

# The Eleatics:

## Kierkegaard's Metaphysical Considerations of Being and Motion

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It is well known that Kierkegaard was a great enthusiast for ancient Greek philosophy. For example, he seems to make Socrates the model for his own attempts at the religious reform of the individual.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he often contrasts ancient Greek philosophy with then contemporary German philosophy.<sup>2</sup> His clear conviction is that ancient Greek philosophy is closer to the real problems and issues of life and existence than academic philosophy, which has completely lost sight of such things.

One of the less explored connections in this context is Kierkegaard's use of the Eleatics. He refers to these thinkers several times in both his published works and his journals and notebooks; most Kierkegaard readers will recall the prominent reference to them in the opening lines of *Repetition*.<sup>3</sup> The Eleatics are known as a school of metaphysics, and Kierkegaard tends to appeal to them in this regard, specifically in reference to their theory of motion. Moreover, Kierkegaard often places the Eleatics in the context of Hegel's speculative logic. His use of the Eleatics thus testifies to an engagement in both ancient and modern philosophy.

### *I. The Eleatics*

In the history of Greek philosophy, the term "the Eleatics" refers to a school of Presocratic thinkers from the city-state of Elea, which was a Greek colony on the western coast of southern Italy. The leading figures of the Eleatic school are Parmenides and his followers, Zeno, and Melissus. In older histories of philosophy, Xenophanes is also added to this group, while today he is usually categorized among the Ionian thinkers by virtue of the fact that he was from Colophon and not Elea. Kierkegaard refers to both Parmenides and Zeno specifically; however, he seems

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Paul Muench, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Point of View," *Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 24, 2007, pp. 132–62.

<sup>2</sup> I explore this in more detail in my *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, pp. 640–50.

<sup>3</sup> *SKS* 4, 9 / R, 131.

to regard them more as a group of thinkers than as individuals. When taken as a school, the Eleatics are best known for their claims that all reality or being is one and unchanging. Conversely, one can say that the Eleatics are known for their refutation of all forms of pluralism, dualism, motion, and change. To give some general sense of their philosophical disposition, I will provide a brief account of the thought of the school's two most prominent members: Parmenides and Zeno.

Parmenides of Elea was born around 515 BC. In the dialogue the *Parmenides*, Plato recounts the meeting of Socrates, then a young man, with the Eleatic thinker, who was visiting Athens together with his pupil Zeno on occasion of a festival.<sup>4</sup> Diogenes Laertius reports that Parmenides was a student of Xenophanes and that he was active in the political life of his home city.<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, very little is known with certainty about the circumstances of his life. Parmenides is generally regarded as the most important Presocratic philosopher, and his influence extends far beyond that of the ancient world.<sup>6</sup> His main importance lies in the fact that he was the first thinker to address in a consistent way the basic metaphysical question of the nature of being. One reason for his success is doubtless his ability to challenge our common-sense intuitions about any number of things.

Parmenides' work consisted of a philosophical poem, written in hexameters, perhaps called *On Nature*. This text survives only in fragmentary form. After a prologue, it is divided into two parts: "The Way of Truth" and "The Way of Seeming." In the first part, Parmenides puts forth his own view about the immutability of being, and in the second he refutes the views of his predecessors. In the prologue it is recounted how the poet goes to the goddess who teaches him about truth and falsity. It is through her speech that the philosophical arguments are expounded. Although Parmenides makes use of the figure of the goddess, this does not imply that he is religious or superstitious. On the contrary, he is often credited with being the first thinker to establish the truth by means of pure reason or logic alone. The goddess explains that it is important for him to learn both the truth and the errors which human beings fall victim to. The use of the goddess can be understood as a device

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, 127a.

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book IX, 21–3.

<sup>6</sup> The standard collection for Presocratic philosophy, including the Eleatics, is Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vols. 1–2, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., Berlin: Weidmann 1961. (In English see Patricia Curd and Richard D. McKirahan, *A Presocratics Reader*, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett 1996; G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1957.) For works specifically on Parmenides, see David Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments: A Text and Translation with an Introduction*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991; A.H. Coxen, *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction and Translation*, Assen Netherlands & Dover, New Hampshire: Van Gorcum 1986; Alexander P.D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides: A Study of Word, Image, and Argument in the Fragments*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1970; Hermann Diels, *Parmenides' Lehrgedicht*, Berlin: Reimer 1897; K. Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie*, Bonn: Cohen 1916; Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1939; W.J. Verdenius, *Parmenides: Some Comments*, Groningen: Wolters 1942; Jaap Mansfeld, *Die Offenbarung des Parmenides und die menschliche Welt*, Assen: Van Gorcum 1964.

to give the views presented there a kind of objectivity that transcends the personal opinions of Parmenides himself.

In "The Way of Truth" two different kinds of belief are distinguished as follows in Fragment 2: "I will tell you of two roads of inquiry which offer themselves to the mind. The one, that it is and cannot not be, is the way of credibility based on truth. The other way, that it is not and that not-being must be, cannot be grasped by the mind; for you cannot know not-being and cannot express it."<sup>7</sup> In the first statement the way of truth is defined: what exists is and cannot not be. This is Parmenides' famous statement about the unity and necessity of being. Being is what is. The idea here seems to be that it is impossible to think of any negative predicate in connection with pure being. One can think of empty space, but this is still something positive. It is impossible to think nonexistence or what does not exist. The key missing premise here is supplied by Fragment 3, which states, "Thought and being are the same."<sup>8</sup> In other words, if something cannot be conceived because it is contradictory, then it cannot exist.

The second statement articulates the opposite view, the way of seeming, namely, that not-being also exists. Parmenides immediately identifies this as erroneous and offers a refutation of it. The argument seems to be that non-being is a self-contradiction. It cannot be thought or coherently expressed. This view is further outlined in Fragment 6, where the goddess states:

It is necessary both to say and to think that being is. For to be is possible and not to be is impossible. I bid you consider this, and I warn you against another path, along which mortals wander ignorantly, with divided minds and scattered thoughts, so befuddled and helpless as to resemble the deaf and blind. There are crowds of them, without discernment, maintaining that to be and not to be are the same and not the same, and that everything is in a state of movement and countermovement.<sup>9</sup>

The goddess implies that the way of seeming is the view of common sense, which has ensnared all human beings; however, in her articulation of the position it is also clear that this is the view of Heraclitus, although he is not mentioned by name. Thus the unstated goal is to refute the Heraclitean view that everything is change and that there is no stable enduring being.

