The ‘Neoplatonic’ Interpretation of Plato’s 
*Parmenides*

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**Abstract**

In his highly influential 1928 article ‘The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic “One”,’ E.R. Dodds argued, *inter alia*, that among the so-called Neoplatonists Plotinus was the first to interpret Plato’s *Parmenides* in terms of the distinctive three ‘hypostases’, One, Intellect, and Soul. Dodds argued that this interpretation was embraced and extensively developed by Proclus, among others. In this paper, I argue that although Plotinus took *Parmenides* to contain a sort of outline of the true metaphysical principles, he understood the One of the first hypothesis of the second part of the dialogue in a way importantly different from the way that Proclus understood it. The characterization of this One, especially its identity with the Idea of the Good of *Republic*, has significant ramification for Plotinus’ philosophy that set it apart from Proclus’ philosophy in ways hitherto infrequently noted. The widely accepted reasons for rejecting Proclus’ interpretation do not apply to the interpretation of Plotinus. The two different interpretations help explain why Proclus’ notorious proliferation of entities in the intelligible realm is not found in Plotinus.

**Keywords**

Plotinus – Proclus – Neoplatonism – the One – Plato – *Parmenides* – E.R. Dodds

I begin with the sweeping pronouncement made by the distinguished scholar Jean Trouillard: ‘Neoplatonism succeeded Middle Platonism the day that Platonists decided to seek in *Parmenides* the secret to Plato’s philosophy.
That moment seems to have occurred with Plotinus’s theory of three “ones”.

This paper will be focused on showing how deeply misleading this pronouncement is and on the consequences of tying so-called Neoplatonism to the interpretation of Plato’s dialogue *Parmenides.* On the positive side, it is true that there were some self-declared followers of Plato who did in fact seek in *Parmenides* the secret to Plato’s philosophy. This is clearly the case for Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and Damascius. Nevertheless, first, it hardly needs emphasizing that there never was a Neoplatonic interpretation of this dialogue; Proclus was clearly aware of conflicting interpretations among self-declared Platonists. In this regard, however, it is true that all of these self-declared followers of Plato, at least from Plotinus onward, took the dialogue seriously as opposed to taking it as a mere logical exercise unrelated to any substantive issue. Second, Trouillard’s remark assumes that taking the dialogue as a key to the secret of Plato’s philosophy is an innovation (hence the ‘Neo’ of Neoplatonism). This assumption excludes out of hand the possibility that early members of the Old Academy such as Aristotle and Speusippus interpreted the dialogue in a ‘Neoplatonic’ way even if they did not take it as the key to the secret. Third, this assumption also tends to exclude the possibility that the so-called Neoplatonists were right to take *Parmenides* as containing serious doctrine for the simple reason that Plato himself did, too. Fourth, the

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1 Trouillard 1973, 9. See also Trouillard 1960, 191-193 where he assumes the primacy of *Parmenides* yet claims that dialogues like *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* are used to bring a spiritual dimension to the interpretation of *Parmenides*. The so-called Middle Platonic interpretation which Trouillard has in mind—found in Alcinous most clearly—is one according to which the first principle of all is conflated with the second principle, Intellect or the Demiurge, such that it becomes the principle of all. Krämer 1964a, 21-126, showed that this interpretation has its origin in the Old Academy, in the philosophy of Xenocrates. Indeed, it is still present in Plotinus’ classmate Origen. It also seems to be present in one form in Plotinus’ disciple Amelius who, according to Proclus, *In Tim.* 1 306.1-14, held that the three primary hypostases are three types of Intellect. Proclus proceeds to demolish this interpretation based on the principle that the first hypostasis must be absolutely simple. He then, 1 309.14-310.2, cites Theodore of Asine as making the same error. See Proclus, *PT* II 4, for the rejection of Origen’s position. I should add that this relatively neat picture is complicated by the fact that the Middle Platonic interpretation does not, so far as we know, purport to be an interpretation of *Parmenides* as opposed to a general interpretation of Plato’s philosophy. Dillon 1993, 108-109, thinks that the negative attributes of God in Alcinous’ *Didaskalílos* X 4—ineffable, possessing no characteristics, and so on—are an ‘unmistakeable’ reference to the first hypothesis of the second part of *Parmenides*. By contrast, I will argue that the use of distinctions and arguments in this dialogue should be distinguished from a view according to which the dialogue has interpretative primacy.

2 For a concise history of interpretations of *Parmenides* in antiquity see Brisson 1994, 285-291.
identification of an interpretation of *Parmenides* with a ‘secret’ doctrine tends to invalidate evidence for the contents of this doctrine when this evidence is presented as other than esoteric. Fifth, and for my purposes most important, the ‘Neoplatonic’ interpretation of *Parmenides* is closely related to Aristotle’s account of Plato’s doctrine of first principles and to texts in *Republic*, *Sophist*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus* the 2nd Epistle, and elsewhere. To the extent that one wishes to discredit or refute that interpretation, one will be inclined to resist or reject Aristotle’s testimony—especially as this refers to unwritten teachings of Plato—and also any interpretation or reading of the passages in the dialogues that tend to support this testimony. Accordingly, a focus on the supposed Neoplatonic interpretation of *Parmenides* raises the stakes to a high level for the success or failure of that interpretation.

Here are the lineaments of the argument I am about to present. Plato’s *Parmenides* was in all probability not intended to be a *direct* expression of the basic principles of Platonic metaphysics, the so-called three hypostases of One, Intellect, and Soul. It was, though, intended to examine ‘logically’ (λογικῶς) the properties of these principles and their relation to everything else. Therefore, the second part of the dialogue in particular is an *indirect* expression of Plato’s commitment to these principles; indirect in the sense that it addresses only the logical issues surrounding the positing of first principles. By ‘logically’ I mean what Aristotle meant when in *Metaphysics* he introduced his discussion of ‘essence’ (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι) by saying that he will first make some ‘logical’ remarks about it and later in Book Lambda when he criticizes Plato, among others, for their ‘logical’ inquiries into principles and causes. The second part of *Parmenides* is a rigorous logical investigation into the properties of metaphysical principles. These metaphysical principles are both explicitly and

3 Allen 1983, 189-195, is an excellent example of the use of a misinterpretation of *Parmenides* to undercut Aristotle’s testimony. Allen assumes that Plotinus’ understanding of *Parmenides* is representative of the one and only Neoplatonic interpretation. He dismisses this as based on Plotinus’ mysticism and so obviously irrelevant to the interpretation of Plato’s dialogues.

4 Cf. de Vogel 1953, 58-59. Also, Proclus, *In Parm. 1* 630.37-635.27 Steel (using the more familiar numbering of Cousin), who rejects the interpretation of the dialogue as a mere logical exercise. However, at *In Parm. 1* 652.29-37, v 1015.27-32, Proclus insists that *Parmenides* is a logical exercise with truth about reality as its goal; against Plotinus, he finds the reality thus analyzed exclusively or primarily in *Parmenides* itself. Steel 2002, explains and eventually rejects the interpretation of the dialogue according to which it is a logical exercise, providing training in disputation. This is not the position I am advancing when I say that the dialogue consists of a logical investigation.

implicitly treated in the dialogues and explicitly indicated in Aristotle’s testimony. In particular, the Idea of the Good in *Republic*, the Forms, the principles of Limit and Unlimited in *Philebus*, a divine Intellect or Demiurge in *Timaeus*, and Soul in numerous places, including especially *Laws* 10, are the metaphysical principles indirectly treated in *Parmenides*. Aristotle’s testimony in regard to the Good, its identification with the One, and the mention of the Indefinite Dyad or Great-and-Small confirm the presence of these principles in Plato’s philosophical thinking. This testimony is fraught with difficulties not the least reason for which is that Plato had apparently not completely worked out his own account of the principles, especially their dynamic relations. Consequently, all those ancient philosophers who saw in the second part of *Parmenides* the basic metaphysical principles in the background were correct to do so. But they were incorrect to claim to see there any indication of the dynamic relations among these, in particular the derivations or causal relations among them.

On behalf of the above argument I will try to show that there is a fundamental difference in the way that Plotinus treats *Parmenides* and the way that virtually all of his Platonic successors do. The above incorrect reading of *Parmenides* is not Plotinus’; that reading probably originates with Iamblichus and is amplified by Proclus, Damascius, and many others. When I say this, I take the sentence in the 7th *Epistle*, 341B7-C2, where Plato disparages the accounts of those who purport to speak about the matters on which ‘I am working’ (σπουδάζω), to indicate that Plato had probably not even late in life worked out the details of the dynamics of his metaphysics. By contrast, I think the static architecture had probably been in place very early on in his career.

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6 Note that Forms in general are not ultimate principles, but somehow ‘reducible’ to ultimate principles, according to Aristotle’s testimony. Still, the dialogue speaks ‘logically’ about the properties of Forms as such.

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8 In this regard, F.M. Cornford 1939, 131-34, was correct to question the Neoplatonic interpretation’s identification of the One of the first hypothesis (137C4-142A8, henceforth H1) and the Idea of the Good of *Republic*. The identification of the two is not straightforward, but then why should we suppose that it must be so? Nevertheless, I will argue that it can be shown that the subject of H1 suitably analyzed must in fact be identical with the Idea of the Good. We should reach this conclusion even if we were to be convinced that Plato himself had not worked out completely how this is to be done.

