

AFTERWARD AND CLARIFICATION

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Almost a year in from when I first began organizing my thoughts for the oft spurious *Eleatic Conceptions of Musical Experience*, I do think it would be beneficial to make some comments, or rather, an afterword to the work itself, taking note of something that I did not think necessary to outline (as I thought it obvious) the importance of Xenophanes' comments on seeing as a prerequisite to Parmenides methodology.

This being noted, I would like to note, in a casual, non-systematic manner, a clarification of the two parts of the title that directly relate to the meaning of the total text: *Eleatic* and *Conceptions*.

I do regret not reaching back to Xenophanes at that time, for I believe it properly allows me to place the notion of the object that expresses itself into the context of inquiry and seeing. However, at that moment I had not fully investigated his work, it being somewhat insubstantial and somewhat pedestrian in comparison to the ideas proposed systematically by the Eleatics; however, upon cracking them open, so to speak, I began to notice that Xenophanes provides the proper setup to Parmenides argument. Parmenides begins with the presumption that the reader is aware of two things: truth and supposition (or opinion or belief), and these are the categories of knowledge that Xenophanes expresses in the fragments B34-36

... and of course the clear and certain truth no man has seen nor will there be anyone who knows about the gods and what I say about all things; for even if, in the best case, someone happened to speak what has been brought to pass, nevertheless, he himself would not know, but opinion is ordained for all. (B34)

Let these things be believed as resembling the truth. (B35)

... however many they have made evident for mortals to behold. (B36)

Xenophanes' argument is as so: all things that are were put into being as to be experienced, but it seems that he will never truly know this truth for some reason or another (whether it be a problem of perception, comprehension, or judgement), and will express what he believes he sees through opinion.

Parmenides, when discussing the dichotomy, has the goddess

resolutely decree that there are two ways: the way of truth and the way of belief. In this situation, Parmenides directly relies upon Xenophanes argument that men only offer opinions or suppositions, even though the truth be laid bare, and he uses the omnipotent role of the goddess to express the truth to the reader as to dissuade him for the way of belief.

From this I made my argument in *Eleatic Conceptions*: a thing that exists, in order to exist, must have the ability to express itself, otherwise it does not exist. Thus, to overcome the problems of perception, comprehension, and judgement, the burden of existence cannot be placed upon human perception (thus my disapproval of Berkeley's *esse est percipi*), because it appears that the perceptive faculties are inferior and incapable of perceiving even that which exists at the fringes.

The problem of knowledge is that it is what we know, or rather, what we think we know; yet, for Xenophanes and Parmenides, the problem of truth is that it, if it is true, must exist separately, even if that means it cannot be fully apprehended by human perception.

We exist in a state of *nescire*, the state of not knowing, and we must overcome that through *cognoscere*, coming to know, via *cognito*, examination or inquiry. Therefore, coming to know, and true knowledge, requires us to come to perceive and comprehend the object that expresses itself in the manner in which it totally expresses itself; yet, if total perception is impossible, than coming to know cannot be and we are permanently in such a state of not being able to know.

This essential dilemma means that I am quite skeptical of inquiry, even more skeptical of man's ability to properly perceive anything, and, ultimately, have come to know that man cannot come to know anything. The inferiority of perception in acknowledging how something expresses itself means that, in order to fully appreciate it as Parmenides does, then one must augment it with logical, well reasoned conceptions of what it truly is based upon one's incomplete or rough notions of what it seems to be. Because my inclinations are not necessarily in philosophy in itself, I use this in the context of understanding musical frequencies. I cannot hear a high or low frequency, but I can logically conceptualize it in the same way I can conceptualize a frequency I can hear.

Therefore, I use logical constructions not as the primary means of first expressing something, but as a secondary, supplemental part of how I engage with truth, and I do believe that Parmenides, if one takes into account his possible connection to Xenophanes, too does not begin with logic, but as one who makes logical conclusions based

upon solid inquiry, processing that experience through an apophatic line of reasoning, and thus making a conjecture about what the thing that expresses itself truly is. Thus, one's ability to come to know can find itself closer to the mark as opposed to simply perceiving it and misunderstanding the perception of it for the actual thing as it expresses itself. This is consistent with a Zen koan by Qingyuan Weixin:

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.

And this koan is too perfect not to discuss in the context of the Eleatic gaze, because both deal with this sense of attempting understanding without personal, conscious judgment, only the act of coming to know the object as it expresses itself. Xenophanes' true vision, because he acknowledges the prevailing nature of opinion and supposition, can only come from the obliteration of the self as to see what is quite clearly, and buddhist thought, especially Zen, revolves around fostering a relationship to the world that allows for obliteration as to escape suffering.

When I bring up this notion of obliteration, I naturally use it in the context of it's Latin root: *oblitterare*, to erase or to blot out; that is, when one states that the goal of Buddhism is to obliterate oneself, it is not to physically destroy oneself, as to imply suicide, but to leave a tabula rasa, a blank mind, without judgment, a "Prajñā," or Buddha-nature. When I obliterate myself, I remove my ego, my opinions and presuppositions about the world, and simply accept truth as it is.

