AMBIGUITY AND TRANSPORT: REFLECTIONS ON THE PROEM TO PARMENIDES' POEM

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Let me begin by distinguishing an ultimate and a proximate task for these reflections. The ultimate task, a perennial one for students of Greek philosophy, is to understand just what Parmenides lays open for thinking and speaking when, in the so-called Truth-section of his poem, fragments 2 through 8. 49, he isolates the 'is' (ἔστι) that is 'the steadfast heart of . . . truth' (1. 29). The proximate task is to explore the context Parmenides gives us for this ultimate task, the proem's account of the transformative journey to and through 'the gates of the paths of Night and Day' that brings the traveller into the presence of the truth-speaking goddess. We modern-day philosophers have generally been reluctant to pursue this exploration too closely, not only because we are accustomed to draw a sharp distinction between poetry and philosophy, a distinction that, arguably, did not take hold in the Greek world until Aristotle, but also, more to the point at present, because Parmenides' proem seems riddled with ambiguity. This is not wrong; indeed, as I shall try to show, its ambiguity is both more extensive and more central than has been recognized heretofore. But I shall also try to show that it is a resource, not a liability; by the close of these reflections I hope to have made compelling that and why bringing the ambiguity of the proem into good focus is key to a well-oriented turn to our ultimate task, understanding the 'is'.

We shall proceed in three broad stages. I shall begin with a series of orienting observations on fragments 2 and 6, as well as a provisional indication of the historical-philosophical background that the proem recalls; our purpose will be to acquire questions and resources. In Section 2 we shall turn to the proem; I shall first draw on parallels with fragments 8. 50–61 and 9 in the Doxa section to give a general characterization of the significance of the image of arriving at the gateway, then lay out three fundamental ambiguities that must complicate, to say the least, any effort to understand the significance of the proem's image of passing through the gateway to the goddess. What first appears as a set of obstacles will, however, when considered more closely, reveal itself as a well-integrated means of passage; embracing these ambiguities, I shall try to show, lets us recognize Parmenides' manifold response to his two major philosophical predecessors, Hesiod and Anaximander, and gives us two distinct but complementary courses of thought (marked in fragment 6) for experiencing the 'truth' of the 'is'. In Section 3 we shall attempt to travel each of these courses, then reflect on the implications of their difference and their fit for the significance of the 'is'.

1. Preparatory questions and observations

(a) *A first reading of fragment 2; basic questions*

Parmenides first articulates the 'is' in fragment 2:

> 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 (ἀληθείῃ 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.[1]

Come, I shall tell you, and you, having heard, preserve the account,
These are the only routes of enquiry there are for thinking:
The one—that . . . *is* and that it is not possible [for] . . . *not to be*—

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[1] For Parmenides' Greek, here and below, I borrow, with a few differences noted, from A. P. D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* [*Route*] (New Haven, 1970), appendix IV, pp. 279–84.

Is the path of persuasion, for it attends upon truth;
The other—that . . . *is not* and that it is right [for] . . . *not to be*— 5
This unturning route, I point out to you, is one from which
   no learning ever comes,
For you could not know *what-is-not*, as such, for it cannot be
   brought about,
Nor could you point it out.

There are a number of observations to make here. First, the god-
dess picks out or highlights the 'is' by pointedly suppressing its
subject (and, possibly, predicate). The effect is to reverse the usual
order of the conspicuous and the inconspicuous: by eliding the nor-
mally conspicuous subject (and, possibly, predicate), the goddess
brings the normally inconspicuous 'is' to the front and centre and
challenges us to reflect upon it. Second, she sets the 'is' into an
adversative contrast with its negation, 'is not' (2. 5). If on 'the one
[route of enquiry]' one thinks 'that' (or 'how') its elided subject 'is',
on 'the other [route]' one thinks 'that' (or 'how') its elided subject
'is not'. But, third, this contrastive pairing of the two routes belies
a deeper, asymmetrical connection between them: the first route
is essentially constituted as a response to the impossibility of the
second. The goddess marks out the first route by closely conjoin-
ing[2] her articulation of the 'is' with the declaration that its negation,
'not to be' ($\mu\grave{\eta}$ $\epsilon\hat{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$), 'is not possible'. Thus, the first route bears
an internal relation to the second: its thinking 'that' or 'how . . .
is' arises, if not out of, then in close connection with the attempt to
think the negation of the 'is'—that is, to think 'that' or 'how . . .
is not'—and the recognition of its impossibility. The goddess pro-
vides the insight at the core of this recognition in her critique of
the second route in the closing lines of fragment 2. 'No learning
ever comes' from the second route, she tells the traveller, because
the enquiry that proceeds upon it tries to take up what, because
it 'cannot be brought about' ($o\mathring{\upsilon}$ $\gamma\grave{\alpha}\rho$ $\mathring{\alpha}\nu\upsilon\sigma\tau\acute{o}\nu$, 2. 7)[3]—that is, be-
cause it cannot be constituted as an object or determinate content,
much less, then, as an object for thought—cannot be 'know[n]' or
'point[ed] out' (2. 7–8). This imponderable is $\tau\acute{o}$ $\gamma\epsilon$ $\mu\grave{\eta}$ $\mathring{\epsilon}\acute{o}\nu$, 'what-

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[2] Note $\tau\epsilon$ $\kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}$, the tightest possible pairing expression, in 2. 3 and 2. 5.
[3] $\mathring{\alpha}\nu\upsilon\sigma\tau\acute{o}\nu$, 'to be accomplished; practicable' (LSJ), derives from $\mathring{\alpha}\nu\acute{\upsilon}\epsilon\iota\nu$ 'to effect,
accomplish'. LSJ also lists three narrower senses of great interest for understanding
Parmenides: 'to make . . . to be . . .', 'to make [an image]', and 'to finish [a journey]'
(LSJ s.v. 3, 4, and 5, respectively).

is-not, as such' (2. 7), a 'what' (τό . . .) whose 'is' (or 'being', . . . ἐόν) is subjected to negation ('not', . . . μή . . .) and which thinking seeks to take up precisely and exclusively as it suffers this negation; the goddess indicates this restrictive focus by the particle γε, the force of which I have tried to convey with 'as such'. Asserting not only 'that . . . is not' but, as the basis for this, that 'it is right [for] . . . not to be' (2. 5), the thinking that proceeds on the second route gives itself—or, more precisely, tries and fails to give itself—such a pure 'what-is-not' as its object. By contrast, the thinking that proceeds on the first route, recognizing that the very formation of such a (non-)object 'is not possible' (2. 3), turns away from it and affirms, instead, 'that' or 'how . . . is'.

The vagueness of these formulations is deliberate; their chief value is to let some of the sets of questions emerge that are important for interpreting Parmenides' '. . . is'. I would single out, to begin with, these five: (i) Does the 'is' have an implied subject? About what—if, indeed, about anything specific at all—does the thinking that proceeds on the first route say 'is'?[4] And if there is an implied subject of some sort, why does Parmenides elide it? (ii) In what sense or senses should we hear the 'is'? What, if anything, does this 'is' signify?[5] (iii) What, if anything specific, does Parmenides intend to call to mind when he has the goddess speak of 'what-is-not, as such'? How do the possible specifications of the '. . . is' that are invited by questions (i)–(ii) bear on any possible specification of 'what-is-not, as such', and vice versa? (iv) Through the voice of the goddess, Parmenides lays claim to the discovery of the route

[4] To put this in familiar grammatical terms, does the '. . . is' imply a specific subject, of which it is asserted? Does Parmenides intend a subject for 'is' but elide it in order to turn our focus to the normally inconspicuous 'is'? The analogous questions could be asked, note, with regard to the possibility of an implied predicate.

[5] To put this question in terms of familiar scholarship, does the 'is' signify existence, identity, or truth, or is it better understood syntactically, as an 'is' of predication, or, again, does it cross the line between significance and function in the way that, especially, 'speculative predication', as proposed by Mourelatos, *Route*, ch. 2, and rearticulated by P. Curd, *The Legacy of Parmenides* [*Legacy*] (Princeton, 1998), does? (See n. 63 below.) Does it involve not just one but rather some interplay of these senses and functions, as Charles Kahn ('Parmenides and Plato', in V. Caston and D. Graham (eds.), *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Alexander Mourelatos* (Aldershot, 2002), 81–93) has recently reiterated? Or, perhaps, are these very distinctions questionably or poorly attuned to ancient Greek, as Lesley Brown ('The Verb 'to Be' in Ancient Philosophy: Some Remarks' ['Verb'], in S. Everson (ed.), *Language* (Companions to Ancient Thought, 3; Cambridge, 1994), 212–36) has argued, implying choices that the Greek ear would not have heard, at least as we do?

on which one thinks 'that', or enquires 'how', '. . . is'. But he has the goddess disclaim the second route. Whom does she target in identifying the second route? Who, if anyone, takes it as 'right [for] . . . not to be'? (v) Finally, Parmenides' elision of the subject (and, perhaps, the predicate) of the '. . . is' is part of a larger act of elision. In bringing the '. . . is' front and centre, he lets fall from view the context within which the '. . . is' emerges. This *may* signal the indifference of the '. . . is' to its context—but it may also, instead, signal the first stage in the transformation of this context; that is, it may mark a departure from the context that will put thought in position to return to it with new understanding of its meaning and significance. Without begging this question, we can hope that identifying the context would help give us our bearings in trying to respond to questions (i)–(iv). Accordingly, we need to ask: does Parmenides indicate the context within which the two routes emerge, even as he prepares to elide it in fragment 2?

(*b*) *Fragment 6; two encounters with the negation of being?*

Before proceeding, we should pause to recognize a complication. In fragment 6 the goddess once again distinguishes two 'routes'. Are these in some way redescriptions of the two routes of fragment 2, or—an alternative view held by many—is the second route in fragment 6 a third route overall, set apart from the two routes in fragment 2? Fortunately, we do not yet need to venture too deeply into the difficult syntax of the opening clause of 6. 1 (the proem will help us with this later), nor do we need to address the question of the lacuna in the text at 6. 3.[6] At this point we need only to observe

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[6] The main verb is missing in the oldest manuscripts. My supplement, ἄρξω, is suggested by A. Nehamas, 'On Parmenides' Three Ways of Inquiry', *Deucalion*, 33/4 (1981), 97–111. This runs parallel with the earlier suggestion of ἄρξει, 'you shall begin', by N.-L. Cordero, 'Les deux chemins de Parménide dans les fragments 6 et 7', *Phronesis*, 24 (1979), 1–32. (Both have repeated their proposals, first arrived at independently, in more recent work—Nehamas in his 'Parmenidean Being/Heraclitean Fire' ['Fire'], in V. Caston and D. Graham (eds.), *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Alexander Mourelatos* (Aldershot, 2002), 45–64, and Cordero in *By Being, It Is* [*By Being*] (Las Vegas, 2004).) The traditional and more widely accepted reading, going back to a Renaissance edition in 1526 and adopted by Diels, is εἴργω, 'I restrain' or 'hold [you] back'. If we adopt the traditional reading, we must take the goddess to intend to 'hold' the traveller 'back' only from the thinking of the negation of being, whether in the sense of the 'nothing' (μηδέν) of 6. 2 or in the sense of the thought of 'not to be' (οὐκ εἶναι) of 6. 8, and not from the affirmation of being that goes along with each of these. I adopt the Cordero–Nehamas alternative because it avoids the need for this special pleading.

the difference between the two characterizations of the encounter
with the negation of 'being' in 6. 2 and 6. 8–9. Here is fragment 6,
with the key phrases underlined:

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

It is right for what is there for discourse and understanding[7] to be;
    <u>for it is there[8] to be,</u>
<u>Whereas nothing cannot [be]; that is what I bid you consider.</u>
For [I shall begin for] you from this first route of enquiry,
And then next from the [route] on which mortals knowing nothing
Wander, two-headed; for helplessness in their   5
Breasts guides their wandering mind; and they are borne along
Both deaf and blind, dazed, tribes without discernment,
<u>By whom to be and not to be have come to be taken as the same</u>
<u>Yet not the same</u>; and the path of all is backward-turning.

Taken by itself, the route marked in 6. 1–3 seems to fit well with the
first route the goddess describes in 2. 3: in the compound clause that
ends 6. 1 and begins 6. 2, it is the impossibility that 'nothing' '[be]'
that secures the 'right'-ness or propriety of saying 'to be' (ἔμμεναι)
of 'what is there for discourse and understanding' (6. 1), and this
correlates with the way that, in fragment 2, it is the impossibility

[7] Thus λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ'. Mourelatos has argued persuasively, I think, that '"think-
ing" (νοεῖν) functions in Parmenides not as a psychological but as an epistemic
term, that it expresses the incisive and sure apprehension of what-is, or truth . . .
Parallel comments apply to "speaking". It is clear that Parmenides treats, on the
one hand, νοεῖν and, on the other, λέγειν, or φάναι, or ὀνομάζειν as cognate processes'
(*Route*, 164). Accordingly, following his suggestions (ibid.), I shall translate νοεῖν as
'understanding' and λέγειν, when paired with νοεῖν, as 'discourse'.

