Perceiving Parmenides: A Reading of Parmenides of Elea's Philosophy by way of the Proem

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to read Parmenides' poem as a work of philosophical literature. Hence we will approach the text with attention to mythology and an awareness of the rather indefinite nature of literary art. Thus, as opposed to the solid *logos* of rational excursus, we will expect the blurring escapade of *mythos*. However, our intention is not simply to make Parmenides into a 'poet' and to rob him of reason; rather, by careful attention to the action of the poem, it is hoped that his philosophy will become clearer. Accepting the poem as a work of literature, this paper argues that Parmenides' poem must be read *as a whole*—beginning with the proem and seeing it as a basis for approaching the entirety of the work. The first part of the paper will demonstrate through an analysis of the *Odyssey* and the *Theogony* that the proem is a masterpiece of allusion, establishing a definite method and imagery by which the following two sections can be read both independently and in relation to each other. The second part will focus primarily on the Way of Doxa in order, first, to provide a general explication of Parmenides' cosmology and theology and, second, to demonstrate that the Doxa is in fact necessary to Parmenides' philosophy—the Doxa may be deceitful, but it is not worthless. As will be seen, the heart of Parmenides' thesis lies in the juxtaposition of the two ways. The third and final part will then examine the Way of Truth and, in light of the previous two discussions, find a succinct statement of the nature of Reality and its relation to human experience. By approaching the text in this manner, our reading will show Parmenides to be both an author of literary merit and a philosopher of sublime intelligence.

The Journey

Parmenides' poem begins with the image of an individual being carried by mares "as far as [his] desire reached." To where the individual is being carried is a matter of some debate. Many scholars interpret Parmenides'

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journey as an ascent out of the darkness and into the light. However, as has been increasingly shown since Burkert's study,[1] when careful attention is paid to the text itself the journey begins to look more and more like a descent. Parmenides is calling upon the solar motif of ascent and descent, and the related motif of seizure by a god. The Heliades rise in the east, as the sun does, driving the chariot and mares of the sun. They travel the path of the sun, pick up the *kouros*, and then descend into the west at the Gates of the Sun. Like Odysseus, the *kouros* follows a solar route into the far west and he will descend into the underworld only to ascend once again. Just like the tales of rapture by Eos and Aphrodite, the Heliades have seized the 'young man' who will soon plunge into Oceanus.[2] At his birth Apollo is described as leaping forth into the light (ἔθορε πρὸ φόωσδε).[3] Several instances in Greek literature connect this movement into the light (εἰς φάος) with the verb ἀνάγειν and use it in the sense of anabasis.[4] Parmenides also uses this image in line 10 of the proem: "Ἡλιάδες κοῦραι, προλιποῦσαι δώματα Νυκτός, // εἰς φάος, ὠσάμεναι κράτων ἄπο χερσὶ καλύπτρας." The Heliades have ascended from the place from which one ascends into the light, in the east; they have picked up Parmenides, and are now descending in the west, following the course of the Sun.

In Greek mythology the Gates of the Sun/Entrance to the Underworld, although located in the direction of the horizon, are truly beyond the horizon. Hence the Gates should not be conceived as 'heavenly,' i.e., somewhere up in the sky, but also they are not necessarily on the horizon. The Gate represents the conflation of opposites, of east and west, of north and south; the idea is that the horizon is one binding entity—a unity which is all and everywhere the same. As is seen in the *Odyssey*, Oceanus is the horizon as such. After departing from Hades, Odysseus' ship brings him back to Aeaea, where it is now said that "Dawn the early comer has her dwelling-place and her dancing grounds, and the sun himself has his risings."[5] Odysseus was in the West, he leaves Aeaea on Oceanus, travels to Hades, and returns to Aeaea, but now he is in the East and the abode of Dawn.[6] This disorientation may

1. W. Burkert, "Das Proömium des Parmenides und die Katabasis des Pythagoras," *Phronesis* 14 (1969): 1–30.

2. Abductions by Dawn and Aphrodite usually involve gusts of wind which seize the abducted, but also a descent into one of the nether rivers of the cosmos: e.g., Tithonos, Phaethon (Hesiod, *Th.*), Orion, Adonis, etc.

3. *Hymn to Delian Apollo*, 119.

4. e.g., Hesiod, *Th.* 626; Plato, *Rep.* 521c; Aeschylus, *Agam.* 1023.

5. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. G.S. Kirk (Oxford U Press, 1980), 12.3–4 [hereafter *Od.*].

