New riders, old chariots: poetics and comparative philosophy

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Scholars have claimed that similarities between the Greek poem of Parmenides and the Indic *Upaniṣads* demand an explanation from either historical contact between Greece and other cultures, or a commonly inherited Indo-European philosophy.¹ Several striking similarities between Parmenides and the *Upaniṣads* supposedly reveal borrowing or a genetic relationship: first, monism, the idea of metaphysical unity;² second, the rejection of empirical knowledge;³ third, the


² From a Greek perspective, the nature of Parmenides’ monism is a source of scholarly debate, due to both the conceptual difficulties and fragmentary nature of the text. Parmenides is variously termed a strict monist (Guthrie 1965), a logical monist (Owen 1960), a speculative monist (Mourelatos 2008), a predicational monist (Curd 2004), a modal monist (Palmer 2009), or a mystic (Kingsley 1999). For an argument emphasising Parmenides’ mystical affiliations and arguing against the analytic approach, see Gemelli 2008. For a useful treatment of the *status quaeestionis* as regards Parmenides’ affiliations, see Granger 2008 (thanks to John Bussanich for these two references). Therefore, making an *a priori* equation between the fragmentary representation of Parmenides’ monism and a fully preserved external tradition is circular logic; even worse, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* is not monist. This is not an argument from *diaphonia*; it suggests that one needs to understand the intellectual culture of Parmenides before external comparison. Monism is a response to the ambiguity of ‘the beginning’ (e.g. Aristotle *Physics* 1.2.184b15–25). This is a controversial metaphysical question, but external explanation is unnecessary.

³ Doubt relating to the reliability of empirical knowledge is present in Homer’s *Iliad*, with which Parmenides clearly engaged, cf. *Il.* 2.484–93. One difference is that Parmenides provides an account of reliable knowledge, see Lesher 2008: esp. 472–6 *contra* Most 1999: 353. Cf. also *Il.* 23.450–98, where Idomeneus and Oelian Ajax break into a verbal quarrel in the stands based on their differing visual and intellectual judgements. Although
potential for allegory, and fourth, the chariot imagery. This last similarity will be the focus of this chapter, which will argue that Parmenides’ poem engages with the chariot race during Patroclus’ funeral games in book 23 of the *Iliad*. Then, it will argue that the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*’s chariot imagery draws on the use of chariots in the *Ṛgveda*. Therefore, these supposedly anomalous chariots function perfectly well within their respective Greek and Indic intellectual traditions.

We contend that there is no need to posit Indo-European philosophy to explain the striking, but ultimately incidental parallels between these two texts. In short, an Indo-European explanation of the chariot in this case would only be applicable to Homeric poetry and the *Ṛgveda*. This itself is unlikely, because the

Parmenides’ discussion of the senses is metaphysically sophisticated, this very sophistication is a development of pre-existing Greek thought. For a general account of Homeric phraseology in Parmenides, see Mourelatos 2008: 1–17. On the journeys of the *Odyssey* compared to the journey of the *kouros* in Parmenides, see Mourelatos 2008: 17–25, building on Havelock 1958. An account of Parmenides’ thought as a development from his predecessors tempers some of the more extreme claims of Parmenides’ ‘big bang’ of rationalism, e.g. Popper 1998: 71, 102. See B1.28–32, . . . χρεὼ δὲ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι / ἡμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτο / ἡδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, τῆς οὐκ ἐνὶ πίστις ἀληθῆς. / ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσει, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα / χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα. ‘It is right for you to learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well-circled reality and of the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true trust; nevertheless you shall learn these as well, how it was right that the things that seem do seem, permeating all things from end to end.’ It also must be recognised that λόγος in Greek philosophy is often assumed to be equivalent to ‘logic’, and its presence in Parmenides B7 is taken by some to indicate that he is an orthodox rationalist. This is problematic because λόγος in Plato and Aristotle frequently means ‘explanatory account’, see Moss 2014.

There is a tradition of allegory that precedes Parmenides in the Greek intellectual tradition, in the works of Pherecydes of Syros and Theagenes of Rhegium, both of whom were operative in the sixth century BCE. Parmenidean ‘allegory’ has clear antecedents in the Greek tradition, so explaining this as somehow being due to contact or Indo-European philosophy begs the question. On early allegorists and ‘riddles’, see Ford 2002: 67–89, Struck 2004: 21–9, Gemelli Marciano 2008: 22, Bierl 2014.

For students of philosophy, any intertextual relationship between a philosophical text and an antecedent or contemporary source provides additional empirical data that can help one to characterise how a given thinker ‘does philosophy’, or at the least, what sources he or she chooses to draw upon. On the importance of an understanding of intellectual history and culture as a precondition for philosophical analysis, see Mourelatos 2008: 350–63.

This chapter agrees with the conclusions in Staal 1955 and Bucca 1964, both of whom treat Greek and Indic philosophy as independent, with the latter focusing on the chariot imagery. For a cognitive approach to chariot metaphors, see Schlieter, in this volume.

This is contra Latona (2008: 208) and Ježić (1992), whose lexical evidence for inherited philosophy is overly general and unconvincing on linguistic grounds. For a helpful discussion on comparative methodology, see Barr 1995.
earliest evidence of the chariot in Greece (sixteenth century BCE) long post-dates any speaker of late Indo-European.\(^8\)

There is perhaps even less of a reason to posit historical borrowing or ‘diffusion’ to account for the similarities in the chariot imagery.\(^9\) There is no historically reliable evidence for an extended conversation between a Greek speaker and Indic speaker before the time of Alexander. Nor is there any historically reliable evidence that any Pre-Socratic philosopher had any contact with Iranian, let alone Indic priests.\(^10\) Unless new primary source evidence from antiquity is discovered, there is no way to argue either point with probability.\(^11\)

Contextualisation is source criticism: one must examine what a document is, how it relates to other evidence, and how it has come to us.\(^12\)