However, to remove one's ego, to ensure that one fully fulfills oneself, is impossibly difficult, and this is of course why the koan places it in the context of a monk who reaches true Enlightenment; for, the first two stages can be instant, but the third stage might take decades, and then perhaps happen in a flash.

It is much easier to walk another path or lie to oneself, to tell oneself that one's duty is other than what must be done, that what one thinks should be true is *what is*, when it is instead *what is not*; rather, that *what is* is *not* what one supposes. Or, put simply: what I think I should do is not necessarily what I must do. One might see it in the apocryphal meeting of Peter with Christ before he is executed by the Romans.

Peter, running from Rome, sees Christ on the road and asks

Quo vadis?

To where are you going?

Christ replies

Romam eo iterum crucifigi.

I am going to Rome to be crucified again.

And upon hearing this, Peter turns back and goes to Rome to be executed.

Peter becomes so absorbed in himself, entranced by the vanity of being the main evangelist, the head of the church, that he forgets the news he spreads; instead, he begins to act in a manufactured way, one defined by his own presuppositions of his role in the church: what he thinks he should do is not necessarily what he must do.

To hide from martyrdom in light of the gospel is to see the mountains but say that they are not mountains; that is, one's own conceited interpretation of what one perceives does harm to how one truly perceives. Surely Peter might tell himself, I am the rock, I cannot go the way of all flesh so soon, for if I die then it might die with me. The evangelist, monk, ascetic, or priest, all members of a social structure that grants them a certain degree of privilege over laypeople, might always assume their own importance in this vain notion and thus act against the teachings they profess. A zen monk who says mountains are not mountains is not a zen monk; they act upon presuppositions, intellectual constructs, as opposed to a clear vision of the mountains, "Prajñā".

For Peter to accept his martyrdom, he must first obliterate himself, erase his conscious judgment, so that he can accept the teaching as it is, not how he wishes to interpret it. Christ comes to him, in a surreal manner, to question his conscious judgment, no different than the doubting Thomas; indeed, to need to touch the wounds of Christ to know is the conscious judgment taking control. One who obliterates themselves would not express such doubt, but fully understand the nature of Christ's presence because he has no reason to doubt if he comes from a perspective in which there are no presuppositions to cause doubt in such an experience.

The perceived mountain is not just the literal mountain; rather, it might be more abstract, as in this case of one's duty to something, as if to say that if I first recognize the duty to the other by recognizing

them (stage 1), but then deny that by saying that it is not my duty (stage 2), then I have used conscious judgment to deny my propensity to see clearly, and thus affect realistic change, and perhaps cheat myself. If I shirk my duty, then I deny that such duty should exist at all, if duty is denied in one place, why would it not be denied in another? After all, mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers, so why would it not be so anywhere else? Therefore, by assuming my duty, as it is, not as I view or judge it to be (stage 3), then I fulfill it.

The parable of the poor widow expresses this succinctly: the widow and the scribe both perceive their duty to be charitable; however, the scribe frames his act not as part of his duty to be charitable, but as a show of charity, a show of the wealth he possesses as to say he could give so much. He is acting on a sense of vanity, not out of a sense of duty, thus he perceives the nature of charity not as it is good for (the poor), but how he views it to be good for (his image as a charitable man); again: what he thinks he should do is not necessarily what he must do.

The widow, who only gives what she can, correctly understands her action not being the amount she gives, but the willingness to offer it, even if it is nothing in comparison. Pure duty, pure compassion, can only flow from a selfless act, an act that can only come to wiping away one's ego as to do what one must do.

If I say that, for whatever reason, mountains are not mountains, then I might as well admit that my duty is not my duty; for, what is being done by viewing mountains or doing charity then is neither viewing mountains nor doing charity; rather than self effacement, I am practicing self aggrandizement, I am deciding what it should be, not recognizing what it is, and in placing my judgements above actuality, I am feeding my ego as to blind myself.

Thus we find the fourth step, as expressed in the final section of Eleatic conceptions: true vision, absolute understanding, the knowledge of truth, whatever it may be, is not the final step, but the means to one. Once one destroys subjectivity, wipes away the ego, and seizes objective reality, they then must express it, and that expression of their body, of their mind, is their unique, unconscious subjectivity. And this their conception of it, the manner in which they, having come to understand truth, convey it to others.

Having denied a frame as to see, one then will naturally frame it, even without ego, by their innate qualities of personal expression. Obliteration if the ego does not turn one into a total blank slate, but wipes away the layers of falsehood to reveal one's true nature. This is most apparent in Zen ink wash painting.

The steps of the zen painting are: seeing, coming to know, obliterating, knowing, and conceptualizing. The painter first must see a landscape and come to understand it in order to properly paint it, but the painter is not compositing it as it appears according to what he sees literally, but his deep understanding of *what it is*, the mountain as a mountain.

