The Nature of Predication in Parmenides

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Abstract

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Among the many difficulties with which Parmenides of Elea has left us is that of finding a way to reconcile the two accounts of reality given by his Goddess. First, she delivers a sustained argument for ontological monism, but then quickly turns away from it to describe the opinions of mortals, which she reminds us has no share of the truth which was attributed to her first account. On the one hand, monism utterly compromises both individuation and change, while Parmenides claims that mortal opinions, on the other hand, are mistaken and ultimately end in contradiction. I argue that the key to unifying Parmenides' poem lies in understanding the important role that predication plays in defining and distinguishing these two accounts of reality. I conclude that the application of predicates to what-is turns mortal thinkers away from the path of Being, which itself cannot bear any description.

> Παρμενίδης δέ μοι φαίνεται, τὸ τοῦ Ὁμήρου, ‘αἰδοῖός τέ μοι’ εἶναι ἅμα ‘δεινός τε.’ συμπροσέμειξα γὰρ δὴ τῷ ἀνδρὶ πάνυ νέος πάνυ πρεσβύτῃ, καί μοι ἐφάνη βάθος τι ἔχειν παντάπασι γενναῖον. φοβοῦμαι οὖν μὴ οὔτε τὰ λεγόμενα συνιῶμεν, τί τε διανοούμενος.
>
> -Socrates in Plato's *Theaetetus,* 183e

Although many of the presocratic philosophers present interpretive difficulties, Parmenides of Elea is routinely counted among the most difficult. Whereas the majority of philosophy before Plato is lost or badly fragmented, surviving only a line or two at a time (and often less), Parmenides' poem, “On Nature,” comes to us in comparatively good condition. However, interpretation of his work is hindered not only by its fragmentary nature, but also by the difficulty of the fragments which we have. Fragment 8, which includes the bulk of his argument for ontological monism, is the longest surviving fragment of any presocratic, but contains an obscure discourse on an abstract topic wrapped in epic meter and often difficult phrasing. Beyond the interpretive difficulty of Parmenides' words lies the task of envisioning his program as a whole. Parmenides complicates the task of the would-be interpreter by distancing himself as author from the content of the poem, placing all of the explication in the mouth of an unnamed Goddess. Along with the now classic case for monism, she outlines a contradicting material dualism in the vein of the Ionian cosmologists without offering any suggestions for reconciling the two. I believe that the key to unifying the poem and understanding the function of the Δόξα can be found by examining the role that predication plays for Parmenides.

Like Plato's Socrates, I am hesitant to claim that we will ever truly understand Parmenides' words, and even more so that we will grasp his intent. All the same, I believe that there is a great wealth of benefit to be had in the attempt. Many philologists and philosophers have commented on Parmenides, arriving at a multitude of conclusions, but few have noted the

substantial role that predication plays in the poem and none, to my mind, have given it the attention it deserves. It is, I believe, the defining characteristic of the flawed mortal belief system that comprises the Δόξα, and thus must be a central concern for any interpretation of Parmenides' thought as a whole. At first glance, however, a reading that divides truth from opinion along the line of predication may seem at odds with the σήματα attributed to what-is in the Ἀλήθεια. There, the Goddess shows no reservation in assigning predicates such as "eternal" and "whole" to Being. Even if Parmenides was himself unaware of this potential problem, however, Plato addresses it in his *Parmenides* and provides some potential clarification to his predecessor's thoughts on predication. Plato's insight also sheds light on the worry that Parmenides' Ἀλήθεια is ultimately self-refuting. My reading, then, identifies what-is as unable to sustain any predicate whatsoever, though mortal belief is essentially characterized by that very act. This reading offers a way of potentially reconciling the two parts of Parmenides' poem and expands the scope of his influence to the roots of the philosophy of language.

I will start by offering a detailed explication of the first two sections of Parmenides' poem, attempting to elucidate the important facets of his thought in as interpretively neutral a manner as I am able, before turning to the Δόξα and demonstrating the prominence of predication in understanding his program. I will then turn to the first two hypotheses of the second half of Plato's *Parmenides* in order to clarify some of the troubles that this reading introduces. Finally, I will present a revised view of the poem, which underscores the role of predication in our encounter with what-is, and point to some useful implications and potential applications for Parmenides' ideas.

I: A Goddess and a Dilemma

Parmenides' poem falls into three main segments: (1) the proem details the mystical journey of

an unnamed youth to an unnamed Goddess who previews two lessons on which she will instruct him; (2) the Ἀλήθεια, which comprises the first of the lessons, is an argument for ontological monism whose veracity is vouched for by the Goddess; and (3) the Δόξα Βροτῶν, the second of the lessons, presents a materialistic dualism of fire and night, which the Goddess attributes to mortal thinkers and claims to have "no true conviction." What remains of the text provides no clear indications as to how we are supposed to understand the poem as a whole, leaving us to decide for ourselves how to fit the monism and dualism together within the mythical framework Parmenides provides us. If we take his Goddess at face value, the truth consists of the realization that there is only one unique, eternal, uniform existent and all appearance of change and individuation is illusory. At the same time, conventional mortal belief, such as her dualism purports to be, rescues our commonsense beliefs about what exists and what it is like, but at the cost of consistency and any claim to truth. Making sense of this dilemma is perhaps the most difficult task in interpreting Parmenides.

Proem

Parmenides begins his poem with an account of a mystical journey of an unnamed youth, borne by wise mares, guided by the Heliades, through the gates of the paths of Night and Day, to encounter a Goddess who reveals not only the true nature of existence, but also a plausible, though explicitly false, account of reality which she ascribes to mortal thought. The proem establishes a rich mythical backdrop for the entire poem, using the Homeric dialect and epic hexameter,[1] drawing on various mythic and religious traditions.[2] Parmenides, however, is careful

1 Of the 410 vocabulary entries in Parmenides' poem, only 39 are not found in early epic, and many of those clearly imitate Homeric diction. See Mourelatos (1979, pp. 4-6). For Parmenides' choice of poetry, many reasons have been postulated. Cornford (1939) claims that he chose hexameter in order that his arguments might be better remembered, while Chalmers (1960) attributes the decision to the inherently religious and revelatory nature of the work. Mourelatos (1970) recognizes many literary and cultural influences and concludes that "the question 'why poetry?' was not likely to have occurred" to him.

2 Guthrie (1965) and Mourelatos (1970) recognize epic motifs and "traces of Orphism... or shamanism"

to avoid positioning his poem too close to any of these. The subject of the journey remains unnamed throughout, referred to only as a "youth" (κοῦρος, B1.24).[3] Though he makes use of chariot imagery, no particular literary chariot or charioteer is drawn to mind. The journey carries the youth through portions of the mythical landscape described by Hesiod without calling undue notice to Hesiod's program. Helios, Night, Day, Dike and Themis all make appearances in the proem, but the Goddess who ultimately receives the traveler remains unnamed. All of this suggests that Parmenides crafted his poem to be vaguely familiar, yet radically distinct from any potential analogues or parallels.

This tension is reflected in the puzzling program which the Goddess lays out in the closing lines of the proem (B1.28-32):[4]

> χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι,
> ἠμὲν ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ
> ἠδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, τῇς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής. (30)
> ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι ὡς τὰ δοκεῦντα
> χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.
>
> You must be informed of everything, both of the unmoved heart of persuasive reality (30) and of the beliefs of mortals, in which there is no genuine conviction; nevertheless you shall learn this also, how it was necessary that the things that are believed to be should have their being in general acceptance, ranging through all things from end to end.[5]

The Goddess goes on to detail the two accounts of reality mentioned here. The first part, the

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(Mourelatos, 44) in the proem, though neither sees any profound significance in any particular parallel. Pellikaan-Engel (1978) argues for the importance of recognizing Hesiodic allusions in interpreting Parmenides, while Palmer (2009) surveys influences as far abroad as Babylon.

3 The proem begins with the youth speaking in the first person, and the remainder of the poem consists of the Goddess addressing her comments to him in the second person. This unnamed youth is often assumed to be Parmenides himself, and the journey as either a metaphor for his intellectual discovery, or as a description of some religious experience or revelation.

4 Despite the various arrangements of the fragments which have been proposed, I will follow the standard numbering of Diels, Kranz (1951) without broaching that controversy.

5 All translations of Parmenides are adapted from Richard McKirahan's in Coxon (2009), unless otherwise indicated. I discuss the difficulty in translating the last two lines of the proem below.

Ἀλήθεια or Truth, most of which appears to be extant, presents a sustained argument for ontological monism, which the Goddess claims necessarily follows from the assertion that "it is." The latter portion, the Δόξα Βροτῶν or Beliefs of Mortals, seems to have consisted of a fully developed cosmology based on the differentiation of two elements, fire and night. Unfortunately, the majority of the Δόξα does not survive, though from the extant fragments and testimonia we have good evidence for the range of topics covered in the cosmology as well as the character of some of those aspects. The poem as a whole prompts us, then, to decide between logical necessity, which entails difficult-to-swallow conclusions, and a purportedly false worldview that nonetheless preserves our commonsense intuitions about reality.

Ὡς ἔστιν

In the Ἀλήθεια (fragments 2-8), Parmenides makes the case for ontological monism;[6] that there is only one thing that exists, which is eternal, unique, entire and changeless. His monism rests upon two claims: (1) that Being and non-Being are mutually exclusive, and (2) that non-Being is impossible.[7] What remains, then, is Being, to which he attributes the above qualities necessarily. His Goddess begins her explication of the truth by presenting the two possible paths of inquiry, immediately rejecting one of them (B2-3):

6 Though most interpreters agree that Parmenides was earnest in his argument for monism (for a notable exception, see Barnes, 1979 who argues for a possible plurality of Parmenidean 'Ones'), there is significant disagreement on exactly how to understand his brand of monism. Those who view Parmenides as a strict monist (Guthrie 1965, who viewed fragment 8 as a response to the previous material monists, and Owen 1960, who saw Parmenides operating more out of logical concerns, among others) face the difficulty of explaining away an unnecessary and false cosmology. Similarly, Mourelatos (1970), Nehamas (1981) and others who understand Parmenides as employing a special use of "is" to denote the essence or true nature of a thing seem to run aground on the Δόξα as well, though Curd (1992) offers a detailed defense of how we might understand fire and night as fulfilling the roles of "proper" elements. Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1.5.986^{b}27-34) construed Parmenides to be a monist concerning the essence of a thing, and a pluralist regarding its phenomenal appearance. Other ancient authorities, including Plato, Theophrastus and Plutarch, as well as some recent scholars (Palmer 2009) have followed a similar 'aspectual' approach which seems to offer an adequate interpretation for both parts of the Goddess' explication.

7 The exact nature of the necessity which Parmenides has in mind here has been hotly debated. Lewis (2009) offers an account of what he perceives to be an implicit modal shift in the argument, while Goldin (1993) attempts to defend Parmenides against such modal fallacies. I will not enter the debate here, but will take for granted that Parmenides himself, at any rate, found the argument to be valid.

εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσας,
αἵπερ ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι
ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,
Πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος (Ἀληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ)
ἡ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεών ἐστι μὴ εἶναι, (5)
τὴν δή τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἔμμεν ἀταρπόν
οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἐόν (οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν)
οὔτε φράσαις.

...τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι (1)

Come now, I will tell you (and do you preserve my story, when you have heard it) about those ways of enquiry which are alone conceivable. The one, that a thing is, and that it is not for not being, is the journey of persuasion, for persuasion attends on reality; (5) the other, that a thing is not, and that it must needs not be, this I tell you is a path wholly without report, for you can neither know what is not (for it is not possible) nor tell of it...

… for the same thing is for conceiving as is for being.[8]

The two paths – that there is, and that there is not – are meant to exhaust all possible ways of inquiry (ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιος). Each path is described in two parts, the first of which identifies it, while the second excludes the other path. The unqualified use of the verb 'to be' in each of the two paths has occasioned much discussion, but I believe that it must be taken as existential rather

8 The meaning of fragment 3 has been the subject of much debate. Syntactically, it may plausibly be read either as an identification between thought and existence (as do Kahn (1969), Sedley (1999) and Crystal (2002)), or as McKirahan has rendered it here, expressing the extent of what is in fact conceivable. See Long (1996, pp. 132-4), Coxon (2003) and Palmer (2009, pp. 118-122) for detailed discussion of the possibilities.

than predicative for at least two reasons.[9] First, regardless of the subject we ascribe to the verb,[10] one would expect the use of ἔστιν without any predicate to be read naturally as a simple statement of existence, and second, the predicative use of the verb will later be identified as the central cause of mortal error and confusion.[11] The first path – that a thing is – is, *prima facie*, correct.[12] It is difficult to deny that there is at least one thing which exists and Parmenides takes this point for granted, offering no explicit argument. That the path of what-is-not is false, however, is evidenced, not only by the tautology that what-is-not *is* not, but also by the impossibility of both thinking and speaking what-is-not. Parmenides assumes that every proper thought and speech act must have, in some sense, a real object.[13] To think or say what-is-not is

9 Without a clear predicate, the copulative use of ἔστιν seems untenable here. Mourelatos (1970, pp. 56-60), however, proposes that a special predicative use of the verb *to be* is at work here, which he terms the "is of speculative predication." In this sense, ἔστιν predicates something richer than identity or class of its subject, responding specifically to the question "what is it?" in such a way that "no further questions with respect to that thing need or may arise" (57). He argues that the copulative use of ἔστιν with ὡς in B8.3, where the Goddess introduces the σὴματα of what-is, determines its use in the identification of the first path in B8.2 and subsequently the use of ἔστιν and εἶναι in B2 (55). This is, I believe, mistaken. First of all, there is no reason to assume that Parmenides exclusively employed a copulative ἔστιν in ὡς clauses. Mourelatos claims that there is "certainly no obstacle in treating the bare ἐστι and εἶναι as copulative" in B2, but by the same token, there is nothing preventing Parmenides from varying his use of ἔστιν as needed within his poem (as he clearly does in the latter portions of B2.3 and B2.5 between the finite and infinitive forms of the verb). Moreover, Mourelatos' proposed "speculative" is makes for an unnecessarily artificial rendering of the paths (particularly since the verbs lack both expressed subject and predicate). On his account (borrowing and modifying, in italics, his own formulation on p. 55), we ought to read B2.3 something like "that ___ *really* is ___, and that it is not possible that ___ be not *in nature* ___." Finally, as Palmer (2009, pp. 29-32) rightly points out, an interpretation such as Mourelatos', which understands the Ἀλήθεια as an effort to establish a set of qualities (the σήματα) that any thing (particularly any fundamental cosmological principle) which properly is itself must possess, we would expect the cosmology included in the poem to demonstrate principles with these qualities. This is, however, not the case. Coxon (2009, pp. 290-93) also denies that ἔστιν may be existential here, on account of the phrase οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι. He claims this use must differ from other 'absolute' uses of the verb in the poem, which are always accompanied by either an adverbial qualification or further predicate. I cannot see how else one might understand the datival μὴ εἶναι (see Smyth §1969) here apart from as an adverbial qualification establishing the necessity of the subject's existence. See Brown (1994) and Kahn (1973) for much more detailed discussions of the verb "to be" in Greek.

10 Despite being identified as Being, reality, truth, the One, the way, and the object of speech, thought or inquiry (amongst other things), Coxon notes that the "omission of the indefinite pronoun is widespread in epic and later Greek" (2009, p. 291).

11 e.g., B8.53 κατέθεντο δύο γνώμασ ὀνομάζειν, B6.8 οἷς... νενόμισται

12 Particularly if we are inclined to agree with Descartes. Parmenides' argument evokes a similar self-verifying notion, though the Goddess' statements are in a much more precarious place than the *cogito*, as we will see. See MacKenzie (1982) for the difficulty of positing monism within a dialectical setting.

13 Here, we must notice that the argument requires potential, not actual existence. Surely, we can say something

functionally equivalent to neither thinking nor speaking at all. Both speech and thought require propositional content, which what-is-not cannot support, and thus, such a path is "wholly without report," since an account of it cannot be formulated. Instead, the only proper object of rational inquiry and speech is what-is. Therefore, if what-is can be conceived and spoken of, by contraposition, what cannot be said must not exist. A third, mixed option, consisting of both Being and non-Being, is out of the question given the utter rejection of existential non-Being.[14]

With the decision between the paths settled, the Goddess proceeds to better define what-is, identifying "signposts" (σήματα) marking out the true path of inquiry (B8.1-6):

> μοῦνος δ' ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο
> λείπεται ὡς ἔστιν ταύτῃ δ' ἐπὶ σήματ' ἔασι
> πολλὰ μάλ', ὡς ἀγένητον ἐὸν καὶ ἀνώλεθρόν ἐστιν,
> οὖλον μουνογενές τε καὶ ἀτρεμὲς ἠδ' ἀτέλεστον
> οὐδέ ποτ' ἦν οὐδ' ἔσται, ἐπεὶ νῦν ἐστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν (5)
> ἕν, συνεχές.
>
> Only one story of the way is still left: that a thing is. On this way there are very many signs: that Being is ungenerated and imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved and perfect; (5) it never was nor will be, since it is now all together, one, indivisible.

Here, Being (τὸ ἐόν) makes its second appearance in the poem (after the first line of fragment 6), accompanied by a set of predicates: ungenerated, imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved, perfect, one and indivisible.[15] The Goddess' elaboration of these attributes forms much of the

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meaningful about non-actual things, like unicorns, without any terrible difficulty. However, a "round square," that is, a geometrical figure with all of the qualities of both a circle and a square, cannot support any meaningful signification because it cannot exist. We might discuss individual qualities that such a figure would possess, but we may say nothing about the figure itself. For instance, it is entirely possible to think and express that there are such things as those that have four right angles, and also that there are such things as those that have their perimeter equidistant to a central point. However, there is no way to describe a figure which has both four right angles and whose perimeter is equidistant to its center: the thought and related speech act have no content.

14 Such a mixed option will materialize when mortals invoke the predicative use of ἔστιν and introduce predicative non-Being, however.

15 Many scholars end the list at ἀτελέστον in line 4, believing "one" and "indivisible" are redundant, given the other attributes already listed. A unique existent must necessarily be one, and Parmenides' sense of "entire" encompasses indivisibility. I include lines 5 and 6 here for the sake of completeness, since the Goddess'

remainder of fragment 8, wherein the argument for the logical necessity of monism is developed. I will now briefly examine the argument(s) for each of these attributes.

Ἀγένητον καὶ ἀνώλεθρον

The argument against the generation of Being proceeds on two tracks: the denial of generation *ex nihilo*, and the argument from sufficient cause. The former follows directly from the argument which decided between the two paths of inquiry. If we are to seek an origin for what-is, we cannot claim non-Being, having already established that it cannot be the object of any thought or speech.[16] Moreover, attempting to place non-Being as either the source or cause of what-is does little to explain how anything has or could come to be and nothing to identify any sufficient cause for it to come into being at any given time. The Goddess thus concludes:

> εἰ γὰρ ἔγεντ', οὐκ ἔστ', εἴ ποτε μέλλει ἔσεσθαι (20)
> τὼς γένεσις μὲν ἀπέσβεσται καὶ ἄπυστος ὄλεθρος.
>
> If it came to be, it is not, nor is it, if at some time it is going to be. Thus becoming has been extinguished and perishing is unheard of.

The earlier denial of non-Being precludes the possibility that what-is could not be. If at any point Being were not, non-Being must stand in its place. Given that non-Being cannot be, Being cannot have either a beginning or an end. The impossibility of annihilation is never explicitly argued (perhaps lending a bit of humor to ἄπυστος, "unheard"), though the likely argument is easy to supply. If Being had ever come to be, then it must not have been beforehand, and, by the same logic, if it were to be destroyed, then it would not be. Either case ends with the assertion of non-Being, which is impossible.[17]

Packaged in with the rejection of generation and corruption are glimpses of several of the

arguments will eventually guarantee oneness and indivisibility as well.

16 B8.7-9, οὐτ' ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐάσσω/ φάσθαι σ' οὐδὲ νοεῖν οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητόν/ ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι.

17 B8.11, οὕτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεών ἐστιν ἢ οὐχί. Without either a source or sufficient cause, Being (were it at some point nonexistent) could not ever come into being.

other signposts given at the outset. First, we can begin to understand one aspect of the perfection (ἀτέλεστον) of Being in that it admits neither "was" nor "will be." Since it is subject to neither generation nor corruption, Being exists entirely in an eternal present (ἐπεὶ νῦν ἐστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν/ ἕν). Likewise, the argument against creation *ex nihilo* also begins to establish the uniqueness of what-is. Just as Being could not have come to be out of nothing, nothing may come into being *ex nihilo* alongside Being. That Being may not spawn something else is on its own guaranteed by the next phase of the argument.

Οὖλον

The four lines of fragment 8 following the argument against generation and corruption provide an account of why Being must be conceived of as entire, whole and homogeneous (B8.22-25).

> οὐδὲ διαιρετόν ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἐστιν ὁμοῖον,
> οὐδέ τι τῇ μᾶλλον, τό κεν εἴργοι μιν συνέχεσθαι,
> οὐδέ τι χειρότερον, πᾶν δ' ἔμπλεόν ἐστιν ἐόντος
> τῷ ξυνεχὲς πᾶν ἐστιν ἐὸν γὰρ ἐόντι πελάζει. (25)
>
> Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike and not more in degree
> in some respect, which might keep it from uniting, or
> inferior, but it is all full of Being. (25) Therefore it is all
> united, for Being draws near to Being.

