and reincarnation, 284, taken together with 281–3, suggests that Pythagoras taught an eschatology according to which: (1) the soul is subject after death to a divine judgement; (2) there follows punishment in the underworld for the wicked (perhaps with hope of eventual release: 410), but (3) a better fate for the good, who—if they remain free from wickedness in the next world and in a further reincarnation in this—may at last reach the isles of the blessed (cf. Plato Gorg. 523a–b).

CONCLUSION

285 Porphyrius Life of Pythagoras 19 (DK 14, 8a) ὁ μὲν οὖν ἔλεγε τοῖς συνόντισι, οὐδὲ ἐς ἔχει φράσαι βεβαιῶς καὶ γὰρ οὕδ’ ἢ τυχούσα ἢν παρ’ αὐτῶς σιωπή, μάλιστα μένει γνώριμα παρὰ πάσιν ἐγένετο πρῶτον μὲν ὡς ἀδάνατον εἶναι φησὶν τὴν ψυχήν, εἶτα μεταβάλλοντας εἶς ἄλλα γένεσιν φώνης, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ὅτι κατὰ περίεργους τινὰς τὰ γενόμενα ποτε πάλιν γίνεται, νέον δ’ οὔδεν ἀπλῶς ἔστι καὶ ὅτι πάντα τὰ γινόμενα ὑμμὺς ὑμμογενή δὲν νομίζειν. φαίνεται γὰρ εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα τὰ δόγματα πρῶτος κοιμᾶτα ταῦτα Πυθαγόρας.

285 What he said to his associates, nobody can say for certain; for silence with them was of no ordinary kind. Nonetheless the following became universally known: first, that he maintains that the soul is immortal; next, that it changes into other kinds of living things; also that events recur in certain cycles, and that nothing is ever absolutely new; and finally, that all living things should be regarded as akin. Pythagoras seems to have been the first to bring these beliefs into Greece.

285 (probably by Dicaearchus) sums up a picture of Pythagoras' teaching which our study of the sources has confirmed, although it leaves out one or two points on which we have laid some stress (notably ideas about number and harmonia), and includes some not so far mentioned, such as Pythagorean silence (cf. Aristotle fr. 192, DK 14, 7; Diog. L. viii, 15) and belief in cyclical recurrence (cf. Eudemus ap. Simpl. in Phys. 732, 39, DK 581b34). Like the other sources it vouchsafes no hint of any reason Pythagoras may have offered for any of his doctrines. Like them it gives little ground for recognizing anything determinately philosophical or scientific in the content of his thought. Pythagoras, we must conclude, was a philosopher only to the extent that he was a sage (cf. p. 213 above). His contribution to Greek thought more broadly considered, however, was original, seductive and durable.

CHAPTER VIII

Parmenides of Elea

DATE AND LIFE

286 Plato Parmenides 127α (DK 29aii) ἐφή δὲ δὴ ὁ Ἀντιφόρων λέγειν τὸν Πυθοδώρον ὅτι ἀφίκοντο ποτε εἰς Παναθήναια τὰ μεγάλα Ζήνοι τε καὶ Παρμενίδης. τὸν μὲν οὖν Παρμενίδην εὐ μᾶλα δὲ προσβύτην εἶναι, σφόδρα πολίον, καλὸν δὲ κάθαρον τῆν ὁμιλίαν, περὶ ἐπὶ μάλιστα πλέον καὶ ἔξηκοντα: Ζήνοι δὲ ἔγγυς ἔτοι τετταράκοντα τότε εἶναι, εὐμήκη δὲ καὶ παιδική ταύτα τοῦ Παρμενίδου γεγονεῖν. καταλεύει δὲ αὐτοῦς ἐπὶ παρὰ τὸ Πυθοδῶρῳ ἔκτος τέχνης ἐν Κεραμεικῷ οἱ δὲ καὶ ἀφικέσθαι τὸν τε Σωκράτη καὶ ἄλλους τινὰς μετ’ αὐτοῦ πολλοὺς, ἐπιθυμοῦσαν ἄκουσαν τῶν τοῦ Ζήνους γραμμάτων—τότε γὰρ αὐτὰ πρῶτον ὑπ’ ἐκείνων κοιμηθήναι—Σωκράτη δὲ εἶναι τότε σφόδρα νέοι.

287 Diogenes Laertius IX, 21–3 (DK 28a1i) Ζενοφόντος δὲ διῆκονος Παρμενίδης Πύρρος Ἔλεατίς (τοῦτον Θεόφραστος εἶν ἐπὶ Ἑπίτημος Ἀναξιμάνδρου φησὶν ἀκούσαι). διὸς δ’ οὖν ἀκούσας καὶ Ζενοφόντος οὐκ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ἠκοινώσας δὲ καὶ Ἄμελις Διοικεῖά τῷ Πυθαγορίκῳ, ὃς ἐφὶ Σωτίων, ἀνδρὶ πέντε μὲν, καλὸν δὲ καὶ ἄγαθόν. ὃ καὶ μᾶλλον ἠκολούθησεν καὶ ἀποθεόθηκα τοῖς ἱδρύσατο γένοις τοὺς ὑπάρχους λαμπροὺς καὶ πλούτους, καὶ ἔπει Ἄμελις, άλλ’ οὐν ὑπὸ Ζενοφόντος εἰς ὁμογενῶς προετρώτη... ἠμαζει δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἑνάτην καὶ ἕξηκοστὴν ὕληπτιάδα... λέγεται δὲ καὶ νόμισες θείας τοῖς πολιτικαῖς, ὅς φησὶ Σπευστιππάς ἐν τῷ Περὶ φιλοσόφοιν.
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287 Parmenides of Elea, son of Pyres, was a pupil of Xenophanes (and he, according to Theophrastus in his Epitome, of Anaximander). But though a pupil of Xenophanes, he did not follow him. He associated also, as Sotion recorded, with the Pythagorean Ameinias, son of Diochaitas, a poor but noble man, whom he preferred to follow. When Ameinias died Parmenides, who came of a distinguished family and was rich, built a shrine to him. It was by Ameinias rather than Xenophanes that he was converted to the contemplative life...He flourished in the sixty-ninth Olympiad [500 B.C.]...He is said also to have legislated for the citizens of Elea, as Speusippos records in his work On the Philosophers.

