

## Plato on Parmenides of Elea: The Eleatic PNC Case

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According to several scholars, the first explicit formulations of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC) can be found in Plato's works, e.g. in the *Republic* and the *Sophist*. The paper defends that, in these two dialogues, the context for that is the discussion of possible consequences of Parmenides' Poem, in which Plato seems to have seen a proto version of the PNC: *it is not possible what is not to be* (DK28 B7). In that proto version, the PNC would present itself as an exhaustive disjunction: *either it is, and cannot not be, or it is not, and cannot be*; and *tertium non datur* (DK28 B2, B8, *passim*). The paper shows the problematic corollaries thereof pointed to by Plato in the *Republic* and the *Sophist*, as well as it analyses the solutions that he had presented in each dialogue for those problems, namely, his own versions of the PNC.

*To be, or not to be? That is the question—  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And, by opposing, end them?*

(Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1)

### *Introduction*

There are certainly several ways to approach the question of the relations between Plato's and Parmenides of Elea's works. Among these approaches certainly we can count the presence in the works of both thinkers of what was later known as the "*Principle of Non-Contradiction*" (PNC). Although it is in the *corpus aristotelicum* that we find the most famous formulations of the PNC (*Met.* Γ3, 1005b19-20; Γ6, 1011b15-17; *APo.* A11, 77a10; etc.), several scholars have recognized, from Antiquity to now, some versions of this principle in the works of these two early philosophers. My aims in this paper are:

- i) to present the Eleatic PNC that Plato recognized in Parmenides' Poem;<sup>1</sup>
- ii) to show the problems he saw arising from this PNC to his own dialogical objectives in the book 4 of the *Republic* and in the *Sophist*;
- iii) to present the Platonic solutions in both dialogues.

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<sup>1</sup> I shall stress that my main concern is with Plato's reception and interpretation of Parmenides' PNC. For the issue if the Athenian did or not justice to the early philosopher, see Cordero, 1979, 2007; O'Brien, 1987; Frère, 1991; Scolnicov, 1995; Palmer, 1999; etc. For some Platonic echoes on Aristotle's treatment of the PNC, see *inter alia* Anton, 1972.

## I. *The absolute Eleatic PNC: an ancient Italian song*

We are told in fragment DK28 B2 of Parmenides' Poem about the two only ways of research:

[1] Εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσας,  
αἴπερ ὁδοὶ μούνα διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι·  
ἢ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,  
Πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος - Ἀληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ -,  
[5] ἢ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεῶν ἐστι μὴ εἶναι,  
τὴν δὴ τοι φράζω παναπευθεά ἔμμεν ἀταρπόν·  
οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἔδον - οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν -  
οὔτε φράσαις·

[1] Well then, I will tell you – and you who listen, receive my word –  
what are the only ways of investigation there are to think:  
one, on the one hand, that “is”, and that it is not possible not to be;  
this is [the way] of persuasion, since it accompanies the truth;  
[5] another, on the other hand, that “is not”, and that it is necessary  
not to be; I tell you that this path is completely unknowable, since you will  
not know that which is not (as it is not possible) or utter it.<sup>2</sup>

As we can see, the two alternatives are drawn as exhaustive and mutually exclusive:  
*either it is and cannot not be, or it is not, and cannot be; and tertium non datur.*<sup>3</sup> The goddess,  
in addition to establishing the two routes, also establishes that the second way pointed to  
actually is a way without feasibility, that is, a route which cannot be followed or inquired about:  
see “*panapeuthéa*” (DK28, B2.6).

The same point is reinforced by DK28, B7, which begins with the following words:

[1] Οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆ εἶναι μὴ ἐόντα·

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<sup>2</sup> PARMENIDES, DK28 B2 – text established by Cordero (2004), Engl. transl. by D. Livingstone, slightly modified. All quotations of the Poem of Parmenides are from this edition.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of a “*third way*” which supposedly is alluded to in the Poem is object of no small controversy in the Parmenidean studies. This notion was presented by Diels by his *collage* of texts when composing what we nowadays know as fr. DK28 B6 and B7. Nevertheless, that thesis was contested by Vitali (1977), and, in my opinion, convincingly demolished by Cordero (1979; 2007), with strong philosophical and philological arguments. His arguments were mostly followed by Nehamas (1981). Cordero's philosophical argument points to the fact that all the other parts of the Poem speak *only of two ways* (e. g. “*αἴπερ ὁδοὶ μούνα διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι*”, B2.2). The main philological argument runs as following: the stronger textual evidence of a third way would be the term “*eirgo*” in B6.3, but it is not attested by the manuscripts we have, being just an *interpolation*. As Cordero (1979) have shown, the first version of that “evidence” was actually added to the text in the Aldine edition of Simplicius' *in Aristotelis Physica commentaria* (Venice, 1526), whose passage 117.6-8 is our only source for B6. Later, that notion of “withdrawing” was, say, “sacralized” by Diels' edition of Simplicius' *commentaria* (1882), and his version of Parmenides' text (Diels & Kranz, 1951) was thereafter accepted by many important scholars as the definitive form of B6 (e. g. Owen 1960, Tarán 1962, Stokes 1971, Furley 1973). For more details, see Cordero, 1979, 6 ff; Nehamas, 1981, 98 ff; O'Brien, 1987, 222 ff.

ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ' ἀφ' ὁδοῦ διζήσιος εἶργε νόημα·

[1] For this shall never prevail: that there are things that are not.  
But you, withdraw thought from this way of investigation [...]

We hear the same litany in some lines of DK28, B8:

[1] Μόνος δ' ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο  
λείπεται ὡς ἔστιν· [...]  
[...]  
[7] [...] οὔτ' ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐάσσω  
φάσθαι σ' οὐδὲ νοεῖν· οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητόν  
[9] ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι. [...]  
[...]  
[11] οὔτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεῶν ἔστιν ἢ οὐχί.  
[...]  
[15] ἀλλ' ἔχει· ἢ δὲ κρίσις τούτων ἐν τῷδ' ἔστιν·  
ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν· κέκριται δ' οὖν, ὥσπερ ἀνάγκη,  
τὴν μὲν εἶν ἀνόητον ἀνόνημον - οὐ γὰρ ἀληθῆς  
ἔστιν ὁδός - τὴν δ' ὥστε πέλειν καὶ ἐτήτυμον εἶναι. [...]

