Truth and Falsehood in Mesopotamia and Greece: Similarities and Differences

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Abstract   This article explores the meaning and boundaries of the conception of truth in Mesopotamia and Greece. The two cultures show similarities and differences, but Mesopotamian scholarship never developed a concept of truth as conformity to 'what is'. On the contrary, Greek philosophy separated truth and falsehood in epistemological and ontological terms.

Keywords   Truth. Falsehood. Mesopotamian literature. Greek literature. Philosophy.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Mesopotamian *kittu*. – 3 Ἀλήθεια in Archaic Greece. – 4 Knowledge in Mesopotamia. – 5 Mesopotamia and Heraclitus. – 6 The Development of ἀλήθεια towards an Epistemological and Ontological Concept of Truth. – 7 Conclusions.

1   Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary offers several definitions of 'truth'. Among these we find definitions such as the following: "Something that conforms with fact or reality"; "Conformity with fact; agreement with reality; accuracy or correctness in a statement, thought". Consequently, the OED defines 'falsehood' as follows: "That which, or something that, is contrary to fact or truth" and "Want of conformity to

fact or truth".[1] An intimate opposition between true and false with reference to reality clearly emerges from such definitions as well as an implicit principle of noncontradiction, which prevents a certain thing from being true and false at the same time. Also, these definitions seem to presuppose a conception of truth as a relation between thought or saying and reality: in other words, an *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, to use the words of Thomas Aquinas, who derives this idea directly from Aristotelian thought. On this Aristotelian line we nowadays tend to conceive truth in a twofold way, both as a relation between thought and reality and as noncontradiction. However, the history of ancient Greek thought witnesses different conceptions of truth, sometimes similar to those found in Mesopotamia. In this paper we will try to analyze and compare the ideas of 'truth' attested in Mesopotamia and Greece in order to outline similarities and differences. Let us begin with Mesopotamian sources.

2　Mesopotamian *kittu*

In Babylonian cuneiform texts the word which is usually translated with truth is the Akkadian term *kittu*.[2] This meaning is commonly accepted by scholars besides dictionary entries.[3] But does *kittu* really mean truth? *Kittu* is a substantivized verbal adjective from the verb *kânu* which means 'to be firm, to be correct'.[4] The Sumerian equivalents of *kittu* are niĝ₂-gi-na and niĝ₂-zi which are abstracts from gi.n 'to be firm' and zi.d 'to be right'.[5] Already von Soden argued that in Babylonian and Biblical sources there is no concept of 'historical' truth as correspondence to reality; the concept of truth is associated with immutability and rectitude.[6]

The term *kittu* is usually found in legal and juridical contexts with the meaning of 'justice, fairness, correct procedure'. Indeed *kittu*

Paragraphs 2, 4, and 5 of this paper were written by Maurizio Viano. Paragraphs 3 and 6 were written by Francesco Sironi. Paragraphs 1 and 7 were written by both Authors.

1 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "truth, n. & adv.", July 2023. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6193356826.

2 CAD K: 468.

3 See van de Mieroop 2015, 174-5; see also Glassner 2012, 41-2.

4 CAD K: 159 ff.

5 See Attinger 2021, 790, 800; Cohen 2023, 442, 1539-40; ePSD2, http://oracc.org/epsd2/o0035723, http://oracc.org/epsd2/o0036144. Lämmerhirt (2010) dedicated a monographic study to the words for 'truth' in Sumerian and Akkadian sources listing many attestations.

6 von Soden 1967-68, see also Lämmerhirt 2010, 10-16.

often appears alongside the term *mīšaru* which means 'justice'.[7] The two terms represent two complementary rather than parallel concepts and can be translated with 'law' and 'justice'.[8] Most famously the two terms are found at the end of the *Code of Hammurabi*:

> Obv. V (20) *ki-it-tam* (21) *u₃ mi-ša-ra-am* (22) *i-na* KA *ma-tim* (23) *aš-ku-un*

> I promised *kittu* and justice on the land!

In letters and legal documents *kittu* appears as a qualifier of a preceding substantive with the meaning 'correct':[9]

TC 3 102
(7) *ma-aš₂-ka-al-tam₂* (8) *ša ki-tim*

Correct payment.

AbB 1 46
(25) 3.0.4 ŠE GUR *i-na* GIŠ.BÁN *ki-it-tim pa-aq-da?-ku?*
(26) 3.0.4 GUR ŠE-*a-am i-di-iš-šum*

I am provided with 3 gur and 4 *sûtu* in the correct seah-measure, therefore give him 3 gur and 4 *sûtu* of barley.

AbB 14 191
(23) *uš?-ta-bi-la-kum šu-qu₂-ul* (24) ⌜*i-na*⌝ *a-ba-an ki-ti-im*

I have now sent you (soft wool); weigh it out using a reliable weighing stone.

Inscriptions from various periods mention *kittu* in opposition to *ṣaliptu*, 'dishonesty', *gullultu* which means 'crime, sin', and *lemuttu*, 'evil'. The following examples are taken from a royal inscription of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE) and two Kassite inscriptions of the king Melišipak (early twelfth century BCE).

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[7] CAD M: 116 ff.

[8] Maul 1998, 66-7.

[9] TC 3 102 is an Old Assyrian letter; AbB 1 46 and AbB 14 191 are two Old Babylonian letters.

Esarhaddon 1 (RINAP 4.1)[10]

IV (25) *a-na-ku* ᵐ*Aš-šur*-PAP-AŠ LUGAL KUR *Aš-šur*ᵏⁱ LUGAL *kib-rat* LIMMU₂-*ti*
IV (26) *ša₂ kit-tu i-ram-mu-ma ṣa-lip-tu₂ ik-kib-šu₂*

I, Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters, who loves rectitude and abhors treachery.

Kudurru of Melišiku (MDP 2 99)[11]

IV (52) *šum-ma* LU₂ *šu-u₂* (53) *ki-it-ta ir-tam-ma* (54) *gu-ul-lu-ul-ta iz-ze-er*
V (20) *šum-ma* LU₂ *šu-u₂ ki-it-ta iz-ze-er-ma* (21) *gu-ul-lu-ul-ta ir-tam*

If this man loves rectitude and hates crime.
If this man hates rectitude and loves crime.

Kudurru of Melišiku (MDP 10 87)[12]

III (9) *u₃ šum-ma* LU₂ *šu-u₂* (10) *ki-it-tam is-si₂-ir* (11) NI₂.SI.SA₂ *la iḫ-ta-ši-iḫ-ma* (12) ḪUL-˹*ti*˺ *ir-ta-am*

And if this man hates rectitude and does not want rectitude and loves evil.

In these cases the contrast with words describing criminal attitudes makes clear that *kittu* means 'justice' or 'rectitude'.

Even when the most appropriate translation appears to be 'truth', the semantic sphere of *kittu* relates to speech and indicates something 'undeceiving'. In letters *kittu* refers to reports of facts with a practical meaning of correctness and trustability.

EA 107[13]

(8) *a-mur* ˹*a*˺-*na-ku* (9) ARAD *ki-ti šar₃-ri* ᵈUTU (10) *u₃ pu-ia a-wa-te*ᵐᵉˢ *aq-bu* (11) *a-na šar₃-ri ki-ta-ma*

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10 Leichty 2011, 9-26.