Though the language is rather dense, the Goddess makes the case that Being must be qualitatively homogeneous across its entirety. As with generation and corruption, the denial of non-Being again helps to decide the case. No part of what-is may be excessive or deficient in any degree, since any deficiency in a part of Being would imply some kind of is-not, which has already been dismissed. A part which presents an excess of some quality when compared with some other part demonstrates a lack within the second part. Being is full of being: just as with other potential qualities, no part of Being may exist to a lesser degree than another. Rather, all of Being must exemplify existence to the highest degree, lest some degree of non-Being creep in to

the picture. Lacking any degree of difference within itself, Being is united and any divisions imposed upon it become arbitrary. Nor can Being exist as a number of distinct and spatially separate, though qualitatively identical, entities. For, if this were the case, any "gaps" in what-is, it seems, must consist of what-is-not, which cannot be. In this way, Being must be undivided and homogeneous, that is, entire.

This conclusion follows neatly upon the previous arguments, if we think of Being's homogeneity as temporal as well as physical. While a physical difference would indicate spatially distinct parts, temporally distinct parts require there to be some chronological difference within a subject. No such distinctions may be drawn with regards to Being, since it is without either beginning or end, existing instead entirely in the present. The Goddess does not elaborate here exactly how Being's homogeneity is meant, though each sense will be shown to be necessary.

Μουνογενές

Being's uniqueness, though not explicitly argued, follows from the previous two conclusions. On the one hand, it is ungenerated and not subject to annihilation, with creation *ex nihilo* ruled out entirely, and on the other, it is homogeneous and indivisible. Parmenides' Goddess has already denied that another existent could come into being alongside Being from what-is-not (8.12-13). The second signpost, that Being is entire, eliminates the potential that Being may divide or spawn something alongside itself. Being must be homogeneous because what-is-not cannot be, either by degrees through any qualitative difference within Being, nor within gaps between portions of Being. Therefore, any subsequent instances of existence apart from Being are necessarily indistinguishable from it. Any non-arbitrary distinction within what-is requires some qualitative difference, which Being cannot exhibit. A second instance of Being – if it were to be

truly distinguishable from Being – must be distinct in either time, space, or some other quality. As with the original, any temporal distinction would imply the presence of non-Being at some point in time, while a spatial difference would introduce a gap between the two Beings, which would consist of non-Being. If we imagine the two Beings as continuous, but distinguishable, then there must be some quality in which one excels and the other is deficient, again introducing some degree of what-is-not. At best, we may imagine a spatially and temporally coextensive, though indistinguishable pair of Beings, which is little more than to argue Being's self-identity. Thus, if we assent to the Goddess' first two 'proofs,' then we should also concede that Being is necessarily unique.

Ἀτρεμές

The Goddess picks up her argument again, articulating the claim that Being is unmoved and unchanging. On the one hand, qualitative change has already been eschewed by Being's homogeneity. Since Being is necessarily homogeneous, one part or another may not undergo any sort of change, lest it become distinguishable from another, spoiling Being's unity. Nor can Being, as a whole, be subject to some qualitative change, since it must necessarily be "full of Being." At the same time, existential change has also been precluded, since we have denied both generation and corruption. On the other hand, Being may not be thought to move in space, since motion requires either empty space to which a thing might move or parts which could move relative to one another.[18] Thus the Goddess states (B8.26-30):

> ἀυτὰρ ἀκίνητον μεγάλων ἐν πείρασι δεσμῶν
> ἐστιν ἄναρχον ἄπυστον, ἐπεὶ γένεσις καὶ ὄλεθρος
> τῆλε μάλ' ἐπλάγχθησαν, ἀπῶσε δὲ πίστις ἀληθής.
> τωὐτόν τ΄ ἐν τωὐτῷ τε μένον καθ΄ἑαυτό τε κεῖται

18 Parmenides does not seem to be tremendously interested with the spatial motion of what-is, though he does briefly mention that Being "remains... where it is perpetually." My argument is derived from that found in Plato's *Parmenides* (139a).

χοὕτως ἔμπεδον αὖθι μένει. (30)

Further, it is changeless in the coils of huge bonds, without beginning or cessation, since becoming and perishing have strayed very far away, thrust back by authentic conviction; remaining the same and in the same state, it lies by itself (30) and remains thus where it is perpetually.

In this passage, emphasis is placed on the disavowal of generation and corruption as the guarantor of Being's resistance to change. The Goddess seems to understand generation and corruption both existentially and qualitatively. What-is may change neither with respect to its existence, nor with respect to its quality.[19] In the former sense, neither Being nor any imagined part of it may be destroyed nor may some other part come into being, for the reasons stated above, while in the latter, no quality of Being or any imagined part of it may be subject to creation or destruction in that Being may not gain or lose qualities, nor may its qualities increase or decline in degree.

Τέλεστον[20]

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Being is its perfection. The Goddess likens it to "the volume of a spherical ball," giving rise to numerous interpretations of the fragments which paint Parmenides as a materialist or as merely sloppy with his similes. Though his Being is unique and homogeneous, Parmenides conceives of it as existing within absolute boundaries, rather than the infinite Being for which Melissus argued.[21] Within those boundaries, Being is perfect, homogeneous and truly One (B8.42-49):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πεῖρας πύματον, τετελεσμένου ἐστὶ
πάντοθεν, εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ,
μεσσόθεν ἰσοπαλὲς πάντῃ· τὸ γὰρ οὔτε τι μεῖζον
οὔτε τι βαιότερον πελέναι χρεών ἐστι τῇ ἢ τῇ. (45)

19 For the latter sense, see B8.24, πᾶν δ΄ἔμπλεόν ἐστιν ἐόντος.

20 The manuscripts all provide ἀτέλεστον, though the context clearly demands its opposite. Most critics emend to either ἠδὲ τέλεστον or ἠδὲ τέλειον. See Coxon (315) for further discussion.

21 See Arist. *GC* i. 8 325^{a}2-17.

οὔτε γὰρ οὐκ ἐόν ἐστι, τό κεν παύοι μιν ἱκνεῖσθαι
εἰς ὁμόν, οὔτ' ἐόν ἐστιν ὅπως εἴη κεν ἐόντος
τῇ μᾶλλον τῇ δ' ἧσσον, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἐστιν ἄσυλον·
οἷ γὰρ πάντοθεν ἶσον ὁμῶς ἐν πείρασι κύρει.

Since now its limit is ultimate, Being is in a state of perfection from every viewpoint, like the volume of a spherical ball, and equally poised in every direction from its centre. For it must not be (45) either at all greater or at all smaller in one regard than in another. For neither has Not-being any being which could halt the coming together of Being, nor is Being capable of being more than Being in one regard and less in another, since it is all inviolate. For it is equal with itself from every view and encounters determination all alike.

While some monists argue that Being must be infinite on account of their denial of what-is-not, Parmenides allows that there is a limit to what-is, but insists that this limit is ultimate. This absolute limit follows from the previous argument against motion and change. If Being is motionless, there must be some sense in which it remains where it is, within some kind of limit or bond. Though a spatially infinite existent may not change location, the notion of unceasing extension does not rest easy with the kind of stasis which Parmenides seems to envision. Rather, a "perfect" Being must have a limit within which it is complete. This conception of perfection rests upon and sums up the previous arguments. Being's temporal perfection, that it always has existed and always will exist, has already been guaranteed by the elimination of generation and corruption. Rather than positing a temporally infinite Being, extending indefinitely into both past and future, Parmenides denies that Being ever was or will be. Being is 'limited' to the present. Likewise, Being is existentially and qualitatively perfect within itself (which must be coextensive with the absolute limits the Goddess mentions), since it can neither be more or less in one place or another without admitting non-Being by degrees. In this way, then, it is like a

sphere[22] - “equal with itself from every view.”

The image of Being with which Parmenides' Goddess leaves us consists, then, of an eternal One: unique, indivisible, uniform and unchanging. This is truly a radical view of reality which denies both individuation of particulars and all change. It is built from the absolute denial of what-is-not, and the assertion of existence. Once non-Being is eschewed, Being is shown to be without either beginning or end, which would necessitate the presence of non-Being as either predecessor or successor of Being. It must also be indivisible, since any gap or separation within Being must consist of non-Being. Without divisions, Being is also homogeneous, differing by no degree in any quality within itself, lest there be less Being (thus, a degree of non-Being) in one part or another. Following from this, Being is necessarily unique, since any other, hypothetical Being would be neither spatially nor temporally distinct, nor could it differ at all in quality, since “Being draws near to Being.” Moreover, this unique existent cannot suffer change of any sort in any degree if it is to remain homogeneous and wholly without what-is-not. Therefore, we arrive at a view of Being's perfection: a unique One, with neither a temporal beginning nor end, uniform and homogeneous within itself (like the “volume of a spherical ball”), immune to internal distinction and change – a stark contrast to the perceived world with which our senses are familiar.

Δόξα Βροτῶν

For Parmenides, however, this is, less than half the story, as the second portion of the Goddess' explication is thought to have been as much as eight times the length of the Ἀλήθεια. After presenting this argument for monism, his Goddess goes on, as promised in the proem, to explain the nature of “mortal beliefs.” In the final portion of the poem, she espouses a dualistic

22 The most perfect and uniform of the geometrical solids, as widely recognized in ancient astronomy and geometry.

cosmology stemming from the identification of two forms, fire and night. Here, the phenomenal world is preserved and given explanation. Though perhaps as much as ninety percent of the Δόξα does not survive, the extant fragments and testimonia indicate much of what was presumably discussed. We may safely assume from the programmatic statements of fragments 10 and 11 that the Goddess included accounts of the origins and natures of both the cosmos and the bodies which inhabit it – the sun, moon, stars and earth. Simplicius and Plutarch attest that the cosmology explained the generation of both humans and animals,[23] while fragments 16 and 17 indicate that Parmenides also developed accounts of mental activity and biological reproduction. From the evidence we have, it seems that Parmenides omitted nothing from his cosmology of those things which we are accustomed to find in the work of his contemporaries.

One of the enduring puzzles in interpreting Parmenides' work is to understand the function of the Δόξα, which evidently comprised the majority of his poem. Interpretations of the poem that understand Parmenides as making an earnest case for monism in the Ἀλήθεια often falter at this point. Having just articulated a rational case for the truth of monism, why would he bother to develop an elaborate cosmology from two elements? Suggestions have ranged from the Δόξα being a "second best" approximation of the nature of reality (e.g., Guthrie 1965, who supposes Parmenides to be "doing his best for the sensible world…by giving as coherent an account of it as he can"), to it serving as a catalog of the contemporary views of other natural scientists (though this track is not supported by any evidence we have of such views).[24] The reading which seems to have prevailed in antiquity claims that Parmenides aimed to make a distinction between the intelligible world, in which the object of a thought is eternal and

23 Simp. *in Cael.* 559.26-7 and Plu. *Col.* 1114B-C.

24 See Cordero (2010), who attempts to "dismantle" the conjunction of Parmenides and the Δόξα, denying that we should conceive of them as his own ideas.

unchanging, and the sensible, where objects of the senses are multiform, fluctuating and often carry contradictory qualities.