[8] This clause could also be translated 'for it can be', in which case we would have
the same use of ἔστι signifying possibility that, on my reading, we have in 6. 2.
This, however, would fail to convey the way in which ἔστι in 6. 1, heard existentially,
resonates with the idea of presence for . . . that is expressed by the preceding ἐόν
and with the idea of existence that is expressed by the preceding ἔμμεναι. By the
same token, the οὐκ ἔστιν of 6. 2 could be translated 'is not', but this would lose the
intensification of the denial of existence that is expressed by the denial of possibility
and that is so appropriate to μηδέν. (I owe thanks to Rachel Kitzinger for discussion
of this variety and interplay of uses.)

of 'what-is-not, as such'—'for it cannot be brought about' (2. 7)—
that moves thought to turn back to affirm 'that' or 'how . . . is'
(2. 3). In 6. 4–9, however, the goddess brings us to consider the
negation of 'being' under what appears to be a different aspect:
here, in the view of 'two-headed mortals', 'to be and not to be'
(τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι) are 'the same and yet not the same'; it
is not the isolated 'what-is-not, as such' but rather the apparently
contradictory linking of 'not to be' with 'to be' that is problematic.
So we must add the following to the questions we gave ourselves
at the end of the previous subsection: (vi) What is the 'backward-
turning path of all' that the goddess refers to at 6. 9, and how does
it link 'to be' and 'not to be'? (vii) How does this second 'route', in
6. 4–9, relate to the 'route' in 6. 1–3? Do they, each encountering
the negation of 'being' in its own way, lead to different destinations,
or do they somehow converge? And, (viii), how do these 'routes'
relate to the 'routes' in fragment 2? How should we understand the
relation between Parmenides' distinct pairings in 2 and 6?

(*c*) *Background: notes on Hesiod and Anaximander*

My project in this essay is, of course, an affirmative response to (v).
I want to try to show that Parmenides gives us in the proem the
context for the discovery of the '. . . is'. First, however, we need to
provide ourselves with some key historical background. The central
image in the proem is the gateway 'of the paths of Night and Day'
(1. 11 ff.), presided over by 'much-punishing Justice' (1. 14). In
its details this image resonates with Hesiod and Anaximander, and
our ability to appreciate its significance for the discovery of the
'. . . is' will depend on our ability to recognize and, what is more,
let our imagination be guided by these allusions.[9] Hence this set of
preliminary notes.

(i) *Hesiod's recognition of the play of opposites*. Parmenides' refer-
ence to the 'House of Night' at 1. 9 and his forceful opening locative
adverb 'There' (ἔνθα) in 1. 11 recall Hesiod's description of the un-
derworld in the *Theogony*,[10] and Parmenides' image of the gateway

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[9] On Parmenides' rightful presumption of this ability in his hearers, see K. Robb,
Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece (Oxford, 1994), esp. p. 5.

[10] Hesiod structures the description, 720–819, as a series of pointings, each begun
with an opening ἔνθα. See 729, 734, 736, 758, 767, 775, 807 (=736), 811. This is an
ingenious way to proceed, for it allows him to keep a certain order in his discourse

will remind his Greek hearer of Hesiod's vivid portrayal of the in-
terplay of the personified Night and Day at 748–55. By referring
to a 'great threshold of bronze' (μέγαν οὐδὸν χάλκεον, 749–50) and a
'door' (cf. θύραζε, 750), Hesiod conjures up a gateway on the border
of the underworld.[11] On the far side and underneath, containing
the House of Night, lies Tartarus, a 'great chasm' (*Theogony* 740).
Night and Day, Hesiod sings,

                                        draw near to each other
and speak a word of greeting as they exchange places [ἀμειβόμεναι]
        over the great threshold
of bronze; when the one is about to go down, the other comes
out the door, and the house never holds them both within at once
but always, when one of them is outside the house, faring over the earth,
the other stays inside, waiting for its due time for travel to arrive;
the one brings to those on the earth far-flashing light,
while the other holds Sleep, brother to Death, in her arms,
[and she is] destructive Night, veiled in dark clouds.

That this is mythopoeic depiction makes all the more remarkable
the keen sense for the logic of opposites that it expresses. Night and
Day are mutually exclusive, strict alternatives each to the other;
in having them 'speak a word of greeting' as they pass each other
over the threshold, however, Hesiod makes poignant the way in
which their alternation is a form of sharing and collaboration. Each
requires the other in order, through their very contrast, to be itself,
and so they share a home and yield, each to the other, an equal share
of the diurnal period to 'fare over the earth'. By their interplay they
express just the knowledge that Hesiod makes it his mission to
teach, 'how much greater is the half than the whole' (*Works and
Days* 40).
   Hesiod expresses this keen sense for the play of opposites in
two further ways as well, and since both are at work in the allu-
sive content of Parmenides' proem, we need to note them here.
First, Hesiod recognizes the way in which the specifically tempo-
ral alternation of night and day fits together with the specifically
spatial distribution to opposed loci of their spatial analogues. At
Theogony 123–5 he pairs Erebus, the darkness of the underworld,

without thereby attributing any subordinative or even interrelating structure, hence
any intrinsic integration, to Tartarus itself.

   [11] M. L. West (ed.), *Hesiod:* Theogony (Oxford, 1966), ad loc.

with Night, and he makes them the parents of their correlative op-
posites, Aither, the sheer radiance of the upper sky, and Day. Thus
the principles of light and dark fit together in different ways—ways,
indeed, that themselves in their own difference also fit together—to
structure both the time and the space of the world. Second, and still
more remarkably, Hesiod appears to recognize the way in which the
very lack of differentiation stands over against differentiated total-
ity, and so stands with it to constitute a still higher totality. In his
cosmogony he builds up an image of the whole of the world as a set
of nested pairings of the internally differentiated with the absence
of differentiation. To trace this from micro- to macro-structure:
within the earth, the fertile hills and forests stand over against
the barren sea (129–32); within our over-world, in turn, the thus
differentiated whole of the earth stands over against the open sky
(126, 133); and finally, within the cosmos as a whole, the thus dif-
ferentiated over-world stands over against 'dark and murky' (729),
storm-filled (742–3) Tartarus, a 'great chasm' (740) precisely in
that, far beneath the very 'roots of earth and sea' (727–8), it lacks
any such internal differentiation and structure within itself.[12]

(ii) *Anaximandran justice and the Apeiron.* Whereas the figure
of the gateway of the paths of Night and Day resonates with He-
siod, the figure of 'much-punishing Justice [who] holds the keys
of interchange' (1. 14) resonates with Anaximander. I have trans-
lated Parmenides' word ἀμοιβούς as 'interchange' in order to pre-
serve its echo of Hesiod's ἀμειβόμεναι, 'as they exchange places',
at *Theogony* 749 (quoted above). But Parmenides' word also car-
ries the ethico-legal significance of retribution or requital and fits
together with 'much-punishing' to recall Anaximander's recogni-
tion of the 'moral necessity' (τὸ χρεών)[13] that governs the cosmos.
Anaximandran justice is in play in two ways in Parmenides' image.
Most obviously, the regular alternation of Night and Day conforms
to the cyclical pattern in which opposites, each one 'perishing into'
and, conversely, 'coming to be out of' the other,

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[12] For sustained exegesis, see M. Miller, '"First of all": On the Semantics and
Ethics of Hesiod's Cosmogony' ['First'], *Ancient Philosophy*, 21 (2001), 251–76; also
'La logique implicite dans la cosmogonie d'Hésiode', *Revue de métaphysique et de
morale*, 82 (1977), 433–56.

[13] This and the fragment quoted below are reported by Simplicius, *In Phys.*
24. 18–21 Diels (=DK 12 B 1+A 9), cited in G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M.
Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edn. [*Presocratics*] (Cambridge, 1983),
§101a, p. 107.

διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας
κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν.

pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice
according to the assessment of time.

Anaximander, it is usually thought, has in mind the hot and the
cold, very possibly in combination with the dry and the wet, and
refers especially to the rhythm of the seasons.[14] For either of a pair
of opposites to exist for a time is for it to suppress the other, and that
is an injustice; hence it must 'pay' the proportionate 'penalty' of
'perishing' so as to let that other 'come to be' and exist for an equal
time. But this second existence, even while a just compensation for
having suffered the earlier crime of suppression, is also in its own
right a new crime of suppression, and so requires a new 'penalty';
hence the second opposite must also 'perish' in its turn so as to
let the first 'come to be' again. Thus, summer heat gives way to
winter cold, and winter cold again to summer heat, endlessly—
or, similarly, day gives way to night, and night to day, over and
over—all in accord with the requirements of justice. Though his
motif of crime and punishment represents the harshness of justice
in contrast with Hesiod's motifs of a 'greeting' and the sharing of
time and a home, still, Anaximander's 'moral necessity' fits well
with Hesiod's image of day and night 'exchanging places' on the
'threshold'. Hence Parmenides' integration of the two in his figure
of the gateway 'of the paths of Night and Day' ruled by 'much-
punishing Justice'.

We shall come to the second, less obvious presence of Anaxi-
mandran justice later, when our discussion of the proem invites it.
To be ready for that moment, however, we need to pause here to
note the connection of justice with his conception of the *archē*, the

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[14] He also seems, like Hesiod, to have recognized a spatial analogue to the temporal
interplay of opposites. His obscure account of the sun, moon, and stars as apertures
in great rotating tyre-like wheels made of a solid, bark-like night on the outside
and filled inside with fire gives equal place to night and fire. As Charles Kahn
has argued very persuasively in *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*
[*Anaximander*] (New York, 1960), 159–63, the qualitative associability of the pairs
hot and cold, dry and wet, and (mediated, I suggest, by fire and night) bright and
dark invites us to recognize as a distinctively 'Milesian view' the recognition of a
'pattern of elemental dualism' (162). Kahn takes as evidence of this Parmenides'
own designation, in the Doxa section of the poem, of Fire or Light and Night as the
two forms privileged by 'mortals'. For discussion suggesting how rare and dense
should also be included in this nexus, see the remarks on fragment 4 in sect. 3(*b*),
esp. n. 55 below.

'source' of the cosmos itself, as 'unlimited' or 'boundless' or 'inde-terminate'.[15] To compress a momentous and complex insight to its core: Thales had made the revolutionary claim that the 'source' of all things is water, but Anaximander, on the strength, arguably, of his recognition of the justice that regulates opposites, saw that this could not be. For water, or the wet, to be the source for all else would imply the permanent suppression of the dry, a crime that 'moral necessity' could not—and in observable fact, does not—permit. Anaximander saw the positive implication of this impossibility in its full generality. Since to grant the status of *archē*, 'source', to any power that has an opposite—that is, to any qualitatively deter-minate power—would be to endorse this injustice, the *archē* must be something qualitatively indeterminate. Accordingly, he distin-guished from the opposites a qualitatively indeterminate stuff that somehow gives rise to them,[16] and so to the world structured by their interplay. This world, moreover, he was the first to conceive as spherical in shape, with the column drum-shaped earth at its centre and the great wheels of night-sheathed fire that are the stars, the moon, and the sun lying concentrically and at the angle of the ecliptic around it. Outside this world-sphere, 'surrounding' it en-tirely and 'embracing' it ($\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\acute{\epsilon}\chi o\nu$),[17] he held, lies the Apeiron, the indeterminate and boundless stuff that is, somehow, its 'source'.

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[15] Anaximander's word, $\mathring{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\iota\rho o\nu$, is remarkable not only for what it means but also for the transparency with which it bears this web of meanings; it is tempting to think that we can witness in Anaximander's choice of it his very thought process as he objects to Thales and reconceives the source and shape of the world-whole accordingly. $\mathring{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\iota\rho o\nu$ is constructed out of an alpha-privative, meaning 'un-', and either $\pi\epsilon\hat{\iota}\rho\alpha\rho$ (or $\pi\epsilon\hat{\iota}\rho\alpha\varsigma$), meaning 'end, limit, boundary', or the root of the adverb $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha$, meaning 'beyond, further, beyond measure'. It invites us to think of something 'boundless' in the distinct but complementary senses of something that, since it is neither limited by any bordering other nor set into contrast with any qualitatively specific other, is both unchecked in its outward reach and without any internal qualitative determinateness. And, indeed, the reports of Anaximander's teaching suggest that he did have both these senses in mind.

[16] On this obscure process see Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratics*, §121 and commentary.

[17] This key word and idea is reported by Aristotle at *Phys*. 3. 4, 203ᵇ7–8. On the spherical shape of the world, 'surrounded' by the $\mathring{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\iota\rho o\nu$ stuff, see Kahn, *Anaxi-mander*, esp. 76–81, 233–9. For a fascinating dissent, see Dirk Couprie, 'The Vi-sualization of Anaximander's Astronomy', *Apeiron*, 28 (1995), 159–81, and Robert Hahn, *Anaximander and the Architects* (Albany, 2001), 200–18; but I find no trace of Couprie's cylindrical world-structure in Parmenides' allusions to Anaximander.

2. The proem: towards the gateway and the route(s)

We turn now to the proem. Here, for the sake of a common point of departure as we proceed, is the text and a provisional translation.

ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἱκάνοι,
πέμπον, ἐπεί μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι
δαίμονος, ἣ κατὰ πάντ' ἄ⟨ν⟩τη⟨ν⟩[18] φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·
τῇ φερόμην· τῇ γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποι
ἅρμα τιταίνουσαι, κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευον.   5
ἄξων δ' ἐν χνοίῃσιν ἵει σύριγγος ἀυτήν
αἰθόμενος (δοιοῖς γὰρ ἐπείγετο δινωτοῖσιν
κύκλοις ἀμφοτέρωθεν), ὅτε σπερχοίατο πέμπειν
Ἡλιάδες κοῦραι, προλιποῦσαι δώματα Νυκτός[19]
εἰς φάος, ὠσάμεναι κράτων ἄπο χερσὶ καλύπτρας.   10
ἔνθα πύλαι Νυκτός τε καὶ Ἤματός εἰσι κελεύθων,
καί σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάινος οὐδός·
αὐταὶ δ' αἰθέριαι πλῆνται μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις·
τῶν δὲ Δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς·
τὴν δὴ παρφάμεναι κοῦραι μαλακοῖσι λόγοισιν   15
πεῖσαν ἐπιφραδέως, ὥς σφιν βαλανωτὸν ὀχῆα
ἀπτερέως ὤσειε πυλέων ἄπο· ταὶ δὲ θυρέτρων
χάσμ' ἀχανὲς ποίησαν ἀναπτάμεναι πολυχάλκους
ἄξονας ἐν σύριγξιν ἀμοιβαδὸν εἰλίξασαι
γόμφοις καὶ περόνῃσιν ἀρηρότε· τῇ ῥα δι' αὐτέων   20
ἰθὺς ἔχον κοῦραι κατ' ἀμαξιτὸν ἅρμα καὶ ἵππους.
καί με θεὰ πρόφρων ὑπεδέξατο, χεῖρα δὲ χειρί
δεξιτερὴν ἕλεν, ὧδε δ' ἔπος φάτο καί με προσηύδα·
ὦ κοῦρ' ἀθανάτοισι συνάορος ἡνιόχοισιν,
ἵπποις ταί σε φέρουσιν ἱκάνων ἡμέτερον δῶ,   25
χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὔτι σε μοῖρα κακὴ προὔπεμπε νέεσθαι
τήνδ' ὁδόν (ἦ γὰρ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν),
ἀλλὰ Θέμις τε Δίκη τε. χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι
ἠμὲν ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος[20] ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ

[18] I follow A. H. Coxon, *The Fragments of Parmenides* [*Fragments*] (Assen, 1986), 158, in reading ἄντην in place of the universally disputed ἄτη.