6. Cf. G. Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973): 151. Similarly in Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.251, the Argonauts reach the Red Sea via Oceanus.

be at first bewildering, but it is natural to solar mythology. Odysseus travels westward and comes to an island—similar to the Blessed Isles—where the flux of day and night are indistinguishable: this is the realm of the sun, the *axis mundi*, where all opposites conflate. He then sails along Oceanus (in mythic imagery to the north), but is in truth following the course of the Sun as it traverses the earth to its eastern rising place—hence the image is really that he is sailing 'under' the earth with the Sun, traversing the 'otherworld' where the Sun goes at night;[7] he emerges with Dawn (12.8) at Aeaea, which is now the House of Dawn. The re-appellation of Circe's island, and indeed Circe, is not surprising—the reader was prepared for it prior to the *katabasis*—but only now after the descent is all revealed to Odysseus and the reader. Nor is the seeming repositioning of Aeaea surprising, as the *axis mundi*, the solar realm is both east and west, north and south, heaven and earth—even life and death.

In Hesiod's *Theogony* Night and Day reside in the same house, although never at the same time: once a day they pass each other at the Doorway to the House of Night and Day.[8] This fact is often overlooked by analyses of Parmenides' proem. Also neglected is where this House of Night and Day is: in the depths of Tartarus. As Nakassis notes: "In Hesiod, Tartarus is clearly the place where the sun both rises and sets; that is, solar change is conceptualized as occurring at a single threshold."[9] Hence, if Oceanus is the binding circumference, the Gate is the binding point—a point wherein all the opposites collide: heaven, earth, and the underworld. Therefore the Gate operates as an entrance to the underworld for the Sun and also for the dead, but its further mythic function is as a *coincidentia oppositorum*: it is a point where all flux passes and originates. Consequently, Kingsley is correct in saying:

> That's why Parmenides' journey takes him precisely to the point where all opposites meet: the point where Day and Night both come from, the mythical place where earth and heaven have their source.[10]

The image which is evoked is one of a single basis of being, a Monad, which operates as the principle of the flux of day and night, of life and death.

Poetically, in the first ten lines there are three images placed almost in parallel. First, there is the image of the solar *kouros* lifted up and hurtling across the sky, lead according to his desire. Second, there is the image of

7. Gilgamesh likewise follows the Sun when he traverses Mashu (*Gilg*. 9.2ff).

8. Hesiod, *Th*. 716–52, 805–14.

9. D. Nakassis, "Gemination at the Horizons: East and West in the Mythical Geography of Archaic Greek Epic," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134 (2004): 217.

10. P. Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness, CA: Golden Sufi Center, 1999), 70.

the sun-maidens having set out, leading the chariot and steeds of the sun to the *kouros*. Lastly, we have the image of the arrival at their destination.[11] In this parallel presentation there is a collapse of time, as past, present, and future—what was, what is, what will be—are all blurred into one image: the Heliades ascend, the *kouros* is picked up, and they descend. The *kouros* in the role of the sun both is and is not the sun-god—in the nature of the mystery cult, as the knowing-one, he is lead towards and is partaking of the divinity. At the gates he is greeted by Dike who holds the key to the Gates of Night and Day and, like all the gate keepers in myth, she first needs to be convinced to let the adventurer through. Dike opens the doors, revealing the great Chasm/Chaos beyond, and the horses proceed.[12] Then the poem strangely jumps; there are no connecting verses, but rather out of nowhere the goddess greets the *kouros*. Here we have our second moment. In summary: first, the collapse of time in the flight; second, the presentation at the Gates and admittance. Once we move past the threshold all artifices fall away and we are left with the poet and the goddess. At the moment of *katabasis* Light has collapsed into Night, and Night has collapsed into Chaos—Hesiod's three primal generations have each collapsed, arriving at the origin: a de-genesis.[13] Time, space, motion (becoming) have collapsed back to the source, this divine entity which Parmenides does not name.[14]

Having woven together a poetic image articulating and depicting the nature of the journey, Parmenides must finish with one more element. For

11. W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol II: *The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (Cambridge U Press, 1965), 9: "the journey is not narrated stage by stage, but the key-points are brought out in an impressionistic manner."