1 Theophrastus' claim must have related to Xenophanes, but Diogenes writes as though Parmenides is in question.

Whether or not Parmenides and Zeno ever visited Athens and met there the young Socrates, Plato need not have been so precise about their respective ages. The fact that he gives these details strongly suggests that he is writing with chronological accuracy. Socrates was just over seventy when he was put to death in 399 B.C., which means that he was born in 470/469. If we assume that the words σοφόςρος νεος, 'very young', mean that he was about 20, then the meeting might have taken place in 450 B.C. This places Parmenides' birth in about 515 B.C. and Zeno's in about 490 B.C. It is of course true that the date given by Diogenes, which he probably derived from Apollodorus, does not nearly square with this; but, as Burnet points out (Erg, 170), 'the date given by Apollodorus depends solely on that of the foundation of Elea (540 B.C.), which he had adopted as the floruit of Xenophanes. Parmenides is born in that year, just as Zeno is born in the year Parmenides "flourished". Unsatisfactory as a late Platonic dialogue may be as evidence for chronology, it can hardly be doubted that it is more reliable than this.

The other items of information in 287 probably derive from early traditions, which may well be true, particularly Sotion's circumstantial tale. If it was a Pythagorean who converted Parmenides to philosophy, there is little sign that any preoccupation with Pythagorean ideas continued into his mature thought, except perhaps in his description of birth as something 'hateful' (306) and in the teaching about the fate of the soul which Simplicius briefly and allusively records in connexion with fr. 13 (in Phys. 39, 18). The notion that he was taught by Xenophanes was taken over by Theophrastus from Aristotle, who may in turn have derived it from a remark, perhaps not entirely serious, in Plato's Sophist (see 163, with the discussion on pp. 165ff.). Certainly there are echoes, not merely verbal, of Xenophanes' theology (170 and 171) and epistemology (186-9) in Parmenides. And Parmenides' decision to write his philosophy in hexameter verse may well have been prompted partly by the example of Xenophanes, who spent the latter part of his long career in Sicily and South Italy.

Parmenides' Hexameter Poem

Parmenides is credited with a single 'treatise' (Diog. L. 1, 16, DK28A13). Substantial fragments of this work, a hexameter poem, survive, thanks largely to Sextus Empiricus (who preserved the proem) and Simplicius (who transcribed further extracts into his commentaries on Aristotle's de caelo and Physics 'because of the scariness of the treatise'). Ancients and moderns alike are agreed upon a low estimation of Parmenides' gifts as a writer. He has little facility in diction, and the struggle to force novel, difficult and highly abstract philosophical ideas into metrical form frequently results in ineradicable obscurity, especially syntactic obscurity. On the other hand, in the less argumentative passages of the poem he achieves a kind of clumsy grandeur.

After the proem, the poem falls into two parts. The first expounds 'the tremorless heart of well-rounded Truth' (288, 29). Its argument is radical and powerful. Parmenides claims that in any enquiry there are two and only two logically coherent possibilities, which are exclusive— that the subject of the enquiry exists or that it does not exist. On epistemological grounds he rules out the second alternative as unintelligible. He then turns to abuse of ordinary mortals for showing by their beliefs that they never make the choice between the two ways 'is' and 'is not', but follow both without discrimination. In the final section of this first part he explores the one secure path, 'is', and proves in an astonishing deductive tour de force that if something exists, it cannot come to be or perish, change or move, nor be subject to any imperfection. Parmenides' arguments and his paradoxical conclusions had an enormous influence on later Greek philosophy; his method and his impact alike have rightly been compared to those of Descartes' cogito.

Parmenides' metaphysics and epistemology leave no room for cosmologies such as his Ionian predecessors had constructed nor indeed for any belief at all in the world our senses disclose to us. Nonetheless in the second (and much more scantily preserved) part...
of the poem he gives an account of 'the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true conviction'. The status and motive of this account are obscure.

THE PROEM

288 Fr. 1 (Sextus adv. math. vii, 3 (lines 1-30); Simplicius de caelo 557, 25f. (lines 28-32))

Parmenides' chief purpose in these lines is to lay claim to knowledge of a truth not attained by the ordinary run of mortals. The claim is dramatically expressed by means of motifs deriving largely from Homer and Hesiod, in matching diction and metre. It is sometimes suggested that Parmenides' journey to the goddess recalls the magical journeys of shamans. But as was observed above (p. 229) the evidence for a shamanistic tradition in early Greece is doubtful. Sextus, followed by many modern scholars, took the journey to be an allegory of enlightenment, a translation from the ignorance of Night to the knowledge of Light. But Parmenides already begins his
journey in a blaze of light, as befits one who 'knows'. The point of
the narration is suggested rather by the obstacle that has to be passed
and by the destination, the two things (apart from description of the
chariot and its movement) upon which the poet dwells. Parmenides
seeks to leave the familiar world of ordinary experience where night
and day alternate, an alternation governed - as Anaximander would
have agreed - by law or 'justice'. He makes instead for a
path of thought ('a highway') which leads to a transcendent com­
prehension both of changeless truth and of mortal opinion. No less
important is his message about the obstacle to achievement of this
goal: the barrier to escape from mortal opinion is formidable, but
it yields to 'gentle argument'.

The motifs of the gates of Day and Night and of divine revelation,
modelled on materials in Hesiod's Theogony, are well chosen to convey
both the immense gulf which in Parmenides' view separates rational
enquiry from common human understanding and the unexpectedness
of what his own reason has disclosed to him (cf. for both these points
Heraclitus, e.g. 205, 206, 210). And religious revelation suggests both
the high seriousness of philosophy and an appeal to authority - not,
however, an authority beyond dispute: 'Judge by reason my strife­
encompanied refutation' says the goddess later (294).