Although Parmenides' positive view about the unity and necessity of being appears at first glance fairly straightforward and even plausible, it leads to a number of consequences that run contrary to our common-sense intuitions. Being is ungenerated and indestructible, or put differently there is ultimately no growth or decay. Being cannot come into existence or perish since it always is. In Fragment 8 we read: "There are many signs that what is has no beginning and never will be destroyed: it is whole, still and without end. It neither was nor will be, it simply is—now, altogether, one, continuous."<sup>10</sup> The first argument here is that it is impossible

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<sup>7</sup> English translation quoted from Philip Wheelwright, *The Presocratics*, New York: The Odyssey Press 1966, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

to conceive of how pure being could have arisen from something else: "How could you go about investigating its birth? How and whence could it have grown? I shall not allow you to say or to think of it as coming from not-being, for it is impossible to say or think that not-being is. Besides, what could have stirred up activity so that it should arise from not-being later rather than earlier?"<sup>11</sup> The point seems to be that it is impossible to conceive of how being could have arisen from another principle. Moreover, what could the moving force have been to have stimulated this other principle to create being in the first place? Similarly, since being is immutable there is no change or motion: "Remaining always the same and in the same place by itself, it stays fixed where it is."<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, each of Parmenides' arguments attempts to show that concepts such as change, motion, coming into being, and destruction, all presuppose the concept of not-being, which is self-contradictory. For a thing to be conceived as divided implies that there is a something which *is not* a part of the original thing. For motion to be conceived, one must think of a thing that *is no longer* at a specific point that it once occupied. To conceive of change, one must imagine a thing *is no longer* what it was. In all of these cases one is obliged to posit something negative or not-being. Thus, according to the argument, we should stick firmly to Parmenides' conception of being despite its counterintuitive character.

After the account of the truth, the second part of the poem is dedicated to "The Way of Seeming." Here the goddess begins by explaining that human beings are caught in a mistaken belief in dualism. They regard reality as consisting of opposing principles from which an attempt is made to give a cosmogony. She states:

Learn next about the opinions of men, as you listen to the deceptive ordering of my words. For men have established the habit of naming two thought-forms; therein they have erred, because one of the forms ought not to be named. They have distinguished the thought-forms as opposed in character and as having properties which set them apart from each other. On the one hand there is the fire of the upper sky, gentle, rarefied, and everywhere identical with itself; on the other hand there lies opposed to it utter darkness, dense and heavy.<sup>13</sup>

According to Parmenides, this conception is mistaken since opposites such as fire and darkness are ultimately the same, that is, pure being. Thus, the attempt to explain the universe by means of conflicting opposites, as Heraclitus does, is misleading since there is only a single principle. With this Parmenides laid the groundwork for a profoundly counterintuitive position, which naturally evoked a number of objections that his followers were obliged to try to refute.

Parmenides' most influential student was Zeno of Elea, who lived in the fifth century BC.<sup>14</sup> Only fragments and second-hand reports of his works survive. Zeno

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> For Zeno's life and works, see N.B. Booth, "Zeno's Paradoxes," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 77, no. 2, 1957, pp. 187–201; V.C. Chappell, "Time and Zeno's Arrow," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 59, 1962, pp. 197–213; Hermann Fränkel, "Zeno of Elea's Attacks on Plurality," *American Journal of Philology*, vol. 63, 1942, pp. 1–25; Adolf Grünbaum, *Modern*

is best known for his defense of the doctrine of the unity of being by means of his refutations of pluralism and motion. He devised a series of arguments demonstrating that the common-sense views that the world consists of a plurality of things or that there is motion ultimately lead to paradoxes or absurdities. He is credited by some sources with inventing the argumentative strategy of the *reductio ad absurdum*, that is, the refutation of a given position by the demonstration that contradictory or "absurd" consequences result from it. These arguments have been preserved in Aristotle's *Physics*.<sup>15</sup>

The first argument claims that in order for there to be motion from one point to another, the object in motion must first traverse half of the distance between the two points. But in order to traverse this distance it must first traverse half of it, and so on to infinity. Therefore, there can be no motion. Since the distance can be infinitely divided into halves each time, it seems impossible for the object to make any progress since between any two points there are always an infinite number of intervening half-distances, which must first be traversed.

The second refutation of motion, called the "Achilles argument," concludes paradoxically that the quicker runner, that is, Achilles, can never catch up with the slower. Some versions of this refer to it as "Achilles and the Tortoise," with the latter playing the role of the slower runner. The argument goes as follows: for Achilles to catch the slower runner, he must first reach the point where the slower runner was at, but in the time he takes him to do so, the slower runner has progressed past that point. Thus Achilles must now reach that new point, but in the time he takes to do so, the slower runner has progressed yet again, and so on to infinity. Therefore, Achilles will be eternally getting closer but will never manage to catch up with the slower runner.

The third argument, often referred to as "the arrow argument," argues for the thesis that a flying arrow is not in motion. The argument claims that a moving object such as an arrow either moves in the place where it is or where it is not. The latter case seems blatantly absurd since an object cannot move in a place where it is not. But can the arrow move in the place where it is? Zeno claims that at any given point in time the arrow occupies a place that is precisely equal to its own length, but this means that at any given instant it is at rest since it does not occupy a space beyond its own length. The time that it takes an arrow to fly from one point to another consists of a number of finite instants like this where the arrow occupies its own place and is thus at each moment at rest. Therefore, at no moment is the arrow in motion.

In a footnote in *Philosophical Fragments* reference is made to the "arrow argument." Here, however, instead of referring to the Eleatics or to Zeno specifically, Kierkegaard ascribes the argument to "the skeptics." There he quotes Aristotle to the

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*Science and Zeno's Paradoxes*, Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press 1967; H.D.P. Lee, *Zeno of Elea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1936; H.N. Lee, "Are Zeno's Arguments Based on a Mistake?" *Mind*, vol. 74, 1965, pp. 563-90; Mario Untersteiner, *Zenone*, Florence: La nuova Italia 1963; Gregory Vlastos, "A Note on Zeno's Arrow," *Phronesis*, vol. 11, 1966, pp. 3-18; Gregory Vlastos, "Zeno's Race Course," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 4, 1966, pp. 95-108; *Zeno's Paradoxes*, ed. by Wesley C. Salmon, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 239b and following and 263a.

effect that when throwing a stone, one has power over it, but once it has been thrown one ceases to have power over it. Then one reads, “Otherwise the throwing would become an illusion, and the person throwing, despite all his throwing, would keep the stone in his hand, since the stone, like the skeptics’ ‘flying arrow,’ did not fly.”<sup>16</sup> This is a simple allusion to the argument, but it is not explored further.

Zeno also offers a series of arguments against plurality that are generally based on the impossibility of infinitely dividing a thing into an infinite number of parts. However, I will forgo an account of these arguments since what interested Kierkegaard was clearly the refutations or paradoxes of motion and not pluralism. I likewise forgo an account of Melissus since he plays no independent role in Kierkegaard’s understanding and use of Eleatic philosophy.

The challenge that the Eleatics left to later Greek philosophy was to reconcile two seemingly incompatible things: on the one hand, the claim about the ultimate metaphysical unity of being that seemed to preclude change and motion, and, on the other hand, the obvious demands of common sense, which observes examples of change and motion every day. Later Greek thinkers such as Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus were profoundly exercised by this dilemma and offered several different solutions to it. Attempts to refute Parmenides and the other Eleatics can also be found in the works of Plato (in, for example, the *Sophist*) and Aristotle (in the *Physics*, Books I–IV). Thus there can be no doubt that Parmenides and the Eleatics significantly shaped the course of Greek philosophy by problematizing the concepts of being and motion. These issues continued to be important in medieval and modern philosophy and are still the object of discussion right up to our own day.

