Fragments of Parmenides

Parmenides

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The fragments of Parmenides are preserved for the most part by Simplicius, who fortunately inserted them in his commentary, because in his time the original work was already rare.[1] I follow the arrangement of Diels.

(1)

The car that bears me carried me as far as ever my heart desired, when it had brought me and set me on the renowned way of the goddess, which leads the man who knows through all the towns.[2] On that way was I borne along; for on it did the wise steeds carry me, drawing my car, and maidens showed the way. And the axle, glowing in the socket—for it was urged round by the whirling wheels at each end—gave forth a sound as of a pipe, when the daughters of the Sun, hasting to convey me into the light, threw back their veils from off their faces and left the abode of Night.

There are the gates of the ways of Night and Day,[3] fitted above with a lintel and below with a threshold of stone. They themselves, high in the air, are closed by mighty doors, and Avenging Justice keeps the keys that fit them. Her did the maidens entreat with gentle words and cunningly persuade to unfasten without demur the bolted bars from the gates. Then, when the doors were thrown back, they disclosed a wide opening, when their brazen posts fitted with rivets and nails swung back one after the other. Straight through them, on the broad way, did the maidens guide the horses and the car, and the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and spake to me these words:

Welcome, O youth, that comest to my abode on the car that bears thee tended by immortal charioteers! It is no ill chance, but right and justice that has sent thee forth to travel on this way. Far, indeed, does it lie from the beaten track of men! Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, as the opinions of mortals in which is no true belief at all. Yet none the less shalt thou learn these things also,—how passing right through all things one should judge the things that seem to be.[4]

. . . . . .

But do thou restrain thy thought from this way of inquiry, nor let habit by its much experience force thee to cast upon this way a wandering eye or sounding ear or tongue; but judge by argument[5] the much disputed proof uttered by me. There is only one way left that can be spoken of. . . . R. P. 113.

The Way of Truth

(2)

Look steadfastly with thy mind at things though afar as if they were at hand. Thou canst not cut off what is from holding fast to what is, neither scattering itself abroad in order nor coming together. R. P. 118 a.

(3)

It is all one to me where I begin; for I shall come back again there.

(4, 5)

Come now, I will tell thee—and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away—the only two ways of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that *It is*, and that it is impossible for it not to be, is the way of belief, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that *It is not*, and that it must needs not be,—that, I tell thee, is a path that none can learn of at all. For thou canst not know what is not—that is impossible—nor utter it; for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.[6] R. P. 114.

(6)

It needs must be that what can be spoken and thought is; for it is possible for it to be, and it is not possible for what is nothing to be.[7] This is what I bid thee ponder. I hold thee back from this first way of inquiry, and from this other also, upon which mortals knowing naught wander two-faced; for helplessness guides the wandering thought in their breasts,

so that they are borne along stupefied like men deaf and blind. Undiscerning crowds, who hold that it is and is not the same and not the same,[8] and all things travel in opposite directions![9] R. P. 115.

(7)

For this shall never be proved, that the things that are not are; and do thou restrain thy thought from this way of inquiry. R. P. 116.

(8)

One path only is left for us to speak of, namely, that *It is*. In this path are very many tokens that what is is uncreated and indestructible; for it is complete,[10] immovable, and without end. Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for now *it is*, all at once, a continuous one. For what kind of origin for it wilt thou look for? In what way and from what source could it have drawn its increase? . . . I shall not let thee say nor think that it came from what is not; for it can neither be thought nor uttered that anything is not. And, if it came from nothing, what need could have

made it arise later rather than sooner? Therefore must it either be altogether or be not at all. Nor will the force of truth suffer aught to arise besides itself from that which is not. Wherefore, justice doth not loose her fetters and let anything come into being or pass away, but holds it fast. Our judgment thereon depends on this: "*Is it or is it not?*" Surely it is adjudged, as it needs must be, that we are to set aside the one way as unthinkable and nameless (for it is no true way), and that the other path is real and true. How, then, can what *is* be going to be in the future? Or how could it come into being? If it came into being, it is not; nor is it if it is going to be in the future. Thus is becoming extinguished and passing away not to be heard of. R. P. 117.

Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike, and there is no more[11] of it in one place than in another, to hinder it from holding together, nor less of it, but everything is full of what is. Wherefore it is wholly continuous; for what is, is in contact with what is.