289 Fr. 5, Proclus in Parm. 1, p. 708, 16 Cousin
... ἐξονὶ δὲ μοι ἑστίν
ἀποθεοὶ διδομαί τούτῳ γὰρ πάλιν ἥξιμαι αὖθις.

289 It is a common point from which I start; for there again and
again I shall return.

289 fits neatly after 288 and immediately before 291, at any rate if
its point is that all the proofs of 296-9 take the choice specified in
291 as their common foundation (cf. also 294). 1

1 With 289 may be compared 290 Heraclitus fr. 103, Porphyrius in Iliadem xiv,
200 εὐνὸν ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρας ἐπὶ κύκλου. (In a circle beginning and end are common.)
But despite his talk of 'well-rounded truth' Parmenides need not be implying
here that his own thought is circular.

TRUTH

(i) The choice

291 Fr. 2, Proclus in Tim. 1, 345, 18; Simplicius in Phys. i 16, 28 (lines
3-8)

PARMENIDES

el δ' ἀγ' ἔγων ἔρεω, κοίμισα δὲ σὺ μύθον ἄκουσάς,
αἵτερ δοῦλοι μοῦνα διβδινόις εἰς νοήσαι:
ἡ μὲν ὀπτωπ ἑστίν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἑστιν μὴ ἑσναι,
πειθόν ἐστι κέλευθος ('Αληθεία γὰρ ὀπττοβεί),
ἡ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἑστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεων ἑστιν μὴ ἑσναι,
τὴν δ' τοι φράσει πανταπεθεδέ τίμεν ἀταρτόν'
ούτε γάρ ἂν γνωσίς το γε μὴ ἔδω (οὐ γάρ Δυστυνον)
οὔτε φράσας.

291 Come now, and I will tell you (and you must carry my
account away with you when you have heard it) the only ways
of enquiry that are to be thought of. The one, that [it] is and that
it is impossible for [it] not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for she
attends upon Truth); the other, that [it] is not and that it is
needful that [it] not be, that I declare to you is an altogether
indiscernible track: for you could not know what is not - that
cannot be done - nor indicate it.

The goddess begins by specifying the only ways of enquiry which
should be contemplated. They are plainly assumed to be logically
exclusive: if you take the one, you thereby fail to take the other. No
less plainly they are exclusive because they are contradictory (cf.
296, 16: 'the decision on these things lies in this: it is or it is not'). 1
What is the [it] which our translation has supplied as grammatical
subject to Parmenides' verb estin? Presumably, any subject of enquiry
whatever - in any enquiry you must assume either that your subject
is or that it is not. Interpretation of estin itself, here rendered
awkwardly but neutrally as 'is', is more difficult. The two obvious
paraphrases are the existential ('exists') and the predicative ('is
[something or other]'). To try to decide between them we need to
consider the arguments in which estin most prominently figures,
particularly the argument against the negative way of enquiry in
lines 5 to 8 of 291.

Unfortunately consideration of this argument is not decisive.
Certainly it appears impossible to know or point out what does not
exist: nobody can be acquainted with Mr Pickwick or point him out
to anyone else. But a predicative reading of Parmenides' premiss is
also plausible: it seems impossible to know or point out what is not
something or other, i.e. what possesses no attributes and has no
predicates true of it. Clearer is 296, 5-21, where an analogous
premiss - 'it is not to be said nor thought that it is not', lines 8-9 - is
used to argue against the possibility of coming to be or perishing. The
point Parmenides makes is that if something comes to be, then it must
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Previously not have been—and at that time it would have been true to say of it 'it is not'; but the premise forbids saying just that; so there can be no coming into being. Now 'come to be' in this context is plainly to be construed as 'come to exist'. Here, then, 'is not' means 'does not exist'.

At 296, 10, however, Parmenides goes on immediately to refer to what does not exist (hypothetically, of course) as 'the nothing' (cf. 293, 2). This suggests that he understands non-existence as being nothing at all, i.e. as having no attributes; and so that for him, to exist is in effect to be something or other. When later (e.g. 297, 22–5; 299, 46–8) he uses the participle ous, 'being', it is much easier to construe it as 'reality' or 'the real' than as barely designating existence. And what makes something real is surely that it has some predicate true of it (e.g. 'occupies space'). If this line of interpretation is correct, Parmenides' use of estin is simultaneously existential and predicative (as KR held), but not therefore (as KR concluded) confused.

From the unknowableness of what does not exist Parmenides concludes directly that the negative way is 'indiscernible', i.e. that no clear thought is expressed by a negative existential statement. We might put the point thus: 'Take any subject of enquiry you like (e.g. Mr Pickwick). Then the proposition "Mr Pickwick does not exist" fails to express a genuine thought at all. For if it were a genuine thought, it would have to be possible to be acquainted with its subject, Mr Pickwick. But that possibility does not obtain unless Mr Pickwick exists—which is exactly what the proposition denies.' This line of argument, in one guise or another, has exercised a powerful attraction on many philosophers, from Plato to Russell. Its conclusion is paradoxical, but like all good paradoxes it forces us to examine more deeply our grasp of the concepts it employs—notably in this case the relations between meaning, reference and existence.1

1 A difficulty: Parmenides further specifies the first way as 'it is impossible for [it] not to be' and the second as 'it is needful that [it] not be', which are not contradictories. A solution: perhaps these further specifications constitute not characterizations of the two ways, but indications of their incompatibility. Line 3 will be saying: the first way is 'it is'; and it follows necessarily that, if something is, it is not the case that it is not. So mutatis mutandis for line 5.

2 Editors often complete the half-line 291, 8, with a fragment known only in quite different sources: 292 Fr. 3, 'Clement Strom. vi. 23; Plotinus v. 1, 8 το γέρ ἄλλος νοεῖν ἵπτιν τε καὶ εἶναι. (For the same thing is there both to be thought of (and to be.)' If thus translated (but some render: 'Thought and being are the same'), it does sound as though it may fit here; 293, 1 shows that Parmenides explicitly deploys considerations about what can be thought, not just what can be known, in the context of argument against the negative way. But if so it is surprising that neither Frolus nor Simplicius quotes it at the end of 291. And it is hard to see what contribution it adds to the reasoning of 291, 6–8. (If ousin meant 'know' here, as e.g. C. H. Kahn (Review of Metaphysics 22 (1968–9), 700–24) thinks, then perhaps 292 would simply be another way of putting 291, 7–8. But ousin is used by Parmenides in parallel with simple verbs of saying (293, 1; 296, 8; cf. anísmatōn, 296, 17), and so must be translated 'think'.)