[19] Punctuation was, of course, added only later, and editors disagree about whether to put a comma at the end of the line, thereby dividing προλιποῦσαι δώματα Νυκτός from εἰς φάος. Among those who do put a comma here are L. Tarán, *Parmenides* (Princeton, 1965), 7; Mourelatos, *Route*, 279; and Cordero, *By Being*, 185. Among those who do not are D. Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea* [*Elea*] (Toronto, 1984), 48; Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratics*, 242; and Coxon, *Fragments*, 160. On the underlying issue see subsect. (*b*)(i) below.

[20] Without wanting to make much hang from this, I have a slight preference

ἠδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής.   30
ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα
χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι, διὰ παντὸς πάντα περ ὄντα.[21]

The mares that bear me the lengths my spirit might reach
Were escorting me, when they took and set me on the storied route
Of the divinity who bears onwards throughout the man who knows;
On that route was I borne, for on it the much-discerning mares
    were bearing me,
Straining to pull the chariot, and maidens were leading the way.   5
And the axle in its sockets, ablaze, gave out the war-shriek of a pipe,
For it was being driven hard by the two whirling
Wheels at both ends, whenever the Daughters of the Sun hastened
To escort me, after passing from the House of Night[22]
Into the light, having lifted their veils from their heads.   10
There stand the gates of the paths of Night and Day,
And a lintel and threshold of stone hold them together;
And they themselves, ethereal, are filled with great doors,
Of which much-punishing Justice holds the keys of interchange.
Appeasing her with gentle words, the maidens,   15
Persuading, showed her why for them she should lift the bolted bar
Quickly from the gates; and these in their casing made
A yawning chasm as they were thrown back

for εὐκυκλέος here, following e.g. Tarán, *Parmenides*, 16–17, and Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratics*, 242; others, including Mourelatos, *Route*, 154–5, and Coxon, *Fragments*, 168–9, argue well for εὐπειθέος. There is a semantic felicity in having the goddess describe the 'truth' as 'well-rounded' just before turning the traveller's attention back to the 'opinions of mortals', at 1. 30, and showing him the implications of the 'truth' for the best or strongest version of these, at 1. 31–2. We shall discuss this in sect. 4 below.

[21] There is wide, if not deep, support for the reading περῶντα (e.g. Tarán, *Parmenides*, 8–9, 214; Gallop, *Elea*, 21; Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratics*, 242–3; Coxon, *Fragments*, 51, 170) over περ ὄντα in the final clause of 1. 32. But I have a slight preference for the reading περ ὄντα ('just being') as it is argued for by G. E. L. Owen in 'Eleatic Questions' ['Questions'], *Classical Quarterly*, NS 10 (1960), 84–102, repr. in R. E. Allen and D. Furley (eds.), *Studies in Presocratic Philosophy*, ii (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1975), 48–81, esp. 49–55, and by Mourelatos, *Route*, esp. 210–16. The unusual ὄντα, rather than ἐόντα, appears also at 8. 57. Both Owen and Mourelatos note that this text is better attested, and Mourelatos argues with persuasive precision that the primary sense of περῶντα would be 'piercing through', not 'pervading' (Tarán; Kirk, Raven, and Schofield) or 'permeating' (Gallop) or 'ranging through' (Coxon). Under those translations, it should be noted, περῶντα would fit very well with 9. 3 ('all is full of . . .') and would be very appealing. On the other hand, a chief virtue of περ ὄντα is that it exhibits a use of 'is' on which we should expect Parmenides, with his keen attention to the ontological commitments of cosmological dualism, to seize. See subsect. 4(*b*) below.

[22] Should there be a comma here? See n. 19 above.

And caused the bronze axle-posts to revolve interchangingly
    in their sockets,
Being attached with pegs and rivets. This way, then, straight
    through [the gates],   20
Did the maidens guide the horses and chariot along a broad way.
And the goddess received me kindly, and took my right hand
In hers and spoke to me, addressing me thus:
'Youth, companion to immortal charioteers
Who reaches our home with the mares who bear you,   25
Welcome! For no evil fate has sent you forth to travel
This route (for indeed it is beyond the beaten track of ordinary men),
But propriety and justice. And it is right that you should
    learn all things,
Both the steadfast heart of well-rounded truth
And the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true trust.   30
But nevertheless you shall learn these as well, how for what
    are deemed [to be]
It would have been right that they be eminently, just being all things
    in every way.[23]

I shall begin with a general reflection on the significance of the
journey to the gateway; our primary resource for this will be the
goddess's ironically delivered statement of the 'opinions of mortals'
(1. 30), in the Doxa section (8. 50–fr. 19). Then we shall bring to
focus the three key ambiguities in the proem's description of the
journey to, and the passage through, the gateway. This, I hope, will
position us to experience the emergence of the '. . . is'.

(a) *The general significance of the arrival at the gateway*

Why, then, does the youth journey to the gateway? But this is poorly
phrased. Only in the very beginning of the proem is he travelling
'the lengths my spirit might reach' (1. 1). This self-directed travel
turns out to be but the first phase of a journey in which the powers
that 'bear' (1. 3, 1. 4) and 'guide' (1. 5) him—the 'much-discerning
mares' (1. 4) and Daughters of the Sun (1. 8)—and, indeed, the
course itself, the 'storied route of the divinity' (1. 3), are revealed
to be superhuman. Moreover, the lines just preceding his arrival at
the gateway seem to portray the journey itself as an experience of
ecstatic transport; the chariot reaches such an intensity of speed,
'its axle . . . driven [so] hard by the two whirling wheels' (1. 7–8),

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[23] On the translation of lines 31–2, see n. 26 below.

that it catches fire and gives forth a fierce, uncanny screech, 'the war-shriek of a pipe' (1. 6). It is no wonder that in her greeting to the youth the goddess begins by reassuring him that 'no evil fate' (1. 26)—euphemistic for madness or death—has brought him to her.[24] All of this reshapes our question: what is the extraordinary achievement symbolized by the youth's arrival at 'the gates of the paths of Night and Day' (1. 11)?

Both the structure of the proem as a whole and the specific content of the goddess's formulations of the 'opinions of mortals' make the Doxa section our key place to begin in seeking an understanding of this. Structurally, the poem moves in a circle: the youth travels to the goddess in the proem, hence from the region of human understanding to that of the divine; in fragments 2–8. 49 the goddess teaches him 'the steadfast heart of well-rounded truth' (1. 29); then, at 8. 50 ff., she guides him back to the region of human understanding, presenting from that point on 'the opinions of mortals' (1. 30, cf. 8. 51). What she presents correlates closely—with but one major difference, which we shall discuss shortly—with what is expressed by the image of the arrival at the gateway in the proem. From the side of the Doxa section: by telling the traveller that she presents to him 'the opinions of mortals' so that 'no thought of mortals shall ever outstrip you' (8. 60), she grants these 'opinions' the status of the deepest possible human insight; that 'no thought *of mortals*' can 'outstrip' these 'opinions' implies that they can be surpassed only by going on to her own specifically divine wisdom. From the side of the proem, correlatively: the gateway is the last structure the youth sees before passing through it and into the presence of the goddess—hence it signifies what human understanding grasps at the limit of its reach, the last (or, as we shall see, nearly the last) insight we at-

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[24] Peter Kingsley's two books on Parmenides, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* [*Dark*] (Inverness, Calif., 1999) and *Reality* (Inverness, Calif., 2003), stand out from all other recent commentary for the utter—indeed, deeply passionate—seriousness with which they recognize in the proem an experience of spiritual transport. It is very difficult to assess as a truth claim Kingsley's fascinating identification of Parmenides as an Apollonian *iatromantis*, a 'healer-priest', who is reporting back to 'mortals' what he has learnt from an underworldly 'incubation' and meeting with Persephone. My own more philological approach leads me to agree, however, that the proem (and, hence, the poem as a whole) is inspired by and seeks to re-create some such initiatory and transformative experience; that Parmenides tries to evoke this experience in the proem implies that the depth of attunement to the order of the world that it enables is necessary if the hearer is to share in the goddess's insight.

tain from the human side of the boundary between human and
divine.

The content of the two passages informs and supports this corre-
lation. Here, beginning in each case with the 'opinions of mortals'
and then turning to the proem, are the key substantive parallels:
(*a*) mortals 'have become accustomed in their thought to name two
forms' (8. 54); 'Night and Day' (1. 11) are a paradigm case of such
a pair. (*b*) These 'two forms' are Night (8. 59)—just as in the proem
(1. 11)—and 'fire of flame' (8. 56) or 'light' (9. 1), close kin both to
each other and to Day (1. 11), which bears the '*light*' of the *fiery* sun
to those dwelling on the earth (Hesiod, *Theogony* 755). (*c*) The two
forms are in themselves and in their powers 'opposites' (8. 55), as,
of course, are Night and Day. (*d*) And they are 'equals' (9. 4), as are
Night and Day. (*e*) The two forms, since the 'features' of 'all things'
are explained as the expressions or effects of their 'powers' (9. 1–
2),[25] are together the causes of 'all' (9. 3), analogously as Night and
Day provide the two basic contexts that at every moment condition
everything in the world. In all these ways, the goddess's formu-
lation of the 'opinions of mortals' in effect spells out as doctrine
the symbolic content of the youth's arrival at the gateway. The vi-
sion of the gateway, 'filled with [the] great doors [of each path]'
(1. 13), represents the insight that there are two fundamental prin-
ciples, opposite and equal to one another, that stand as the causes
of the 'features' (9. 2) of all else: 'all is full of light and obscure
night together' (9. 3). The thinking that achieves this insight, in
turn, has detached itself from the seemingly orderless multiplic-
ity and heterogeneity of the world as we ordinarily experience it
and reached the recognition of the underlying order that makes it
a whole ($\pi \hat{a} v$, 9. 3) and gives the multiple and heterogeneous the
secondary status, relative to the two forms, of appearance. Thus
understood, the arrival at the gateway marks the achievement of
comprehensive insight into the fundamental powers and structure
of the world.

As for the one major difference that breaks the correlation of the
'opinions of mortals' and the gateway, the goddess signals this in
advance at 1. 31–2. After telling the youth that he must 'learn . . .

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[25] The 'signs' (8. 55) of fire of flame are its 'bright[ness]', its 'gentle[ness]' (that
is, its rarity or dispersedness), and its 'light[ness]' (8. 56–7); those of Night are its
'dark[ness]', its 'dense[ness]', and its 'heav[iness]' (8. 59). Fire and Night have the
'powers' to produce these 'features' (9. 2) in things.

both the steadfast heart of well-rounded truth and the opinions of
mortals' (1. 29–30), she adds that he must also learn

$$\dot{\omega}\varsigma\ \tau\dot{\alpha}\ \delta o \kappa o \hat{\upsilon}\nu\tau\alpha$$
$$\chi\rho\hat{\eta}\nu\ \delta o \kappa\acute{\iota}\mu\omega\varsigma\ \epsilon\hat{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota,\ \delta\iota\dot{\alpha}\ \pi\alpha\nu\tau\dot{o}\varsigma\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \pi\epsilon\rho\ \acute{o}\nu\tau\alpha.$$

how for what are deemed [to be]
It would have been right that they be eminently,[26] just being
all things in every way.

Her pointed χρῆν ('it would have been right') indicates a past obli-
gation that mortals have not met: to what they 'deem [to be]',
namely, the two forms, mortals ought to have granted the status
of δοκίμως εἶναι, 'be[ing] eminently' or 'with distinction', for these
forms 'just *are* all things in every way'[27]—that is, as we have heard
her explain from the point of view of mortals, they are the ultimate
principles whose 'powers' account for all the 'features' of every-
thing else. At 9. 4 the goddess will fulfil this obligation and make
the necessary correction of the 'opinions of mortals': by her ob-
scure final clause, 'to neither belongs any nothingness' (οὐδετέρῳ
μέτα μηδέν), she asserts that neither of the two forms suffers any
negation; that is, drawing on 1. 32 to put this positively, each 'is'
so 'eminently', 'with' such 'distinction', that it is not subject to
any lack or negation. The implication for our understanding of the
vision of the gateway is important: to recapture the way the figure
of the gateway expresses the best human insight *prior to* the cor-
rection the goddess warns us of at 1. 31–2, we must *not* make this

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[26] I translate τὰ δοκοῦντα as 'what are deemed [to be]' in order to convey its focus
on the things that mortals in their δόξαι ('opinions') take as basic. The imperfect
χρῆν expresses a past (and still present) obligation that has gone unfulfilled (Smyth,
Greek Grammar [*Grammar*] (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), §1774). δόκιμος means 'es-
teemed' and 'excellent' (LSJ s.v. 1 and 2); nicely capturing its combination of subjec-
tive appraisal and objective worth, Owen comments that '[i]n Herodotus the sense
"renowned" becomes common, but never with the implication that the renown is
not wholly deserved' (*Questions*, 70 n. 13). It is in an effort to convey this double
sense of a thing's being held in high regard or granted distinction, on the one hand,
on account of its genuine stature, on the other, that I have translated the adver-
bial δοκίμως as 'eminently'. Owen's 'genuine', following its uses to mean 'really' or
'genuinely' in Aeschylus and Xenophon (*Questions*, 51, and LSJ s.v. 3), captures
only the objective aspect, but the punning resonance in δοκίμως of δοκοῦντα requires
that we try to convey the subjective aspect as well.

