

***"When Philosophical Theories Become Dialectical: The Parmenidic Critique of the Theory of the Forms and the Platonic Criticism of Earlier and Contemporary Philosophical Theories."***

After a careful survey of the secondary literature on Plato, one of the leading philosophers of antiquity, we found out that scholars have not given due attention or have not, as much as they should have, emphasized this philosopher's criticism both of his own theory of the Forms and of the philosophical theories of his earlier and of his contemporary philosophers (although predominant in platonic studies, as we know, is another similar issue, the question of Plato's admittedly harsh criticism of politicians, poets and orators, which is found in several dialogues, mainly of his early and middle writing period, according to the most prevalent dating of his works),<sup>1</sup> and, consequently, there has been no systematic attempt by modern research to explore Plato's intentions and purposes through this critical attitude not only towards his own philosophical theory but also towards the philosophical systems of his opponents.

My dissertation, therefore, is going to focus on the study of some later platonic dialogues, of the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* (who belong to the category of his so-called "logical dialogues" and in these dialogues the philosopher discusses logical and dialectical problems), and seeks to explore Plato's intentions through his critique of philosophy itself, of his own field of occupation.

The reason why these particular dialogues were chosen for study is because Plato's aforementioned criticism of various philosophical theories is found in them. The questions we intend to answer through our research and our study are the following: **(a)** what are Plato's (philosophical and pedagogical) purposes from this critical survey of both his own theory of the Forms and of the philosophical theories of earlier and contemporary philosophers, most of whom have left a strong imprint on the history of philosophy? Is the philosopher merely seeking a confrontation with them in his attempt to demonstrate the superiority of his own philosophy? And if this is indeed his intention, why does he allow someone else (Parmenides) to criticize his own theory or why does he present the deceased Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* defending his philosophical views and accusing Socrates of partiality (165e -168c)? **(b)** What are the ontological consequences of this critical overview (to what extent can this critical approach be more "enlightening" to the nature and structure of the Being?), **(c)** what are its epistemological implications (to what extent does this critical elenchus help to clarify the crucial and always timely –and therefore timeless– philosophical problem of knowledge and wisdom, that is, the possibility of the knowledge of the Being?) and **(d)** what is the effect of this critical examination on the philosophy itself and the way in which it is exercised (is there any way more appropriate and more suitable for the best possible approach to the truth?).

The dissertation will consist of **five** chapters. In the **first chapter**, there will be a general **introduction** to the subject and a brief overview of both the theory of the Forms of Plato's middle writing period (in order to highlight its similarities and differences from that of his late writing period) and the philosophical theories of his predecessors, which are criticized in the dialogues to be examined, namely the philosophical systems of the Eleatics (Xenophanes, Zeno, Parmenides), of Heraclitus and of Protagoras, while at the same time the guidelines of the whole work will be

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<sup>1</sup> See *Apology, Ion, Gorgias, Menexenos, Republic, Phaedrus*.

given. More specifically, the aims of the research will be set, reference to the texts to be studied and to the reason for their selection will be made, the method of our study will be described, the originality of the topic will be displayed, and the structure of the present study will be briefly presented.

In the **second chapter**, entitled “**Parmenides' Critique of the Theory of the Forms**”, there will be a detailed presentation of not only the first part of the dialogue (130b-135c), where we found Parmenides' criticism of the theory of the Forms, but also an extensive analysis of the most mysterious section, the second part of the dialogue (135d-166c), in which the Eleatic philosopher demonstrates his own method of discovering the truth, in order we reach, through this in-depth examination, some conclusions which are drawn from Parmenides' study and are relevant to the aims of our research.

The **third chapter** will be titled “**Plato's Criticism of his Earlier and of his Contemporary Philosophical Theories**” and it will be composed of two sub-chapters, as follows: **(a)** “Socrates' Critique of the theory of Protagoras and Heraclitus in the *Theaetetus*”, where the ontological and epistemological limitations of these philosophical theories will be presented and will be highlighted, and **(b)** “The Eleatic Stranger's Criticism of Parmenides' theory and of other philosophical theories in the *Sophist*”, where more will be stressed Stranger's critique of the Eleaticism (as it is found in most of the dialogue) and less will be emphasized his criticism of other philosophical theories (dualism, pluralism, materialism, idealism), and we will also deal with the serious problems caused by the Eleatic metaphysics (such as the problem of images, a problem, primarily, of ontological nature, and the problem of false opinion, a problem of epistemological nature) due to its rigid monism and the rejection of the existence of the not-being, an element of the parmenidic theory of which, as stated in the text (239c onwards), the sophist takes advantage and he denies the possibility of any fraud.