[1] So there remains one single word of the way: "is." [...]  
[...]  
[7] [...] that it [came] from that which is not being, I do not allow  
you to say or to think, since it is not sayable or thinkable  
[9] that it is not. [...]  
[...]  
[11] Therefore, it is necessary to be absolutely, or not.  
[...]  
[15] [...] The decision on these things lies in this:  
it is or it is not. It has already been decided, of necessity,  
that one remains unthinkable and unnamable – since it is not the true  
way – and that the other exists and is genuine. [...]

Although many points surely can be developed on the basis of these lines of the Poem, we will pay special attention just to one: the ceaseless repetition in all these parts of the text of the more absolute impossibility of something both being and not being. That is, just to say in a style like Aristotle's (*Met.* Γ3, 1005b19-20), we are told about the total impossibility of opposite predicates belonging to the same thing. Let us call this specific point of the goddess' message, as Scolnicov<sup>4</sup> called it, the "strong" or "absolute Eleatic Principle of Non-Contradiction": *it is not possible for A to be ~A*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Scolnicov, 1995, 218 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Thom (1999, 155 ff) claims, against Austin (1986), that the 'strength' of Parmenides' PNC is explained by the presence, in the Poem, of two other not explicit principles, which he calls the "principle of Complement-Dropping" and the "principle of Adverbial Modifiers-Dropping". According to him, these principles would permit discharging the complements and the modifiers of the verb, so making possible for Parmenides the inference "*Being is not green in the human blood* → *Being is not green* → *Being is not*". I think Thom missed Parmenides' point. As I shall argue for later, the complements and the

Plato, who was a manifest heir of Eleaticism, recognized the presence of that principle in the Poem, as well as the power of its radical affirmation. However, the Athenian philosopher recognized also the great difficulties arising from this radicality for his own Ethics, Psychology, Epistemology, Theory of Language and Ontology. Facing that, he was forced to dwell on this absolute Eleatic PNC, sometimes in an implicit, sometimes in an explicit way. Concerning that, I will analyse two moments of *corpus platonicum*: one in the book 4 of the *Republic*, another in the *Sophist*.

## II. Problems arising from the absolute PNC in Republic IV

In the *Republic*, the context in which the topic arises is clear. At the "second start" of the dialogue, to wit, the opening of the book 2 (cf. *tò próimion*, *Rep.* 357a2), Glauco and Adimantus, through a lengthy argument, show Socrates that the refutation of Thrasymachus in book 1 was not satisfactory: the question about whether it is better to live a just or unjust life, was not properly answered (*Rep.* 357a-367e). Therefore, Socrates says that it is necessary to investigate what justice and the injustice happen to be, and how they come to be in the individual's soul. Then he uses the letters' argument, to wit: before trying to read an inscription in small letters, it is easier first to read the same inscription in bigger letters. By applying this argument to their investigation, Socrates says that, before looking for justice and injustice in the individual's soul, it will be easier first to investigate what they are and how they arise in a bigger and easier to see model, the city model. Everybody agrees with this and so it is done: a city is created in *lógos* and analysed. In *Republic IV*, the investigation about this city reaches the conclusion that a just city is one which has three parts or genres, and that justice would be a kind of harmonious relationship between these parts. After that, the next step would be to verify whether these properties of the city model can also be found in the individual soul. At this point Platonic Socrates says:

[...] εἰς φαῦλόν γε αὖ [...] σκέμμα ἐμπεπτόκαμεν περὶ ψυχῆς, εἴτε ἔχει τὰ τρία εἶδη ταῦτα ἐν αὐτῇ εἴτε μή. οὐ πάνυ μοι δοκοῦμεν [...] εἰς φαῦλον: ἴσως γάρ, ὃ Σώκρατες, τὸ λεγόμενον ἀληθές, ὅτι χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά.

[SOC.] [...] Now, we have plunged into a trifling problem about the soul: the question whether it contains these three species in itself or not.

[GLA.] It does not seem to me at all trifling, [...] for perhaps, Socrates, the saying is true that '*beautiful things are difficult*.'

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modifiers were not formerly present and later supposedly discharged in Parmenides' PNC. Parmenidean philosophy can actually be better understood as a reflection which aimed at some truths beyond any relation or predication.

(PLATO, *Republic*, IV, 435c4-8 – transl. by P. Shorey)

As we are told, Glaucus immediately criticizes his friend's irony, and even points to the opposite direction, by quoting the preferred Greek saying of Plato, “*chalepà tà kalá*”. Surely Socrates' affirmation is an ironic one, because, as noticed by Thomas Robinson (1970), even to the Greek tradition in Plato's time this problem was not a "small" nor a "trifling" one. Moreover, the passage points to a problem which, being developed in the *Republic*, was central to Platonic Ethics and Psychology: the problem about inner conflicts notable in the practice of some human actions and decisions. Socrates gives a very banal and everyday example of what it could be: somebody who is very thirsty and even so refuses (*ouk ethélein*) to drink (*Rep.* 439c3-4). Thirst (*dipsan*) is defined in the dialogue as "desire for drink" (*Rep.* 437d2-7). So we can imagine the following situation:

- i) a cup of soda pop is offered to a really very thirsty man;
- ii) this man is full of desire to accept the offer, especially because, being thirsty, he remembers the TV advertisements, where that drink flows, fresh and cold, into a glass full of ice cubes;
- iii) even so, he denies the offer, because he realizes that that drink, being basically food coloring and chemical preservatives mixed with sugar or artificial sweeteners, cannot be good for his health.