[27] It is important to underscore, however, that this last is the goddess's formulation
as she greets the traveller in fragment 1, not in the Doxa; in the Doxa she does *not*
say 'is' explicitly, for there, by the 'deceptive order of [her] words' (8. 52), she is
representing, as if in their own voice and language, the opinions of mortals, and
mortals have not discovered the '. . . is'.

correction; even at their best, then, mortals not yet instructed by the goddess—that is, Parmenides' predecessors—think that each of the two forms is somehow afflicted by 'nothingness'. This gives us an additional question: (ix) what is this 'nothingness', and in what way(s) are the two forms, as they are understood prior to the goddess's intervention and correction in the Doxa section, subject to it?

(*b*) *The three ambiguities*

In the preceding account of the figure of the gateway, I have deliberately held back from invoking the Hesiodic and Anaximandran resonances in it, and I have not tried to interpret either the location of the gateway or the actual passage through it. All of this we must now attempt. As we do, we shall find ourselves confronted with three fundamental ambiguities in Parmenides' language. One's first response will be, almost surely, to turn away from these as obstacles to understanding. (Indeed, no scholar I know of has acknowledged all three, much less accepted that which he has acknowledged as both deliberate and positive in its substantive implications; I too, until risking this essay, have shared in this aversion, fearing the chaos that opening up to the ambiguities might let loose.) But, remarkably, these ambiguities are, *even as obstacles*, also constitutive of the way to the experience of the emergence of the '. . . is'.

Let me take up each of the three—and, where the poem invites this, its historical resonance—in turn.

(i) *First ambiguity: descent to the underworld, ascent to the Apeiron.* The most extensive—and, though only in part, well known—of these ambiguities presents itself when we try to locate 'the gates of the paths of Night and Day'. If, on the one hand, Parmenides' early reference to the female divinity ('the divinity who bears me', 1. 3)[28] who bears on her 'storied route' 'the man who knows' moves us to think of Circe's guidance of Odysseus' descent into Hades (*Odyssey* 11), we shall be predisposed to envisage the proem's journey as a *katabasis*, a 'descent' into the underworld.[29] And we shall

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[28] The Greek—δαίμονος, ἥ . . .—makes the divinity's gender explicit by making the relative pronoun, 'who', feminine.

[29] This view was first argued by J. S. Morrison, 'Parmenides and Er', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 75 (1955), 59–68; W. Burkert, 'Das Prooemium des Parmenides und die Katabasis des Pythagoras', *Phronesis*, 15 (1969), 1–30; and D. Furley, 'Notes

feel confirmed in this when we hear of the 'House of Night' (1. 9) and when, with his Hesiodic 'There . . .' (ἔνθα . . ., 1. 11), Parmenides situates the traveller before the gates; for these, as we have noted in recalling *Theogony* 748–55, are located at the very edge of the world, dividing it from Tartarus. Does Parmenides prepare us to meet the waiting goddess, a Demeter- or Persephone-like figure, in the 'great chasm' of Tartarus?

If, on the other hand, our imagination is caught by the image of the 'Daughters of the Sun' (1. 8), we shall be drawn instead to see their 'escort[ing] me . . . into the light' as an ascent.[30] And we shall feel confirmed in this by the characterization of the gates as 'ethereal' (1. 13)—for the Aither, as we noted in discussing Hesiod, is the radiance of the upper sky. Two further details in the passage also seem to support this interpretation. If we take the unveiling by the Daughters of the Sun (1. 10) to reflect their sense of having come home when they pass 'into the light' (1. 10),[31] then, since this is their last gesture before the chariot halts in front of the gateway, it will be natural to locate the gateway in the light. What is more, the phrase Parmenides uses to describe the chariot's course through the opened gates, 'this way, then, straight through them' (τῇ ῥα δι' αὐτέων, 1. 20), is an all but exact quotation[32] of the phrase Homer uses at *Iliad* 5. 752 to describe how Hera, seeking Zeus at the very peak of Olympus, steers her chariot up through the 'gates of sky' (πύλαι . . . οὐρανοῦ, 5. 749). Does Parmenides, then, prepare us to meet the waiting goddess, a Zeus-like figure, in the space above the world?

Remarkably, we seem to be in a stand-off. Should 'ethereal' overrule the reference to the House of Night, or vice versa? Should 'this way, then, straight through them' overrule 'There . . .', or vice versa? Or, a third possibility, is it the very undecidability of the direction of the journey that Parmenides intends? This third alternative begins to acquire plausibility if we focus on the exquisite

on Parmenides', in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and R. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos* (Assen, 1973), 1–15. It has been adopted by Gallop, *Elea*, 6–7, among others.

[30] This interpretation goes back at least as far as Sextus. It has been reaffirmed against Morrison's and Burkert's challenges (cited in n. 29) by Coxon, *Fragments*, 9–10, 14–15, 161–2, 170–1, and very recently by Kahn, 'Parmenides and Plato', 90–2, and Cordero, *By Being*, 27–30. [31] Coxon, *Fragments*, 161.

[32] Parmenides writes τῇ ῥα δι' αὐτέων; Homer's τῇ ῥα δι' αὐτάων differs only in the use of alpha for epsilon in αὐτάων, and that is simply a matter of dialect.

indeterminateness of Parmenides' syntax in the key clause at 1. 8–
10. At issue is how $\epsilon \mathring{\iota} \varsigma \ \phi \acute{a} o \varsigma$ ('Into the light'), the opening phrase
of line 10, fits into the $\H{o} \tau \epsilon$ ('whenever') clause in lines 8–10. When
we hear it, do we link it with the subject and finite verb, $\sigma \pi \epsilon \rho \chi o \acute{\iota} a \tau o$
$\pi \acute{\epsilon} \mu \pi \epsilon \iota \nu \mid \ \text{'} H \lambda \iota \acute{a} \delta \epsilon \varsigma \ \kappa o \tilde{\upsilon} \rho a \iota$ ('the Daughters of the Sun hastened to
escort me'), in lines 8–9, or do we link it with the intervening
and immediately preceding participial phrase, $\pi \rho o \lambda \iota \pi o \tilde{\upsilon} \sigma a \iota \ \delta \acute{\omega} \mu a \tau a$
$N \upsilon \kappa \tau \acute{o} \varsigma$ ('after passing from the House of Night'), that ends line 9?
Parmenides' syntax, which I have preserved in my translation, al-
lows one to construe the connections equally well either way. The
two construals, however, invite and reflect opposite visualizations,
with the journey going in opposite directions to opposite destina-
tions. Thus, if one links $\epsilon \mathring{\iota} \varsigma \ \phi \acute{a} o \varsigma$ with $\sigma \pi \epsilon \rho \chi o \acute{\iota} a \tau o \ \pi \acute{\epsilon} \mu \pi \epsilon \iota \nu \mid \ \text{'} H \lambda \iota \acute{a} \delta \epsilon \varsigma$
$\kappa o \tilde{\upsilon} \rho a \iota$, one will see the Daughters of the Sun, having just 'pass[ed]
from the House of Night', now 'hasten[ing] to escort' the traveller
'into the light'; thus heard, the proem describes an ascent to the
'ethereal gates'. But if one links $\epsilon \mathring{\iota} \varsigma \ \phi \acute{a} o \varsigma$ with $\pi \rho o \lambda \iota \pi o \tilde{\upsilon} \sigma a \iota \ \delta \acute{\omega} \mu a \tau a$
$N \upsilon \kappa \tau \acute{o} \varsigma$, one takes 'the light' as the destination of the Daughters'
initial passage 'from the House of Night', and one will see this pas-
sage, now completed ('after passing . . .'), as only the first leg of a
longer journey in which, having initially come out of their home in
the underworld and into the light of the over-world to pick up the
traveller, they next 'hasten to escort' him to the gateway. And in so
far as the gateway, as that 'of the paths of Night and Day', is on
the border of the underworld, the Daughters will be escorting him
back towards Tartarus.[33]

Note, moreover, how the detail of the Daughters' unveiling can
be—and for one visualizing the passage this way, will be—easily
assimilated to the construal of the journey as a descent. One who
is caught up in this way of visualizing the journey will take the
aorist participle $\mathring{\omega} \sigma \acute{a} \mu \epsilon \nu a \iota$ ('having lifted', 1. 10) to indicate a prior
action, and so to imply that the Daughters 'lifted their veils from
their heads' before they 'passed from the House of Night into the
light'. And this timing, one will think (using the same argument
we made earlier but now to the opposite conclusion!), aptly reflects

[33] To mark the obvious: neither punctuation, which is added only later, nor oral
performance, which is, alas, irrecoverable, can be the basis for resolving the ambi-
guity. Scholarly consensus, moreover, is that since hexameter is a stichic metre with,
therefore, the line as its determining unit, a pause at the end of each line would
be normal; but in this case it would not indicate how Parmenides' syntax is to be
construed. I owe thanks to Rachel Kitzinger for this observation.

the Daughters' feeling at home in that House, which, as powers
associated with Day, they share with Night.[34]

But we have not yet reached the climax of this first ambiguity.
This comes with the pivotal moment of the arrival at the gateway,
the opening up of the 'yawning chasm' (1. 18). To put ourselves
in position to appreciate what Parmenides offers us, we must first
suspend this translation, which, as translations almost always do,
selects some one possibility to the exclusion of others, and so con-
ceals as well as reveals the sense(s) of its original. Parmenides'
Greek is the stunning noun–adjective construction χάσμ᾽ ἀχανές. It
is built from χάσμα, 'chasm', and ἀχανές, which I have so far trans-
lated 'yawning'. Notice that both terms have the same stem, χα
(*cha*), which bears the sense of 'opening' or (to invoke two English
cognates) 'gap' or 'yaw'.[35] Hence the stem of the following adjective
repeats the sound and sense of the stem of the initial noun. Thus, on
one level they form a tightly integrated unity. But on another—if,
indeed, it makes sense to speak of 'levels' at all in analysing such a
play of meanings—the adjective opposes the noun.[36] The Hesiodic
resonance of Parmenides' χάσμα, first of all, brings us to see the vast,
dark abyss of the 'great chasm' of Tartarus[37] stretching *beneath* us.
This is the culminating moment of the image of the journey as
descent. The kinaesthetic grip of this sight makes it all the more
striking that the following ἀχανές, even while echoing the sense of
'opening', effectively reverses the spatial orientation of our experi-
ence of the 'chasm'. Let me explain by providing some philological
background. Parmenides' 1. 18 gives us the earliest surviving ap-
pearance of ἀχανές in Greek poetry. The next appearance is in a
now lost play by Sophocles; it is preserved only in a later lexicon
of Sophoclean vocabulary[38] in which we are told that it expresses

[34] What should not be lost sight of in this indeterminateness—whether one takes
the unveiling as evidence that the Daughters are coming home to 'the light' or
takes it as a sign of their feeling at home in the 'House of Night' or finds this
undecidable—is the more fundamental and invariant value of the unveiling: it is a
gestural announcement of the revelatory experience to come.

[35] Moreover, *cha* and 'gap' and 'yaw' all bear this sense with a certain ono-
matopoeia. Notice the comportment of the throat and mouth in uttering these
sounds. This onomatopoeia is most completely accomplished by Greek χάσκειν ('to
yawn'—which translation, of course, repeats just the same sound–sense performance
as χάσκειν).

[36] There is, moreover, a third level to consider as well, which we shall turn to in
subsect. (ii)[α] following.   [37] *Theogony* 740, as noted in subsect. 1(*c*)(i) above.

[38] Fragment 1030 Pearson (as reported in LSJ s.v. II.1) = *Tragicorum Graecorum
Fragmenta*, iv. *Sophocles*, ed. S. Radt (Göttingen, 1977), 612.

the sense of open space spreading 'over the labyrinth on account of its not having a roof'. This meaning has a long life. LSJ also cites an instance of it from the second or third century CE in the phrase ἀχανὴς καὶ ἀνώροφος νεώς, 'an open and roofless temple'. In these uses ἀχανές signifies the openness overhead, above the upper reaches of the structures—in these examples the high walls of the labyrinth, the column tops and lintels of the temple—that define our local place below. If we let this spatial orientation reinforce Parmenides' 'ethereal' at 1. 13 and itself be further reinforced by his evocation of the Homeric 'gates of sky' at 1. 20, then ἀχανές opposes the sense of place and direction that the Hesiodic resonance of χάσμα so strongly invites: the chasm that 'yawns', yawns *overhead*, and we find ourselves gazing up, not down, through the open gateway and into the void above, not below, the world!

   If we allow ourselves to feel and be guided by this oppositional force in ἀχανές, moreover, we also open ourselves to an otherwise unsuspected complexity in the historical resonance of Parmenides' imagery. In Hesiod there is no thought of anything above the upper limit—Aither and sky—of the world; to go beyond the world, one must descend into the 'chasm' of Tartarus. In Anaximander, by contrast, the world is a sphere with the earth at the centre; accordingly, there can be no thought of an underworld. Every path leads outward to the limit of sky. One can, however, at least in thought, go beyond the world by such ascending, for beyond the world-sphere, 'surrounding' and 'embracing' (περιέχον) it in every direction, is its ἀρχή ('source'), the ἄπειρον. This, then, is what would 'yawn' overhead, on the far side of the 'ethereal gates', for one transported there: the indeterminate, boundless, unlimited stuff that 'embraces' and is somehow the 'source' of the world.

