

THE RELATIVE ORDER OF PLATO'S  
*PARMENIDES* AND *THEAETETUS*

Although stylistic studies generally show that Plato's *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus* are adjacent in the order of composition, the exact order of the two dialogues is not at all certain.<sup>1</sup> In such cases, arguments from internal evidence might prove crucial in tipping the balance one way or the other. There is a long-standing argument from internal evidence according to which one should seriously doubt the posteriority of the *Parmenides* or even prefer the posteriority of the *Theaetetus*. This argument appears never to have been challenged in print, and the considerations offered below are intended to undermine it by questioning some of its implicit premises.

The argument starts with two factual premises. First, in the *Theaetetus* (143B–C) the narrator comments on the tediousness of the indirectly reported narrative and proposes to dispense with this method in favor of the directly reported narrative. Second, the *Parmenides* employs just the kind of narrative which is condemned in the *Theaetetus* and never again used by Plato. From these premises A. E. Taylor draws the conclusion that the *Parmenides* "cannot well be later" than the *Theaetetus*.<sup>2</sup> D. W. Ross draws a slightly different conclusion. In view of the fact that while the first part of the *Parmenides* (up to 137C) uses *oratio obliqua*, the second part uses *oratio recta*, Ross suggests that "the first part of the *Parmenides* was written before the *Theaetetus*, and the second after it, or that the *Theaetetus* simply enunciates a principle which Plato had already in fact adopted in the second part of the *Parmenides*."<sup>3</sup>

Both versions of the argument proceed on the assumption that the view expressed on *oratio recta* in the *Theaetetus* must be intended as a general principle to be followed from now on. Unless one makes this assumption, one cannot draw from the two factual premises the conclusions which Taylor and Ross draw. But this assumption cannot and should not be readily granted. For, surely, *oratio recta* is introduced in the first place because in the *Theaetetus* Plato is contemplating the composition of two or three other dialogues as sequels to, and with the same dramatic setting as, the *Theaetetus* (cf. 210D).<sup>4</sup> The use of *oratio obliqua* in the sequels would be indeed confusing, unless the assumed dramatic situation was explained at the beginning of each sequel. Since the setting would be identical in each case the repetition would obviously be uneconomical, tedious, and dramatically clumsy. In short, Plato's failure in the *Parmenides* to observe the principle on *oratio recta* of the *Theaetetus* need not imply that the former dialogue is, in whole or in part, earlier than the latter. Instead, his "failure" may easily be accounted for by, or it may mean no more than, the fact that the composition of the *Parmenides* does not involve Plato in the same type of dramatic problems as does the composition of the *Theaetetus* and the sequels to it.

It is true of course that, with the exception of the first part of the *Parmenides*,

1. For the order of composition, cf. D. W. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), p. 2, and L. Brandwood, *A Word Index to Plato* (Leeds, 1976), pp. xvi–xviii.

2. *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London, 1960), p. 349.

3. *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, pp. 8–9. Cf. also F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1935), p. 17, n. 1.

4. Three, if we assume that he was intending to write the so-called "Philosopher."

*oratio obliqua* is never used again. This fact is obviously thought to be good evidence in support of the claim that at least the first part of the *Parmenides* is earlier than the *Theaetetus*. But behind this claim there lurks the assumption that the pronouncements on *oratio recta* in the *Theaetetus* constitute not merely a general principle but an inviolable one. It is this assumption which finds expression in the suggestion that we break up the *Parmenides* into two distinct parts, the first of which was written before while the second after the *Theaetetus*.

In reply one might make the following two points, the first of which is simply a reiteration of remarks made earlier. In the first place, the pronouncement on *oratio recta* need not be meant to constitute a general principle, let alone an inviolable one. If this is so, the decision on the type of narrative to be employed will be made by considering the peculiar dramatic requirements of each dialogue or set of dialogues. Consequently, one cannot argue from the type of narrative used in a dialogue to its place in the order of composition relative to the *Theaetetus*. In this connection, it is worth remembering that of the ten late dialogues six are members of trilogies, one (the *Laws*) is even longer than the *Republic*, while the *Philebus* and *Epinomis* are not dramatically interesting. All these factors would obviously tend to discourage the employment of *oratio obliqua*. Secondly, even if we are to suppose that Plato intends his pronouncements on *oratio recta* as a general principle, which he will consciously strive to follow, we need not also suppose that he will treat the principle as inviolable. He may well wish or have to suspend it, whenever the dramatic requirements and/or the circumstances surrounding the composition of a particular dialogue are such as to warrant its suspension. We are all aware of the gap between our stated intentions and what we might do or might have to do.

In view of the above considerations, the next task is to try to outline the kind of circumstances, motives, or reasons which might lead Plato to abandon the principle on *oratio recta* in the first part of the *Parmenides*.