11 Paulus 2014, 369-83.

12 Paulus 2014, 390-401.

13 Rainey 2015, 580-1; EA 107 is a letter from El-Amarna between the king of Byblos and the Pharaoh.

Look, I am a loyal servant of the king, the sun god, and as for my mouth I always speak sincere words to the king.

ABL 586[14]

obv. (7) [*ša*] LUGAL EN *iš-pur-an-ni* (8) *ma-a ina ket-ti-ka* (9) *šup-ra ke-e-tu* (10) TA LUGAL EN-*ia* (11) *a-da-bu-u*

[As to what] the king, my lord, wrote to me: "Write me truthfully" – I am speaking the truth to the king, my lord.

What *kittu* means is clarified by one of the most iconic wisdom compositions from ancient Mesopotamia, the *Babylonian Theodicy*

(78) *ki-na ra-aš₂ uz-ni ša₂ tuš-ta-ad-di-nu la mur-qa*
(79) *ki-it-ta ta-at-ta-du-ma u₂-ṣur-ti* DINGIR *ta-na-ṣu*

Righteous one, one who possesses wisdom, what you have pondered is not rational.
Have you forsaken what is right? Do you despise the order of deity?[15]

These lines make clear that what is right is what has been fixed by the gods, their plans.

The negation of *kittu*, namely *la kittu*, means 'deceiving, unjust, unfair' as in the following Old Babylonian letter:

AbB 9 236

(5) *a-na mi-ni-im* (6) *la ki-ti ta-aš-ku-n*[*a*] (7) *u₃ i-di wa-ar-di-˹ia˺* (8) *tu-ša-di-na*

Why did you act unfairly and why did you collect the wages of my servants?

The legal aspect of *kittu* and *la kittu* is even more explicit in one of Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions where *la kittu* is listed among criminal actions.

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14 Parpola 1993, 241-3 (= SAA 10 302); ABL 586 is a letter from an Assyrian scholar to the king.
15 Oshima 2014, 154-5.

Esarhaddon 33 (RINAP 4.33)[16]

obv. I (8) *ki-a-am iš-pur-am-ma um-ma* LUGAL *ša₂ an-zil-li la kit-tu₃ ḫa-ba-lu ša₂-ga-šu₂* ⸢*ik-kib*⸣-[*šu₂*]

Thus he wrote to me, (saying): "O, king, to whom abomination, unjustice, plundering, (and) murdering are taboo".

As with *kittu* also *la kittu* when associated with declarative verbs relates to the realm of fairness/unfairness; something *la kittu* is deceiving as is clear from another Old Babylonian letter:

AbB 11 85

(5) *ki-ma ki-it-tim* (6) *ša* ᵈUTU *u₃* ᵈAMAR.UTU (7) *ra-i-mi-ka* (8) *iš-ru-ku-ni-ik-kum* (9) GIŠ.BAN₂ 3 ᵈUTU *šu-a-ti* (10) ⸢*it*⸣-*ti* GIŠ.BAN₂ 3 ᵈUTU *ša* ŠE-*am* (11) *im-du-du ša ma-aḫ-ri-ka* (12) *li-iš-pu-ku-ma*

According to the sense of justice that Šamaš and Marduk, who loves you, bestowed upon you: let them pile up the three-seah measure of Šamaš with the three-seah measure of Šamaš of the barley they have measured.

The convergence of *kittu* and justice is clearly stated in royal inscription of Lipit-Ištar, a king of first dynasty of Isin (1936-26 BCE):

RIME 4 1.5.3[17]

(30) *i-nu-mi* (31) *ki-i-ta-am* (32) *i-na ma-at* (33) *Su-me-ri-im* (34) *u₃ A-ka₃-di₃-im* (35) *as-ku-nu-ni*

When I established justice in the land of Sumer and Akkad.

The connection of *kittu* with correctness is also clear in the context of divination. In the Old Babylonian *ikribu* prayers recited in preparation of the extispicy *kittu* indicates the correct verdict that the diviner asks Šamaš and Adad, the gods of divination, to place in the lamb he is sacrificing:[18]

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[16] Leichty 2011, 79-86.

[17] Frayne 1990, 49-51.

[18] On the *ikribu* prayers and more generally on the diviner's ritual see Starr 1983; see also Cohen 2020, 31-46.

AO 7031 = RA 38 86[19]

rev. (23') *i-na pu-ḫa-ad a-ka-ra-bu ki-ta-am šu-[uk-na]*

Place a correct verdict in the lamb I am offering.

AO 7032 = RA 38 87[20]

obv. (9) *i-na te-er-ti-i-šu i-na pu-[ḫa-a]d a-ka-ra-bu ki-ta-am šu-uk-nam*

In its extispicy, in the lamb I am offering, place a correct verdict.

YBC 5023[21]

obv. (12) *i-na ik-ri-ib a-ka-ra-bu i-na te-er-ti e-pu-šu*
(13) *ki-it-tam šu-uk-nam*

In the ritual I perform, in the extispicy I perform, put a correct verdict!

That in these cases *kittu* refers to the correctness of divine judgment is ensured by the legal metaphor used in extispicy rituals that were understood as court cases in which the client was considered the defendant and the gods acted as judges.[22] The gods were asked to render justice as mentioned in another Old Babylonian *ikribu* prayer which uses an expression similar to that found in the *Code of Hammurabi*:

HSM 7494[23]

(18) *li-iš-bu-ma da-a-a-nu i-lu-u₂ ra-bu-tim wa-ši-bu* GIŠ.GU.ZA-*a-at ḫu-ra-ṣi a-ki-lu pa-aš-šu-ur uq-ni-im ma-ḫa-ar-ka*
(19) *i-na ki-it-tim u₃ mi-ša-ri-im li-di-nu di-na-am u₄-ma-am di-in an-na-an-na ma-ri an-na-an-na di-na-a-ma*

Let the judges, the great gods, who sit on golden thrones, who eat at a table of lapis lazuli, sit before you.
Let them judge the case in righteousness and justice. Judge today the case of so-and-so, son of so-and-so.

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19 Nougayrol 1941; Starr 1983, 123-6.
20 Starr 1983, 122-3.
21 Goetze 1968, 25.
22 Cohen 2020, 35-9.
23 Starr 1983, 31, 38.

Kittu is also attested as a deified entity as daughter of Šamaš, the god of justice.[24] *Kittu* as a deity appears in incantations and prayers addressed to Šamaš, as well as in documents of legal nature where she acts as witness together with Šamaš. In Sumerian and bilingual texts as well as in divine lists the goddess' name is found as Niĝ₂-gi-na, which as said before means 'what is established, fixed', and as Niĝ₂-zi-da which means 'what is right'. Although this deity is usually understood as a personification of the concept of truth, a more nuanced reading would be righteousness as suggested by the Sumerian names especially because these were probably secondary translations. At any rate the interpretation of *Kittu* as the goddess of Truth can be retained with the caveat that she is not identified with an abstract idea of truth, but with truth meant as correctness and righteousness rendered in verdicts. The realm of this deity is justice as also strengthened by her pairing with her brother *Mīšarum*, who is the deification of justice.

In none of the examples discussed so far, *kittu* refers to an abstract or epistemological concept that can be compared to the concept of 'truth' as conformity to reality.