12. The word χάσμα is scarce in Greek literature. Hesiod provides the only prior instance of the word and he uses it to refer to the gaping maw of Tartarus. In the *Phaedo* Plato uses χάσμα to denote a great gap stretching deep into the earth (*Phd*. 111e6–112a6). As Kingsley notes in *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford U Press, 1995), 83 n.12: "the idea of a chasma stretching an enormous distance into the earth is naturally suggestive of volcanic phenomena." The meaning of the word, therefore, in Hesiod, Parmenides, and Plato is likely that of a volcanic crater pictured as an entrance into the underworld, or perhaps the underworld was conceived of as a great yawning space to which volcanic craters were portals. The chasm image may call upon not only the idea of the underworld/Tartarus, but also the primal state of the cosmos. In such mythology the chasm is very nearly the primagenerix of Hesiod's cosmology: Night—the dark womb of all life. Cf. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, 127, *OF* fr. 66, and M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford U Press, 1983), 198ff. & 231.

13. In *The Rig Veda*, trans. D. O'Flaherty (Penguin, 1981), 1.185, Day and Night/Heaven and Earth are produced from an abyss (which is also associated with Night and the underworld). These "two sisters" meet at the horizon and at the "navel of the world."

14. Diogenes Laertius (9.3) reports that some say that Parmenides was the first to suggest the Achilles/Hercules paradox. If this is true then there may be a degree of irony in the opening lines—where is he going? The shifting of tenses may play on this irony, i.e., no journey traverses space or time, but rather all movement is *noesis*.

the journey which he has depicted is a *katabasis* and the *katabasis* must be balanced by an anabasis; as in the mystery cults the anabasis is the mystery which makes life new—it is also the path of ascent, of movement from the region of shades. So the goddess directs the *kouros*:

> Come, I will tell you—and you must accept my word when you have heard it—the ways of inquiry which alone are to be thought: the one that IT IS, and it is not possible for IT NOT TO BE, is the way of credibility, for it follows Truth; the other, that IT IS NOT, and that IT is bound NOT TO BE: this I tell you is the path that cannot be explored; for you could neither recognise that which IS NOT, nor express it …. But next I debar you from that way along which wander mortals knowing nothing, two-headed, for perplexity in their bosoms steers their intelligence astray, and they are carried along as deaf as they are blind, amazed, uncritical hordes, by whom To Be and Not To Be are regarded as the same and not the same, and (for whom) in everything there is a way of opposing stress. (B2, B6)[15]

Even though the exact nature of the 'Ways' which the goddess outlines is often misunderstood by scholars, this section becomes clear based on a comparative study with the *Odyssey*. Parmenides has placed the goddess into the role of Circe, describing the path by which Odysseus must return from the solar realm of Aeaea. Like Circe, the goddess here gives three symbolic routes: one of which cannot be travelled, one of which only leads to ruin, and one of which will lead Odysseus through great peril but will bring him home if he keeps to the path. Hence to think that IT IS NOT is to pass where Charybdis sucks and spews its murky water; to think that both IT IS and IT IS NOT is to pass the Wandering mount; to think that "IT IS, and it is not possible for IT NOT TO BE" is the path of Odysseus past the cliff of Scylla who indiscriminately devours mortals. The goddess here tells the *kouros* the way home—his *anabasis*—which is also the revelation and the mystery which she is about to tell him: the message is a new knowledge, a new life, and a return home.

The Gates

In what can be pieced together from the contemporary literature, the concept of flux seems to have been fundamental to the science of Parmenides' day.[16] Two elements are posited, usually air and fire, which operate

15. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the B fragments are from K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers* (Harvard U Press, 1948).

16. Cf. notably M.L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford U Press, 1971); W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. Edwin L. Minar, Jr. (Harvard U Press, 1972); Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*; H.S. Schibili, *Pherekydes of Syros* (Oxford U Press, 1990); G. Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation* (Cambridge U Press, 2004); *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus,* ed. A. Laks and G. Most (Oxford U Press, 1997).

in concert. The flux—or, better yet, the insubstantiality and indefinitude of the cosmos—is usually understood in the image of the inhalation and exhalation of the air. In such cosmology the notion is not so much of a cyclic flow from one to another, but rather a passing back and forth of one primary and defining essence. Standing historically parallel, Zoroastrian theology and cosmology posited a flux of two contrary elements bound in perpetual tug-of-war. Zoroastrian doctrines were known to the Greeks by at least Heraclitus' time and the magi were commonly recognized among the itinerant 'spiritualists' of the ancient world by the time of Plato and the Derveni commentator. Most extant Zoroastrian literature dates from after Parmenides, but some fragments can be safely judged to hearken back to the age of the great Achaemenids. For example:

> It is thus revealed in the Good Religion that Ohrmazd was on high in omniscience and goodness. For boundless time He was ever in the light. That light is the space and place of Ohrmazd. Some call it Endless light …. Ahriman was abased in slowness of knowledge and the lust to smite. The lust to smite was his sheath and darkness his place. Some call it Endless Darkness. And between them was emptiness. They both were limited and limitless: for that which is on high, which is called Endless Light … and that which is abased, which is Endless Darkness—those were limitless.[17]

Notions of opposition were common to Greek thought as well. Aristotle famously attributed a table of opposites to Pythagoras that reflect similar Babylonian concepts.[18] Heraclitus had his doctrine of flux and the role of fire as the single underlying and uniting principle of that flux. However, whereas the Greek mind seems more connected to a notion of cyclic flux to explain the mutability and imperfection of the world, the Persians held a doctrine of two conflicting powers: an absolute dualism. Nevertheless, both of these mentalities are assuredly "two-headed," for:

> they have established the custom of naming two forms … they have distinguished them as opposite in form, and have marked them off from another by giving them different signs: on one side the flaming fire in the heavens, mild, very light, the same as itself in every direction, and not the same as the other. This (other) also is by itself opposite: dark Night, a dense and heavy body. (B8)

Conceding that the philosopher cannot remain long in the Sun and must return to the flitting shadow-realm of opinion, the goddess proceeds to discuss an account of this διάκοσμον so that no mortal γνώμη may ever overtake the hearer.

17. "The Greater Bundahishn," 1.1–10 in M. Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (U of Chicago Press, 1990), 45–46.

18. *Meta*. 1.986a23ff.

The cosmology which follows is mostly lost, but from testimonia and the remaining fragments we can get a sense of what is said. Parmenides seems to have written a treatise involving a great deal of astronomical and perhaps even medical data. Always prevalent throughout this section is the theme of duality—male/female, Light/Night, fire/earth—and circularity.[19] Aëtius says of Parmenides' Doxa:

> Parmenides [says that] there are circular bands, woven around one another, one made of the rare, the other of the dense; and between these are others mixed <of> light and darkness. What surrounds them all is solid like a wall, and beneath this is a fiery band, and what is in the very middle of them all [is solid], around which again there is a fiery band. The midmost of the mixed bands is the <origin> and <cause> of movement and coming-into-being for all of them, and it is this that he calls 'the goddess who steers,' 'holder of the keys,' 'Justice' and 'Necessity.' The air is separated from the earth, vaporized because of the earth's more violent compression, and the sun is an exhalation of fire, as is the circle of the Milky Way. The moon, however, is a mixture of both, of air [/earth] and fire. Surrounding these at the uppermost level of all is the aether, with that fiery region which we call heaven ranged beneath it; and beneath this come the regions about the earth.[20]

Again, according to Cicero:

> Parmenides invents a fanciful sort of thing; he makes up an unbroken circle of lights, like a crown (his word is *stephane*), which encircles the heavens, and this he calls 'god.' But now one can suppose that such a thing possesses divine form or sensation. This philosopher produces other freakish entities—for he deifies war, discord, desire, and similar notions, which can be destroyed by illness of sleep or forgetfulness or old age. He treats stars in the same way, but let us pass over that point here, for it has been criticized in connection with another philosopher.[21]

The meaning of the concept of circularity signifies the perfection of the cosmos and the positioning of the goddess in the center, "who guides everything" (B12) and who represents a principle which establishes order.[22]

19. E.g., Plutarch, *Reply to Colotes* 1114b: "[Parmenides] has actually made a cosmic order, and by blending as elements the light and dark produces out of them and by their operation the whole world of appearances. Thus he has much to say about earth, heaven, sun, moon, and stars, and has recounted the genesis of man; and for an ancient natural philosopher—who has put together a book of his own, and is not pulling apart the book of another—he has left nothing of real importance unsaid" (trans. Gallop); Simplicius, *Commentary on Physics* 144.25: "For he too, in the verses concerning seeming, makes hot and cold principles; and he calls them fire and earth, and light and night or darkness" (trans. Gallop).

20. Parmenides, A37.1–15 (trans. Gallop): Aëtius, 2.7.1. Diels has ἀέρος at line 14 and Gallop follows that, translating "air and fire," and argues that it is the correct reading. However, Guthrie emended the text to read "earth and fire," which agrees with the testimonia.