Furthermore, we will attempt to explore Plato's aims through all this critical treatment of philosophical theories in this particular dialogue, to examine whether his attitude towards Eleatic philosophy is clearly hostile, to ascertain whether the criticism by the Eleatic Stranger of “the Friends of the Forms” is self-critical and a continuation of the critique of the theory of the Forms in the *Parmenides*, and finally to test if some modification of Plato's metaphysics through the reference to the “communion of kinds” takes place (254c onwards). The answer to the last three questions will be utilized in the next chapter, in which we will compare –inter alia– the *Sophist* with the *Parmenides*, where (i.e. in the *Parmenides*), on the one hand, the Eleatic philosophy is brought out again, and, on the other hand, the theory of the Forms is under critical scrutiny.

In the **fourth chapter**, entitled “**When Philosophical Theories Become Dialectical**”, before stressing the differences between the philosophical theories under critical elenchus in ontology/metaphysics and in epistemology and highlighting their difficulties,<sup>2</sup> (in order to see if it is possible in this way to further elucidate the Being and the possibility of its knowledge), they will be systematically examined (something which, as already stated, has not been done by modern research) the three Platonic dialogues selected for our study so as to specify their similarities and their differences in the critique of the various philosophical theories. In particular, the

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the difficulty of the Platonic metaphysics (the problem of participation) will be compared with that of the Eleatic metaphysics (the problem of the not-being).

following questions will be attempted to answer: Are the same philosophical problems repeated in the three dialogues? If so, what does this repetition mean to them? Are other philosophical problems mentioned? Offers the *Sophist* solutions to the problems raised in the *Parmenides* (such as to the issue of “communion of kinds”, *Parm.*129c) and to that of the erroneous opinion, which is described in the *Theaetetus* (187d onwards)? Are these solutions satisfactory?

In addition, we will try to emphasize the differences between Socrates and other philosophers (Parmenides, Protagoras, Heraclitus and the Eleatic Stranger) in order to further illuminate Socrates' work. A comparison of the methods used by the various philosophers for the discovery of the truth will also be helpful in this regard<sup>3</sup> (Parmenides' dialectic in the homonymous dialogue will be examined comparatively with Socrates' midwife in the *Theaetetus* and with the dichotomous division of the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist*). Are there any weaknesses and deficiencies in them? Is the Eleatic Stranger's method of division identical with that described by Plato in the *Phaedrus*? What is the effect of these methods on the concept of the Being?

Before completing this chapter, we will try to answer the following question: Is Socrates in the *Theaetetus* and the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist* Plato himself? If not, why is this happening? In the end, we will refer to the purposes, in our view, of Plato through all this dialectical conflict of his own theory of the Forms with the philosophical theories of his predecessors and his contemporaries. Does the philosopher merely parody and ridicule his opponents or does he aim at something deeper through the combination of the joke with the serious?

In the **fifth chapter** (which is the final) the research data will be evaluated and the final conclusions will be drawn. After summarizing Plato's intentions through all this dialectical comparison of philosophical theories, we will try to answer the other three central questions that were the focus of our study, namely questions about the nature of the Being, the possibility of knowing it and about the existence or not of a method for a better approach to the truth. It would be desirable for our research to have helped to illuminate, along with all these aspects of the subject, the very nature of philosophy and of philosopher, and thus to confirm our original assumption that all this dialectical contrast of philosophical theories could help to further clarify all these crucial for the philosophy issues, which are a challenge to the philosophy itself in all times, and which will be seen from the perspective of a philosopher who, as everyone confesses, has decisively affected all subsequent philosophical thought. His criticism of philosophy, therefore, may be of major importance to philosophy itself.

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<sup>3</sup> This is also an element which has either not received the due attention of modern research or, if it has been observed, it has not been sufficiently stressed and analyzed and it has not been explored further through the correlation of all three under study dialogues.