This would seem to be the most plausible reading of the entire project, insofar as it unifies and gives purpose to both the Ἀλήθεια and Δόξα, and it can be strengthened and refined by a careful reading of the Goddess' proposed reasons for explaining the opinions of mortals, as well as the feature by which she distinguishes them from the truth. She claims that mortal opinions comprise a necessary lesson so that no mortal shall "ever outstrip you in practical judgement." Though it is unclear exactly what this means, Parmenides certainly seems to have thought that there was some practical value in having a ready account of the world as it seems. Moreover, we will find that the characteristic act of mortal thinkers is that of assigning names and predicates, arbitrarily dividing what-is. That predication is the line at which Parmenides claims absolute truth ceases and mere opinion begins is, I think, both adequately supported in the text and Parmenides' great contribution to how we should conceive of our encounters with reality. At this point, I wish to examine exactly how Parmenides understands mortal thought and what role predication plays in interpreting reality.

Even though we are often reminded that mortal opinion is untrustworthy and has no important claim to truth,[25] Parmenides' Goddess insists that it comprises an important lesson. She explains the necessity of learning mortal opinions as well as the truth in two places, both in her programmatic statements at the end of the proem[26] and in the concluding remarks of the Ἀλήθεια as she segues to the cosmology. In each case, however, her comments are difficult, obscure and have been variously interpreted. In the final five lines of the proem, after the

25 B1.30, B6.3-7, B8.50-52, 60
26 B1.28-32, quoted above.

Goddess has warmly welcomed the youth, she outlines the lessons which he will learn from her. The two topics that she previews are "the unmoved heart of persuasive reality" (ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ) and the "beliefs of mortals, in which there is no genuine conviction" (τῇς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής), which correspond to the two main portions of the rest of the poem. She plainly states the necessity of learning each (χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι), but does not elaborate on why they would both be necessary lessons, adding only a difficult phrase concerning the necessity of the "things that are believed" (τὰ δοκεῦντα).

The Ἀλήθεια has a genuine claim to being a necessary part of the Goddess' revelation insofar as it forms a sound argument. It is much more difficult, however, to determine what about the Δόξα makes it equally important to learn. The final clause of fragment 1 is notoriously difficult to understand:

> ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι, ὡς τὰ δοκεῦντα (31)
> χρῆν δοίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.
>
> But nonetheless you will also learn this, how it was necessary
> that the things that are believed to be should have their being in
> general acceptance, ranging through all things end to end.

We must take the ὡς as introducing the content of what the youth must nonetheless learn (μαθήσεαι),[27] however, the adverb, δοκίμως is not easily rendered.[28] Without it, the Goddess asserts that the things believed necessarily exist (χρῆν... εἶναι), which would be a surprising claim for her to make, having asserted in line 30 that there is in them "no genuine conviction." The sense of δοκίμως, then, must be to modify the manner of their existence, such that the things believed have an "accepted" or "acceptable" (and thus "reliable") being. Nonetheless, it is

27 Regardless of whether we translate "how" or "that."

28 The adverb appears only twice outside of this instance: Aesch. *Pers.* 547 and Xen. *Cyr.* i, 6,7. See Coxon (2009, p. 285). Diels emends to the somewhat awkwardly elided aorist infinitive δοκιμῶσ΄ which would be rendered "how passing through all things, one should judge the things that seem to be." See Chalmers (1960, pp. 6-7) for further discussion of this passage.

puzzling at this point why the Goddess would claim that mortal beliefs have any sort of necessary existence at all. The remainder of line 32 is no less difficult. The things believed are said to περᾶν, "pass (through)," though it is unclear which of the potential objects the Goddess has in mind. The participle, περῶντα, appears elsewhere both with an accusative object and with prepositional phrases,[29] including διά,[30] as we have here. If we take the accusative, πάντα, as the object of the participle, the things believed pass through all things "continually" or "altogether." Should we understand the prepositional phrase as dependent on περῶντα, πάντα may either agree with the subject of the participle or function adverbially, rendering "passing though everything entirely." However, mental objects may be said to pass through a person as well,[31] should we take πάντος as masculine. On any plausible reading of these lines, however, it is clear both that the Ἀλήθεια is posited as absolutely true and that despite lacking any true claim to reality, the Δόξα nonetheless comprises an important lesson, having some necessity of its own.

The opposition between the truth of monism and the illusion of the Δόξα is continued in the transitional portion of the Goddess' speech at the end of fragment 8. Here, she again emphasizes that mortal beliefs are not to be trusted, though they must be given a proper account. These lines also comprise the longest continuous fragment of the Δόξα, giving a preliminary account of the underlying principles of Parmenides' cosmology, namely the establishment of two elements, fire and night. More detail is also given regarding both the nature of mortal error and the necessity for learning a "likely," but ultimately false cosmology.

> ἐν τῷ σοι παύω πιστὸν λόγον ἠδὲ νόημα (50)
> ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης· δόξας δ' ἀπὸ τοῦδε βροτείας
> μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων.

29 θάλασσαν, Od. 6.272; πόντον, Od. 24.118.
30 δι' Ὠκεανοῖο, Od. 10.508; διὰ κροτάφοιο, Il. 4.502.
31 ὠκὺ νόημα διὰ στέρνοιο περήσῃ, *Hymn to Hermes* 43.

μορφὰς γὰρ κατέθεντο δύο γνώμας ὀνομάζειν·
τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεών ἐστιν—ἐν ᾧ πεπλανημένοι εἰσίν—
τἀντία δ' ἐκρίναντο δέμας καὶ σήματ' ἔθεντο (55)
χωρὶς ἀπ' ἀλλήλων, τῇ μὲν φλογὸς αἰθέριον πῦρ,
ἤπιον ὄν, μέγ' ἐλαφρόν, ἑωυτῷ πάντοσε τωὐτόν,
τῷ δ' ἑτέρῳ μὴ τωὐτόν· ἀτὰρ κἀκεῖνο κατ' αὐτό
τἀντία νύκτ' ἀδαῆ, πυκινὸν δέμας ἐμβριθές τε.
τόν σοι ἐγὼ διάκοσμον ἐοικότα πάντα φατίζω, (60)
ὡς οὐ μή ποτέ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμῃ παρελάσσῃ.

(50) Therewith I put a stop for you to my reliable discourse and thought about reality; from this point learn human beliefs, hearing the deceptive composition of my verse. For they resolved to name two Forms (of which it is wrong to name one), wherein men have gone astray,[32] (55) and they chose opposites in body and assigned them marks separate from one another, on the one hand aetherial fire of flame, being mild, immensely light, the same with itself in every direction but not the same as the other; that, on the other hand, having likewise in itself the opposites, unintelligent night, a dense and heavy body. (60) This order of things I declare to you to be likely in its entirety, in such a way that never shall any mortal outstrip you in practical judgment.

The exposition of Parmenides' dualism begins by reminding the youth that such an account does not accurately describe reality, as the Goddess invites him to listen to the "deceptive composition

32 The parenthetical statemtent, τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεών ἐστιν – ἐν ᾧ πεπλαημένοι εἰσίν, has often been read as indicating the error to be in either "naming even one form," or "naming either one or the other of these forms," in each case, the statement is aimed at the opposition between the Ἀλήθεια and Δόξα. Coxon, however, argues that the targets of the statement are material monists such as Heraclitus, Anaximenes and Thales, translating "of which it is wrong to name only one, wherein men have gone astray" (see Coxon 344-5). He claims that while mortal beliefs stray from reality by rejecting the logical consequences of τὸ ἐόν, Parmenides' predecessors have failed to create any satisfactorily plausible cosmologies of their own, attempting to derive the sensible world from a single element. Though this is a plausible interpretation, it seems to be a stretch to assume that such a radical change of subject occurs here. Though there is no expressed subject for any of the verbs, κατέθεντο, ἐδρίναντο and ἔθεντο clearly refer to the same group (i.e., those who name two forms). It would be surprising if Parmenides suddenly turned to attack a separate group of thinkers without pointing out a change of subject for πεπλανημένοι εἰσίν. Moreover, the same group of mortals who name two forms here are consistently characterized as "wandering" throughout the poem (πλάζονται at B6. 5, and πλάγκτον νόον at B6.6, for instance). Instead, I find it much more likely that the antecedent of ᾧ is the preceding line, rather than the first half of 54. The manner in which "they" (mortals) go astray is in the naming of two forms. The parenthetical, then, is merely τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεών ἐστιν, reminding us that neither fire nor night exist at all in the same way as τὸ ἐόν. See Woodbury (1986) for a detailed account of the difficulties surrounding 8.53-56.

of my verse" (κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων). The deceptiveness of her account of the sensible world is reaffirmed in line 60, described as "likely in its entirety" (διάκοσμον ἐοικότα πάντα) to further distinguish it from the true account of reality already given. The Goddess also clarifies the practical necessity of learning the beliefs of mortals, claiming that knowing this cosmology will make it so no mortal will "outstrip you in practical judgment."[33]

One possible interpretation of this section claims that this likely account of the kosmos must serve to protect those who know it from being deceived by presumably less accurate descriptions of reality,[34] such as those of his materialist contemporaries. Though Parmenides' material dualism may provide refutations of other, competing theories, the question of why such a defense would be necessary after the logical rigor of the Ἀλήθεια still remains. Presumably, a proper – and moreover, logically necessary – account of the nature of reality (that it is eternal, whole, uniform, etc.) such as the youth has just heard would nullify the usefulness of any cosmology that seeks to maintain the reality of individuation and change. If the practicality of learning the Δόξα does not come from simply being a good refutation of other theories (something that the Ἀλήθεια does better), there must be something intrinsically useful about the theory itself – something which the account of ontological monism presumably lacks. The most obvious possibility is that this cosmology preserves both individuation and change, which makes it a much more "practical" account of reality than its counterpart.[35] Such a reading of the Δόξα

33 Coxon argues, following on his view of lines 53-4, that this comment is directed at the Ionian material monists (see his notes concerning these lines, pages 343-45). Parmenides, in laying out his ὁδοί, has not show himself to be particularly interested in naming those who follow one path or another, but rather in the types of paths which are available to those inquiring. Thus, I find it more convincing that he would intend this line to apply more broadly rather than bothering with details about who employs which investigative method.

34 A view held somewhat broadly, including Guthrie (1965) and Coxon (2009, p. 352), who claims that Parmenides here "asserts that his analysis of human beliefs, though 'deceptive,' has a validity which experience will prove insuperable." See Curd (1992), who identifies a number of ambiguities and problems with this view.