Something like a *conflict* arises within this man, between wanting and not wanting to drink. From the Platonic view, what is been pointed to by this kind of inner conflict, noticeable in many daily situations, is the fact is that *the same individual, i.e. the same soul, feels at the same time desire and repulsion towards the same object or the same action*. That is, it feels contrary *élans* or wills. Nevertheless, if this is so, it will be a *transgression* of the absolute Eleatic PNC, according to which there is no room for contrary predicates to be attributed to the same thing. To put it in the Parmenidean goddess' way: *either the soul is desiring to drink the soda pop, or it is not; and tertium non datur*.

Nonetheless, if ones maintains that original rigidity of the principle, it would preclude the Platonic way of reflecting on the soul and on the ethical decisions within individual actions. It is very important to the dialogical aims of the *Republic* to warrant *reality* to that kind of conflict of *élans*, which are linked to the somewhat “plural” nature of the soul. For that reason, Socrates chooses, so to speak, to "attenuate" or "weaken" the Eleatic PNC by adding to it

*modifiers*.<sup>6</sup> And so he draws what came to be recognized by some scholars as the first formulations of the PNC in Western thought<sup>7</sup>, in the style in which it is best known.<sup>8</sup> Although I basically will dwell on only one of its formulations, there are in the entire *Republic* four versions of the PNC. Here they are, in Shorey's translation:

δηλον ὅτι ταῦτόν τάναντία ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταῦτόν γε καὶ πρὸς ταῦτόν οὐκ ἐθελήσει ἅμα [...].  
[SOC.] It is obvious that the same thing will never do or suffer opposites in the same respect in relation to the same thing and at the same time.  
(*Rep.* IV, 436b9-10)

οὐδὲν ἄρα ἡμᾶς τῶν τοιούτων λεγόμενον ἐκπλήξει, οὐδὲ μᾶλλον τι πείσει ὡς ποτέ τι ἂν τὸ αὐτὸ ὄν ἅμα κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ τάναντία πάθοι ἢ καὶ εἴη ἢ καὶ ποιήσειεν.  
[SOC.] [...] No such remarks then will disconcert us or any whit the more make us believe that it is ever possible for the same being at the same time in the same respect and the same relation to suffer, be, or do opposites.  
(*Rep.* IV, 436e7-437a1)

οὐ γὰρ δὴ, φαμέν, τό γε αὐτὸ τῷ αὐτῷ ἑαυτοῦ περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἅμ' ἂν τάναντία πράττοι.  
[SOC.] [...] For it cannot be, we say, that the same thing with the same part of itself at the same time acts in opposite ways about the same thing. [...]  
(*Rep.* IV, 439b5-6)

οὐκοῦν ἔφαμεν τῷ αὐτῷ ἅμα περὶ ταῦτα ἐναντία δοξάζειν ἀδύνατον εἶναι;  
καὶ ὀρθῶς γ' ἔφαμεν.  
[SOC.] [...] And did we not say that it is impossible for the same thing at one time to hold contrary opinions about the same things?  
[GLA.] And we were right in affirming that.  
(*Rep.* X, 602e8-10)

I will use in this paper mainly the second formulation above, given that it seems to be the more complete, in view of the two occurrences of the verb "*eimi*" (*ón*, 436e8, and *eie*,

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<sup>6</sup> See Scolnicov, 1995, 228.

<sup>7</sup> E. g. Anton, 1972, 272: "The first clear formulation of the principle of contradiction is given in *Republic* 436b, where Plato uses the principle to prove the tripartite nature of the soul". Cf. also Shorey, 1937, 376, 382; Steel, 2003, 581. Nonetheless, some passages of other dialogues are sometimes also considered as presenting the PNC: *Theaetetus* 188a-e; *Euthydemus* 293c-e; and *Sophist* 230b-d. See the next note.

<sup>8</sup> Although it has been affirmed by some scholars (e. g. Maceri, 1994; Hawtrey, 1981) that *Euthydemus* 293c1-e6 contains a version of the PNC similar to *Republic*'s, I see a notable difference between both texts. If we pay attention to how the PNC is used by the eristic character Euthydemus, we can conclude that '*katà tautá*' in *Euthd.* 293d1 cannot have the same meaning of '*katà tò autó*' in *Rep.* 436e8. If it had the same meaning, it would be impossible to Euthydemus the conclusion "Socrates is and is not knowing at the same time and in respect of the same". Then '*tautá*' (*Euthd.* 293d1) cannot mean the object of the action, which is different each time, but something else – probably, the action itself ("to know"), which is the same in the affirmative and the negative statements. Moreover, as noted by Delcomminette (2008, 9-10), if Plato presents together two restrictions in his version of the PNC ('*katà tò autó*' and '*pròs tò autó*', *Rep.* 436e8-437a1), thus he *does not* consider them as having the same meaning.

437a1), which, as indicated by Repellini<sup>9</sup>, are not dispensable in that context. Then, just to be clear, when I hereafter refer to the "weakened PNC of Republic", this is what I have in view: *it is not possible for the same being at the same time in the same respect and the same relation to suffer, be, or do opposites*<sup>10</sup> (*Rep.* 436e7-437a1).

For the sake of testing the veracity and utility of this principle, Socrates proposes two possible counterexamples that could be raised by a somewhat "controversialist" (*Rep.* 436c10) or "jesting" (436d4) interlocutor: the "still man" and the "top" examples.

The first one, called in the *Philebus* (14d7) an "easy and infantile" provocation, is this: somebody could say about a man, who is still in the same place but shaking his hands and head, that the same (man) is at same time resting and moving (*ho autòs hestéké te kai kineïsthai háma*, *Rep.* 436c11-12). According to Socrates, such a situation has nothing to damage the principle, because we are not speaking of the same thing showing contrary predicates: something of that man (*ti autoû*), i.e. *some part* of him (e.g. his torso and legs) is resting, and something, i.e. another part, is moving (e.g. his hands and head). The impossibility of the contraries established by the weakened PNC of *Republic* is concerned with the same subject (*tautón*, 436b8). So, by speaking about different subjects in the action, namely the parts of body, this example is innocuous against the principle.

