, the charioteer's journey represents travel beyond known paths of human perception in a search for what true being is. Third, the destination of the two journeys is the realm of thought and eternal existence, which, in Parmenides, explicates the doctrine of being as the sole subject of thought and speech (B8.1-42), and, in Plato, explains the distinction between the souls of gods and men (*Phaedrus* 246-7). The charioteer's journey in Parmenides and Plato is an allegory that literally unites the two philosophical texts. It therefore serves as an example of an inter-conceptual relation between philosophical texts, representing a symbiosis of evolving content and literary form.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the first item Svetla Slaveva-Griffin offers, is the deficiency of her perspective on the guidance of the charioteer. The guide, who leads to the true, for the reasons mentioned above, is the horses and not the divine maidens. The Goddess also confirms this consideration, affirming to the narrator of the Poem, that: "from the mares that carry you, you arrive at our

home" (frag. 1.25). Parmenides uses the verb φέρουσιν[3], which teaches that the subject of the verb is the reason that, because of it, he himself managed to reach the "house" of the Goddess; that is to say, the knowledge.

In addition, Parmenides notes in the same fragment, that the "just" and the "true" (θέμις τε δίκη) is what brought you here and not the "bad destiny" (μοῖρα κακή), expressing that the right corresponds to the guide, the guiding force that has the capacity of prudence to guide what is true. Philosophy, itself, is a term whose very essence is based on (i) what is true, through deductions justified by reason, and (ii) what is just, as the fundamental motive that guides researchers to disinterested and unhindered wisdom. As stated in the *Parmenides*: "οὐδὲ περὶ ταῦτα τὴν πλάνην ἐπισκοπεῖν" (135e). The characteristics of this representative guide, as demonstrated above, are fulfilled by the horses, which Parmenides determines as prudent, in contrast to the maidens who only affirm their divine character-nature.

An added element that strengthens this perspective is the word θυμὸς, which appears in the first line of the Poem of Parmenides.[4] The masculine noun θυμὸς has a wide variety of meanings, as well as (a) soul, (b) will-intention, (c) audacity- courage, and (d) fury. In my opinion, the word θυμὸς is translated in this line as *volition*. Above all, it is a term that is strictly linked to philosophy and, more precisely, to the dialectical process. The original sense of the dialectic is clearly an instance of πρᾶξις; that is, a primarily individual process, an action that develops in a social interaction. This πρᾶξις is not a priori ἔργον, but is a matter of individual choice and decision. To properly practice dialectics, the individual has to be open to contradiction and appearance (Kovel 1998, 475). The constant search which based on reasoning without personal claims- that disorient the individual-researcher- is a basic requirement that completes the meaning of the dialectic. The word θυμός (volition-desire) that is mentioned at the beginning of the Poem of Parmenides (frag. 1), according to my point of view, characterizes all the above. The very will of a pole for the search of truth is the reason for the dialectical process that is part of the Poem of Parmenides. I consider this *individual volition* that corresponds to the narrator-traveler´s own desire to reach knowledge as the "dynamic motive" that attributes to the concept of dialectics.

In contrast to my own perspective, Matthew Cosgrove (2011, 39) considers that this word can refer to both the traveller and the mares that carry it and one of the

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[3] Φέρουσι (ν): Is the third-person plural theme, present tense of active voice and indicative mood of the verb φέρω. The subject of the verb is the feminine article in the nominative plural ταί, which constitutes a Doric form of the article αἱ. The feminine article ταί corresponds to the noun ἵπποι (horses-mares), which, as Parmenides himself informs us, are feminine.

[4] Ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ᾽ ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἱκάνοι.

main meanings of ϑυμὸς is the wild arousal of sexual appetite, which would fit very well with mares. Cosgrove agrees with the perspective of Charles Kahn (1970, 116) that, according to him, the traveller has a passive role and the guide of the way is in other hands, that is, in the hands of the maidens.

However, although I consider as valid the perspectives of Kahn and Cosgrove, about the passive role of the traveller, I do not agree with the correspondence of the word θυμὸς to mares.[5] In my view, if the mares had a fury representing an erotic sense, the predicate πολύφραστοι, which Cosgrove interprets as *talkative-loqua-cious*,[6] would have a meaning that is quite distant from the meaning that Cosgrove wants to express. Furthermore, nowhere in the Proem of the Poem does this characteristic appear that the word determines the subject that is, "talking too much". On the contrary, terms that are used by the author, as well as ϑέμις and δίκη, which refer to the reason for the traveller's arrival in the light – a reason strictly connected with the traveller's guide, which are the mares – can be considered more strongly linked to the noetic and conscious aspect that the word expresses. Hence, we have the following assumption that, if the previous premise about the word πολύφραστοι is accepted, it follows that the interpretation of ϑυμὸς as fury establishes a contradiction in the logical perception about the use of the two terms for the same subject.

