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4. The description seems to take place against the background of the *Theogony*; for it originates in “the dreadful house of black-robed Night”, and leads upward into the light, high into the upper air where stands the gates of night and day described by Hesiod.
5. Considered as the organ of taste not of speech.
6. Joseph Owen states: “Fr. 3 is open grammatically to the translation: “For it is the same thing to think and to be” or “For thinking and being are identical”. Undoubtedly knowledge as well as anything else turns out to be identical with being in Parmenides’ Way of Truth, and knowledge in a special way exhibits the same characteristics as being; but in the context at this stage of the reasoning, his point is merely that one cannot think except in terms of being because only what can be can be thought of.” (1959, p.61).
7. To be compared with the views of such philosophers as Avicenna, St. Thomas Aquinas and Thomas Hobbes, among others.
8. “Fr. 2: Since, then, it did not come into being, it is now, always was and always will be, without either beginning or end, but infinite. For if it had come into being, it would have a beginning (for it would at some time have begun coming into being) and an end (for it would at some time have stopped coming into being); but since it neither began nor ended, it always was and always shall be, without either beginning or end; for it is possible for anything to exist for ever unless it all exists.  
Fr. 3: But just as it exists for ever, so too it must for ever be infinite in magnitude.  
Fr. 4: Nothing that has a beginning and an end is either eternal or infinite.  
Fr. 5: If it were not one, it would be bounded by something else.  
Fr. 6: For if it were <infinite>, it would be one; for if it were two, the two could not be infinite, but would be limited by one another.”  
From *The Presocratic Philosophers: Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.299.
9. The original German runs as follow: "Diese wenigen Worte stehen da wie griechische Standbilder der Frühzeit. Was wir vom Lehrgedicht des Parmenides noch besitzen, geht in ein dünnes Heft zusammen, das freilich ganze Bibliotheken philosophischer Literatur in der vermeintlichen Notwendigkeit ihrer Existenz widerlegt. Wer die Maßstäbe solchen denkenden Sagens kennt, muß als Heutiger alle Lust verlieren, Bücher zu schreiben.", *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Martin Heidegger, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, ss. 73-74.
10. For example Fr. 3: (to gar auto noein estin te kai einai)  
is cited in the following books and their French and English Translations:
  1. (1980) *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main, 6. Auflage.  
[French translation: *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*, traduit par Wolfgang Brokmaier, Paris, Editions Gallimard, p. 118.]
  2. (1954) *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Moira (Parmenides, VIII, 34-41), Pfullingen.

perfectly well replace whole libraries of supposedly indispensable philosophical literature. Any one living today who knows the measure of such thinking discourse must lose all desire to write books. (ibid)<sup>9</sup>

Among the remaining fragments, Heidegger seems to be especially interested about Fragment 3, 6 and 8, discussed dispersedly throughout his works.<sup>10</sup> But it seems to be that his first approach may be regarded to be that of describing how Being is concealed more in [lethe] that is later revealed in [aletheia] in his first essay on Anaximander's Fragment:

As it reveals itself in beings, Being withdraws (1975, p.26)

In the same essay, he goes on to discuss the ontological difference and how this concealment of Being has occurred in Western Philosophy. This state of forgetfulness about the distinction, with which the destiny of Being in the history of the Western world begins, may very well be called the history of Metaphysics or the story of metaphysical thinking, i.e. the rendering of Being into beings, in order to become the subject matter of philosophical speculations.<sup>11</sup> In other words, what now the modern man considers "is" to stand for, can very well be regarded to be in the shadow of the already forgone destiny of Being's oblivion.

### Endnotes

1. Though there are various rendering of Parmenides' Poem into English, I have benefited mostly from the scholarly work of Leonardo Taran (1965), although three other translations have also been consulted: *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Kathleen Freeman, Oxford, 1948; Chapter I (*Parmenides' Way of Truth*) of *Plato and Parmenides*, Francis MacDonald Cornford, Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1977; and *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.
2. "Pythodorus had related to him that conversation which Socrates once had with Zeno and Parmenides", *Plato's Parmenides*, 126 C., Translated by Francis MacDonald Cornford, in, *Plato and Parmenides*, Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1977, p. 64.
3. The tone of this Prologue is quite unlike anything one has encountered in the early philosophers. To find its like, we may look back to Hesiod's *Theogony*, which opens with a kind of Prologue. In it, Hesiod speaks of how he has received instructions from the Muses. *Theogony*, 22-23.

impossibility of void (and perhaps also on religious grounds). Now since there is no inconsistency in assuming at once Monism, Conservation, and Change (as the Atomists were to show), Parmenides' reasoning would have been invalid without the premise of "Phenomenalism". Yet this premise seems incompatible with his conclusion that "what-is" is not at all what we perceive. Perhaps, however, Parmenides interpreted the third premise as implying only that "what-is" must have (or be) some kind of consciousness- the property in question might have been just awareness itself. The fact that Melissus argued explicitly that the One could not "suffer pain" suggests that he thought it could "suffer" something, in other words, be somehow conscious. This lends some slight support to the conjecture that Parmenides' sphere, though undeniably a body, was also endowed with non-discursive consciousness, the one we see in the world Mysticism and especially through the introduction of the "Knowledge by Presence" by Mulla Sadra, and before him by Suhrawardi, Shaikh al-'Ishraq.