## II. Kierkegaard’s Familiarity with the Eleatics

Kierkegaard’s knowledge of Parmenides and the other Eleatic thinkers could have come from any number of ancient or modern sources. He was, of course, an avid reader of Plato, and he even mentions the dialogue the *Parmenides* in *The Concept of Irony*<sup>17</sup> and *The Concept of Anxiety*.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, he could also have read about the Eleatics in Aristotle, whose works he also owned and studied.<sup>19</sup> We know that Kierkegaard read Diogenes Laertius, who also provides a brief account of each of the Eleatic thinkers in Book IX of his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, which Kierkegaard

<sup>16</sup> SKS 4, 225, note / PF, 17, note.

<sup>17</sup> SKS 1, 174 / CI, 123. SKS 1, 177 / CI, 126. See Plato, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus* 180a, 183b, *Sophist* 217c, 242d

<sup>18</sup> SKS 4, 387, note / CA, 83, note.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, *Aristotelis omnia quae extant opera cum Averrois commentariis*, vols. 1–13 in vols. 1–11, Venice: apud. Iunctas 1562 (ASKB 1056–1068); *Aristotelis Opera omnia graece ad optimorum exemplarium fidem recensuit, annotationem criticam, librorum argumenta*, vols. 1–5, ed. by Johann Gottlieb Buhle, Biponti [Zweibrücken]: Ex typographia Societatis 1791–97 (ASKB 1069–1073); *Aristoteles Graece ex recensione Immanuelis Bekkeri*, vols. 1–2, Berlin: Georg Reimer 1831 (ASKB 1074–1075); see specifically *Physics* 184b 16; 188a 19; 207a 16; *Metaphysics* 984b 2; 986b 19; 986b 29; 1001a 32; *On Generation and Corruption* 318b 17; 325a 3.

owned.<sup>20</sup> As we shall see below, it is clear that Kierkegaard used this source since he frequently refers to an anecdote recounted by Diogenes Laertius. Finally, Sextus Empiricus, whose collected writings Kierkegaard also owned,<sup>21</sup> quotes extensively from Parmenides' poem in *Adversus Mathematicos* (VII, 111 ff.).

With regard to modern sources, Kierkegaard had a number of works on the history of philosophy which contained chapters on the Eleatics, either as a school or as individuals. From the eighteenth century, one can mention Christoph Meiners' (1747–1810) chapter “Xenophanes, Parmenides, Leukipp und Heraklit,” in his *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom* from 1781 to 1782.<sup>22</sup> It is well known that Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761–1819) was one of Kierkegaard's key sources for the history of philosophy. In Tennemann's extensive work he has a detailed chapter dedicated to the Eleatics, entitled “Darstellung der Eleatischen Philosophie.”<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard takes meticulous notes on this chapter in *Notebook 14*.<sup>24</sup> The Eleatics are also mentioned extensively in the first volume of Dietrich Tiedemann's (1748–1803) *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie von Thales bis Sokrates*, published between 1791 and 1797.<sup>25</sup>

Kierkegaard also owned the works of several important nineteenth-century sources. Here one must mention G. W. F. Hegel's (1770–1831) chapter “Die eleatische Schule,” in his well-known *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, which were published between 1833 and 1836.<sup>26</sup> Karl Friedrich Hermann (1804–55) dedicates a chapter to the Eleatics in his book on Plato's philosophy from 1839.<sup>27</sup> Likewise

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<sup>20</sup> *Diogenis Laertii de Vita Philosophorum libri X*, editio stereotypa, Leipzig: Tauchnitz 1833 (ASKB 1109); *Diogen Laërtises filosofiske Historie, eller: navnkundige Filosoffers Levnet, Meninger og sindrige Udsagn, i ti Bøger*, vols. 1–2, trans. by Børge Riisbrigh and published by Børge Thorlacius, Copenhagen: J.H. Schubothe 1812 (ASKB 1110–1111).

<sup>21</sup> *Sexti Empirici Opera quæ extant*, Geneva: Chouët 1621 (ASKB 146).

<sup>22</sup> Christoph Meiners, “Xenophanes, Parmenides, Leukipp und Heraklit,” in his *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom*, vols. 1–2, Lemgo: Meyer 1781–82, vol. 1, pp. 603–30 (ASKB 1406–1406a).

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, “Darstellung der Eleatischen Philosophie,” in his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vols. 1–11, Leipzig: J.A. Barth 1798–1819, vol. 1, pp. 150–209 (ASKB 815–826).

<sup>24</sup> SKS 19, 426–7, Not14:1.

<sup>25</sup> Dietrich Tiedemann, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie von Thales bis Sokrates*, vols. 1–6, Marburg: in der Neuen Akademischen Buchhandlung 1791–97 (ASKB 836–841).

<sup>26</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, “Die eleatische Schule,” in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vols. 1–3, ed. by Carl Ludwig Michelet, Berlin: Duncker and Humblot 1833–36 (vols. 13–15 in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, ed. by Philipp Marheineke et al., Berlin: Duncker and Humblot 1832–45), vol. 1, pp. 280–327 (ASKB 557–559); See also his references to the Eleatics in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Philipp Marheineke, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed., Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1840 (vols. 11–12 in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, ed. by Philipp Marheineke et al., Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1832–45), vol. 1, p. 95; vol. 2, p. 432; p. 510; p. 515 (ASKB 564–565).

<sup>27</sup> Karl Friedrich Hermann, “Die Eleaten,” in his *Geschichte und System der Platonischen Philosophie. Erster Theil, die historisch-kritische Grundlegung enthaltend*, Heidelberg: C.F. Winther 1839, pp. 168–79 (ASKB 576).

Gotthard Oswald Marbach (1810–90) and Eduard Zeller (1814–1908) explore the Eleatics in individual chapters in their respective works on the history of ancient philosophy.<sup>28</sup> The Eleatic school is also discussed extensively by Heinrich Ritter (1791–1869) in his history of Greek and Roman philosophy from 1838.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from these writings dedicated specifically to the history of philosophy, there were of course also critical discussions of the Eleatics in the works of other philosophers. Kierkegaard could read about Parmenides and his followers in Friedrich Schlegel's (1772–1829) *Philosophische Vorlesungen aus den Jahren 1804 bis 1806*.<sup>30</sup> The Eleatics are also mentioned by Schopenhauer (1788–1860)<sup>31</sup> and, more importantly, Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg (1802–72), whose *Logische Untersuchungen* Kierkegaard admired.<sup>32</sup> Schelling (1775–1854) refers to the Eleatics a couple of times in his lectures on the philosophy of revelation, which Kierkegaard attended from 1841 to 1842. These references are recorded in Kierkegaard's notes.<sup>33</sup>

In the Danish context there can be little doubt that Poul Martin Møller (1794–1838) is Kierkegaard's key source. In his lectures on ancient philosophy, which appeared in his posthumous writings, there is a section dedicated to the Eleatics.<sup>34</sup> It is also quite possible that Kierkegaard attended these lectures in person. Other

<sup>28</sup> Gotthard Oswald Marbach, "Die Eleaten," in his *Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie. Mit Angabe der Literatur nach den Quellen*, Leipzig: Otto Wigand 1838 (1. Abtheilung, in Gotthard Oswald Marbach, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Mit Angabe der Literatur nach den Quellen*, Abtheilung 1–2, Leipzig: Wigand 1838–41), pp. 125–47 (ASKB 642; for Abtheilung 2 see ASKB 643); Eduard Zeller, "Die Eleaten," in his *Die Philosophie der Griechen. Eine Untersuchung Über Charakter, Gang und Hauptmomente ihrer Entwicklung*, vols. 1–3, Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues 1844–52, vol. 1, pp. 133–54 (ASKB 913–914).