9 This is the position briefly outlined in Gurtler 1992, 443-445. See also Blumenthal 2000, 175.

10 If the *Anonymous Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* is really by Porphyry, as Pierre Hadot 1961 argued, then perhaps the so-called Neoplatonic interpretation with all its attendant problems is traceable to Plotinus’ own disciple. But see below n.66. It is I think worth considering that Iamblichus’ making *Parmenides* into a canonical theological text was
I realize that I must make a sharp distinction between the Platonic adherence to Plato's metaphysics principles in general—which certainly antedates Plotinus—and the ‘new’ interpretation of Parmenides which leads to some misunderstandings of these principles, including their dynamics.¹¹

The highly suggestive and influential article of Eric Dodds in 1928, for all its considerable learning, is a principal source for the conflation of one Neoplatonic interpretation of Parmenides (the one I take to be incorrect) with the substance of Aristotle's account of Plato's metaphysical principles and even with the references to these principles in the dialogues. There are two central points in Dodds's paper which I wish to dispute. First, although Dodds will go on to claim that Plotinus is not the originator of the Neoplatonic interpretation of Parmenides, he maintains that Plotinus is certainly one major proponent of this interpretation. Second, Dodds argues that this interpretation can be traced back at least to Moderatus of Gades in the late first century C.E. Here Dodds mentions in passing that this interpretation may well go back to the Old Academy in the writings of Speusippus. What I shall show is that Dodds unjustifiably assumes that the Platonists' embrace of Plato's metaphysical principles is essentially tied to the interpretation of Parmenides.¹² Accordingly, motivated by his wishing to have for polemical purposes a Greek philosophical scripture as a prophylactic against Christians with their scripture.

¹¹ Beierwaltes 1985, 155-174, uses the word ‘dynamic’ (dynamisch) differently, such that he can argue that Proclus has a dynamic metaphysics. By ‘dynamic’ Beierwaltes means ‘relative’. That is, if two principles in the system are ἕνωμον, it follows that they are relatively identical (ταυτόν), but also different (ἕτερον). This logical distinction is, according to Beierwaltes the core of Proclus' dynamic metaphysics. See also Beierwaltes 1965, 34-35; Gersh 1973, 103, ‘dynamic logical relation’. As I will show, Proclus certainly wants to recognize causal dynamism in Plato's metaphysics. Nevertheless, his rejection of dynamism in the first principle of all skewers his overall account of the metaphysics.

¹² It should be noted that Dodds's paper appeared more than 30 years prior to the seminal works of the so-called Tübingen School, and the subsequent shift in emphasis in the interpretation of Plato's philosophy from the dialogues to the unwritten teachings. This shift increased the prominence of the direct and indirect testimony of Aristotle and the later tradition. Dodds seems to assume that an interpretation of Plato's metaphysics must be an interpretation of one or more dialogues. One consequence of the Tübingen School's case is that no one dialogue—or the sum of the dialogues—is likely to contain the ‘secret’ to Plato's metaphysics. Nevertheless, leading figures of this School tend to follow Dodds's line on the primacy of Parmenides for Plotinus. See, e.g., Krämer
if one follows Dodds’s argument—whether or not this interpretation goes back to the Old Academy—its persuasiveness will have a great deal to do with one’s acceptance of the claim that the metaphysical principles are authentically Platonic. It is, unfortunately, all too common a view that the lack of persuasiveness of ‘the Neoplatonic’ interpretation of *Parmenides* invalidates the entire direct and indirect tradition of testimony regarding Plato’s philosophy as well as the interpretation of the dialogues that supports and is supported by that testimony.

Dodds provides a score or so of passages from *Enneads* that he supposes repeat or otherwise endorse things that are said in the first hypothesis (H1) and the second, H2 (142B1-155E3) of *Parmenides*.13 All these passages concern the properties of the One of H1 that is absolutely one or simple and the properties of the One-Being of H2 that is intrinsically complex. There is no question that Dodds is correct in supposing that Plotinus finds the One in H1 and his second principle, Intellect, in H2 (and the third, Soul, in H3 (155E4-157B5)). He tells us exactly this:

But Parmenides in Plato [as opposed to the historical Parmenides] speaks more accurately when he distinguishes from each other the primary One, which is strictly One, from the secondary One which is a one-many, and the third which is one and many. In this way he, too, is in harmony with the three natures.14

(1959), 487ff; Halfwassen (1992), 187-192. See also Armstrong, 1940, 17, who refers to the ‘Neo-Platonic exegesis of *Parmenides*’ given by Proclus, and . . . also found in Plotinus’; Volkmann-Schluck 1966, 143, who believes Plotinus takes *Parmenides* as a ‘Grundbuch des Platonismus’; Saffrey and Westerink 1968, lxxxv-lxxxix, who explicitly follow Dodds; Halfwassen 1999, 415, claims that Proclus’ understanding of the One of H1 ‘differs in no way from that of Plotinus’. Horn, 2006, 12, characterizes Proclus as “extremer Unitarist” who reads Plato entirely in the light of his interpretation of the second part of *Parmenides*. Horn, 13-14, seems to assume that Plotinus shares this view. Cürsgen 2007, 16-17 and p.18, holds that Dodds’s interpretation, particularly insofar as it applies to Plotinus ‘gilt allerdings heute weitgehend als unbestreitbar’.

13 Dodds 1928, 132-133.

14 v 1, 8. 23-27: ‘Ο δὲ παρὰ Πλάτωνι Παρμενίδης ἀκριβέστερον λέγων διαιρεῖ ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων τὸ πρῶτον ἕν, ὁ ἐκ μικρύστερου ἕν, καὶ δεύτερον ἕν πολλὰ λέγων, καὶ τρίτον ἕν καὶ πολλά. Καὶ σύμφωνος οὕτως καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστι ταῖς φύσει ταῖς τρισὶν. Most translators supply something like ‘the doctrine of’ or ‘die Lehre von’ before the words ‘the three natures’. I would resist this as unnecessary and misleading since it is implausible to take the second part of *Parmenides* as directly or straightforwardly expressing doctrine. Igal has the more accurate version: ‘Parménides está de acuerdo con las tres Naturalezas’. On my interpretation, Plato has Parmenides make ‘logical’ remarks about hypothetical principles. What he says is indeed
Notice that in the last sentence Plotinus implies that the doctrine does not originate in *Parmenides*, but that what Parmenides says there is in harmony with the three principles. In other words, it cannot be that Plotinus is saying that what Parmenides says in *Parmenides* is in harmony with what Plato says in *Parmenides*. What he is saying is that Plato is in accord with the claim that there are fundamentally three ‘hypostases’ a claim, according to Plotinus, that antedates Plato himself. We need not suppose that we can identify a specific source for the expression of this metaphysical position, since Plotinus (1) does not believe it originates with Plato and (2) he clearly believes that Aristotle accurately represents the position even though Aristotle refers to no specific dialogues; rather, he takes it from Plato’s unwritten doctrines as much as he does from any reading of these dialogues. In fact, in the vast majority of references to this dialogue, Plotinus makes use of the logical distinctions made therein. He does not refer specifically to *Parmenides* for insight into the properties of the principles beyond the perfunctory remarks that H1 concerns that which is ‘one’, H2 that which is ‘one-many’, and H3, that which is ‘one and many’.

When Plotinus, however, speaks of the operational properties of the One and Intellect and Soul and when he speaks of the generation of Intellect from the One and Soul from the One with the instrumentality of Intellect, far from relying on *Parmenides*, he draws his argument from elsewhere in the dialogues, from independent philosophical reasoning and, most importantly, from Aristotle himself. For the principal operational property of the One Plotinus draws on is that it is the Good and that it is primary ἐνέργεια. These two properties

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15 See VI 1, 8.1-14 where Plotinus emphasizes the antiquity of the doctrine, appealing equally to the 2nd Epistle and *Timaeus*. Combès 2002, x, says that Plotinus ‘draws his inspiration from *Parmenides*,’ a remark that seems to me to be seriously misleading.

16 There are about 100 discernible references to *Parmenides* in *Enneads*, expanding somewhat on the citations found in the *index fontium* of Henry and Schwyzer. See Charrue 1978, 43-84. Cürsgen 2007, 20, has a convenient digest of the passages in *Enneads* correlated with the specific texts of *Parmenides*. The number of references to each of *Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, *Symposium*, *Timaeus* is, however, considerably greater. The number of references to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is about double that of the number of references to *Parmenides*. It is also true that there are dozens of uses made of the logical distinctions in *Parmenides* by Aristotle himself in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*.

17 It is the essential diffusiveness of the Good that is most relevant here. Of course, that the One is self-diffusive follows from its identification with the Good, as witnessed by
(the possession of which are not supposed by Plotinus to compromise the simplicity of the first principle) provide the foundation for the dynamics of the metaphysical structure.\textsuperscript{18} It is much more likely the case that Plotinus derives Aristotle. See below n.72. On Plotinus' use of the term ἐνέργεια for the One see \textsuperscript{v} IV, 2.28-39, especially 35, συνούσης ἐνέργειας; \textsuperscript{v} I, 6.38; \textsuperscript{v} I, 8, 20.9-15, especially τελείοτατον το πρῶτον [ἐνέργεια]; \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 12.22-37, especially 36, ἢ γάρ ἐνέργεια μόνον ἢ σὺδ' ὅλως ἐνέργεια; \textsuperscript{v} I, 8, 13.5-9.