(i) Mortal error

293 Fr. 6, Simplicius in Phys. 86, 27–8; 117, 4–13 χρή το λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ε'ν ἔμεναι: ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι, μηδέν δ' ὦκα ἔστιν τά' ε'ν ἔγω φράσσει άνωγα, πρώτης γάρ σ' ᾧννα τάύτης διήγουσιν ἐλέγχων, αὐτὰρ ἐπειτα πρό τος, ἤν δέ βροτοι εἰδότες οὐδ' ἐπαύονται, δικαίου σ' ὑποτικὸν ἐπάνω εἰς αὕτων στιβέαρει ιθύνει πλακτόν νόμον ὑπὲροντ' οὐ δέ φεονται κωφοὶ όμος τυφλοὶ τε, τεθητότες, ἀκριτα φύλα, οίς τὸ πέλειν τα' καί οὐκ εἶναι ταύτων νεώμιστα καὶ ταύτων, πάντων δὲ παλιντρόπος ἐστιν κάλευοι.

293 What is there to be said and thought must needs be: for if it is there for being, but nothing is not. I bid you ponder that, for this is the first way of enquiry from which I hold you back, but then from that on which mortals wander knowing nothing, two-headed; for helplessness guides the wandering thought in their breasts, and they are carried along, deaf and blind at once, dazed, undiscriminating hordes, who believe that to be and not to be are the same and not the same; and the path taken by them is all backward-turning.

Parmenides' summary of his case against the negative way (lines 1–3), which says in effect that any object of thought must be a real object, confirms despite its obscurity that his rejection of 'is not' is motivated by a concern about what is a possible content for a genuine thought. It is followed by a warning against a second mistaken way, identified as the way of enquiry pursued by mortals. No mention of this third way was made in 291, and the reason is not far to seek. The goddess was there specifying logically coherent alternatives between which rational enquirers must decide. The third way is simply the path you will find yourself following if, like the generality of mortals, you do not take that decision (293, 7) through failure to use your critical powers (293, 6–7). You will find yourself saying or implying both that a thing is and that it is not (e.g. by acknowledging change and coming into existence); and so you will wander helplessly from one of the ways distinguished in 291 to the other. Hence your
steps will be ‘backward-turning’, i.e. contradictory. Of course, you will recognize that ‘is’ and ‘is not’ are not the same. But in failing to decide between them you will treat them as though they were the same.

293 was probably followed, after an interval, by a fragment in which the goddess bids Parmenides to make up his mind (unlike the mortals dismissed in 293) about her refutation of the second way:

294 For never shall this be forcibly maintained, that things that are not are, but you must hold back your thought from this way of enquiry, nor let habit, born of much experience, force you down this way, by making you use an aimless eye or an ear and a tongue full of meaningless sound: judge by reason the strife-encompassed refutation spoken by me.

295 There still remains just one account of a way, that it is. On this way there are very many signs, that being uncreated and imperishable it is, whole and of a single kind and unshaken and perfect.

If we must avoid the way ‘is not’, our only hope as enquirers lies in pursuit of the way ‘is’. At first sight it would appear that if we embrace that alternative, there open for us limitless possibilities of exploration: the requirement that any subject we investigate must exist seems to impose scarcely any restriction on what we might be able to discover about it; and the argument that what is available to be thought of must exist (293, 1–2) makes it look as though the range of possible subjects of investigation is enormous, including centaurs and chimaeras as well as rats and restaurants. But in the course of a mere 49 lines Parmenides succeeds in reducing this infinity of possibilities to exactly one. For the ‘signs’ programatically listed in 295 in fact constitute further formal requirements which any subject of enquiry must satisfy; and they impose formidable constraints (note the metaphor of chains in 296 and 298 below) on the interpretation of what is compatible with saying of something that it exists. The upshot of Parmenides’ subsequent argument for these requirements is a form of monism: it certainly transpires that everything there is must have one and the same character; and it is doubtful whether in fact anything could have that character except reality as a whole.

(iii) Signs of truth

296 Fr. 8, 5–21, Simplicius in Phys. 78, 5; 145, 5 (continues 295)

5 οὐδὲ πτώτ’ ἢ οὐδ’ ἑσται, ἕτει νῦν ἑστιν ὁμοὶ πάν, ἐν, συνεχές: τίνα γὰρ γέγονεν διηγείσαι αὐτοῦ; τῇ πόθεν αὐξηθέν; οὐδὲ ἐκ μὴ ἐνότος ἐκάσω φάσθαι σ’ οὐδὲ νοεῖν οὐ γὰρ φατόν οὐδὲ νοητὸν ἐστιν ὑπὸ τῶν οὐκ ἑστι. τῇ δ’ ἢ μίν καὶ χρέος ἄρεσεν ὡστερον ἢ πρόσθεν, τοῦ μηδενὸς ἀρκαίον, φύς; οὐτός τί πάμπην πελάναι χρεῶν ἑστιν ἡ ὦξι. οὐδὲ πτώτ’ ἢ μὴ ἐνότος ἐφησί τίτιος Ἰσχύς γύνεσθαι τι παρ’ αὐτ’ τοῦ εὐκενεκαί ὡδή σ’ ἀλλοθεί, ἄνθικον Δίκαι χαλάσσει πέθαιν, ἀλλ’ ἔγειρ’ ἢ δὲ κρίσις περὶ τοῦτον ἐν τῷδ’ ἑστιν ἐστιν οὐκ ἑστιν κέκριται δ’ οὗν, ὡστερ νάγκα, τὴν μὲν ἀνάντου ἀνάκυκλους (οὐ γὰρ ἀληθῆς ἑστιν ὁμοί), τῇ δ’ ἄστε πελάναι καὶ ἐτήτουμ ἂν εἶναι. πῶς δ’ ἢ ἐπέτα πέλαι τὸ ἄντ’; πῶς δ’ ἢ κε γενέστω; εἶ γὰρ ἐγέντε τ’, οὐκ ἑστε, οὐδ’ εἴ ποτε μέλλει ἐσθανεῖ. τῶς γένεσις μὲν ἀπέστεικατ’ καὶ ἄτυπος ὀλέθρος.

