

# *Materialism and Immaterialism, Compatibility and Incompatibility in Parmenides*

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**ABSTRACT:** The article provides a critical assessment of the viability of a materialist interpretation of Parmenides' ontology, discussing it in the context of the notorious issue of the compatibility of what-is in *Alētheia* and the cosmic constituents (light and night) in *Doxa*. It makes a case for a strictly incompatibilist view and, on this basis, concludes that a materialist interpretation of what-is is wanting. Clarifying Parmenides' own notion of the material, it makes the proposal that, whereas the mind vs. body/matter contradistinction was not available for Parmenides, he did distinguish between the natural and the supernatural. Finally, it suggests that a special kind of duality reminiscent of the contradistinction could have featured in his philosophy, which might have influenced Plato.

**KEY-WORDS:** Eleatics; Ontology; Metaphysics; History of Philosophy; Ancient Philosophy.

**RESUMO:** O artigo oferece uma avaliação crítica da viabilidade de uma interpretação materialista da ontologia parmenidiana, discutindo-a no contexto da famosa questão da compatibilidade de o-que-é na *Alētheia* e dos constituintes cósmicos (luz e noite) na *Doxa*. É analisado o caso de uma visão de estrita incompatibilidade e, nesse sentido, conclui que a interpretação materialista de o-que-é é insuficiente. Ao esclarecer a noção de material própria de Parmênides, o artigo propõe que, embora a contraposição e distinção mente contra corpo/matéria ainda não estava disponível para Parmênides, ele distinguiu entre natural e sobrenatural. Finalmente, se sugere que um tipo especial de dualidade remanescente dessa contraposição possa ter atuado na sua filosofia e ter influenciado Platão.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Eleáticos; Ontologia; Metafísica; História da Filosofia; Filosofia Antiga.

*In memoriam* Enrique Hülsz Piccone

Although Plato puts Parmenides under critical scrutiny with regard to his monism and banishment of what-is-not, it is widely conceded that he takes him for his own intellectual predecessor, notably, in terms of the theory of forms. In the *Sophist* he refers to him as “father Parmenides” (241d5, cf. 241d3, 242a2) and classifies him as a representative of the “friends of forms” in the *Gigantomachia* (“battle of gods and giants”) between those much later to be called “idealists” and “materialists”, respectively (*Sophist* 246a–249d).<sup>1</sup> The latter acknowledge the existence only of whatever exhibits resistance and can be touched (246a10–b1), whereas the former insist that true being is intelligible and incorporeal (246b6–7). In striking contrast, Aristotle gives us a different account about Parmenides:

[Of the earliest thinkers who philosophized about the truth.]  
Some of them eliminated generation and perishing altogether.  
They declare that none of the things-that-are either is  
generated or perishes, but they only seem to us [to do so]—for  
example, Melissus and Parmenides. But even if what they say is  
excellent in other ways, we must not suppose that they are

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<sup>1</sup> For a short but informative discussion of the history of the term “idealism” and its contrast with non-idealist positions see Guyer and Horstmann 2015.

speaking about nature. For that some of the things-that-are are ungenerated and altogether unmoved is a claim that belongs to an inquiry different from natural philosophy and prior to it. *But because they supposed that there is nothing apart from the substance of sensible things*, and because they were the first to think that [there must be] entities of this sort (i.e., ungenerated and imperishable) if there is to be any knowledge or wisdom, *they thus transferred to the former (i.e., the sensibles) the accounts derived from the latter.* (De caelo iii, 1 298b14-24 = DK28 A25. Tr. by Coxon.)

While Aristotle grants Plato that Parmenides (and Melissus) eliminated motion and change, complying with his own account of the overall outlook of early Greek philosophy, in terms of which most of them recognized none but (what he calls) a “material cause” (*Metaphysics* i, 3 983b6), he suggests that the Eleatics were no different in this regard.<sup>2</sup> Buttressed by the influence of German idealism, in the modern history of the reception of early Greek philosophy scholars for a long time followed Plato’s take on Parmenides, until John Burnet at the end of the 19th century thought otherwise. Siding with Aristotle, he held that for the early Greek philosophers reality was fundamentally of material nature and, challenging Zeller and others under the influence of German idealism, argued that Parmenides was not “as some have said, the ‘father of idealism’; on the contrary, all materialism depends on his

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<sup>2</sup> This complies with his report that the Eleatics identified sensation and thought (*Met.* iii, 5 1009b12-15 = Coxon 2009, t. 28) (cf. Hussey 2006, 17).—Elsewhere, however, Aristotle differentiates between Parmenides and Melissus, claiming that the former speaks of what-is as “one in terms of definition”, whereas the latter takes it “in terms of matter” (*Met.* i, 5 986b18-21 = Coxon 2009, t. 26). In contrast, he also claims that in order to comply with “appearances” Parmenides posited “two causes and principles, the hot and the cold ... and ranked the former with what-is, the latter with what-is-not” (*Met.* i, 5 986b30-987a1 = Coxon 2009, t. 26). Hence, it is not entirely clear that Aristotle conceives of Parmenides’ *eon* as a material entity; nonetheless, the thrust of his conception of early Greek philosophy in general, the alleged Eleatic identification of thought and sensation, and the assumption that Parmenides sought to comply with phenomena are strongly in favor of this view.

view of reality” (Burnet 1945, 182).<sup>3</sup> While, in contrast with the general thesis about the early Greeks’ conception of the material nature of reality, this account of Parmenides’ *eon* did not gain wide popularity, it was forcefully revived by Karl Popper, who not only suggested a more complex argumentation for the material nature of what-is (*eon*) in Parmenides, but also defended him as a cosmologist *vis-à-vis* Owen’s (and his followers’) strong case for a Parmenides bent on metaphysical reasoning (Popper 1998, 16–17, 70, 87, 99–100, 111–114, 143; Owen, 1960).<sup>4</sup> Since about the same time, the tendency to reinstate Parmenides as a philosopher of nature has been on the rise among his students, to the extent that today this is just about the majority view.<sup>5</sup> However, whereas both Burnet and Popper agreed with interpretations of a non-materialist outlook that Parmenides’ account of what-is in *Alētheia* is incompatible with his description of cosmological entities in *Doxa*, the tendency to do justice to Parmenides as a cosmologist is today conjoined with a compatibilist account of these two sections of his poem.<sup>6</sup> This is the

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<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that Burnet calls Parmenides “the father of materialism” because of his influence on atomism (Burnet 1945, 180, 339–40, 349). Nonetheless, he considers Parmenides’ *eon* to be a corporeal entity (Burnet 1945, 178–179, 182).