   Does the traveller, then, descend to the lower limit of the world to gaze down through the gateway into the dark 'chasm' of Tartarus, or does he ascend to the upper limit, the 'ethereal' height, of the world-sphere to gaze up into the limitless stretches of the Apeiron? It would be a mistake, I think, to choose: Parmenides interweaves pointed cues for each reading, and in χάσμ' ἀχανές he brings the two together into a balanced conjunction of opposites. Nor, further, should we settle for the negative, epistemologically weighted position that Parmenides intends nothing more than to reflect the confusion of 'two-headed' mortals (6. 5) who posit two forms, then 'wander' (6. 5) inconsistently between the privileging

of the one and the privileging of the other. This possible reading
has the virtue of acknowledging that the evidence points in both
directions at once; but in so far as it treats the ambiguity as an ex-
pression of the confusion of mortals, it turns away before noticing
a deeper, more positive philosophical content that Parmenides may
be inviting us to recognize.[39]

What is this content? First, Parmenides appears to set before
us an analogy of thought-form that unites the apparently opposite
paths of his two great predecessors. In making it impossible—or,
rather, possible only through a demonstrably arbitrary choice—to
experience the journey as either a descent alone or an ascent alone,
he compels us to feel the draw of both, and this puts us in position to
discern, beyond their differences, the underlying structure that they
share. Thus he points to the universal pattern that shapes our best
human enquiry into the order of the world. Even while one proceeds
imagistically, the other conceptually, and while their thinking moves
in apparently opposite directions and to locatively and qualitatively
contrasting ultimates, still, both Hesiod and Anaximander alike
move from the heterogeneous plurality of the phenomenal world
to the discernment of pairs of opposites that, in the interplay of
mutual physical displacement and logical complementarity, account
for the basic order, both spatial and temporal, of that heterogeneous
plurality. This is the pattern of thinking to which, with the one
major correction she introduces at 1. 31–2, the goddess gives her
ironic blessing in the Doxa section of the poem.

Secondly—and here we begin to move into uniquely Parmeni-
dean territory—Parmenides also marks and exposes as deceived the
further move from the opposites to a prior 'one' that both Hesiod
and Anaximander, in their different ways, attempt.[40] The 'great
chasm' of Tartarus, we saw, is that region not subject to the to-

pographical and elemental articulation that makes the over-world
a differentiated whole. The Apeiron, in turn, is a boundless and
qualitatively indeterminate stuff that both precedes and somehow
sources, outside of itself, the qualitatively determinate opposites
whose just interplay structures the world. Both, accordingly, must
be located beyond the space of the differentiated and determinate,
and in this analogous 'beyond' they are not opposites to the world
but, rather, privations of the structure that constitutes it. But this
is to say that each alike is arrived at not by the discovery of any
intrinsic character but, rather, by removing the opposites. This is
the significance of Parmenides' subtle but, in its critical bearing
on both Hesiod and Anaximander, devastating account of the for-
mation of the χάσμ' ἀχανές, the 'yawning chasm', of 1. 18. Even as
he compounds Hesiod's underworldly 'chasm' with the Anaximan-
dran Apeiron that 'yawns' above the world, he discloses the abyss
itself *as a product of the opening of the gates*. It is '[the gates] in their
casing' (ταὶ . . . θυρέτρων), 'as they were thrown back' (ἀναπτάμεναι),
that 'made' (ποίησαν) the 'yawning chasm' (1. 17–18). With this
touch Parmenides invites us to appreciate the full uncanniness of
Tartarus and the Apeiron: each is an artefact and an expression
of absolute negation, a pure absence of the opposites, and so in
itself *nothing*. This Hesiod and Anaximander have missed, each
mistaking sheer absence for a positive presence, the void that the
removal of the opposites constitutes for an ultimate 'something'.
In exposing this deception, Parmenides frees himself to encounter
this nullity, the pure absence of the opposites, for what—to speak
with unbridled paradox—'it' 'is', and so allows his thought to be
borne by 'it' through the gateway.

   (ii) *A second and a third ambiguity*. That Tartarus and the Apeiron
are in each case only an absence or nothing is, I shall try to show
in Section 3, the recognition that opens the way (sticking, for the
moment, to Parmenides' figurative language) through the gateway
to the goddess. But to prepare for this opening of the way, we need
first to acknowledge two further ambiguities; like the first, these too
will both complicate and orient our thinking as we seek the '. . . is'.

   [α] *The '(un)yawning chasm'?* Parmenides' 'yawning chasm'—
χάσμ' ἀχανές—has still one more strange gift to offer. We have noted
its onomatopoeic echoing of the χα-; hence my English effort to re-
peat in the adjective 'yawning' the idea and the sound of the noun

'chasm'. At the very centre of the compound we hear the -α-, the first sound in the adjective ἀχανές and, at the same time, a trace of the elided final -α of χάσμ' that it displaces. Given the dominance of the sound and the idea of χα-, 'opening', it is natural to take that -α- as an alpha-intensive; in this function it heightens the idea of the stem to which it is prefixed. (Smyth gives as examples of the alpha-intensive ἀτενής 'stretched, strained', in which the initial ἀ- intensifies the sense of the stem of τείνω 'stretch', and ἄπεδος 'level', in which the ἀ- intensifies the sense of the stem of πέδον 'ground'.[41]) But, strikingly, the ἀ- may equally well be heard as an alpha-privative, which cancels or takes back the idea of the stem to which it is prefixed; indeed, this is the more frequent and familiar function of the prefixed ἀ- in Greek, well known to us in countless English cognates such as 'atheist' (cf. ἄθεος), 'anodyne' (cf. ἀνώδυνος), 'asymmetry' (cf. ἀσυμμετρία), 'apolitical' (cf. ἀπολιτικός), etc.[42] Hence, surprisingly, ἀχανές can mean not only 'wide-mouthed' (LSJ s.v. II) but also 'not opening the mouth' (LSJ s.v. I), not only 'yawning' (LSJ s.v. II) but also 'narrow' (LSJ s.v. I).

How should we respond to this ambiguity? Every translation I have seen fails to express it.[43] In so far as this reflects a preference for the alpha-intensive reading, it is understandable and right. To translate, as we noted earlier, requires making choices, and it would do an injustice to Parmenides' χάσμ' ἀχανές to choose 'un-yawning' over and to the exclusion of 'yawning'. The gates are, after all, 'thrown back' or 'open', <u>ἀνα</u>-πτάμεναι, and it is only by passing 'this way, then, straight through' the opening they make that the traveller reaches the goddess. At the same time, to fail to indicate the alpha-privative sense at all, hence to fail to indicate the ambiguity, is also to leave hidden a forewarning of the very mistake that reflection on the first ambiguity has exposed in Hesiod and Anaximander. Just in so far as the 'chasm' is not a separate *something* beyond the gates but rather the *nothing* that their 'being thrown back' 'makes', it is not in itself a positive object or determinate content for thought. In this sense, even as it seems to invite consciousness to take it up, we discover when we try to do so that there is nothing there—no

[41] Smyth, *Grammar*, §885.4.
[42] Smyth, *Grammar*, §885.1, gives the first two examples, LSJ the second two.
[43] This includes my own 'Parmenides and the Disclosure of Being', *Apeiron*, 13 (1979), 12–35. It was Rachel Kitzinger who first pressed me to account for my presumptive neglect of the alpha-privative sense.

'it' at all—for consciousness to take up in the first place. As the privation or absence of the opposites, 'it' resists being constituted as 'an' 'it', as in itself a separate intentional object. Parmenides, as we have already noted, will have the goddess explain this in 2. 7–8: 'what is not, as such'—that is, taken by itself—'cannot be brought about', and so cannot be 'known' or 'pointed out'.

But, of course, it is within the context of the act of trying to point 'it' out that the goddess declares this very act impossible. In terms of the imagery of the proem, it is as a 'chasm', as an 'opening' that 'yawns' before the traveller, that the 'chasm' is also 'un-opening', 'un-yawning'. So we need to hear both the alpha-intensive and the alpha-privative senses of ἀχανές together.

[β] *The way(s) the gates open.* If the 'chasm' is 'un-yawning' as well as 'yawning', how is it possible for the traveller to pass 'this way, then, straight through' it? Part of the force of the contradiction is to turn us away from a literal understanding of its significance. We need to understand the meaning of the image of the χάσμ' ἀχανές in a way that makes its ambiguity appropriate. Just what is this strange nullity that both invites and resists thought and that, in this very resistance, is somehow none the less transitional to the thought of the '. . . is'? But here we need to step back, for such a direct and single-minded focus both forgets and falls prey to the very difficulty that the χάσμ' ἀχανές poses: the thought that it resists is the thought that tries to take it up by itself, 'as such' (γε, 2. 7). We should therefore pursue it instead in the larger context of relations in which it first seems to present itself. How is it, then, that the gates first 'make' the 'chasm'?

Here we encounter the third ambiguity: Parmenides gives us two essentially different descriptions of how the gates swing open. These descriptions come only a line apart, and they are conveyed by two participles, ἀναπτάμεναι (1. 18) and εἱλίξασαι (1. 19), that modify the same noun ('these [gates]', ταὶ [πύλαι], 1. 17), are in the same tense (the aorist), and are not linked by any third term that might subordinate one to the other. Parmenides once again invites us to confront and interpret a contradiction. To explicate by translating: in the first description, at 1. 18, it is by 'being thrown back' (ἀναπτάμεναι) that the gates 'make' the 'chasm'. The Greek term signifies a flinging (-πτάμεναι) open or back (ἀνα-), with the strong presumption that the two gates are pushed back together and in

the same direction. In this case, the 'chasm' will be constituted by *the absence of both gates together*. In the second description, at 1. 19–20, the gates are said to open in such a way that they 'caused the bronze axle-posts to revolve ($\epsilon i\lambda i\xi a\sigma a\iota$) interchangingly in their sockets, being attached with pegs and rivets'. The adverb 'interchangingly', $\dot{a}\mu o\iota\beta a\delta\acute{o}\nu$, refers us back to Justice's 'keys of interchange', $\kappa\lambda\eta\hat{\iota}\delta a\varsigma\ \dot{a}\mu o\iota\beta o\acute{v}\varsigma$, 1. 14—and so, also, both to Hesiod's image of the 'exchang[e] of places' (cf. $\dot{a}\mu\epsilon\iota\beta\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu a\iota$, *Theogony* 749) by Night and Day as they enter and depart their shared home and to Anaximander's account of the 'moral necessity' that requires the regular alternation of the opposites. Here the doors are depicted as swinging in opposite directions, the one swinging back while the other swings forward. In this second depiction, the 'chasm' will be 'made' by the absence *now of one* of the gates (which swings back while the other swings forward), *now of the other* (which now swings back while the first swings forward), *alternately*.

Here as before, it is at first tempting to look for a way to defuse the contradiction—or, indeed, simply to ignore it. The latter has been the universal practice of previous commentators, so far as I know.[44] If we look away, however, we risk missing what may be a first indication in the text of how to understand the initially puzzling distinction between the two routes in fragment 6. (Recall Section 1(*b*) above.) If we key from the first description of the gates' opening, the 'chasm'—that is, the absence they 'make' by 'being thrown back' together—will be the absence of them both at once. If, on the other hand, we key from the second description, the 'chasm' will be first the absence of one of the gates as it swings back, even as the other, swinging forward, becomes present, and then the absence of this other as *it* swings back while the first gate swings forward and becomes present. Is there not a prima facie correlation of these two images with the two characterizations of the routes in fragment 6? Is Parmenides anticipating with these contradictory depictions the two different ways of encountering the negation of being that he distinguishes in fragment 6? The absence of both gates at once appears to fit with the unqualified 'nothing' ($\mu\eta\delta\acute{\epsilon}\nu$) in

[44] I have not attempted a complete canvassing, but I find no acknowledgement of this ambiguity in Tarán, *Parmenides*; Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratics*; Mourelatos, *Route*; J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (London, 1979); Gallop, *Elea*; Coxon, *Fragments*; R. McKirahan, *Philosophy before Socrates* (Indianapolis, 1994); Kingsley, *Dark* and *Reality*; Curd, *Legacy*; Kahn, 'Parmenides and Plato'; or Cordero, *By Being*.

6. 2, while the alternation of the absence of one (together with the
presence of the other) and the absence of that other (together with
the presence of the one) fits well with the 'path' of 6. 8–9 that, as the
cycling between the 'being' (τὸ πέλειν, 6. 8) of one of the opposites
at the expense of the 'non-being' ([τὸ] οὐκ εἶναι, 6. 9) of the other
and the 'being' of that other at the expense of the 'non-being' of
the first, is 'backward-turning' (παλίντροπος).

3. Passing through the gates—the
emergence of '. . . is' for 'understanding'

Our guiding thought in this essay is that Parmenides gives us in
the proem the context within which the '. . . is' first emerges from
inconspicuousness to become a referent for philosophical insight.
This insight is the achievement of the 'discourse and understand-
ing' (λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ', 6. 1) of the goddess in the Truth section (frag-
ments 2–8. 49) of the poem. My heuristic hope has been that by
letting ourselves be informed and oriented by the parallels between
the proem and the Doxa and by the proem's historical resonance,
we shall find ourselves in position to experience the emergence of
the '. . . is', and so to rise to the level of the goddess's 'discourse
and understanding'. This, if we can accomplish it, will be our own
enactment of the traveller's passing through the gateway.

   Our recognition of the third ambiguity has given us two distinct
courses of thought to pursue. We shall attempt to think through
each in turn.