<sup>29</sup> Heinrich Ritter, *Historia philosophiae graeco-romanae ex fontium locis contexta*, ed. by L. Preller, Hamburg: Perthes 1838, pp. 83–127 (ASKB 726).

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen aus den Jahren 1804 bis 1806*, ed. by C.J.H. Windischmann, vols. 1–2, Bonn: Weber 1836, vol. 1, pp. 196ff. (ASKB 768–68a).

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vols. 1–2, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised and enlarged ed., Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus 1844 [1819], vol. 1, p. 30; p. 53; pp. 80–1 (ASKB 773–773a); *Parerga und Paralipomena: kleine philosophische Schriften*, vols. 1–2, Berlin: Druck und Verlag von A.W. Hayn 1851, vol. 1, pp. 32ff. (ASKB 774–775).

<sup>32</sup> Adolf Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, vols. 1–2, Berlin: G. Bethge 1840, vol. 1, pp. 179ff. (ASKB 843).

<sup>33</sup> SKS 19, 322, Not11:15 / SBL, 356–7: "Then [Aristotle] refers to other philosophers, the Eleatics, who, as he says, promote a fraud and in whom there is nothing helpful as soon as they try to explain actuality. They promote fraud, just as does every uninterrupted movement at one point. Socrates' dialectic was directed as much against the subjective untruths of the Sophists as against that more objective turgidity, which was, as Plutarch says, like smoke that Socrates blew back upon them." SKS 19, 347–8, Not11:29 / SBL, 389: "Pure *Seyn* is Spinoza's substance, but in this way Spinoza did indeed become a monotheist. Hegel even regards the Eleatic position as monotheism and speaks of several monotheisms."

<sup>34</sup> Poul Martin Møller, "Den eleatiske Philosophie," in *Efterladte Skrifter af Poul M. Møller*, vols. 1–3, ed. by Christian Winther, F.C. Olsen, and Christen Thaarup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1839–43, vol. 2, pp. 325–45; see also vol. 3, p. 350 (ASKB 1574–1576).

Danish thinkers such as Jakob Peter Mynster (1775–1854)<sup>35</sup> and Rasmus Nielsen (1809–84) mention the Eleatics sporadically,<sup>36</sup> but only Møller gives a more detailed account of their thought.

Given this, it is clear that Kierkegaard could have received his information about the Eleatics from numerous sources. Moreover, it could also be fairly claimed that the philosophical issues treated by the Eleatics were quite topical at this time. Thus, Kierkegaard's attention to these thinkers was by no means original or idiosyncratic.

### *III. Kierkegaard's Use of the Eleatics*

Kierkegaard's references to the Eleatics can be broken down into a couple of main groups. In the first of these I will explore a few passages from his *Nachlass* that fall into the category "reading notes." I will then examine his references to the Eleatics in connection with Heraclitus' student, who constantly tries to outdo his master. In the third subsection I will then explore Kierkegaard's frequent allusions to the refutation of Zeno's denial of motion. Finally, an attempt will be made to understand the connection that Kierkegaard sees between Eleatic philosophy and Hegelian logic.

#### *A. Reading Notes that Refer to the Eleatics*

The background for Kierkegaard's understanding of the Eleatic philosophers can be found in his reading primarily of Tennemann's section on them in his history of philosophy. But, as we have seen in the previous section, this was presumably not Kierkegaard's only source of information on this topic.

Although Kierkegaard's most extensive use of the Eleatics comes in the years 1843–46, that is, from roughly the period from *Repetition* to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he shows an interest in the Eleatics at a very early period. On a loose paper presumably from 1837, he mentions Parmenides by name. In what appears to be a note taken perhaps from his reading or from a lecture, he writes the following:

τὸ ὄν the Eleatics (Parmenides),

*Pure being*—

1. it is universally applicable.
2. most universal. Single—immediate.
3. not a distinction as if it were something objective.
4. copula without predicate or subject. To that extent it is nothing (i.e., nothing is predicated of it).

τὸ ἕτερον (ἕτερον).

<sup>35</sup> Jakob Peter Mynster, *Den hedenske Verden ved Christendommens Begyndelse*, Copenhagen: Schultz 1850, p. 29 (ASKB 693).

<sup>36</sup> Rasmus Nielsen, *De speculativa historiae sacrae tractandae methodo commentatio*, Copenhagen: Tegnagel 1840, p. 7 (ASKB 697); Rasmus Nielsen, *Den propædeutiske Logik*, Copenhagen: P.G. Philipsen 1845, pp. 12–13; p. 115 (ASKB 699).

*Existence—*

proceeds out of a lack—

being presupposes an other, i.e.: existence—boundary.

Every negation implies an affirmation, since otherwise it would itself be completely meaningless—this is what Heiberg calls infinite judgments.

An abstract beginning is neither something nor nothing, for, if it were nothing, then it would not have begun, and if it were something, it would be more than a beginning.<sup>37</sup>

This note seems clearly to be connected with Kierkegaard's studies. The first part gives a description of the key elements in the Eleatic conception of pure being ( $\tau\acute{o} \acute{o}\nu$ ). The second part seems to sketch the Heraclitean view that everything has an other or difference ( $\tau\acute{o} \acute{\epsilon}\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\nu$ ); in contrast to the Eleatics, this view features the dialectical interplay of opposites that generate one another reciprocally. What is significant here is that these two views are juxtaposed; this juxtaposition will reappear later in his published authorship.

It is not certain from what book or lecture this is a note, but we receive an important clue when Kierkegaard refers to "what Heiberg calls infinite judgments." This is a reference to Johan Ludvig Heiberg's (1791–1860) main work on speculative logic that appeared in 1832 under the title *Outline of the Philosophy of Philosophy or Speculative Logic*.<sup>38</sup> In this work, Heiberg gives an account of "infinite judgments."<sup>39</sup> Kierkegaard's note also mentions the "abstract beginning," which is clearly a reference to the controversial beginning of philosophy with the concept of being that Hegel proposes in the *Science of Logic* and that Heiberg sketches in his *Outline*. Like Hegel, Heiberg in his account refers to the Eleatics and to Zeno explicitly in this context.<sup>40</sup> From this one might argue that this is the text that Kierkegaard was taking notes to. In any case, what is significant is that right away the key topics that Eleatic philosophy is known for are understood in the context of Hegel's philosophy. This is important since we know that Kierkegaard was generally exercised by any number of key issues in Hegel's speculative logic. This association of the Eleatics with Hegel's philosophy will emerge again even more explicitly in the later published writings.