<sup>4</sup> Popper 1998 collects (published and unpublished) essays of a lifetime and attests to Popper’s passionate love for the Presocratics, especially for Xenophanes and Parmenides. The most influential essays relevant to our central topic in the collection are Essay 5 (“Can the Moon Throw Light on Parmenides’ Ways?”, 1988), Essay 4 (“How the Moon Might Throw Some of Her Light Upon the Two Ways of Parmenides”, 1989) and Essay 3 (“How the Moon Might Shed Some of Her Light Upon the Two Ways of Parmenides”, 1992). The 2012 edition contains an invaluable Foreword by the late Scott Austin (Austin 2012). On Burnet’s influence on Popper see Austin 2000, 240.

<sup>5</sup> See most contributions to the volume of the Buenos Aires Symposium (Cordero 2011); also Granger 2002; Graham 2006; Sisko and Weiss 2015.

<sup>6</sup> By ‘compatibility’ (or ‘incompatibility’) I mean that between what-is as described in *Alētheia* and entities (light and night) featuring in *Doxa*, in terms of what Tor (2017, 160) calls the “ontological question” (that is, the metaphysical status of doxastic things *vis-à-vis* what-is), vs. the “aetiological question” of Parmenides’ rationale for including *Doxa* in his poem. Compatibilists are not restricted to those in favor of a strongly “scientist” Parmenides (see e.g., Thanassas 2007; Palmer 2009; Johansen 2016) and also include some of those supporting a religious Parmenides (Kingsley 2003; Adluri 2011; Tor 2017). For a recent criticism of compatibilist views in general (and, in particular, of interpretations of Parmenides as primarily a cosmologist) see Cosgrove 2014.

outspoken rationale behind a recent revival of an interpretation of Parmenides along materialist lines (Sisko and Weiss 2015, 40–42).<sup>7</sup> In theoretical terms, the assumption that Parmenides conceived of what-is as a material entity seems to be the most obvious way of reconciling it with the two cosmic constituents (light and night) in *Doxa*, and to provide a more coherent account than to contend that what-is is corporeal, yet incompatible with cosmic entities, as Burnet and Popper held.<sup>8</sup> Hence, in view of the current trend of rendering what-is compatible with light and night in *Doxa*, its materialist interpretation is not fortuitous, since it might well have been lurking behind a series of attempts at reconciling *Doxa* and *Alētheia*.

But how far is an interpretation of Parmenides (or of any other early Greek thinker) feasible within the framework of “idealism” vs. “materialism” at all? Is Plato to be credited in claiming that “the battle between gods and giants” is one that “has always been around” (*Sophist* 246c2–3)?<sup>9</sup> And if so, which side is Parmenides to be aligned with? Is Plato’s classification of him as a forerunner of his own theory of forms,

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<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this essay ‘materialism’ is taken in a broad, intuitive sense, referring to a form of monism which assumes that fundamental entities (or, the fundamental substance behind phenomena) are of material (i.e., corporeal) nature. ‘Material’ and ‘corporeal’ are not synonymous, yet for the purposes of this essay, the difference is, by and large, inconsequential.

<sup>8</sup> Both of them suggest a biographical explanation for the incompatibility of what-is and the cosmology of *Doxa*, notably, that the latter represents some earlier beliefs Parmenides came to renounce (cf. Burnet 1945, 184; Popper 1998, 82, 90).

<sup>9</sup> The “giants”, or those “born from the earth” (247c5) are notoriously difficult to identify in philosophical historical terms, which suggests that the “battle of gods and giants” is Plato’s own theoretical construction.

and in that sense an idealist, to be accepted?<sup>10</sup> Or, is Aristotle correct in suggesting that the early Greek philosophers knew none but sensible or corporeal reality, Parmenides included? Since neither the issue of Plato or Aristotle as “historians of philosophy”, nor all these questions in their complexity could be adequately addressed in a short essay, in what follows I focus on one of them in order to contribute to a clarification of all the rest. How far is an interpretation of Parmenides along materialist lines feasible?<sup>11</sup>

This question is currently pertinent not only because of a recent proposal for an interpretation of Parmenides to this effect (Sisko and Weiss, 2015), but also for reasons to do with the development of Presocratic studies since the first widely influential account along materialist lines was suggested by modern scholars. Since Burnet’s influential study, it has become fairly clear in the literature on the Presocratic philosophers in general that their notion of the material or corporeal (and, *a fortiori*, that of the immaterial or incorporeal), if they had any of that *at all*, is rather different from our own. Burnet could still assume without proviso that they took it for granted that any entity is “what we call body”, and hence that the incorporeal was unknown to

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<sup>10</sup> In an influential article Burnyeat (1982) argued that none of the Greeks was an idealist, which might seem to provide indirect support for interpretations of Parmenides along materialist or anti-idealist lines. Burnyeat, however, fails to distinguish between what might be contrasted as “subjective” vs. “objective idealism”. While both posit the existence of immaterial entities in one way or another, in contrast with the former, the latter is a metaphysical realist thesis (just as materialism), i.e., assumes mind-independence about them (as Plato’s forms). (See Brown 1998, 186; on subjective and objective idealism see Guyer and Horstmann 2015). Hence, Burnyeat’s central thesis is highly misleading and the denial of idealism in Parmenides fails to provide sufficient support for his materialism (*contra* Popper 1998, 82–83, with reference to Burnet), since the latter is not the contradictory of the former.