21. Parmenides, A37.15–21 (trans. Gallop): Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.28.

22. Parmenides, A32 (Aëtius, 1.25.3): "According to Parmenides and Democritus, every

The figure at the middle is understood by Aëtius as Dike or Ananke, which correlates with Parmenides' statements.[23] Dike stands at the Gates in the proem, the Gates which in the solar mythology were conceived as the *axis mundi*. However, the Gates are in the far West where the Sun sets and also open to the far East where the Sun rises—the Gates are the horizon, which is the limit of the cosmos. Hence the Gates and Dike stand at both the center and the conflation of the universe. Therefore the image created by the Gates and Dike, combined with the solar connotation of a cyclic passage of ascent and descent, is reflected in the Doxa in three ways: by the celestial rings of fire reported above; by the balance of duality—"everything is full equally of Light and invisible Night, as both are equal, for nothing is possible which does not come under [one] of the two;"[24] and finally by the role of the goddess in ordering it all—"and you shall know also the surrounding heaven, whence it sprang and how Necessity brought and constrained it to hold the limits of the stars" (B10).

In the *Theogony* Tartarus is described as:

> the sources and extremities (πηγαὶ καὶ πείρατ') of dark earth and misty Tartarus, of the undraining sea and the starry heaven, all in order, dismal and dank, that even the gods shudder at a vast chasm.[25]

Bergren argues that Hesiod is articulating the Greek manner of representing boundary (πεῖραρ):

> conceived from the outside in, the border is the source, the place where the body begins, from the inside out, it is the line of the furthest outward extension of the body, the point beyond which the body is no more and another begins.[26]

Thus, as Nakassis states:

> from a Greek standpoint, Tartarus is located at the edges of the earth, while from a cosmic or panoptic perspective, Tartarus is cosmologically central, a nexus that mediates between the cosmic forces of the world. Center and periphery are thereby conflated.[27]

thing is out of necessity; and fate, justice, providence, and the maker of the universe are the same thing" (trans. Gallop).

23. Parmenides uses four different expressions in order to convey the notion of necessity: *Ananke/ananke* (B8.30, 10.6, 8.16), *Moira* (B1.26, 8.37), *Daimon/daimones* (B12.3, 1.3), and a series of words derived from χράω (B1.28, 1.32, 2.5, 6.1, 8.9, 8.11, 8.45).

24. Parmenides, B9 (trans. Freeman, following Kranz's emendation).

25. Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M.L. West (Oxford U Press, 1998), 738–40.

26. A.L.T. Bergren, *The Etymology and Usage of* ΠΕΙΡΑΡ *in Early Greek Poetry* (Pennsylvania State College, 1975), 115.

27. Nakassis, 217.

This conflation is represented most clearly in the significance of the Gates. We mentioned above the role of the Gates in solar myth as the *coincidentia oppositorum* and the nature, especially seen in the *Odyssey*, of the solar realm conceptualized as both the limits and the *axis mundi*. The solar realm, Tartarus, and the Gates all are the point of this conflation—all three are one and the same: the point where all opposites come together, the source of all becoming and perishing, all ascent and descent, the limits and the center, the point where all multiplicity comes together. Mythically, it signifies unity and the principle of order; the flux of which it is principle is perfect and ordered—the perfection is understood in the balance of opposites in the world and the perfection of cosmic circularity. The Sun and Night move in ordered and constant flux, watched over constantly by Dike, who holds "the interchangeable keys."

Not only are these themes reflected in the Proem and the Doxa, they are also found in the 'Way of Truth.' In the Truth, the discussion revolves around the nature of Being. The theme of perfection is again evident; Being *is*:

> Being has no coming-into-being and no destruction, for it is whole of limb, without motion, and without end. And it never Was, nor Will Be, because it Is now, a Whole all together, One, continuous. (B8.3–4)

However, unlike the perfection of Doxa, the perfection of Being is absolute and immutable:

> How could Being perish? How could it come into Being? If it came into being, it is Not, and so too if it is about-to-be at some future time. Thus Coming-into-Being is quenched, and Destruction also into the unseen. (B8.20–21)

Duality has been transcended since Being is indivisible, but the balance and perfection articulated through the ordered duality and circularity of Doxa finds a resonance in the perfect and divinely ordained wholeness and unity: "since there is a Limit, it is complete on every side, like the mass of a well-rounded sphere, equally balanced from its center in every direction … it is an inviolate whole" (B.42–49). The limits and source of all are found also in Being in the echo of the *axis mundi*:

> But it is motionless in the limits of mighty bonds, without beginning, without cease, since Becoming and Destruction have been driven very far away, and true conviction has rejected them. And remaining the same in the same place, it rests by itself and thus remains there fixed; for powerful Necessity holds it in the bonds of a Limit, which constrains it round about, because it is decreed by divine law that Being shall not be without boundary. (B8.26–33)

Being is both finite and infinite: it is bound in perfect order but it is also like the infinite sphere, never without end; it has no spatial and temporal existence, yet it is all space and all time since all space and time is simply Doxa, appearance and opined:

> For nothing else either is or shall be except Being, since Fate has tied it down to be a whole and motionless; therefore all things that mortals have established, believing in their truth, are just a name: Becoming and Perishing, Being and Not-Being, and change of position, and alteration of bright colour. (B8.36–41)

Being is absolute, whole and one, yet we are confronted with a world of change and difference. Parmenides says that all the world of sense is a deception and a façade, a delusion for those who cannot perceive what truly is.

However, by the artistry of his poem he is not so unforgiving as most have read him. Parmenides needs to be intolerant and definite because what is is, yet subtle hints are carried throughout the articulation of his poem which relent to experience.[28] Parmenides seems to be saying that the world of sense-perception, although it is not real, is real insofar as it reflects in its order and composite wholeness the singular perfection of Being. The initiation ultimately comes down to a matter of orientation, of turning away from perceiving the world by the senses and perceiving it anew by another means. Hence the metaphor he uses in reference to the moon holds a double significance: "Shining by night with a light not her own …. Always gazing towards the rays of the sun" (B14–15).

This re-orientation may be best understood when we recall the entire nature of *katabasis* at the Gates: not only is this the point of the descending Sun, as is seen in the second *nekyia* of the *Odyssey* (24.2–14), it is also the point where the spirits of the dead pass. For Plato, "those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but death and dying."[29] Why the morbid obsession? It is not that the philosopher is suicidal, but rather that the philosopher has an awareness of the need for purgation in order to find illumination—for Plato this manifests itself in the necessity to purge the soul of the body:

> so long as we have the body, and the soul is contaminated by such an evil, we shall never attain completely what we desire, that is, the truth. For the body keeps us constantly busy by reason of its need for sustenance …. And the body fills us with passions and desires and fears, and all sorts of fancies and foolishness, so that, as they say, it really

28. Parmenides, A34.32–6 (Simplicius, *Commentary on Physics*, 39.10): "He calls the discourse 'seeming' and 'deceitful,' not outright false, but because the sensible world has fallen from the intelligible reality into the domain of appearing and seeming" (trans. Gallop). A34.25–6 (Plutarch, *Reply to Colotes* 1114d): "Parmenides, however, abolishes neither the one world nor the other" (trans. Gallop).

29. Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. H.N. Fowler (Harvard U Press, 1914), 64a [herein after *Phd.*].

> and truly makes it impossible for us to think at all … if we are ever to know anything absolutely, we must be free from the body and must behold the actual realities with the eye of the soul alone. (*Phd*. 66b–d)

Later we read:

> [the philosopher] will confidently believe that he will find pure wisdom nowhere else than in the other world. (*Phd*. 68b)

Such a notion of purgation—of seeking to remove oneself from the sensible and corporeal in order to better attain to truth—is not Plato's in origin. He found it among the Pythagoreans of Magna Graeca:

> the Pythagorean asceticism was conceived as a study ἀποθνήσκειν τε καί τεθνάναι (*Phaedo* 64a, 67e), and Parmenides himself implies that the journey to the goddess is an anticipation of death. This journey then is simply the Pythagorean κάθαρσις, which Plato identifies as the philosopher's study to free the soul from the body and as proceeding by a road which is the sole avenue in human life to the discovery of reality and life with the gods.[30]

However, the Pythagoreans likely adopted the concept of *katabasis-anabasis* from somewhere else and Plato provides one clue in the *Phaedo*:

> But Truth is in fact a purification from all these things, and self-restraint and justice and courage and wisdom itself are a kind of purification. And I fancy that those men who established the mysteries were not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning when they said long ago that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods. (*Phd*. 69c)

The Eleusinian mysteries held the similar motif of descent as purgation from sensible existence and the ascent as an initiation/illumination into truth, or a revelation.[31]