The second counterexample that could be claimed is the top example: a top is capable of entirely resting and entirely moving in the same place and at the same time, i.e. spinning (*Rep.* 436d4-8). I agree with Bobonich<sup>11</sup> that this example is offered to overcome the "weakness" of the first example, given that now the notion of "parts" or "different subjects" for each one of the contraries is not available: the top *as a whole* (*hóloi*, 436d5) has contrary

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<sup>9</sup> Repellini, 1998, 239.

<sup>10</sup> I agree with Maceri (1993) that we can consider *Republic's* principle as a Platonic version of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC), *pace* Robinson (1971). Robinson's main argument is that it cannot be the PNC because that is a principle of *things*, not of *propositions*. In my opinion, however, this argument is insufficient (see Lachance, 2014:177 *ff.*). Surely *Republic's* PNC is an ontological version of the PNC, a principle of *the reality*, as correctly noted by Robinson, but it is pretty clear that it is supposed to rule the correct reasoning and speaking in that dialogue. For Plato, there seems to be not such a gap between *lógos* and reality; the true *lógos* is supposed to mirror the structure of the reality (see *Sph.* 259e5-6). Besides, even if I agree with Robinson that Plato's language here is in terms of "contraries", "opposites" (*enantía*), not strictly of "contradiction", I think that the risk of falling in logical contradiction is always present and noted by Plato; and this is precisely named as "*enantía légein*". Regarding that, as noted by Lachance (2014, 175 *ff.*), there is a "fluctuation" between "contradiction" and "contrariety" in the Platonic terminology on that topic, as we can see in *Apol.* 26e-28a and *Sph.* 230b-d (see also Dorion, 2012, 251 *ff.*). For scholars who accept that *Republic* IV, 436e7-437a1, contains a version of the PNC, see Adam (1902), Shorey (1930), Bloom (1968), Büttner (2006), Delcomminette (2008), and Zingano (2008). *Contra*, Robinson (1971), Annas (1981), Irwin (1995), Bobonich (2002), Lorenz (2004), and Ferrari (2007).

<sup>11</sup> Bobonich, 2007, 229-230.

predicates.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Socrates shows that, even in this case, his PNC shows itself valid, if one has in view that it forbids the contrary predicates from being addressed to the same subject at the same time *in the same respect* and *in the same relation*. The spinning top case, on the other hand, is different: when it does not incline nor dislocate, the top is the same thing which happens to be entirely resting *in respect to its axis* (*katà tò euthý hestánai*) and, at same time, to be moving *in respect to its circumference* (*katà tò periphères kýkloī kineísthai*), that is, spinning (436d9-e5). So the opposite predicates are not related to the top *in the same relation*, but in relation to different things, the axis and the circumference. Then, even this example does nothing to affect the validity of the established PNC.

On the basis of the refutation of these two counterexamples, Socrates' conclusion is that his PNC is valid to think about the soul and its impulses in actions. However, he does not assert its *absolute* validity. It is a fact that the “strong”, Parmenidean version of the PNC was established in a definitive way by the goddess in the Poem. Notwithstanding, as observed by Proclus (*Comm. On Plat. Parm. VI*)<sup>13</sup>, the “weakened”, Platonic version of the principle is established in a completely different way, to wit, in a *hypothetical* manner, for the sake of the continuity of discussion:<sup>14</sup>

οὐδὲν ἄρα ἡμᾶς τῶν τοιούτων λεγόμενον ἐκπλήξει, οὐδὲ μᾶλλον τι πείσει ὡς ποτέ τι ἂν τὸ αὐτὸ ὄν ἅμα κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ τάναντία πάθοι ἢ καὶ εἶη ἢ καὶ ποιήσειεν. [...] ἀλλ' ὅμως [...] ἵνα μὴ ἀναγκαζώμεθα πάσας τὰς τοιαύτας ἀμφισβητήσεις ἐπεξιόντες καὶ βεβαιούμενοι ὡς οὐκ ἀληθεῖς οὐσας μηκύνειν, ὑποθέμενοι ὡς τούτου οὕτως ἔχοντος εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν προῖωμεν, ὁμολογήσαντες, ἐάν ποτε ἄλλη φανῇ ταῦτα ἢ ταύτη, πάντα ἡμῖν τὰ ἀπὸ τούτου συμβαίνοντα λελυμένα ἔσεσθαι. ἀλλὰ χρή [...] ταῦτα ποιεῖν.

[SOC.] [...] No such remarks then will disconcert us or any whit the more make us believe that it is ever possible for the same thing at the same time in the same respect and the same relation to suffer, be, or do opposites. [...] All the same [...] that we may not be forced to examine at tedious length the entire list of such contentions and convince ourselves that they are false, *let us proceed on the hypothesis that this is so*, with the understanding that, if it ever appear otherwise, everything that results from the assumption shall be invalidated.

[GLA.] That is what we must do [...].

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<sup>12</sup>Then I accept the differentiation that Bobonich (2002, 229-231) sees between the two counterexamples: in the still man case, as we have different subjects in motion (his “parts”), we can call it, in Bobonich’s words, a “complete contraries” case. On the other hand, in the spinning top case, as we have in view always the same subject (the “whole” top, *hóloi*, 436d5), we must call it an “incomplete contraries” case. The reason is that, in the second counterexample, it is not the case of attributing contrary predicates *tout court* to the same subject, but attributing to it contrary predicates “*in respect of*” (*katà*) A and “*in respect of*” B. The “incomplete predicates” case is not the case of the still man example, in which it is said that “something of him” (*ti autoû*) is moving and “something” is resting; that is, in this case there are two different subjects of the actions. Pace Price (1995) and Woods (1987).

<sup>13</sup> See also Steel, 2003, 581 ff.

<sup>14</sup> So Platonic Socrates is proceeding according to his usual method: see *Phd.* 99e-102d.