1 Many scholars follow Karsten and Reinhardt in emending μὴ τοῦ.
need would have driven it later rather than earlier, beginning from the nothing, to grow? Thus it must either be completely or not at all. Nor will the force of conviction allow anything besides it to come to be ever from not being. Therefore Justice has never loosed her fetters to allow it to come to be or to perish, but holds it fast. And the decision about these things lies in this: it is or it is not. But it has in fact been decided, as is necessary, to leave the one way unthought and nameless (for it is no true way), but that the other is and is genuine. And how could what is be in the future? How could it come to be? For if it came into being, it is not: nor is it if it is ever going to be in the future. Thus coming to be is extinguished and perishing unheard of.

These lines (as the conclusion, line 21, shows) are designed to prove what is can neither come to be nor perish.\(^1\) Parmenides is content to marshal explicit arguments only against coming into being, taking it as obvious that a parallel case against perishing could be constructed by parity of reasoning. He advances two principal considerations, corresponding to the dual interrogative: 'How and whence did it grow?' (line 7). He assumes that the only reasonable answer to 'whence?' could be: 'from not existing', which he rejects as already excluded by his argument against 'is not' (lines 7–9). In his treatment of 'how?' he appeals to the Principle of Sufficient Reason. He assumes that anything which comes to be must contain within it some principle of development ('need', \(\gamma ρέος\)) sufficient to explain its generation. But if something does not exist, how can it contain any such principle?

\(^{1}\) In lines 5–6 Parmenides appears to go farther than this. The statement 'it never was nor will be, since it is now, all together' seems to claim not merely that what is will not come to exist, but that it will not exist at all in the future. Probably what Parmenides means to ascribe to what is its existence in an eternal present not subject to temporal distinctions of any sort. It is very unclear how he hoped to ground this conclusion in the arguments of 296.

(iii) (b) One and continuous

297 Fr. 8, 22–5, Simplicius in Phys. 144, 29 (continues 296)

\begin{align*}
οὐδὲ & \text{ διακρίτης ἢστιν}, \text{ ἐπεὶ πάν ἢστιν ὄμοιον}\; \\
οὐδὲ & \text{ τῷ μέγάλῳ, τῷ κεν ἐγροῖ μιν συνεχεσθαι}, \; \\
οὐδὲ & \text{ τῷ χειρότερον, πάν ἢστι ἐμπλεόν ἢστιν ἑνότος}. \; \\
τῷ & \text{ ἑνότερον, πάν ἢστι} \; \text{ ἐν} \gamma χαρ ἑνότι πελάζει}. \\
\end{align*}

297 Nor is it divided, since it all exists alike; nor is it more here and less there, which would prevent it from holding together, but

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it is all full of being. So it is all continuous: for what is draws near to what is.

Does Parmenides have in mind spatial or temporal continuity here? He surely means to show that what is is continuous in any dimension it occupies; but 296 has probably already denied that it exists in time. Is the point simply that any subject of enquiry must be characterized by internal continuity, or is Parmenides more ambitiously claiming that all reality is one? It is hard to resist the impression that he intends the stronger thesis, although why he thinks himself entitled to assert it is unclear (perhaps he would rely, for example, on the identity of indiscernibles: there is no basis for distinguishing anything that is from anything else that is). The same ambiguity affects 298 and 299, and the same verdict suggests itself.

(iii) (c) Unchangeable

298 Fr. 8, 26–31, Simplicius in Phys. 145, 27 (continues 297)

αὐτὰρ ἀκίνητον μεγάλων ο ἐγροῖ δεσμῶν ἢστιν ἄναρχον ἄπαυστον, ἐπεὶ γένεις καὶ ὀλέθρος τόλμη ἐπελάξθησαν, ἀπόδοσε ἄπαυστος ὑλήθης,

τάυτον ἐν ταύτῳ τε μένον καθ' ἐστι δὲ τε κεῖται ἀνή διος ἐμπέδου αὐτὴ μενεῖ κρατερή γὰρ Ἀνάγκη περιταγός ἐν ἐσμοῦντι ἔχει, το μ ὄμφος ἐγροῖ.

298 But changeless within the limits of great bonds it exists without beginning or ceasing, since coming to be and perishing have wandered very far away, and true conviction has thrust them off. Remaining the same and in the same place it lies on its own and thus fixed it will remain. For strong Necessity holds it within the bonds of a limit, which keeps it in on every side.

Lines 26–8 suggest the following argument:

(1) It is impossible for what is to come into being or to perish.

So (2) it exists unchangeably within the limits of a limit.

It is then natural to read lines 29–31 as spelling out the content of (2) more fully. So construed, they indicate a more complex inference from (1):

(2a) it is held within the bonds of a limit which keeps it in on every side.

So (2b) it remains the same and in the same place and stays on its own.

The notion of limit Parmenides is employing here is obscure. It is easiest to understand it as spatial limit; and then (2b) follows
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somewhat less here or there. For neither is it non-existent, which would stop it from reaching its like, nor is it existent in such a way that there would be more being here, less there, since it is all inviolate: for being equal to itself on every side, it lies uniformly within its limits.

1 Or: 'in which thinking is expressed'.

This long and difficult final section of the Truth combines a summing-up of the whole first part of the poem with a derivation of the perfection of reality from its determinacy (argued fully in lines 42–9, which are often – as in KR – regarded as presenting a train of thought quite distinct from both lines 32–3 (usually reckoned part of 298) and lines 34–41). Parmenides first briefly sketches his main argument that what is, if limited or determinate, cannot be deficient, and if not deficient, cannot be imperfect (32–3). Then he takes us right back to his original starting-point: if you have a thought about some object of enquiry, you must be thinking about something that is (34–6). You might suppose you can also think about something besides what already is coming into being. But the argument has shown that what is exists completely and changelessly – it is never in process of coming to be (36–8). So expressions like ‘comes to be’ and ‘changes’ employed by mortals can in fact refer (despite their mistaken intentions) only to complete and changeless reality (38–41). Indeed from the fact that what is is limited or determinate, we can infer its perfection (42–4). For its determinacy excludes not just the possibility that it is subject to coming into being and change but any kind of deficiency in its reality (44–9).