35 Indeed, a longstanding knock on Parmenides' monism is that it is utterly impractical and absurd. Colotes famously argued that nothing prevents Parmenides from walking off a precipice, since he denies that both it and himself exist (Plut. *Col.* 1114B).

must assume that Parmenides was aware of the potential absurdities of his monism *and* that he thought that the phenomenal world was important enough to be given its own account, regardless of whether it were "true." Moreover, such an account, it seems, was too important to be left to the minds of his contemporaries. Taken this way, Parmenides did not give a "second best" account of reality as a consolation prize to our senses, but rather put forward an earnest attempt to create an understanding of the world which might provide the practical use that his monism cannot.

The establishment of the two elements by mortal thinkers is also described in this passage, with careful attention paid to precisely how the forms came to be recognized. From the fact that Parmenides associates dualism with mortal thought it becomes apparent that the "mortals" he has in mind cannot be among his intellectual contemporaries, at least not any whose ideas survive, since none of those posited more than a single basic element. Rather, the Goddess seems to have some other group in mind. The key to understanding both the identity of Parmenides' mortals and their place in his poem, I believe, lies in recognizing precisely how they are seen to err in their description of reality. The two elements which mortals believe constitute the universe are not given as "natural" forms, but rather as consciously determined (κατέθεντο... γνώμας) distinctions imposed upon reality. Fire and night are distinguished as discrete substances by means of assigning names to them (ὀνομάζειν). By resolving to assign these names, the Goddess claims, mortals have gone astray (πεπλανημένοι εἰσίν). Further, the qualities assigned to each of the elements are likewise arbitrary (τἀντία δ' ἐκρίναντο δέμας καὶ σήματ΄ ἔθεντο). Mortals compound their error not only by distinguishing substances but also by determining qualities of those substances. Predication of names and qualities is shown to be the

defining character of mortal opinions. Rather than reasoning to the necessary conclusions that what-is is eternal, whole and unchanging, mortals impose distinctions on reality with the use of names. Parmenides' mortals, then, are not a specific group of contemporary thinkers, but rather those who blindly apply predicates and divide what-is into opposites.

We can now understand how the third path described by the Goddess, that of mortal opinion, distinguishes itself from the other two ways of inquiry. Mortal thought, deceptive as it is, does not venture down the path of what-is-not. Rather, that they resolved to *name* two forms tells us that mortal thinkers are, in fact, interpreting reality. For, to properly name anything, the name must correspond to something that is, that is, it must be a name that can be said. If we were to imagine that Parmenides viewed mortal error as straying down the path of what-is-not, they would be utterly unable to assign or use any meaningful names whatsoever. Instead, since the Goddess allows that they have "resolved to name two forms," the mortal path must be distinct from the inscrutable way of non-Being. However, though mortals name something that exists, they wander off of the path of the Ἀλήθεια by assuming that what-is is both a plurality and that it exhibits contradictory qualities. In the first part of the Goddess' revelation, she shows how what-is must necessarily be eternal, whole and unchanging. Mortals, on the other hand, believe that there are such things as generation and corruption, individuation and change. Each of these beliefs entails that Being both is and is not simultaneously. Though the path that "it is" and that of mortal opinion share the same object, the way of mortals is confused, wandering and ultimately turns back on itself in contradiction.

The relationship between mortal thought and the application and use of names is given in several other places throughout the fragments. In fragment 8, after the Goddess has ruled out the

existence of time alongside Being,[36] she concludes that the content of mortal belief (ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ, B8.39) – generation and corruption, existence and nonexistence, motion and change – will be a mere name (πάντ' ὄνομ' ἔσται, B8.38),[37] not anything which has a share of truth or real Being. Likewise in the fragments of the Δόξα, we find the Goddess emphasizing the importance of names for the establishment of the two elements and the subsequent cosmology. It is not until fire and night have been named (αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ πάντα... ὀνόμασται, B9.1) and assigned qualities (κατὰ σφετέρας δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τοῖσί τε καὶ τοῖς, B9.2) that the phenomenal world becomes populated (πᾶν πλέον ἐστὶν, B9.4). Fragment 19, which Simplicius quotes as concluding the Δόξα, reaffirms that the mortal practice of naming corresponds closely with the realm of opinion, saying that it was "according to belief" (κατὰ δόξαν, B19.1) that those things described in the cosmology originated and will have their end, with men having "bestowed a name to give each its mark" (τοῖς δ' ὄνομ' ἄνθρωποι κατέθεντ' ἐπίσημον ἑκάστῳ, B19.3).

In fragment 6, we find a similar association between mortal thought and predication, accompanied by a cryptic account of the trouble with perceiving of the world as mortals do. There, the Goddess reiterates her prohibition against the path of what-is-not, and also warns against a third path, that of mortals. She portrays mortal thinkers as utterly lost and hopeless, on account of the contradictions inherent in their conventions.

> χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐὸν ἔμμεναι· ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι,
> μηδὲν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν· τά σ' ἐγὼ φράζεσθαι ἄνωγα.
> πρώτης γάρ σ' ἀφ' ὁδοῦ ταύτης διζήσιος ≤εἴργω≥,
> αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ' ἀπὸ τῆς, ἣν δὴ βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν
> πλάζονται, δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν (5)

36 χρόνος or, as some read, οὐδὲν, "nothing."

37 This line is also attested as πάντ΄ ὀνόμασται, πάντ΄ ὠνόμασται, πάντ΄ ὄνομ΄ ἐσται, and παντὶ ὄνομ΄ εἶναι. Woodbury (1958) explores possible implications of ὄνομα here and throughout the text, particularly in relation to the problematic B3.

στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλακτὸν 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 assert and conceive that this is Being. For it is for being, but Nothing is not. These things I command you to heed. From this way of enquiry I keep you first of all, but secondly from that on which mortals with no understanding (5) stray two-headed, for perplexity in their own breasts directs their mind astray and they are borne on, deaf and blind alike in bewilderment, people without judgement, by whom this has been accepted as both being and not being the same and not the same, and for all of whom their journey turns backward again.

The first line of fragment 6 is notoriously ambiguous.[38] For our purposes here, however, it is not as interesting as the remainder of the fragment, where the Goddess introduces the way of mortals as distinct from both the Ἀλήθεια and the path of what-is-not. The first path which she denies us must be the way of what-is-not, with ταύτης finding its antecedent in fragment 2 with ἡ δ', or its equivalent. We are also barred from pursuing the path on which mortals stray, mortals who are described as "two-headed," "deaf and blind alike in bewilderment," having "no understanding," and being "without judgement." This diatribe against mortal thought is perhaps surprising, coming from the same Goddess who stresses the necessity of learning these same beliefs. These comments are, however, within the context of the Ἀλήθεια, where Parmenides would want to draw the sharpest distinction between absolute truth and the appearances which mortals believe to be true. Even at the points where we are reminded of the importance of understanding the beliefs of mortals, the Goddess always asserts simultaneously that they are indeed mistaken.

38 τὸ may be taken as (a) a demonstrative pronoun (= τόδε), or (b) the definite article. For (a), it would be understood as the object of λέγειν τε καὶ νοεῖν, reading as equivalent to either ἐὸν or the indirect statement ἐὸν ἔμμεναι. If (b), it may be taken either with articular infinitives λέγειν τε καὶ νοεῖν, ἐὸν (with datival infinitives λέγειν τε καὶ νοεῖν) or, as is less likely, ἔμμεναι.

The fragment concludes with an account of precisely why mortal thought is unreliable. The fault lies in the contradictions in which mortals believe: the Goddess claims that their journey turns backward because they treat (οἷς ... νενόμισται) a thing as though it both is and is not the same and not the same. We can unpack four propositions from this statement: (1) that a thing is [the same], (2) that a thing is [not the same], (3) that a thing is not [the same], and (4) that a thing is not [not the same]. The Goddess' attack on mortal thought states that mortals assert each of these statements of the same subject, in which case they inevitably contradict themselves on all counts.[39] In fragment 6 she does not, however, indicate in what way or by what mechanism they make these assertions. We must instead return to the final passage of fragment 8 to find such a mechanism. There, she tells us that mortals "resolved to name two forms" (μορφάς).[40] Contrary to following the path of monism, which follows of necessity from the premise that "it is," mortals consciously decide to apply arbitrary names, picking out two forms on which to ground their cosmology. Naming is nothing other than the application of predicates to portions of reality.[41] The Goddess claims, then, that predication naturally results in the set of contradictory statements (1)-(4), above.

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39 cf. Coxon, 302-3, who takes this comment to be an attack on the Ionian physical monists, who must admit that their primary element undergoes substantial changes in order to account for the multitude of properties found in the sensible world. Pluralists, like Parmenides, have a ready explanation for contradictory appearances. However, reading fragment 6 as an attack on physical monism seems to fall short on several counts. First, there is very little to distinguish the mortals described here from the mortals to whom the Goddess attributes the Δόξα. Certainly, there are verbal echoes of her description of such dualists present here: δίκρανοι, οἷς...νενόμισται (compare B8.53, κατέθεντο...ὀνομάζειν), εἰδότες οὐδέν (in opposition to the εἰδότα φῶτα who pursue the path to the Goddess and the Ἀλήθεια in the proem) and πλὰζονται, πλαγκτὸν (8.54 πεπλανημένοι). Though fragment 6 has the strongest language for criticizing mortals, there is nothing that explicitly calls out particular thinkers or philosophies. The stronger language is not inappropriate to this context insofar as it clearly separates the truth of the Ἀλήθεια from the mere appearance of the Δόξα.

40 Μορφὴ does not occur in Hesiod and only twice in Homer (*Od.* 11.367 and *Od.* 8.170), where it denotes the shape or shapeliness of words (ἔπος). By Plato's *Republic,* we find it also used relating to types or classes (e.g., *Resp.* 380d, 397c).

41 Plato's Socrates appropriately defines a name as a "tool for giving instruction and dividing Being" at *Cratylus* 388b-c.

The framework of Gongsun Long's[42] paradox, "that a white horse is not a horse," can help to illustrate how predication implies such contradictions by introducing a species of non-Being. His problem turns on the ambiguity between two types of "is" statements: one, indicating that something is a member of a class (x is a member of y), and the other, making an identity claim (x is y). While a white horse is a member of the class "horse," a white horse is nonetheless not identical with the set of things denoted by "horse." Though this is a fairly simple sophism, it can be reworked into something much less trivial if we expand it to identify a thing with *the sum* of its qualities, pointing to one of the larger issues regarding predication which Parmenides has in mind. This reductionist claim becomes problematic when we consider all of its implications. When we introduce predicates, such as "horse" and "white," they serve not only as positive statements, but also contain implications which exclude other potential predicates. For instance, a horse, by virtue of being a horse, is not a cow: the terms "horse" and "cow" exclude one another. Likewise, a white horse is neither black, brown nor tan (presuming it is all white). Predicating qualities of things not only makes the positive assertion that x is y (x has quality y), but also implies the negative predicative claim that x is not z, where the qualities y and z are incompatible.