(*a*) *'The gates . . . thrown back'—being guided by 'nothing'*

Let us begin by putting ourselves in the position of the traveller and
reconstructing the situation of enquiry one more time. To arrive
at 'the gates of the paths of Night and Day' (1. 11) is to reach the
'naming' of 'two forms' (8. 53, 9. 1) that, by their 'powers', account
for the 'features' of 'all things' in the world (9. 1–3); presided over by
Justice (1. 14), they are 'opposites' in every way (8. 53) and 'equals'
in their exercise of causal power (9. 4). And to be poised there, our
inspiring guides asking for passage through the gateway, is to be
asking—but now of the two forms themselves—the questions that
first led us beyond the heterogeneous plurality of things. What, in

turn, might lie beyond the two forms? What, just as they are basic
to 'all things', might be basic to them? Persuaded of the 'propriety
and justice' (1. 28) of our enquiry,[45] Justice unbars the gates, and
'these in their casing made │ A yawning chasm as they were thrown
back . . .' (1. 18). In its resonance, this 'yawning chasm', χάσμ'
ἀχανές, summons to mind both the 'great chasm' of Tartarus, the
abyss of the underworld, in Hesiod and the Apeiron, 'yawning'
above, beyond the boundary of the world-sphere, in Anaximander.
But even as he elicits these associations, Parmenides also undercuts
them: the 'chasm' is 'in the casing' of the gateway, and it is 'made';
it is not, then, a region or a stuff beyond the gateway but rather
the very lack of the gates, 'thrown back', within it. What appears
as beyond and independent to one gazing into the open gateway is
just that—an appearance from the human side—and, indeed, less
than that: as the emptiness 'in the casing' that is 'made' by the gates
being 'thrown back', it is *nothing*, a pure absence or privation.

Here, finally, is the moment of passage:

> This way, then, straight through [the gateway],
> Did the maidens guide the horses and chariot along a broad way.
> And the goddess received me kindly, . . .
>
> (1. 20–2)

The way we understand the traveller's passing into and through the
gateway, I would argue, makes all the difference for our appreciation
of the goddess's disclosure of the '. . . is'.

If, on the one hand, we neglect the manifold ambiguity of the
text, letting its difficulties disappear in favour of the formation of a
consistent image, we gain a clear and straightforward symbolization
of the traveller's surpassing the dualism of mortals and attaining
the higher standpoint of the welcoming goddess. This clarity and
straightforwardness come at great cost, however: Parmenides' chal-
lenge to the presumption of there being *something* beyond the two

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[45] 'Propriety and justice' are the goddess's words, in effect thematizing the signi-
ficance of Justice's decision to grant the traveller passage through the gateway. This
gives us yet another web of questions: (ix) in what sense of justice is it just for one
who has attained the 'naming' of 'two forms', the limit of the reach of the 'opinions
of mortals', to pass beyond this to the 'discourse and understanding' of '. . . is'? In
what way is Justice's character as 'much-punishing', that is, as requiring alternation
and balance, relevant and in play here? And in so far as in some way it is in play, is
there a reciprocal or complementary 'propriety and justice' to the mirroring return
from the discourse and understanding of '. . . is' to the two forms, as Parmenides
has the goddess execute this at 8. 50 ff.?

forms goes forgotten; that the 'chasm' is, as ἀχανές, 'un-yawning' as well as 'yawning', hence a closure as well as a site of passage, is ignored; and in our ongoing picturing of the journey, our own mode of thinking remains undisturbed and, so, untransformed. We have an unproblematic picture of the transport from human to divine consciousness and, on that account, have ourselves undergone no such transport at all.

If, on the other hand, we keep the first and second ambiguities firmly in mind, we seem to face an insuperable obstacle. To pass through the gateway is—to bring into focus the philosophical depth of the symbol—somehow to take up the *nothing*, the pure absence or privation of the opposites, in thought. But the second ambiguity has brought home the difficulty of this: if the 'chasm' is, as 'yawning', apparently an opening or site of passage, it is also, as 'un-yawning', not an opening but a closure. Thus, thought appears to be blocked. The 'chasm', a *nothing* or absence or privation, is precisely not something that we can think into. It cannot be constituted as an object and remain itself; it cannot be taken up in thought by itself, 'as such' (γε, 2. 7); and these very utterances of mine, precisely by their failure to express their point without at the same time performatively contradicting it, show why: each starts from the presumption of an 'it', and this is just what, as *nothing* or absence, it is not. 'What-is-not, as such, . . . cannot be brought about' (2. 7).

And yet 'this way, . . . straight through [the gateway]', the traveller does pass. Does the insuperable resistance, then, that the *nothing* offers itself provide the decisive occasion for the transformation of consciousness and the transition to the goddess's insight? To see how this might be so, we need to work patiently, step by step, through a series of distinct recognitions that, in the experience of the thinking they trace, belong to one manifold intuition. Consider: (*a*) as the gates are 'thrown back', their withdrawal constitutes the 'chasm', the emptiness 'in the casing'. That is, as we turn in thought away from the opposites, seeking what other than them may be still more fundamental than and basic to them, what begins to present itself to mind—since, after all, the opposites themselves account for 'all things'—is nothing further, no third thing, but just their absence. (*b*) An emptiness first presents itself as an altering of context: the gates fly backward, and the casing empties out. But at the end of this event, the emptiness is invisible, vanished, so to speak, in the presence of what lies within or beyond it. Analogously, the *nothing*

or absence of the opposites, even as it begins to present itself, fails to complete itself, fails to constitute itself as an object or determinate content that can be taken up in thought. (For, to step again into inescapable paradox, this is its very nature, namely, not to be an 'it' with a nature, a specific character, in the first place.) (*c*) But this failure, even as it leaves us without an object, is not fruitless; for in the very experience of it, we learn not to picture but rather, as the attitude that underlies and turns this surrender into receptivity, to open up to the lack of an object as the condition for something altogether different in kind. And this frees us to experience—bear with me here! I am straining for helpful language—the functioning of referral. For the *nothing* or absence, even while it fails to take a form that thought could 'know' in the sense of 'pointing it out' (2. 7–8) as one content among others, is none the less the absence or the privation *of* . . ., and the thinking that is capable of not trying to take 'it' up 'by itself' thereby opens itself up to the dynamic of this '*of* . . .'. (*d*) If we were less patient than Parmenides, we might now jump to the assumption that the 'chasm', 'un-yawning', refers us back to the opposites; for it was as the opening left by the gates, that is, as the absence *of* the opposites, that it first 'yawned'—began to present itself—before us. But this would be too quick, for it would cost us the crucial insight that, for Parmenides, is the attainment of the company of the goddess. The *nothing* or absence of the opposites is indeed the negation of them—but not of them as, when in enquiring into the basis of the heterogeneous plurality of the world, we first brought them to view. Then it was their reciprocal difference that, making for their complementarity, let us pair them together in mind. Parmenides evoked this beautifully by his image of the essentially bipartite gateway, in which the opposed courses of Night and Day are placed side by side, 'held together' from without by the lintel and threshold (1. 12). But the *nothing* or absence of the opposites is the negation not specifically of Day (that negation is the work of Night) or specifically of Night (that negation is the work of Day), nor is it merely the conjunction of these negations; accordingly, it refers us not to the one and then the other, nor even to the conjunction of the two in their complementarity. Rather, it is the negation of *the very being* or *presence* that, as it is made subject to negation, they share. It is this that *nothing* threatens, this that their absence is the absence *of*. To try to think this counterfactually: if the negation of them could 'be brought about'—that is, if it could

'be made to be' or 'finished' (ἀνυστόν, 2. 7)[46]—then they would be
denied their very being. But it cannot 'be brought about' (not if
it is *nothing*), and so their very being cannot be denied. What the
negation does do, however, even as it fails to take form as an object
for mind, is refer to that of which it is the negation, *the being, as
such*, of the two, and so, in calling this out of inconspicuousness,
provide the occasion for νοεῖν (2. 2, 6. 1), that is, for thought to
'understand' it. (*e*) Finally, however, this 'as such' is dangerous.
'Being' too, in a way that makes it oddly akin to its very absence, is
not a separate object. As the being *of the two forms*, it too has the
character for mind of a functioning referral. To focus our attention
on it is, accordingly, to be referred to what it is the being *of*, that is,
to the two forms—now, however, under the newly disclosed aspect
of their very being. Thus we are led to bring them to mind in their
fundamental unity or affinity in kind *as beings*.

  This experience of the passage through the gateway gives us
the basis, I think, for an understanding of the obscure 6. 1–2.[47]
Why, we want to ask the goddess, does she declare that 'it is right
for what is there for discourse and understanding to be' (χρὴ τὸ
λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐὸν ἔμμεναι, 6. 1)? Here I take as the subject of
the 'to be' (ἔμμεναι) the substantive 'what is there' (in Greek the
substantivized participle τὸ . . . ἐόν); the closely conjoined infinitives
'for discourse and understanding' (λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ') function to
limit the meaning of the participle,[48] restricting and specifying the
context in which 'what is there' (τὸ . . . ἐόν) presents itself. And I
take it that Parmenides' reference to 'discourse and understanding'
(λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ') is pointed: he refers to the modes of consciousness
that we achieve only in so far as we detach from the need for image-
bound consciousness, namely, the seeing and hearing (cf. 6. 7: 'deaf
and blind') and the thinking that is still dependent for its content on
things as they are given to seeing and hearing (cf. 6. 6: 'wandering
mind', and 6. 7: 'without discernment'), that grips even Hesiod
and Anaximander. Accordingly, we are asking the goddess why it
is 'right' for the *being* that is taken up by the 'understanding' that

  [46] Recall n. 3 above.
  [47] For a sample of the different construals of 6. 1–2, see Gallop, *Elea*, 30–1 nn. 15
and 16, and his apparatus on p. 61. Mourelatos, *Route*, p. xv, declares that 'undeniable
syntactic ambiguity . . . make[s] gratuitous any attempt to obtain from these lines
positive information regarding Parmenides' philosophical doctrine'.
  [48] Smyth, *Grammar*, §2006. I owe thanks to Rachel Kitzinger for illuminating
discussion of this syntax with me.

we have just traced to have its status *as being* in the first place. Her explanation (cf. 'for', γάρ, 6. 1),

$$\tilde{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\ \gamma\grave{\alpha}\rho\ \epsilon\mathring{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota,$$

μηδὲν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν,

(6. 1–2)

for it is there to be,
Whereas nothing cannot [be],

refers us to the two fundamental moments in that complex 'under-standing'. She sets her declaration of the manifestness or presence of being—namely, 'it *is there* to be'—into the context of the thought of the impossibility of 'nothing'. That is, she gives us, as if to be considered, the *nothing*, only then, in a beautifully dexterous con-signing of it to its own impetus, to declare that it 'cannot [be]'. Had we not thought into the passage through the gateway, we might be puzzled over the connection of these two thoughts, 'it is there to be' and 'nothing cannot [be]'. But our reconstructive reflections have shown us the fit that the goddess now invokes: it is precisely by its referring, even as it itself fails to be constituted as an object, to the very being that it negates that it lets this being emerge and become manifest to mind.

(b) *'The gates' . . . 'revolving interchangingly'*

Let us now attempt to pass through the gateway by the second course. In 1. 19, recall, Parmenides says that the gates, unbarred by Justice, swung open in such a way that they 'caused the bronze axle-posts to revolve interchangingly in their sockets' (1. 19). In this second image the 'chasm' is 'made' by the gates swinging in opposite directions: while the one swings forward, the other swings backward, then vice versa. Since this is how the gates must open at dawn and at dusk to let Night and Day pass side by side, the one coming forth to 'fare over the earth' while the other 'goes down' into Tartarus, the image recalls their 'exchange of places' in Hesiod.[49] But it also fits the analogue of this exchange in Anaximander, the 'backward-turning path of all'[50] (6. 9) that is manifest, for instance, as the cyclical interchange of summer heat and winter cold. Each

[49] *Theogony* 749, 750, 752, slightly modified, all cited within the longer quote in subsect. 1(*c*)(i) above.

[50] Some argue that 'all' refers not to all things but to all men. See e.g. Mourelatos, *Route*, 77 n. 7. But though all live under its sway, only a few, the most eminent

opposite, by its own time of existence having denied such time to
the other, must then 'pay penalty and retribution' to that other by
'perishing into' it, and so allowing the other to have its time of
existence. Thus the 'chasm' that the gates 'make' by swinging open
'interchangingly' signifies (in Hesiodic terms) the 'going down' into
the underworld or (in Anaximandran terms) the 'perishing into' its
opposite or (now in Parmenidean terms) the reduction to a *'what-is-
not'* (τό γε μὴ ἐόν) or *'nothing'* (μηδέν) that each opposite must suffer
as both the consequence of and the precondition for the presencing
or coming to be of the other.

   As before, the key to passing through the gateway will turn out to
be attending to the second ambiguity, the way in which the 'chasm',
even as it 'yawns' before us, is also 'un-yawning'. But the different
way in which the 'chasm' is 'made' points to the different context
in which the *nothing* here begins to present itself: the manifold
connections of being and not-being in the 'backward-turning path'.
At 6. 8–9 the goddess points to this manifold when she says that
'mortals' have come to take[51] 'to be and not to be as the same |
Yet not the same'. In the interplay of the opposites in Hesiod and
Anaximander, we can identify a double knot of sameness and dif-
ference. Take Anaximander's pair of hot and cold as a paradigm.
In any definite time and place, the hot's coming to be is absolutely
dependent upon the cold's ceasing to be, and vice versa. For each
of the opposites in the cycle, the 'being' of the one, here and now,
cannot be separated from the reduction of the other to 'not being',
hence to the status of a 'what-is-not' (2. 7). And conversely, the
reduction of one to the status of a 'what-is-not' cannot be separated

thinkers, have discovered and articulated the structure of the cycle of opposites.
So I find it more plausible to take 'all' to refer to all things as, in accord with the
fundamental insight of these few, these things are governed by this cycle. One of
those few was Heraclitus, and some, most recently Daniel Graham ('Heraclitus and
Parmenides', in V. Caston and D. Graham (eds.), *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays
in Honor of Alexander Mourelatos* (Aldershot, 2002), 27–44), have found in Par-
menides' word παλίντροπος ('backward-turning') an allusion to Heraclitus 22 B 51
DK. This is possible but, I think, unlikely. On the side of its possibility, Graham
identifies other wordplays in Parmenides that remind one of Heraclitus. None of
these, however, seems pointed in its critical thrust. This includes even Parmenides'
use of παλίντροπος here in fragment 6; whereas Parmenides seems to refer to a cycle
over time, Heraclitus in fragment 51 seems to refer to the simultaneous and recipro-
cal production of one opposite by another. On the question of the relation between
Heraclitus and Parmenides, see Nehamas, 'Fire'.

