Introduction

From Athens to Jerusalem

D—— and others,

I write you anxious that these words will not be able to sustain our conversation.

After all, this is a book about meontology, literally the study of that which is not, of nonbeing (in Greek, *to mē on*). "Meontology" is not exactly a word that is on the tips of people's tongues at the moment. It perhaps only calls attention to its own obscurity, evidence for yet another scholar's ignorance of the real world, of body, of skin. If so, then our conversation will fall into nothingness – an event I cannot bear to face. In resistance against this possibility, I want to state, at the outset, as simply as possible, what is at stake in thinking about meontology, so that I can hear or read your response, which I so fervently desire. I imagine you (perhaps falsely) asking four questions about what I will describe in these pages as "the Jewish meontological tradition," and I offer four preliminary responses.

1. *What is not?* Everything that has not yet actualized its potential. Most viscerally, me.
2. *What is meontology?* The study of unmediated experiences of lack and privation. This study inaugurates self-critique and the realization that I live in a moment best described as not-yet. I thereby begin my path toward human perfection and toward God.
3. *How do I live in this not-yet?* In manic desire for what appears to me to be stable, for what displays a comfort in its own skin that I have never experienced. For you.
4. *What is the effect of this desire?* In the hope against hope that my desire will come to fulfillment, I keep you in mind, near me. I take care of you and work to engender political reforms that allow our conversation and relationship to perdure. I act to delay your death – even, perhaps, if this contributes to the skyrocketing proportion of the GDP taken up by the cost of medical care – and the death of your friends, and their

> friends, ad infinitum. In these brief moments when I break free of my narcissistic chains, I act messianically and redeem the world that is responsible for your suffering and your death, which will always be premature for me. I engender a world that my tradition (and perhaps yours) says God engenders, and I articulate my resemblance to God.[1]

This argument makes a long journey from Athens to Jerusalem. It moves from a philosophy of nonbeing to the passionate faith in a redeemer still to come . . . whom I represent. Indeed, the notion of a redeemer to come – *the* difference between Judaism and Christianity – cannot be defended without turning back to the analysis of nonbeing in the Greek philosophical tradition. Without Athens, Jerusalem (Judaism) risks being unable to articulate the meaning of its own religious practices, becoming no more than a set of customs divorced from their ultimate source, a sedimented series of rote actions that can create an identity for its practitioners only through the profane category of "culture."

As a result, this book vigorously rejects the Athens–Jerusalem problem that has been our pet mosquito, sucking our lifeblood since the third century C.E. In its infancy, it was a problem for Christianity. It is first mentioned in the seventh chapter of the early Church father Tertullian's *de Praescriptione Hoereticorum* (*On the Prescription against Heretics*). To be sure, Tertullian credits Paul with posing the conflict in his command to the Colossians that "no one take you captive through philosophy and empty deception" (Col. 2:8). But it is Tertullian who first codifies the problem in geographical language: "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!"[2] Thus begins a long history of the fear of miscegenation, paralleled by rabbinic texts from the same time period that proscribe the learning of Greek wisdom.[3] But the Athens–Jerusalem problem is not only about the relationship between faith and the heresy of philosophy. In the modern period, it is about the relationship between Jewish faith and Western culture, which are perceived to be in necessary conflict. On the side of culture, the Orientalist Johann David Michaelis, writing in 1782 in Göttingen, claims that Jewish observance of the ceremonial law established Jews as being at cross-purposes with the laws of the German nation. Hence, "it will be impossible to grant the Jew the same freedoms [as

[1] In "The Absence Fetish," *Religious Studies Review* 29:3 (July 2003), 225–34, I argue that the fact that foundations are not accessible to human understanding necessitates an ethics that oscillates between narcissism and the sacrifice of that narcissism.

[2] Tertullian, "On the Prescription against Heretics," in *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, vol. II [*Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. XV], trans. Peter Holmes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), 246.

[3] Cf. M. Sotah 9:14, B. Sotah 491, B. Menachot 64b.