In addition to *la kittu*, the opposite of *kittu* is identified by the term *sartu* that is translated with 'lie, falsehood, treachery',[25] and is often coupled with *kittu* as in the following passage from the seventh tablet of the *Enūma eliš*:

(35) ᵈŠa₃-zu mu-de-e lib₃-bi ilāni ša₂ i-bar-ru-u kar-šu₂
(36) e-piš lem-ne₂-e-ti la u₂-še-ṣu-u₂ it-ti-šu₂
(37) mu-kin puḥri ša₂ ilāni mu-ṭib lib₃-bi-šu-un
(38) mu-kan-niš la ma-gi-ri ṣ[u-lu-u]l-šu-un ra-a-šu
(39) mu-še-šir kit-ti na-si-[ḫ] it-gu-ru da-ba-ba
(40) ša₂ sa-ar-ti u k[i-it]-tum um-tas-sa-a aš-ru-uš-šu

Šazu, who knew the heart of the gods, who saw the reins,
Who did not let an evil-doer escape from him,
Who established the assembly of the gods, who rejoiced their hearts,
Who subjugated the disobedient, he is the gods' encompassing protection.
He made *truth* to prosper, he uprooted perverse speech,
He separated *falsehood* from *truth*.[26]

Despite Lambert's translation of *kittu* with truth, the god's actions against evil-doers, disobedients and perverse people, show that this passage refers to correct and deceiving behaviors. This passage, including line 40 that opposes *sartu* and *kittu*, does not refer to epistemological concepts of truth and falsehood. This interpretation is

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24 Klein 1998-2001.

25 CAD S: 186.

26 Lambert 2013, 126-7.

further strengthened by the nature of the god Šazu who was the deified representation of river ordeal.[27] Thus, the legal and judicial context stands out once again.

That *sartu* was understood as the opposite of *kittu* in legal and juridical contexts is supported by lexical lists. In Old Babylonian bilingual Nigga,[28] the negative terms *nakāru* and *sartu* appear just before *kittu* and the words *kīnum* and *mīšarum*.

52.	[niĝ₂-kur₂] di	*na-ka-ru-[um]*	to be hostile
53.	[niĝ₂]-⌈lul⌉-la	*sa₃-a-⌈ar⌉-[tum]*	falsehood
54.	[niĝ₂]-⌈gi⌉-na	*ki-i-it-[tum]*	truth
55.	[niĝ₂]-zi	*ki-i-nu-[um]*	righteousness
56.	[niĝ₂-si]-sa₂	*mi-ša-ru-⌈um⌉*	justice[29]

We can therefore conclude that in all instances we have discussed so far, which are not exhaustive but highly significant, the term *kittu* and its opposites *sartu* and *la kittu* never identify epistemological concepts of truth and falsehood. If we want to retain the translation 'truth' we must be aware that *kittu* refers to what is fixed, and to correct, reliable and trustworthy declarations. This very meaning of *kittu* finds similarities in the concept of ἀλήθεια (*aletheia*) in archaic Greece. Both concepts seem to have no epistemological value. On the contrary, they appear to be tied to social interactions and communication.

3 Ἀλήθεια in Archaic Greece

In archaic Greece the ideas of and the words for 'truth' present us with a complex scenery, as we will see. The main Greek word for truth is ἀλήθεια (*aletheia*), but a simple translation with 'truth' would fail to express the significance of the original. Ἀλήθεια and its derivatives, at least in the first stages of Greek cultural history, have a quite different meaning, only partially overlapping with the dictionary entries recalled at the beginning of this paper. We will try to briefly recall what scholars have pointed out with regard to ἀλήθεια, without any pretense of exhaustivity – that would require an entire book – but in the hope of highlighting some fundamental aspects. Let us begin our journey towards ἀλήθεια.[30]

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27 Lambert 2013, 484.

28 Nigga is an acrographic list known in unilingual (i.e. Sumerian only) and bilingual (i.e. Sumerian and Akkadian) from the Old Babylonian period, see MSL 13, 91-2.

29 MSL 13, 116.

30 A good summary of the scholarly debate about ἀλήθεια in the archaic age is provided by Riu 2004, 64-8.

As Detienne and many others after him rightly observed in analyzing the archaic occurrences of the word, ἀλήθεια is originally what is authoritatively expressed by a 'master of truth' deriving his authority from divine forces.[31] Therefore, in an aural context such as that of archaic Greek culture often implying a specific occasion for every performance of a text, ἀλήθεια was not conceived as a mere conformity between something (thought or saying) and reality nor as reality itself. It was a conception intertwined with social functions such as authority, justice, poetic inspiration, praise, blame, persuasion and memory. In other words, ἀλήθεια was a concept working within the context of public speech. In this context the idea of ἀλήθεια does not match the definition of 'conforming to fact or reality'.

This is also clarified by the etymology of ἀλήθεια. There are two main schools on the matter:

1. Heidegger's 'objective' etymology: privative ἀ + ληθ (from λανθάνω) 'that which is not concealed' (the unconcealing nature of a thing lies in the thing itself);[32]
2. Snell's 'subjective' etymology: privative ἀ + λήθη 'that which does not undergo oblivion' (the 'unforgetfulness' of something lies in the remembering subject).[33]

As one can see, these etymologies, too, show that Greek ἀλήθεια is not primarily what conforms with reality. A few examples, already pointed out by scholars, can help with making this clearer. Let's read Hesiod's description of Nereus, the 'old man of the sea':[34]

Νηρέα δ' ἀψευδέα καὶ ἀληθέα γείνατο Πόντος
πρεσβύτατον παίδων· αὐτὰρ καλέουσι γέροντα,
οὕνεκα νημερτής τε καὶ ἤπιος, οὐδὲ θεμίστων
λήθεται, ἀλλὰ δίκαια καὶ ἤπια δήνεα οἶδεν·

Pontus begot Nereus, unerring and truthful, the oldest of his sons; they call him the Old Man, because he is infallible and gentle, and does not forget established customs but contrives just and gentle plans.[35]

It has been rightly pointed out that ἀψευδέα 'unerring' and ἀληθέα 'truthful' are not synonyms in this context. The description is based

31   See Detienne 1967.

32   See Heidegger 1927, 220-3. This etymology was actually already in Classen 1851, 197.

33   See Snell 1975. Cole 1983 attempts to reassess Snell's interpretation without undermining its core by placing ἀλήθεια within the frame of communication processes. It might be useful to point out that both λάνθανω and λήθη share the same root and their semantic fields are not completely segregated from each other.