Once again we face a puzzling choice between a literal and a metaphorical interpretation of ‘limit’. Once again what the argument seems to require is only some form of determinacy (cf. 296, 14–15). Once again the spatial connotations of the word are hard to forget – indeed they are pressed upon our attention (NB the epithet pumatan, ‘furthest limit’). And one can well imagine Parmenides concluding that if reality is both spatially extended and determinate, it must be limited in spatial extension. In the end we must settle for both the literal and the metaphorical reading of the term.

Pursuit of the way ‘is’ thus leads to a conclusion as astonishing as the result of consideration of ‘is not’. Parmenides’ final position in 299 is in fact doubly paradoxical. He not only denies the logical coherence of everything we believe about the world, but in making all reality a finite sphere introduces a notion whose own logical coherence must in turn be doubted.1

299 Therefore it is right that what is should not be imperfect; for it is not deficient – if it were it would be deficient in everything. The same thing is there to be thought and is why there is thought. For you will not find thinking without what is, in all that has been said.1 For there neither is nor will be anything else besides what is, since Fate fettered it to be whole and changeless. Therefore it has been named all the names which mortals have laid down believing them to be true – coming to be and perishing, being and not being, changing place and altering in bright colour. But since there is a furthest limit, it is perfected, like the bulk of a ball well-rounded on every side, equally balanced in every direction from the centre. For it needs must not be somewhat more or

1 For ὄνωμασται Simplicius (in Phys. 87, 1) E; ὄνομα ἔσται DF. Cf. Mourelatos, Route, 180–5; M. F. Burnyeat, Philosophical Review 91 (1982), 19 n. 32.

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MORTAL OPINIONS

(i) The status of Parmenides' account

300  Simplicius in Phys. 30, 14 (continuation of 299, cf. in Phys. 146, 23) metelhôn de átô tòw vnohtòv épi tâ aîshthtâ ò Ïarhmiéidhs, hîstî ótô álhithèss, ós autôs fheîn, épi bôzai, én òs lêgei (fr. 8, 1. 50) én tò soi peâw wistôv lôgon hîde nôhmìa ámpis álhithèss: bôzos b' átô toutô bôrteias máisîan kôsmou émiou épêw âpattîlon âkouw.

300  Parmenides effects the transition from the objects of reason to the objects of sense, or, as he himself puts it, from truth to opinion, when he writes: 'Here I end my trustworthy discourse and thought concerning truth; henceforth learn the beliefs of mortal men, listening to the deceitful ordering of my words.'

The goddess's account will doubtless be unreliable and deceitful principally because it presents beliefs which are themselves utterly confused as though they were in order (cf. 293). The second half of the poem did not simply describe or analyse current opinions about the cosmos. It contained an elaborate and distinctive theogony and cosmology reminiscent in parts of Hesiod, in parts of Anaximander. Parmenides' object, as we shall see, is to present mortal opinions not as they actually are, but as they might be at best. But that makes the account deceitful in a further sense: in effect it provides a deceptively plausible (although not genuinely convincing) representation of reality.

To understand better the connexion between Parmenides' cosmology and mortal opinions in general, we need to consider the last two lines of 301:

301  Fr. 1, 28–32, Simplicius de caelo 557, 25 (from 288) xêrôw dé se pánta prôdêsôsai ëmèn 'Îlthèssis evkuklêos âtrepèmì ëtop ën òtô bôtônto dôzai, taîs oûk èni pîstis álîthès. Ëllî împtis kai tòutâ makêsaei, òs tâ dôkousa xrôv dokîmôs ëînà diâ pàntos pànta peîrònta.

PARMENIDES

301  It is proper that you should learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true reliance. But nonetheless you shall learn these things too, how what is believed would have to be assuredly, pervading all things throughout.

Lines 31–2 are naturally interpreted as stating the condition upon which the genuine existence of the objects of mortal belief may be secured, viz. that they completely pervade all things. This condition is closely akin to the requirement of the Truth that any subject of inquiry exist completely. What Parmenides takes to be false in lines 31–2 is not the goddess's specification of the condition, but her claim that it can be satisfied by objects of mortal belief. It follows that the cosmology of the second part of the poem should be read as a reinterpretation of the world mortals believe in, in terms which explain it (falsely but attractively) as satisfying the pervasiveness condition.

1  Text, translation and interpretation are vexed: see Mourelatos, Route, ch. viii.

The main problem is that lines 31–2 appear to attempt to save the credit of mortal opinions, in flagrant contradiction with the assertion of line 30 that there is no truth in them. The solution is to read the content of the teaching of lines 31–2 as a lie, as indeed it is explicitly presented in 300 (cf. Hesiod Thng. 26–7, the model for 301).

(ii) Light and night

302  Fr. 8, 53–61, Simplicius in Phys. 38, 28 (continues 300) mophèsa xâr katèêwnto duôw gnômôs ònmaçênt, tòw miâ 'khêwôn éstîn — én fî peûlaîmêvôi eîsîn — tânta b' èkrînánto déma kai sîmat' èwênto xôrîs ðpp' òlîllhôv, tì ìn fî loghôs ìdethîn pûr, ëptîw òn, ìmëw' elàfrôn, éwotî pàntos pòtûnt, tò b' èpêw mû pòtûnt' âtâr kàkëinî katt' ûmî tânta vûkî' adagî, tûkîwv déma èmâbrîsî te. òn soi ègwí diákoûvön òvôkòta pànta fâtîzô, òs mû mî ptôt tîs se bôtônto gnômî pârelâsêst.

55  Tòs ìsû xêwô dènokîvôn òvôkòta pànta fâtîzô, òs mû mî ptôt tîs se bôtônto gnômî pârelâsêst.

302  Fr. 9, Simplicius in Phys. 180, 8 aútôp èpêidh pànta fâsîs kai vûs òwmaçêntai kai tâ katà sêfêòs ònmaçênt òntì tôsî tê kai tôsî, pîn plèw éstîn òmûf fâzos kai òkîtôs fâzos, lîstw èmîtêwv, èpêî ouðêtrîwû mëtës mûbênt.
they needs must not name so much as one\(^1\) – that is where they have gone astray – and distinguished them as opposite in appearance and assigned to them signs different one from the other – to one the aitherial flame of fire, gentle and very light, in every direction identical with itself, but not with the other; and that other too is in itself just the opposite, dark night, dense in appearance and heavy. The whole ordering of these I tell you as it seems fitting, for so no thought of mortal men shall ever outstrip you.