Counter evidence may be thought to be found at \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 2.21, \textsuperscript{i} III, 9, 9.8, and \textsuperscript{v} VI, 6.1-11, where Plotinus says that Intellect is πρῶτη ἐνέργεια and (in the latter two passages) that the One is ἀνενέργητον. Also, \textsuperscript{v} III, 3, 10.16-18 where the One's simplicity seems to preclude its ἐνέργεια. The context of these passages reveals that Intellect is the first actuality of a potency and that all actualities are directed to the Good. So, the One is not an actuality nor does it actualize anything; it is simple activity. At \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 8, 16-17, the One is an ἐνέργημα ἑαυτοῦ, meaning that it is not an actualized result of any potency, but identical with its activity, as the next line indicates: [the One is] ὡς ἐνεργεῖ αὑτὸς. There are three passages where Plotinus qualifies ἐνέργεια with ὦν (‘sort of,’ ‘in a way’), his usual way to indicate that the noun is to be understood analogically, not literally. But in all three passages, \textsuperscript{v} VIII, 3, 2.33; \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 7, 4.77; \textsuperscript{v} VIII, 16, 24, Plotinus uses the word to indicate that the One's ἐνέργεια is not distinct from its being or existence or from any other putative property of it. In \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 7, 4.95-50: ἢ τι μᾶλλον κατὰ τὸ εἶναι ἢ ἐνέργεια ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τὸ εἶναι Henry-Schwyzer, if Kirchhoff’s emendation of δι' to οὗτος is necessary, as I would contend it is, then Plotinus is, with the use of κατὰ, clearly making the point that no compositeness resulting from predication is correct in reference to the One. That is, the One's activity is no more predicated of its being than is its being predicated of its activity. Cf. \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 8, 10.28-31: μηθὲνας αὑτοῦ κατηγορεῖσθαι δυναμένου; \textsuperscript{v} III, 12.51: εἰ γάρ τι ἐν, οὐχ ἐν αὐτοῦν; \textsuperscript{v} IV, 1.11: [the One is] συμβάσεως ἐξ ἔξω πάσης καὶ συνθέσεως. Cf. Aristotle, \textit{Pr. An.} 1 24a17, 29, for the canonical expression τι κατὰ τὸν εἶναι to indicate predication. By contrast Proclus, \textit{In Parm.} \textsuperscript{vii} 1172.18-19, says: πρὸ ἐνεργείας ἕστιν πάσης τὸ ἔν. Also, \textsuperscript{v} XI, 106.5-6, where Proclus rejects the view of those who place ἐνέργεια prior to οὐσία. Cf. \textit{Pr. An.} 17, 50.14: μήτε ἐνεργοῦντος; \textsuperscript{i} III, 1.6.1: καὶ πάσης ἐνεργείας καὶ καταιγραφημένην [the primary cause, that is, the One]. At \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 17, 4.10 and \textsuperscript{i} IX, 7, 1, 19-20 Plotinus says the One is ἐπέκεινα ἐνεργείας, which follows from its being ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας and ἐπέκεινα νοῦ. That is, just as the fact that it transcends οὐσία and νοῦ does not mean that it transcends being altogether, so the fact that it transcends ἐνεργεία (i.e., the ἐνεργεία of οὐσία and νοῦ) does not mean that it transcends activity altogether. It means that it transcends being or activity when these imply complexity. The One’s ἐνεργεία is its being. Cf. \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 10.29-31 where neither being nor essence can be predicated (κατηγορεῖσθαι) of the One.

We can add the properties (= ‘not inappropriate names’) of βούλησις, \textsuperscript{v} VIII, 13.21; ἔρως and ἐρώς ἑαυτοῦ, \textsuperscript{v} VIII, 15.1-2; and ‘transcendent thinking’ (ὑπερνόησις), \textsuperscript{v} VIII, 16.33. Interestingly, Proclus, \textit{In ALC.} \textsuperscript{vii} 117, 96.10-11, agrees that ἔρως is ἐνεργεία, but ἔρως only descends from the intelligible realm, not from the One. See 52, 43.12-13. For Plotinus, the One is also ‘self-caused’ (ἀὑτοῦ ἑαυτοῦ). See \textsuperscript{i} VIII, 14.41. It is instructive that Plotinus is not deterred from using a reflexive pronoun for the One by the \textit{Parmenides} arguments of \textsuperscript{Hi}, e.g., 138A2-B6, that the One cannot be in itself (‘subjective genitive’) or in another (‘objective genitive’).
his understanding of Plato's metaphysics primarily from dialogues other than *Parmenides* along with Aristotle's testimony and the testimony of the entire Platonic tradition than that he derives it from that dialogue alone or even primarily. He reads *Parmenides* to discover the logical properties of the principles; he does not start with *Parmenides*, taking it as a primary statement of the principles, and then try to fit the rest of the dialogues and the testimony to that reading.\(^\text{19}\) I conclude that this is the shape of his thinking because what Plotinus thinks is of overwhelming importance for Platonism is the dynamism of the system not the mere assertion of its basic architecture. This follows from his respectful acknowledgement and then disregard of those who were Platonists *avant la lettre*, so to speak.

Dodds's second claim is that the Neoplatonic interpretation of *Parmenides* has its origin in the so-called Neopythagoreanism of Moderatus of Gades.
I am not interested here in how Neopythagoreanism is related to Neoplatonism since the error made by Dodds is not affected by these artificial categorizations. Dodds cites a text from Simplicius’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* in which he is apparently reporting Moderus’s interpretation of Parmenides. The relevant line are:

For this man [Moderatus?]\(^{20}\) says, following the Pythagoreans, that the first One is above being and all essence, the second One which is real being and intelligible, he says are the Forms, whereas the third, which is psychical, partakes of the One and of Forms, whereas the ultimate nature, which is that of sensibles and which is derived from this does not partake, but has been ordered as a reflection of those Forms, by contrast with the matter in sensibles which is primary non-being, is a shadow of that which underlies the plurality of Forms [intelligible matter] and stands outside of this.\(^{21}\)

Dodds think that we have here clear evidence of what later became the Neoplatonic interpretation of *Parmenides*. He argues that the words ‘according to the Pythagoreans’ should be understood as ‘along Pythagorean lines’ thereby assuming the association of Plato with Pythagoreanism that goes back to Aristotle. Dodds rejects Zeller’s contention that Simplicius is not here quoting Moderus’s view but that of other unnamed Pythagoreans. Zeller maintained that it is Plato’s view that is here been exposed, but not from *Parmenides*; rather, this is taken from the 2nd Epistle. Dodds is correct that the ‘three Ones’ are not directly in *Parmenides* and hence that Simplicius is not

\(^{20}\) See Saffrey and Westerink 2003, xxx-xxv, who argue that the word οὗτος refers not to Moderus but to Plato, according to the interpretation of Moderus by Porphyry, and recorded by Simplicius. If this is true, then Moderus is not a safe candidate for originator of the so-called Neoplatonic interpretation. Porphyry is basically following Plotinus. Rist 1962, 398-99, suggests, rightly in my view, that Moderus’ use of *Parmenides* was only as confirmation for his otherwise Pythagoreanizing interpretation of Platonism. Hubler 2010, argues against Dodds that Simplicius’ citation of Moderus is not an indication of the latter’s Neoplatonic interpretation of the dialogue, but of Simplicius’ interposition on Moderus of his own (Neoplatonic) interpretation.

\(^{21}\) Simplicius, *In Phys.* 230.36-231.5: οὗτος γὰρ κατὰ τοὺς Πυθαγορείους τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἐν ὑπὲρ τὸ εἶναι καὶ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν ἀποφαίνεται, τὸ δὲ δεύτερον ἐν, ἀπερ ἐστὶ τὸ ὄντως ὅν καὶ νοητόν, τὰ εἴδη φησὶ εἶναι, τὸ δὲ τρίτον, ἀπερ ἐστὶ τὸ ψυχικόν, μετέχειν τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ τῶν εἰδῶν, τὴν δὲ ἀπὸ τούτου τελευταίαν φύσιν τὴν τῶν αἰσθητῶν οὐσίαν μηδὲ μετέχειν, ἀλλὰ κατ’ ἐμφασιν ἐκείνων κεκοσμηθεῖσα, τῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς ὕλης τοῦ μή ὄντος πρώτως ἐν τῷ ποσῷ ὄντος οὐσίας σκίασμα καὶ ἑτὶ μᾶλλον ὑποβεβηκμένα καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου.
quoting Plato. He is also correct in saying that these ‘three Ones’ belong to an interpretation of Plato, but there is no evidence that this is a direct interpretation of Parmenides. As we have already seen, Plotinus finds the three Ones in Parmenides, but these are principles otherwise discernible in the dialogues and in Aristotle’s testimony. As much can be said for the 2nd Epistle wherein the mention of the three grades of reality—the king of all, things of the second order, and those of the third—is interpreted by Plotinus to represent metaphorically the three metaphysical principles. Both Zeller and Dodds seem to suppose that there must be one dialogue or letter which is the baseline for interpretation, but there is no evidence to support this. On the contrary, the nature of Aristotle’s testimony makes it clear that the baseline is simply Plato’s philosophy as this was partially revealed in the dialogues, but also transmitted orally. And the words ‘partially revealed’ must be understood not to indicate that there are discrete doctrines the exposition of which is confined to discrete dialogues but rather the unified metaphysical vision is revealed from various angles including by its application to the solution to specific philosophical problems. There is actually not one bit of evidence that prior to Iamblichus Parmenides was taken to have a unique place as a repository of Platonic metaphysics or theology. On the contrary, the privileged positioning of that dialogue seems to begin with Iamblichus and then to find its fullest expression in Proclus, who is himself following the lead of his mentor Syrianus.