<sup>11</sup> Objections to Popper’s materialist Parmenides are adduced by Austin 2000; and Austin 2012. Some of my points are related to Austin’s criticism (to be noted below), but my objective here is not a thorough criticism of Popper’s conception of Parmenides. Lebedev (2017) provides a more general critique of a materialist interpretation of Parmenides (addressed to Burnet); his arguments are in part historical, in part assume that Parmenides was a Pythagorean and rely on B 3 as expressing the identity of what-is and *noein* (cf. esp. Lebedev 2017, 497–501). My arguments below against materialism in Parmenides are internal and do not assume either of these contentious interpretations.

them (Burnet 1945, 178). However, in light of more recent research, these assumptions are no longer self-evident, for it is far less clear than before that our own notion of the material complies with their “stuffs”. In particular, Patricia Curd (Curd 2011) has adduced salient arguments against the general thesis adopted by Burnet and others from Aristotle that the early Greek philosophers had no notion of (what we call) the immaterial or the incorporeal. While Curd leaves the question open whether Parmenides’ *eon* is immaterial, she raises ample doubt about the thesis that he could not think so, while providing an indirect argument in further support by contesting Aristotle’s assumption (*Metaphysics* iii, 5 1009b12; 1009b21) that “thinking” (*phronesis*) was identified with sensation by Parmenides (Curd 2011, 129–131). My discussion, then, is meant to be a follow-up on the issue of materialism vs. immaterialism in Parmenides in the context of reasonable doubt raised against Aristotle’s (and his modern followers’) take on the overall materialist or corporealist outlook of early Greek philosophy. Since, however, this question is intimately intertwined with compatibilism vs. incompatibilism in Parmenides, as the recent revival of his materialist interpretation illustrates, another inevitable focus of my discussion is this notorious problem, at least in so far as it is related to a clarification of the nature of what-is.

### *Criteria for the material*

Two crucial tenets in *Alētheia* are fundamental to interpretations of what-is as a material or corporeal entity. The first one is related to Parmenides’ repudiation of what-is-not (B 2.3, 5–8; B 6.1–2, etc.); the second is the sphere simile employed to illuminate the nature of what-is (B 8.43–44). Both have been taken to suggest that what-is is an entity

extended is space and, as such, inevitably corporeal.<sup>12</sup> But what is inevitable for us, might not have been so for Parmenides. Curd duly warns against attributing to the Presocratics a notion of space as we know it from Plato and Aristotle (let alone from modern conceptions, such as that of Descartes):

The very concept of space is one that both Plato and Aristotle wrestle with as something new and very difficult, and not at all intuitively obvious. The empty (τὸ κενόν) is not space. In pre-Platonic atomism, the void is what separates atoms, it is not a container for atoms. It is moved just as the atoms are, like interstices in a sponge or, as Sedley suggests, the vacuum in a flask. (Curd 2011, 127.)

Hence, it is far from clear that when Parmenides repudiates what-is-not (B2.3-8), he denies the existence of the void (i.e., empty space).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, and for the same reason, one should be wary of taking his assimilation of what-is to a “well-rounded sphere” literally (B 8.43). If the “empty” (i.e., the negation of what-is in one sense or another) is not (yet) space (i.e., the lack and container of, *body*) for the atomists, the “fullness” (ἔμπλεόν ... ἐόντος B.8.24) of what-is in Parmenides is not

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<sup>12</sup> In all three major materialist interpretations referred to above, the reconstruction of Parmenides’ arguments in *Alētheia* entail the assumption that his denial of what-is-not boils down to the denial of the void (Burnet 1945, 178-182, 333-337; Popper, 1998, 71, 86, 91, 101, 103, 119-120, 157-158; Sisko and Weiss 2015, 53 n. 31). The sphere simile is made use of in support of Parmenides’ materialism by Burnet (1945, 181-182) and Sisko and Weiss (2015, 42-43). For Popper this is not vital, for his reconstruction of Parmenides’ arguments entails the special premiss that light (as something immaterial) is illusory (Popper 1998, 70-71), concluding on an identification of what-is with night alone as a corporeal entity (Popper 1998, 41, 71, 125). Nonetheless, he characterizes what-is as “a dark sphere of dense matter (like the Moon)” (Popper 1998, 71).

<sup>13</sup> Nor is it clear whether Parmenides himself (rather than his disciple, Melissus) argued from the denial of the void to immobility, and whether “immobility” meant lack of locomotion (alone) for him, or that of alteration in general (cf. Mourelatos 1970/2008, 116-117). Mourelatos (1970/2008, 118-119) adduces convincing arguments that “motion” for Parmenides meant dislocation or “egress” with the (metaphysical) implications of “self-estrangement or alienation” (Mourelatos 1970/2008, 118).



self-evidently the bulk (body) of a “ball”.<sup>14</sup> Besides, the sphere simile might just be that: a simile or metaphor<sup>15</sup> (cf. Owen 1960, 95; McKirahan 2008, 214; Wedin 2014, 179) meant to illuminate the homogeneity of what-is (Wedin 2014, 178), or having an epistemic, rather than an ontological message (Mourelatos 1970/2008, 123–130).<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, since one risks begging the question, it is ill-advised to rely on characterizations of what-is in order to determine whether or not Parmenides conceived of it as a corporeal entity. If, and in so far as, he had any notion of the material or corporeal, we should take his *Doxa* section as a clue, notably, his characterization of light and night, their constitution, behaviour and relation to each other and to what-is. For, whereas what-is possesses characteristics that run counter to the material or corporeal in any obvious sense (indivisible: B 4.2–4, B 8.22; ungenerated and imperishable B 8.3; immobile/unchanging B 8.26, 38, 41), the two cosmic constituents are certainly not such a far cry from our own notion of the material or corporeal that we could not recognize in them any aspect of ours. There are a series of common denominators between our conception and that of Parmenides. Night and light have sensible properties, such as texture, expanse, weight, and colour (B 8.41, 56–59); night and light interact with each other in a uniform way (by ‘mixing’, B 12, B 16) and presumably in a regular manner (B 10.6, B 12.3, B 14), endowing the universe with unity and, at the same time, differentiation and structure. Thus, they are sufficiently

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<sup>14</sup> What is widely understood as the ‘bulk’ or ‘mass’ (of a body) (ὄγκος B 8.43) of the sphere might refer to its ‘totality’, as Plato speaks of the ‘total number’ of citizens (τὸν αὐτῶν ὄγκον τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ) at *Laws* 737c2.