<sup>37</sup> Pap. II C 37 / JP 1, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *Grundtræk til Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik. Som Ledetraad ved Forelæsninger paa den kongelige militaire Høiskole*, Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin 1832. (Reprinted as *Ledetraad ved Forlæsninger over Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik ved den kongelige militaire Høiskole* in Heiberg's *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vols. 1–11, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1861–62, vol. 1, pp. 111–380.) In English in *Heiberg's Speculative Logic and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2006, pp. 39–213.

<sup>39</sup> Heiberg, *Grundtræk til Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik*, § 144, Remark 3,  $\alpha$ . *Heiberg's Speculative Logic and Other Texts*, p. 165: "The negative judgments are therefore positive. This is the case with respect to so-called 'infinite judgments,' where subject and predicate belong to mutually exclusive spheres, and therefore no subsumption or judgment can take place but only a proposition, and a meaningless one at that (for example, the proposition mentioned in connection with the law of contradiction: 'An elephant is not a cube root')."

<sup>40</sup> Heiberg, *Grundtræk til Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik*, § 29, Remarks 1–2. *Heiberg's Speculative Logic and Other Texts*, pp. 56–7.

Kierkegaard's *Notebook 14*, from 1843, contains his reading notes to Tennemann's aforementioned history of philosophy.<sup>41</sup> Kierkegaard goes through "1. The Ionic School" "2. The Pythagorean School" and then arrives at "3. The Eleatics." Here he notes the members of the school, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno of Elea, and Melissus, and gives the following characterization of their doctrine: "The older philosophers had assumed that from nothing comes nothing; the Eleatics discovered the difficulty of thinking becoming. 'In the world there is only being not becoming.'" <sup>42</sup> This is presumably a free rendering of Parmenides—perhaps Fragment 8—that Kierkegaard found in Tennemann.

Kierkegaard then continues by noting Tennemann's description of Parmenides as follows: "*Parmenides*. What is, is, what is not, is not. To think nothing is the same as not thinking at all. Being is identical; for if there were several things, they must be different either by them being or by their not being, which is an impossibility. His poem consists of two parts:  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota$  νοητοῦ—τὰ πρὸς δόξαν."<sup>43</sup> Here Kierkegaard simply notes the main theses of Parmenides' philosophy and the organization of his poem into "The Way of Truth" and "The Way of Seeming."

Still following Tennemann's account, Kierkegaard notes the following about Zeno. He begins with a general statement and then proceeds to sketch three of Zeno's famous arguments against motion:

*Zeno*. Rejected movement. The infinity of the space, which is to be traversed conflicts with the finitude of time.

The 4 proofs against movement. 1) When a body moves, it runs through a line; before it comes to the end, it must have traversed the half [of the distance of the line], but now every space is infinitely divisible. 2) A body that moves with the greatest speed can never catch up with another one that moves with the greatest slowness; for the former must always first come to the point where the latter has been. 3) When a body moves, it must at once be both unmoving and in movement, for every body must at every moment be in a space that is equal to the body, which is unmoving. 4) Two bodies run through unequal space with the same speed, which is a contradiction.<sup>44</sup>

There is a footnote to the second proof, where one reads simply, "This proof is called Achilles."<sup>45</sup> This seems clearly to indicate a fairly close study of Zeno's paradoxes, at least as expounded by Tennemann.

In the *Journal JJ*, there are a series of entries also from the year 1843 concerning the history of philosophy. These are again reflections on and notes to Kierkegaard's reading of Tennemann, as is indicated by the frequent references that he gives to that work in these entries.<sup>46</sup> There Kierkegaard writes the following: "one can only say

<sup>41</sup> SKS 19, 425–7, Not14:1. According to the editors, Kierkegaard worked on this journal during the period between January and April of 1843. Leon Jaurnow and Steen Tullberg, "Tekstredøgørelse" in SKS K19, p. 604.

<sup>42</sup> SKS 19, 426, Not14:1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> SKS 19, 426–7, Not14:1.

<sup>45</sup> SKS 19, 427.36, Not14:1.

<sup>46</sup> See SKS 18, 150, JJ:24 / KJN 2, 140. SKS 18, 157, JJ:53 / KJN 2, 145–6. SKS 18, 158, JJ:55 / KJN 2, 146. SKS 18, 160, JJ:66 / KJN 2, 149. SKS 18, 160, JJ:67 / KJN 2, 149. SKS 18,

that the principle of unity has sublated the principle of contradiction in the same sense that Pythagoras taught that one was not a number. One precedes differentiation, and numbers only begin with differentiation. Unity precedes contradiction, and existence only begins with contradiction."<sup>47</sup> Then in the margin to this he refers to Zeno of Elea as follows: "or in the same sense that Zeno the Eleatic said: μηδὲν τῶν ὄντων ἔστι τὸ ἕν cf. Tennemann, 1<sup>st</sup> vol., p. 202 and note."<sup>48</sup> In his reading notes to Tennemann in *Notebook 14*, Kierkegaard makes use of this same passage.<sup>49</sup> Here Tennemann quotes Simplicius, who attributes the following statement to Zeno: "the one is not among the things that are."<sup>50</sup>

From these entries is it clear that in 1843 Kierkegaard was keenly interested in Eleatic philosophy and that he actively sought to inform himself about it from one of the main works on the history of philosophy at the time. From these entries alone, however, it is not clear what the motivation for this study is or how he envisions it to fit into his writing plans.

### B. References to the Eleatics and Heraclitus' Disciple, Cratylus

One recurring motif in Kierkegaard's allusions to the Eleatics is the story of Cratylus, a student of Heraclitus, who attempts to surpass his master. Although neither Cratylus nor Heraclitus is an Eleatic thinker, the latter are mentioned together with the former since they represent opposed doctrines.

In his *Journal JJ*, Kierkegaard writes the following in a marginal note presumably at some point between 1842 and 1843:

A similar foppish conceit comes from one of Heraclitus' disciples. Heraclitus had said, You cannot cross the same river twice. A disciple wanted to better that and said, You cannot do it even once. The nerve is thereby removed; the principle, so far as anything became of it at all, turned into the opposite, an Eleatic principle, and denies movement.<sup>51</sup>

As noted, this is a reference to Heraclitus' student Cratylus, known primarily from the Platonic dialogue of the same name. This anecdote is preserved in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which reads as follows:

And again, because they saw that all this world of nature is in movement, and that about that which changes no true statement can be made, they said that of course, regarding that which everywhere in every respect is changing, nothing could truly be affirmed. It was this belief that blossomed into the most extreme of the views above mentioned, that of the professed Heracliteans, such as was held by Cratylus, who finally did not think it right to say anything but only moved his finger, and criticized Heraclitus for saying

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160, JJ:68.a / *KJN* 2, 149. *SKS* 18, 162, JJ:72 / *KJN* 2, 150. *SKS* 18, 163, JJ:74 / *KJN* 2, 151. *SKS* 18, 166, JJ:86 / *KJN* 2, 154.