34   Hes. *Theog.* 233-6.

35   Transl. G.W. Most.

on two positive poles: accuracy (expressed by the adjective νημερτής) which prevents from saying things erroneously – that is why Nereus is ἀψευδής 'unerring' – on the one hand and the memory which gives the authority to say ἀληθέα on the other. This means that Nereus says ἀληθέα because he does not forget (λήθεται) the θέμιστα ('established customs'), which implies that Nereus is ἀληθής not only because he says true things but also and especially because he does not let them fall into oblivion.[36]

Another clear example is Pindar:[37]

Τὸν Ὀλυμπιονίκαν ἀνάγνωτέ μοι
Ἀρχεστράτου παῖδα, πόθι φρενός
ἐμᾶς γέγραπται· γλυκὺ γὰρ αὐτῷ μέλος ὀφείλων
ἐπιλέλαθ'· ὦ Μοῖσ', ἀλλὰ σὺ καὶ θυγάτηρ
Ἀλάθεια Διός, ὀρθᾷ χερί
ἐρύκετον ψευδέων
ἐνιπὰν ἀλιτόξενον.
ἕκαθεν γὰρ ἐπελθὼν ὁ μέλλων χρόνος
ἐμὸν καταίσχυνε βαθὺ χρέος.
ὅμως δὲ λῦσαι δυνατὸς ὀξεῖαν ἐπιμομφὰν
τόκος †θνατῶν·

Read me the name of the Olympic victor,
the son of Archestratus, where it is written
in my mind, for I owe him a sweet song
and have forgotten. O Muse, but you and Zeus' daughter,
Truth, with a correcting hand
ward off from me the charge of harming a guest friend
with broken promises.
For what was then the future has approached from afar
and shamed my deep indebtedness.
Nevertheless, interest on a debt can absolve one from
a bitter reproach.[38]

Ἀλήθεια here is deeply connected with the Muses in that they can prevent oblivion and blame, opposed to memory and praise. Many other passages could be brought forth to underline these aspects of ἀλήθεια, which appears to be at the center of an intertwining of meanings resulting in a mismatch with the idea of 'truth' as conformity to reality.

In archaic Greece the communicative and social nature of ἀλήθεια, as well as its dependence on memory and authority, implies variability and also deception. This emerges clearly in the famous words of the Muses in Hesiod's poetic investiture:[39]

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36 See Riu 2019, 249.

37 Pind. *Ol.* 10.1-9.

38 Transl. W.H. Race.

39 Hes. *Theog.* 27-8.

ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.

We can say a lot of false things similar to genuine ones,
and, when we want, we can also celebrate true things.

This passage gives us the opportunity to address an important topic. Ἔτυμα and ἀληθέα are not synonyms in this passage. Apparently, in archaic Greece the only words referring to some sort of compliance with reality or fact – what we call factual truth or genuineness – seem to be ἔτυμος (and its derivative ἐτήτυμος) and ἐτεός, most notably all adjectives.[40] The ἀληθέα celebrated by the Muses are not subject to oblivion and are therefore unchangeable – they would otherwise be somehow forgotten – whereas the ἔτυμα, on the contrary, can undergo silence and be replaced by lies.[41] This might also explain why Stesichorus, in his famous *Palinode*, retracts his former poem about Helen by stating that it was not ἔτυμος:[42]

Οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος
οὐδ'ἔβας ἐν νηυσὶν εὐσέλμοις
οὐδ'ἵκεο Πέργαμα Τροίας.

This story is not genuine,
you did not go on well-benched ships
and you did not arrive to the citadel of Troy.

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40   See Krischer 1965; Riu 2019, 246: "C'est surtout ἀλήθεια et ses dérivés et ἔτυμον avec ses variantes (ἐτήτυμον, ἐτεός) qui posent problème. Selon le contexte, en effet, on peut choisir de les comprendre comme, respectivement, 'vrai' et 'réel', ou bien 'inoubliable' (ou 'qui n'est pas à oublier', ou 'à passer sous silence', ou 'à laisser inaperçu') pour l'un; et 'factuellement vrai' pour l'autre. Globalement, je dirais qu'il y a un consensus assez général pour considérer que ἐτεός et ἐτήτυμος font référence à la réalité, aux faits, tandis que ἀληθής est un fait de langue, de parole: c'est quelque chose qui est dit". Sometimes the feminine form of the adjective ἐτεός (ἐτεή) is used as a noun adjective, much attested in Democritus, but it consistently appears to mean 'reality' rather than 'truth' and is almost exclusively used adverbially: ἐτεῆ 'in reality'. The abstract noun ἐτητυμία is not attested in the archaic and classical ages, since its first occurrence is in Callimachus (*Aet.* 75-6).

41   See Riu 2019, 248: "on croit habituellement que ἔτυμος signifie ce qui est 'vrai' en entendant par là ce qui est 'réel', tandis que ἀληθής signifierait simplement 'vrai', conduisant certains commentateurs à ne plus les distinguer l'un de l'autre: 'nous savon dire beaucoup des mensonges semblables à des réalités, mais nous savons, quand nous voulons, faire entendre des vérités', où 'vérités' n'est en fait qu'une variatio par rapport à 'réalités'. Pourtant, ici du moins, ἔτυμα et ἀληθέα ne sont certainement pas des synonymes, même s'ils ont, tous les deux, affaire à la vérité. Il y a au moins un aspect sous lequel les deux mots sont différents: les ἔτυμα peuvent être oubliés ou passés sous silence, remplacés par des mensonges, mais pas les ἀληθέα, comme leur nom même l'indique".

42   Fr. 91a Davies-Finglass.

Most notably, Stesichorus does not use the adjective ἀληθής, perhaps because he is retracting the story of Helen, but not questioning his own poetic authority – it may be added that the very fact that he mentions his former poem somehow saves it from oblivion (λήθη). Be it as it may, there seems to be no noun to refer uniquely to any sort of conformity with reality or fact in archaic Greece until its last phases. Until then, truth does not seem to be an *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. Still, at a certain stage of Greek cultural history, things will start to change. Before discussing these developments, however, let us look at the Mesopotamian conception of knowledge. This will help us in outlining some crucial differences between Mesopotamia and Greece.

4 Knowledge in Mesopotamia

Akkadian and Sumerian as well as the whole Mesopotamian scholarly tradition seem to lack a mutually exclusive opposition between true and false. This absence is associated with the nature of knowledge in Mesopotamia which is fundamentally cumulative. As for cumulative we maintain that the addition of new elements does not cause the exclusion of the former and does not lead to contradiction. For Babylonians knowledge is singling out meanings, reaching a more detailed level of precision; for them it was the exact opposite: expanding the meaning of words and adding new meanings. The cumulative nature of Mesopotamian knowledge rests on the concept that words have deep and hidden meanings that must be found; by principles of analogical associations the meaning of a word can be expanded to find new meanings that can be completely unrelated to the original one.[43] As aptly argued by Cavigneaux the Babylonian scholars had no theory according to which each translation corresponded to a phonetic or written contrast.[44] The cumulative nature of knowledge can be found in many aspects of cuneiform scholarship, especially in lexical lists.[45] In particular, first millennium lexical lists tend to increase the number

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[43] Maul 1999, 13-14.

[44] Cavigneaux 1976, 69.