30. Coxon, 16.

31. In Hippolytus' description of the Eleusinian mysteries (*Ref*. 1.3) there is a similar significance to purification and illumination, descent and ascent. The lower mysteries, as Hippolytus tells us, lay emphasis on chthonic elements—earth and fire—and the reverence due to the heavenly. The higher mysteries induct one into a new 'spiritual' life, with the gate of heaven as the passage to this new life, which is described as conceived in a womb. Parmenides' proem (if properly interpreted in this paper) is a parallel to this summation: descent, ascent, purgation of sensory existence bringing on a new life in spiritual/noetic existence, the road of the divine (to the House of Night) and acceptance into the divine. The nineteenth-century scholar Augustus Meineke attributed to Parmenides one statement found here within Hippolytus' description of the mysteries, which Diels accepted as spurious: "But below it (Earth?) is a path, dreadful, hollow, muddy; this is the best path to lead one to the lovely grove of much-revered Aphrodite" (B20).

The new life offered by the descent and ascent of the mystery brought with it the promise of a blessed afterlife—enjoying the sun-drenched fields of the underworld—but it was also doubly applied to the physical world: to live with the revelation was a blessed life, but to live without it was to be deprived of life—to be a mindless wraith of Hades. As Kingsley notes:

> According to the *Gorgias* it is not a question of us being alive and the underworld being somewhere else. On the contrary, we are already dead (νῦν ἡμεῖς τέθναμεν), and the world that we think of as life on earth is really the underworld itself. The *Phaedo* myth makes exactly the same point in even fuller terms.[32]

The tendency to allegorize Tartarus can be seen most clearly and radically in Lucretius (3.978ff), who shrugs off the various legendary punishments of Tartarus as similes of human conditions or tendencies in real life. Plato likely plays with this device in the Allegory of the Cave and it reaches its most full treatment with Dante. The suggestion that the world of Doxa is the true Tartarus may also be apparent in Parmenides.[33] Hence the concept offered by cult found its way into philosophy, or perhaps more likely, philosophy found itself in the message.

To exist in Doxa, then, is not only to accept the sensible as real, but the key for Parmenides seems to be that it is to form opinions based on sensory conceptions and not to apprehend the world as it truly is. As Coxon notes, Parmenides' criticism of 'people without judgment' is not aimed generally at "the man in the street."[34] Rather the assault is aimed at those who exist properly in Doxa, i.e., those who make "two-headed" opinions based on the world of impermanent flux before their eyes. Thus to exist in Doxa is a failure to orientate oneself and to apprehend reality. Now the full significance of the proem becomes apparent: in depicting the ascent and descent of the Sun, Parmenides is also bringing forward the theme of *anabasis* and *katabasis*, of the purgation and new life of the philosophic/religious impulse. Just as, in the tradition, Empedocles threw himself into the crater of Etna and in so doing became divine, so the *kouros* is seized by the divine, catapulted across the all-knowing road, and brought along the course which the dead traverse. Nonetheless, it is not an "evil fate" which awaits the *kouros*. Not death, but rather revelation (*aletheia*), a new life and a true life awaits him. The *kouros* rises again as the knowing man, walking the way of the divine. However, as the *kouros* descends, the Gates through which he is about to pass stand agape and reveal a vast chasm, the gaping yawn of death. Nevertheless, the moment of impending death passes away as he traverses the Gates and the *kouros* finds

32. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, 105.
33. Coxon, 19.
34. Coxon, 18.

himself immediately before the Goddess. The Gate is the conflation of the flux of the sensory world and of life and death. Passing through the Gate, he moves beyond all such flux, beyond coming-to-be and perishing, and there he comes upon the disclosure of what is. Hence the proem is a dramatization of the orientation towards or, better yet, the perception of what is—it is a movement into *nous*.

The Goddess

The goddess who speaks throughout the poem has been interpreted as many different figures. It is quite possible that this goddess may be Persephone. The *kouros* descends to the underworld and like Hercules is greeted by the Lady of the nether realm. When the *kouros* arrives at the goddess, he says that she "received me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and thus she spoke and addressed me: 'Young man'" (B1.22–23). This greeting follows in the mode of Heracles' *katabasis*, as Kingsley summarizes:

> the goddess who welcomes Heracles so warmly when he goes down as an initiate to the underworld is Persephone. And in paintings of her, made during Parmenides' own lifetime, you can see exactly how she greets him. She welcomes by reaching out and giving him her right hand.[35]

Moreover, by the fifth century Heracles was said to have been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries.[36] Heidegger's thesis that she is a personification of the revelation itself (i.e., she is Aletheia) is worthy of consideration, for as Fränkel notes: "the function of the goddess of the way and of the maidens is one and the same: they lead to knowledge."[37] As Aletheia, the goddess would also be Being—as Truth, she would be Being disclosing itself. Others have suggested that the goddess may be Aphrodite, which is also possible. Parmenides is credited by Diogenes Laertius as the first to have recognized that the Evening and Morning stars, i.e., Venus, are the same. The 'heavenly Aphrodite' rises before sunset and sets after sunrise, hearkening the coming of Dawn and the Sun in the East and passing into the depths of the Earth after the Sun in the West. Hence Aphrodite is united with the solar themes.