303 But because all things have been named light and night, and things corresponding to their powers have been assigned to this and that, all is full of light and of obscure night at once, both equal, since neither has any share of nothing.

\(^1\) Alternatively: (a) ‘not name one’ (sc. although the other is correct); the culprit is then identified as night, following Aristotle’s view (mistaken: see 303) that Parmenides ‘ranges the hot with what is and the other with what is not’ (Met. 986b31), or as not-being (an over-ingenious suggestion). (b) ‘not name only one’: so KR, following Simplicius; but mortals in general avoid this error – their discourse is full of contrary expressions, as 302 obviously recognizes. See further e.g. A. A. Long in Furley and Allen (eds.), Studies in Presocratic Philosophy, 82-101, Mourelatos, Route, 8a-7, D. J. Furley in Exegesis and Argument, ed. E. N. Lee et al. (Phronesis Supp. Vol. 1), 1-15.

302–3 advance the specific hypothesis by which Parmenides seeks to do the best that can be done to save mortal opinions. He pretends that they are built upon the foundation of a belief in two basic and mutually irreducible sensible forms, which are individually ascribed something like the determinacy required of subjects of enquiry in the Truth, and which together satisfy the condition of 301, 31–2 that they pervade all reality. Other things are treated simply as manifestations of light or of night (or, presumably, of both), and are characterized by specific powers associated with one form or the other.

The fiction of an arbitrary decision to introduce the names ‘light’ and ‘night’ has sometimes been implausibly construed as an explanation of how there can be a world of the sort believed in by mortals. It rather expresses dramatically an epistemological characterization of their belief. Mortal opinions do not reflect the discovery of objective truth: the only alternative is to interpret them as products of conventions elaborated by the human mind. Now it follows that nothing about the world can explain why mortals should have such conventions or why they should invest them with the specific content they give them. Hence the currency of these conventions can only be represented as due to arbitrary fiat.

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PARDENIDES

Parmenides was evidently quite systematic in his use of light and night in physical explanation, to judge from 305–7 below and from Plutarch’s testimony (which also indicates the main topics discussed; cf. fr. 11, Simpl. de caelo 559, 20):

304 Plutarch adv. Colotem 1114b (DK 28B10) δυ γε και διάδοσις πεποιθεί τα στοιχεία μηγάνοι τό λαμπρόν και σκοτεινόν ἐκ τούτων τα γαύνεμα πάντα καὶ διὰ τοῦτων ἀποτέλεσκαὶ γὰρ περὶ γῆς ἐρήμης πολλὰ καὶ περὶ οὐρανόν καὶ ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης καὶ γένεσις ἀνθρώπων ἀφῆται καὶ οὐδὲν ἀφρίγγον ὡς ἄνηρ ἄρηξιον ἐν φύσισι καὶ συνέσει γραφήν ἡδέω, οὐκ ἀλλοτρίων διαφορῶν τῶν κυρίων παρκένει.

304 Parmenides has actually made an ordering, and by blending as elements the clear and the dark produces out of them and by them all sensible appearances. For he has said much about the earth and about the heavens and sun and moon, and he recounts the coming into being of men; and as befits an ancient natural philosopher, who put together his own book, not pulling apart someone else’s, he has left none of the important topics undisputed.

While Parmenides offers no rational justification for choosing light and night as cosmological principles, he was probably conscious of following Hesiod’s Theogony 123ff. (31 above), which was certainly the model for his treatment of the origin of Love (fr. 13; cf. 31, 116–22) and of War and Discord (Cicero de natura deorum 1, 11, 28, DK 28A37; cf. Theog. 223–32).

(iii) Cosmology

305 Fr. 10, Clement Strom. v, 138 εἶτι δ’ αἰθέρια ταὶ φύσεις τὰ τ’ ἐν αἰθέρι πάντα στήματα καὶ καθαρὰς εὕαγες ἔλεοι λαμπάδοις ἔργῳ δίδηλα καὶ ὀπτάπθεν εὔεγένετο, ἔργα τού κύκλωμα τευχή περίφοιτα σελήνης καὶ φύσιν, εἰδήσεις δὲ καὶ οὐρανῶν ἄμφος ἔχουτα ἐνεν εὗρι τε καὶ ὦς μίν ἀγούσα(α) ἐπεθέουσα Ἀνάγκη πείρατ’ ἤχειν ἀστράων.

306 Fr. 12, Simplicius in Phys. 39, 14 and 31, 13 αἰ γάρ στεινόταται (sc. στεφάναι) πληθύνει πυρὸς ἀκρήτητος, αἰ δ’ ἐπὶ ταῖς νυκτοῖς, μετὰ δὲ φλόγος ἔτειν ἀσάν ἐν δὲ μέσῳ τούτων διάμοιν ἢ πάντα κυβερνά.
of both air and fire. Aither is outermost, surrounding all; next comes the fiery thing that we call the sky; and last comes the region of the earth.

305 evidently formed part of the introduction to the detailed account of the heavens. It is full of echoes of the Truth, e.g. when it speaks of the heaven 'surrounding' (cf. 298, 31), of the 'limits of the stars' (cf. 298, 26, 31; 299, 42, 49), and of how 'Necessity fettered' the heaven (cf. 296, 14; 298, 30–1). Perhaps they are meant to suggest that in attempting to save mortal opinions our descriptions of the world they invent must approximate so far as possible to those used in our account of true reality.

The exiguous surviving evidence of Parmenides' astronomical system is so brief (306) and so obscure (307) that it is impossible with any confidence to reconstruct a coherent account of his extraordinary theory of 'garlands' or rings.1 The whole construction was built out of the basic forms of light and night, as witness further Parmenides' memorable line about the moon's borrowed light:

308 A night-shining, foreign light, wandering around the earth.

The theory seems to have been surprisingly influential. Philolaus (446–7 below) was perhaps following Parmenides when he placed fire both at the extremity of the universe and at its centre, displacing the earth from the position traditionally assigned to it (but Parmenides' idea may have been of a fire within the earth). And Plato developed his own version of the scheme, including its presiding deity, in the myth of Er in the Republic (617–18). Parmenides for his part probably owed something to Anaximander's rings (125–8), although Hesiod had spoken of the shining stars with which the heaven is garlanded' (Theog. 282).