[45] Van de Mieroop 2015, 71-2 see also 82-3. Lexical lists are among the earliest cuneiform texts; the earliest forms were simply lists of Sumerian words but later developed in complex structures with multilingual entries similar to vocabularies; the typical form consists of a sumerian sign, its reading and one or more Akkadian translations. Lexical lists were at the core of the scribal curriculum and were used for three millennia in school to learn cuneiform writing. Lexical lists may concern different subjects (e.g. professions, realia, naturalia, body parts) and were arranged according to different principles, mainly thematic or acrographic; for an introduction to lexical lists see Cavigneaux 1980-83.

of Akkadian translations for a single Sumerian sign.[46] The Akkadian translations only partially correspond to the Sumerian sign and draw on various principles of association to expand and create new meanings.[47] Quite interestingly, these new meanings may include antonyms. One of the most extreme cases is that of the sign bar in the lexical list Aa, which receives probably nearly two hundred Akkadian translations.[48]

The same lexical list provides other examples of the accumulation of meanings:[49]

SILA$_3$	$q\hat{u}$	$q\hat{u}$ (a capacity measure)
	$sul\hat{u}$	street
	$s\bar{u}qu$	street
	$hup\hat{u}$	one-half (of a $q\hat{u}$)
	$hep\hat{u}$	to split
	$mindatu$	measure
	$m\bar{\imath}\check{s}ertu$	standard $q\hat{u}$-measure
	$sil\bar{\imath}tu$	afterbirth
	$\bar{\imath}pu$	membrane, afterbirth

The basic meaning of the sign SILA$_3$ is a unit of measurement. The Akkadian words $q\hat{u}$, $mindatu$, $m\bar{\imath}\check{s}ertu$ are traditionally associated with the sign SILA$_3$[50] and are all related to measures. The Akkadian correspondences are expanded to a close semantic field, that of dividing into units, with $hup\hat{u}$, 'one-half' and $hep\hat{u}$, 'to split'. The translations $sul\hat{u}$ and $s\bar{u}qu$, which mean 'street', are clear examples of cumulative knowledge: the Sumerian word sila$_3$ is expanded to include the meaning of its homophone sign sila which means 'street'. The most common Sumerian word for womb, membrane and afterbirth is arḫuš (occasionally with reading uš$_3$); there is however a quite rare word (a)-sila$_3$-ĝar-(ra)[51] which has this very meaning and it is written with the sign SILA$_3$. In our lexical list this meaning is attributed to the sign SILA$_3$ only, and therefore translated with $sil\bar{\imath}tu$ and $\bar{\imath}pu$.

Another example from the same lexical list is the sign MUL that has the basic meaning 'star':[52]

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46 Texts tended to grow by imitating former models rather than replacing older traditions, see Van de Mieroop 2015, 192-3.

47 Cavigneaux 1976, 107.

48 MSL 14, 163.

49 Aa I/6 20-8. MSL 14, 225-6.

50 They are already attested in Proto Aa.

51 See http://oracc.org/epsd2/o0024513; Attinger 2021, 117; Cohen 2023, 112.

52 Aa II/6 25-44. MSL 14, 291-2.

MUL	*kakkabu*	star
	zappu	Pleiades
	šiṭru	writing
	šiṭirtu	writing, document
	nabāṭu	to shine
	napāḫu	to light up
	namāru	to be bright
	banû	well-formed, perfect
	kunnû	to honor, honored
	zuʾunu	decorated
	papallu	offspring
	bibbu	planet
	mulmullu	arrow
	amartu	dividing wall
	bīʾu	drainage opening (in a wall)
	šēpu	foot
	šēnu	shoes
	banû	well-formed, perfect
	banû ša šitirṭu	well-formed, perfect (said of) writing
	awīlu EME.SAL	man

Some Akkadian correspondences such as *nabāṭu, napāḫu* and *namāru*, are related to the basic meaning or are connected to a typical feature of stars, that of being bright. The basic meaning star, Akkadian *kakkabu* attracts *zappu*, 'Pleiades' and *bibbu* 'planet', that are not exactly synonyms. The Akkadian *šiṭru* and *šiṭirtu* 'writing' are traditionally related to the role of heavenly bodies as divine writing, *šiṭir šamê*.[53] The term *banû* means 'to be well-formed, perfect' and is usually associated with gods. We can surmise that *banû* is associated with MUL for the natural connection between stars and gods. This term attracts *kunnû* 'to honor or honored', that is also used for gods and in other parts of the same lexical list appears with *bunnû*, which is a derivative of *banû* and means 'to adorn'.[54] The word for 'shoes', Akkadian *šēnu*, is totally unrelated to a star but in Sumerian it is indeed written with the sign MUL but with reading suhub₂. This list conflates two different readings of the same sign in one single entry. Most likely the word *šēpu* 'foot' is attracted by *šēnu*:

MUL	(suḫub₂)	=	*šēnu*	>>	*šēpu*
	shoes		shoes		foot

53   For an introduction to celestial divination see Rochberg 2004 and Van de Mieroop 2015, 87-94 with previous bibliography.

54   See CAD K: 540.

The translation *awīlu*, 'man', is totally unrelated to the meaning of the sign MUL but the Emesal[55] word for 'man', *mulu*, is phonetically close to the reading mul.

Lexical lists even provide antonymic translations. In the list IZI the two opposite directions of movement, coming close and moving away, are associated with the same Sumerian verbal root that originally had only the meaning of 'to be near, to approach'.[56]

95.	[TE]	ne_2-su-$\lceil u_2 \rceil$	to be distant
96.	[TE]	*du-up-pu-rum*	to move away
97.	TE	*sa-na-qu*	to approach
98.	TE	*ṭe-ḫu-um*	to approach

Behind the antonymic translation there is possibly a graphic principle: the sign KAR which means 'to leave' is a compound sign written TE.A.[57] Therefore a synecdochic (or abbreviated)[58] equation TE.A: TE results in an antonymic association, although neither *nesû* nor *duppuru* are known to translate KAR.[59]

In the Old Babylonian IZI the sign til, which means 'to complete, to be completed' is glossed with *laqātu*, 'to gather'; this equation derives from the reading of til as the same sign as bad, meaning 'to be distant' which has a semantic contrast to *laqātu*.[60]

Two other examples may be quoted. The first is from a manuscript from Ugarit of the lexical list Sa (Ugaritica V 133 = RS 23.493A)[61] in which the sign BAD is translated both with *mūtu* 'death' – the regular translation – and with *balāṭu* 'to live'.

r 8'	DIŠ	BAD	ba-$\lceil la \rceil$-[ṭu]	to live
r 9'	DIŠ	BAD	$\lceil ga$-$ma \rceil$-[ru]	to complete
r 10'	DIŠ	BAD	la-$\lceil x \rceil$ [...]	
r 11'	[DIŠ]	BAD	mu-$\lceil tum \rceil$	death

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55 Emesal is a sociolectic variant of Sumerian which was spoken by women in literary texts and used in rituals, see Garcia-Ventura 2017.

56 Cavigneaux 1976, 109-10; MSL 13, 187; the same entries are found in Aa VIII/1, MSL 14, 494. The verb te/teĝ₃ is translated with *nesû* and *duppuru* also in CUSAS 12, 7.1 A 4: 32-3 (MS 4135), te-ba = *i-si₂* (be distant!) // te-ba = *du-up-pi-ir* (move away!).

57 Veldhuis 2018, 190.

58 For abbreviated Sumerian signs in lexical list see Crisostomo 2019, 156-7.

59 Cf. CAD D s.v. "duppuru", lexical section, and CAD N/2 s.v. "nesû", lexical section.

60 Crisostomo 2019, 163.

61 Nougayrol 1968, 236-7.

This equation is based on a series of analogical reasonings: the sign BAD with reading $uš_2$ means 'to die, death' in Akkadian *mâtu*, *mūtu*, and with reading til means 'to (be) complete(d)', Akkadian *gamāru*. By playing with the reading til which is homophonic to the reading til_3 of the sign TI which means 'to live' the list gives an antonymic translation *balāṭu* 'to live'.