### The second approach

It may very well be claimed that among contemporary thinkers, Heidegger may be regarded as the one who has paid a special and unique attention to the Presocratic Philosophers, among them Heraclites and Parmenides. His account differs all together with others. He seems to have been willing to re-discover the Presocratics, not by rendering them into modern-analytic terminology, but rather through entering into their *Weltraum*. This end in mind, his quest is to read through Parmenides' Poem in order to find the true meaning concealed beneath the language. His approach, then, would very well be a sort of unconcealment (aletheia).

Heidegger regards Parmenides, though "lived at the turn of the fifth century B.C. [in den Uebergang vom 6. ins 5. Jahrhundert]" (1980, p.95) as a "farsighted thinker and Poet [denkend-dichtend]" (p.96), who set forth the being of the essent in contradistinction to becoming [das Sein des Seienden im Gehalt zum Werden herausgestellt] (ibid). After citing Parmenides Poem, i.e. Fragment8, lines 1-6, Heidegger goes on to say that:

These few words stand there like the Greek statues of the early period. What we still possess of Parmenides' didactic poem fits into a thin brochure, but this little brochure is one which might

3. A refusal to distinguish (or rather, the non-occurrence of the idea of distinguishing) between what *we* should call the qualities of things and the things qualified. Thus heat and brightness were not thought of as properties of a fire-substance in itself inaccessible to observation; heat and brightness literally *constituted* fire. For lack of a better word we may call this assumption "*Phenomenalism*".

#### 4. Reality of Change.

Once these assumptions are made explicit, Parmenides' philosophy becomes in a certain way obvious. If the stuff of things is ungenerated and indestructible, and if that stuff consists of its sensible qualities, then it is out of the question for it to change. For to say that it changes is precisely to say that it has a property at one time that it lacked at another, a conclusion that may very well contradict assumptions two and three. Thus what-is must be at least "frozen". But furthermore there cannot be any diversity in it, if the premise of Monism is taken seriously.

Parmenides' argument against motion on the ground that motion requires empty space, and empty space would be "what is not" and therefore "non-existent", might perhaps be rejected only by making a distinction between a thing and its properties, i.e. by abandoning the third assumption, namely "Phenomenalism". Otherwise the Parmenidean view of reality, based upon the supposed premises, seems to be inescapable.

All said, one should not think, however, that Parmenides' philosophy is free of internal problems. Besides the difficulty of the "outermost boundary", the most obvious one is this: it is not sufficient to reject sense-experience (or anything else) as illusion unless one can at least show the *possibility* of explaining, consistently with one's general position, how the illusion occurs. But such a possibility seems to be ruled out in Parmenides' system. For if we assume that in reality there exists nothing but a homogeneous rigid sphere, it seems that there can not be any illusions at all, since in order for there to be an illusion there must *really* be a mind that is deceived; and a mind is by its very nature something that is changing or at least implies change (it thinks now one thought, now another).

There is a further paradox that Parmenides in effect reduced one of his premises to absurdity. As a matter of strict logic, all that Parmenides proved was that the four assumptions listed above are incompatible, with regard to motion; the argument of itself did not show that the postulate of change was the one to be rejected. Parmenides evidently chose to deny it because of his (logically independent) argument for the

incompleteness, hence could not be predicated of what-is, which is perfect.

“Here I end my trustworthy account and thought concerning truth” (ibid), says the goddess. “From now on learn the beliefs of mortals, listening to the deceptive order of my words” (ibid). After this unpromising beginning, there follows an account of the nature of things that are in keeping with the general tenor of early Greek thought. We learn, for instance, that Parmenides understood that the moon shines by light “borrowed” from the sun. But the fragments of this part of the poem are too few for us to reconstruct the system at all.

To the modern man, perhaps the most puzzling thing about Parmenides is the fact that his successors (including especially Plato) had so much respect for him and took his arguments so seriously.