It is interesting and significant that in the *Parmenides* Plato contrives to employ as characters in the narrative all of his three brothers (Adeimantus, Glaucon, and his half brother Antiphon), to mention Pyrilampes, Antiphon's father, and to refer indirectly to Antiphon's paternal grandfather of the same name (126A-C). Antiphon is clearly the guest of honor since, inter alia, it is he who relates, in a prodigious feat of memory, the conversation among the dialectic participants. The fact that Antiphon is the guest of honor and the fact that his progenitors are mentioned make it almost certain that the *Parmenides* is dedicated in memoriam to Antiphon.<sup>5</sup>

Now, Plato's desire to honor Antiphon in the first place and the subsequent literary problem of explaining how the story of the meeting was transmitted through Antiphon may well account for the complicated, indirect format in which the narrative is delivered. Once Plato decides to use Antiphon as one of the links in the transmission of the story, the employment of the indirect narrative we get in the *Parmenides* is almost inevitable (the report of a report of a report).<sup>6</sup> At the

5. As, most probably, the *Republic* is dedicated in memoriam to Adeimantus and Glaucon.

6. The dramatic meeting between Socrates and Parmenides is assumed to take place around 450 B.C. Antiphon (b. 425-24 B.C., see J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* [Oxford, 1971], p. 330) heard the story as a child and he relates it to Cephalus as a grown man. Thus, Plato has to bridge dramatically a time span of some sixty-five to seventy years.

same time, Plato's dramatic interests in recording, for example, the exchange between Socrates and Zeno (128 A-E) or the reaction of Parmenides and Zeno to Socrates' theory (130A) are also best served by having a narrator report on them.

In short, the psychological motives for bringing Antiphon into the narrative in the first place, the subsequent need to explain the transmission of the story, and the dramatic interest in recording the participants' reaction to one another might easily lead Plato to abandon *oratio recta* in favor of *oratio obliqua*. Furthermore, he need not feel bound to employ *oratio obliqua* throughout the dialogue, but rather until that point at which its use becomes too intrusive and clumsy. Thus, having served its purpose in the first part, *oratio obliqua* is replaced by *oratio recta* in the second part of the dialogue.

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### GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT: CATULLUS 103

This witty epigram involves a logical disjunction: the addressee Silo is told to choose between (a) returning ten thousand sesterces to the speaker, in which case he may be as *saevus et indomitus* as he pleases, or (b) keeping the money, in which case he should stop trying to be both a *leno* and *saevus et indomitus*. Since the cognomen "Silo" implies respectable Italian parentage, the epigrammatic point must lie in an unexpected and insulting use of *leno*.<sup>1</sup> Catullus' target is a man of good family who has accepted a large sum to serve as a go-between; thus he performs precisely the same function as a disreputable slave dealer. Unfortunately, he performs it ineptly, for he displays a lordly insolence toward his rich client, whereas a real pander would know enough to be properly ingratiating.

The incongruity between Silo's demeanor and his sordid office is underscored by an artful play on words. In the last line, the elision of *leno* and *esse* produces a sound superficially reminiscent of *lenis*—close enough, at any rate, to gratify a determined punster.<sup>2</sup> Now, the late grammarians Priscian and Eutyches posit an etymological link between *leno* and the verb *lenire*.<sup>3</sup> Although there is no evidence to establish that this etymology was current in Catullus' time, the jingle at *Poenulus* 639, "bene volumus leniter lenonibus," suggests that Plautus may have perceived a paradoxical connection between the last two words. Moreover, *lenire* is often put in direct opposition to *saevus* and its cognates: Plautus *Bacchides* 408 "leniter qui saevium sapiunt magis"; Livy 2. 56. 15 "plebem saevientem precibus lenisset" and 27. 34. 14 "parentium saevitiam . . . leniendam esse"; Silius *Punica*

1. This interpretation is accepted by W. Kroll, *Catullus*<sup>3</sup> (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 276, and by C. L. Neudling, *A Prosopography to Catullus*, Iowa Studies in Classical Philology 12 (Oxford, 1955), pp. 163-64, who documents it with inscriptional evidence for the name. K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London and Basingstoke, 1970), p. 443, merely assumes that Silo is a professional pimp.

2. The elision of final long -o as in *leno* possibly involved contraction with the following initial vowel to produce a single long vowel or diphthong: see W. S. Allen, *Vox Latina* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 78-82. Catullus would then have pronounced the first foot as *lenōs-* or *lenōēs-*. There is a somewhat similar pun at 40. 8, *poena/pene* (first noted by L. Richardson, Jr., "Furi et Aureli, comites Catulli," *CP* 58 [1963]: 102).

3. Priscian 121. 17 Keil<sup>2</sup>: *a leniendo* "leno"; Eutyches 454. 23 Keil<sup>5</sup>: *lenio leno*. This etymology is of course rejected by modern scholars, for whom the actual derivation of the word is a matter of dispute.