(PLATO, *Republic*, IV, 436e7-437a9 – transl. by P. Shorey – my italics)

Now that the principle has been fully explained, let us turn back to the soda pop example. We can wonder: concerning the case of a thirsty man facing a cup full of drink, how can the Platonic version of PNC be applied to the inner conflict seen in that decision to (not) drink, and how can it help the consideration of the nature of the soul? Socrates' answer would be that, *within that man's soul*, on the one hand, a desiring principle impels him to drink the drink, and, on the other hand, another principle, which reasons about the best and the worse (*tà analogisámenon perì tou beltíonos te kai cheíronos*, *Rep.* 441c1-2), impels him *to resist* his will to drink. That is, the conflict occurs because *the soul has a plural nature*, and within it there are different 'kinds' (*eídē*), 'principles' or 'powers' (sometimes called metaphorically 'parts', *mérei*)<sup>15</sup>, which are the causes of contrary impulses. Moreover, Socrates concludes from this example that there is at least one principle that desires typical bodily desires, *tò epithymetikón*, and another one that reasons and calculates, *tò logistikón* (439d).

Afterwards, the Athenian says that there is a third kind of impulse within the soul, one related to "spirit" or "anger" (*thymós*, 439e2; *orgé*, 440a6). And through two more examples, one anecdotal, the other a Homeric one, Socrates shows that the third impulse is different from the former two. By the example of Leontius, who feels desire to look to corpses and simultaneously gets angry at having this desire, the application of the weakened PNC of *Republic* leads to the conclusion that, if there is a conflict, there must be two "subjects". Consequently, the spirited principle (*thymoidés*) is different from the desiring one (*epithymetikón*). On the other hand, in the other example, that of Odysseus hitting his own chest to stop his impulse to attack Penelope's suitors (*Od.* XX, v. 17), the Platonic PNC leads to the conclusion that also in this situation there is a conflict of two "subjects": the spirited principle wants to attack, and, at the same time, the reasoning principle calculates that is better to wait. So the *thymoidés* has to be different from the *logistikón*.

Therefore, the version of the PNC presented in the *Republic* makes it possible to explain these kinds of conflicts by showing *the plural nature of the soul*. As the argumentation has revealed, the soul has *at least* three genres, powers or parts. Socrates nonetheless, seemly

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<sup>15</sup> Marceri (1993) makes use of the notion of "*dýnamis*" set forth in *Republic* V to thinking the *eídē* of the soul. For a good argumentation against that view, see Delcomminette (2008).

desiring that soul be a perfect analogue of the city sketched in the dialogue, ‘concludes’ that the soul *really* has three kinds or parts (*Rep.* 441c4-d6).<sup>16</sup>

### III. Problems arising from the absolute PNC in the Sophist

It can be said however that there are more "problems" arising from the Parmenidean PNC than those possible consequences for the *Republic's* argumentation on the soul. The "deepness" of the thought of the master of Elea (cf. *báthos*, *Tht.* 184a1), which in a Platonic context warranted the sobriquets “venerable” and “awesome” (*Tht.* 183e6), was far from being exhausted. Indeed, this deepness has not yet been faced. But it will be.

The dialogue *Sophist* has three textual quotations of Parmenides' Poem, at 237a8-9, 244e3-5 and 258d2-3. As my interest rests on the Eleatic PNC mainly expressed in fragments DK28 B2, B7 and B8, there is no reason to analyze the second occurrence. The first and third occurrences, by their turn, are exactly about my point. They are two almost identical quotations of the same part of the Poem: the first two verses of fragment DK28 B7 (quoted above). One more time:

οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆ, φησίν, εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα:  
ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ' ἀφ' ὁδοῦ διζήμενος εἶργε νόημα.

For this shall never prevail: that things that are not are.

But you, withdraw thought from this way of investigation [...]

(PLATO, *Sophist* 237a8-9; 258d2-3; PARMENIDES, DK28 B7.1-2)

The Visitor from Elea quotes these lines for the sake of presenting the thesis that Parmenides teaches to his students, to wit, the thesis of *the impossibility of reaching the truth by an inquiry through the second way alluded to in the Poem*. The “sermon” of the goddess makes it clear: only through one way could the truth be reached, and that means the *unidirectionality* of the decision required by the divinity. The path itself, the act of traversing it, and the grasp of the truth, on the view of the goddess, are one and same thing. The other option cannot not be discharged: *exhaustive dichotomy + unidirectionality = decision in favor of A and exclusion of ~A*, as crystallized in the framework established by the absolute, Eleatic PNC.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. also Andersson (1971); Williams (1973); Vegetti (1998); Blössner (2007). Nonetheless, Socrates curiously will consider the possibility of his tripartition being not exhaustive: *Rep.* 443d7-e1. Adam (*ad. loc.*) connects this step with *R.* 548d (especially with the expression ‘*mē akribōs*’).

In the context of the investigation presented in the dialogue *Sophist*, the entire problem starts with the fact that the man who is being hunted, the sophist, works in the realm of imitation and falsehood, which is constituted by "copies" (*eikóna*, *Sph.* 236a8) and "simulacra" (*eikóna*; 236b7). Besides, it has been established that copies and simulacra, *qua* "images" (*eidola*), are beings that are like other beings, without, however, being them:

τὸ διὰ πάντων τούτων ἃ πολλὰ εἰπὼν ἠξίωσας ἐνὶ προσειπεῖν ὀνόματι φθεγζάμενος εἰδωλον ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ὡς ἓν ὄν. λέγε οὖν καὶ ἀμύνου μηδὲν ὑποχωρῶν τὸν ἄνδρα.  
τί δῆτα, ὦ ξένε, εἰδωλον ἂν φαίμεν εἶναι πλήν γε τὸ πρὸς τάληθινὸν ἀφωμοιωμένον ἕτερον τοιοῦτον; ἕτερον δὲ λέγεις τοιοῦτον ἀληθινόν, ἢ ἐπὶ τίνι τὸ τοιοῦτον εἶπες;  
οὐδαμῶς ἀληθινόν γε, ἀλλ' εἰκοῦς μὲν.  
ἄρα τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὄντως ὄν λέγων;  
οὕτως.  
τί δέ; τὸ μὴ ἀληθινὸν ἄρ' ἐναντίον ἀληθοῦς;  
τί μήν;  
οὐκ ὄντως οὐκ ὄν ἄρα λέγεις τὸ εἰκοῦς, εἴπερ αὐτό γε μὴ ἀληθινὸν ἐρεῖς. ἀλλ' ἔστι γε μήν πως.  
οὐκ οὐκ ἀληθῶς γε, φῆς.  
οὐ γὰρ οὖν: πλήν γ' εἰκὼν ὄντως.  
οὐκ ὄν ἄρα οὐκ ὄντως ἐστὶν ὄντως ἢν λέγομεν εἰκόνα;  
κινδυνεύει τοιαύτην τινὰ πεπλέχθαι συμπλοκὴν τὸ μὴ ὄν τῷ ὄντι, καὶ μάλα ἄτοπον.  
πῶς γὰρ οὐκ ἄτοπον; ὀρθῶς γοῦν ὅτι καὶ νῦν διὰ τῆς ἐπαλλάξεως ταύτης ὁ πολυκέφαλος σοφιστὴς ἠνάγκακεν ἡμᾶς τὸ μὴ ὄν οὐχ ἐκόντας ὁμολογεῖν εἶναι πως.

[VISITOR] The common character in all these things you mentioned and thought fit to call by a single name when you used the expression 'image' as one term covering them all. State it, then, and hold your ground against the man without yielding an inch.

[THEAET.] Well, Visitor, what could we say an image was, if not another similar thing, copied from the real thing?

[VIS.] 'Similar'? Do you mean another real thing, or what does 'similar' signify?

[TH.] Certainly not real, but like it.

[VIS.] Meaning by 'real' a thing that really exists.

[TH.] Yes.

[VIS.] And by 'not real' the opposite of real?

[TH.] Of course.

[VIS.] Then by what is 'like' you mean what has not real existence, if you are going to call it 'not real'. But it has some sort of existence...

[TH.] What?

[VIS.] ...only no real existence, according to you.

[TH.] No; except that it is really a likeness.

[VIS.] So, what we call a real likeness, it does not really exist!

[TH.] Being and not-being do seem to be combined in that perplexing way, and very queer it is.

[VIS.] Queer indeed. You see that now again by dovetailing them together in this way our hydra-headed sophist has forced us against our will to admit that 'what is not' has some sort of being.

(PLATO, *Sophist*, 240a4-c5 – transl. by F. M. D. Cornford, slightly modified)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I'm following, with Cordero (1993, 237-238; 288 ff.), the readings given by MSS T and Y in the whole passage.

Then the Visitor and Theaetetus conclude that any image, or false thing, only can exist if some kind of reality can be conceded to "*that which is not*" – or, if one wants, to the so-called "*not being*". Nonetheless, if the reality of something false is accepted, the absolute PNC would be disregarded. That is the whole problem. The "not being", as we were told in the Parmenidean Poem, would be something like a 'black hole', from whose 'gravitational force' we must prudently keep far away. The affirmation of existence of such an entity, or even the mere consideration of something like that, is already sufficient to undermine the rule established by the Eleatic goddess, to wit, the "strong" PNC:

ὄντως, ὦ μακάριε, ἐσμὲν ἐν παντάπασιν χαλεπῇ σκέψει. τὸ γὰρ φαίνεσθαι τοῦτο καὶ τὸ δοκεῖν, εἶναι δὲ μὴ, καὶ τὸ λέγειν μὲν ἄττα, ἀληθῆ δὲ μὴ, πάντα ταῦτά ἐστι μεστὰ ἀπορίας αἰεὶ ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν χρόνῳ καὶ νῦν. ὅπως γὰρ εἰπόντα χρηὶ ψευδῆ λέγειν ἢ δοξάζειν ὄντως εἶναι, καὶ τοῦτο φθεγξάμενον ἐναντιολογία μὴ συνέχεσθαι, παντάπασιν, ὦ Θεαίτητε, χαλεπόν.

τί δὴ;

τετόλμηκεν ὁ λόγος οὗτος ὑποθέσθαι τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι: ψεῦδος γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως ἐγίγνετο ὄν. [...] Παρμενίδης δὲ ὁ μέγας [...] παισὶν ἡμῖν οὕσιν ἀρχόμενός τε καὶ διὰ τέλους τοῦτο ἀπεμαρτύρατο [...].

[VIS.] The truth, my friend, is that we are faced with an extremely difficult question. This 'appearing' or 'seeming' without really 'being', and the saying something which yet is not true – all these expressions have always been and still are deeply involved in perplexity. It is extremely hard, Theaetetus, to find correct terms in which one may say or think that falsehoods have a real existence, without being caught in a contradiction by the mere utterance of such words.

[TH.] Why?

[VIS.] The audacity of the statement lies in its implication that '*what is not*' has being; for in no other way could falsehood come to have being. But the great Parmenides [...], when we were children, always testified against this [...].