   [51] Parmenides puts this in the passive voice: 'to be and not to be have come to be
taken [νενόμισται] to be the same and not the same'.

from the 'being' of the other. Accordingly, 'to be' and 'not to be', in so far as they are inseparable, may 'be taken' to be 'the same'—'and yet', in so far as their subjects differ, they may also 'be taken' to be 'not the same'.

Or so, prior to Parmenides' closer reflection on the 'chasm', it seemed. As with the first course of thought, so here, we can best re-cover Parmenides' insight if we distinguish and work through, step by step, a series of recognitions that are really integral moments in one manifold intuition. (*a*) Each opposite, presenting itself ini-tially as a qualitatively determinate sensible presence, precludes the appearance of the other; for instance, when and where the hot pre-vails, the cold cannot be. (*b*) But if, with Parmenides, we pause to consider this 'chasm' of the cold, we discover that it is, rather, this very not-being of the cold that cannot be. With a qualification we shall come to, this is once again the recognition of 2. 7–8: 'what-is-not, as such, . . . cannot be brought about', hence cannot be 'known' or 'pointed out'. That is, to fall again into illuminatingly self-undermining language, it cannot be constituted as an object or determinate content for thought, for it is its very nature to be, 'by itself' ($\gamma\epsilon$, 2. 7), precisely the negation or lack of any such nature and determinateness.[52] (*c*) This is the moment of apparent impasse. The 'chasm' is 'un-yawning', no passageway after all—unless, as before, we learn the lesson its very closure has to teach us: if we accept, in the failure of 'what-is-not' to constitute itself as an object or content for thought, that we cannot take it up 'by itself', we free ourselves to experience the force of its referral beyond itself. (*d*) Here we encounter the difference from the first course that re-quires the qualification I just anticipated. As before, the not-being *of* . . ., even as it itself fails to stand alone for thought, refers us on beyond itself to what it is the *not* or negation *of*. And analogously as before, this referent is the opposite not in its immediate qualitative presence but rather in its very being—for it is this, as we saw, that the negation, i.e. the reduction to not-being, threatens, and so lets

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[52] This, note, is why any account of the world that invokes it as if it were an intelligible content for thought—as does Anaximander's account of the cycle of opposites—is deceived, and it is in order to avoid this deception that the goddess makes the reform of the 'opinions of mortals' in fragment 9 that she first warned the traveller of at 1. 31–2. 'To neither [of the two forms]', she declares at 9. 4, 'belongs any nothingness'. Thus—but only when she comes to present the 'opinions of mortals' at 8. 50 ff. and in fragments 9–19—she arranges that what we mortals 'deem [to be]' we deem 'to be eminently', purging from our best mortal account any reduction of what-is to the status of what-is-not.

emerge for νοεῖν, 'understanding'. But in addition, the negation of
the very being of the opposite refers us as well to the very being
of the opposite's other; that is, it refers us to the conjunction of the
being of the one with the being of the other. For in the relation of
opposites, the one cannot be what it is unless its other, both pro-
viding and receiving the contrast in the context of which each has
its proper specificity, also is what it is. And this means that when
negation threatens the being of the one, it necessarily threatens
the being of the other as well. (*e*) Thus—now to bring (*c*) and (*d*)
together—we are guided, even as the absence that guides us absents
itself, so to speak, from thought, to the 'understanding' (νοεῖν) of
the way *the very being of* each requires *the very being of* the other,
and so to the reciprocal necessity by which, as *being* to *being*, each
is conjoined with the other.

   This movement and insight, I think, are the crux of fragment 4:[53]

> λεῦσσε δ' ὅμως ἀπεόντα νόῳ παρεόντα βεβαίως·
> οὐ γὰρ ἀποτμήξει τὸ ἐὸν τοῦ ἐόντος ἔχεσθαι
> οὔτε σκιδνάμενον πάντῃ πάντως κατὰ κόσμον
> οὔτε συνιστάμενον.

> Consider what are absent, and see how they are, nevertheless,
>   steadily present to mind;
> For [mind] will not cut off what-is from holding fast to what-is—
> [For what-is] neither scatters in every direction everywhere
>   in order
> Nor solidifies.

Let me prepare the way for a reading of this with several orient-
ing observations. Parmenides' beautiful—and, alas, only awkwardly
translatable—opening imperative, λεῦσσε, urges a meditative atten-
tiveness. It is cognate with λευκός 'light, bright, clear',[54] and means
'look upon . . ., gaze at . . .', with the connotation of letting an
otherwise hidden intelligibility 'dawn' on one or 'come to light'.
To convey both these aspects, process and goal, I have written two
verbs in place of Parmenides' one: 'Consider . . ., and see how . . .'.
Second, the effect of his paratactic play with ἀπεόντα and παρεόντα in

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[53] It is a virtue of this second course of thought that it provides a rich context
for interpreting this otherwise enigmatic sentence, 'the most disputed of all [the]
"fragments"' (Cordero, *By Being*, 16). Mourelatos, *Route*, p. xv, chooses not to
'attempt . . . an interpretation' of fragment 4 on account of its 'syntactic . . .
ambiguities coupled with loss of context . . .'.

[54] And with Latin *lux* (LSJ s.v.).

4. 1, 'what are absent' and '[what are] present', respectively, and of
his substantive reference to 'dispersal' and 'solidification' in 4. 3–4
is to turn our thought to Anaximander's conception of opposites.
The polarity of dispersal and solidification (or, more familiarly,
of rarefaction and condensation) constitutes a fundamental axis of
possibility for the states of bodies; Anaximander's prime successor
Anaximenes picked these out as the basic opposites underlying all
other physical conditions in the world, and in this he is probably
reinterpreting Anaximander's fundamental pair, the hot and the
cold; certainly dispersal (as in thawing, melting, and evaporating)
and solidification (as in condensation and freezing) are conspicu-
ous effects of the powers of the hot and the cold, respectively. The
goddess seems to allude to this when, articulating the opinions of
mortals in 8. 55–9, she declares 'gentle' (in the sense, presumably,
of 'yielding')[55] and 'dense' as 'signs' of the two forms, 'fire of flame'
and 'night', respectively. The key point is this: as 'opposites' (8. 55),
they are exhaustive alternatives; a body must be in the state of, or
be undergoing the process of, either 'dispersal' or 'solidification'.
This gives us the point of departure, I suggest, for understanding
the sense of the goddess's term 'what are absent' ($\dot{a}\pi\epsilon\acute{o}\nu\tau a$) in 4. 1.
She asks us to contemplate qualitative states that, in the perceptible
presence of their opposites, are 'absent'. That is, she asks us—to
put this in the terms she used in characterizing the Anaximandran
'backward-turning path' in fragment 6—to consider states that, in
the 'being' (cf. 'to be', 6. 8) of their opposites, are 'taken' to suffer
'not being' (cf. 'not to be', 6. 8). To repeat our examples: when and
where it is night, it is not day; when and where the cold prevails, the
hot must be absent; if a stuff grows compact, solidifying, it cannot be
dispersing. And yet, the goddess now urges us to 'see', this alterna-
tion of perceptible states is itself opposed by their 'steady presence
to mind' or 'thought'. 'What are absent' are 'nevertheless'—that is,

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[55] Taking $\H{\eta}\pi\iota o\nu$ (8. 57) in this very material sense—namely, of a body's offering no
resistance to whatever enters the space it occupies—makes intelligible Parmenides'
otherwise puzzling assignment of it to 'fire of flame' (8. 56); in no other sense is
fire 'gentle', and in this sense it is paradigmatically so. Further, what is 'yielding' in
this sense is opposed to the resistant character of whatever is $\pi\upsilon\kappa\iota\nu\acute{o}\nu$, 8. 59, 'dense,
close-packed'; and since the resistant character of what is $\pi\upsilon\kappa\iota\nu\acute{o}\nu$ is based on its
density, we may take the yielding character of what is $\H{\eta}\pi\iota o\nu$ to be based on its being
maximally loose-packed or internally dispersed, the paradigm for which is, again,
'fire of flame'. Thus, by the opposition of $\H{\eta}\pi\iota o\nu$ and $\pi\upsilon\kappa\iota\nu\acute{o}\nu$ in 4. 3–4 Parmenides
integrates the rare and the dense into the goddess's reconstruction of the 'opinions
of mortals'.

even in their absence—also unfalteringly 'present'. How so? In 4. 2
the goddess indicates what we must come to understand. When
she says that 'mind' (or 'thought') 'will not cut off what-is from
holding fast to what-is', she implies that the senses, by contrast, do
'cut off' 'what-is' from 'what-is', and we have seen that this is so:
in their sensible presence, qualitative opposites are mutually exclu-
sive; when and where either one of them is, the other cannot be. If,
however, we step back to contemplate this 'cannot be', this denial
of being, already we are turning from the sensible absence of the
qualitatively determinate to the intelligible presence of its being,
and since, in the relation of opposites, neither one can be what it
is unless its other also is what *it* is, we find ourselves turned, now
in 'thought', to the 'holding-fast', the requirement, by *the being of*
each opposite to *the being of* the other. Thus our initial 'considera-
tion' of 'what are absent' is transformed into the recognition of the
necessary conjunction of 'what-is' with 'what-is'.

(*c*) *The fit of the two courses*

We are now in position to reply to the questions we raised earlier
under (vii) and (viii).[56] To begin with, the two courses we have just
traced do, it appears, correspond to the two 'routes' distinguished
in fragment 6,[57] and these, in turn, are complementary versions of
the first 'route' distinguished in fragment 2, the 'route of enquiry'
on which one 'thinks' 'that (or how) . . . is and that it is not possible
[for] . . . not to be' (2. 3). Both turn on the discovery of this impossi-
bility; in each, it is the resistance to thought posed by 'what-is-not,
as such', that provides the occasion for the discovery of the thought
of being. But 'what-is-not' arises for consideration, so to speak, at
different points in the two courses of reflection, with the conse-
quence that being emerges at different points as well. In the first
course, the *nothing* that is the absence or negation of the two forms
at once, even as it fails, taken by itself ($\gamma\epsilon$, 2. 7), to be thinkable,
none the less refers thought on to the being, as such, of the two
forms together; in the second course, the *nothing* that is the absence

[56] To recall these from sect. 1(*b*): (vii) How does this second 'route', in 6. 4–9,
relate to the 'route' in 6. 1–3? Do they, each encountering the negation of 'being'
in its own way, lead to different destinations, or do they somehow converge? And,
(viii), how do these 'routes' relate to the 'routes' in fragment 2? How should we
understand the relation between Parmenides' distinct pairings in 2 and 6?

[57] Recall 6. 3 and 6. 4, as discussed in sect. 1(*b*) above.

or negation of each of the two in turn, as this absence is implied by
the sensible presence of the other, refers thought on to the very be-
ing of each of the two in its requirement of—and its being required
by—the very being of the other. Though the two vistas that these
referrals open up for thought are distinct, they dovetail, fitting to-
gether as complementary aspects of the same order. In the first, the
being, as such, of the two forms refers thought on to these as beings,
bringing them to mind as 'of a single kind' (μουνογενές, 8. 4);[58] in
the second, the 'holding-fast' (4. 2, cf. 8. 25) of the being of each to
the being of the other reveals the two as integral, each to the other,
in the being that, brought together to constitute a 'whole' (οὖλον,
8. 4), they thereby share. Hence, whereas in the first vista the being
as such of the two discloses them in their affinity as beings, in the
second the fit or coherence of being with being (or, to say the same,
of what-is with what-is) implies the transcending of their distinct-
ness by what presents itself, accordingly, as their being, as such.

4. Postscripts

These remarks are offered as provisional. At the very outset of this
essay I distinguished the 'proximate task' of studying the proem
from the 'ultimate task' for which, I hope, this study might provide
us with good orientation, the task, namely, of interpreting the 'is'
as Parmenides lays it before us in the Truth section of the poem.
All that we have said so far must be put to the service of that
interpretative task—and, too, be put to the test by it. This next
phase of the project must be deferred to the future. In anticipation,
however, let me mark the distance we have come by bringing into
focus the provisional light the proem casts on the first two sets of
questions we posed regarding fragment 2.[59]

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[58] I follow Mourelatos, *Route*, 95 n. 3, as well as Kahn, *Anaximander*, 157 n. 1,
Tarán, *Parmenides*, 88–93, and Owen, 'Questions', 101–2, in favouring this reading
over μουνομελές, 'single-limbed', which is preferred by Gallop (*Elea*, 64–5) among
others, and οὐλομελές, 'whole-of-limb', which is favoured by Diels–Kranz. This
reading allows the larger conjunction at 8. 4, οὖλον μουνογενές τε, 'whole and of a
single kind', and this pair answers beautifully, as I try to explain in the next few
sentences, to the different accents of the thought of *being* provided by the two courses
we have traced, with the first course revealing the two forms as, *qua beings* (ἐόντα),
'of a single kind' and the second course revealing them, in the requirement of the
being of each by the *being of* the other, as integral to each other, and so constituting
a 'whole'.   [59] See subsect. 1(*a*) above.