See 2nd Epistle 312E. Cf. Plotinus, V 5, 3, VI 7, 42, et cet. Proclus, PT I 5, 24.23-25.2, treats the 2nd Epistle as supplementary to Parmenides just as I am claiming Plotinus treats Parmenides in relation to the other dialogues, to Aristotle’s testimony, and to independent philosophical considerations. The 2nd Epistle was generally regarded as genuine in antiquity. That we no longer accept this is irrelevant to my main argument.

For the likely Iamblichean origin of the view of the primacy of Parmenides, see Proclus, In Tim. I 13.14-19 and Anonymous Introduction to Plato’s Philosophy 26, 39.18-21. Proclus expands on this claim at some length in his PT I 7, 31.7-32.12 and I 8, 32.15-18 in reply to an objection that Plato’s theological principles are found variously and unsystematically in all the dialogues. Against this objection, he claims that all Plato’s principles of theology are contained in Parmenides. Cf. I 12, 56.17-24. This dialogue is the baseline for the interpretation of all the rest. See Horn 2006, 12. For Proclus’ dependence on Syrianus in this interpretation, see In Parm. VI 1061.31-1064.12. The theological orientation of Proclus is not to be discounted in understanding his interpretation of the metaphysics of Parmenides. See Beierwaltes 1985, 157-158; Abbate 2008, 11-16; 70-73; Abbate 2010. As Steel 2000, 384, points out, Proclus’ interpretation of Parmenides depends on an antecedently arrived at systematic theology, not the other way around.
A different and provocative line of research has been taken by Prof. Jens Halfwassen in recent years. Halfwassen wants to push the ‘Neoplatonic’ interpretation of Parmenides back to Speusippus, nephew of Plato and his successor as head of the Academy. If, in fact, Speusippus interprets Parmenides in the way that some later Platonists do, this presumably lends weighty support to the accuracy of the later interpretation given Speusippus’ close connection to Plato himself.24 There is a crucial passage in this regard in Proclus’s Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides in which he specifically mentionsSpeusippus as expressing a view on the principles which he (Speusippus) attributes to the ‘ancients’.

For they [the ancients] held that the One is higher than being and is the source of being; and they delivered it even from the status of a principle. For they held that, given the One in itself conceived as separated and alone without the other things, with no additional element, nothing else would come into existence. And so they introduced the Indefinite Dyad as the principle of beings.25

Just before this citation from Speusippus, Proclus gives the rationale for this claim.

If the first One participated in being in some way, although it is higher than being and produces it, it would be a one which appropriated the existence which belongs to being. But it is not some one, and is not the cause just of being but of everything, even though it is the cause of being before the rest. And if each thing necessarily participates in its

25 Proclus, In Parm. vii 504.4-9: Le unum melius ente putantes et a quo le ens et ab ea que secundum principium habitudine ipsum liberauerunt; existimantes autem quod, si quis le unum ipsum seorsum et solum meditatum sine alis secundum se ipsum suadere, nullum alterum elementum ipsi apponens, nichil utique fiet aliorum, interminabilem dualitatem entium principium inducens. The text here is only available in the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke. As Halfwassen notes, 2006, 381, this passage contains the only testimony we possess regarding why Plato introduced the Indefinite Dyad, namely, that without it, the utter simplicity and transcendence of the One would result in their being nothing else. The Old Academic provenance of this passage has been challenged by Steel 2002, unsuccessfully in my view.
cause, there must be a ‘one’ subordinate to the simply One and prior to being.26

It is probably the case that Proclus assumed that Speusippus is interpreting *Parmenides* in a way similar to his own interpretation. But in fact the quotation does not mention *Parmenides*. And the claim that the One is ‘higher than being’ and ‘the source of being’ can be directly derived from what is said about the Idea of the Good in *Republic* when combined with Aristotle’s identification of the Good with the One.27 And yet once again, we need not deny that Speusippus saw in *Parmenides* the metaphysical architecture beneath the logical investigation.28

Especially interesting is the reason given for the introduction of the Indefinite Dyad. We may assume, I think, that the introduction of the Indefinite Dyad as a principle by Plato is confirmed by Aristotle’s testimony. That the Indefinite Dyad is derived from the One-Good is also implied by that testimony.29 Is the Indefinite Dyad discoverable in *Parmenides*? At 143A2, near the beginning of H2, Parmenides argues that the One-Being must be ‘unlimited in multitude’ (ἀπειρον πλήβει) because One and Being, taken separately, leave us with a One which has being and Being which is one. So, these are indefinitely divisible. Is, then, One-Being the ‘principle of beings’? It is not at all unreasonable that a Platonist should try to match up the Indefinite Dyad with a principle the logical properties of which are examined in H2. But the problem with

26 *In Parm.* VII 500.27-501.2. Here is Steel’s Greek retroversion: Εἰ γὰρ ἐσται τὸ πρῶτως ἐν μετέχον πάς τού ὄντος, ὑπαρξεν προσλαβόν μὴ γὰρ δι τὶ ἐν ὑ ὄντος, ἀλλά πάντων αἴτουν, εἰ καὶ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων τοῦ ὄντος καὶ εἰ ἕκαστον ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αἴτους, ἐσται τί ἄλλο <πρὸ> τοῦ ὄντος ε, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁπλῶς ἐνός ὑφεστώς.

27 See *Meta.* N 4, 09b13-15; *EE* A 8, 1218a15-32. Halfwassen 2006, 371, is no doubt correct that the identification of the Good with the One was accepted by almost all ancient Platonists. But there is no evidence that the Good was understood to be identical with the One of H1, as interpreted by Proclus.

28 If Speusippus did indeed interpret *Parmenides* in a ‘Neoplatonic’ fashion, it is significant that, unlike Plotinus, he did not identify the One with the Good. See Aristotle, *Meta.* Α 7, 1072b30-1073a3 (= fr. 53 Isnardi Parente): ὅσοι δὲ ὑπολαμβάνουσιν, ὡσπερ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι καὶ Σπεύσιππος τὸ κάλλιστον καὶ ἄριστον μὴ ἐν ἀρχῇ εἶναι, διὰ τοῦ καὶ τῶν φυτῶν καὶ τῶν ζώων τὰς ἀρχὰς αἴτια μὲν εἶπαι τὸ δὲ καλὸν καὶ τέλειον ἐν τοῖς ἐκ τούτων, οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὀςονται (Those who suppose, like the Pythagoreans and Speusippus, that the most beautiful and the best are not in the first principle, because the principles are causes of plants and of living things, whereas the beautiful and the complete are in the things that come from these, do not think correctly). Cf. frs. 57, 58, 64, 66.

29 See *Meta.* N 1, 1087b4-12.
this approach is that nowhere in *Parmenides* is the operation of the One on the putative Indefinite Dyad discussed. Nor, indeed, is the generation of the Indefinite Dyad addressed. According to Aristotle’s testimony, it is ambiguous whether the operation of the One on the Indefinite Dyad is an operation on an independent principle or whether (as in Plotinus) the Indefinite Dyad is first itself derived from the One and then operated on by the One. If Plato is thought to have wanted to avoid an irreducible dualism, a great deal turns on how the Indefinite Dyad is supposed to be derived from the One. My claim is that the resources for arriving at a solution to this problem are not available in *Parmenides*. And much of the confusion and disagreement among later Platonists is owing precisely to their assumption that, on the contrary, the solution must somehow be there.

The principal hurdle facing those who are resolved to expose the dynamics of the Platonic system on the basis of an interpretation of *Parmenides* is that the One of H1 is described in a completely negative manner such that it can scarcely be thought to have a causal role to play in the generation of anything. Therefore, the One that serves this role has to be located in H2. But it cannot just be the One-Being which, at least according to Speusippus, and followed by

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30 See *Tim.* 48C2-6 with 53D4-7 where Plato has Timaeus decline to speak about ‘the principle or principles’ (ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἀρχῆς) of everything. Had this discussion occurred in *Timaeus*, dynamic or causal relations would have presumably been at the forefront. Plato also calls these principles στοιχεῖα (‘elements’) which is how Aristotle characterizes the One and the Indefinite Dyad. See *Meta.* A 6, 987b19-20.