In the case of Parmenides, this chariot imagery, and indeed most of Parmenides’ language, has been analysed in terms of earlier hexameter poetry.\(^13\) However, there is an unrecognised density of intertexts between Parmenides’ poem and a limited episode in the *Iliad*, the chariot race in Patroclus’ funeral games.\(^14\) The structure of the narrative is as follows: the organisation of the race (23.262–361), the race itself (23.362–447), a conflict between Idomeneus and Oelian Ajax in the stands (23.450–98), and the end of the race and the ensuing prize-ceremony (23.499–652). The didactic speech of Nestor to his son Antilochus before the race (23.301–50) shares several intertexts with Parmenides’ poem:

\[τῶν δ’ ἵπποι μὲν ἔασιν ἀφάρτεροι, οὐδὲ μὲν αὐτοὶ πλείονα ἴσασιν σέθεν αὐτοῦ μητίσασθαι.\]

\(^8\) We, following Hooker (1999: 65–86), cannot agree with Drews 1988, which posits that Greeks ‘arrived’ on chariots based on linguistic evidence.

\(^9\) *Contra*, recently, Magnone 2012: 122–3 (and this volume); Kahn 2001: 19. McEvilley (2002) argues that monism and reincarnation diffused from India to Greece (122), but that the chariot allegory is an independent innovation owing to common heritage (185). For a review of McEvilley 2002, see Bussanich 2005. For a culturally situated treatment of Parmenides’ ideas as related to monetary systems, see Seaford 2004: 185–9, 244–65. The concept of ‘borrowing’ itself is simplistic. Even if one is prepared to (re-)construct an untested historical moment of contact, what would the cultural and personal preconditions of such a dialogue be?

\(^10\) See Seaford, this volume.

\(^11\) See Kahn 1979: 297–302, who says of the need to posit a ‘historical’ explanation for commonalities between Greek and Indo-Iranian thought: ‘It also tends to produce historical fiction, as in West’s (1971) concluding hypothesis . . . (299).’

\(^12\) As a young Frits Staal (1955: 82) pointed out, we must also consider ourselves. See Lincoln 1999: 209, ‘If myth is ideology in narrative form, then scholarship is myth with footnotes.’


\(^14\) Fränkel (1960a) omits the chariot race.
The horses of these men are faster, but they themselves do not know how to be more crafty than you. Remember then, dear one, to cast every kind of craft into your mind, so that the prizes may not escape you. The woodcutter is far better by craft than he is by force. It is by craft that the pilot keeps true his swift ship, though torn by winds, over the wine-faced sea. By craft charioteer surpasses charioteer. He who is confident in his horses and chariot and recklessly spins this way and that, does not control them. But the man, although driving the lesser horses, who knows his advantage, and constantly watching the post turns closely, nor does it escape his notice, how he first will pull with the ox-hide reins, he holds steady, and watches the leader. (Il. 23.311–25)

In Parmenides’ poem the mortals who do not understand the reality of the world are described using phraseology that is either inverted from that of Nestor’s good charioteer (B1.39 ἐπιφραδέως ~ Il. 23.320 ἀφραδέως), or consistent with that of the poor charioteer (B8.54 ἐν ὧι πεπλανημένοι εἰσίν ~ Il. 23.321 πλανόωνται). Moreover, Parmenides’ use of σῆμα as an indicator of knowledge, specifically referring to signs along the path of knowledge, recalls Nestor’s polysemous use of this word in the middle of his speech to Antilochus:16

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16 This is in agreement with the perceptive analysis of Latona 2008: 218–27, which sees Parmenides’ poem in terms of a chariot race. Where this chapter differs is the identification of this race especially (but not exclusively) with that of Iliad 23, and a disagreement about Latona’s definition of the term ‘allegory’ as an ‘extended metaphor’ (199), which does not reckon with the recent advances in the study of allegory, esp. Struck 2004: 1–20, see also note 4 above.
μόνος δ᾿ ἔτι μύθος ὁδοῖο
λείπεται, ὡς ἔστιν' ταύτῃ δ᾿ ἐπὶ σήματ᾿ ἔασι
πολλὰ μάλ᾿', ὡς ἀγένητον ἐὸν καὶ ἀνώλεθρόν ἔστιν,
οὐλὸν μουνογενές τε καὶ ἀτρεμὲς ἠδ᾿ † ἀτέλεστον,

Only one story of the way is still left: that (it) is. On this way there are very many signs: that Being is ungenerated and imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved and without end; (B8.1–4)

The ‘signs’ as the basis of understanding recall the centre of Nestor’s extensive, didactic speech to his son:

σήμα δὲ τοι ἐρέω μάλ’ ἀριφραδές, οὐδὲ σε λήσει.
ἔστιν ξύλον αὖον ὅσον τ’ ὄργυι’ ὑπὲρ αἴης
ἡ δρυὸς ἢ πεύκης; τὸ μὲν οὐ καταπύθεται ὄμβρῳ,
λᾶε δὲ τοῦ ἐκάτερθεν ἐρηρέδαται δύο λευκῶ
ἐν ξυνοχῇσιν ὁδοῦ, λεῖος δ’ ἱππόδρομος ἀμφὶς
ἤ τευ σῆμα βροτοῖο πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,
ἢ τό γε νύσσα τέτυκτο ἐπὶ προτέρων ἀνθρώπων,
καὶ νῦν τέρματ’ ἐθηκε ποδάρκης δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

I will tell you a distinct sign, and it will not escape you. There stands a dry stump a fathom above the ground, either oak or pine, which is not rotted away by rain, and two white stones lean against it on either side, at the joining place of the road, and there is a smooth track for horses around it. Either it is the grave-sign of some long-dead man, or was established as a racing mark by earlier men. And now swift-footed, shining Achilles made it the turning-post. (Il. 23.326–33)

The σήμα in both cases is the basis of knowledge, but used as a term of ‘imagination’ rather than vision. Nestor’s instructions depend on Antilochus’ ability to map the visual instructions onto a specific portion of the physical world, and the emphasis on the application of the ‘sign’ to Antilochus’ actual sense perception differentiates Nestor’s sign from Parmenides’ signs. Although Parmenides’ message is more abstract, the ‘sign’ in both poems is the instructional key, and located upon a path. Combined with other local lexical parallels, this suggests Parmenides’ close engagement with book 23. Both texts, moreover, share a similar internal audience: the addressee is a young man, in Parmenides’ poem the anonymous kouros and in the Iliad Nestor’s son Antilochus.