The word θυμὸς expresses the individual's desire for his or her goal, and as Thomas Rickert (2014, 479) well notes, the verses of the Proem emphasize this "movement" that arises from the desire of man, guided by the mares. Therefore, I consider the term θυμὸς as corresponding to the traveller, a perspective that Max Latona (2008, 214) also supports, and expresses a very fundamental element for the author's purpose and the connection between the Parmenides tradition with the dialectical process, that is the core of what the personification of Parmenides emerged.

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[5] I. Crystal (2002, 209) claims that the dramatic scenario described in the Proem places Parmenides in a passive role and the goddess is revealing to him the structure of reality.

[6] The word πολύφραστος is a compound word that comes from the verb φράζω and not from the verb φρυάσσομαι that Cosgrove supports a relation with the word πολύφραστος. The meaning of the verb φράζω has several aspects (speaking, expressing, teaching, thinking, and observing) that, according to their own interpretation, an inclination of the meaning of the verb to the noetic can be observed.

Synthesis between the Poem of Parmenides and
the dialogue of the '*Parmenides*'

On the basis of all that has been described above, the process of analyzing the personification of Parmenides, within the Parmenides dialogue, will be directly compared with the specific elements of the Poem. By accepting that the mares in Parmenides' Poem have the role of the guide of the narrator-traveller, one could move on to the next argumentative step, which is the similarity of the Ibycus horse with the concept of horses in the Poem. In my opinion, there is a symbolic similarity between the Ibycus horse and the Parmenides mares, both representing the capable guide that guides the research volunteers to the path of truth and knowledge. Nevertheless, in *Parmenides*, this concept of the horse appears, but with a specified conversion: that the horse in *Parmenides* is directly assimilated with the very personality of Parmenides, containing its properties, that is, the authorization of the guide as a teacher, considering his old age, and his great fear. At this point, I consider that the interpretation of the personification with the horse does not have necessarily to focus on the personality of Ibycus or the literary extensions that express his intention about love. The dialectical process of the second longer part of the *Parmenides* (137c4 -166c) and the deductions of the eight hypotheses are the fundamental themes that, according to my point of view, Plato wants to highlight with this similarity, in order to criticize the Eleatic antiquated tradition on his metaphysical doctrine.

Parmenides, at this point in the dialogue (136e), has inherited from Socrates and Zeno the role of the most appropriate person regarding the teaching of the qualities of dialectics and the demonstration of a hypothesis that Parmenides is going to propose, the hypothesis of "If the One is" (136e). Therefore, Parmenides represents the logical guide that has the ability to correctly guide all dialogue participants to the path of truth. As shown above, Parmenides, in his own Poem, has entrusted this same role to the 'prudent horses' (ἵπποι πολύφραστοι). Therefore, what is observed is a direct parallelism between the two readings, in the case of the horse as a guide. First, the core of this parallelism, the concept of the horse and all that it represents, is offered for the character of Parmenides and his literary tradition. Second, there is another fundamental similarity between the two works, the subject of the great amount of reasoning that the guide has to go through-to penetrate the difficulties that arise from this amount of reasoning and lead to knowledge. In the Poem of Parmenides, the author mentions the phrase πάντα περῶντα (frag. 1.33), which was analyzed earlier in this section. In reading the *Parmenides*, Plato, through the character of Parmenides, introduces the phrase πέλαγος λόγων (137a6), a phrase that is strictly assimilated with the whole (πάντα) of Parmenides in his Poem.

As stated by Constance Meinwald (2016, 14), literary elements often provide a way for Plato to refer to passages in his own work or to the work of other authors; in effect they function as footnotes do for us, thus, literary elements are often important when we are in the 'retrospective' mode in the sense that he often uses literary elements to refer to things that he was already aware of and he could reasonably have expected from other readers to know about. At this point, the literary element present, the only one that appears in the entire dialogue of the *Parmenides*, stands out precisely in such a full and prosaic dialogue, as is the *Parmenides*, especially in comparison with the reading closest to that of a platonic work, such as *Phaedrus* (Cornford 1939, 64).

To conclude, in both cases, the guide has to go through a difficult process, *to cross to* the other side;[7] that is to say, from the side of ignorance to the side of knowledge. The conversion that exists in this parallelism is the element of the guide´s problematization. The aforementioned problematization is caused by the reasons shown above: (i) Parmenides' fear, (ii) the old age that characterizes both Parmenides and the Ibycus horse, and (iii) the great amount of reasoning.