(*a*) *The subject(s) of the '. . . is'*

Question (i) asked: does the 'is' have an implied subject? If our
understanding of the significance of the image of the gateway
presided over by 'much-punishing Justice' is well taken, then our
answer will be a qualified yes. The proem situates the discovery of
the thought of the 'is' at several key moments of enquiry into the
basic principles responsible for the heterogeneous plurality of the
world. It is when, after identifying the 'two forms' (8. 53) whose
'powers' account for the 'features' of 'all things' (9. 1–2), we then go
on to seek what may lie beyond them that, in the experience of the
χάσμ᾽ ἀχανές, we have occasion to discover their being, as such. Or,
to turn to the second course, it is when, having recognized that the
sense-perceptual presence of each of the 'two forms' requires the
sense-perceptual absence of the other, we then contemplate (λεῦσσε,
4. 1) this absence that we have occasion for the 'understanding', be-
yond sense, of how the very being of each 'holds fast' to the very
being of the other. In both of these moments of breakthrough, then,
it is the 'two forms' that are the subject of—and, indeed, are subject
to a transformation of the way they are disclosed to mind by the
emergence of—the '. . . is'.

But there are two important qualifications to add. First, the ge-
nerality of my reference to 'the two forms' is deliberate. As we have
noted, by interweaving allusions to Hesiod and to Anaximander
in the proem's account of the journey to the goddess, Parmenides
makes it problematic for us to privilege any one particular pair of
opposites; while the gateway is 'of the paths of Night and Day', the
Anaximandran Justice that presides over it regulates the hot and
the cold in the changing of the seasons. If (as, surely, Parmenides'
intended Greek hearers would have done) we hear both the Hesi-
odic and the Anaximandran resonances together, we shall be led to
recognize them as analogues, and so as examples of a more universal
pattern of thought. It is, then, any discernment of a fundamental
two that Parmenides both acknowledges by his compound figure of
Justice and the gateway and then claims to surpass by having the
traveller pass through the gates to the goddess.[60]

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[60] This point is reinforced, I think, by the way Parmenides has the goddess
formulate the 'opinions of mortals' in the Doxa section. Though the goddess does
pick 'fire of flame' (or Light) and Night over, for instance, the hot and the cold
and the rare and the dense, etc., she also stresses that 'there is no true trust' in 'the
opinions of mortals' (1. 30, cf. 8. 50–1); thus she leaves this question open. What

Nor, indeed, is it even certain that these fundamental principles need be two rather than some other number. Here the proem gives us a question to pursue when, in taking up the 'ultimate task', we turn to fragment 8:[61] if some larger number of forms were to have the same integrality, each to each of the others, that the balanced enclosure of the gateway and the precise alternation of the swinging of the gates suggest the 'two forms' must have, would Parmenides regard the set of these as an equally valid possible subject of the '. . . is'?[62]

However this may turn out, the key help the proem gives us is this: it is not the heterogeneous many given in sense experience that are the subjects of the '. . . is' but, rather, the several 'forms' that mortals identify as their basic causes. It is these that, if we can learn from the occasion for insight provided by the χάσμ' ἀχανές, will emerge for thought in the radically new light of their being.

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is more, when Parmenides shifts from 'Day' in the proem to 'fire of flame' in 8. 56 and then to 'Light' in 9. 1, she indirectly acknowledges the instability—or, to put a more positive face on it, the openness to reconsideration and redefinition—of 'the opinions of mortals'. Parmenides' primary concern is with the metaphysical status of any such causes, not their particular identity.

[61] And, I would add, the so-called 'Cornford fragment': 'Such, changeless, is that for which as a whole the name is "*to be*"'. See Gallop, *Elea*, 90–1.

[62] With her insightful opening reflection on the implications of the fact that Parmenides' successors gave no arguments in defence of their positing more than one fundamental principle, Curd (*Legacy,* 1–2) throws open the door—initially left ajar by Mourelatos, *Route*, 132–3—to the possibility of reading him as open to pluralism. (Consider, for example, Empedocles' four elements or Anaxagoras' infinite number of qualitatively different 'seeds'.) On the same grounds I would add the distinct but analogous point (which, however, Mourelatos and Curd reject) that since his successors also felt no need to give special arguments in defence of making their fundamental principles complementary opposites, that is, 'enantiomorphic' pairs (Curd, *Legacy*, 107–8), the door should also be open to reading Parmenides as a dualist. (Consider, for example, Empedocles' pairing of 'love' and 'strife', or the atomists' pairing of 'full' and 'void'.) Indeed, if we are to take our bearings from Parmenides' successors' responses to him, it was not the number of principles but, rather, their integrality—paradigmatically but not exclusively achievable by complementary opposites, the being of each of which requires the being of the other—that Parmenides stressed. (Consider in this light how even the unrestrainedly pluralistic Anaxagoras claims such integrality both in the beginning—'all things were together' (fragment 4)—and once and for all—'in everything there is a portion of everything' (fragments 11 and 12). These fragments appear in Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratics*, as §468 and §§476, 481, respectively.)

(*b*) *The significance*(*s*) *of the* '*is*'

Question (ii) asked: in what sense or senses should we hear the 'is'? What, if anything, does this 'is' signify? As interpretative work on the Greek verb 'to be', much of it concerned directly with Parmenides' 'is', has developed in the past half-century, both the array of distinctions to be drawn and the array of connections problematizing them have multiplied. This has occasioned pointed and illuminating second thoughts about the aptness to Greek, and to philosophical Greek in particular, of some of the ways of categorizing senses and syntactical patterns that have become staples of modern logic and philosophy of language.[63] Working through all this in a systematic way would be much too large a project to undertake here. None the less, we can draw pointedly from the resources of this discussion—and, equally important, mark its limits—in making explicit what we have seen the proem to imply regarding the sense(s) of the '. . . is'.

The first of the two courses through the gateway has brought us to the thought of the being, as such, of the two forms together; the relevant sense appears to be existential. The second course has

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[63] To acknowledge much too briefly several of the major contributors: at the forefront of the work throughout this recent period is Charles Kahn ('The Greek Verb "to Be" and the Concept of Being', *Foundations of Language*, 2 (1966), 245–65; 'The Thesis of Parmenides', *Review of Metaphysics*, 22 (1969), 700–24; *The Verb 'Be' in Ancient Greek* (Dordrecht, 1973); and 'Parmenides and Plato'), who long ago called attention to the locative cast ('is *there*') of the existential sense of Greek ἔστι ('there is'), to the irreducibility of the veridical sense ('is true, truly so, is the case') to either the existential or the predicative senses (or, turning this round a bit, the existential implications but formally predicative structure of the veridical), and—recently joining Lesley Brown, 'Verb'—to the disanalogy of the distinction of the 'complete' ('*x* is') and 'incomplete' ('*x* is *y*') uses with our familiar distinction of existential ('*x* exists') and predicative ('*x* is *y*') uses. (The expression '*x* is', by analogy with 'John teaches', admits of expansion by '. . . *y*', or, say, '. . . Greek', as in '*x* is *y*', 'John teaches Greek', and just as 'John teaches' may be derived from 'John teaches Greek', so may '*x* is' be derived from '*x* is *y*'; neither of these conditions is true of '*x* exists' in relation to '*x* is *y*'.) Further, Alexander Mourelatos, *Route*, ch. 2, in a brilliant recognition, qualified in 'Determinacy and Indeterminacy, Being and Non-Being in the Fragments of Parmenides' (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (1976), suppl. vol. ii. 45–60), and very recently renewed and rearticulated by Patricia Curd (*Legacy*, 39–40), long ago introduced the notion of 'speculative predication' to single out predications in which the predicate lays bare the very nature of the subject, what it 'really' or 'truly is', rather than just an attribute of it. (Consider, for example, 'all things are matter and energy', or, to cite Mourelatos's own citation of Xenophanes fr. 29, 'The things which come to be and grow are all of them earth and water' (*Route*, 60).) He noted how, in '*x* is really *y*' or '*x* is truly *y*', the 'is' has existential and veridical force; '*x* is really, or is truly, *y*' suggests that '*y* exists' and/or 'is true, or truly is the case'.

brought us to the thought of the very being of each of the two forms, as this being stands in a relation of mutual requirement with the being of the other. Here the sense of being is twofold. Were, for example, Light to be reduced to nothing, there would also *be* no Night; that is, Night would not exist. But we can also accentuate this differently and say, there would be no *Night*; that is, without Light, Night could not *be Night*, could not *be what it is*. Travelling on the second course, then, we hear both the 'is' of existence and the 'is' of identity.

   But this, already complex, is only the beginning of the reflection the proem prepares us to pursue. These emergences of being, recall, occur at crucial moments of the larger enquiry in which, seeking the 'forms' fundamental to all else, mortals arrive at the gateway—that is, come to understand and to say,

> πᾶν πλέον ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ φάεος καὶ νυκτὸς ἀφάντου . . .
> All is full of Light and obscure Night together . . .
> (9. 3)

Notice how, in 'order[ing]' '[her] words' 'deceptive[ly]' (8. 52) so as to give voice to the perspective of mortals, the goddess elides the 'is'—that is, the expression of the being, as such—of the two forms. Her 'is', ἐστίν, copulative with 'all' and 'full', serves to direct attention away from itself and to the two forms in their eminence as the principles basic to 'all things'. This is good mimetic irony, for the 'is' she elides is exactly what, since mortals have not paused to experience the imponderability of 'what-is-not, as such', they have not yet found occasion to discover. None the less, this 'is' is implicit and there 'for discourse and understanding' (6. 1)—as, we can now see in retrospect, her reversal of this elision in the elision of 2. 3 serves to bring out. What is the sense of this implicit 'is'? We might bring out the point of 9. 3 by restating it as

> all things are really (or truly) Light and Night.

This gives us a speculative predicative 'is' with strongly veridical force. Interestingly, if we try to express this same insight but with a reversal of subject and predicate, to wit,

> Light and Night just are all things,

we recover the goddess's own language in the opening of the Truth

section when she describes the ultimate principles that mortals
posit—that is, the 'two forms'—as

> . . . just being [$\pi\epsilon\rho$ ὄντα] all things in every way.
>
> (1. 32)

And if we now expand this quotation to include all of 1. 31–2, we
can hear the goddess herself highlight the implications of existence
and of identity that this (inverted) speculative predication bears
within it:

> But nevertheless you shall learn these as well, how for what
>   are deemed [to be]
> It would have been right that they be eminently, just being all things
>   in every way.

This 'be[ing] eminently' implies the being, as such (that is, the
existence) of the two forms together and, as well, the being-what-
it-is (that is, the being in the sense of identity) of each form by
virtue of the other's also being-what-*it*-is, that we have discovered
by travelling the two courses through the gateway. With her ad-
verb 'eminently'[64] the goddess indicates the transcending of any
negation that we have witnessed for ourselves in imaginatively re-
constructing each of the two experiences of the χάσμ' ἀχανές and
that she declares at 9. 4 with her enigmatic '. . . to neither belongs
any nothingness'. In the context of the question of the sense(s) of
the '. . . is', then, the proem prepares us to see that it is meant in
a host of intelligibly interrelated senses. The search for the basic
principles of the cosmos invokes a speculative-predicative 'is' with
strong veridical force, and the thinking that enters into the experi-
ence of the impossibility of thinking 'what-is-not, as such' brings
to the fore the senses of existence and identity that are implicit in
that speculative-predicative/veridical 'is'. Rather than choose be-
tween these various senses, we need to acknowledge and mark their
interplay.[65]

   In doing so, however, we need to be both circumspect and bold.
Circumspection is required if we are to preserve our historical sense,
our appreciation for the strangeness of the past: even while we let

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[64] Here Owen's translation of δοκίμως as 'genuinely' or 'really' ('Questions', 51)
makes my point more clearly than my 'eminently'. But as indicated in n. 26, 'emi-
nently', taken with 'be', is intended to include this meaning.

[65] Kahn, 'Parmenides and Plato', stresses such interplay.

these distinctions of senses help us secure an analytical clarity in hearing the 'is', we must resist the anachronism of letting ourselves assume that we are recovering the terms of Parmenides' own self-understanding. Boldness is required, in turn, if, our energies quickened by this appreciation of strangeness, we are to risk opening up to the provocative vitality of Parmenides' language; that is, to say this in a way that articulates in one sentence our project and its most important finding: we need to let the poetry of the proem lead us into the experience of the epiphanous power of the 'is'. By 'poetry' I do not mean to speak of the peculiar beauty or grace of Parmenides' verse (I must leave that to others better qualified than I);[66] rather, I mean to remind us one last time of the surprisingly Heraclitean power of the ambiguity of his imagery. By generating contradictions, he provides occasions for intellectual transport, and in doing this, he gives us access to the power that, if we give ourselves to these occasions, his core referents, *'what-is-not, as such'* and (*the*) *'being'* (*of* . . .), show themselves to have, the power to detach us from, then turn us back to, the ultimate principles of the world, disclosing them in a hitherto unsuspected light in the process. The study of these principles as, in this light, they 'are there for discourse and understanding' (6. 1)—the study of them, accordingly, in their status *as beings*—is the 'ultimate task' for which the proem prepares us.

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[66] See R. Boehme, *Die Verkannte Muse: Dichtersprache und die Geistige Tradition des Parmenides* (Berne, 1986); R. Cherubin, 'Parmenides' Poetic Frame', *International Studies in Philosophy*, forthcoming; E. D. Floyd, 'Why Parmenides Wrote in Verse', *Ancient Philosophy*, 12 (1992), 251–65; Mourelatos, *Route*, 34–5; and T. Popa, 'The Reception of Parmenides' Poetry in Antiquity', *Studii clasice*, 34–6 (1998–2000), 5–27. I have also benefited from James Barrett's 'Struggling with Parmenides', a paper presented at the Ancient Philosophy Society meetings, 2003.

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