Parmenides’ physical description of reality is highly reminiscent of language found elsewhere within the chariot race of book 23:

17 On B8 see McKirahan 2009.
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πείρας πῦματον, τετελεσμένον ἀρχήν,
πάντοθεν, εὐκύκλῳ σφαίρῃς ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ,
μεσσοῦθεν ἰσοπαλὲς πάντῃ· τὸ γὰρ ὄντε τι μείζον
όυτε τι βαϊώτερον πελέναι χρεόν ἐστι· τῇ ἢ τῇ.

But since its limit is final, it is completed from all sides,
like the weight of a spherical ball, and similarly balanced in all ways
from the centre: for it must not become at all greater or at
all smaller in one way than in another. (B8.42–5)

This comparison of being to a sphere shares phraseology with the chariot race,
including exact lexical parallels:18

Ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ πῦματον τέλεον δρόμον
ὠκέες ἵπποι (≈ 23.768)
ἐφ' ἁλὸς πολιῆς, τότε δὴ ἀρετή γε ἑκάστου
φαίνετ’ . . .

But when the swift horses were finishing the final run
back towards the grey sea, then the virtue of each
was apparent . . . (Il. 23.373–5)

The three-dimensional circularity of the sphere can be in turn compared with the
two dimensional circularity of the chariot race itself.19 Parmenides characterises
his own path of inquiry as recursive:

ξυνὸν δὲ μοί ἐστιν,
ὁππόθεν ἄρξωμαι· τόθι γὰρ πάλιν ἱξομαι αὖθι.

It is the same to me whence I begin,
for to that place I shall come back again. (B5)20

Therefore, one can envision Parmenides’ ‘path of thought’ as being a diaulos,
or a lap, just as a chariot race. In addition to the foregoing similarities, the case
of Eumelus in the Iliad presents several points of comparison to Parmenides’
proem:

18 Cf. Il. 23.410: ὃδε γὰρ ἔξερεν, καὶ μὴν 
τετελεσμένον ἔσται· Il. 23.672: ὃδε γὰρ ἔξερεν,
tο δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται. See Mourelatos 2008: 31 discussing Onian’s translation of 
τετελεσμένον ἔσται· ‘it will be bound (to happen)’.
19 See Jameson 1958. Tarán (1965: 159) argues that Parmenides’ being is not spherical, it is 
compared to that which is spherical.
20 The misguided inquiry of mortals employs similar language, B6.9: πάντων δὲ παλιντροπός
ἐστι κέλευθος, ‘but the journey of all men turns back on itself’. B6.4–6: αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ’ ἀπὸ
tῆς, ἢν δὲ βροτοὶ εἰδότες σύνθεν / πλαξίονται, δίκρανοι· ἄμηχαναν γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν / στήθεσιν
ἰθύνει πλαξίοντι νόον . . . uses the same verb (ἰθύνει) as Nestor describing the captain who
guides his ship (23.317). Likewise, as the bad charioteer’s horses wander (πλαξίονται,
23.321), so do deceived mortals in Parmenides’ poem (πλαξίονται . . . πλαξίοντι νόον).
Nor did Apollo’s obstruction of Diomedes escape Athena’s notice, and especially quickly she aided the shepherd of the host, and gave his whip to him, and imbued his horses with vigour. But she angrily approached the son of Admetus, and the goddess broke the yoke of his horses: and his mares ran around the path . . . (Il. 23.388–93)

Eumelus is exceptional in the Iliad for having two mares as his horses.21 So a young man driving a chariot pulled by two mares is sabotaged by a goddess. In Parmenides’ proem, a young man on a chariot pulled by two mares (B1.1) is guided by a goddess (B1.22). It may also be relevant here that in the proems both of the Iliad (1.1) and of Parmenides’ poem, the goddess (θεά) is anonymous.

Parmenides’ engagement with book 23 of the Iliad puts him in good company, since a fragment of Empedocles’ also engaged specifically with the chariot race:

στεινωσποι μὲν γὰρ παλάμαι κατὰ γυία κέχυνται,
pollâ δὲ δειλ.’ ἐμπαία, τὰ τ’ ἀμβλύνουσι μέριμνας.
paiōn δ’ ἐν ἄωθει βίου μέρος ἄθρεσαντες
ὀκύμοροι κατονδὸν δίκην ἄρδεντες ἀπέπταν,
αὐτὸ μόνον πεισθέντες ὅτι προσέκυρσεν ἕκαστος,
pántos’ ἐλαυνόμενοι, τὸ δ’ ὅλον <πᾶς> εὐχετᾶ ἀπεπτάν,
οὔτως οὔτ’ ἐπιδερκτά τάδ’ ἀνδράσιν οὔτ’ ἐπακουστά
<πᾶ> εὐρεῖν ἄρδεντα

. . . σὺ <δ’> οὖν, ἐπεὶ ὧδ’ ἐλιάσθης,
pεύσεαι. οὐ πλεῖόν ἠὲ βροτείη μῆτις ὄρωρεν.

For narrow devices are poured throughout their limbs,
but many wretched things are embedded, and they blunt their meditations. And having seen [only] a small living in their lives, they swift-doomed soar and fly off like smoke, persuaded of only that very thing which each crashes into,
being driven in all directions. But <each> boasts to have found the whole.
In this way these things are neither seen by men nor heard
Nor grasped with the understanding . . .