By asserting "this is a white horse," we have already committed ourselves to all of the statements extracted from fragment 6 above. (1) amounts to a statement of self-identity: our white horse is [the same], that is, it is what it is, namely a white horse. We assert that the white horse is a thing in and of itself, that there is some essential this-white-horseness which cannot be resolved into anything else. Following this, (4) makes the unobjectionable claim that our horse

42 Chinese philosopher and sophist (c. 300 BCE) who is credited with numerous logical and dialectical puzzles and paradoxes, many involving issues of predication.

is not [not the same]: it is not what it is not, things like "white" and "horse." Though a white horse exhibits both whiteness and horseness, it is itself neither, and we would be falling back into Gongsun Long's sophism if we failed to distinguish between the uses of "is" here. Together, (1) and (4) explore the positive and negative predicative claims made by the statement "this is a white horse," understanding this "is" to be the is of identity. Statements (2) and (3) delve into the other predicative use of "is," that which denotes membership within a class. However, rather than the sophistic paradox which Gongsun Long presents, let us expand the predicate of the statement to not just one quality, but the sum total of the qualities evidenced by our subject. Rather than sliding from claiming that a white horse is a member of the set of things that are horses to attempting to identify a white horse with the predicate "horse," we can understand (2) as making the reductionist claim that a white horse is identical to the sum of its qualities. This identifies a white horse not with "white" or "horse," but instead makes the claim that our white horse is both a member of these classes and is identical with their coincidence in this particular horse. In this way, we can say that a white horse is [not the same] – that it is a certain set of qualities, a bundle of tropes, none of which are identical to it themselves. Connected with this is (3), that our poor white horse is not [the same]. Should we harden our reductionist claim that a white horse is nothing over and above the set of qualities that we can predicate of it, there is nothing particularly special about being a white horse, no this-white-horseness apart from the sum of the names by which we call it.

Neither statement (1) nor (2) is particularly problematic when taken on its own, so long as we are prepared to swallow the reductionist pill. However, when we factor in the negative predicative claims implied by each, we find ourselves faced with a dilemma: the sort of identity

found in (1) is not compatible with the reductionist move in (2). A thing cannot be simultaneously both [the same] and [not the same], it cannot be both one (a thing in and of itself) and many (a conglomeration of particular qualities). This is the confusion with which Parmenides saddles mortal thought. Predication is inherently exclusive: mortals who name one thing simultaneously deny that it is something else. On this reading, the Goddess attributes the simultaneous assertions of "is" and "is not" to mortals, who, by using names and applying predicates introduce a form of non-Being into the world. Thus, the path of mortals distinguishes itself from the other two paths, since the way of what-is-not asserts existential, not predicative non-Being, while the Ἀλήθεια remains in the realm of positive existential Being. While existential non-Being amounts to nonsense, predicative non-Being, inevitably introduced alongside every predicate, brings with it contradictions and reductionist puzzles. Though Parmenides' mortals do not pursue the forbidden path of what-is-not, they err by deciding to apply names and predicates to describe what-is. They look toward Being, but by dividing it with names, turn away from its unity and uniformity, and introduce non-Being and contradiction.[43]

II: Squaring Predication with the Ἀλήθεια

If Parmenides criticizes mortals for assigning names to what-is, then how are we to reconcile the σήματα introduced in the Ἀλήθεια with the apparent mistake of predication? Do those qualities differ significantly from the σήματα which mortals established for their two elements?[44] The Goddess' argument for monism consists in determining which attributes what-is must have. Can we coherently say that what-is is ungenerated, incorruptible, whole, unique and all the rest

43 Ultimately, though they take aim at what-is, mortals miss their mark by attempting to grasp Being with names. Rather than accurately describing what-is, the names they apply introduce non-Being and their thoughts become vacuous. It is important to note again the difference between this mode of mortal thought and the prohibited path of what-is-not. Mortal error lies not in the object of their thought, but in their method of grasping it.

44 B8.55-56, ἀντία δ΄ ἐκρίναντο δέμας καὶ σήματ΄ ἔθεντο/ χωρὶς ἀπ΄ ἀλλήλων. I doubt that Parmenides would indicate mortal predicates with σήματα if he intended there to be such an important difference between those and the σήματα for which the Goddess argues in the Ἀλήθεια.

without introducing predicative non-Being and the problems which accompany it? Parmenides' Goddess does not hesitate for a moment to put these names to use in describing Being. Does Being constitutes a special case, then, in which certain, limited predication proves unproblematic? Plato, in his *Parmenides*, addresses (among other things) this point. The dialogue, whose dramatic date is roughly 450 BCE, depicts a young Socrates meeting the older Eleatics, Parmenides and Zeno, when they visited Athens for the Panathenaea. In the first portion of the dialogue, Parmenides pressures Socrates on several points of his theory of Forms, while the remainder of it consists of Parmenides going through eight hypotheses concerning his One with the young Aristotle (a future member of the Thirty, not the philosopher).

The philosophical exercise undertaken in the second half of the dialogue, the series of eight hypotheses, aims to draw out all of the implications concerning the One, in relation both to itself and other things, assuming both that it is and is not. Of this exercise, the first two hypotheses concern themselves most directly with Parmenides' own work. The first, that the One is one (and not many),[45] concludes with Socrates and Aristotle in agreement that the One which is one does not exist, and therefore cannot be one.[46] The second concerns itself with the One that is,[47] which is found to be no longer one but many, and also to be beset with many other contradictions. In examining the consequences of each hypothesis, the fictional Parmenides addresses many of the σήματα found in his poem. Plato's dialogue ends in *aporia*, and little sense is made out of Parmenides' One. The lesson that we may draw from the *Parmenides* is, however, is that predicating any coherent set of qualities of the Parmenidean One proves quite difficult. When we name what-is, whether we call it "One" or "Being" or some other name, we

45 εἰ ἕν ἐστιν, ἄλλο τι οὐκ ἂν εἴη πολλὰ τὸ ἕν, 137c
46 οὐδαμῶς ἄρα ἔστι τὸ ἕν, 141e; τὸ ἓν οὔτε ἕν ἐστιν οὔτε ἔστιν, 142a
47 ἓν εἰ ἔστιν, 142b; τὸ ἓν ὄν, 143a

seem bound to encounter the same difficulties which beset Parmenides' deaf, blind, two-headed mortals.

The first Hypothesis: The One that is one

The first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* considers what must be true of the One, if it is truly one. The conclusions drawn from this hypothesis can be conveniently arranged into two groups: the first, those derived from the impossibility of what is one either being a whole or having parts, and the second, those derived from the claim that, by virtue of its oneness, the One can be neither the same as nor different from either itself or another, since "one" carries with it neither notion. The first group follow from denying that the One either is a whole or has any parts, and refute the possibility of the One having any physical existence. If it is to be one, and not many, it cannot be a whole (that is, a unity of parts), since the parts would be many and the resulting unity would no longer be absolutely one, but would consist of many things. Nor, for the same reason, could the One have any parts.

At this point, we begin to see the familiar case for the homogeneity of Parmenides' One – to be a true singularity, it must be internally uniform, without divisions, distinctions or parts. Plato, however, continues to draw further conclusions regarding the uniformity of the One. Without parts, it cannot have a beginning, middle or end,[48] as each of those amounts to a part, and lacking these, it follows that it must be limitless (ἄπειρον 137d), contrary to Parmenides' notion of Being uniformly encountering an absolute limit. However, without a beginning, middle or end, the One cannot have shape, which is nothing more than a particular arrangement of parts according to Plato's Parmenides.[49] Further, without parts, the One cannot exist either in

48 Evidently construed not as temporal parts: temporality of the One is not discussed until 140e.

49 E.g., a straight shape is that where the middle occurs between the beginning and end, while the middle of a round shape is equidistant from all of its extremities (137e-138a). Perhaps this is aimed at Parmenides' claim that what-is is like the volume of a spherical ball.

another or in itself (οὔτε γὰρ ἐν ἄλλῳ οὔτε ἐν ἑαυτῷ εἴη, 138a). In the first case, if we presume the One to exist within its own confines, it would require that it both contain and be contained simultaneously. In the dialogue, Parmenides argues that one and the same thing cannot both act and be acted upon in the same capacity at the same time, but rather such circumstances would require two "parts," one which contains, and another which is contained. The One cannot admit parts if it is to remain one, thus cannot contain itself. However, if it were to exist within something else, it would have to be contained by that thing and be in contact with it all around. Such contact, however, would presume the presence of more than one part, since contact at only one point can hardly be said to be containment. Therefore, Parmenides and Aristotle are forced to conclude that the One is nowhere (Καὶ μὴν τοιοῦτόν γε ὂν οὐδαμοῦ ἂν εἴη, 137a), existing neither within itself nor within another.

Following from this, the One can neither be in motion nor at rest (οὔθ' ἕστηκεν οὔτε κινεῖται, 139b). A change of location has already been undermined by the denial of physical existence either in itself or another, while Parmenides and Aristotle also agree that the One cannot rotate about an axis, lest they attribute to it a middle and other parts which might revolve around it. The One, moreover, cannot be said to be at rest, either. Under the definition that an object at rest remains in the same location, the One, which does not have any location, cannot be at rest. Once again, Plato not only follows Parmenides to the point of denying that the One can undergo change or motion, but also continues on to deny that it is at rest as well.[50] Thus, without exhibiting parts, the One is limitless, shapeless and is neither at rest nor in motion, since it does not exist anywhere.

The second line of argument following from the hypothesis "that the One is one" denies it

50 cf. B8.37-38, τό γε μοῖρ΄ ἐπέδησεν/ οὖλον ἀκίνητόν τ΄ ἔμεναι

of temporality and all quality whatsoever, and consequently the first hypothesis concludes by denying that the One either exists or is one. Parmenides begins by claiming that the One, insofar as it is one (and has only this quality), exhibits neither sameness nor difference. Therefore, if it is to be one, it is neither the same as nor different than either itself or anything else (ἕτερόν γε ἢ ταὐτὸν τὸ ἓν οὔτ' ἂν αὑτῷ οὔτ' ἂν ἑτέρῳ εἴη, 139e). On the one hand, it cannot differ from itself nor be the same as another and yet remain one, while, on the other, oneness is a separate thing from sameness and difference, and so it cannot, by virtue of being one, be self-same or other than another. Likewise, the One cannot come to be affected so as to be like or unlike either itself or another.[51]

The One also does not admit of any measure; it is neither greater, lesser nor equal (οὔτε ἴσον οὔτε ἄνισον ἔσται οὔτε ἑαυτῷ οὔτε ἄλλῳ, 140b), as each of these presumes either similarity or difference (to a given number of measures) as well as the presence of at least as many parts as there are measures. From here, Parmenides moves to deny that the One has anything to do with time or exists in time at all (ἆρα τὸ ἓν μηδαμῇ μηδενὸς μετέχει χρόνου, 141e). Beings which partake of some temporal relation also partake of similarity, difference, equality and inequality, depending on the relation examined. Anything which is in time at all has some temporal relation to itself: it is of the same age as itself, it is older than it once was, and it was once younger than it is currently. Because the One cannot bear such relations to either itself or another, it must not be in time or have any temporal relations whatsoever. Therefore, if it is atemporal, then it neither was, nor is, nor will be:[52] the One does not (and cannot) exist. Finally, Parmenides concludes

51 The definitions of like and unlike here revolve around being affected in the same or different ways. In either case, if the One is affected in such a way as to be anything other than one (e.g., "same" or "different"), it is no longer one.