Of course, no serious thinker in the fifth century B.C. could dismiss and somehow neglect Parmenides’ conclusions merely on the ground that they were incompatible with observed fact. For philosophy, which was still a new enterprise, consisted in an investigation of the world by *reason*. And if in general the senses provided the data for the inquiry, no philosopher considered himself bound to conclude that things are in all respects as they appear to be. If the senses declared things to be thus-and-so, but reason indicated that they were otherwise, it was not by any means unheard of to dismiss the observations as deceptive. In throwing out *all* observation Parmenides only carried to an extreme a pre-existing practice.

This disregard for the realm of sense perception and observation could be accounted for, in two different ways. One approach may be that of an analytically oriented mind to read through and understand Parmenides perplexing sayings, and the other may pertain to someone who tries to see through and contemplate upon the existing Fragments in pursue of a much deeper meaning, not necessarily that of a discursive mind.

### The first approach

It may have been formulated that Parmenides, the founder of formal logic, simply *deduced the logical conclusion of the assumptions agreed on by his predecessors*. These assumptions could run as follow:

1. *Monism*: The stuff (whether water, the Boundless (apeiron), mist, or fire) of which all things are made is at base of one kind only.
2. *Conservation of stuff*: This stuff, as such, is eternal, being neither created nor destroyed, neither augmented nor diminished.

from nothing, and nothing disappears into nothing. The concept of creation *ex nihilo* is completely foreign to Greek thought. But:

Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike. Nor is there somewhat more here and somewhat less there that could prevent it from holding together; but all is full of Being. Therefore it is all continuous, for Being is in contact with Being. But motionless in the limits of mighty bonds it is without beginning and never-ending, since coming into being and perishing have been banished far away, driven out by true conviction.... therefore, all that mortals posited convinced that it is true will be [mere] name, coming into being and perishing, to be and not to be, change of place and exchange of brilliant color. (pp. 85-86)

These astounding conclusions are drawn as corollaries, without any further argument. Motion was supposed to be impossible because if anything were to move, it would have to move into empty space; but since empty space would be “what-is-not”, there cannot *be* any empty space. As for “alteration of bright color” or other qualitative change, this could not take place either, for if an object, previously green, were to become red, this would entail the disappearance of the greenness into nothing, and the appearance of redness from nothing, both equally impossible because contradictory.

The last surprise the goddess has for Parmenides is this:

Since it remains the same and in the same, it lies by itself and abides so firmly where it is; for powerful Necessity holds it in bonds of the limit which encircles Being, because it is not right for Being to be incomplete, for it is not in need; if it were it would need all... Since there is a furthest limit, it is in every direction complete; like the body of a well-rounded sphere, from the middle everywhere of equal strength. (p.86)

Perhaps this emphatic assertion of a spatial limit to what-is is the hardest to be regarded and apprehended, since one may immediately be led to ask, in Parmenidean fashion, What is outside it? If more of what-is, then there is no limit after all; but if what is outside of what-is is what-is-not, then it cannot exist as a limit. And indeed Parmenides' follower, Mellisius of Samos, undertook to correct the master on this point; he asserted that what-is is spatially infinite.<sup>8</sup> Parmenides' thought might seem to have been that infinity (being *without* end) entails



“For this shall never be proved, that what-is-not is”, “for it is not possible to say or to think that is not”. The thought is that the word “nothing” means “that which is-not”; consequently any sentence having the word “nothing” as its subject, and “is” as its verb, must be contradictory, “not to be thought of”.

Having established this, it is easy for the goddess to prove that “what-is is uncreated and indestructible”.

For, what origin could you search out for it? How and whence did it grow? Not from non-Being shall I allow you to say or to think, for it is not possible to say or to think that it is not. (Taran, 1965, p.85)

The argument implied is a simple dilemma: if there is an origin of what-is, that origin must be either what-is or what-is-not. But it cannot be what-is-not, for if so, the contradictory sentence “What-is-not *is* the origin of what-is” would be true, which is absurd. And while, of course, in a sense is true to say that the origin of what-is is what-is, this is so, only trivially. Therefore what-is is uncreated.

The goddess advances another argument to prove the same conclusion:

What need would have made it grow, beginning from non-Being, later or sooner? (p.85)

This is really an argument from an assumed causal principle; even if the objection be intended not to insist that “what-is-not” is unthinkable, mere nothingness or negation could not, by definition, afford any reason or cause why something, if it were to originate out of it, should suddenly appear at one time rather than another. But without such a reason, nothing could appear at any time; hence, if there ever were a time at which there was just nothing at all, then there never could be anything at any other time.<sup>7</sup>

A similar argument, though not put forth, would show that annihilation is also impossible.