German Christians], for he will never be a full citizen with respect to love for and pride in his country."[4] On the side of Jewish faith, the argument of modern Jewish thinkers (including Moses Mendelssohn, Hermann Cohen, and Abraham Joshua Heschel) that Jews have a mission within the public rational sphere already appears to assume that the spheres of Jerusalem and Athens are different, that the mission is grounded in a text or culture different from that which grounds the nation-state.[5] The either/or of the Athens–Jerusalem problem insidiously perseveres to this day, either in the move of the two Zions – Israel and America – to separate themselves from Europe, or in the need of contemporary Jews to articulate their cultural difference through means above and beyond the unique texts at the basis of study and prayer.

There is no reason why this either/or is necessary. In spite of the uneasy relationship with Athens displayed by the rabbis, some medieval Jewish philosophers refused to admit that there was any Athens–Jerusalem split. In a classic essay published in 1974, Herbert Davidson offers some religious motives for a Jewish intellectual in the medieval period to turn to Greek philosophy in the interest of gaining a better understanding of Judaism.[6] Simply put, the Hebrew Bible commands knowledge of God. In the final four chapters of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides cites at least four verses as prooftexts for his claim that divine worship has an intellectual dimension (G 620–21, G 636): Deut. 4:35 ("You have been shown, in order to know that the Lord is God"), Deut. 4:39 and Ps. 100:3 ("Know . . . that the Lord is God"), and Jer. 9:23 (then interpreted to mean "glory only in this, in intellectual understanding and knowledge" [*haskel ve-yadoʿa*]).[7] This command to know God through studying Torah was expanded to include the requirement to learn the natural sciences and the Greek metaphysical tradition. For Maimonides, these are accounts of the ways God works in the created world. Maimonides connects this interpretation of the command to study natural science with the command to love God, when he writes in *Guide* III:28 that love of God "only becomes valid through the apprehension of the whole of being as it is and through the consideration of His wisdom as it is manifested in it" (G 512–13). He further claims that this holistic view of Torah is justified by the tradition itself. Bringing together Athens

[4] Johann David Michaelis, excerpt from "Herr Ritter Michaelis Beurtheilung," reprinted in *The Jew in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 43.

[5] Cf. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1983), 118; RV 298/255; Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Noonday, 1955), 245.

[6] Herbert A. Davidson, "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 53–68.

[7] See ibid., 57–58.

and Jerusalem – in hindsight, having dual citizenship – becomes a means for working through elements of the tradition that are, on the surface, opaque and therefore open to challenge. "Greek philosophy highlights, for the medieval thinker, elements in the Jewish religion that were vague and problematical, and then provides him with the means for clarifying those problematic elements."[8]

Although this instinct to work through theological problems with the aid of philosophical texts appears organic in the texts of the medieval philosophers, it appears artificial in the texts of the modern Jewish philosophers. Here, Jewish philosophy has been stereotyped as an apologetic that seeks to defend Judaism as unopposed to the voice of secular reason, by redescribing Judaism in the foreign language of the Western philosophical canon.[9] This accusation is directed at the liberal Jewish tradition, stretching from Moses Mendelssohn in the eighteenth century to Emmanuel Levinas in the late twentieth (and his students today). These German Jews and their French heirs allegedly introduce some infectious agent into the tradition. In the eighteenth century, Mendelssohn used a Leibnizian-Wolffian framework; in the nineteenth century, Samuel Hirsch used Hegel while Hermann Cohen used Leibniz, Kant, and Plato; in the twentieth century, Franz Rosenzweig used Schelling while Emmanuel Levinas used a Platonic interpretation of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. By using another culture's tools to examine Judaism, these supposed apologists risk a complete loss of the natural particularity of the Jewish tradition. And in an age in which any threat to the vitality of Judaism appears to run even a slight risk of granting Hitler a posthumous victory,[10] this simply will not do. Thus, as Arthur Green wrote about the nature of American Jewish theology in 1994, "[s]haken to our root by the experience of the Holocaust, our religious language took the predictable route of self-preservation by turning inward, setting aside this universalist agenda as non-essential to our own survival." For this reason, Green chooses to reject this entire Mendelssohn-to-Levinas tradition in favor of a neo-Hasidic stance based in Eastern European traditions, favoring the broad contours of the individual's religious experience and prayerful life. This has the effect of omitting all searches for justification of Judaism in the philosophical tradition of Western Europe.[11] The

[8] Ibid., 54.