52 141e: οὔτε ποτὲ γέγονεν οὔτ' ἐγίγνετο οὔτ' ἦν ποτέ, οὔτε νῦν γέγονεν οὔτε γίγνεται οὔτ' ἔστιν, οὔτ' ἔπειτα γενήσεται οὔτε γενηθήσεται οὔτ' ἔσται.

from the hypothesis "that the One is one" that the One neither is one nor is (ἀλλ' ὡς ἔοικε, τὸ ἓν οὔτε ἕν ἐστιν οὔτε ἔστιν, 142a), nor can it be named, given an account, known, perceived or be the subject of opinion (οὐδ' ἄρα ὄνομα ἔστιν αὐτῷ οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη οὐδὲ αἴσθησις οὐδὲ δόξα, 142a).

Again, Plato's Parmenides not only presents an argument for one of the Parmenidean σήματα by determining that the One neither was nor will be, but continues on to draw further conclusions (that the One is not), which raise serious difficulties concerning how those familiar Parmenidean predicates are applied. Whereas Parmenides asserts that what-is is ungenerated and indestructible, existing altogether in a timeless present (ἐπεὶ νῦν ἐστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν/ ἕν, συνεχές), the arguments of the *Parmenides* show that, if it is one (εἰ ἕν ἐστιν) it cannot have any relations, either with itself or with anything else, either spatially, qualitatively or temporally. Similarly, Plato's dialogue takes aim at Parmenides' accounts of how what-is is unmoved (ἀτρεμές) and perfect within limits (τέλεστον). Plato's Parmenides shows in what ways the One must be unmoved, admitting of neither qualitative change nor physical movement, but also argues that it cannot be at rest without either having parts or location. Likewise, with neither beginning nor end, the One must expand indefinitely and be an unlimited singularity without parts, rather than a homogeneous One within absolute limits. At each point, Plato seems to be taking Parmenides' case for monism and pushing it to its limits, where the σήματα begin to fall apart and Parmenides' logic begins to turn back on itself.[53]

The Second Hypothesis: The One that Is

This agenda is also evident in the second hypothesis, in which Parmenides assumes not that the One is one, but rather that the One exists. Whereas the first hypothesis considered the

53 Or perhaps "become παλίντροπος"?

consequences of positing that the One is essentially and only one – that it has only the quality of oneness – and concluded that such a One neither exists nor can be said to be one, Parmenides and Aristotle begin their investigation again, this time supposing that the One exists. This statement already presupposes the existence of two things, the One and Being (ἡ οὐσία), which must be separate from the One, if the One is to partake (μετέχειν) of it.[54] Therefore, the One that is (ἓν ὄν) possesses a dual nature, that of oneness and that of existence. Moreover, each of these natures both exists (i.e., partakes of Being) and is one, thus making the One that is into an unlimited multitude of holographic parts. Though the One as a whole is one, it is many – in fact, unlimited – with regard to its parts. The distinction between One and Being gives rise to difference, then duality, the generation of unlimited number and, consequently, a vast plurality of other existents. Once the many are, Being is found to have just as many instances as there are individual things and, insofar as each individual is a thing in and of itself, the One is found in an equal number of places (οὐκοῦν ἄπειρον ἂν τὸ πλῆθος οὕτω τὸ ἓν ὂν εἴη, 143a). At the same time, however, it is limited by the sum of the many which exist. Thus, the One that is is both singular with respect to itself and unlimited in its multitude of parts as well as in the multitude of particulars which are instances of it, while the same plurality also marks the limit of instances of the One.

Being a whole and having parts, the One that is has a beginning, middle, end and therefore, some shape defined by the spatial relationship between those parts. It exists both in itself and in another, just as parts exist within a whole and the whole must be contained by something else, since the whole cannot contain itself (as concluded in the first hypothesis), nor

54 The language of participation here is distinctively Platonic and the notion that participation in a Form amounts to having that Form as a part draws us back to the young Socrates' difficulties with the theory of Forms in the first part of the dialogue. Nonetheless, the distinction between One and Being remains, and if the One is (or if Being is one), there must be at least two things, not the unique existent (τὸ ἑόν) which Parmenides posits.

can it exist if it is nowhere. Existing within itself, it is at rest, so long as its parts remain within the whole, while it must also be in continual motion, the whole always existing within another.[55] From here, Parmenides continues to the conclusions (contrary to those of the first hypothesis) that the One that is is similar to, different from, like and unlike itself and others, is both in contact and not in contact with itself and others, is equal to, less than and greater than itself and others in both magnitude and number, and shares in every attribute in which anything else shares. We find also that the One that is participates in temporal relations, past, present and future, that it is and comes to be, was and was coming to be, and will be and will be coming to be.

Whereas the One which is necessarily one could not sustain any predicate whatsoever (not even "one"), Plato's Parmenides demonstrates in the second hypothesis that contradictions arise when we posit Being alongside One, as we must if we assert that the One is. These two hypotheses function very similarly to the two portions of the Goddess' revelation in Parmenides' poem. The first hypothesis, on the one hand, explores the ramifications of absolute unity and singularity. The conclusion is ultimately untenable, finding that the One, if it is truly, essentially and only one, cannot exist, nor can it be one, "nor is there any name for it, nor is there an account, nor any knowledge, nor perception, nor opinion of it" (οὐδ' ὄνομα ἔστιν αὐτῷ οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη οὐδὲ αἴσθησις οὐδὲ δόξα, 142a). Similarly, Parmenides' radical monism denies individuation, a prerequisite for all of the above. In each case, absolute singularity, while logically demonstrable, does not yield productive results. On the other hand, Plato's second hypothesis begins from the assertion that the One exists. However, the contradictions which follow are philosophically troubling. Contrary to the first hypothesis, though, Parmenides and

55 This conclusion is drawn from the somewhat specious definition (139b) that being at rest is "always remaining in the same," thus something which is always in another cannot be at rest and would have to be in motion.

Aristotle ultimately conclude that the One that is possesses both a name and an account, and "that it is named and spoke of" (καὶ ὄνομα δὴ καὶ λόγος ἔστιν αὐτῷ, καὶ ὀνομάζεται καὶ λέγεται, 155d-e). The One that is produces an account of individuation and change at the cost of logical coherence, just as the Goddess' cosmology purports to do. As soon as we apply names and qualities – even existence – we begin down the slippery slope of predication which "comprises no genuine conviction," though it seems to rescue the phenomenal world from monism.

III: Returning to Parmenides

I do not think that it is any coincidence that Plato has his Parmenides proceed in the first two hypotheses to "recreate" the problems raised in Parmenides' Ἀλήθεια and Δόξα.[56] The language with which he concludes the first two hypotheses makes clear, in Parmenidean terms, what Parmenides and Aristotle have found. Absolute singularity, Parmenides' Ἀλήθεια, cannot support any name or account, and attempts at describing reality so as to preserve the validity of our sense perceptions, by admitting the use of names (such as we find in the Δόξα), lead us down the backward turning path of mortals, where predication results in every contradiction and we are forced to admit that a thing both is and is not the same and not the same. The world of predication and existence, which maintains the reality of our perceptions necessarily admits absurdities regarding the nature of what-is, that it is both one and many, similar and different, hot and cold, and all the rest. Parmenides offers us an escape from these contradictions, down the path of what-is. By rejecting the mortal predicates, by arguing that objects in the sensible world are arbitrarily distinguished, he resolves these difficulties at the cost of individuation and change. However, if we also accept the arguments of the first hypothesis in Plato's dialogue, it seems that

56 Cherniss (1932) also presents the *Parmenides* as an expansion of the arguments found in the poem. He, however, takes Plato to be completely lampooning the Eleatic program and its "systematic abuse of εἶναι," attributing the first four hypotheses to a commentary on the Ἀλήθεια and the last four on the Δόξα.

a universe with a single inhabitant cannot support any proposition without collapsing, not even the σὴματα which Parmenides argued to be logically necessary. Instead, if we push past the σήματα to the other conclusions that Plato draws out, Parmenides' distinction between mortal thought and truth along the line of predication becomes clear. The realm of mortal thought allows predication and ultimately reduces to contradiction, whereas the path of what-is ends in monism, which cannot support any predicate whatsoever, not even existence.

Was Parmenides aware of this shortcoming of his grand argument for monism? In his poem, he attributes the error of mortals to their decision to apply names even though his Goddess provides no fewer than six predicates for what-is. Plato's *Parmenides* turns the Ἀλήθεια on its head, disallowing that any statement can be made about what must be essentially one. The puzzling character of Parmenides' monism shows itself in another way, as well. The dramatic setting for the Goddess' revelation of ultimate truth is fundamentally dialectical, that is, Parmenides places it explicitly in the context of a dialogue between the Goddess and the youth. The argument for monism is given by the Goddess to the intrepid youth who has traveled "far from the step of mortals." Assuming that our youth understood and agreed to what he heard, the poor boy has journeyed to see the Goddess, only to be convinced that, in truth, neither he nor the Goddess exists. This, of course, says nothing about Parmenides himself or anyone reading the poem. This setting is probably not just a rhetorical device, either. The proem establishes the dialectical setting, while the Goddess maintains the sense of a dialogue throughout, addressing the youth (and readers) in the second person.[57] Moreover, Parmenides' use of the word ἀλήθεια reaffirms that he intends a plurality of interlocutors. While in later authors the term can be used

57 Second person pronouns, B1.26, 28, B2.1, B6.2, 3, B7.2, 3, B8.8, 50, 60, 61; second person verbs, B1.26, 31, B2.1, B4.1, 2, B7.1, 2, 5, B8.6, 36, 52, 61.

in opposition to mere appearance, it only occurs in Homer in the context of a truth told, as opposed to a lie.[58] This use occurs only in the context of multiple parties engaging in a dialogue. Parmenides draws almost exclusively from the Homeric dialect for his vocabulary and usage, making it quite unlikely that he intended ἀλήθεια to be taken in any other sense. That monism could ever be considered the content of ἀλήθεια in this sense is a perplexing notion, along the lines of telling an interlocutor, "I am lying to you." If we assume that Parmenides indeed intended to distinguish mortal thought from truth on the basis of predication, surely he must have meant for the Ἀλήθεια to be unnameable and unspeakable. Given both the striking originality of the argument and the care with which Parmenides crafted his case for monism, it is difficult to believe that the paradoxical nature of his poem was anything but intentional.