. . . But you, then, since you have stepped aside here,
you will learn. Mortal craft has certainly risen no further. (31 DK B2)

21 The only other hero not to have a stallion is Iphinous, killed by Glaucus (Il. 7.13–16).
We have already seen how Nestor’s advice regarding μῆτις (‘craft’) (Il. 23.311–18) features prominently in the lead up to the race, and Empedocles’ mention of the limitations of craft here could be seen as an agonistic reference to Nestor’s discourse. In moving to specifics, during the race itself, Antilochus’ interpretation of his father’s advice involves a dangerous manoeuvre to overtake Menelaus, who yells a warning to Nestor’s son:

Ἀντίλοχ’ ἀφραδέως ἱππάζεαι, ἀλλ’ ἄνεχ’ ἵππους.
στεινωπὸς γὰρ ὁδός, τάχα δ’ εὐρυτέρῃ παρελάσσαι,22
μή πως ἀμφοτέρους δηλῆσαι ἅρματι κύρσας.

Antilochus, you are recklessly charioteering. Restrain your horses. For the road is narrow, and it will soon be wider to pass, lest you crash into my chariot and wreck both of us. (Il. 23.426–8)

We find here a significant overlap in lexicon with the Empedoclean passage: the adjective στεινωπός, ‘narrow’, and verb forms of ἐλαύνειν, ‘drive’, and κυρεῖν, ‘strike’.23 Antilochus’ dangerous use of μῆτις, according to Menelaus, risks the disaster of mutual destruction, and it is in these terms that Empedocles discusses the limits of mortal craft (βροτείη μῆτις). By standing apart from the chaos, Pausanias, Empedocles’ addressee, will learn precisely how to transcend these limitations.

The Iliadic chariot race also introduced a topos to post-Parmenidean and Empedoclean philosophical texts. Specifically, Nestor’s speech to Antilochus is the locus classicus of Socratic ἐπαγωγή, usually termed ‘induction’, but perhaps more rightly, ‘analogy’.24 Later authors use the phraseology of Nestor’s advice as the material for analogical arguments about knowledge and technique.25 Eustathius’ comments (on Nestor’s speech) are as follows:

Then, arguing inductively via a woodcutter (δρυτόμου) and a pilot (κυβερνήτου) and a charioteer (ἡνιόχου) that all things are achieved rightly by means of counsel and skill – for here first, they say, Homer uses induction like philosophers, namely, the argument establishing the general from specifics. (Eustathius Commentary on the Iliad 4:736.8–13)

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22 We adopt West’s (2000) reading of the aorist infinitive active.
23 Cf. στεινωπῷ ἐν ὁδῷ (Il. 23.416). Kingsley 2002: 360–6 is a more exhaustive treatment of the intertexts between Empedocles B2 and the chariot race of Iliad 23, emphasising the associations of Pausanias with Achilles and Empedocles with Apollo.
This statement is borne out by the evidence when one turns to Plato’s *Ion*, where Socrates’ ultimate point is that a rhapsode does not have skill, but rather is inspired. Plato is not here engaging in induction, but analogy, since the rhapsode is negatively compared to skilled/artistic professions:

Socrates: Why, does not Homer speak a good deal about arts, in a good many places? For instance, about chariot-driving (περὶ ἡνίοχείας): if I can recall the lines, I will quote them to you.
Ion: No, I will recite them, for I can remember.
Socrates: Tell me then what Nestor says to his son Antilochus, advising him to be careful about the turning-post in the horse-race in honour of Patroclus. (Plato *Ion* 537a5–7, trans. Lamb)

Now the *Ion* is specifically about Homeric recitation, so the presence of this passage would not necessarily be evidence for book 23’s special place in Platonic thought were it the lone instance of charioteers and pilots appearing in Platonic arguments. However, Plato elsewhere uses the terms of book 23 to ask about the aptness of analogical comparisons between earthly rulers and the gods:26

Athenian: But to which kind of rulers are they like? Or which are like to them, of those rulers whom we can fairly compare with them, as small with great? Would drivers (ἡνίοχοι) of rival teams resemble them, or pilots (κυβερνήται) of ships? (Plato *Leges* 905e5–8, trans. Bury)

It is not just that charioteers are mentioned here, but that these are also compared to pilots of ships using the exact terminology of Nestor’s speech. This does not necessarily imply a direct or intentional ‘intertext’ between Nestor’s speech and the use of charioteers and pilots in inductive or analogical arguments in Classical philosophy. It more likely indicates that the authority of the *Iliad* created a *topos*, wherein the charioteer (ἡνίοχος) and the pilot (κυβερνήτης) were the default terms in induction/analogy. It also seemingly demonstrates that *Iliad* 23 was not as neglected in antiquity as it has been in modern scholarship. Aristotle, using the examples of both the pilot and the charioteer, similarly refers to this process as ἐπαγωγή:

Induction (ἐπαγωγή) is the passage from specific things to the general; for example, if the knowledgeable pilot (κυβερνήτης) is best and likewise the charioteer (ἡνίοχος), generally speaking even the knowledgeable person is best concerning each thing. (Aristotle *Top.* A.12, 105a13–16)27

26 Cf. Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.1.9.7.
27 See Polybius Sardianus *De Figuris* 614.4–10 Walz cited by Ausland 2002: 50, n30: ‘It is induction (ἐπαγωγή δὲ ἐστιν) when, having proposed something from similar things, we adduce the point for which we will persuade. For example . . . (citing Il. 23.315–18).’
Therefore, book 23 of the *Iliad* is a source of ‘philosophical’ authority for Classical philosophy. Nestor’s examples of induction/analogy are precisely the same as Plato’s and Aristotle’s. Parmenides’ engagement with the chariot race, therefore, aligns him with Empedocles as well as the later philosophical tradition.