31 In the above quotation Proclus does indeed maintain that the One is the cause of everything. See *In Parm.* VI, 1108.19-20. Exactly how this is so is, for Proclus, a vexed matter. In *PT I* 12, 58.11-22, Proclus argues that the last four negative hypotheses of *Parmenides* (‘if the One is not’, ‘if there is no One’), since they are reductio arguments, show that everything depends on the One for its existence. In *PT II* 4, Proclus excoriates the interpretation of Origen, the classmate of Plotinus, who argued that since the putative subject of H1 cannot exist, the real One must be the One of H2, that is, it must be identified with Intellect. Proclus calls this a ‘Peripatetic innovation’. Evidently, the desire to avoid such an innovation is part of the motive for assigning to the One of H1 a distinct role to play. It is just that, within the confines of *Parmenides*, this role cannot be described in other than negative terms. The negative description does not imply non-existence; it implies only ineffability. See *In Parm.* VII 518.13-28. Also, see *PT I* 7, 29.22-25, where Proclus explicitly cites *Parmenides* as showing that the One is αἰτία τῶν ἐξήλθον. One looks in vain, however, for such a passage in that dialogue. Proclus seems to acknowledge this only two pages later, 8, 31.16, when he says that the One ‘transcends causality’ (ἐπέκειται τῆς αἰτίας). Cf. *In Parm.* I 641.12-13, where Proclus says that in the dialogue Parmenides is undertaking an examination of all beings from the perspective of the One of H1.
Proclus, is indefinitely divisible and is identified with the Indefinite Dyad. So, we have to posit within H2 a One which is the principle of One-Being or otherwise make the One-Being to be derived from a One that is capable of actually causing it. Needless to say, none of this is in H2. On the one hand, *Parmenides* in its logical austerity does not have the resources to explain how the first principle of all has any sort of causal efficacy. On the other hand, the One taken as the Idea of the Good, which is explicitly said to exercise causality on the being and essence of Forms, makes a good deal more sense. At the same time, we need not suppose that to characterized the One of H1 as absolutely simple because absolutely one or incomposite is wrong. We can, I think, suppose that Plato left it to the reader to figure out how this One operates. We need not suppose that Plato himself had no solution to this problem.

Proclus unambiguously identifies the One of H1 with the Idea of the Good in *Republic*. He also tries to reconcile the causal role of the Idea of the Good with absence of causality, or even the conditions for the possibility

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32 I want to emphasize here that Proclus certainly dwells at length in many places on the dynamic relations within the intelligible realm. See Gersh 1973, *passim* and esp. ch.4. See ET §33, 36.11-19 on the centrality of (κυκλικὴ) ἐνέργεια in the triadic structuring of the intelligible realm. Nevertheless, Proclus does not get his metaphysical dynamics from *Parmenides*. It is also important to emphasize that Proclus, unlike Plotinus, does not, owing to his focus on *Parmenides*, consider any dynamical aspect to the first principle. This makes his dynamics of the intelligible realm problematic, to say the least.

33 The explicitly aporetic conclusion of *Parmenides* (at least with respect to the problems raised in the first part of the dialogue) mirrors the explicitly aporetic conclusion of *Theaetetus*. The latter dialogue, like the former, is a ‘logical’ investigation of the properties of ἐπιστήμη which must be (the logical ‘must’) both in fallible and have as its ‘objects’ what is real. Hence ἐπιστήμη cannot be αἴσθησις nor can it be ἀληθὴς δόξα, nor even ἀληθὴς δόξα with a λόγος added. We need to go to other dialogues such as *Republic* and *Timaeus* for a positive account of ἐπιστήμη. Horn 1995, 96, seems to think that to insist on the explicitly aporetic conclusion of *Parmenides* is to admit that it is implicitly aporetic, too, a sign of Plato’s ‘honest perplexity’ as Gregory Vlastos might have put it. But this does not follow for either of these dialogues.

34 See *In Remp.* I 269-87 generally, and 283.11 in particular. Cf. ET §13; *In Parm.* VI 1097.8 with VII 511.10-11. See Beierwaltes 2004, 104-120. Proclus acknowledges all that is said of the Good in *Republic*, including that it is the ‘most luminous among beings’ (τὸ φανότατον τοῦ ὄντος) (*PT* II 7, 48.9), and that the ‘greatest study’ (τὸ μέγιστον μάθημα) is of it (*In Remp.* I 269.7; 272.12; 280.15). But this does not move him to qualify the completely negative conclusion of H1. See *In Remp.* I 286.8-9, where Proclus suggests that the reason for attributing to the One properties that only belong to the One of H2 is that Glaucon would not understand the negative theology of H1. See Cürsgen 2007, 53-59.
of causality, in the One of H{1}. But Proclus is misguided, not in identifying the One of H{1} and the Idea of the Good, but in supposing that an absolutely simple first principle of all can have no nature whatsoever. Relying solely on Parmenides, Proclus thinks that the One can only be characterized negatively. Hence, he is driven to architectural extravagances as a substitute for causal dynamism. It is as if someone supposed that adding additional syntactical elements could ever substitute for semantics.

3

Plato’s Parmenides is a dubious choice for the axis of interpretation of Plato’s metaphysics. I believe this is so despite maintaining at the same time that it is indispensable for understanding the metaphysics. The explicit motive for the exercise of Part 2 of that dialogue is the solution to the problems for Forms posed by Parmenides in Part 1. As is typical in the dialogues, Plato only includes as much metaphysics as is necessary to solve the specific problem at hand. His Sophist, Philebus, and Timaeus are excellent examples of truncated

35 See e.g., PT II 9, 58.23-24 where Proclus calls the One ‘the uncausing cause prior to all causes’ (πρὸ τῶν αἰτίων πάντων ἀναιτίως αἴτιον). In the next sentence, he allows that the One, qua Good, is a final cause (τελικόν), but this, too, is difficult to reconcile with the characterization of the One of H{1}. At PT III 14, 50.16-18, Proclus says that the intelligible triads ‘announce mystically’ (μυστικῶς ἀπαγγέλλουσι) the ‘totally unknowable’ (πανεξίστως ἄγνωστον) causality of the One.

36 See ET §175, 152.30-32 for the principle providing the warrant for the architectural extravagance: οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ αἱ πρόοδοι γίνονται ἀμέσως, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῶν συγγενῶν καὶ ὁμοίων κατὰ τὰς ὑποστάσεις καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας τελειότητας ὡσαύτως (For nowhere do processions occur unmediated, but rather through existents and perfections of actuality of things that are connatural and the same). See Beierwaltes 1965, 31-48, on this principle.

37 At ET §33, 36.11-12 we have the principle: Πᾶν τὸ προϊὸν ἀπὸ τίνος καὶ ἐπιστρέφον κυκλικὴν ἕχει τὴν ἐνέργειαν. (Everything that proceeds from something and reverts to it has a cyclical activity). Proclus explains that the ‘motion’ (κίνησις) originates ‘from that which remains’ (ἀπὸ τοῦ μένοντος). This cyclical process does not appear to apply to the ineffable One since the reversion is always a participation and the One is unparticipated. This is the case even though the One-Good is the primary object of desire and the primary object of desire is that towards which all things revert. See §31, 34-35-32.2.

38 Parm. 134E8-135C3. The dialogue is also quite obviously relevant to the substantive metaphysics of Sophist. Horn 1995, 96-99, thinks that the relevance of Part 2 to the problems of Part 1 is found in Aristotle, Meta. A. 6, 988a7-17, wherein the One and the Great-and-Small are said to be the causes of Forms. This is true indirectly, I suppose, but only in the sense that the logical distinctions made there must be shown to be applied to Forms.
metaphysical expositions introduced only to solve a particular problem, in the first case how the sophist’s métier can be non-being, in the second, what is the appropriate mixture of pleasure and intellectual activity in the best life for man, and in the third how to account for the beauty and order of the cosmos. The ad hoc introduction of metaphysics, of course, does not diminish its importance and it certainly does not justify its exclusion from an overall account of Plato’s philosophy. But it does mean, I would suggest, that the view of Parmenides as a self-standing or at least load-bearing beam in the architecture of Plato’s metaphysics is unsustainable. The best evidence I can muster for this claim is to display the convoluted constructs produced by later Platonists determined to divine in Parmenides much more than the basic elements of the metaphysical structure. There is obviously not adequate space to do that here. Nor shall I attempt to explain exactly how I see the second part of the dialogue contributing to the solution to what is in effect a super dilemma posed by Parmenides: either Forms are completely separate from the sensible world, in which case they are irrelevant to thought and discourse about it or else they are implicated in the samenesses and differences (and hence intelligibility) among things here below, in which case they are susceptible to puzzles about their division and vicious infinite regress arguments. I shall only say here that the distinctions among senses of ‘one’, ‘many’, ‘part’, ‘whole’, ‘limit’, ‘unlimited’, ‘same’, ‘identical’, and so on made in the second part of the dialogue will be essential to a correct representation of Forms and their participants. Moreover, these distinctions must be applied within the framework of principles that are the basic elements of Plato’s metaphysics. But that is as much as need be conceded to Parmenides partisans.