The second example is taken from an Old Babylonian bilingual lexical list in which the sign SIG_7 meaning 'good', Akkadian *banûm*, *damqum*, is also translated with its opposite, *la banûm* 'not good'.

r i 14	se₂-e	SIG₇		ba-nu-˹u₂˺-[um]	good
r i 15			SIG₇	da-˹am˺-[qum]	good
r i 16				wa-˹ar˺-qu₂-˹um˺	green
r i 17			SIG₇	ra-aṭ-bu-˹um˺	fresh
r i 18			SIG₇	la ba-nu-um	not good[62]

The foregoing examples showed that knowledge in Mesopotamia developed through the accumulation of elements rather than through their selection. As [the author] already argued, the cumulative knowledge typical of Mesopotamian scholarship finds similarities in Heraclitus' philosophy.

5 Mesopotamia and Heraclitus

In Mesopotamia the highest form of knowledge was finding the hidden meaning of signs and words which was arrived at through analogical reasoning.[63] In Babylonian hermeneutics knowledge unfolds through the search of underlying and hidden connections. A passage of the Examenstext A[64] possibly specifically refers to this process as the way to reach hidden meanings:

eme-gi₇ a-na i₃-zu niĝ₂-dul₃-bi ur₅-ra bur-ra i-zu-u
ina šu-me-ri ma-la ta-ḫu-zu ka-tim-ta-šu₂ ki-a-am še-ṭ[a-a t]i-de-e

(The teacher to the student): "Do you know how 'to spread out' in the same way, the secrets of Sumerian you have learned?"

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62 Klein, Sefati 2020, 93.

63 Bottéro 1977, 19-27; Cavigneaux 1987, 245, 247-52; Seminara 2001, 422-4, 430-51.

64 The Examentext A is a Sumero-Akkadian dialogue about school from the first millennium, Sjöberg 1975.

It is likely that 'to spread out' refers to the required ability of the student to expand knowledge by finding hidden meanings.[65]

Similarly, in Heraclitus the *logos* had hidden meanings as stated in the fragment D 50 (B 54)[66] which points to the unseen connection of opposites.[67]

Ἁρμονίη ἀφανὴς φανερῆς κρείσσων.

An unapparent connection is stronger than an apparent.

Understanding the logos was reserved to wise people; those unable to understand the logos were ἀξύνετοι (D 1 = B 1), 'uncomprehending' namely unable to put things together and find connections between things.[68] In Heraclitus word-plays and analogical reasoning or to use Charles Kahn's terminology 'linguistic density'[69] were heuristic tools to find the hidden meanings of words. Knowledge for Heraclitus derives from finding the hidden and underlying connections as clear from fragment D 47 (B 10).

Συνάψιες ὅλα καὶ οὐχ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον καὶ διαφερόμενον, συνᾷδον διᾷδον, καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα.

Conjoinings: wholes and not wholes, converging and diverging, harmonious dissonant; and out of all things one, and out of one all things.

Another similarity is that knowledge is produced by the conflation of elements rather than by singling out elements. Heraclitus was working with lists of opposites as we can see in the fragment D 48 (B 67) where god is defined:

ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμὼν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός.

God: day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger.

We may recall here Jonathan Barnes' words:

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65 Frahm 2011, 75-6.

66 We refer to the fragments of the early Greek philosophers according to the numbering of the edition of Laks and Most (D); in parentheses we recall the numbering of Diels and Kranz's edition (B). Translations of Heraclitus' fragments follow Laks and Most 2016a.

67 See also Kahn 1979, 202-4.

68 Nussbaum 1972, 11; Gianvittorio 2010, 237-9.

69 Kahn 1979, 89-95.

[Heraclitus] was working with a fairly loose, intuitive notion of what 'opposites' were; he would, I imagine, have presented a list, not a definition, if asked to explain himself: wet, dry; up, down; straight, crooked; sweet, sour; hot, cold; male, female; and so on. The list would no doubt be long, and its items would, to our eyes, be logically diverse: some pairs seem logical contraries; some express physically incompatible properties; some are elliptically expressed relations between which no true incompatibility exists in the form of a list.[70]

The similarity of the concept of knowledge in Mesopotamian scholarship and Heraclitus' philosophy is underpinned by a further point of contact, which is given by similar ideas of harmony. In Heraclitus harmony ensues from the tension of opposites as stated in one of his most famous fragments (D 49 = B 51):

οὐ ξυνιᾶσιν ὅκως διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῷ ὁμολογέει·
παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης.

They do not comprehend how, diverging, it accords with itself: a backward-turning fitting together (ἁρμονίη) as of a bow and a lyre.

The ἁρμονίη is given by the tension between the string stretched in the direction opposite to the armed-body of a bow or lyre. The connection or ἁρμονίη reconciles the conflict in the unity of the single parts where the opposites are identified in one single whole.[71] The above quoted fragment D 47 expresses this very concept in a more abstract way.

The idea of harmony is self-evident in Babylonian scholarship: for instance the long lists of Akkadian translations we have discussed above are reconciled in one single Sumerian sign. As recognized by many scholars the Babylonian world view was built upon binary oppositions[72] of complementary parts. A harmonic relation of counterparts is expressed by the principle of correspondence between Sumerian and Akkadian: although they were two separate languages, for Babylonians what was expressed in one language corresponded in the other.[73] This principle clearly stands out in the expression used for the two languages: *lišān miṯḫurti*, literally 'languages of the meeting each other'. In Sumerian this expression corresponds to eme ḫa-mun which appears in Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta (l. 142) referring to Sumerian and Akkadian.[74]

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70 Barnes 1979, 80.

71 Kahn 1979, 195-200, in particular, "[t]he concept of *harmoniē* as a unity composed of conflicting parts is thus the model for an understanding of the world ordering as a unified whole" (200); see also Kahn 1979, 150-1.

72 Van de Mieroop 2015, 124; Rochberg 2019, 263-6.

73 For the principle of correspondence see Seminara 2001, 460-6.

74 Vanstiphout 2003, 64-5.

Babylonian scholarship was pervaded by the attempt to find correspondences in the whole world: in lexical lists between Sumerian and Akkadian words; in divine lists between Sumerian and Akkadian gods; in divination between macrocosm and microcosm; in the debate poems between entities such as Summer and Winter or Sheep and Grain;[75] in cosmology with the unity and opposition of the pair Heaven and Earth and even in historiography between Assyrian and Babylonian kings.[76] Correspondences can also be found between deities and phenomena, between parts of the liver and deities or months and zodiac signs.[77] The words *miṭḫurtu* and *ḫa-mun* indicate symmetry/counterpart and mean something like 'harmony (of opposites)'. As argued by Rochberg[78] the concept of the harmony of opposites is also expressed graphically because *ḫa-mun* has a rare writing NAGA.NAGA where the second NAGA is written upside down ▒◁▒.[79]

We can conclude that although the object of knowledge was different in Mesopotamia and Heraclitus, the cuneiform system and the *logos* respectively, the epistemological approach was similar.[80] Both Mesopotamia and archaic Greece seem to lack a purely epistemological and ontological concept of truth implying the principle of noncontradiction. In Mesopotamian scholarship and Heraclitus' philosophy knowledge does not unfold through selection and rejection of propositions but through the harmonic unity of elements that can be opposite and yet do not exclude each other.