One might speculate on the nature of Parmenides’ conceptual relationship to the *Iliad*. Parmenides has used the metrical language of Homeric poetry, and specifically of the chariot race, in his metaphysical poem. Moreover, he specifically uses the competitive language of chariot racing:

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\text{τόν σοι ἐγὼ διάκοσμον ἐοικότα πάντα φατίξω,} \\
\text{ὡς οὐ μή ποτέ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη παρελάσῃ.}
\]

So I will tell you each thing, seemingly well-ordered, 
So that no judgement of mortals will ever surpass you. (B8.60–1)

In Homeric poetry, παρελαύνειν, ‘to pass in one’s chariot’, appears only in the chariot race (II. 23.382, 427, 527). Based on Parmenides’ use of verbs of competitive chariot racing, it is conceivable that he is portraying not only the conceptual journey of his philosophy, but also his *kouros* as participating in a race of insight against his contemporaries, predecessors and successors. The conceptual metaphor of a chariot race, as a culturally prestigious and deeply embedded mental image of Parmenides’ audience, might have been the perfect, to use I. A. Richards’s term, ‘vehicle’ through which to impart knowledge.

To sum up, the precondition for assessing the degree of conceptual innovation or conservativism within Parmenides’ poem is a nuanced understanding of the intellectual culture in which he lived. The contribution of this study is the idea that Parmenides’ text is among the oldest instances of the reception of the chariot race in book 23 of the *Iliad*, with which Empedocles also directly engaged. Moreover, Nestor’s advice to Antilochus in the lead up to the chariot race is the *locus classicus* for inductive reasoning and/or analogy in later philosophical writing. One cannot explain economically this chariot imagery via either a lost tradition of Indo-European philosophy or historical interaction with early Indic philosophy. Parmenides’ interaction with Homeric poetry renders Indo-European or contact-based explanation of the role of the chariot in Parmenides and the *Upaniṣads* unnecessary. Regarding the correspondences between the chariots of Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, we side with Jens Schlieter’s judgement, in this volume, of ‘coevolution’ rather than any kind of diffusion. On the Greek side, it remains to be said that the representation of the soul as a chariot

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29 The chariot race, the most culturally prestigious act of physical agonism within fifth-century Greek society, potentially reflects a competitive relationship between Parmenides and his poetic predecessors.
in *Phaedrus* potentially engages with the chariot in Parmenides’ poem. Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (2003) has argued for a precise intertextual relationship between Parmenides and the *Phaedrus*, specifically focusing on their common use of Zeus’ chariot ride in *Iliad* 8.41–52. Moreover, Plato’s wider attention to earlier poetry in this dialogue is well documented. As Moore (2014) has treated in detail, Socrates’ quotation of Pindar at 227b6–10 reveals a more systematic relationship between the chariots of the *Phaedrus* and the chariot team of *Isthmian* 2. Furthermore, Pender (2007) has independently argued that Plato’s *Phaedrus* engages intertextually with the poetry of Sappho and Anacreon.

The chariot also captured the imagination of the hieratic traditions of northern India. The Vedic texts routinely deploy the chariot journey as a metaphor for the sacrifice. The germ of this idea, seen already in the *Ṛgveda*, has been re-shaped by generations of Vedic theologians. It will be claimed in this chapter that the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, when restored to its proper canonical context, also uses the chariot as a metaphor for the sacrifice.

The *Upaniṣads* are a discrete genre of texts from the perspective of Śaṅkara, the great Advaita Vedānta philosopher of the eighth century CE. The earliest *Upaniṣads*, however, were not distinguished from their respective Vedic canons. Typically considered the oldest *Upaniṣad*, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is in fact the terminus of the White Yajurvedic canon, which begins with the *Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā*, a text containing all the sacrificial mantras. It is followed by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, a text replete with variations and exceptions to ritual praxis as well as exegetical commentary. Placed at the end of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

The first chapters of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, a Black Yajurvedic text, would have been the capstone of Kaṭha education in its respective canon. Essentially, Parmenides, or his informants, would have had to be Vedic initiates and committed to memory the corpus of Kaṭha texts before instruction in an *Upaniṣad* would be permitted. Outsiders to Vedic practice do not appear in depictions of

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30 On the particular relationship between Parmenides and the *Phaedrus*, see Slaveva-Griffin 2003: 244–9. She does not discuss the chariot race of *Iliad* 23 as a textual antecedent.

31 A few remarks on the document’s history will allow us to contextualise *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* within its own time, rather than through the lens of later Indian traditions. The consensus, based on thematic correspondences and manuscript divisions, is that the six chapters, or *vallīs*, consist of two halves. The latter three chapters are not reliably pre-Alexandrian. As the image of the chariot is located in the third *vallī*, it is the first half of the text which will receive attention. If indeed the first three chapters are pre-Alexandrian, then the text predates writing in India and must be an oral composition. Witzel (1977) suggests the first three *vallīs* originally belonged at the end of the lost *Kaṭha-Śīkṣā-Upaniṣad*.

32 This is still true of Vedic transmission today. Knipe (2015: 32): ‘In any case, if successful at memorizing passages from either the third or fourth section of the Taittirīya Saṁhitā the student will persevere until he has mastered all seven sections before going on to the
studentship in the earliest *Upaniṣads*; only a senior student who has mastered the visible mechanics of the sacrifice is permitted to learn its arcane metaphysics. After all, these Vedic texts are the intellectual property of priestly clans and are orally transmitted exclusively within the family.

While the Samhitās were performed in public, the Āraṇyakas and *Upaniṣads* were not. The Āraṇyakas, ‘wilderness books’, were studied privately away from settled populations. The word *upaniṣad* is often translated as ‘secret’, and indeed these texts were even less accessible. Their depiction of studentship is always master and pupil. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Yājñavalkya only tells Janaka his secret after they go ‘off-camera’ such that the transmission is hidden even from the text itself. As Parmenides would have encountered both linguistic and social barriers, a contact scenario is impractical. While this analysis treats the chariot imagery employed by the *Katha Upaniṣad* and Parmenides, once restored to their respective intertextual relationships, any philosophical similarities become much more uncertain as well.