These partisans never did eschew appeal to other dialogues or to the direct and indirect tradition of testimony. For example, almost everyone seems to be in agreement that the One of Parmenides H1 is just the Idea of the Good. But there are so many claims made about the Idea of the Good in Republic that seem incompatible with the description of the One of H1 that much time is spent in explaining away the plain sense of the text. For example, everyone can agree that the Idea of the Good is ‘above οὐσία’ and as such is not necessarily in conflict with the One of H1 which also does not partake in οὐσία.

39 See, e.g., Damascius, De princ. 1 65-7-8, who takes the μέγιστον μάθημα of Rep.504E4-5 which is referring to the Idea of the Good as equally referring to the One. Damascius, however, thinks that the first principle of all is utterly ineffable and uncognizable, in which case the Idea of the Good gets identified with a second One, the One of H1. On ineffability in general in later Platonism see Hoffman 1997.

40 See Rep. 509B9-10; Parm. 141D9.
But it is much harder to show how the Good, which is the source of being and essence for Forms, and which is the cause of their knowability and truth can refer to the same principle that in H1 can have no causal relation to anything.\footnote{See \textit{Rep.} 509B9-10, on cause of being and essence; 508E1-4 with 508A9-B7, 509B6, on cause of knowability and truth. See \textit{Parm.} 139E4-5 on the One’s not having a self-identity and 141D10-11 on the One not being one.} There can be an account (\(\lambda\acute{\o}g\o\varsigma\)) of the Idea of the Good; there can be no such thing for the One of H1.\footnote{See \textit{Rep.} 508E4, 517B8-C1, 532B1, 534B3-Di; \textit{Parm.} 142E3-4.} In addition, the Idea of the Good is the ‘happiest of that which is’ (\(\varepsilon\upnu\delta\alpha\imath\o\nu\epsilon\acute{\o}st\o\tau\o\nu\) \(\tau\o\nu\) \(\acute{\o}\nu\tau\o\tau\o\varepsilon\o\varsigma\)) and the ‘best among things that are’ (\(\tau\e\nu\) \(\tau\o\nu\) \(\acute{\o}\rho\i\acute{\o}\lambda\o\tau\o\tau\o\nu\) \(\epsilon\nu\) \(\tau\o\i\o\varsigma\) \(\acute{\o}\upsilon\varsigma\)).\footnote{See \textit{Rep.} 526E4-5, referring to E2 and 532C6-7. Proclus, \textit{PT} II 7, 48.9-19 explains Socrates’ claim that the Good is \(\varphi\alpha\o\nu\o\sigma\tau\o\tau\o\nu\) \(\tau\o\nu\) \(\acute{\o}\nu\tau\o\tau\o\varepsilon\o\varsigma\) (\textit{Rep.} 518C9) as meaning only that the Good is the ‘cause’ (\(\acute{\o}\pi\i\o\tau\o\nu\)) of the light emanating from it.} Needless to say, it is something of a puzzle as to how these attributes can be applied to the One of H1.\footnote{Horn 1995, 106, thinks that the One of H1 is a ‘suitable candidate’ for the unhypothetical first principle of \textit{Republic} because of its ultimacy. Logically speaking, yes; substantively, no. The One of H1 is an absolutely simple first principle of all, but its simplicity is unanalyzed. Cf. Halfwassen 2004, 214-215.}

The appropriate rejoinder to these disanalogies between the Idea of the Good in \textit{Republic} and the One of H1 of \textit{Parmenides} should be, I think, to insist that the absolute simplicity of the first principle of all cannot be sustained if the characterizations of the Good in \textit{Republic} are taken to introduce complexity of any sort, including the complexity assumed in true predication.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Soph.} 245A8-9 where the Parmenidean One is criticized because it is understood as holding that the One is One-Being and therefore \textit{not} simple. Halfwassen 2011, 69-70, is correct to conclude that the ‘absolute simplicity’ of the One excludes from it every ‘determination and structure’. Cf. 2004, 268. He does not, however, consider that what René Arnou long ago called ‘l’activité par excellence’ does not preclude absolute simplicity. See Arnou 1921, 70. The evidence Halfwassen, 1999, 415-420, cites to show that in and around the early Academy the One was subject only to ‘negative dialectic’, e.g., passages from Theophrastus’ \textit{Metaphysics}, do not entail that the One was understood as Proclus understood it.} For example, it is not a defect in the Neoplatonic interpretation of \textit{Parmenides} and the assimilation of the Idea of the Good to the One of H1 to maintain that the Good cannot be the source of knowability or truth in Forms by surreptitiously introducing into it \(\o\nu\sigma\i\a\) distinct from its existence. Indeed, even making it one would be to do exactly that, for then it and its oneness would be distinct, where ‘one’ names the sort of \(\o\nu\sigma\i\a\) it has. So, since none of these characterizations can be supposed to introduce complexity, the possibilities for driving...
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a wedge, so to speak, between Good and One are severely reduced or, more likely, eliminated.

As I say, this is a legitimate rejoinder, but it fails to take account of a more sophisticated concept of simplicity. Plotinus’s analysis of simplicity is a stellar example of his purely philosophical approach to central issues that are not subjected to analysis in the dialogues. That concept of simplicity is also analyzed by Aristotle who identified unqualified simplicity with perfect actuality (ἐνέργεια), and perfect actuality with intellectual activity (ἐνέργεια νοῦ). Somewhat less paradoxically, Aristotle argues that form is actuality in relation to matter or potency. Form without matter or any potency would be perfect actuality. The unique example of perfect actuality is the activity of thinking uncontaminated with potency. This is the activity of the Unmoved Mover, whose uniqueness follows from its perfection: if there were more than one examples of such activity, each would have to have potency to distinguish it from the other. So, perfect actuality is perfect simplicity, that is, incompositeness. Plotinus embraces the concept of perfect ἐνέργεια without potency as applicable to the first principle of all. He denies, though, Aristotle’s identification of this activity with thinking, for thinking cannot be unqualifiedly simple. Thinking is complex at least because a thinker and an intentional object of thinking must be distinguished. In addition, if the thinking is of a multiplicity of intelligibles, then further complexity or multiplicity is introduced. Plotinus accepts the analysis of the simplicity of a first principle offered by Aristotle, but he rejects the primacy of the Unmoved Mover. By contrast, Proclus and other proponents of the ‘Neoplatonic’ interpretation of Parmenides think that not only is the ἐνέργεια νοῦ necessarily complex, but any ἐνέργεια must be so. So, the first principle of all in its absolute simplicity cannot be ἐνέργεια. It cannot even be one or be in any way.

An obvious problem faces us. Since ἐνέργεια is not a term that even appears in Plato’s writings, why should we suppose that Plotinus’s understanding of the first principle of all in Plato—whether we call this the Idea of the Good

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46 See on simplicity II 9, 1.8; V 3, 11.27-31; V 3, 13.33-36; V 4, 1.10-13, etc.
47 See Meta. A 7. See Halfwassen 1999, 389, who cites Hegel’s extreme but perceptive judgment that Plotinus got more from Aristotle than from Plato.
48 See V 6, 1.14. Cf. III 8, 9.8-13; V 1, 9; V 3, 11.25-30; VI 9, 2.17-19. It should also be noted that Plotinus also follows Aristotle in the use of (ἐξ)ἀρτᾶσθαι for the dependence of all things on the primary ἐνέργεια. See e.g., I 6, 7.10; II 2, 2.4; III 2, 3.33; V 3, 12.20; V 5, 3.6; VI 8, 18.7, et cetera.
49 See PT II 7, 49.14, where the One is said to have a ‘unique pre-eminence in simplicity’ (μίαν ἁπλότητος ὑπερβολήν). No doubt this is so, but it completely ignores Aristotle’s argument about the nature of simplicity.
or the One—is correct as an interpretation of Republic or Parmenides?\footnote{50} I think the answer to this question should begin by noting that the fact that the Good is ‘beyond ςυσία’ does not imply that it is beyond being altogether; indeed, Plato says as much in the passages quoted above. The Idea of the Good is not nothing.\footnote{51} It does not have an essence or, what amounts to the same thing, its essence is not distinct from its existence. It is a non sequitur to say that because the Good is ‘above ςυσία’, it has absolutely no existence.\footnote{52} Not only does this make nonsense of its causal role, but it ignores the precise point of Parmenides H2 where it is argued that participation in ςυσία introduces complexity into the participant. Since the first principle of all must be absolutely simple or without complexity, it cannot participate in ςυσία.\footnote{53} But this does not mean that it is nothing. It is uniquely that in which existence and ςυσία are not distinct. Starting from the One of H1, this unique status might well appear non-evident; starting from the Idea of the Good, it is evident and required to make sense of the text.\footnote{54}

\footnote{50} See VI 9, 3 for an extended statement of the identification of Good and One in Plotinus. Cf. I 11, 1.

\footnote{51} Proclus and Damascius both use the term ὑπάρξις to refer to the One, indicating at least that they concede that the first principle of all is not nothing. At PT II 4, 34-9-12, Proclus applauds those who realize that Intellect is second (δευτέραν) in order after the One. And yet, ordinal ranking would seem to have no meaning if the One is non-existent. Cf. 24, where the words τοῦ πρώτως ὄντος seem to concede as much. At In Tim. I 256.8-9 the One is said to be (ἐίναι), albeit beyond the realm of the eternal.

