PART I

PLATO
The Muses and Philosophy: Elements for a History of the *Pseudos* [1991]

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(The liar) takes advantage of the undeniable affinity of our capacity for action, for changing reality, with this mysterious faculty we possess that enables us to say “The sun is shining” when it is raining cats and dogs.

The philosopher, guard-dog of the truth and of the desire for truth, is committed to *alētheia*. The sophist, this wolf for as long as there have been philosophers, is committed to the *pseudos*. *Pseudos* names, from its origin, and indissolubly, the “false” and the “lie” – the “falsehood,” therefore, of one who deceives and/or deceives himself. It is the ethico-logical concept par excellence. The *Sophist* of Plato explicitly marks this double bind, which joins the sophistic and *pseudos* in the eyes of philosophy: the sophist is an imitation, a feral counterfeit of the philosopher, because the sophist chooses the domain of the false, the semblance, the phenomenon, opinion – in a word, all that is not. Philosophy of appearances and appearance of philosophy: sophist simulator-dissimulator.

I would like to attempt to pinpoint the *pseudos*, primarily through Parmenides and Hesiod, in order to determine the manner in which the sophistic lodges itself there, so as to understand, through Plato, how philosophy at its beginnings domesticates the very idea of *pseudos*, and organizes the place of the sophistic. Place the *alter ego* in the structure: on the one hand, the *pseudos*, the possibility of choosing the *pseudos*, is a condition of the possibility of the very existence of language; in other words, not everyone is a sophist, but in order to speak, there must be sophists. On the other hand, the interpretation of the *pseudos* in terms of *mimēsis* blocks every assignment of the criterion and confuses the imputation: “Sage or sophist?,” the Stranger wonders to the end.
One further word about the *pseudos* before the great ancestors mount the stage. Not on what it signifies, but on how it signifies it. *Pseudos* (like *phēmi*, *fari*, which mean the act of pronouncing) has the root *bha*, “breathe.” With *pseudos* it is a matter of the breath in language, of the irreducibility of breath – I could have used the title: “On the breath in language” – the *bha* in the *logos* – in every sense of the word, because, as everyone knows, the sophist does not lack an air.

I. PARMENIDES OR HESIOD: WHAT PLACE FOR THE PSEUDOS?

I.1. Parmenides. “Is not”: the impossibility of the “pseudos” and the habit of words

The possibility of the *pseudos* is linked to the existence of not-being. For if what is not, in the simplest sense, is not, if it is not in any way, then obviously there could only be being, and the saying of being. The term *logos* says this plenitude of saying and being as they reveal each other, this “thought-speech” proper to Greek, which Martin Heidegger, contemplating one of the most Parmenidean fragments of Heraclitus, renders as “the Laying that gathers.”

Such is the very situation that the *Poem* of Parmenides inaugurates at the origin of western thought. The term *pseudos* does not appear in the preserved fragments. I would like to say that it cannot, that it should not appear there. For *pseudos* names the mode of being of what is not, while the *Poem* is there to assert that what is not, absolutely is not. In its place emerges the term *doxa*, or rather its plural, *doxai*. “Two-headed” mortals do not know to which “opinion” to dedicate themselves; while the truth, and it alone, “untrembling heart” which characterizes the path of being, is always “persuasive,” just as “persuasion,” and it alone, is always “true.”

Some textual waypoints to authenticate the monody. In fragment 2, the goddess speaks, articulating the “only two ways of inquiry that one can think”:

η μὲν ὅπως ἦστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἦστι μὴ εἶναι,
πειθοῦς ἔστι κέλευθος, ἀληθείῃ γὰρ ὑπηδεῖ,
η δ’ ὡς οὐκ ἦστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεῶν ἦστι μὴ εἶναι,
τὴν δὴ τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἐμμεν ἀταρπόν·
οὔτε γὰρ ἄν γνοίης τὸ γε μὴ ἔδω, οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν,
οὔτε φράσαις.

This one: that is and that (it) is not (capable of) not being,
Is the way of persuasion, for (persuasion) accompanies truth.
That one: that is not and that is necessarily not being,
I tell you is an impracticable path,
Because you could not know that which exactly is not
(indeed, it is inaccessible)
Nor say it.
On one side then, taken in an original mutual belonging, of which Martin Heidegger henceforth will have made every historian of philosophy aware, are being, thinking, saying, truth, but also, as is seldom not forgotten, persuasion. On the other: “is not” and that is all. One cannot deploy – think, say – the identity of the “is not”: that is why the path is impracticable.