<sup>47</sup> *SKS* 18, 161, JJ:68 / *KJN* 2, 149.

<sup>48</sup> *SKS* 18, 161, JJ:68.a / *KJN* 2, 149.

<sup>49</sup> *SKS* 19, 427.13–14, Not14:1.

<sup>50</sup> Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1, p. 202, note 75.

<sup>51</sup> *SKS* 18, 152, JJ:31.b / *KJN* 2, 141.

that it is impossible to step twice into the same river; for *he* thought one could not do it even once.<sup>52</sup>

The point that Cratylus wants to make is, of course, that there is also change even in the minutest instant of time that it takes to step into the river. Thus, he attempts to make even more extreme Heraclitus' claim that everything is constantly in a state of change.

Kierkegaard then subsequently returns to this anecdote in his published writings. In a key passage in the epilogue to *Fear and Trembling* (1843), he has his pseudonym end the work with a reference to the purported refutation of Heraclitus:

"One must go further, one must go further." This urge to go further is an old story in the world. Heraclitus the obscure, who deposited his thoughts in his books and his books in Diana's temple (for his thoughts had been his armor in life, and therefore he hung it in the temple of the goddess), Heraclitus the obscure said: One cannot walk through the same river twice. Heraclitus the obscure had a disciple who did not remain standing there but went further—and added: One cannot do it even once. Poor Heraclitus, to have a disciple like that! By this improvement, the Heraclitean thesis was amended into an Eleatic thesis that denies motion, and yet that disciple wished only to be a disciple of Heraclitus who went further, not back to what Heraclitus had abandoned.<sup>53</sup>

In the footnote to this passage Kierkegaard refers directly to the *locus* in Tennemann, where he found this anecdote. Thus, it is not certain that Kierkegaard knew the original source of the story in Aristotle. It should be noted that the story is also recounted by Poul Martin Møller in his aforementioned lectures.<sup>54</sup>

The point that Kierkegaard seems to want to make with the use of this anecdote is that Cratylus' modification in effect undermines Heraclitus' thesis, and indeed turns it into the very opposite. In short, Heraclitus' main claim was that everything was in flux and thus changing. But by saying that one cannot even step into the same river a single time, Cratylus seems to be denying that any motion at all is possible, which is precisely the thesis of the Eleatics, that is, the exact opposite view that was intended to refute the radical claims of Heraclitus. This anecdote illustrates the absurdity of trying to "go further," a motif that Kierkegaard frequently returns to. By trying to go beyond the position of Heraclitus, Cratylus ultimately ends up reverting to a previous position, namely, that of the Eleatics.

### *C. References to Diogenes' Refutation of Zeno's Denial of Motion*

Another episode concerning the Eleatics that one finds as a recurring theme in Kierkegaard is the refutation of Zeno's denial of movement by the philosopher Diogenes. In order to defend common sense, Diogenes is said to have walked back

<sup>52</sup> English translation quoted from *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon, New York: Random House 1941, pp. 745–6. *Metaphysics*, Book IV, Chapter 5, 1010a 10–15.

<sup>53</sup> SKS 4, 210.7–18 / FT, 123.

<sup>54</sup> *Efterladte Skrifter af Poul M. Møller*, vol. 2, p. 304.

and forth to refute the claim that there is no motion. Kierkegaard is clearly intrigued by this story.

Kierkegaard makes fairly extensive use of the Eleatics in *Repetition* (1843). Here he begins the book with a reference to this story: “When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, came forward as an opponent. He literally did come forward, because he did not say a word but merely paced back and forth a few times, thereby assuming that he had sufficiently refuted them.”<sup>55</sup> The source of this anecdote is Diogenes Laertius, who writes, “In like manner, when somebody declared that there is no such thing as motion, he got up and walked about.”<sup>56</sup> Kierkegaard has his pseudonymous author use this anecdote to introduce the concept of repetition.

This same anecdote is referred to again in a letter from 1847 that Kierkegaard writes to the wife of his elder brother Peter Christian Kierkegaard (1805–88). Since his sister-in-law was apparently having problems with her health, Kierkegaard advises her to take regular walks. In this context, he writes, “Health and salvation can be found only in motion. If anyone denies that motion exists, I do as Diogenes did, I walk. If anyone denies that health resides in motion, then I walk away from all morbid objections. *Thus, if one just keeps on walking, everything will be all right.*”<sup>57</sup>

The point of Kierkegaard’s use of this anecdote is not easy to discern. On the face of it, one might claim that the reference to it at the beginning of *Repetition* merely serves the purpose of motivating the action since it is the occasion for Constantin Constantius to hit upon the idea of making a return trip to Berlin in order to test if a repetition is possible:

When I was occupied for some time, at least on occasion, with the question of repetition—whether or not it is possible, what importance it has, whether something gains or loses in being repeated—I suddenly had the thought: You can, after all, take a trip to Berlin; you have been there once before, and now you can prove to yourself whether a repetition is possible and what importance it has.<sup>58</sup>

Thus just as Diogenes purportedly refuted Zeno’s claim, not by a syllogism or a new argument but, as it were, by a performative act, that is, by walking, so also Constantin thinks that he can confirm or disconfirm the possibility of repetition, not by constructing an original argument in favor of or against the concept, but rather again by an action, by going back to Berlin. From this, one might infer that Kierkegaard finds sympathetic this kind of refutation of an abstract philosophical view by means of concrete action in the realm of existence. Such “arguments” represent a kind of protest against academic philosophy.

<sup>55</sup> SKS 4, 9 / R, 131.

<sup>56</sup> English translation quoted from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. by R.D. Hicks, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann 1979–80 (*Loeb Classical Library*), vol. 2, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 169 / *LD*, Letter 150, p. 215.

<sup>58</sup> SKS 4, 9 / R, 131.

D. Hegel and the Eleatics

As noted at the outset, in a number of passages Kierkegaard associates the Eleatics with Hegel's philosophy. At first glance this might strike one as rather strange since usually he appeals to ancient philosophy as a contrastive term to Hegelian speculation. In these passages, however, he seems to regard the Eleatic doctrines of being and the denial of movement as pure abstractions, like Hegel's speculative logic. This is an issue that exercises him in connection both with the Danish debate about mediation<sup>59</sup> and with the development of his own concepts such as repetition and reduplication.