[9] See Arthur Green, "New Directions in Jewish Theology in America," in *Contemporary Jewish Theology*, ed. Elliot N. Dorff and Louis E. Newman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 488.

[10] The phrase is Emil Fackenheim's, and it can be found in several of his writings. One example is *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 84.

[11] Green, 493. While Green also states that "we find ourselves turning back to the interrupted work of our nascent Jewish universalists and theologicans of radical immanence" (493), it is clear that his universalism is radically different from that of the liberal Jewish philosophical tradition. Instead of a universalism in which different cultures gain self-understanding

post-Holocaust crisis of Jewish philosophy, then, should in Green's eyes lead to the dissolution of a tradition that extends back to the Hellenistic period and the writings of Philo in the first century C.E.

But with respect to Jewish philosophy, the dismissal is too hasty. What should now be the task of at least a subset of Jewish theology is to *retrieve* the modern Jewish philosophical tradition in a way that speaks to the particular needs (and the need for particularity) of the Jewish people. Only when it has been conclusively demonstrated that philosophy is a sham and of no aid to Jewish self-understanding can one accept Green's view. Davidson (and the entire field of medieval Jewish thought) has given the confidence necessary to retrieve modern Jewish thought in such a way that it serves not as an apologetic tool, but as a tool for deepening the relationship of contemporary Jews to core Jewish concepts.

THE THESIS AND TWO COROLLARIES

At this point, you may be expecting a hysterical assertion of the relevance of the liberal Jewish philosophical tradition despite recent history: "Don't forget that this is our past too!" But I will readily admit that Green is to some extent correct. Modern Jewish thought has indeed become somewhat sedimented as an era of Jewish history; we already see its theological elements drained off by intellectual historians.[12] When reconstructing these works of philosophy in terms of their cultural context, it is all too easy to read them either as cries to non-Jews to be serious about their acceptance of Jews in the political order, or as a series of melancholic consolations to Jews that acceptance from Gentile society will be easier if they understand themselves according to Jewish philosophy's refraction of the Jewish past. Why then not view modern Jewish thought as immaterial, as nothing?

But ironically enough, this focus on nothing in the Jewish philosophical tradition can end up having a reactivating effect on it.[13] In the chapters that follow, I will produce evidence that will show the possibility of invoking a different memory of the origin of modern Jewish thought, not as a desire to fit in to foreign empires or languages, but as an analysis of the nature of the world around us as nothing, as nonbeing, as unredeemed and deprived

through an exchange of languages, Green imagines a universalism in which particular cultures gain "a deeper and richer appreciation . . . of our natural and earthly heritage" (493). This nature-mysticism, if rooted in traditional Jewish history as well as contemporary Jewish history, may well lead to political problems that can be solved only by a retreat from history to ahistorical concepts such as rationality. Cf. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 232–33.

[12] Cf. Mark Lilla, "A Battle for Religion," *The New York Review of Books* 49:19 (December 5, 2002), 60–65.

[13] For the model for reactivating sedimented meanings, cf. Edmund Husserl, "The Origin of Geometry," in Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's* Origin of Geometry: *An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 164ff.

of the fullness of God's presence. Therefore, it is the study of nonbeing and not-yet-being in some texts in this tradition (and in some texts that are key precursors of it) that will allow us to retrieve modern Jewish thought as something that can speak to our present cultural situation in which clarity has been exchanged for murkiness, and not as something that spoke only once upon a time.