(PLATO, *Sophist*, 236d9-237a4 – transl. by F. M. D. Cornford, slightly modified – my italics)

The reason why that *lógos* is "daring" is this: such a possibility of conceding reality to *that which is not* runs against the very prohibition established by the Parmenidean goddess: if it is impossible to reach something that "is" through the second way, the way of that which is not, it would not be possible to concede whatever "is" to *that which is not*.<sup>18</sup> *Either it is, or it is not*. The absolute PNC of the Poem contains unidirectionality within itself, which could not be bypassed. In that sense, the 'absoluteness' established in the Poem comes sharply to the forefront of the *Sophist*, in such a way as to collide with the possibility of qualifying the sophist as an imitator and faker.<sup>19</sup> Whether the falsehood needs to be supported by the reality of not being, it would be nothing but an impracticable route, a "complete aporia", through which nobody can pass. You, mortals, keep your own thought away from that path without passage,

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Cornford, 1935, 200; Ross, 1951, 114–115; Bluck, 1975, 60–61. For other interpretations of *Sph.* 236d9-237a4, see Crivelli, 2012, 31 *ff.*

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Cordero, 1993, 293 *ff.*; O'Brien, 2011, 200.

said the goddess. As Thom<sup>20</sup> remembers us, the sentence “what-is-not is” was a completely ‘forbidden sentence’. However, the terrible Parmenidean aporia is not exhausted with that: the absolute PNC is sufficiently strong to block not only false predication, but actually any and all predication, and relationship, whatsoever – as an irresistible ontological ‘black hole’.

As noted by Scolnicov<sup>21</sup>, every predication presupposes:

- i) a differentiation between the subject and the predicate;
- ii) a relation between them;
- iii) a differentiation within the subject himself between
  - iii.a) some aspect(s) by which he, subject, is what he is by himself (*kath' hautó*); and
  - iii.b) some aspect(s) by which he is what is predicated of him (*pròs álla*).

In a deeper way, every predication and every relationship depend on the existence of a multiplicity, that is, depend on the fact that there could be some alterity. This is exactly what the absolute Eleatic PNC, in Plato’s eyes, cannot allow. For that reason, in his opinion, there would be no room for any predication, relation of alterity, or multiplicity in, say, an Parmenidean universe. Thus, if it is interpreted in this radical way, it is possible to say about the absolute PNC:

a) *from the perspective of an epistemology*, it would annihilate any pretension of a frontier of differentiation between true and false discourse: if not being is not possible, then it would also not be possible to say that which is not; so all discourse would always say *what is*, and every *lógos* would say *that which is, as it is*, i.e. the truth; thus there would not be any differentiation between false and true discourse, nor between “ignorance” and “knowledge”<sup>22</sup>;

b) *from the perspective of the language*, given that all *lógos* depends on a degree of alterity between subject and predicate, there would also not be room for any language, because nothing could be said about anything; from a Platonic point of view, this result could not be more disastrous: the impossibility of any *lógos* means also the impossibility of “discussing” (*dialégesthai*) and of “thought” (*diánoia*, which is defined as “a silent inner dialogue of the soul with itself”, *Sph.* 263e3-5); this fact would mean the impossibility of philosophy itself;

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<sup>20</sup> Thom, 1999, 155.

<sup>21</sup> Scolnicov, 1995, 226.

<sup>22</sup> For some differences between Parmenides’ own theses and the consequences presented by Plato as possibly inferred by some thinkers from Parmenides’ Poem, see *inter alia* Cordero, 1993, 294 ff; Frère, 1991, 127 ff; Palmer, 1999, 118 ff. Such thinkers could be Protagoras “and his followers” (see *Euthydemus* 286b-c), Gorgias (the *MXG* version), Antisthenes (see Proclus, *in Crat.*, 37), and many others.

accordingly, if one accepts a universe ruled by the absolute PNC, the conclusion, in the opinion of Parmenides himself (this time, however, the Platonic character), is that

[...] τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν παντάπασι διαφθερεῖ. [...] τί οὖν ποιήσεις φιλοσοφίας περὶ; πῆ τρέψη [sc. τὴν διάνοιαν, 135b8] [...];

[PARM.] [...] he will completely destroy all possibility of dialogue. [...] What do you will do, then, about philosophy? Where will you turn [sc. your thought] to [...]?  
(PLATO, *Parmenides*, 135c1-5 – transl. Scolnicov 2003)

c) *from the perspective of an ontology*, as a consequence of that PNC, the absence of alterity and multiplicity would also preclude the existence of the Ideas, which are in a relation of alterity with the sensible beings as well as each other; it would obviously preclude the existence of inter-relations between them, such as "participation", and, in general, the so-understood structure of reality according to the *Sophist*: the interweaving of Ideas (*tôn eidôn symploké*, *Sph.* 259e5-6).

### *Final Considerations*

On this basis, it is perfectly possible to say that a reflection on the Eleatic PNC is made in the *Sophist* by the Eleatic character, the Visitor. His astonishing conclusion is that the consequences of the Parmenidean version of the principle are the most fatal ever to what this very dialogue aims to defend: the possibility of falsehood, the possibility of *lógos*, the possibility of the reality being an interweaving of intelligible beings, and the very possibility of philosophy.

If we compare this point with what we saw in *Republic* IV, there is no doubt that, according to the *Sophist's* view, upholding the absolute PNC would result in even worse damage to the Platonic thought than the mere impossibility of the tripartition of the soul: there would be no room for the Platonic philosophy itself, in all its aspects: epistemology, theory of language, ontology, etc.

Indeed, all these points which would be precluded are certainly connected in a mutually dependent relationship, as made clear by the Visitor himself:

καὶ γὰρ, ὦγαθέ, τό γε πᾶν ἀπὸ παντὸς ἐπιχειρεῖν ἀποχωρίζειν ἄλλως τε οὐκ ἐμμελές καὶ δὴ καὶ παντάπασιν ἀμούσου τινὸς καὶ ἀφιλοσόφου. [...] τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων: διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν. [...] τοῦτου γὰρ στερηθέντες, τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, φιλοσοφίας ἂν στερηθεῖμεν [...]