<sup>15</sup> It seems significant that the adjective Parmenides employs for assimilating what-is to a sphere is not ὅμοιος (ambiguous between ‘like’ and ‘the same as’), but ἐναλίγκιον (‘like’, ‘similar’).

<sup>16</sup> Mourelatos here adduces a series of salient arguments for concluding that the upshot of the sphere simile is *the perspectival neutrality* of what-is (Mourelatos, 1970/2008, 129; cf. Austin, 1986, 84, 87; Austin, 2007, 15). The point that Parmenides uses πάντοθεν, ‘from every side’(8.43) in the context of the sphere simile (implying *view* from the outside), rather than παντοσε, ‘all over’ (which might be taken to imply extension, bulk or surface) is especially cogent (cf. Mourelatos, 1970/2008, 126–127, with n. 32).

close to what we commonly regard as properties of the basic, material constituents of natural entities today. However, beyond this much, caution is required, at least of historians of philosophy. For it has been duly pointed out that, in striking contrast with our conception of the elemental constituents of the physical world (as well as with later developments in Greek philosophy), the “basic stuffs”, “opposites” or “elements” of the early Greek thinkers are different from our notion of the corresponding basic building-blocks of matter in at least one fundamental respect. Basic stuffs, such as fire, air, water and earth, as they feature in Ionian philosophy and beyond, are not simply “things” but “quality-things”, that is, they are just as much “substances” as they are “powers”.<sup>17</sup> For example, the hot is not merely “fiery”, but something making other things hot, just as water makes things wet, etc. (Cornford 1952, 161-162; Vlastos 1975, 329; Curd 2011, 127).<sup>18</sup> If later (Aristotelian) terminology might be allowed to clarify the point in terms more familiar to us, they are just as much material as efficient causes. Hence, they differ from the material (cause) in so far as they are not mere passive recipients of forms.<sup>19</sup> As far as Parmenides and his own stuffs, light and night are concerned, an even more specific feature must be noted. Over above physical properties commonly attributed to bodies (solidity, weight, expanse), light and night are also endowed with (what we regard as) *par excellence* psychic or mental properties (Hussey 2006, 17). Light is ‘gentle-minded’ (ἡπιον B 8.57), whereas night is

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<sup>17</sup> This is why they are now customarily referred to as “stuffs”, rather than “matter”.

<sup>18</sup> This is in line with the Greek notion of *phusis* (from *phuō*, ‘grow, make grow’), with its biological connotations (life, vitality, change and movement).

<sup>19</sup> See the apt formulation of Curd, who denies that Presocratic stuffs could “be thought of as matter, in the sense of an uncharacterized extended something that is to be characterized” (Curd 2011, 127). Curd does not, however, controvert that stuffs might be corporeal. The issue is thus whether they are merely corporeal, or also (what we consider as) mental or incorporeal.

‘unknowing’ or ‘unintelligent’ (ἄδαῖ,<sup>20</sup> B 8.59).<sup>21</sup> Hence, they combine what, again for *us*, belongs to the domain of “mind” (something mental or psychic) and “matter” (something corporeal), respectively.

What might thus be plausibly characterized as a sort of “psychosomatic” constitution of light and night seems to undermine the conception of night (or, indeed, of light) as corporeal or material in Parmenides (noted by Hussey, 2006, 17).<sup>22</sup> However, it could still be argued that light and night represent some kind of proto-materialist entities and that they are quasi-material. But unless what-is is to be associated with either light or night (alone) in one way or another (e.g., in the manner of identity, coexistence, consubstantiality, or the like), or with the two of them together, Parmenides could not be classified even as a proto-materialist with regard to his ontology on the whole. Hence, this question is intimately related to the issue of compatibility vs. incompatibility in terms of the ontological question. Alternatively, it might be argued that what-is is material in a different sense from light and night. It might not be a specific “body” with distinct (contrary) “forms” (μορφάς B8.53) and phenomenal traits (such as weight and colour), but their underlying (undefined or indefinite) substrate of sorts from which they originate and which inheres in them in some way (Sisko and Weiss, 2015, 51–53). As we shall see, the plausibility of this suggestion might also be adequately determined in the context of the issue of compatibility vs. incompatibility, so this is to be discussed next.

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<sup>20</sup> From \*δάω, δαῖναι (‘learn, know’), not from δάος (‘torch’) (Coxon 2009, 348). Cf. Vlastos 1946, 74 n. 48; Coxon 2009, 347–348.

<sup>21</sup> I take the phrase φλογὸς αἰθέριον πῦρ (‘the aetherial fire of flame’) in B 8.57 to denote light, for it is contrasted with night in B 8.59.—The fact that Parmenides refers to “the hot power of the stars” (ἄστρων θερμὸν μένος B 11.3), to the δυνάμεις (‘powers’) of light and night (B 9.2) and their ‘impulse’ (ὀρμήθησαν B 11.3) clearly confirms the general thesis that for the early Greek thinkers stuff is just as much matter as power.

<sup>22</sup> Hence, Hussey (2006, 28) speaks of “pangnosis” in Parmenides, but it is important to note that this is meant to apply only to the cosmology of *Doxa*.

## Compatibility and Incompatibility

Although the realization that basic stuffs in early Greek philosophy significantly differ from modern conceptions of the material constituents of the physical world is relatively recent, even early advocates of a materialist interpretation of Parmenides could have registered and accounted for a common property of light and night of great importance for Parmenides. However, while giving prominence to characteristics of the cosmic constituents (or of what-is) commonly associated with body today, a crucial feature of them is ignored by these interpreters. Light and night must be divisible in order to mix with each other and occupy various parts of the cosmos to form the celestial luminaries and the earth (B 11, B 12, A 35, A 37, A 40a, A 43, A 43a). Their nature is in singular contrast with what-is, distinctly indivisible as it is argued to be (οὐδὲ διαίρετόν ἐστιν “nor is it divisible”, B 8.22; ξυνεχὲς πᾶν ἐστιν· ἐὸν γὰρ ἐόντι πελάζει “it is all cohesive, for what-is draws near to what-is”, B 8.25; cf. B 4.2–4).<sup>23</sup> Given that proponents of materialist accounts underline features of what-is commonly associated with body, it is odd that they ignore divisibility, an intuitively inevitable property of material entities. All the more so, since the importance of the indivisibility of what-is (and, *a fortiori*, of the divisibility of the cosmic constituents) for Parmenides might be inferred from the fact that this is its only feature referred to prior to the strict deductions of B 8 (οὐ γὰρ ἀποτμήξει τὸ ἐὸν τοῦ ἐόντος ἔχεσθαι “for it will not sever what-is from holding fast to what-is”, B 4.2).<sup>24</sup> In order to see the full theoretical import of the fundamental contrast of what-is and