In turning now to the chariot imagery, it merits pointing out that just as the *Upaniṣads* are the inheritors of Vedic traditions of ritual exegesis, they are also the inheritors of poetic and rhetorical traditions going back to the *Ṛgveda*.

next three major texts in his tradition, the *Taittiriya Brahmana*, *Taittiriya Āraṇyakas*, and *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*.

33 In fact, there is a tradition of recitational acrobatics, still popular today at temples, in which the Samhitā is recited with word order transformed by algorithm. The more complex the recitation the more impressive and respectable.

34 Staal (2008: 116) notes that some Sāmvedic chants are *grāmageyagāna*, ‘to be sung in the village’, but a category of complex and powerful melodies are *araṇyageyagāna*, ‘to be sung in the forest’. While the village was a public space, the forest was a remote, dangerous and private place. Concerning the Āraṇyakas, Staal (2008: 117) adds ‘Renou characterized all these “Forest Compositions” as “meta-ritual esotericism”, stressing their secretive character as well as the fact that they are still pervaded by ritual technicalities and often exhibit ritual structures.’

35 The oldest of this stratum of texts, the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*, clearly positioned itself in relation to the older *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* as the ‘secret Brāhmaṇa’ of the Jaiminīya Sāmavedins.

36 Indeed, *Katha Upaniṣad* depicts studentship this way; only in private does Death teach Naciketas how to pile the fire altar who recites the instructions back to him.

37 Staal (2008: 160) notes with irony: ‘Secrecy is the last remnant of the originally secret oral traditions of families and clans. There is one paradox: the Upaniṣads became the most famous part of the Vedas.’

38 The specifics of Parmenides’ monism are controversial, but the monism of *Katha Upaniṣad* is no less problematic. The text claims a special relationship between the ātman, ‘the self’, and brahman, typically taken to be a panentheistic conception of the cosmos. These ideas are still developing, and to use these simple definitions bleaches the words of their ritual dimensions. If restored to their proper Vedic context, ātman and brahman are quite different from anything in Eleatic thought.
Already in the *Ṛgveda*, the chariot is a frequent locus of metaphor and simile for a number of reasons. We will enumerate a few here. Firstly, the root *yuj*, ‘to yoke’, is extended to new semantic domains much as the English verb ‘to harness’ can be; thus the chariot is used in the context of technique, for example RV 9.88.2a: *ā īṃ rátho ná bhuriśāḷ ayoji*, ‘(Soma) is yoked like a much-conquering chariot.’ Secondly, the chariot is symbolic of competitive sport, so it is iconic of any agonistic endeavor. Employing both a metaphor and a simile is RV 9.94.3ab: *pāri yát kavīḥ kāviyā bhārate / śūro ná rátho bhúvanāni viśvā*, ‘When the poet encompasses all poetics, like the champion chariot, he encompasses all worlds.’ In this diptych, the winning poet is compared to a winning chariot, and not just any chariot, but the champion chariot who races in the largest track: the Sun. Thirdly, the chariot, being a constructed item, features in similes and metaphors of creation, sometimes called ‘craft metaphors’. Consider examples such as RV 1.130.06ab: *imāṃ te vācāṃ vasūyānta āyāvo / rátham ná dhīraḥ suápā atakṣiṣuḥ*, ‘Seeking wealth, the Āyus fashioned this poetic speech for you, like an insightful artisan does a chariot.’ The most famous iteration of chariot metaphor in the *Ṛgveda* may be that of 10.135.3, in which a boy mourning his deceased father hears a voice that tells him *yāṃ kumāra návaṃ rátham / acakrām mánasākṛṇoh / ēkeśam viśvātaḥ prāṇcam / āpaśyann ádhi tiṣṭhasi* // ‘Boy, you have made a new chariot with your mind, wheel-less, single-axled yet facing all directions, without seeing you stand atop it.’ This chariot may well be a metaphor for the sacrifice that has the power to reunite father and son, but because the son lacks vision, he cannot see the chariot and does not understand the sacrifice.

What follows is an attempt to demonstrate that the chariot in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* still refers to the sacrifice and constitutes a metaphysical theorisation of the operations of the fire altar. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, like the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* and the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, belongs to a priestly śākhā, or school, of the Black Yajurveda. The chief representative of the Black Yajurveda on the ritual ground is the adhvaryu who is responsible for, among other things, piling the fire altar. A close examination of all three of these *Upaniṣads* reveals a focus on fire and the fire altar. The first vallī of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* reimagines a dialogue in verse originally present in the lost *Kaṭha Brāhmaṇa*. In the *Brāhmaṇa* account, a boy, Naciketas, goes to Death’s house to discover the secrets of undiminishing merits and ritual. Death reveals that the secret is the proper piling of the nāciketa fire altar. Many altars take the sacrificer to heaven, but this fire altar allows one to avoid *punarmṛtyu*, ‘re-death’, and remain in heaven indefinitely.

The text then describes how the altar is constructed. It utilises twenty-one

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39 Readings of KaU that ignore Bodewitz 1985 are intellectually moribund.
40 Selections of the *Kaṭha Brāhmaṇa* survive as quotations in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, see Witzel 1977: 140. Plato quotes neither text.
golden bricks in a ring as the base of the altar, called the ātman, upon which one piles a layer of clay bricks. The golden base establishes a golden, heavenly abode for the patron of the sacrifice, and this is explained through an aetiology of gold. The primordial sacrificer, Prajāpati, created tapas, ‘heat’, from which sprang gold. After tossing it into the fire, he is unsatisfied and casts it into two other fires. These three fires of the Vedic sacrifice still do not please him. He is only satisfied after placing the gold into the fire of his own heart, Agni Vaiśvānara.