Meontology plays a key – but understated – role in the strand of the Jewish philosophical tradition I analyze here. Although the term is used explicitly only in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas (and then, only sparingly), concepts that are thematically associated with it – privation, lack, not-yet – are important concerns in the writings of Maimonides, Hermann Cohen, and Franz Rosenzweig. These four thinkers participate in what I am forcefully naming "the Jewish meontological tradition," a tradition of Jewish thinkers who use either the explicit concept of nonbeing or implicit adjunct concepts as prisms for viewing the Jewish tradition. Further, I claim that the use of this Greek term for the purpose of Jewish theology, far from watering down the richness of Jewish life, expresses and clarifies it. All four thinkers argue for a teleological vector to existence, rendering history radically open, unfulfilled, and ungraspable. The nature of human being is to be not yet, to be deprived of the stasis of being, to hunger after it, and to work to engender it. This sets the stage for a view of the religious life as centered on messianic anticipation.

There are two corollaries to this main thesis. One is a claim about Levinas, or at least about current understandings of Levinas. Depending on one's view of deconstruction and the Jewishness of Jacques Derrida,[14] Levinas (1906–1995) is arguably the most recent representative of the Western Jewish philosophical strand rejected by Green. Trained under Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Levinas developed a phenomenology that uncovered an ethical and precognitive stratum at the base of experience, commanding us to let go of egoist tendencies and become responsible for others. In an important 1981 interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas described his ethics as "a meontology which affirms a meaning beyond Being, a primary mode of non-Being (*mē on*)."[15] Levinas's phenomenology of bodily expression belies an openness to the infinite that cannot be objectified in conceptual terms, and that therefore lies beyond that which is, exterior to the aegis of human knowing and willing, transcendent and hence belonging to religious discourse. Because of Levinas's antipathy to the later work

[14] Cf. Gideon Ofrat, *The Jewish Derrida*, trans. Peretz Kidron (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

[15] Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Lévinas," in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 61 and 63. Reprinted in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 25 and 27, and, as "Ethics of the Infinite," in Kearney, *States of Mind* (Manchester: Manchester University Perss, 1995), 190 and 192.

of Martin Heidegger, and because of Heidegger's sustained interaction with Greek philosophy throughout his career, many interpreters of Levinas within the discipline of modern Jewish thought associate his critique of the "Greek" philosophical tradition with a valorization of the "Jew" and remain trapped within Tertullian's distinction. Articles in which Levinas has claimed parallels between his phenomenology and various passages of Oral Torah have only made this trap more tempting. Reading Levinas's philosophy within what I draw to be the meontological tradition of Jewish theology allows one to see it as a species of Greek as well as Jewish thought, thereby sanctioning a critique of the very notion of a gap, no matter how oblique, between Athens and Jerusalem. For Green's claim that Jews must now turn inward assumes that they have been facing out before now, looking at someplace else, traveling to a different place. But if there is no gap between Athens and Jerusalem, then the call to turn inward can only be a call for Jewish philosophers to keep doing what they have been doing for centuries.

The second corollary of my main thesis is that while the Jewish meontological tradition centers on messianic anticipation, this anticipation has a double-edged quality, in which the Messiah I await is not external to myself. Traditionally, Jewish messianism refers not only to the general redemption of Israel and the world in the concrete sphere of historical and political reality but also to the anticipation of a particular figure who serves as the conduit of divine agency on earth. The anointed figure, whether seen as king or priest or holy person, manifests divine kingship in his association with Mount Zion (Ps. 2:6), the residence of God (Is. 8:18). Thus, anticipation of a messianic figure who brings peace and political autonomy to Israel is also anticipation of God's nearness to the nation, mediated through the human figure of the Messiah. In the Jewish meontological tradition, messianism expresses not only intimacy between the divine and a singular political or religious leader but the real possibility for *any* person to attain this perfection – if only for an ephemeral moment – through his or her teleological aim at human perfection. As Levinas writes in his first magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity*, the radically other-centered ethics for which he argues has the effect of conserving the self (TI 282/305) and ensuring my own redemption in messianic triumph (TI 261/285). It is difficult to pin down exactly who the messianic agent is, since redemption – both of the other person and of myself – is guaranteed through my own ethical action. In a radical sense, human agency has messianic force. I trace this idea back to Cohen, to a lesser extent to Rosenzweig, and further back into the rabbinic tradition. As Levinas formulates the view in one of his first Talmudic readings, "to be myself is to be the Messiah."[16] This "myself" [*moi*] is not the ego who lords