\footnote{52} Cf. I 8, 15-3-5 where the argument is that if matter did not exist (ἐίναι), then the Good would also not exist (ἐίναι). Also, v 5, 6.21, where the existence of the One is emphatically distinguished from its putative knowability. Cf. v 5, 11.7-8: ἐίναι . . . μᾶλλον πάντων in reference to the One. See Kremer 1966, 172-185; Baltes 1997. Abbate 2003, 659-666, nicely exposes how Proclus, in Essay XI of his Commentary on Plato’s Republic, argues that the One is ἐπέκεινα τῆς ςυσίας because it is ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ὄντος. He thinks the latter is the case because at Rep.508E1-4 (cf. 508A9-B7 and 509B6), Plato says that the Good provides truth to Forms or to being. If this is so, then truth is distinct from and superior to being. And the Good is superior to truth.

\footnote{53} See e.g., v 3, 11.27.

\footnote{54} Incidentally, although Plotinus and Proclus agree that the One is not related to anything (although things are related to it), their reasons for holding this are importantly different. Plotinus says that the One is not really related to anything because real relations are between or among ςυσίαι. See I 7, 116-17; VI 8, 8.12-18. Proclus says that the One is not related to anything owing to its absolute transcendence. See In Tim. I 304.9, 11; PT II 5, 39.6-26, 50.10-13, 111 8, 31.15-18. ‘Transcendence’ here indicates the absence of any causal connection, as stated explicitly in the last text.
Furthermore, it is uniquely called ‘Good’ because it is the goal of all desire. This is an important point because all Platonists recognize that the reason for the Good being the goal of all desire is that it is the source of all that desires.\(^{55}\) Hence, the fundamental triad μονή-πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή.\(^{56}\) The ‘procession’ from the Good or, if we like, the One, looks very much like the ‘external’ activity of the first principle, as distinct from the ‘internal’ activity which is its perdurance or μονή.\(^{57}\) The Good, Plotinus thought, could not but be ἐνέργεια if it is to be the unifying principle of all.\(^{58}\) Plotinus has little difficulty in fitting the negative characterization of the One in H1 into this account of the Good.\(^{59}\) Neoplatonists have considerable difficulty when they start with the One negatively described and focus on the negativity to try to flesh out its role as principle rather than appealing to ἐνέργεια as a systematic term for the activity of

55 See Proclus, _ET_ §§31-34.
56 See esp. Beierwaltes 1965, 118-164. This fundamental doctrine in later Platonism is already outlined in Plotinus, V 2, 1,7-21.
57 See V 4, 2.27-33; I 9, 8.22-5; IV 5, 7.15-17, 51-5; V 1, 6.34; V 3, 7.23-4; V 9, 8.13-15; VI 2, 22.24-9; VI 7, 18.5-6; VI 7, 21.4-6; VI 7, 40.21-4. The distinction between ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας (internal activity) and ἐνέργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας (external) is explicitly applied to the One itself, despite the fact that it is ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας (see esp. V 1, 6.45-46). As I construe this, the distinction is applicable to the One because its being or existence is not distinct from its οὐσία. That is, being ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας means that it does not μετέχει οὐσίας. Halfwassen 1992, 98-130 and 1997, 17-18 denies that what I am calling the ‘dynamism’ of the Platonic system is thematized by Plotinus. As he puts it, only the ‘fact’ of the generation of a many from a one, not the ‘how’ and ‘why’, are knowable by us.
58 Cf. Aristotle, _Meta_. Λ 10, 1075a11-25 and Plotinus’ allusion to this passage at H1 3, 2.5-6. Aristotle compares primary ἐνέργεια to an army general and to the head of a household. At _De mun._ 6, 400b6-11, to these metaphors are added those of ship’s captain, a charioteer, the leader of a chorus, and the law (or lawgiver) of the city (depending on the correct text). The principal point is that Plotinus accepts from Aristotle the claim that primary ἐνέργεια is productive. But, against Aristotle, he argues that this is true only of the primary ἐνέργεια that is the Good. Aristotle recognizes that there must be a primary object of desire, but he mistakenly identifies this with the primary object of intellection, instead of with that which is beyond Intellect. See _Meta_. Λ 7, 1072a27-8.
59 See H1 8, 10.28-31 where Plotinus says that neither τὸ ὄν nor οὐσία nor ζωή can be predicated (κατηγορεῖσθαι) of that which is simply One (τὸ ἀπλῶς ἕν). The chapter begins with Plotinus insisting that if the δύναμις that is the One did not exist’ (μὴ οὔσης), then nothing would exist. I take it that lines 28-31 cannot be interpreted in such a way that this inference is contradicted. Being is not a predicate of the One; it is its οὐσία. Cf. H1 8, 11.12-13; H1 9, 9.22-23; V 5, 13.9-11, etc.
the Idea of the Good and then using H1 to enrich the characterization of the first principle.\(^{60}\)

The One of H2, One-Being or, as Plotinus puts it, ‘one-many’, poses a slightly different problem for interpreters. Plotinus and his successors agree that this One includes not only what is unqualifiedly intelligible, but it also includes that which is intelligible wherever it may be, including in the sensible world. That is why at the end of H2 it is said that there can be δόξα and αἴσθησις of it, not only ἐπιστήμη.\(^{61}\) There can be various types of cognition of everything that is even minimally intelligible; matter alone is not cognizable precisely because it is not intelligible. However, for all Platonists the intelligible realm is also the realm of intellect and intellection. But nowhere does H2 mention this. Plotinus spends much effort in explaining how Intellect is a ‘one-many’.\(^ {62}\) Indeed, it is an (imperfect) One as derived from the first principle, meaning that it has the potency for manyness realized in its return to that principle. This δύναμις is fundamentally different from that of the One which is δύναμις τῶν πάντων. The One has no potency for being other than what it is; Intellect is generated with the potency for becoming a specific many, the many that is a composite of intellection and intelligibles. It is as such that it achieves its desire for the first principle of all.

It really makes little sense to insinuate Intellect directly into H2. Neoplatonists admit as much when, like Plotinus, they appeal to the Demiurge in Timaeus and a divine Intellect in Laws 10 as implicitly present in H2. But the derivation of Intellect and the precise sense in which it is a one-many depends on the first principle being the Good. Plotinus appeals to Parmenides for confirmation of the Platonic architecture; he looks elsewhere for insight into the dynamism of the system.\(^ {63}\) Adhering to the text, he thinks that H2 covers much more ground than the nature of Intellect, even though Intellect is discoverable there as a ‘one-many’. Neoplatonists who are committed to finding Intellect solely

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\(^{60}\) Proclus uses an abundance of terms, drawn partly from Republic and partly from religious texts, to characterize the One positively or as causally active. For example, it is γεννητικός (‘generative’) and γόνιμος (‘fruitful’), \(PT\) II 7, 49.27-50.11; ὑποστατικός (‘productive’), \(PT\) II 12, 72.18-73.21. But these characterizations are in sharp contrast to the way he interprets the One of H1 of Parmenides. And given that interpretation, these attributes are bound to be largely honorific.

\(^{61}\) See Parm. 155D6.

\(^{62}\) IV 8, 3.10; V 1, 8.26; V 3, 15.11; VI 2, 2.2; VI 2, 10.11; VI 2, 15.14; VI 2, 21.7; VI 2, 22.10; VI 5, 6.1-2; VI 6, 8.22; VI 6, 13.52-53; VI 7, 8.17-18; VI 7, 14.11-12; VI 7, 39.11-14. Proclus, In Parm. 11 768.21, says that Intellect is a one-many, but there is nothing in H2 to support this directly.

\(^{63}\) Indeed, as Gurtler 1992, 445-457, shows, Plotinus is even critical of at least one way of understanding the deductions in H2.
within the confines of H2 have no basis for the analysis of its generation or its activity in relation to the One. Indeed, as with Proclus, they have no reason not to insert the gods or henads between Intellect and the One.64

Aristotle’s account of the Good as One and its operation on the Indefinite Dyad is, as noted above, a problem for a monistic conception of Platonism.65 Since the division between H1 and H2 is unambiguous, Platonists who want to rely primarily on Parmenides have no choice but to locate the Indefinite Dyad in H2, for if it were in H1 it could only be the ineffable One which alone is the subject of that hypothesis. As we have seen, it is not unreasonable to identify the ‘unlimited in multitude’ with the Indefinite Dyad. But the problem here is squaring this with Aristotle’s testimony where the One that works on the Indefinite Dyad is the first principle of all. Proclus derives Limit, containing generative potency, from the transcendent One, which is identified with the Idea of the Good. He thus rejects Aristotle’s testimony insofar as this can be taken to identify implicitly Good, One, and Limit. The strength of Proclus’s interpretation is that it uses the Philebus account of Limit and Unlimited to block Aristotle’s claim that the One is Limit. So, in effect Proclus wants to insist upon two Ones, the first of which is identical with the Good, the first principle of all, and the second of which is identical with the One which is Limit.66

64 See e.g., Proclus, PT I 14, 67.10-11; I 15, 76.25-77.1. At ET §121, 106.5-7, Proclus says ἐν θεοῖς οὖν ἡ πρόνοια πρώτως, καὶ ποῦ γὰρ ἡ πρὸ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ἢ ἐν τοῖς ὑπερουσίοις; ἡ δὲ πρόνοια, ὡς τούνομα ἐμφαίνει, ἐνέργεια ἐστι πρὸ νοῦ (Providence rests primarily with the gods; indeed, where should the activity prior to intellect other than in those that are prior to being? For providence, as the name reveals, is an activity prior to intellect). The identification of ἐνέργεια with the Henads actually highlights Proclus’ refusal to identify ἐνέργεια with the One.