To attempt to add something to the “is not,” to pronounce, for example, an untameable statement like “not-beings are,” amounts to embarking on a “phantom path.” If, however, we are seeking habit, custom, it is here that it speaks, or rather, makes some sound: this phantom path is that of “ethos, with its multiple experiences,” it is the very thing that forges ethos, character, about which ethics treats. Opposed to this, by refuting its composite statements, is logos, which keeps “is” as the word of the sole way. It is as if the opposition of being and not-being, or more exactly of being and the being/not-being mixture, furnished the first co-ordinates of the opposition between logic and ethics. Here is fragment 7 and the beginning of fragment 8:

This statement shall never in fact be tamed: not-beings are. But you, turn your thought away from this way of inquiry. Let not a habit with its multiple experiences draw you down this path: to direct an eye without aim, and an ear and tongue ringing with echoes; but by means of the logos make yourself a judge of the refutation, with its multiple disputes, that I have just uttered. There remains only the word of the way: is.

The situation, more complex than it first appeared, is therefore as follows. On the one hand, we must say that the pseudos is impossible because not-being is not, because being and not-being do not mix, because the logos says always and says only being. Such is the case when one lets oneself be guided by the goddess, when one is a sage, or perhaps merely a philosopher. But we must also admit that the opinions of mortals, that which appears to them, doxai, ta dokounta closely resemble the pseudos, because they are “words,” “names,” which are believed to say “true” things, that is, things that are, while in fact the words and things have everything except being:

τῷ πάντ’ ὄνομ’ ἔσται,
δόσα βροτοί κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἁληθῆ,
γίγνεσθαι τε καὶ ἄλλωσθαι, εἶναι τε καὶ οὐχί . . .
They will be a name, therefore: all the things that mortals, convinced that they are true, have supposed come to be and disappear, are and are not.\textsuperscript{15}

The impossibility of the \textit{pseudos}: there is only being, the \textit{logos}, ontology. The habit of words: there is also, beside the \textit{logos} and making itself pass for it, the \textit{flatus vocis}, a conventional effect of breath.

I.2. Hesiod. The pair “\textit{pseudos-alēthes},” and the mimetic

The joint between \textit{alētheia} and \textit{doxai}, between \textit{on} and \textit{dokounta} is doubtless one of the most delicate and controversial points in the interpretation of Parmenides. We can measure the difficulty better by confronting it with another source of Greek thought, one which we customarily think of as non-philosophical, although its kinship is recognizable:\textsuperscript{16} Homer, and, accordingly, Hesiod.

The term \textit{pseudos} is this time liberally pronounced. One of the most significant sequences is found both in book \textit{τ} of the \textit{Odyssey},\textsuperscript{17} and in the prologue to the \textit{Theogony}.\textsuperscript{18} Odysseus, unrecognizable, tells Penelope, as if he were not himself, but Aithon the Cretan, how he received Odysseus and his companions at his home for twelve days: ἵππες ψεύδεα πολλά λέγων ἔτυμοις ὁμοία, “He feigned many falsities while speaking, similar to authentic realities.”\textsuperscript{19} And this is for Penelope, for the games of Penelope, to dissolve.

Essential here, in my opinion, is the appearance, paired with \textit{pseudos}, of a term other than \textit{alēthes}: \textit{etumos}. The doublet of \textit{etumos}, \textit{etētumos}, already for Parmenides qualifies the path “\textit{which is and which is real} (τὴν δ’ ὄστε πέλεκεν καὶ ἔτητμοιν εἶναι),”\textsuperscript{20} as opposed to the path “unthinkable and anonymous, which is not true/is not a true path (οὐ γὰρ ἀληθῆς ἔστιν δῶς).” However, the two words do not mean the same thing. We know well, perhaps too well, the extent to which \textit{alētheia} faithfully names the recollection, the unveiling of being within, through, in, as \textit{logos}. \textit{Etumos} – coming from the same family as \textit{etazō} (“put to the test,” “examine”) and doubtless \textit{etoimos} (“ready,” “available,” and so “imminent” and “effective,” as well as “zealous,” “courageous”) – means rather, as we observe, “reality,” \textit{Wirklichkeit}. In “etymology,” for example, it designates the heart of the word, its most profound eponymy; it marks in a terminological fashion, for Democritus in particular, the register of the real in its most inescapable authenticity – atoms and void – as opposed to the conventional – sensible qualities and probably too the words which designate them, sweet, or hot.\textsuperscript{21} Linked, certainly, in any case no less essential, is the explicitly mimetic relationship which in this sequence seems to be constitutive of the false.

In the \textit{Theogony}, it is the Muses, “the daughters of great Zeus, of the well-fitted words,” “who know well how to make use of words,”\textsuperscript{22} who address themselves to Hesiod, making use of the same words as Odysseus:
Shepherds of the fields, wretched things of shame, like bellies,
We know how to say many false things similar to authentic realities,
But we know how, when we wish, to intone truths.