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75 Note that debate poems may end with a reconciliation between the contenders, Vanstiphout 1990, 284-6.

76 See Seminara 2001, 463.

77 See Rochberg 2019, 266.

78 Rochberg 2019, 266.

79 CUSAS 12, 1.1.2: 231, ḫa-mun NAGA.NAGA-inv. ⸢*mi*⸣-*it-ḫa-ar-tum*. Note that the sign NAGA is used to write the name of Nisaba the goddess of writing; thus one may speculate that harmony is also expressed theologically.

80 Viano 2021, 240.

6 The Development of Ἀλήθεια Towards an Epistemological and Ontological Concept of Truth

So far, we have detected contact points between the Mesopotamian idea of *kittu* and the archaic Greek conception of ἀλήθεια as well as the absence of a clear principle of noncontradiction in both contexts. Let us now see how the idea of ἀλήθεια began to change at the end of the archaic age.

In his seminal essay Detienne identified two main development lines for this period: a philosophical one and a rhetorical one. The philosophical line moved towards a rationalization of ἀλήθεια in terms of what uncontradictorily corresponds with reality and also the criterion itself to establish this correspondence. The rhetorical line, on the contrary, focused on the communicative aspects of ἀλήθεια and persuasion techniques, implying relativism and the idea that truth is what is perceived as such without necessarily adhering to reality or fact.

The archaic author who most of all presents us with an emerging distinction of these two intellectual paths is Parmenides, who also builds the foundation of the philosophical line. Parmenides is a philosopher, but expresses his thought in verse and presents himself as an inspired 'master of truth' in his poem,[81] where he is instructed by a goddess about the way of truth (ἀλήθεια):[82]

> χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι
> ἠμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ
> ἠδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής.
> ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα
> χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.
>
> It is necessary that you learn everything,
> Both the unshakeable heart of well-convincing truth
> And the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true belief.
> But nonetheless you will learn this too: how opinions
> Would have to be acceptable, forever penetrating all things (?)

This truth is for the first time both an ontological and epistemological one and is deeply rooted in the relation between the thinking subject and reality:[83]

> εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσας,
> αἵπερ ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι·

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81 See Pòrtulas 2019.

82 D 4, 28-32 = B 1, 28-32. Text and translation of Parmenides' fragments are those provided by Laks-Most 2016b.

83 D 6 = B 2-3.

ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,
πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος (ἀληθείῃ γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ),
ἡ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεών ἐστι μὴ εἶναι,
τὴν δή τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἔμμεν ἀταρπόν·
οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἐὸν (οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν)
οὔτε φράσαις. τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι.

<div align="right">5</div>

Well then, as for me, I shall say – and as for you, have a care for this dis
<div align="right">course when you have heard it –</div>
What are the only roads of investigation for thought [*noêsai*]:
The one, that 'is', and that it is not possible that 'is not',
Is the path of conviction, for it accompanies truth;
The other, that 'is not', and that it is necessary that 'is not' –
I show you that it is a path that cannot be inquired into at all.
For you could not know that which is not (for this is impracticable)
Nor could you show it. For it is the same, to think [*noein*] and also to be.

The ontological and epistemological nature of Parmenidean truth im-
plies the idea of truth as a complete, understandable, and communi-
cable correspondence with reality, i.e. with 'being':[84]

<div align="center">ἡ δὲ κρίσις περὶ τούτων ἐν τῷδ' ἔστιν·</div>
ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν· κέκριται δ' οὖν, ὥσπερ ἀνάγκη,
τὴν μὲν ἐᾶν ἀνόητον ἀνώνυμον (οὐ γὰρ ἀληθής
ἔστιν ὁδός), τὴν δ' ὥστε πέλειν καὶ ἐτήτυμον εἶναι.[85]

The decision [*krisis*] on these matters depends upon this:
'Is' or 'is not'? Well, it has been decided, as is necessary,
To abandon the one [*scil.* road] as unthinkable, unnameable (for it is not
The true road), and [*scil.* deciding] thereby that the other, by consequence,
<div align="right">exists and is real.</div>

We can see how ἀληθής and ἐτήτυμον (see section 3) are here con-
flated together. The only ἀληθής road is the one implying genuine ex-
istence (τὴν δ' ὥστε πέλειν καὶ ἐτήτυμον εἶναι). Ἀλήθεια is something
that exists and that exists genuinely. In other words it is 'being that
completely corresponds with reality' or better 'being that coincides
with reality'[86] or even better and most simply 'being'.

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84 D 8, 20-3 = B 8, 15-18.

85 Author's emphasis.

86 McKirahan 2009 always translates ἀλήθεια with 'reality': "P. uses the word ἀληθείη
['reality'] thrice in the extant fragments [...]; in each case the context shows that it de-
notes not truth as an attribute of thought or language but objective reality, as often in
Plato" (282). We must recall, however, that Parmenides holds thought and being to be
the same thing; see above fr. D 6, 8 (B 3) τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι.

Truth is 'being' an – which is relevant for the purposes of our paper – does not allow contradiction:[87]

χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐὸν ἔμμεναι· ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι·
μηδὲν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν· τά γ᾿ ἐγὼ φράζεσθαι ἄνωγα.
πρώτης γάρ σ᾿ ἀφ᾿ ὁδοῦ ταύτης διζήσιος <εἴργω>,
αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ᾿ ἀπὸ τῆς, ἣν δὴ βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδέν
πλάττονται, δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν   5
στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλαγκτὸν νόον· οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται
κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοί τε, τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φῦλα,
οἷς τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταὐτὸν νενόμισται
κοὐ ταὐτόν, πάντων δὲ παλίντροπός ἐστι κέλευθος.

It is necessary to say and to think that this is being; for it is possible that it is,
While nothing is not: that is exactly what I bid you to meditate.
For such is the first road of investigation from which <I keep> you <away>,
But then also from this one, which mortals who know nothing
Invent (*plattontai*), two-headed [*scil.* creatures]! For the helplessness in their
Breast directs their wandering (*plankton*) thought; and they are borne along,
Deaf and likewise blind, stupefied, tribes undecided [or: without judgment],
Who suppose that 'this is and is not' [or: that to be and not to be] is the same
And not the same, and that of all things [or: for all] the path is backward-turning.

The Parmenidean being dissolves all oppositions and contradictions in itself. There are no opposites as such, inasmuch only 'what is' is while 'what is not' is not.[88] The principle of noncontradiction emerges for the first time in the extant fragments of Parmenides and is at the core of his ontology.[89]

As we recalled above, Detienne identified another development line of the meaning of ἀλήθεια, namely the rhetorical-sophistic one. It is not surprising that the most extreme representative of this development line overtly challenges Parmenides. Gorgias of Leontini tried to disprove Parmenides in his *On Nature or On Non Existence*, where he demonstrates that:

1. Nothing exists.
2. Even if something exists, it is not knowable.
3. Even if it is knowable, knowledge about it is incommunicable.
4. Even if it is communicable, it cannot be understood.

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87 D 7 = B 6.