Moreover, it is immovable in the bonds of mighty chains, without beginning and without end; since coming into being and passing away have been driven afar, and true belief has cast them away. It is the same, and it rests in the self-same place, abiding in itself. And thus it remaineth constant in its

place; for hard necessity keeps it in the bonds of the limit that holds it fast on every side. Wherefore it is not permitted to what is to be infinite; for it is in need of nothing; while, if it were infinite, it would stand in need of everything.[12] R. P. 118.

The thing that can be thought and that for the sake of which the thought exists is the same;[13] for you cannot find thought without something that is, as to which it is uttered.[14] And there is not, and never shall be, anything besides what is, since fate has chained it so as to be whole and immovable. Wherefore all these things are but names which mortals have given, believing them to be true —coming into being and passing away, being and not being, change of place and alteration of bright colour. R. P. 119.

Since, then, it has a furthest limit, it is complete on every side, like the mass of a rounded sphere, equally poised from the centre in every direction; for it cannot be greater or smaller in one place than in another. For there is no nothing that could keep it from reaching out equally, nor can aught that is be more here and less there than what is, since it is all inviolable. For the point from which it is equal in every direction tends equally to the limits. R. P. 121.

The Way of Belief

Here shall I close my trustworthy speech and thought about the truth. Henceforward learn the beliefs of mortals, giving ear to the deceptive ordering of my words.

Mortals have made up their minds to name two forms, one of which they should not name, and that is where they go astray from the truth. They have distinguished them as opposite in form, and have assigned to them marks distinct from one another. To the one they allot the fire of heaven, gentle, very light, in every direction the same as itself, but not the same as the other. The other is just the opposite to it, dark night, a compact and heavy body. Of these I tell thee the whole arrangement as it seems likely; for so no thought of mortals will ever outstrip thee. R. P. 121.

(9)

Now that all things have been named light and night, and the names which belong to the power of each have been assigned to these things and to those, everything is full at once of light and dark night, both equal, since neither has aught to do with the other.

(10, 11)

And thou shalt know the substance of the sky, and all the signs in the sky, and the resplendent works of the glowing sun's pure torch, and whence they arose. And thou shalt learn likewise of the wandering deeds of the round-faced moon, and of her substance. Thou shalt know, too, the heavens that surround us, whence they arose, and how Necessity took them and bound them to keep the limits of the stars . . . how the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the sky that is common to all, and the Milky Way, and the outermost Olympos, and the burning might of the stars arose. R. P. 123, 124.

(12)

The narrower bands were filled with unmixed fire, and those next them with night, and in the midst of these rushes their portion of fire. In the midst of these is the divinity that directs the course of all things; for she is the beginner of all painful birth and all begetting, driving the female to the embrace of the male, and the male to that of the female. R. P. 125. 5

(13)

First of all the gods she contrived Eros. R. P. 125.

(14)

Shining by night with borrowed light,[15] wandering round the earth.

(15)

Always looking to the beams of the sun.

(16)

For just as thought stands at any time to the mixture of its erring organs, so does it come to men; for that which thinks is the same, namely, the substance of the limbs, in each and every man; for their thought is that of which there is more in them.[16] R. P. 128.

(17)

On the right boys; on the left girls.[17]

(19)

Thus, according to men's opinions, did things come into being, and thus they are now. In time they will grow up and pass away. To each of these things men have assigned a fixed name. R. P. 129 b.

1. ↑ Simpl. *Phys.* 144, 25 (R. P. 117). Simplicius, of course, had the library of the Academy at his command. Diels estimates that we have about

nine-tenths of the Ἀλήθεια and about one-tenth of the Δόξα.

2. ↑ The best MS. of Sextus, who quotes this passage, reads κατὰ πάντ' ἄστη Parmenides, then, was an itinerant philosopher, like the sophists of the next generation, and this makes his visit to the Athens of Perikles all the more natural.
3. ↑ For these see Hesiod, *Theog.* 748.
4. ↑ I read δοκιμῶσ' (i.e. δοκιμῶσαι) with Diels. I have left it ambiguous in my rendering whether εἶναι is to be taken with δοκιμῶσαι or δοκοῦντα.
5. ↑ This is the earliest instance of λόγος in the sense of (dialectical) argument which Sokrates made familiar. He got it, of course, from the Eleatics. The Herakleitean use is quite different. (See p. 133, *n.* i.)
6. ↑ I still believe that Zeller's is the only possible interpretation of τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι (*denn dasselbe kann gedacht werden und sein*, p. 558, *n.* 1: Eng. trans. p. 584, *n.* 1). It is impossible to separate νοεῖν ἔστιν here from fr. 4, εἰσὶ νοῆσαι, "can be thought." No rendering is admissible which makes νοεῖν the subject of