This time, it is quite clear: *pseudos* and *alēthes* are two possible modalities of the *etumos*, two ways of enunciating what is actually real. Two ways which, in addition, are available to the same speaker, who has the ability, therefore, to exercise something like a choice. It is this pairing, with a *pseudos* built mimetically upon the real (*psēdeu̇thos*/*homoia*) rather than on the true, through a difference with the immediate and conspicuous vocalization of truths, that the philosophical tradition will retain and accommodate, in the place and position of the exclusive monody of “is.” But as for the sophistic, it plays, between Parmenides and Hesiod, in both scenes at once.

II. SOPHISTIC INFALLIBILITY

II.1. Parmenides, guarantor of sophistic infallibility

If philosophy in one way or another will believe that it ought to renounce Parmenides, that is because sophistry, with an unanswerable consequence, draws from the Parmenidean interdiction the guarantee of its own infallibility. It seems to me that its argumentation is twofold and sets off not only (with Gorgias, for example) from the path of being, but also (with Protagoras) from the pseudo-path of opinions.

II.1.1

The first type of argument: if not-being is not, the *pseudos* is impossible, and one who speaks always speaks the truth. Two major texts, often cited, bear witness to this deduction:

- The fragment of Antisthenes, cited by Proclus, which draws the conclusion from what could be called the exclusivity of being: πᾶς γὰρ, φησί, λόγος ἀληθεύει; ὁ γὰρ λέγων τι λέγει· ὁ δὲ τι λέγων τὸ ὄν λέγει· ὁ δὲ τὸ ὄν λέγων ἀληθεύει, “All speech is veridical; for the one who speaks says something, but one who says something says what is; and one who says what is, is veridical.” Aristotle, at the moment in which he refutes this argument by showing the necessity of complicating it, indicates its essence: “the false *logos* is properly speaking *logos* of nothing (ὁ δὲ ψευδὴς λόγος ὀὐθενός ἔστιν ἄπλος λόγος).” Every *logos* is *logos* of something; the false *logos*, not being the *logos* of anything, is not *logos*, and so is not.
The Treatise on Not-being by Gorgias, which, in its second part (“if it is, it is unknowable”), draws the conclusion from the identity of being and thinking: δεῖν γὰρ τὰ φρονούμενα εἶναι, καὶ τὸ μὴ ὃν, εἴπερ μὴ ἐστι, μηδὲ φρονεῖσθαι, “It is necessary that what is represented is, and that what is not, if it indeed is not, is also not represented.” On this basis, whatever statement one pronounces must in fact be: if, paraphrasing the Prometheus of Aeschylus, I say that “chariots run upon the ocean,” then chariots run upon the ocean.

II.1.2

I would construct the second type of argument in the following manner. There can be no difference between alētheia and doxa: if there are only two ways, and if that of not-being is impracticable, we can deduce that the way which we practice is indeed that of being. A consistent Parmenides necessarily entails the coincidence of “being” and “phenomenon,” as of “truth” and “opinion.” Here we recognize the thesis of Protagoras, such as it is presented as much by Plato as by Aristotle. From this perspective, the clearest statement of the logos of Protagoras is found in Metaphysics Γ5: τὰ δοκοῦντα πάντα ἐστὶν ἀληθή καὶ τὰ φαινόμενα, “everything which is the object of opinion is true, as well as everything which appears”; Aristotle, then, knows well how to show that for Protagoras as for Heraclitus, and indeed for Parmenides as well, the identity of being and thinking necessitates this collapse.

We have seen that the sophistic procedure, whose seriousness consists of taking Parmenides at his word, whether it departs from being or from doxa, from “logic” or “ethics,” renders sophistry and philosophy indiscernible, and blocks every refutation in advance.

II.2. Sophistic poetry

Correspondingly, the “materiality” of language, the “minuscule and unapparent” corporeity that is breath and its modulation, is constitutive and essential to all logos; it could not be isolated from its relation to being, as if being could have on the one hand breath, and on the other logos: on the contrary, it is breath which makes of logos “the great master capable of accomplishing the most divine acts.” A sophist does not lie, does not trick, does not make noise, but, always and completely, speaks: καὶ λέγει ὁ λέγων.

If we are attempting to understand what sense a sophist can still give to the term pseudos while it is ontologically barred, we can seek assistance anew from the Encomium of Helen. Gorgias there begins with a series of magnificent affirmations: “Good order for a city is to be well supplied with men, for a body it is beauty, for a soul wisdom, for an act excellence, for a speech truth.” Truth is simultaneously the essence and excellence, the kosmos, of logos. Yet, by making this encomium, Gorgias aims to “demonstrate that those who denigrate Helen are in the wrong (pseudomenos), and to show the truth.” The pseudos is the “acosmicity” of the speech: we should not understand by this
its chaos, as much as a way of pushing it to the limit, driving it outwards, accomplishing it as the “master,” as the “tyrant” that it is. From such a perspective *pseudos* is nothing but the most extreme manifestation, the point of omnipotence, of the *logos* committed to being by Parmenides, the perverse but sovereign effect of ontology.