[VIS.] [...] not only strikes a discordant note but amounts to a crude defiance of the philosophic Muse. [...] This isolation of everything from everything else means a complete abolition of all discourse;

for any discourse we can have owes its existence to the weaving together of Forms. [And] to rob us of discourse would be to rob us of philosophy. That would be the most serious consequence; [...] if its very existence had been taken from us, we should naturally not be able to discourse any further. And that would have happened, if we had yielded the point that there is no blending of any one Form with another.  
(PLATO, *Sophist*, 259d9-260b2 – transl. by F. M. D. Cornford)

In order to avoid these ‘fatal’ consequences, the main task of the Visitor will be to ‘*dare*’ (see v. *tolmáō*, *Sph.* 237a3; b8) father Parmenides’ lessons, by proving, against them, that, ‘*in some way*’, ‘*in some respect*’ (*katà ti*), the not being is, *as well as, controversially* (*te... kai... au palin*), the Being, ‘*somehow*’ (*pêi*), is not (*Sph.* 241d5-7). In the *Sophist*, as in the *Republic*, the restrictions or modifiers (to wit: *katà ti*, *pêi*, *háma*, *katà tauton*, etc.), *qua* impairments of the Eleatic PNC, are, again, the ‘*crux*’ of the Platonic solution for the problem, as noted by many scholars.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, if Parmenides himself had eventually said to Plato “*to be, or not to be? - that is the question*”, because it would be unbearably strange if reality were not in such a disjunctive way, perhaps Plato’s answer<sup>24</sup> could have been something like that: *then, with all due respect*,

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<sup>23</sup> See *inter alia* Scolnicov (1995, 215, 228, 231, n. 22), Palmer (1999, 237-238). Both scholars also note that these “impairments”, or modifiers, are present in the attributing of contrary predicates in the second part of the dialogue *Parmenides*: 144b3, 145a2, *et passim*.

<sup>24</sup> One could not agree at all with calling Parmenides’ version of the PNC the “strong” one and Plato’s the “weakened” version, presenting perhaps two reasons for that criticism: i) the modifications that Plato introduced in Parmenides’ PNC are not a *weakening* but rather a *strengthening* of it, as far as they only clarify what was an *obvious*, even if not expressed, point of Parmenides’ position on his own version of the PNC; ii) if Parmenides’ version of the PNC did not consider those modifiers, he would have missed half of the PNC; so, how can his version be called the “absolute”, “stronger version” thereof? I should say that the terminology of “stronger” and “weaker version” of the PNC only is the way I chose, following Scolnicov (1995), for marking *an important difference* between Platonic and Parmenidean positions. I understand the mentioned possible criticism dwelling rather on my view that there is such a *substantial difference* than on my terminology. In this regard, I must say that those expressions are not used without qualification, since Scolnicov explained, as I did, that Parmenides’ version of the PNC can be considered a “pure”, “absolute” or “strong” version in the precise sense that *it does not admit exception or nuance at all: it is not possible for A to be ~A*, tout court. So Plato’s position can be considered a “weakened” version of the principle, because he *does* consider *some nuances* in its prohibition. The problem about the mentioned criticism rests on the fact that it really dismisses such a difference between both positions: if one claims that those modifiers (*katà ti*, *pêi*, *háma*, *katà tauton*, etc.) were implicitly present in the Poem, Plato would just be saying in a more complete discourse what Parmenides has already said. Then, Plato would be doing nothing but *paraphrasing* Parmenides. I should say that that is not my position, nor Cordero’s (1979; 2007), O’Brien’s (1987), Scolnicov’s (1995 & 2003), Parmer (1999), as well as, most recently, Pulpito’s (2005), Hermann’s (2011), Galgano’s (2017), and others. Those scholars have defended that Parmenides’ position is *substantially different* from Plato’s, and they have even elucidated what could have been some reasons for that. One possible cause for *the absence of the modifiers* in Parmenides’ version of the PNC could be the fact that his thought on these matters simply was not committed to time, aspects and relations whatsoever. He probably was searching for some truths which would be beyond all that. Notwithstanding, if one is not willing to assume a position according to those scholars, there is one position which, maybe, can commit us: Plato’s position. As I said in the beginning, this paper mainly concerns *the Platonic reception* of the Eleatic PNC. One can hardly support that Plato did

*my dear, allow us to accept the strange face of reality, and*

*[...] as a stranger give it welcome.  
There are more things in heaven and earth [...],  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.  
(Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5)*

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not understand his position as different from Parmenides'. Otherwise, why did he write the *Sophist*? If the Visitor and Theaetetus were doing no more than "*paraphrasing*" Parmenides, why do they say they are facing the biggest and more problematic difficulty of all, which is so great an aporia, in the past as well in the present (*Sph.* 236d-237b)? Why does the Visitor show fear of being called a "*parricide*"? How could a *paraphrase* – more elaborate with modifiers but still a *paraphrase* – "kill" someone, indeed, "kill" such a great philosopher, Parmenides, who was the Visitor's teacher and "father", the very founder of an important philosophical tradition? Moreover, Plato probably had, in a manner different from us, the entire Poem available to read, as he never refer to it as fragmentary or incomplete. If he had understood the restrictions or modifications, the ones he added to the PNC, as already present or implied in the Poem's version of the PNC, how can he make the Visitor presenting these modifications as the 'crux' of his solution of the great aporia he saw arising out the Poem? In fact, did not the Visitor say that they are "*daring*" Parmenides' teaching (see v. *tolmáō*, *Sph.* 237a3; b8)? Whether the position of the Visitor and Theaetetus really has an "*audacity*", which goes "*far beyond*" the limits imposed by the Poem's "*prohibition*" (see *Sph.* 258c6-10), it is because, in Plato's eyes, there is no room in the Poem for the following kind of concession: "*A is A in some respect and ~A in some other respect...*". On the goddess' part, in the Platonic reading, "*or A, or ~A; and tertium non datur*". The Visitor nevertheless proposes something really different, to wit (in Scolnicov's words): "*non plus 'ou... ou...' , mais en quelquer façon 'et... et...' (et que soient ajoutées toutes les additions nécessaires pour surmonter les difficultés éleatiques)*" (Scolnicov, 1995, 234). It seems needless to look in the Poem for textual evidences of those modifiers or restrictions added to the PNC by Plato. When one looks for them, one only finds their *absence* of the text. I insist: had they been in the Poem, even if just in an implied way, why would have Plato written the *Sophist* for his students, for his contenders... and (why not?) for us?

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