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<sup>23</sup> I can find no discussion of the divisibility of the cosmic constituents (or, of the indivisibility of what-is) in Burnet 1945, Popper 1998, or Sisko and Weiss (2015).—Unless otherwise noted, translations of Parmenides’ fragments are by Coxon (in Coxon 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Given that the indivisibility of what-is is inconsistent with its being (literally) a sphere (Mourelatos 1970/2008, 124), but also with its being a (physical or sensible) body of any sort (Austin 2000, 241–242), its neglect by materialist interpretations is not fortuitous.

light and night on this score, consider the following.

Contrary to accounts which attribute a kind of naïve or unreflective attitude to the Presocratics, in terms of which it is taken for granted, for example, that when he enigmatically asserts “is” (in B 2.2), Parmenides has “what we call body” in mind, he, for one, is far more innovative and critical-minded. If, after Vlastos, Owen, Barnes and others who underscored the novelty of his theoretical method, it is clear to many of Parmenides’ students today that his enquiry into the nature of what-is taken *in abstracto* was unparalleled before, then it is just to be expected that the same project entailed for him the need for a similar scrutiny over the character of at least the “natural”, if not of the “material”. The same *a priori* method Parmenides employed in his enquiry into the nature of what-is (B 2, B 6.1–2, B 8) might well have provided him also with a crucial formal criterion for what he considered fundamental to natural entities. Likewise, it is reasonable to assume that he considered sensible qualities such as solidity, weight, expanse, or colour derivable from this criterion, just as the features of what-is are deducible from certain, self-evident assumptions (laid down in B 2). I propose that, in theoretical terms, the most fundamental feature of what-is is that it admits of no *difference* (not merely divisibility but also distinguishability, differentiation, distinction, discrimination, diversity, division, divergence, separation and the like), whether internal or external.<sup>25</sup> This is an aspect of Parmenides’ philosophy rarely put into focus and explored, despite the prominence of the language of ταῦτόν—

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<sup>25</sup> How difference is related to negation, Parmenides’ repudiation of what-is-not and the number of “routes” (raised by B2 and B6) are issues well beyond the confines of this paper. Hence, I propose the following discussion in the belief that it goes a long way into the right direction, being aware that some of my points would require further support.

ἕτερον (‘the same’—‘the different’) all through his poem.<sup>26</sup> The unqualified identity of what-is is directly or indirectly stressed in several lines (B3, B6.8–9, B8.29–30, 34, 57–59, B16.2–3), and mortal error is associated with compromising this identity in one way or another by “difference” (B6.8–9, B8.57–59). Since divisibility assumes difference, but not the other way round, and the latter as a notion of higher abstraction is prominent in the poem, its bearing on the contrast of what-is and the two cosmic constituents might be significant.

The resistance of what-is to what has been referred to as “external difference” above follows from the rejection of what-is-not (B 2.3, B 6.1–2, B 7.1, B 8.1–2, B 8.46), which, regardless of reasons behind it, amounts to the rejection of a contradictory opposite of what-is.<sup>27</sup> Resistance to “internal difference” follows from the (internal) indivisibility of what-is (B 8.23, B 8.25), which implies lack of both *qualitative* (νῦν ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ πᾶν “it is now all together”, B 8.5; πᾶν ἐστὶν ὁμοῖον “it is all alike”, B 8.22) and *quantitative* difference (οὐδέ τι τῆι μᾶλλον, τό κεν εἶργοι μιν συνέχεσθαι, / οὐδέ τι χειρότερον “not any more in degree in some respect, which might keep it from

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<sup>26</sup> Short references to the issue of ταυτόν—ἕτερον are found in Vlastos 1946, 72; Long 1963, 103; Mourelatos 1979; Curd 1998, 94–97; Mourelatos 2008, xxviii, 128; Cherubin 2017, 254, 262; Crystal 2002, 216–218; Wedin 2014, 143, 180; Tor 2017, 186–187. It is only Austin who devoted a more thorough theoretical scrutiny to the issue. (See Austin 1986, 5–7, 18, 21, 35–36; 109–114; Austin 2007, 27, 33–34, 36–37.) The disregard for the issue of ταυτόν—ἕτερον in the poem of Parmenides might well be due to the widely shared presumption that it was Plato who exploited the notion of ἕτερον (‘the different’) in order to come to terms precisely with Parmenides’ unqualified “not-being” in the *Sophist*. However, Plato might not be responding to Parmenides, but to “sophistic Parmenideanism” (Palmer 1999, 134), and/or be more indebted to Parmenides in terms of his notion of “the different” than he seems (or cares) to acknowledge. (For a thought-provoking suggestion about Parmenides’ influence on Plato in this regard see Long 1963, 103.)