I have studied elsewhere\(^{37}\) how the sophists thought the *logos* positively, not in terms of ontological adequacy, but of logological efficacy: in terms of fabrication, of fiction. It is thus that one indeed persuades, by “forging false speech” (*pseudē logon plasantes*)\(^{38}\) (to the extent that *logos* is not only capable of the eternal present – of Parmenidean being – but is also capable of time in its becoming), everything to which it is the function of the muses, the sirens, and the soothsayers to be related. That is why we must say that sophistry is Parmenidean (not-being does not exist, there is no *pseudos*) and Hesiodic (the false is never anything but a turn of the truth, right inside this “veritable reality” produced by language). But from both points of view, the result is the same: it is impossible to make a division between *logos* and sound, simply because there is no sound.

The task of Parmenidean philosophy, in this regard at least, consists in trying again and always to operate the *krisis*, if not between being and not-being, at least, in any case, between sound and *logos*, opinion and truth, true and false.

**III. THE SOPHIST OF PLATO: PARRICIDE AND SYNTAX**

The refuge of the sophist is impregnable:

- We are really (*ontōs*), my dear friend, engaged in an investigation of the utmost difficulty. For appearing and seeming (*to phainestai kai to dokein*, “to be an appearance and to be an opinion”) without being, saying things without saying the truth, all that has always been full of perplexity, before just as now. For how must one speak, in order to say or to believe that falsehoods really are (*ontōs einai*), without remaining caught in a contradiction in saying so – this is of an utmost difficulty, Theaetetus.
- Why is that?
- The audacity of such a discourse is to suppose that not-being is. Unless that were so, falsehood would not come into being. Yet the great Parmenides, my child, when we were children, did not cease from beginning to end to attest to this, saying every time in prose as in verse: ‘This statement will never in fact be tamed: not-beings are. But you, turn your thought away from this way of inquiry.’\(^{39}\)

Plato marks, without the least ambiguity, the consequence that leads from Parmenides to sophistry: without fail, if not-being is not, then there is no *pseudos* – or: if Parmenides, then Gorgias.
On the basis of the end of this dialogue, a text as familiar as it is difficult, I would like to make some clarifications concerning the Platonic localization of the *pseudos*, that is to say its definition and its conditions of possibility.

III.1. The parricide: no “logos” for Parmenides

The possibility of the *pseudos* goes, as is known, through “parricide.” The parricide does not consist of braving the interdiction by taking the way, effectively impracticable, of not-being. It consists, rather, of engaging, in the full knowledge of the facts, with the pseudo-way that mortals follow out of habit: to defend oneself against the sophists, one must put the to the question the *logos* of Parmenides’ rack, and “force not-being to be, in a certain regard, and, in its turn, force being, inversely, to not be, in a certain way (βιάζεσθαι τὸ τε μὴ ὃν ὑπὸ ἐστὶ κατά τι καὶ τὸ ὅν ἀν πάλιν ὡς ὐὐκ ἐστι πη).” To put it yet another way, it is necessary to tame the mixed statements, to successfully make of them something other than sound.

It will first be noted that in this partitioning of sound and *logos*, the initial operation consists of making the *logos* of Parmenides confess that it is itself only sound. What then do Parmenides’ two verses “confess”? First, that one cannot find “on what to lay,” “or to apply” this “word,” “not-being,” one cannot “bring it onto the scene” (*poi* . . . *epipherein*): that is why “it is necessary to affirm that one who would attempt to pronounce ‘not-being’ does not even speak (οὐδὲ λέγειν οὐκέτων, δὲ γ’ ἄν ἔπιχειρή μὴ ὃν φθέγγεσθαι).” Parmenides, in contrast to Wittgenstein, will have said too much of it: anything except stating the second way, or putting into words the pseudo-path of mortals, is already too much for the *logos*. Further, by saying, as here, *mé eonta*, Parmenides visibly “attributes” (*prospherein*) number, which is to say being, to not-being, something he already does just with the singular (properly understood: “not-being” involves unity).