[16] Emmanuel Levinas, "Textes messianiques," in *Difficile liberté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984), 120, translated by Seán Hand as "Messianic Texts," in *Difficult Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 89.

power over others, but the ethical subject who gives up that power and takes responsibility for the suffering of others. In Levinas and Cohen, being the Messiah is synonymous with human moral perfection.

But there are less radical, yet still noteworthy, formulations of the association between human self-perfection and messianism in earlier strands of the tradition. In Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen*, written in 1172, Maimonides subtly tells the embattled Jews of Yemen, who are responding to the possibility of forced conversion to Islam, that devoting themselves to rational perfection will prepare the way for (or even constitute) the arrival of the Messiah – a parallel to the path toward redemption that Maimonides will later lay out in the *Guide*. Also, in an ancient Jewish text, Pesikta Rabbati 34, an embattled group of Jews, who read Torah in a heterodox manner and refer to themselves as the Mourners of Zion, responds to the possibility of being ostracized by the majority of their community by arguing that their heterodox practice will facilitate messianic redemption. Furthermore, in what hindsight shows to be a blatant exercise of projection, they describe themselves in the same language in which they describe the messianic figure. This blurring of the boundary between the anticipated Messiah and the human striving for perfection in these texts is a heightened expression of the tradition's belief in the imminence of messianic advent.[17] Thus, while the openness of history associated with the interpretation of nonbeing in the Jewish meontological tradition rationally justifies Jews' anticipation of a future messianic figure and/or age, it is also the case that this tradition does not decide whether my process of intellectual perfection or my process of learning how to read Torah properly is a sign that messianic advent is really possible, or whether the messianic idea is only a code for the subject's own ethical or spiritual acts. Viewing the Jewish philosophical tradition as about nothing will lead us back to that concept at the core of the modern West, autonomy.

A PRELIMINARY SKETCH OF THE ARGUMENT

It would be possible for me to simply offer you a linear story about the concept of nonbeing in Jewish philosophy from Maimonides to the present, and in fact there are some pages that follow in which I explore questions of influence that would allow you to reconstruct such a narrative. But telling that story would fail to have the effect I desire. It would give the impression that Levinas has a nostalgia for a Maimonidean worldview that history has really passed by; you might then respond by saying that my narrative had persuaded you that history has passed Levinas by as well, and that we should relegate him to a curio in history of philosophy seminars. So it becomes duly important for me to tell you the story in as ahistorical a way as possible and

[17] Cf. B. Baba Metzia 85b, S 404/363 and 253/227.

have it still be coherent. In reading the following pages, you may be surprised to find sudden shifts in discourses, in figures, in time frames. You will wonder why Plato, Husserl, and Derrida are part of the cast of characters. But in order to show that there is no gap between Athens and Jerusalem, I must perform that proximity for you. To show that these texts are relevant today, to preserve their life, I must blast them out of their historical contexts.[18] And to persuade you that their life is in danger, I must show you first of all not only Green's desire to rid the Jewish philosophical tradition of its vitality but also how a first attempt to read this tradition in the light of nonbeing is fraught with difficulty.