In a journal entry from the year 1843, Kierkegaard anticipates his later accounts of this issue in works such as *Repetition* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

What principally concerned ancient philosophy, the most ancient philosophy in Greece, was the question of *the movement* by which the world came into being, the constitutive relationship of the elements to one another. —What especially concerns the most recent philosophy is movement, i.e., logical movement. It would not be without significance to draw a parallel between these two spheres. Modern philosophy has never given an account of movement. Thus in the table of categories—which is so detailed in other respects—there is no category called mediation, which for modern philosophy is nonetheless the most essential of all; indeed, it is truly the nerve of modern philosophy, that with which it wants to differentiate itself from every previous philosophy.<sup>60</sup>

The immediate parallel that Kierkegaard wants to point out here is that both the ancient Greeks (including the Eleatics) and modern philosophy, that is, Hegel, are interested in explaining change and movement. Hegel attempts to do so by means of the concept of speculative mediation. But, although he gives no arguments for his view, Kierkegaard clearly finds this inadequate: "Modern philosophy has never given an account of movement." Thus although speculative philosophy makes a lot of noise about mediation and the speculative method, the key problem of how to explain movement remains unresolved. This entry anticipates Kierkegaard's later view, where he repeats this claim and even elaborates on it, especially in the *Postscript*.

In *Repetition*, the philosophy of the Eleatics is referred to again in reference to Hegel's concept of mediation. In this difficult passage Kierkegaard has his pseudonym write:

Repetition is the new category that will be discovered. If one knows anything of modern philosophy and is not entirely ignorant of Greek philosophy, one will readily see that this category explains the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus, and that repetition proper is what has mistakenly been called mediation. It is incredible how much flurry

<sup>59</sup> See Jon Stewart, "Chapter 3. The Debate about Mediation and the Law of Excluded Middle: 1839," in *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome II, *The Martensen Period: 1837–1842*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2007 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 3), pp. 289–342.

<sup>60</sup> SKS 18, 160, JJ:65 / KJN 2, 148.

has been made in Hegelian philosophy over mediation and how much foolish talk has enjoyed honor and glory under this rubric.<sup>61</sup>

The discussion continues with an account of the concepts of being and nothing and the moment. Here Constantius seems to introduce the concept of repetition as a superior alternative to Hegel's concept of mediation. From the last sentence quoted, it is clear that he believes that Hegel's concept, although it has attracted much attention, has not explained anything.

The key to understanding this passage is to interpret what is meant by the claim that repetition "explains the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus." This is not a straightforward matter. The Eleatics were known for their thesis that there is a single, unchanging, unmoving being. This is a thesis that appeals to abstract thinking but is counterintuitive to the realm of the senses. Heraclitus, by contrast, is known for the claim that there is no enduring substance and everything is in movement and always changing. This view appeals to the intuitive experience provided by the senses but fails to do justice to abstract thought and ideas, such as justice, beauty, or mathematical truths. The "relation" between these two views can thus be said to be the contrast between abstract ideas and the perceptions of the senses, that is, between universals and particulars. Hegel's concept of mediation claims specifically to reconcile the universal and the particular. This is also the work that repetition is supposed to perform: one repeats the universal in the particular action.

As is well known, Heiberg gave a critical treatment of *Repetition* in an article in his journal *Urania*.<sup>62</sup> This triggered a series of drafts of a response that can be found in Kierkegaard's *Nachlass*. From these it is again clear that Kierkegaard wishes to object to Hegelian mediation (advocated by Heiberg) and to replace it with his own concept of repetition. In one of these he explains his use of the Eleatics at the outset of the work:

Movement is dialectical, not only with respect to space (in which sense it occupied Heraclitus and the Eleatics and later was so much used and misused by the Skeptics), but also with respect to time. The dialectic in both respects is the same, for the point and the moment correspond to each other. Since I could not name two schools in which the dialectic of motion with respect to time is expressed as explicitly as Heraclitus and the Eleatics express it with respect to space, I named them.<sup>63</sup>

Here Kierkegaard or Constantin Constantius explains that the concept of repetition concerns a "dialectical" movement in time. Since this is a new concept, the best he could do is to refer to the debate between Heraclitus and the Eleatics, which was primarily concerned with movement in space. Seen in this manner, the concept of repetition captures, by analogy, not one side of this dispute but both; in the temporal sphere it includes the unchanging universal of the Eleatics and the mutable particular of Heraclitus.

<sup>61</sup> SKS 4, 25 / R, 148.

<sup>62</sup> Johan Ludvig Heiberg "Det astronomiske Aar," *Urania*, 1844, pp. 77–160 (*ASKB U 57*). (Reprinted in Heiberg's *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 9, pp. 51–130.)

<sup>63</sup> *Pap.* IV B 117, p. 289 / R, Supplement, p. 309.

The Eleatics and the question of movement also appear in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844). In the Introduction, in a criticism of Hegelian logic, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author explains as follows that there is no genuine movement in logic, despite the Hegelians' claims to the contrary:

In logic, *the negative* is used as the impelling power to bring movement into all things. One must have movement in logic no matter how it is brought about, and no matter by what means. The negative lends a hand, and what the negative cannot accomplish, play on words and platitudes can, just as when the negative itself becomes a play on words. In logic, no movement can come about, for logic is, and whatever is logical only is.<sup>64</sup>

The criticism is clearly aimed at the Hegelian dialectical movement that is driven by the concept of negativity as a determinate negation. Then he compares this with the Eleatics in a footnote: "The eternal expression for the logical is what the Eleatics through a misunderstanding transferred to existence: nothing comes into being, everything is."<sup>65</sup> The key critical point here seems to be that the Eleatics took a logical concept "being" and applied it to the realm of existence and actuality. This seems to be one of the things that Kierkegaard believes Hegel to be guilty of as well. As a system of thought, Hegel's logic may well be interesting and thought-provoking, but it does not apply to the realm of actuality, and it certainly does not explain the phenomena (such as movement) found there. This seems to be confirmed by what Kierkegaard's pseudonym goes on to say in the text: "This weakness of the logical consists in the transition of logic into becoming, where existence and actuality come forth."<sup>66</sup>

At the beginning of Chapter Three of this same work, Kierkegaard has his pseudonym return to this same issue. Here he criticizes the different Hegelian terms, "negation, transition, mediation" for purporting to represent movement.<sup>67</sup> This is then the occasion for the introduction of Plato's concept of "the moment." This issue is treated in more detail in a long footnote on Plato.<sup>68</sup> Here the Eleatics are referred to as follows:

Plato conceives of the moment as purely abstract. In order to become acquainted with its dialectic, one should keep in mind that the moment is non-being under the category of time. Non-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν; the τὸ κενόν of the Pythagoreans) occupied the interest of the ancient philosophers more than it does modern philosophers. Among the Eleatics, non-being was conceived ontologically in such a way that what was affirmed about it could be stated only in the contradictory proposition that only being is. If one pursues this further, he will see that it reappears in all the spheres. In metaphysical propaedeutics the proposition was expressed thus: He who expresses non-being says nothing at all (this misunderstanding is refuted in *The Sophist*, and in a more mimical way it was refuted in an earlier dialogue, *Gorgias*).<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> SKS 4, 320 / CA, 12–13.