I want to stress these two critiques – through *epipherein* (to speak is to go to lay the word on the thing) and through *prospherein* (to speak is also to attribute qualities, predicates, to a subject) – for the two registers that they determine will be reprised, we shall see, at the moment of the definition of the *pseudos*. They corroborate, in fact, the fundamental distinction invented by Plato as a war machine against the Parmenido-sophistic “discourse”: the distinction between *logos tinos*, “speech of something” (a simple substantivation of the sophistic *legein ti*, “to say something”), and *logos peri tinos*, “speech which is about,” “which concerns something.” There are thus two ways in which the supposed *logos* undertakes to “harmonize,” “to adapt being to not-being (ἀν ἔπιχειρή μὴ ὃντι προσαρμόστεν),” two ways that Parmenides thus lays his own trap, and that the Poem of the goddess becomes confused with the noisy habit of mortals. We shall say, in conclusion to this point, that to commit this parricide is first of all to understand how Parmenides committed suicide.
III.2. The “come-back” of Parmenides, or being dialecticized

The parry against the sophist consists, therefore, of rendering “logical” the mixture of being and not-being: indeed “hope” emerges as soon as the Stranger manages to make manifest that “being and not-being involve equal amounts of perplexity,” as soon as a symmetry, a commensurability, between being and not-being can be envisaged. The solution proceeds through the examination of the greatest genera and of their mixture or community. It concludes with the famous reciprocal determination of being and not-being: “each time we say (legomen) not-being, we do not say an opposite of being, but only something different.” Thus, when we pronounce a word and its negation, for example “beautiful” and “not beautiful,” we put “one being face to face with another being (ontos pros on antithesis).”

The Stranger thus returns as conqueror over the Parmenidean quotation: after the impotence and the audacity that provided the context for its first occurrence, the second is characterized by self-satisfaction. Not only has he succeeded in demonstrating that “not-beings are,” but he has also “fully illuminated the eidos that is found to be the one of not-being,” to the point of daring to conclude with a phrase that, although untranslatable, in his mouth earns the right not to be a play on words, τοῦ τοῦν ὄντως τὸ μὴ ὄν (“this is beingly not-being”). In doing so, he well and truly sends the alogon packing – what at the same time both escapes and blocks discursivity – this supposed opposite of being.

Yet one must carefully assess the situation that this triumph establishes. It seems that in fact a backlash is produced: not only does parricide come back to an inquiry on suicide, but moreover it is a suicide very poorly committed. For after all, insofar as not-being is not thinkable except as an other (namely, and very precisely, another being), the privilege of being remains excessive. One could even legitimately speak of exclusivity, could say that there is only being, and that it can happen quite simply that being relates to itself under the figure of the other: Parmenides not dead, but at most (and by the way, this is the very term that Plato introduces) dialecticized.

III.3. Syntax as parry against the efficacy of “logos” (“peri . . . hōs”)

In any case, if non-beauty is not less than beauty, we still do not have hold of the pseudos. The Stranger, in his vocabulary of the community of forms, takes from the sophist the objection according to which, even if not-being participates in being, all the same, nothing proves that speech and opinion themselves participate in not-being (the condition required for the existence of falsehood and simulacrum). From the perspective that we have just outlined, the objection is very grave, because in all rigor with not-being one would say, again and always, something that is. Of two things, the one summarizes everything: either not-being is not, and there is no pseudos, or not-being is, and there is no pseudos. Here we find again the double torsion of the sophistic argument, through Parmenides and through Hesiod.
The solution, in which the Platonic innovation consists, is a new inquiry which bears upon “words.” I shall recount, in the relation to Parmenides, two significant features.

III.3.1. The word and the interlace

First of all, Plato thematizes, even canonizes, a shift of terminology which definitively invalidates the Parmenidean distinction between logos and onoma. We know that, from the Sophist on, “onomata” now generically designates “words,” which can be specified as onomata or “names” (designating agents), and rhēmata or “verbs” (designating actions). As for logos, it designates the “combination,” the “syntax” (sumplokē) of at least one name and one verb: we thus no longer pass from sound to speech, but from the imposition of a word, from the nomothetic, to determination, to discursivity (οὐκ ὄνομα μόνον ἄλλα τι περαίνει). For example, logos is the “word,” in the present case, “the name that we utter for this interlace (τῷ πλέγματι τούτῳ τὸ ὄνομα ἐφθέγξαμεν λόγον).”

One can hence deduce that “is,” the word of the way, is not a logos any more than “short” or “horse.” Parmenides reproached mortals for creating with their words an incompatible mixture of being and not-being. The Stranger reproaches Parmenides for remaining at the level of words and not knowing how to mix compatible words in order to pass to logos. Once again, the Poem of Parmenides read by Plato, as sound, then word, is a not-yet of language.

III.3.2. “Speaking of” and “speaking about” (“logos tinos” and “logos peri tinos”)

A second remark, or, as the Stranger says, “another little thing.” This mutual incompatibility of certain words outlines at most an infra-logic, a misuse of words which spoils language. Apparently nothing allows us to advance in the determination of the false and in its difference from the truth. Unless we are to locate, interlaced amidst the logos itself, a function which is similar to nomination, and another which is similar to the interlace: it is from the interlace as interlace that the “quality” of logos will emerge.