Postulation of a deity as first cause of cosmogonic mixture is supported by appeal to her operation in animal procreation (306, 4–6), which we know was one of the topics of this part of the poem (cf. 304). A single line of Parmenides' embryology is preserved:
The majority of general views about sensation are two: some make it of like by like, others of opposite by opposite. Parmenides, Empedocles and Plato say it is of like by like, the followers of Anaxagoras and of Heraclitus of opposite by opposite... Parmenides gave no clear definition at all, but said only that there were two elements and that knowledge depends on the excess of one or the other. Thought varies according to whether the hot or the cold prevails, but that which is due to the hot is better and purer; not but what even that needs a certain balance; for, says he, 'As is at any moment the mixture of the wandering limbs, so mind is present to men; for that which thinks is the same thing, namely the substance of their limbs, in each and all men; for what preponderates is thought' — for he regards perception and thought as the same. So too memory and forgetfulness arise from these causes, on account of the mixture; but he never made clear whether, if they are equally mixed, there will be thought or not, or, if so, what its character will be. But that he regards perception as also due to the opposite as such he makes clear when he says that a corpse does not perceive light, heat or sound owing to its deficiency of fire, but that it does perceive their opposites, cold, silence and so on. And he adds that in general everything that exists has some measure of knowledge.
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1 Or: ‘for the full is thought’. Translation and interpretation of the whole fragment are much disputed. See e.g. Guthrie, HCP II, 67-9 for discussion and references to the scholarly literature.

Fr. 16 gains in point if construed as a final dismissive comment on mortal opinion. In Truth genuine thought was in a sense identified with the being which is its object. But mortal opinion is mere invention of the human mind, not determined by reality. Mortal thoughts are now reductively ‘explained’ in terms of the very forms they have invented, as functions of the proportions of light and night in the human body.

CONCLUSION

312 Fr. 19, Simplicius de caelo 558, 8
οὐτῶν τοι κατὰ δόξαν ἐρωτάντες καὶ τῆς ἐκσατον καὶ μετέπειτε οὕτω τούτους τελευτήσασι τραφέντα τοις ξύλοις αὐθαίροντος κατέθεντ᾽ ἐπιστήμον ἐκάστῳ.

313 Fr. 4, Clement Strom. v, 15, 5
λέγοντες δ᾽ ὧν ὡς χαίρεται παρείοντας βεβαιῶς; οὐ γὰρ ἀποτιμᾶται τὸ ἐν τούτῳ ἐξεσθαί οὕτω σκιδναμενον πάντη πάντως κατὰ κόσμον οὕτω συνιστάμενον.

312 Thus according to belief these things came to be and now are, and having matured will come to an end after this in the future; and for them men have laid down a name to distinguish each one.

313 But look at things which, though far off, are securely present to the mind; for you will not cut off for yourself what is from holding to what is, neither scattering everywhere in every way in order [i.e. cosmic order] nor drawing together.

The goddess may have concluded her account of the content of mortal opinions (rounded off in 312) with the obscure exhortation of 313 to contemplate the truth. Why that elaborate account was included in the poem remains a mystery: the goddess seeks to save the phenomena so far as is possible, but she knows and tells us that the project is impossible. Perhaps Parmenides simply failed to resist the opportunity for versatility afforded by the idea of ‘saying many false things resembling the truth and uttering true things when we wish’ (Hesiod Thesm. 27-8).

DATE AND LIFE

The most reliable evidence for Zeno’s date is the same passage of Plato’s Parmenides (286) as was used to determine the date of Parmenides. On the basis of that evidence, Zeno seems to have been born about 490-485 B.C. Once again the date given by Apollodorus for Zeno’s flori, namely 464-461 (Diog. L. ix, 29 = DK 29A 1: text unfortunately lacunose), conflicts with this; but we have already seen that his dating of the Eleatics depends solely on the date of the foundation of Elea. Nonetheless he may fortuitously give us a date only about five years too late for Zeno’s book, if it was indeed written (as 314 says) in his youth.

Little is known of Zeno’s life. Diogenes Laertius tells us (ix, 28, DK 29A 1: a passage apparently intended to contradict the story in 286) that he loved Elea, ‘mean though it was and skilled only in bringing men up to be virtuous, in preference to the arrogance of Athens’, which he did not visit, living all his life in his native city. In the one context in which his name repeatedly occurs by itself—the story of his part in a plot against a tyrant and of his courage under torture (see DK 29A 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9)—the details vary so much that the facts are impossible to reconstruct.

ZENO’S BOOK

314 Plato Parmenides 127b-128a. Τὸν οὖν Σωκράτη ἀκούσαντα πάλιν τε κελεύουσα τὴν πρώτην ὑπόθεσιν τοῦ πρῶτον λόγου ἀναγνώσαν, καὶ ἀναγνώσθεισιν, Πῶς, φάναι, ὁ Ζήνων, τοῦτο λέγεις; εἰ πολλὰ ἔστι τὰ ὄντα, ὡς ἀρα δεὶ αὐτὰ ὑμῖν ὑπὸ τὸ ὄνομα τὰ ὄνομα εἶναι καὶ ὄνομα, τοῦτο δὲ δὴ ἄνυσταν; οὔτε γὰρ τὰ ὄνομα ὄνομα οὔτε τὰ ὄνομα ὄνομα ὄνομα ὑπό τὸ ὄνομα ὄνομα ὑπὸ τὸ ὄνομα; οὔτε ὄνομα λέγεις;
Οὔτε, φάναι τὸν Ζήνωνα.
Οὐκοῦν εἰ ἄνυσταν τὰ τὸ ὄνομα ὄνομα εἶναι καὶ τὰ ὄνομα ἄνομοι, ἄνυσταν δὴ καὶ πολλὰ ἔσται; εἰ γὰρ πολλὰ ἔσται, πάσχοι ἄν