65 See Halfwassen 1997 who is right to resist the dualism but wrong to insist that the Neoplatonic interpretation of Parmenides can be the starting-point for arriving at a consistent monism. He insists on the ‘asymmetry’ of the One and the Indefinite Dyad, 10-11, since while the One can exist without any pluralization, the Indefinite Dyad—having a sort of unity in itself—cannot exist without the One.

66 See PT III 8, 31.14-18: ‘Εστιν ἄρα τι πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος ἕν, ὃ καὶ ὑφίστησι τὸ ὄν καὶ αἴτιόν ἐστι τοῦ ὄντος πρώτως, ἐπειδή το πρὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς ἐνώσεως ἐπέκειναι καὶ τῆς αἰτίας ἦν, ἄγχετον πρὸς πάντα καὶ ἀμέθεκτον ἀπὸ πάντων ἐξηρημένον (There is, therefore, some One prior to being which causes being to exist and is the primary cause of being, since prior to it [the One that is the cause of being] there is that which is removed beyond unity and causality, unrelated to everything and unparticipated by everything). Cf. Syrianus, In Meta. 11.29-30. This claim contradicts Plotinus, vi 9, 2.24, who says, pace Meijer 1992, 105-106, that Intellect has the One by μετάληψις and by μέθεξις. Cf. vi 8, 13.14. That for Plotinus the One-Good is participated and that for Iamblichus and Proclus it is not constitutes the clearest divergence in their respective interpretations of the first principle of all and, indirectly,
He argues for the ambiguity of ‘One’ such that Aristotle is right to identify the Good with the One and right to identify the One with Limit but wrong to elide these identifications such that it is the Good as One that is also the One that is Limit. The weakness of his interpretation is that there is no evidence that *Parmenides* derives the One of H2 from the One of H1 thereby providing a basis for the supposed ambiguity. The point here is not that in a reconstruction of Platonic metaphysics, ‘One’ is not to be used ambiguously; indeed, this must be the case, since the first principle of all is uniquely One.67 Rather, the putative ambiguity is in ‘One’ used as another name for the Idea of the Good and ‘One’ used as another name for Limit, coordinated with the principle of Unlimitedness. The insistence on the ambiguity and hence on the inexactness of Aristotle’s testimony is, I suggest, owing to the assumption that the One of H1, given the description of it, could never be identified with the One that is Limit.

How can the One-Good be a principle of Limit if it cannot even be properly said to be one? Proclus is correct to worry about this, but his reliance on the architecture visible in *Parmenides* leads to postulate unnecessary additions in order to fill in for the absent dynamics.68 Plotinus is in agreement with those who will later insist that the first principle of all is unqualifiedly unlimited.69 Any limitation on it could only be a function of an οὐσία that it does not have. The One-Good, however, is a limit on its immediate product, Intellect, not in its initial phase, but in its return or ἐπιστροφή to the One. Hence, it is a limit on

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of the import of *Parmenides*. Proclus, *PT* II 7, 50.10-11, says that because the Good (i.e., the One) is unparticipated (τῷ ἀμέθεκτον ἐναί) its causal power is uniform for everything. For Plotinus, the causal power of the One is infinitely diverse or complex. It seems to me that in the *Anonymous Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, fr. V 22-29, the attribution of ‘pure acting’ (ἐνεργεῖν καθαρόν) to the One and the claim that the second One participates in it suggests that this work, if it is indeed by Porphyry, sets him alongside Plotinus and over against Iamblichus and Proclus. Proclus seems to agree with this assessment. See *PT* II 4, 31.26. I disagree with Hadot 1973, 31, however, who thinks that this fragment reveals for the first time in the history of Western thought the idea of infinite being, that is, being that is participated but not thereby limited or made complex. This fragment follows Plotinus for whom the absolute simplicity of the One guarantees its infinity.

67 Cf. Plotinus, V 1, 8.23-26, where the ambiguity is expressed as ‘One’ which is primarily One, and the second One, which is properly One-Many, namely, Intellect.

68 The proliferation of architectural elements is already on display in Iamblichus. I explain this by his embrace of the primacy of *Parmenides*. See Dodds 1963, xxii, on the proliferation of entities in Proclus and his explicit reliance on Iamblichus in this regard. See Beierwaltes 1985, 155-157, on proliferations of entities, particularly τὰ μεταξύ, as differentiating the metaphysics of Proclus from that of Plotinus.

69 See e.g., V 5, 9.1-18; V 8, 9.24-25; V 5, 11.1-2.
everything. This is because the One-Good is virtually all that there is. The proof of this is straightforward. From the existence of a variegated world, we can deduce that the ultimate cause or explanation of this variety must have all that it produces in it. That is, from the actuality of a many, the possibility of a many follows. But all possibilities must be realized because the Good is unlimited in its production or diffusiveness. The One-Good has ‘in’ it all that is possible, but it has this in a way that does not compromise its simplicity.

Intellect is limited by being, which is prior to the intellection of it. It is limited by the being that the One-Good is virtually. The complete intelligible realm in all its articulated limitedness is caused to be and is sustained in its being by the One-Good. The One-Good acts on the Indefinite Dyad, which is Intellect in potency, to produce the Form-Numbers which are Intellect in actuality. This is not the place to argue that Plotinus’ integration of the Aristotelian testimony with Republic, Philebus, and Timaeus is correct. Nor do I mean to suggest that the focus on Parmenides by Neoplatonists is done to the exclusion of the consideration of these dialogues. My central point is that the dynamics of the system are not found in Parmenides and that the imposition of gratuitous architecture does not, and cannot, provide an adequate substitute. These dynamics are as evident in Republic as they are absent in Parmenides.

The focus on Parmenides as the ‘key’ to Plato’s metaphysics unfortunately goes beyond the error of trying to derive metaphysics from logic. For the Platonists themselves, this focus also inspired fantastical architectural

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70 See I 8, 2.19: μέτρον πάντων καὶ πέρας. Cf. V 5, 4.13. Proclus, ET §92, 82.32-33 also says that the One is the μέτρον of all things. But Proclus places the principles of Limit and Unlimitedness in H2, not H1, which makes the way the One is a measure and limit significantly different from the way Plotinus understands it. See PT III 8.

71 See VI 7, 16.2-31. I use the term ‘virtually’ to reflect the fact that the One-Good is δύναμις τῶν πάντων. The same idea is expressed in the Scholastic Latin virtualiter, as in Aquinas, CG 11 15; In div. nom. 665, 770; ST I 79, 2c; De ver. xxiii, 2 ad. 3um.

72 The Platonic provenance of the principle bonum est diffusivum sui is: (1) Rep. 508B6-7 where the effects of Good are in comparison with sunlight from the sun like ‘an overflowing treasury’ (ἐπίρρυτον ταμιευομένην); (2) Tim. 29E1-2 where the Demiurge is said to be not ‘grudging’ (φθόνος) in making an intelligible cosmos because he is good; (3) Symp. 212A2-7 with Phil. 64E5-7 where birth or production is the result of the encounter with beauty, the attainment of which is identified with achieving the Good. Cf. Proclus, PT II 7, 50.23-25, who says that if the One were to exit from its own superior state in order to produce, this would not be owing to perfection, but rather to a defect. This follows from Proclus’ denial of ἐνέργεια to the One. So, for Proclus the Good is diffusive without being ἐνέργεια, whereas for Plotinus the Good’s diffusiveness is owing precisely to its being pure ἐνέργεια.

73 See V 4, 2.4-7; VI 7, 17.14-16; VI 7, 8.6-7.
additions, spandrels serving no functional purpose. For modern students of Platonism, the assumption that this focus practically defines late Platonism unfairly condemns Plotinus for an error he did not make. The rejection of the ‘Neoplatonic’ interpretation of Parmenides, insofar as it aligns Aristotle’s testimony with that interpretation, leads to the unjustifiable discounting of that testimony. The discounting is unjustifiable because Aristotle’s account of Plato’s philosophy comes not from an interpretation of that dialogue, but from passages in numerous other dialogues and, in all probability, from Plato’s own spoken words. Without that testimony—and its extensive support from the indirect tradition—we are left with a deracinated Plato and the temptation simply to ignore the plain sense of dozens of passages in the dialogues.

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74 My efforts to rehabilitate Aristotle’s testimony in the light of a reconsideration of the ‘Neoplatonic’ interpretation of Parmenides follows the stellar work of Sayre (1983) and Miller (1995) both of whom, in different ways, find confirmation of that testimony in the dialogues—including Parmenides. But neither of these scholars make what I have taken to be the mistake of conflating the testimony about Plato’s unwritten teachings with Proclus’ interpretation of Parmenides.


Simplicius


Speusippus


II Secondary Literature