<sup>27</sup> Though this is debated, I take it that the *upshot* of the disjuncts in B 2.1–5 (supplemented by B 6.4–9) is ultimately exhaustive (for recent arguments see Crystal 2002, 207–208, with n. 5). If what-is is μόνονγενές (B 8.4) in the sense of ‘one of a kind’, that is, *unique* (Austin 1986, 109–110, 153; Austin, 2007, 18), then it admits of no contraries, either. Although on different grounds, Mourelatos (1970/2008, 79–80 and 90) also argues that what-is admits neither of a contradictory nor a contrary opposite.

uniting, / or any inferior”, B 8.23–24, cf. B 8.44–45).<sup>28</sup> In contrast with what-is, however, light and night admit of both kinds of difference. The reasons for their internal difference are the following. On the one hand, to be able to mix with each other, they need to be divisible. Obviously, one portion of light can be divided from another by a portion of night in between them (αἱ γὰρ στεινότεραι πλῆντο πυρὸς ἀκρήτιοιο, / αἱ δ' ἐπὶ τῆις νυκτός, μετὰ δὲ φλογὸς ἴεται αἴσια “for the narrower [bands] were filled with unmixed fire, / and those above them with night, with a due portion of flame discharged”, B 12.1–2),<sup>29</sup> so that there is something qualitatively different scattered here and there within the mass of light; and the same applies to night. On the other hand, at least relative to each other, there is “more or less” of their kind of stuff.<sup>30</sup> Light is “light-weight”, whereas night is “dense and heavy” (B 8.57–59).<sup>31</sup> Hence, whereas, taken in themselves, they might be like what-is—in so far as they are homogeneous (B 9.3) and/or “the same” (B 8.57)—the *totality* consisting of the two admits of both qualitative and quantitative difference (divisibility and augmentation, respectively). The external difference of light and night lies very simply in their qualitative (but,

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<sup>28</sup> Hence, it is ‘of one kind’ (another possible sense of *μουνογενές*), that is, homogeneous (ὅμοιο πᾶν “all together” B 8.5; πᾶν ἔστιν ὁμοῖον “it is all alike” B 8.22, cf. B 8.49, 49, B 4.2). I believe the term denotes both senses (cf. previous note, and below), and that Parmenides might deliberately draw on both.—I take homogeneity as qualitative (rather than temporal) (contra Crystal 2002, 2015) as derivable from (hence not unargued for, contra Barnes 1982, 201) Parmenides’ repudiation of what-is-not, which entails (or is reducible to) a denial of “difference”.

<sup>29</sup> My translation.—This is clearly a contrast with the nature of what-is as described in B 4.2: οὐ γὰρ ἀποτιμήξει τὸ ἔον τοῦ ἔόντος ἔχουθαι (“for it will not sever what-is from holding fast to what-is”) (my translation).

<sup>30</sup> In itself, light is ἑωυτῶι πάντοσε τωῦτόν “the same with itself in every direction” (B 8.57), and the same is true of night. In view of B 9.4–5 I take this as suggesting that while they mix with each other, both light and night preserve their (internal) homogeneity in the sense that, from a qualitative point of view, one portion of light is exactly like another, dispersed somewhere else in the cosmos (and divided from it by a portion of night) (cf. Cherubin 2005, 6). (This is the reason for their similarity to what-is, noted by several interpreters, e.g., Vlastos 1946, 72; Curd 1998, 105–106 Coxon 2009, 347). This means that their degrees of density is fixed, that is, in themselves, they are not subject to augmentation; viewed from the perspective of their totality, however, their *kind* of stuff is subject to it.

<sup>31</sup> Light is presumably also “rare”, which explains the textual variant, ἀραιὸν for ἑλαφρόν (‘light-weight’) in B 8.57. On this see Coxon 2009, 346–347.

interestingly, not quantitative: ἴσων ἀμφοτέρων “both of them equal”, B 9.4) difference, more specifically, in their contrariety (τῶι δ' ἐτέρωι μὴ τούτῳ, “but not the same as the other”, / [...] τὰντία “the opposites”, B 8.58–59).<sup>32</sup>

If all this is correct, then it follows that, because of its resistance to internal (qualitative) difference, what-is cannot reasonably be identical either with light or night *alone*. For they are divisible, hence assume an internal “other” for their capacity to mix with it. But they are also incompatible with the resistance of what-is to external difference, for they assume an “other” for their being what-they-are (Austin 1986, 113–114; Austin 2007, 18, 20, 47–48). If there was no “other” (of their kind) to be differentiated (and divided) from them (whether internally or externally), both would “collapse into” what-is, as it were. But in that case, they would cease to be what-they-are, and could no longer be marked out either as light or night.<sup>33</sup> Hence, from a theoretical point of view, the most crucial feature of both is that they assume an “other” for their very nature and existence. Further, from the discussion above it also follows that, because of its resistance to internal (qualitative or quantitative) difference, what-is cannot be identical with the cosmos, the totality of light-*cum*-night, either. For the cosmos as a totality consisting of light and night admits of both (internal) qualitative and quantitative difference (“stuffs” with different qualities and augmentation). In contrast, because it admits of no “other” (let it be internal or external), what-is is both an undifferentiated (and indivisible)

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<sup>32</sup> Obviously, light and night are contraries, because parts in a continuum and members of the same genus (cf. e.g., Mourelatos 1970/2008, 87; Austin 2007, 44; Cosgrove 2014, 8). However, they can just as well be regarded as contradictories (Austin 1986, 110; Cherubin 2005, 20), since theirs is a special genus of only two members; hence, the negation of either of them fully “defines” or circumscribes the other (Curd 1998, 108; Cherubin 2005, 7–8, 18; Tor 2017, 186). Consequently, in contrast with what-is, which admits of neither kind of oppositions, they are characterized by *both*.

<sup>33</sup> Thus, Aristotle’s report that Parmenides “ranks” (τάττει *Met.* 987a1) the hot (light) with what-is (and the cold with what-is-not) (cf. n. 2 above) is either not to be taken as their identification, or is wrong. Neither of the cosmic constituents might be aligned with what-is, nor with what-is not (cf. Tor 2017, 186, 225).



*unit* (and not a unity) and *unique* (“one of a kind”).<sup>34</sup>

If plausible, these conclusions run counter to any compatibilist view of what-is and the two cosmic constituents. Given the above *theoretical* incongruities between what-is and the cosmic constituents, it is entirely inconsequential whether coexistence, compresence, colocation or consubstantiality (i.e., any kind of *community*) is posited between what-is and the two inhabitants of the cosmos (whether taken together, or alone); subjects of such contradictory nature cannot logically be reconciled (be identical, inhere in the same subject, occupy the same space, or have the same substance). Nor is it of any help to assume that what-is is an insensible material entity, such as the substratum of light and night,<sup>35</sup> or their similarly insensible immaterial genus (‘being’) (as in Thanassas 2011, 291–294; Pulpito 2011, 203–206),<sup>36</sup> for the logical incompatibility persists (cf. Vlastos 1946, 77; Long 1963, 106–107; Austin 1986, 148; Austin 2007, 41, 43; Mourelatos 2011, 181; Cosgrove 2014, 8–9, 16–17, 24, 26). The ontological paradox seems irresolvable.