Our interpretation of Parmenides must, then, understand the inherently and intentionally paradoxical character of the Ἀλήθεια. The σήματα for which the Goddess argues may be helpful in coming to a conception of what what-is must be like, but a proper understanding of how predication functions reveals that such an entity cannot sustain any predicate at all. This is not to say that what-is is not eternal, whole, unique and unchanging, but rather that predicates like these cannot tell the whole story about it. In a certain sense, these qualities serve as an accurate description of what-is, but they necessarily carry with them unwanted instances of non-Being and entail unacceptable logical consequences. Parmenides recognized this problem, and sought to give the best description of an unnameable entity that he could in words, while also providing a functional account of the world, reminding us the whole time that no distinction and no name can truly capture the nature of reality.

58 So it is used exclusively in dialogue by Homer: Hermes to Priam – ἄγε δή μοι πᾶσαν ἀληθείην κατάλεξον *Il*.24.407; Odysseus to the ghost of Achilles – παιδὸς… πᾶσαν ἀληθείην μυθήσομαι, *Od*.11.507; but outside of dialogue only in later authors τῶν ἔργων ἡ ἀλήθεια Th.2.41; ἐπὶ τῆς ἀλήθειας καὶ τοῦ πράγματος D.21.72; ἐν τῇ ἀλήθεια. Pl.*Lach*.183d. See MacKenzie (1982) for more on Parmenides' use of ἀλήθεια.

IV: Epilogue

Cela est bien dit, répondit Candide, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.
Voltaire, *Candide*

If the analysis given in this paper is correct, we are in a position to potentially resolve some puzzles concerning Parmenides. First of all, this understanding of the role of predication in his poem allows us to clearly see the distinction and relationship between its two parts. Assigning names to portions of reality sends us down the misguided path of mortals. Though this is not as fatal as following the path of what-is-not, on which we are denied the ability to have any experience whatsoever, mortal thought entails confusion, contradiction and reductionist puzzles. Rather than assenting to absolute non-Being, mortals introduce degrees of it through the back door of negative predicative implications. Once the idea of nonexistence appears, we are apt to believe in such things as generation and corruption, individuation, change, and that things both are and are not the same and not the same.

Following from the conclusion that predication is at the root of these problems, predication and its associated difficulties must be taken into account in interpreting the argument that Parmenides makes in the Ἀλήθεια. Though he provides a detailed proof for his σήματα, their presence contradicts the larger point that he makes regarding mortal opinion. If we examine what must necessarily be true of the One (or any absolute singularity proposed to actually exist), as Plato does in his *Parmenides*, we find that no predicate can be reasonably applied under such circumstances. This is, perhaps, no real surprise for Parmenides, whose monism has been recognized as self-defeating by many interpreters. That Being cannot support any of the σήματα is only one more way in which Parmenides urges us to "throw away the ladder" on which we ascended.

Even if the qualities with which the Goddess saddled what-is were tenable, the Ἀλήθεια provides us with an only nominally useful ontology. Without them, it is nearly as impractical as the forbidden path of what-is-not. While the path of non-Being cannot ever be the object of meaningful designation, the path of Being *can* be named, but predication opens us to the problems of mortal thought and precludes the possibility of a proposition ever describing some absolute truth. For Parmenides, what is absolutely true cannot be said and retain its truth, while what can be said, at best will lose its claim to truth and, in the worst cases, subjects us to unavoidable contradiction.

Parmenides, I think, understood the shortcomings of each path and, barring a solution to either puzzle, provided for us the best account of each in his poem. On the one hand, he describes a set of qualities which point us toward what what-is is, though even those names cannot apply to it in the strictest sense, and, on the other, he provides an alternate account of reality that clearly takes first prize in utility. It is in this sense that the Goddess claims that mortal thought comprises a necessary lesson. An account which stops at utterly denying predication would surely end in the absurdities which follow from utterly denying the reality of individuation and change (with which some have accused Parmenides). Even if the sorts of ideas put forward in the Δόξα are acknowledged to fall short of completely and comprehensively describing what-is, such predicates and distinctions must be employed in order to navigate one's daily life. Just as no philosopher can maintain his skepticism in the pub, we have to act as though those things are true if we are to accomplish anything. Ultimately, Parmenides leaves neither the Ἀλήθεια nor Δόξα as an appealing candidate for interpreting reality on its own, nor are they to be readily combined. Rather each portion draws our attention to a different and

irreducible aspect of our experience and interpretation of reality.

Understanding Parmenides' program in this way, the mythical and mystical setting in which his Goddess conducts her discourse is more readily understandable. Certainly, he was influenced by the epic tradition and perhaps by early mystic and shamanistic traditions, as were many other figures in ancient Greek literature and philosophy. However, his decision to use such an overtly mystical setting as the vehicle for his ideas, especially at a time when philosophical prose was coming into vogue, was not, I think, as automatic as some have assumed.[59] Rather, presenting a deliberately paradoxical and difficult account of reality is particularly well suited to a poetic medium where as much importance may be attached to what is not (or perhaps, what *cannot* be) said as what the author actually presents. Mystical experience is characterized by its inexplicability. The vague mythological backdrop and mystical overtones of the poem invite the reader to dive in between the lines and try to intuit the author's intent beyond what is explicit.

This reading of Parmenides has numerous applications outside of Parmenidean scholarship. There is potential for yet another interpretive layer in the *Parmenides*, if in fact, Plato intended to systematically work through the very difficulties we find in Parmenides' poem. The irreconcilability of the Ἀλήθεια and Δόξα in Parmenides may help to shed light on some other difficult metaphysical problems. For instance, Parmenides gives us a model of precisely how predicates relate to the larger context from which they distinguish a thing. For those who posit that mereological composition consists merely of an identity relationship between the parts and whole, Parmenides' "aspectual" understanding of reality – that mortal descriptions of reality pick out only certain aspects of what-is, but not Being itself – may prove useful. David Lewis, a

59 e.g, Mourelatos (1979, pp. 45-46), who claims that "the question 'Why poetry?' does not even arise" for Parmenides.

defender of composition as identity, acknowledges this very difficulty, conceding that "It does matter how you slice it – not to the character of what's described, of course, but to the form of the description. […] After all [the parts] are many while [the whole] is one."[60] What Lewis admits falls in line with the distinction between truth and opinion which Parmenides draws at the line of predication. While a whole and its parts comprise the same reality, the decision to describe one or the other irreducibly alters the character of what may be said of them. Predication of nearly any sort aims not at the whole, but at one particular aspect, quality or part of it.[61] What is true of the parts *cannot* be true of the whole, just as what mortals believe concerning reality (that it is a plurality of generated, destroyed and changing things) cannot be true of what-is in its entirety.

Parmenides also gives us a template for two distinct encounters that we might have with an object. In the more familiar encounter, we function as the mortals that we are, making use of predicates to form and evaluate propositions concerning whatever we experience. We thus divide off portions of our experience and recombine them into larger concepts and patterns as we interpret the world around us. Indeed, this practice of naming is extraordinarily useful compared to the alternative. Without using names to distinguish between myself and my coffee mug, my morning routine would likely become much more difficult. For the vast majority of mundane applications, too, the contradictions inherent in predication never rear their heads. However, there are at least two important instances where our mortal interpretive mode fails. First, as Parmenides points out, mortal opinion can never lay claim to absolute truth. The truth of our mundane views about reality is merely relative, only existing within a given context. When we

60 Lewis, 1991. p. 87.

61 With the exception of larger, more complex concepts (like "this white horse," "portrait" and "automobile"), which are understood to entail a particular set of qualities.

begin to treat these opinions as absolute, we find ourselves muddied in contradictions and absurdities, as do composition as identity theorists and many others.

The other instance in which predication fails us, though usually only momentarily, is in the case where we lack a concept appropriate for our experience. This happens both in new experiences and in our experience of the sublime – that which defies categorization. In such cases, we must essentially start from scratch conceptually and search to build a context within which to place the experience. For that instant, we are at a loss for words to describe the situation, and we are sometimes able to catch a glimpse of the other type of encounter with reality for which Parmenides' poem allows. This is a necessarily passive encounter with reality, since action already supposes a distinction between subject and object. In this mode, we do not distinguish parts within a whole, nor do we differentiate particulars. Qualities of a thing are neither recognized nor named. Instead, we are struck by whatever it is that we encounter, if only momentarily before we begin predicating and analyzing. Lacking any named qualities or individuation, this encounter is neither conceptual nor descriptive, though it is our nearest approach to what-is, unmediated by language or thought. Beyond the possible vague "feeling" or impression which we may receive from such an encounter, however, this mode offers very little by way of material from which we might make sense of reality.

These two modes of encounter can be applied to our understanding of aesthetic experience and the interpretation of art. Whereas representational painting, insofar as it represents *something*, provides us with the opportunity to apply one or more of our pre-acquired concepts in interpreting the piece, the non-representational work of Pollock, Kandinsky and others deprives us of that crutch. We approach these paintings afresh, unable to instantly

recognize and name a subject, and therefore the opportunity is there for us to encounter the work before filtering it through a repository of concepts and potential predicates. Moreover, for those of us who are unaccustomed to criticizing non-representational painting, our relevant vocabulary is relatively underdeveloped when compared with what we may be able to say about landscapes, still-lifes and other recognizably representational pieces. This, I think, accounts for the discomfort that often accompanies one's first encounter with non-representational works. Often our immediate impulse is to figure out *what it is*, to find some concept under which to categorize it. Failing that, we tend to focus on one part or another, on one aspect of the piece – its color, composition, brushwork – anything that we might be able to say something about. Conversely, representational work is rarely so troubling for the viewer. Landscapes and portraits offer us familiar concepts and predicates so that we are not forced out of our comfortable mortal mode of understanding.

Finally, I believe that there is an important epistemological implication to be found in Parmenides. When we carry these two types of encounter into epistemological territory, we find that they stand on very different ground. Parmenides often reminds us that our mortal encounter, using names and concepts has no genuine claim to truth. Predication can never result in anything more than relative, contextual truth. A proposition is not true outside of its particular context, and no proposition can be universally true.[62] Absolute truth, according to Parmenides, is not predicable and cannot be said, though it is paradoxically the only proper object of both thought and speech. Our most direct encounter with reality cannot be the object of knowledge,[63] while our concepts stem from our use of predicates to describe our experience, placing all propositional

62 Not even this one!
63 As Plato's Parmenides concludes at 142a.

content at a third remove from what-is. However, this does not doom us to forsake our mundane sense of knowledge. Knowledge, as we can have it, remains incredibly useful, and indeed necessary for everything that we do, even if certainty and absolute truth are beyond our reach. Along with this comes a more important epistemological role for those things which cannot be spoken, named or conceptualized. Predication and analysis serve important functions, but our pre-conceptual encounter with what-is that provides us its own kind of epistemological value. Being is not made manifest by any proposition, but is found in AbEx paintings, thunderstorms and on mountain peaks, when we either set aside or are forced out of our mortal mode of thinking.

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