88 Parmenides fr. D 7 (B 6) has often been read as a critique of Heraclitus. I do not think it is necessary to read any reference to Heraclitus in this fragment, but it is nonetheless clear that Heraclitus' thought is incompatible with that of Parmenides as expressed here.

89 For a brief history of the principle of noncontradiction in Greek philosophy from Parmenides to Aristotle, see Thom 1999.

This appears to be more than a mere rhetorical exercise. This work has often – and we think rightly – been read as the first philosophical manifesto of nihilism. In this view, there is no place for truth meant as the uncontradictory correspondence with reality, let alone for Parmenidean 'being'. The road is open to Sophistic, which has now its philosophical legitimization: there are no true or false discourses, only more or less persuasive ones.[90] This implies a substantial lack of the principle of noncontradiction, which provides a contact point with Heraclitus. It is not surprising therefore that Parmenides is the object of such a philosophical challenge on Gorgia's part.

In his intellectual struggle against the Sophists, Plato will definitely place himself on the 'philosophical' development line – and it may be clear at this point that by 'philosophical' we now mean 'uncontradictory' or 'not allowing contradiction'. In Plato's thought ἀλήθεια will be conceived both at a logical and ontological level, as we will see. Plato knew his rivals well and was well aware of the bond between truth and performance and that at his time ἀλήθεια was still entangled with the ideas of authority and persuasion as well as with the related social functions. In the second book of his *Republic* (376b) he offers a clear example of this. In this book the debate is about education. In discussing what sort of tales and myths children should be taught, a distinction is proposed between true and false ones (377a). Only true ones are allowed in the Platonic city. Needless to say, in Plato's view truth and good are inseparable and true tales and myths are, for instance, those which represent divinity in a noble light, whereas false ones depict the gods in an unflattering way (we must not forget that Plato's discourse here is about education). In this discussion truth is still bound to its occasion and to authority (i.e. that of teachers and the State), but the poles are now inverted: a thing is taught because it is true; a thing is not true only because it is expressed authoritatively. In other words, there is one and only truth and that is what should be taught authoritatively. On this basis, there is almost no place for creativity and that is why Plato ends with banishing almost all kinds of poetry from his ideal city.[91] For Plato there is only one truth. But what is this truth? We find a definition in the *Sophist*, a dialogue whose characters are Theaetetus and, most notably, the "stranger from Elea". At a certain point, the stranger presents Theaetetus with two different statements – a) Theaetetus sits; b) Theaetetus flies – and then discusses them with him (263b)

90　Other sophists explicitly engaged with the conception of truth. We may recall Protagora's *Truth* and Antiphon's treatise of the same name. Truth is conceived in relativistic terms by the first, as plural and ambivalent by the latter (see Gagarin 1991).

91　Aristotle, though conceiving truth in terms similar to Plato's, will separate poetry and philosophy more neatly, applying the criterion of truth only to the latter. See Riu 2004, 76-82.

{ΞΕ.} Τούτων δὴ ποῖόν τινα ἑκάτερον φατέον εἶναι;
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Τὸν μὲν ψευδῆ που, τὸν δὲ ἀληθῆ.
{ΞΕ.} Λέγει δὲ αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν ἀληθὴς τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ.
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Τί μήν;
{ΞΕ.} Ὁ δὲ δὴ ψευδὴς ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων.
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Ναί.
{ΞΕ.} Τὰ μὴ ὄντ' ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει.
{ΘΕΑΙ.} Σχεδόν.

STR. Now what quality shall be ascribed to each of these sentences?
THEAET. One is false, I suppose, the other true.
STR. The true one states facts as they are about you.
THEAET. Certainly.
STR. And the false one states things that are other than the facts.
THEAET. Yes.
STR. In other words, it speaks of things that are not as if they were.
THEAET. Yes, that is pretty much what it does.[92]

Truth is here conceived as some kind of relation between thought or saying and reality.[93] Such an unambiguous relation seems to exclude contradiction. It is not surprising, therefore, that Plato formulates elsewhere – again in the *Republic* – his own definition of the principle of noncontradiction much more explicitly than Parmenides:[94]

Δῆλον ὅτι ταὐτὸν τἀναντία ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταὐτόν γε καὶ πρὸς ταὐτὸν οὐκ ἐθελήσει ἅμα.

It is clear that the same faculty cannot do opposite things nor experience them in the same respect and in relation to the same part all at the same time.[95]

As we can see, Plato conceives truth both at an ontological and at a logical level, as it was in Parmenides.[96] There is an intellectual route starting from Parmenides on which we find Plato and others after him: on this line ἀλήθεια gradually gains a strictly epistemological and ontological meaning. In this regard, we cannot omit Aristotle, whose formulations of the principle of noncontradiction are equally canonical:[97]

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92   Transl. H.N. Fowler.

93   The nature of this relation is a much debated issue. The traditional view is that Plato conceives this relation as correspondence; see Cornford 1935, 309-11. This view has its critics; see Hestir 2003 with further bibliography. For a brief history of the 'correspondence theory of truth' see Long 2011, 21-48; Marian 2022. On truth and falsehood in Plato's *Sophist*, see Crivelli 2012.

94   Pl. *Resp.* 4.436b.

95   Transl. C. Hemlin-Jones, W. Preddy.

96   On this twofold nature of Platonic truth, see Centrone 2014.

97   Arist. *Metaph.* 4.1005b.19-20.

τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ ἅμα ὑπάρχειν τε καὶ μὴ ὑπάρχειν ἀδύνατον τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ
τὸ αὐτό (καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα προσδιορισαίμεθ' ἄν, ἔστω προσδιωρισμένα πρὸς
τὰς λογικὰς δυσχερείας).

"It is impossible for the same attribute at once to belong and not to be-
long to the same thing and in the same relation"; and we must add any
further qualifications that may be necessary to meet logical objections.[98]

Closing the loop, let us now see how Aristotle offers a clear definition
of true and false in terms matching those which opened this paper:[99]

τὸ μὲν γὰρ λέγειν τὸ ὂν μὴ εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ ὂν εἶναι ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ τὸ ὂν εἶναι καὶ
τὸ μὴ ὂν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές.

To say that what is is not, or that what is not is, is false,
whereas to say that what is is, and that what is not is not, is true.

We may hear formal echoes of Parmenides here, which after all is
not surprising. Truth has completely become an *adaequatio rei et in-
tellectus* which does not allow contradiction.

7 Conclusions

In this paper we have argued that in Mesopotamian scholarship there
is no evidence for a clear concept of truth as conformity to 'what is'
as opposed to falsehood as a lack of such a conformity. Similarly, we
have seen that in archaic Greece ἀλήθεια does not uniquely refer to
a conformity to 'what is'. The absence of the principle of noncontra-
diction in Mesopotamia and archaic Greece leads to striking similar-
ities in the way knowledge is produced in Mesopotamian scholarship
and in Heraclitus' philosophy. In both cases knowledge derives from
the harmonic conflation or unity of opposite elements. While Mes-
opotamian scholarship never developed the principle of noncontra-
diction or the ontological concept of truth, with Parmenides Greek
philosophy did so. Parmenides' separation between truth and false-
hood, being and not-being, will be developed by Plato and Aristotle
in strictly epistemological and ontological terms.

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98 Translations from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* are by H. Tredennick.

99 Arist. *Metaph*. 4.1011b.26-7.

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