Such is, I think, the sense of the distinction, very often obliterated or badly understood, between logos tinos and logos peri tinos, that the Stranger then introduces. The complement (in the genitive, without a preposition) is equivalent, as we see, to the possessive. “Theaetetus is seated” is a logos which belongs to Theaetetus, which depends on him, not (of course) in the sense in which Theaetetus would be its speaker, but in the sense in which it comes to lay itself upon Theaetetus, to speak of Theaetetus. This first function is the literal reprisal of the Parmenido-sophistic function: it always concerns the necessity (ontological sensu stricto) of saying something when one speaks, and hence the obligation to be that is proper to what we would today call (at the risk of obliterating the very possibility of the problem) “reference.” To be assured of this fact, it is sufficient to consider the tranquil force of the affirmation which
opens and closes our passage: “discourse is necessarily, each time that it is, discourse of something; that it be not discourse of something is impossible.”

Compare this with the very principle of the Parmenidean confession: “he who does not say something says absolutely nothing” which rendered impossible, unworkable, every refutation of the Parmenid-sophistic position. Nothing has changed: Parmenides, Gorgias, or Plato share the same evidence that Aristotle alone would manage to transform into a prejudice.

However, and herein lies the innovation directly conditioned by the syntactical interlace, this function of efficacious nomination finds itself doubled by a function of “surrounding,” a – if I may put it like this – “peristic” function. This latter function, in contrast to the other, permits the introduction of, and even unites itself with, the “quality” of the discourse. In fact, the determination of the quality of the discourse, that which makes the difference between “Theaetetus is seated” and “Theaetetus flies,” and which unfolds itself in terms of “true” and “false,” requires the space of the peri in order to be deployed: it concerns that which “revolves around” the very thing of which the discourse is discourse, that which one “attaches” to this thing. Even if the genitive alone (the “reference”) and the complement of peri (the “subject”) make only one – Theaetetus – the peri alone introduces the possibility of a hōs, of a syntactical articulation with “that,” “like,” or “as,” which does not reduce itself to the interlace of word and verb.

We can convince ourselves that this hōs is indeed the prize of the analysis by comparing the new definition of true and false with the provisional definition proposed in order to lead into this part of the demonstration. The latter fitted, in fact, into the sophistic mold in its use of direct objects: “To have as an opinion or to say not-beings, such is in a certain manner the falsehood which is produced in thought and in discourses.” The new definition, on the contrary, at once refers to a peri and involves a hōs.

Before giving the text, a precaution: this conjunction is unfortunately not easy to understand and translate. It is without a doubt one of the most truly equivocal little words in the Greek language, probably deriving from the fusion of five different words. One must know, in particular, that, like hoti, hōs can simply introduce a substantival clause, just as in the Parmenidean statement of the ways (a usage present at this very place in the Sophist); followed by a participle, it can also signify “as,” that is to say, “in a quality of,” “in the way in which” (and in this case it approximates the Aristotelian hēi, “insofar as”); but it can also very commonly denote the unreality of an “as if.” I would be tempted, provisionally, perhaps, to perceive in its three successive occurrences a slippage from one sense to the other, leading finally to the mimetic.

The first occurrence: “Of the two discourses,” says the Stranger (speaking of “T. is seated” and “T. flies”), “the true says of the beings which revolve around you that they are (τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστι περὶ σοῦ)” – which clearly implies another sense of hōs and another analysis of peri than “the true says the beings as they belong to you.” “Of course!” Theaetetus would answer. The Stranger continues: “The false says it of others (betera tôn ontôn).” – “Yes” – “It
says not-beings as they are (ta mē onta hōs onta)"—“Agreed.” The Stranger goes on to clarify the formula: “It says beings which, although they are really beings, are other when they concern you” (ontōs de ge onta, hetera peri sou).” “In fact, many beings and many not-beings revolve around every subject,” which are such only in relation to it. Considered in isolation, they are both beings. But some are nevertheless not-beings since they are “others”: it seems to me that one must understand here at once “other than the subject” (flying does not belong to this Theaetetus to whom I am speaking, and who is currently seated opposite me), and, consequently, “other than themselves.” For each at the same time “is” considered in itself, but, when related to the subject, when measured in terms of this subject of the logos which gives (if I may put it this way) the tone of the is, each, nonetheless “is not.”

It is this last interpretation of alterity, the auto-alterity of predicate/predicate by consequence of the hetero-alterity of predicate/subject, that the final, recapitulative, definition gets behind, and which at the same time clearly makes the sense of hōs advance towards an “as if.”

Thus, when one says about you things that are other as if they were the same, that is, not-beings as if they were beings (peri de sou . . . thatera hōs ta auta kai mē onta hōs onta), such an assemblage of verbs and names seems in every respect to constitute, in all being and in all truth (ontōs te kai alethōs), false discourse.

The measure of being and sameness is always provided, as in the Parmenidosophistic discourse, by the subject. But the perception, produced by the theorization of syntax as such, of the subject as a center of gravity of predicates, allows us to distinguish (in relation to the subject) two classes of predicates. To situate a predicate badly, that is the false.