If these inferences are correct, they afford conclusions about the viability of Parmenides’ materialist interpretation in general. As noted in the introductory remarks, in contrast with the incompatibilist accounts of Burnet and Popper, the rationale behind a recent revival of an interpretation of Parmenides along materialist lines is to provide support for a compatibilist view of what-is and the cosmic constituents. In terms of the arguments above, however, some such attempt is ill-conceived.

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<sup>34</sup> Of course, if what-is is unique, then it allows for no “kinds” (or the type–token distinction), so this is just a manner of speech (as it is in Greek).—Cf. Wedin 2014, 109–118 for arguments (on different grounds) for the above theses.

<sup>35</sup> Sisko and Weiss propose that what-is is the (insensible) material substrate of light and night (Sisko and Weiss 2015, 51–52, 57), and this is the major difference of their conception from those of Burnet or Popper, who attribute some body to what-is. Apart from the logical incompatibility of what-is and the cosmic constituents (with the consequence that the latter cannot be its “allomorphs”, as in Sisko and Weiss 2015, 52) (see Mourelatos 2011, 180; Tor 2017, 292), what-is cannot serve as their *archē* (*contra* Sisko and Weiss 2015, 48) (see Tor 2017, 292). On the whole, the conception of Sisko and Weiss (2015) seems to be an example for the anachronistic projection of a quasi-Aristotelian notion of matter onto Parmenides’ eon criticized by Curd (2011, 126–127).

<sup>36</sup> For a criticism of this conception (on different grounds) see Tor 2017, 293.

Regardless of the material or immaterial nature of the two cosmic constituents, what-is cannot *formally* be reconciled with them, whether taken individually, or in conjunction. Hence, a materialist account of Parmenides proves wanting, both on a compatibilist and an incompatibilist view. For, if it is true that, regardless of any interpretation of their precise (material or immaterial) nature, light and night are conceptually entirely incompatible with the nature of what-is, then once they *are* interpreted as material (as per Popper 1998), it follows that what-is should, in fact, be *immaterial* (Austin 2000, 241–242). Last but not least, and again regardless of the nature of the two cosmic constituents in this sense, if what-is *exists*, as in all likelihood is the case in Parmenides,<sup>37</sup> then night and light do *not* exist, and are thus illusory. In terms of arguments above, incompatibility is the only viable option for conceiving of the relationship of what-is and the cosmic constituents described in *Doxa*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Although scholars propose significantly different interpretations of Parmenides' underlying concerns, relying on different usages of the verb 'to be' (existential, copulative, veridical, identificative), I know of no study that would controvert that what-is *exists*.

<sup>38</sup> Arguing against compatibilist views and objecting to what he calls a "hierarchical view" of what-is and the inhabitants of the cosmos, Cosgrove (2014, 23–24) plausibly concludes that there are no "degrees of reality" (23) in Parmenides (cf. Owen 1960, 86; Long 1963, 104). (The objection is addressed to Graham 2006 and Granger 2002, but it equally applies to Tor's distinction of "genuine" and other than genuine—"qualified" or "imperfect"—being in Tor 2017, 297, 299–303, and to Johansen 2016, 5–7, 26.) It is odd, then, that in proposing his own solution Cosgrove reverts to the language of "degrees" by stating that "the goddess does not deny that the mortal world exists, nor does she hold that it exists in some (undefined) *lesser* sense" (Cosgrove 2014, 24) (italics not in the original). In terms of my arguments, however, *nothing* exists (or, can exist) *in the way* that what-is exists, nor in any *other* way. There are neither "degrees" (οὐδέ τι τῆι μᾶλλον, [...] / οὐδέ τι χειρότερον "and not any more in degree in some respect ..., or any inferior" B 8.23–24; οὔτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεῶν ἔστιν ἢ οὐκί "thus it must either be entirely or not be at all" B8.11), nor *kinds* of existence (cf. n. 34 above) in terms of the stringent criteria for what-is. This applies whether one assumes an existential sense for the *esti* in B2.3, or a predicative one, as per Johansen 2016, 5–6, who suggests that the objects of *doxai* may not fully be *what they are*. For, at the end of the day, the *esti* must have ontological implications, unless what-is is some "theoretical object", which is highly unlikely. Hence, the conclusion that night and light do *not* exist seems inescapable.

## *The natural and the supernatural*

Returning to the issue of Parmenides' own notion of the material, the following suggestions might be proposed, keeping the discussion within the limits of a short essay. It has been pointed out that, for the notion to crystallize, its explicit contrast with and exclusion of, anything "mental or intentional" is required concerning the character of the basic constituents of the natural world (Hussey 2006, 17). Now, we have seen that light and night in Parmenides have mental as well as physical (corporeal) properties, which might thus be taken as evidence against the notion. The arguments above suggest, however, that some sort of dualism might, nonetheless, be ascertained in his philosophy, reminiscent of the body-mind dualism emerging later in Greek philosophy. In terms of its essential character, what-is is categorically distinguished from and contrasted with, the two basic constituents (stuffs) of the natural world. If they should be conceived of as *psychosomatic* objects (and/or subjects)—in *our* terms—as has been suggested above, then their contrast with what-is boils down to one between the "natural" and the "supernatural" (*both* in our terms and those of Parmenides), with the difference that the former is not merely "material", but psychosomatic. This itself is a considerable novelty,<sup>39</sup> since traditional Greek conceptions suggest that what is, for us, the contrast between the natural (by and large, inert, sensible matter) and the supernatural (some insensible, mind-like agency) was not clear to Homeric Greeks.<sup>40</sup> It might be proposed, then, that even though the body-mind contradistinction was not available for Parmenides, he did distinguish between the *natural* and the *supernatural*, while giving ontological priority to the latter. If this is correct, then it might be further concluded that, contrary to an

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<sup>39</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the contradistinction of a transcendent God and the immanent cosmos can be found in Xenophanes (Mogyoródi 2019, 26 n. 50).