The Kaṭha Upaniṣad repeats the same opening prose sentence as its source text before going into its poetic recreation. In oral texts in the Vedic tradition, the repetition of the incipit, or pratīka, immediately recalls the quoted text. This first vallī tells much the same story, focusing on Naciketas and Death. Naciketas visits Death who teaches him how to pile the nāciketa altar. Naciketas demonstrates his ability to memorise and repeat what Death instructs, and Death rewards him with a golden circle. Death repeatedly explains that the fire altar connects the ātman, hidden in the cave of the heart, to the brahman which is beyond. From the perspective of its source narrative, the ātman is Agni Vaiśvānara, the fire hidden in heart of Prajāpati. Rau argues that brahman’s ‘birth’ in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad refers to the Sun rising in the east:41

\[
\text{trīṇāciketas tribhir etya sandhiṃ / trikarmakṛt tarati janmamṛtyū / brahma jajñāṃ devam īḍyaṃ viditvā / nicāyyemāṃ sāntim atyantam eti //}
\]

Uniting the three, he is the three nāciketa man. Doing the ritual threefold, he crosses birth and death, perceiving brahman as the one being born, as the god to be worshipped. Recognising this (golden disc), he goes to endless peace. (KaU 1.17)

Rau compares this passage with one found in an Atharvavedic hymn to the Sun, the incipit of which is brahma jajñānāṃ prathamāṃ purāstād, ‘the brahman first born in the East’.42 Although Rau does not mention it, this verse also occurs in the piling of the fire altar.43 The thesis of this vallī, read from the perspective of the Kaṭha canon, is that there is a latent connection between the internal fire, the fire altar and the Sun. That is why sacrifices work, and that is why they achieve the heavenly world. The reductive label ‘monism’ can hardly capture this ritual metaphysics, which joins microcosmic, mesocosmic and macrocosmic theatres. If anything, the text emphasises a threefold model of reality. We have already established the Ṛgvedic antiquity of the chariot as a metaphor for the sacrifice, but in the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, a Black Yajurvedic school closely related to the Kaṭhas, the nāciketa fire altar is directly likened to a chariot:

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41 Rau 1971: 162.
42 Śaunaka Saṃhitā 4.1.1.
43 Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.2.8.2; Kaṭha Saṃhitā 16.15.
He who knows this and piles the nāciketa fire (altar) wins a world beyond, one endless and undecaying. Just like one standing on a turning chariot looks down upon either side, he looks down upon Night and Day. He who knows this and piles the nāciketa fire (altar), Day and Night do not obtain his world. (TB 3.11.7.5)

The Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa informs us that the world beyond is one without spatial (anantā) or temporal (akṣayyā) boundaries. It lacks divisions of day and night. These qualities, however, apply exclusively to the heavenly world gained through proper sacrifice using a nāciketa altar. It is not a theory of monism or masked by the illusion of plurality; these are separate worlds.

The following section of the Kaṭha Upaniṣad is particularly relevant since it opens the chapter featuring the chariot metaphor:

ṛtaṃ pibantau sukṛtasya loke / guhāṃ praviṣṭau parame parārdhe
chāyātapau brahmacaro vaddantī paścāgnayo ye ca triṇāciketāḥ

The brahman-knowers, who maintain the five fires and the triple nāciketa altar, say that shadow and light entered: (one) a cave (the other) yonder beyond. Both drinking in the world of proper ritual actions. (KaU 3.1)

Knowers of brahman assert there are two entities: one inside the heart and one in heaven. This could hardly be characterised as monism. While the two have a relationship, they are not identical, just as light and shadow have a relationship but are not identical. Further, this world is one of proper ritual; knowledge is useless without praxis.44 The knowers of brahman are also maintainers of the five fires, which are the three used in sacrifice (gārhapatya, āhavanīya, dakṣināgni), as well as the domestic fire (āvasthya) and that of the king’s court (sabhya).45 Bodewitz (1973) argues that a doctrine of five fires is mapped to the five breaths as a way of internalising the sacrifice. Bodewitz (1985) argues that the triple nāciketa altar is not synonymous with the three fires of Vedic sacrifice, but rather

44 Other readings of the text give svakṛtasya, ‘one’s own (ritual) actions’; both possibilities are captured by the translation ‘proper’, see Olivelle 1998: 606.
45 This means they have done the ādhana ritual and become āhitāgni, ‘one whose fires are set’, a prerequisite to performing more advanced śrauta rituals like an agniṣṭoma or agnic-ayana. See Knipe 2015: 190–4.
three altars in three theatres.\textsuperscript{46} Hardly rejecting Vedic orthopraxis, the \textit{Kaṭha Upaniṣad} is theorising it. The text continues:

\begin{quote}
yah setur ījānānām aksaraṃ brahma yat param
abhayaṃ tītīṣatām pāraṃ nāciketaṃ śakemahi
\end{quote}

May we master the \textit{nāciketa} (fire altar), which is the bridge of those who have sacrificed, beyond which is unwithering \textit{brahman}, for those who desire to cross to the far shore without fear. (KaU 3.2)

The speakers (‘we’) must be Kaṭha priests, those who can master the \textit{nāciketa} to secure the heavenly shore for their financiers. No self-realisation or arcane knowledge about \textit{brahman} is necessary for the patron of the sacrifice, only for the priests who must construct the altar correctly.

\begin{quote}
pra te bravīmi tad u me nibodha svargyaṃ aṅgīṃ nāciketaḥ prajāṇan anantakāpit-
tim atho pratiṣṭhāṃ u viddhi tvam etam ni-hitam guhāyām
\end{quote}

I proclaim this to you, so pay attention Naciketas! Recognising the heavenly fire (altar) is one which attains an endless world – but know this: its foundation is hidden in the cave (of the heart). (KaU 1.14)

Here there is an explicit identification of \textit{brahman} with the heavenly fire (altar), \textit{svargya aṅgi}, and the foundation, \textit{pratiṣṭhā}, of that altar is in the cave (of the heart).\textsuperscript{47} These are the two which the chapter opened with: Light and Shadow, \textit{brahman} and \textit{ātman}, the visible Sun and invisible altar in the heart; the \textit{nāciketa} fire altar connects them.