Therefore, the first two chapters deal with what I call "the meontological conundrum," that is, the problem of defining meontology. This is not the clever problem of parsing sentences that begin with "nonbeing is . . ." Rather, the problem has to do with two different senses of "meontology" that are currently embedded in Jewish philosophy. Indeed, the two senses are diametrically opposed to one another. On the one hand, there is the Levinasian sense, which uses "nonbeing" to refer to that which transcends and is beyond being. On the other hand, Emil Fackenheim (1916–2003), in his 1961 lecture *Metaphysics and Historicity*, describes meontology as a dialectical process, a circular movement of self-making in which the self is established by integrating its own past history into its future projects. This history of the self, its existential situation including the structures and persons among and with whom it lives, is thus used as fuel for the construction of identity. As a result, Fackenheim's description of meontology involves a notion of otherness that is not beyond the realm of being – Fackenheim denies that his theology involves a notion of revelation[19] – but a mysterious otherness *within* being. Perhaps as a gift from being, otherness presents the self with options for other modes of living. This model of otherness risks losing the element of self-questioning found at such hyperbolic levels in Levinas's conception of alterity. Although Levinas does not offer an explicit critique of Fackenheim,[20] Fackenheim's notion of otherness might easily be the target of a Levinasian critique due to Fackenheim's attachment to Hegelian idealism. In a footnote to *Metaphysics and Historicity* (MH 221n. 23), Fackenheim writes that "the greatest attempt to explicate this kind of [meontological]

[18] The language of this sentence borrows from the seventeenth of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 263.

[19] Emil Fackenheim, "A Reply to My Critics: A Testament of Thought," in *Fackenheim: German Philosophy and Jewish Thought*, ed. Louis Greenspan and Graeme Nicholson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 268–69.

[20] Indeed, there is a paean to Fackenheim's *God's Presence in History* in Levinas's "La souffrance inutile," in *Entre nous* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1991), 115–18, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav as "Useless Suffering," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 97–100.

logic is beyond all doubt Hegel's *Science of Logic*." Yet for Hegel to be associated with meontology is anathema to Levinas. In Levinas's view, the drive to comprehension and the concomitant predilection for violence that constitute Heideggerean method descend from Hegel. Sideswipes to Hegel occur throughout Levinas's work in the cause of wresting the singularity of human subjectivity from the universalist rhetoric of the vast majority of the philosophical tradition. This account of subjectivity is fundamentally opposed to Hegel's language of a consciousness that bridges subject and substance, erases the possibility of anything exterior to the self, and seeks to render different human existences commensurable with one another.[21] One might therefore describe Hegel's philosophy as a heterophagy – a consumption of the other person. In short, while meontology is Hegelian for Fackenheim, it is completely anti-Hegelian for Levinas.

The possibility of finding a new account of the origin of the Jewish philosophical project through the category of nonbeing is threatened by this conflict, and the conflict itself gives us no tools for adjudication. For this reason, I turn in the second chapter to an early setting of the discussion of *to mē on*, namely, Plato's *Sophist*. Here I critique Levinas's nostalgia for middle-period Platonism and contextualize his meontology in a reading of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. Levinas's concept of ethical subjectivity is explicitly rooted in Plato's claim in the sixth book of the *Republic* (509b) that the good beyond all being is the cause of truth (TI 76/103). Nevertheless, Levinas's argument relies upon an uncritical understanding of the theory of forms found in Plato's middle period, namely the argument that an object has a property X because it participates in the form of that property. (For example, one might say "Nathan is beautiful because he participates in the Form of Beauty, in Beauty-itself.") Plato himself radically critiques this position in the *Parmenides*, through the voice of Parmenides who argues that it is impossible for an object to be what it is in this manner, and ends up getting the better of Socrates. An example: assume that both Nathan and Joan share in Beauty-itself. They can either share in the entirety of the form, or each can possess a part of the form, as a sail is spread over a group of people (131b8). In each scenario, Parmenides claims that there is no longer one form of Beauty, but two: either two separate but equal forms of Beauty in the first scenario, or two parts of one form of Beauty in the second scenario. In both cases, Parmenides has put forward a serious challenge to the theory offered in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* by which essences such as Beauty-itself would necessarily be simplex, without composite parts. The *Sophist* attempts to get past this impasse by delineating ways in which properties of an object appear in the context of a network of interrelations between objects. It is in this light that Plato introduces the concept of nonbeing, here defined as otherness or difference. An object X is what it is by virtue of its being

[21] Cf. TI 193/217 and 250/272; AE 131/103.