<sup>40</sup> It is sufficient to refer to the Greeks' attitude to their statues of gods believed to be "both matter and god" (Parker 2011, 15 n. 11). Cf. Furley, 1956, 2-4.

incompatibilist account proposed along materialist lines, which identifies what-is with one of the cosmic inhabitants (night) because of its corporeality (Popper 1998), the reason for which Parmenides considered *both* night and light illusory was precisely their *natural* (psychosomatic), albeit not “material”, makeup. And contrary to any compatibilist interpretation along the same lines, the reason for the incompatibility of what-is and the cosmic constituents is exactly their natural makeup.

It is plausible to assume, however, that apart from being supernatural in the specific sense determined above, what-is is also *intelligible*, in so far as it is contrasted with night and light as *sensible*. Further, if what I referred to as psychosomatic might, within the traditional settings of Homeric psychology, be assumed to function in such a way that the mental or psychic (mostly) supervenes on the somatic (i.e., the corporeal)<sup>41</sup> (Furley 1956, 2–4), then what-is must be *incorporeal* as well (Mourelatos 2008, 329). If this might be granted, then it occurs that Parmenides’ conceptual framework concerning the material-immaterial contradistinction was fairly close to what we mean by it. The lack of closer correspondence might, at least in part, be explained by the fact that for us the material-immaterial opposition is mapped onto the body-mind dualism—hence, the “material” is, by and large, synonymous with the “bodily” or corporeal—whereas for Parmenides the body-mind dualism (as *we* conceive of it) had no sense, as has been argued above.

At this point, perhaps further general conclusions might be permitted, if only for the sake of putting forward some tentative conjectures in need of a more thorough study. If what-is is identical with *noos* (‘awareness, intellect’) in Parmenides, as some assume on the basis of B 3 (τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι “for it is the same to

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<sup>41</sup> With the notable exception of *noos* (Claus 1981, 20).

be aware and to be”),<sup>42</sup> then it is specifically the cognitive (as something supernatural) which he distinguished from and set against, the natural, that is, the psychosomatic. In contrast with later Greek notions attributing passivity and inertia to the material, for Parmenides the natural is something inherently alive, thus mobile, changing and motive, whereas the supernatural reality (*eon*) is distinctly immobile, unchanging and non-motive. Hence, the highest mode of cognition (*noein*), which is for *us* a mental function, is on the side of the immobile, unchanging and non-motive.<sup>43</sup> It might be proposed, then, that this scenario represents a quasi-dualism of body and mind, where a psychosomatic unity endowed with vitality and movement (hence, functionally equivalent to albeit not identical with, what *we* call body) is set against an unchanging, immobile (and non-supervenient<sup>44</sup>) “mind”, with a pure cognitive function.<sup>45</sup> Theoretically speaking, from here on only one vital step is required to furnish the contrast of body and mind familiar to us, notably, connecting *psychē* (‘soul’) (the so-called “free-soul” as a unitary or comprehensive source of life in humans<sup>46</sup>) with

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<sup>42</sup> This is how Clement (*Strom.* vi.2.23) and Plotinus (*Enn.* v.1.8.14–18, v.9.5.26–32) understood B 3. Modern advocates of this reading include Vlastos 1946, 75; Phillips 1955, *passim.*; Kahn 1968/69, 720–724; Austin 1986, 139 with n. 11; Long 1998, *passim.*; Sedley 1999, 120; Giancola 2001, *passim.*; Crystal 2002, *passim.*; Robbiano 2006, 57–59, 128–129; Austin 2007, 24–27; Robbiano 2016, 292, 311–312; Lebedev 2017, 497.

<sup>43</sup> On *noos* as a capacity to reflect, “undisturbed by emotion” in post-Homeric literature (a function closest to ‘intellect’) see Furley 1956, 9–10 (cf. p. 13 on Parmenides and *noos* as ‘intelligence’).

<sup>44</sup> Because of the supernatural character of what-is. Cf. n. 41 above.

<sup>45</sup> This is not meant to controvert some higher form of life or vitality of/in what-is. See Coxon’s note on (ἀληθείης... ἦτορ (‘the heart ... of reality’) in B 1.29, which is “never used in Greek except of a human or divine person, of whom it refers to the heart or inner self as the seat of emotion, virtue or life” (Coxon 2009, 283). See also Kurfess (2017), who excavates a Parmenidean half-verse from Proclus (*In Tim.* ii. 69.9–10, 18–27 Diehl) so far attributed (only) to Empedocles (in a slightly different version, in DK 31 27.4, and 28.2), which refers to what-is as “rejoicing in encircling solitude” (μὸνῃ περιηγέει χαῖρον) (tr. by Kurfess 2017, 8). It must be noted, however, that while some kind of life or vitality might be attributed to what-is, it definitely lacks agency, which sets it apart from the psychic.

<sup>46</sup> The conjunction of the “free soul” with *psychē* as a source of life is already attested in Homer (Bremmer 1983, 29), but its development into a “unitary” or “comprehensive soul” occurred in the course of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. (cf. Bremmer 1983, 14, 24; Claus 1981, 69–102).

*noos*, and setting *their* unity against *sōma* ('body'). The conjunction of *psychē* and *noos* endows the latter with movement, activity and agency, while *sōma* is left alone, lifeless and inert. Thus positioned, *sōma* might be suitable for providing the conceptual pattern for matter as distinguished from and contrasted with mind, the unity of the psychic and the cognitive. This intellectual feat was most probably achieved (or completed) by Plato, who might well have relied, at least in part, on Parmenidean preliminaries.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Sophist* 248e-249b; *Timaeus* 30b, 37a, 46d; *Philebus* 21d-22c, 30c. I believe the above suggestions go a long way into the right direction, but of course, require further elaboration and study. The point I wish to stress here is the role *noos* might have played in the rise of the body/matter-mind contradistinction, beside interest in the moral value or eschatological aspects of *psychē* (a role underrated, e.g. by Claus 1981, 182-183).

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