III.3.3. The failure of discrimination

So be it. Yet, for all that, it will be immediately noted that no criterion of choice is given. What permits me each time to decide if Theaetetus is flying or if he is seated? The Stranger does not breathe a word of it, making at most an implicit appeal to the evidence of perceived reality: “Theaetetus, with whom I am currently conversing, flies.” We all know, and he as well, the extent to which other examples would be less favorable: from “not-being is,” to “the current king of France” (the modern version of the goat-stag) “is bald,” while passing through “this contribution is of limpid clarity.”

What Plato offers us, instead of a rule of discrimination, is the place of the mimetic, in this way outlined by the hōs as an illusion about predicates: one can say that the mimetic exists, but not when it exists, no more than where to locate the model and where the image. The Stranger, militant on behalf of mixture, has proved the existence of the pseudos in discourse, but he has not in fact provided himself the means to make the krisis of the cases.
III.4. The trap of resemblance

Dialogue pleasant and deceiving, or pleasingly sophistic, because transfixed by the mimetic.

The Stranger, of whom one asks from the beginning whether he is man or god, philosopher — and perhaps therefore insane — or sophist, is not Socrates. He merely resembles him, directing the dialogue with Theaetetus in his place, “as” him. But Socrates himself more and more resembles this sophist that is hunted, definition after definition, to the point that his cathartic midwifery no longer manages to distinguish itself from the genei gennaia sophistikē,81 “well born by birth” (“authentic and truly noble,” as it is translated), the wolf-dog of a resemblance so “slippery” that it cannot be escaped.

It is here that we return, after the true and the false, at the very end of the dialogue, to the dichotomies of the mimetic.84 The Stranger makes them fly past at a gallop: the human production of images that are simulacra produced without instruments . . . in order to choose, in the end, against the naifs who think they know what they do not know, the “ironic imitator” — Socrates again. But arborescence that follows, the final one, is still more revelatory: opposed to the popular orator, not one but two personages emerge together, as ever: “sage or sophist (sophon ἐ sophistikon).”85 A doubt that is only alleviated by a “thesis,” which is once more enunciated by Theaetetus: “sage is impossible, because we have posited that this one knows nothing.”86 “Imitator of the sage”: such is, then, “in all truth and in all being (alēthōs . . . ton pantapasin ontōs),”87 like the pseudos earlier, the sophist. But what? “Philosopher” and “sophist” both make contact with “sage,” the same paronym? Who can pretend that they will be distinguished?

“To separate,” this khōris exactly for which Aristotle will reproach Plato, “to separate, . . . belongs to he who absolutely deprives himself of the Muses and of philosophy (amousou tinos kai aphilosophou).”88 To show that “discourse is one of the classes of being,” that it participates in being, that it is: this is the mixture that, with and against Parmenides, makes philosophy triumph.89 The Muse remains. She is, I believe, what one then wins, when one shows that discourse also participates, with and against Hesiod, in not-being. For this sharing is the condition of the pseudos and of mimēsis.90

Pseudos, mimēsis. One does not distinguish the false from the true any more than the evil intention from the good, the wolf from the dog, the sophist from the philosopher. It is not within the logos, within “logic,” that we can find the criterion that permits standardization; it is not on account of logic that there will be ethics. Until Plato, in any case, the only krisis that logic succeeds in establishing is reducible to that of Parmenides, that of all or nothing: either one is not even speaking, one is making sound (of the *bha) with the mouth, or one is in the logos. At most we could add, in the place of the Parmenidean “I, the truth, am speaking,” a more Hesiodic: “I, the Muse, am speaking,” “I alete as I pseude.”
The following stage, which is already the one of modernity, opens doubtless with Aristotle, under the effect of two slight modifications, both anchored in the attention to the principle of non-contradiction: the passage from *legein ti* or *logos tinos* to *sēmainein ti*, “to signify something which has a sense for itself and for another,” which undoes the entanglement in which Plato remains trapped between *legein* and *einei*. And the substitution of *kata* for *peri*: only the semantics of the categories permits the stabilization of the syntax of subject and predicates, and the reformulation of the difference between true and false. The *hōs* no longer designates an illusion about the predicates, but the senses of the verb to be and the possible modalities of the appearance of a subject. It remains to be seen whether the definition of truth in terms of adequacy that necessarily follows ever really manages to escape the mimetic trap enclosed within phenomenology. “The proposition ‘snow is white’ is true if and only if the snow is white.” But “those who ask . . . if the snow is white or not need only look at it.”