<sup>65</sup> SKS 4, 320, note 2 / CA, 13, note.

<sup>66</sup> SKS 4, 320 / CA, 13.

<sup>67</sup> SKS 4, 384 / CA, 82.

<sup>68</sup> SKS 4, 385–8, note 2 / CA, 82–4, note.

<sup>69</sup> SKS 4, 385, note 2 / CA, 82, note.

This passage again testifies to Kierkegaard's study of these issues in the ancient sources. Moreover, the context of this passage gives us some insight into his interest in the concepts of negation and movement. In the immediate context of *The Concept of Anxiety*, he is interested in the notion of negation or non-being as an interpretation or explanation of the Christian concept of sin. In short, he appeals to the history of philosophy to find the conceptual apparatus that he needs to explore this concept from dogmatics.

The Eleatics emerge again in several passages in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). Here the Eleatics' conception of being is understood as pure abstraction, in line with Hegelian logic. In his discussion of the Danish debate about mediation, Johannes Climacus argues that there can be mediation in the realm of thought but not in the realm of being. There is no mediation in the latter sphere, but rather the "either/or" of irreducible alternatives or contradictions. He writes, "On the other hand, do not go and say that there should be an *aut/aut sub specie aeterni*, 'where everything is and nothing originates' (the Eleatics' doctrine)."<sup>70</sup> This is elaborated upon in the corresponding footnote: "misled by repeated talk about a continual process in which opposites combine in a higher unity and then again in a higher unity etc., people have drawn a parallel between Hegel's doctrine and that of Heraclitus: everything flows and nothing abides. This, however, is a misunderstanding, because everything that is said in Hegel about process and becoming is illusory."<sup>71</sup> From this passage it is clear that the Eleatics and Hegel, with their insistence on enduring truth and abstract thought, stand on the same side, opposite Heraclitus. Johannes Climacus is intent on clearing up the misunderstanding that it is the other way around and that Hegel, with his notion of dialectical movement and mediation, is allied with Heraclitus. Climacus clearly does not believe that Hegel's conceptual movement is genuine movement, since the latter must take place in the sphere of actuality.

In the chapter, "The Issue in Fragments," Johannes Climacus refers to the contrast of the Eleatics and Heraclitus. In the passage in question he criticizes Hegel's mediation of opposites into a higher unity. The point of the discussion is to indicate that when Hegel attempts to sublimate Christianity, he in effect turns it into something that it is not, that is, a concept. But mediation can only take place between two like things, that is, opposites, and not between two things that are radically different. Christianity is radically different from objective thinking and cannot be sublated without losing its essential character. In this context, reference is made to the Eleatics as follows:

For example, when speculative thought mediates between the doctrine of the Eleatics and that of Heraclitus, this can be altogether proper, because the doctrine of the Eleatics is not related as an opposite of speculation but is itself speculative, and likewise the doctrine of Heraclitus. Not so when the opposite is the opposite of speculation on the whole. If there is to be mediation here (and mediation is indeed speculation's idea), this means that speculation judges between itself and the opposite of itself and consequently is itself party and judge.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> SKS 7, 279 / CUP1, 307.

<sup>71</sup> SKS 7, 279, note / CUP1, 307, note.

<sup>72</sup> SKS 7, 342 / CUP1, 376.

The idea here seems to be that speculative philosophy can reduce the Eleatic doctrine and the Heraclitean doctrine to thoughts and then sublimate them as opposite positions. This is an immanent sublation. However, when speculative philosophy is confronted with something that is genuinely other, like Christianity, it cannot sublimate it by reducing it to a thought or a doctrine in the same way. When it appears to do so, it is engaging in a deception by pretending to treat Christianity in this way, but what is really being treated is not Christianity at all but an abstract doctrine. Speculative philosophy thus begs the question with its attempt to incorporate everything into its system of thought since it fails to recognize that not everything is a thought.

Johannes Climacus continues this discussion over several pages, and later in the same analysis he refers to the Eleatics again. The context is again the distortion done to Christianity by speculative philosophy. Here he writes:

If Christianity were a doctrine, it would *eo ipso* not constitute the opposite of speculative thought but would be an element within it. Christianity pertains to existence, to existing, but existence and existing are the very opposite of speculation. The Eleatic doctrine, for example, is not related to existing but to speculation; therefore it must be assigned its place within speculation. Precisely because Christianity is not a doctrine, it holds true, as developed previously, that there is an enormous difference between knowing what Christianity is and being a Christian.<sup>73</sup>

This passage makes it clear that, in Climacus' assessment, Eleatic thinking is a form of speculative philosophy. By this he seems to mean that it is concerned with what is abstract, the concept of pure being, or the universal. However, it does not concern existence or actuality, which, by its very nature consists of particulars.

Kierkegaard's interest in the Eleatics was fairly extensive. He clearly studied them and not least of all Zeno's paradoxes with keen interest. He eventually came to associate them with the much-criticized abstraction of Hegel's thought. The Eleatics' doctrine of unchanging being was, in Kierkegaard's eyes, an abstraction from actuality and existence. Seen in this context, the anecdote about Diogenes' refutation of Zeno's denial of motion can be interpreted as a blow for common sense against abstraction. One can see Diogenes' pacing back and forth as an indirect strategy of critique or refutation in line with those used by Kierkegaard's pseudonyms in their criticism of all forms of abstraction.

In comparison with the Eleatics and their abstraction, Heraclitus, with his emphasis on the flux of actuality, might be thought to be a more sympathetic figure for Kierkegaard. The emphasis on change and contingency captures well what has come to be known as the existential dimension of Kierkegaard's thought. In any case the two ancient schools constitute the two sides of the concept of repetition: the Eleatics the universal, and Heraclitus the particular. From this analysis, it seems clear that Kierkegaard developed his own concept of repetition in conjunction with his study of Eleatic thought. As has been seen, the concept of repetition is intended as a replacement for Hegel's mediation of the universal and the particular, and thus

<sup>73</sup> SKS 7, 346 / CUP1, 380.

the development of that notion has a critical edge that again connects the Eleatics to Hegel's philosophy.

Finally, one of Kierkegaard's key objections to Hegel's thought is its abstract monism and claim to universality. Kierkegaard is ultimately interested in making sharp and firm distinctions between, for example, objective and subjective thinking, philosophy and religion, the external and the internal. This view puts him in opposition to many of his systematicizing contemporaries, who attempt to see the grand unity of things by establishing a continuous hierarchy of the academic fields or the forms of cognition. One means to connect these fields or forms is Hegelian mediation. Kierkegaard sees Eleatic thought as a forerunner of this. The doctrine of unchanging being smoothes over key distinctions and reduces and eliminates the absolutely important dimension of the individual. One of Kierkegaard's clear goals throughout his authorship is to work against abstraction and attempt to help to recover the absolute irreducibility of the single individual who is in danger of being lost.

# Kierkegaard and the Greek World

Tome II: Aristotle and Other Greek Authors

*Edited by*  
JON STEWART AND KATALIN NUN

ASHGATE

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