the sentence; for a bare infinitive is never so used. (Some grammars make ποιεῖν the subject in a sentence like δίκαιόν ἐστι τοῦτο ποιεῖν , but this is shown to be wrong by δίκαιός εἰμι τοῦτο ποιεῖν.) The use of the infinitive as a subject only became possible when the articular infinitive was developed (cf. Monro, *H. Gr.* §§ 233, 234, 242). The original dative meaning of the infinitive at once explains the usage (νοεῖν ἔστιν, "is for thinking," "can be thought," ἔστιν εἶναι, "is for being," "can be").

7. ↑ The construction here is the same as that explained in the last note. The words τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐόν mean "that which it is possible to speak of and think," and are correctly paraphrased by Simplicius (*Phys.* p. 86, 29, Diels), εἰ οὖν ὅπερ ἄν τις ἢ εἴπῃ ἢ νοήσῃ τὸ ὄν ἔστι. Then ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι means "it can be," and the last phrase should be construed οὐκ ἔστι μηδὲν (εἶναι), "there is no room for nothing to be."
8. ↑ I construe οἷς νενόμισται τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταὐτὸν καὶ οὐ ταὐτόν. The subject of the infinitives πέλειν καὶ οὐκ εἶναι is the *it*, which has to be supplied also with ἔστιν and οὐκ

ἔστιν. This way of taking the words makes it unnecessary to believe that Parmenides said instead of (τὸ) μὴ εἶναι for "not-being." There is no difference between πέλειν and εἶναι except in rhythmical value.

9. ↑ I take πάντων as neuter and understand παλίντροπος κέλευθος as equivalent to the ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω of Herakleitos. I do not think it has anything to do with the παλίντονος (or παλίντροπος) ἁρμονίη. See Chap. III. p. 136, *n.* 4.
10. ↑ I prefer to read ἔστι γὰρ οὐλομελές with Plutarch (*Adv. Col.* 1114 c). Proklos (*in Parm.* 1152, 24) also read οὐλομελές. Simplicius, who has μουνογενές here, calls the One of Parmenides ὁλομελές elsewhere (*Phys.* p. 137, 15). The reading of [Plut.] *Strom.* 5, μοῦνον μουνογενές, helps to explain the confusion. We have only to suppose that the letters μ, ν, γ were written above the line in the Academy copy of Parmenides by some one who had *Tim.* 31 b 3 in mind. Parmenides could not call what *is* "only-begotten," though the Pythagoreans might call the world so.

11. ↑ For the difficulties which have been felt about μᾶλλον here, see Diels's note. If the word is to be pressed, his interpretation is admissible; but it seems to me that this is simply an instance of "polar expression." It is true that it is only the case of there being less of what is in one place than another that is important for the divisibility of the One; but if there is less in one place, there is more in another *than in that place*. In any case, the reference to the Pythagorean "air" or "void" which makes reality discontinuous is plain.
12. ↑ Simplicius certainly read μὴ ἐὸν δ' ἂν παντὸς ἐδεῖτο, which is metrically impossible. I have followed Bergk in deleting μή, and have interpreted with Zeller. So too Diels.
13. ↑ For the construction of ἔστι νοεῖν, see above, p. 173, *n.* 2.
14. ↑ As Diels rightly points out, the Ionic φατίζειν is equivalent to ὀνομάζειν. The meaning, I think, is this. We may name things as we choose, but there can be no thought corresponding to a name that is not the name of something real.
15. ↑ Note the curious echo of *Il.* v. 214. Empedokles has it too (fr. 45). It appears to be a

joke, made in the spirit of Xenophanes, when it was first discovered that the moon shone by reflected light. Anaxagoras may have introduced this view to the Athenians (§ 135), but these verses prove it was not originated by him.

16. ↑ This fragment of the theory of knowledge which was expounded in the second part of the poem of Parmenides must be taken in connexion with what we are told by Theophrastos in the "Fragment on Sensation" (*Dox.* p. 499; cf. p. 193). It appears from this that he said the character of men's thought depended upon the preponderance of the light or the dark element in their bodies. They are wise when the light element predominates, and foolish when the dark gets the upper hand.
17. ↑ This is a fragment of Parmenides's embryology. Diels's fr. 18 is a retranslation of the Latin hexameters of Caelius Aurelianus quoted R. P. 127 a.

Footnotes

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