Finally, in \textit{Kaṭha Upaniṣad} 3.3, the players appear: the \textit{ātman} is a \textit{rathin}, ‘chariot passenger’, and the \textit{śarīra}, ‘body’, is \textit{ratham eva}, ‘merely the chariot’. The \textit{buddhi}, ‘awareness’, is \textit{sārathi}, ‘chariot driver’. The \textit{manas}, ‘thought’, is \textit{pragraham eva}, ‘merely the bridle’. Finally, the \textit{indriya}, ‘senses’, are the \textit{haya}, ‘horses’.\textsuperscript{48} The Indian chariot is almost always depicted with a driver conveying a warrior or king, and so already different from its single-occupant Parmenidean

\textsuperscript{46} Typically termed microcosmic, mesocosmic and macrocosmic, but perhaps better conceived of as internal, performative and universal. This emphasis on all three theatres, not simply microcosmic and macrocosmic, suggests that the internalisation of the ritual is a component of the ritual performance and not its replacement.

\textsuperscript{47} KaU 2.20 tells us \textit{ātmasya jantor nihito guhāyām}, ‘the \textit{ātman} is hidden in the cave of this person’. A full treatment of the second \textit{Vallī} is currently in preparation.

\textsuperscript{48} Even this compositional metaphor, in which two wholes are homologised by the equation of their parts, has a precedent in the \textit{Ṛgveda}, in which the sacrifice is equated to the year by equating its components to the seasons: \textit{yāt pūruṣaṇa haviṣā / devā yajñām ātanvata / vasantō asyāśid āyam / grīṣmā idhmāh śarād dhavih} // ‘When the gods extended the sacrifice with the Puruṣa as the oblation, Spring was its butter, the kindling was its Summer, and Autumn was its oblation’ (RV 10.90.6).
The chariot, as the method of conveyance of kings, suggests the rathin is of higher social station than the sārathi. None of these nuances is present in the Greek metaphor. The sārathi has one task, then, to deliver the rathin safely to the destination:

\[
vijñānasārathir yas tu manah pragrahavān naraḥ / 
so ’dhvanah pāram āpnoti / tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam //
\]

A man who possesses the bridle of the mind, whose chariot-driver is discerning, he reaches the end of the road: Viṣṇu’s ultimate step. (KaU 3.9)

What follows are three verses that describe a taxonomy of the consistent components of an individual. The lowest elements are the sense faculties, then the mental faculties, then the great ātman, then unmanifest, and then the cosmic man (puruṣa) which occupies the supreme position.

Definitions of ātman and puruṣa contoured by Vedic ritual reveal that the text describes the transmission of the terrestrial self to the heavenly self. Passages of the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa that describe the nāciketa fire altar portray the ātman of Prajāpati, synonymous with the cosmic man (puruṣa), as the fire inside his heart. Elsewhere the piling of the fire altar is depicted as the reassembling of Prajāpati, who sacrificed himself at the beginning of time to create the universe. Piling the altar reassembles his body and restores the universe to its proper state. The Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa claims that the altar will transport the patron of the sacrifice together with a body (saśarīra) to a world beyond.

The chariot is indeed a metaphor, but one that is geared towards a theorisation of ritual success in the late Vedic period. For the sacrifice to work the yajamāna, the patron of the sacrifice, must become Prajāpati, the first sacrificer and cosmic man. While the yajamāna has an invisible fire within his body, his ātman, the cosmic man has a great ātman within his body: the Sun. The bricks of the nāciketa fire altar are also a body for its ātman, which is the ring of gold at its

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49 ŚB (Mādhyandina) 5.3.1.8: sāyonī vā aśvīnau sāyonī savyaṣṭiḥsāráthi samānaṃ hi rátham-adhitīṣṭhatastās, ‘Same-wombed are the Aśvins, and same-wombed both fighter and driver for they stand upon the same chariot.’ Here the connection between chariot fighter and driver is given a charter in the Aśvins.

50 Clear from later texts like the Māhabhārata where Karṇa is disrespected at the assembly as merely the son of a chariot driver. The Bhagavad Gītā inverts this paradigm by having Kṛṣṇa drive Arjuna’s chariot just prior to revealing himself as God.

51 This notion is wholly justified by the constant references to ritual executed through both narrative choice and style.

52 Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad provides more details about this heavenly journey; however, the difficulties of travelling through heaven are also sources of anxiety in the Rgveda; see RV 10.135.

53 See Gonda 1978: 376.
New riders, old chariots

Proper piling and pacifying of this altar produces the interpenetration of these three ātmans (self, gold, Sun) effecting the transit to heaven and preventing rebirth on earth. The chariot, then, refers to the body of the nāciketa fire altar, which transports the sacrificer’s ātman to a heavenly world.

In conclusion, this study has been a collaborative demonstration that these two texts are contoured by their use of earlier sources. To ignore this intertextual dimension reduces the amount of empirical evidence that can inform scholarly analysis. The innovations of Parmenides and the Kaṭha Upaniṣad against their respective traditions deserve further treatment, but such an analytic process can only achieve the best results once these earlier sources are fully appreciated.

The dimensions of the altar and the sacrificial grounds are all relative to the physical measurements of the yajamāna himself; see Staal 2010: 196.

KaU 3.13 refers to three ātmans: a jñāna, ‘recognitive’, amahat, ‘immense’, and a śānta, ‘pacified’, ātman, which in the Vedic context refers to the fire altar. Staal (2010: 508): ‘It is believed that if the adhvaryu steps on the altar, he will die. The completed altar is now ferocious (krūra), vibrating with power, and dreadful (ghora). Its powers have to be channeled and it has to be pacified and made to be at peace (śānta).’

This is consistent with the early Vedic ideology of the fire altar. Proferes (2007) argues that the fire of the clan chief, known as Agni Vaiśvānara, is depicted as supreme over the individual fires of the allied clans just as the Sun is supreme over terrestrial fires.