Thus, the final painting is not the actual object as it expressed itself. That has been internalized by the painter, who then, without ego, expresses his mind, his compression of the object within himself, and reveals it through his action. He, in coming to know, becomes the pure act, that which spurs all the potential into motion! The genius neither depicts neither fiction, nor absolute truth, but his approach to it! Not unlike Turner or Cezanne, who paint what they see, but do not depict what they perceive! Seeing and perceiving become a step toward coming to know, and it is only in coming to know that one can properly express what is.

This being expressed, the second clarification is on what I meant in my sections of conceptions in the context of musical experience. Simply put, when I use the word conceptions, I mean that, once one (im)properly comes to know something, it must then be conceptualized as to be expressed. In *Eleatic Conceptions*, each of the five sections has to do with how one should properly conceptualize music according to what it actually is. The exact purpose of the conceptions was to make an argument against change, movement, and time as faults of perception, a reaction to my understanding of Tenney's work on perception.

The argument itself is that when one eventually comes to properly parse their initial perception, then they can understand the total unity of musical experience as a singular thing: a single waveform with many properties. Thus, the Eleatic conception of musical experience, as expressed in the title, is this understanding of the waveform being what is, and argues that our perceptions of it being something other than what it is, i.e. modality, tonality, dodecaphony, microtonality, etc, or, at the most basic level of this idea: a conception of musical experience that denies the unity of the waveform by creating distinct, determined pitches that are placed in a hierarchical structure that sets some as "good" or "bad."

If the waveform is known to be a single thing that simple vibrates at a different rate, then it cannot be separated into these structural forms that imply that two frequencies, say 440Hz and 392Hz, are two distinct things when they are simply the expression of one thing at different speeds. The Eleatic quality acknowledges that there can only be one thing, which is the thing-in-itself or a platonic form that

provides the essential quality of one thing so that it might appear consistently at any point in time anywhere; thus, distance does not imply difference, because if the two are compared, they are totally equivalent, and must be identical in the sense that there is a root thing that determines them. We always use the notion of the square because one who views a square in Mexico and a square in China will recognize them to be the same thing, despite difference, because the square, as *what is*, is a true universal constant. There can only be one square, and all squares must essentially be the same, otherwise they would not be squares. When *what is* can only be *what is*, then it cannot be said that *it is not*, for that would deny its relationship to *what it is*.

Though the logic of Parmenides' argument can be twisted into obscurantism quite easily, all I really wish to do by expressing it in this manner is deny the cataphatic methods of all musical cultures in their views of tuning and structural relationships by breaking all of musical experience down into its essential expression of itself, not to destroy musical cultures, but to argue against any sort of superior of one type over another, so that tonality neither disappears nor destroys, and that microtonality does not make the mistake of becoming nothing more than the replacement for equal temperament, as those who push for Just Intonation do.

Moreover, the conception itself was meant to be both a refutation and a confirmation of my concluding argument in the *Prolegomena*. I had made an argument at the end of the text that it "not be that it sounds pleasant or ugly, but that *it sounds*, that we are *open to listen*, and that we choose to sing so that *we may be able to listen*." However, I felt that I had betrayed that in my work. Despite noting that I did not believe what I did was an answer in itself, but a means to express that musical structures such as tonality are granted internal consistency according to construction, and a convincing structure can exist if formulated properly, what I was perhaps bothered by was that I, in offering an example of structure, did the very thing that I set out to deny: the creation of a false hierarchy of pitches that privileged a few over others.

It is primarily incorrect and immoral to conceptualize a musical structure or tuning that privileges a certain set of tones over others, and it is doubly so to argue that some frequencies are of higher value than others due to mathematical principles that are really nothing more than logical arguments for subjective aesthetic taste; however, I was incorrect and morally at fault for arguing for a structural tetrachord to replace the triad, for I was expressing that one structure is at fault for creating an "other" out of tones that cannot be formed

through triadic stacking, and then was arguing that I solved the problem by creating a supposedly "open" structure, while not acknowledging that by making outer perfect fourths the foundation for the form that I granted them an inherent superiority over any other pitches.

However, it was the work of the *Prolegomena* that allowed me to even come to think of what would later come to fill *Eleatic Conceptions*, for it allowed me to question what truth outside structural systems might be.

Of course, these conceptions are rather dangerous, as they can lead us to view musical experience in the sense that mountains are not mountains. Composition is perhaps the most difficult if one cannot get beyond the stage of obliteration, so when we fall to this point we must then, in possessing a newfound knowledge that the waveform is what it is, strive for the fourth stage in which the result is not an artificial form of what we think it is, but musical experience *as it is*; however, like the ink wash painting, what that is is not what we see and think it should be, but what we know it must be, and we must first come to know it is it expresses itself before we allow it to spill forth.

If I leave you with more questions than answers, then those might not necessarily be those I can answer, but are those that you must find.