NOTES


7. Fr. 2.3–8.
8. Fr. 3.
9. Fr. 6.1.
12. Fr. 7, 8.1–2; trans. O’Brien, modified; the construction of 7.1 is a particular subject of dispute.
13. Fr. 1.31.
15. Fr. 8.38–40; trans. O’Brien, I, p. 42. But there is another possible construction: “everything that mortals could very well assign to it will be a name (….) being born as well as perishing” (trans. Beaufret). This is equivalent from the point of view that concerns us: there are words about which mortals believe that they are true, and which nevertheless are nothing but words.


18. Theogeny, 19ff.

19. “How well he knew how to give the appearance of truth to so many lies!,” trans. Bérard; “all of these lies, he gave them the aspect of truths,” trans. Jaccottet.


21. For eteēi in Democritus, cf. D.-K. 68 B 6, 7, 8, 10, and especially the group B 9, 117, 125, where the opposition passes between sensible qualities, which are nomōi, and the atoms and void, which are eteēi. Sextus (= D.-K. 68 B 9) translates this pair in terms of “truth” and “opinion.” It is true that the relationship between eteēi and alētheia is established at fr. 117: “we know nothing eteēi, because truth is in the abyss.” Finally, we must note that the sequence ἐοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισιν is found in Xenophanes (D.-K. 21 B 35), in a fragment too brief to be easily interpreted; but Xenophanes also says, at fr. 8, that he would have needed twenty-five years in order to “know how to really speak on this (legein etumōs).”

22. Artiepēiai, Theogeny, v. 29

23. It is not without interest to note that to elenchos, “reproach,” “disgrace,” “shame,” and ho elenchos, “refutation,” are two substantival formations of the same verb, elenchō.


30. Metaphysics 1009a8.


33. MXG, 980b4.
35. Ibid. 2.
36. Ibid. 1.
37. On the new type of relation to being, no longer said in but produced by
the logos, and the shift from pseudos to plasma which already occurs in
Gorgias, I will permit myself to refer to “Du faux ou du mensonge à la
38. Gorgias, B 11.11.
40. Ibid. 241d3.
41. Basanizein, ibid. 241d6 = 237b2.
42. Ibid. 241d6–7.
43. I agree, ultimately, with the analysis that Monique Dixsaut, “Platon et le
logos de Parménide,” in Études sur Parménide, II, pp. 242–6 proposes of
this passage.
44. Tounoma, Sophist, 237c2.
45. Ibid. 237c2; cf. 237c7ff., 10ff. See also the reprisal at 250d7–8, and its
modification at 251a9.
46. Ibid. 237e5ff.
47. Ibid. 283b3.
48. Ibid. 238c5ff.
49. On the series of verbs which make understood that there could be no
orthology of not-being because there is no -logy of it at all, but only
sounds, Sophist, 238c10–12 can be compared to Cratylus, 429e1–430a5
on the subject of false names.
50. [“Come-back” is in English here and below in the original essay. – eds.]
51. Sophist, 250e6ff.
52. Ibid. 257b3–4.
53. Ibid. 257e6.
54. Ibid. 237a.
55. Ibid. 258d.
56. Ibid. 258e3.
57. Ibid. 258e8.
58. Michel Narcy, in B. Cassin and M. Narcy, La Décision du Sens (Paris
1989), insists on this point.
59. Sophist, 253d2ff.
60. Ibid. 260d5–c3.
61. Ibid. 261d2.
62. Ibid. 261d2; 262a1–7.
63. Ibid. 262c6, d4; cf. sumplokē tōn eidōn, 259e5ff.
64. Ibid. 262d3ff.
65. Ibid. 262d6.
66. Ibid. 262e3.
67. Ibid. 263a: περὶ οὗ τ´ ἐστὶ καὶ ὅτου, a4; περὶ ἐμοῦ τε καὶ ἐμῶς, a5.
68. Ibid. 262e5ff., reprised at 263c10–11, “it is counted among the impossibilities that there be a discourse which is a discourse of nothing.”
69. Ibid. 237e1ff.
71. Plato, Sophist, 262e8, kai poion tina; cf. 263a11, b2.
72. Ibid. 260c2–4.
73. Cf. L. S. J., s.v. ὡς, end.
74. For example at Sophist, 261a9, b1.
75. Ibid. 263b4ff., cf. d.1
76. Ibid. 263b7; “others, which are still counted among beings,” conforming to the very definition of not-being and to the Parmenidean come-back.
77. Ibid. 263b9.
79. Sophist, 263b11.
80. Almost the same phrase (and the Stranger refers us to it) describes the manner in which being and not-being revolve around each eidos and the manner in which, in the plural this time, beings and not-beings revolve around each subject (ibid. 263b11ff., 256e5ff.).
81. Ibid. 263d1–4.
82. Ibid. 263a8.
83. Ibid. 231b7ff.
84. From ibid. 265b.
85. Ibid. 268b10.
86. Ibid. 268b11–12.
87. Ibid. 268c3ff.
88. Ibid. 259e2.
89. Ibid. 260a1–7.
90. Ibid. 260d–e.