Criticism of Eleatic Thought

In my view, and according to the analytical process that was exposed previously, Plato, uses the tradition of Parmenides on guide horses and elaborates his allegorical message in the reading of the *Parmenides* in such a way that he criticizes the Eleatic school, due to the fact that the latter represents an old and outdated thinking. If the 'horses' exemplify the character of Parmenides well, it is probably no coincidence that the philosopher from Elea, just before embarking on the dialectical exercise that forms the third part of the *Parmenides* (137c-166c), compares himself to an old horse (136e), showing a revealing reference, pointing back to his poem (Capra & Martinelli 2011, 170).

Based on this premise, it can be observed that this passage has a fundamental role regarding the structure of the *Parmenides* that justifies the demonstrative logical importance contained in the last part of the dialogue on an open question that has been introduced in the previous part, that is, the first part of the dialogue (127d-135c). In addition, and this is the crucial point of my proposal, this passage shows Plato's objective about his own critique of Eleatic thought that highlights the essential point whose meaning distinguishes the two metaphysical theories (Eleatic and Platonic), which in turn, corresponds to the problem between "henology" and

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[7] In the Poem of Parmenides, this "step" is characterized by the verb περαίνω (to pass, to cross). In the Parmenides dialogue, Plato uses the verb διανέω, which, according to Liddell & Scott, Plato uses the verb in the sense of 'to cross'.

"ontology", as it is presented in the hypotheses of the third part of the dialogue (137c-166c) and does not represent an indirect correspondence to the theme of ἔρως. I do not share the perspective of Catherine Zuckert (1998, 891-92) and Mario Regali[8] about the erotic aspect that Plato's reference to the poet Ibycus represents. According to my point of view, the present fragment is absolutely related to the metaphysical sense of the reading analysis of *Parmenides* for the reasons that have been explained previously, and is connected, to the literary harmony, the first part of the dialogue and the introduction of the problem treated within the third part where the dialectical process that justifies the deficiency of Eleatic thought is exposed, offering by this way, the justification about the deficiency of the introduced problem.

As Samuel Scolnicov (2003, 78) affirms, young Aristoteles is chosen as Parmenides' interlocutor because he is least likely to deviate from the matter at hand, that is to answer only to please Parmenides instead of answering "as he thinks". Parmenides wants an unspoiled mind. In the early dialogues, young respondents are, as a general rule, more trustworthy than adults with set opinions. This means that the role of Aristotle in the dialogue fulfils the characteristics of a faithful interlocutor of an affirmative sense, which allows Parmenides to express his own syllogism and dialectical method without any intervention in order to arrive at his own result that can show his own logical contradiction.

As Miller (1986, 71) pointed out for this specific point that separates the two extended parts of the dialogue, the connection of which is difficult for most scholars to interpret, it is important to focus on three key questions: (i) what sort of help are Parmenides' hypotheses for Socrates? (ii) What, if anything, are they about, and do they respond in any material way to the problems Parmenides has raised? (iii) Why, given that it is Socrates who is in aporia and needing help, does Parmenides exclude him from the conversation and engage the young Aristotle instead?

As far as I am concerned, the only help that Parmenides offers with the elaboration of his hypotheses is to teach that the dialectical method is the appropriate logical path for the search for truth and firm knowledge. However, on the core of the open problems of the first part of the dialogue, I consider that Plato, through the character of Parmenides, teaches the crucial metaphysical element, where the logical deficiency in Eleatic thought is justified and indirectly shows the coherence of the platonic doctrine about the Theory of Ideas and the line of truth.[9] The third

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[8] *Plato Journal*, forthcoming.

[9] The justification and the analytical process of this proposal have been exposed in my doctoral thesis and an attempt will be made to publish soon.

question finds a solution in the perspective of Samuel Scolnicov, which was mentioned above, playing a very technical role in the structure of the dialogue to strengthen the parricide of Parmenides by Plato. Although Parmenides seems to be the most suitable teacher to teach the qualities of the dialectical method, according to Plato, his ontological perspective is not sufficient to reach a firm knowledge about the unit and its relationship with the doctrine of the Forms.

Conclusion

Therefore, the personification of Parmenides with the horse of Ibycus has an allegorical sense that aims in (a) criticizing the Eleatic school through elements of the literary tradition of Parmenides (horses), and (b) elaborating this personification as an omen of the final result of the dialogue, about the ontological hypothesis of the second great part of the dialogue, that is, the most extensive part of the reading. Plato demonstrates the importance of the dialectical method, exposes its main characteristics and, at the same time, heralds the deficiency of the Eleatic school to respond to the problematic about the "One" and, by extension, to the arguments that criticize the theory of Ideas. This literary technique of Plato links the two great parts of the reading and, moreover, works as a prologue that predicts to the reader the deficiencies that will arise regarding the ontological premise that the famous parricide of the philosopher Elea will continue to elaborate in the *Parmenides*.

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