So, coming into being is extinguished and perishing is unheard of.  
(ibid)

So far the conclusions reached are only such as were agreed to by all Greek philosophers both before and after Parmenides. Nothing comes

unshaken heart of well-rounded truth as the opinions of mortals in which there is no true belief. Nevertheless you shall learn these [opinions] also, how the appearances, which pervade all things, had to be acceptable. (Taran, 1965, p.9)

The goddess warns Parmenides against relying on the senses for knowledge of reality:

For never shall this be forced: that things that are not exist; but do you hold back your thought from this way of inquiry, nor let inured habit force you, upon this road, to ply an aimless eye and ringing ear and tongue<sup>5</sup>; but judge with reason the much contested argument which has been given by me. (p.73)

The much-disputed proof is strictly a priori, depending altogether on the law of identity:

Come then, I shall tell you, and do you pay attention to the account when you have heard it, which are the only ways of inquiry that can be conceived; the one [says]: "exists" and "it is not possible not to exist," it is the way of persuasion (for persuasion follows upon truth); the other [says]: "exists-not" and "not to exist is necessary," this I point out to you is a path wholly unknowable. For you could not know that which does not exist (because it is impossible) nor could you express it. (p.32)

The goddess' expressions are puzzling to say simply, "It is". We want to know what the "it" stands for. Nevertheless, the sense of the passage is unmistakable: if there is something real (and there is), then whatever characters it has, it has just those characters and none others. A is A. It is impossible to think of A's not being A, for to *say* that the thing having some character, and at the meantime it does not possess the same character would amount to saying something and immediately retracting it, so that altogether nothing was said. It is in this sense that "it is the same thing that can be thought and that can exist" (Owen, 1959, p.61).<sup>6</sup> The goddess did not mean, of course, that there must be mermaids in the ocean because we can think of them. She meant that reality and thought must alike be non-contradictory.

All this is perhaps innocent enough; but the goddess is going to use the principle thus laid down as a weapon to destroy belief in the reality of the world revealed by the senses. The first step is to draw the corollary

Parmenides was a native of Elea, a Greek city in southern Italy. Plato says in his *Parmenides* that he once came to Athens on a visit with his famous pupil Zeno.<sup>2</sup> Plato moreover adds that Socrates was at this time quite young. There seems to have been at least three different traditions regarding Parmenides:

Parmenides ... was a pupil of Xenophanes. Theophrastus, in his *Epitome*, says that he was a pupil of Anaximander. At any rate, though he was a pupil of Xenophanes as well, he did not follow him. He also associated, according to Sotion, with Ameinias the Pythagorean who, though a poor man, was noble and good. It was Ameinias whom he followed, and on his death Parmenides (who was himself of a good family and very healthy) built a shrine to him. And it was by Ameinias, not Xenophanes, that Parmenides was converted to the contemplative life. (Laertius, 1925)

He, therefore seems to have begun his philosophical career as a Pythagorean, but when still a young man he attained the insight that reality consisted of a solid homogeneous sphere, the appearances of diversity and change being altogether illusory. He set out this extraordinary doctrine in a poem consisting of an Introduction [a Prologue or a Proem<sup>3</sup>], a section, "The Way of Truth", expounding and defending the theory of the Sphere, and a section, "The Way of Opinion", in which he dealt with current (probably Pythagorean) scientific theories. The "Proem" and the important "The Way of Truth" have been preserved substantially intact, but only a few fragments of "The Way of Opinion" remain.

The "Proem" is an elaborate allegorical description of Parmenides' journey into heaven. In a chariot drawn by "immortal mares" he is conducted upward by the daughters of the Sun, who bring him to the "gates [separating] of the ways of night and day"<sup>4</sup>, the keys to which "Dike, whose vengeance is stern" holds. At the entreaties of the maidens, Justice opens the portals, revealing "the goddess" who addresses Parmenides:

O young man coming to our abode joined with immortal charioteers with the horses which carry you, welcome!, since it is by no means an evil lot that sent you forth to travel on this road (for it is far away from the wandering of men), but right and justice. It is necessary that you shall learn all things, as well the

On Parmenides' Poem:  
"The Way of Truth" and "The Way of Opinion"<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

*Parmenides' Poem, though expressed in an allegorical manner to the extent that it has been preserved and handed down to us, without any doubt, shows his in-depth and profound insight into the question of Being. After a concise representation of his thought, the main purpose has been to show that, with regards to "The Way of Truth" and Parmenides disregard for the realm of sense perception, two different approaches may be accounted for. One may be that of an analytically-oriented mind to read through and understand Parmenides perplexing sayings, and the other may pertain to someone who tries to see through and contemplate upon the existing Fragments in pursue of a much deeper meaning, not necessarily that of a discursive mind.*

**Keywords:** *Parmenides, Heidegger, Sense Perception, Being, Ontology, Phenomenalism, Monism*

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