35. Kingsley, *Dark Places*, 94.

36. Kingsley, *Dark Places*, 29. Reliefs show Heracles at his initiation as veiled (W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan [Harvard U Press, 1985], 286–97). The ritual veiling and unveiling during the mysteries and the connection with Heracles may explain the significance of the Heliades pulling back their veils in the proem. Orpheus is greeted by Persephone in a similar fashion. Moreover, some of the Orphic gold tablets promise that the holder will be greeted 'kindly' by Persephone in the underworld.

37. Fränkel, 4; cf. M. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. A. Schuwer and R. Rojcewicz (Indiana U Press, 1998).

She descends and ascends at the *axis mundi*, she is tied to the permanence of the celestial cycle, and as the goddess of fertility and of love she returns each Night into the womb and regenerates again each morning. Aphrodite is also the *theotokos*, since in leading the Sun out from the Earth she gives birth to all life and all movement and all death. Aphrodite as the force of generation would be a lovely representative of be-coming/flux. Furthermore, there is the symbolism of Venus as both the Morning Star and Evening Star to again represent the notion of a binding unity of motion.[38]

That the goddess is left unnamed or unidentified has been noticed by most scholars. Tarán says that:

> the fact that goddess remains anonymous shows that she represents no religious figure at all and only stands as a literary device implying that the 'revelation' is the truth discovered by Parmenides himself.[39]

While leaving the goddess nameless is surely a poetic artifice, her being called 'the daimon' and 'the goddess' clearly indicates that she is a religious figure. The nature of her religious significance can, however, be debated. Henn suggests that for ancient peoples naming represented "an expression of *control* over" the named thing, and hence by that rationale not to name the goddess was to leave her free from human conception and language.[40] Moreover, for the Greeks naming also had a sense of genesis, i.e., by naming something it becomes defined and knowable. Therefore, a goddess without name is *ageneton*. However, the wisest course may simply be to accept the ambiguity and suggest that what Parmenides is articulating with his 'goddess' is best spoken of as 'the divine.' She is female because of the duality fulfilled by the male *kouros*, but she also encompasses the feminine Persephone, Aphrodite, Dike/Ananke, and Aletheia. Older Greek religion maintained a male-female duality of some of their gods, a remnant of which is found in Aphrodite's parents Zeus and Dione (*Il.* 5.371–416). Such a mentality denotes an early appreciation of non-anthropomorphic conceptions of the divine, which was certainly held by Parmenides. The positioning of Dike/Ananke throughout not only confirms the ordered nature of the cosmos—the perfection of be-

38. The Sun, Moon, and Venus in Babylonian astronomy formed a triad of the three principle celestial powers, rulers of the Zodiac. This triad was secondary to the primary triad of *Anu* (heaven), *Bel* (Earth) and *Ea* (Waters). Their symbols—the disc, crescent, and a four- or six-pointed star—appear on boundary markers beginning in the 14th century BC. Considering the importance of each in Parmenides' poem, some relation to Babylonian astronomy could be possible.

39. L. Tarán, *Parmenides* (Princeton U Press, 1964), 31.

40. M.J. Henn, *Parmenides of Elea: A Verse Translation with Interpretative Essays and Commentary to the Text* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003), 94–95.

coming being a reflection of Being—but, by her central location and by her standing at the Gates, it also symbolizes that the flux is ordered. However, the indefinite identity of the goddess also amounts to a recognition of the unspeakable and incomprehensible nature of the divine: "divine power as a vastness—or a closeness—that's beyond the limitation of any conceivable name."[41] All mundane utterance can only point the seeker in the direction of the divine; it can never come close to apprehending it. As Coxon notes, it is for this reason that when "Parmenides uses the word ἀληθείη … it does not denote truth as an attribute of thought or language but objective reality."[42]

The notion of an over-arching divinity encompassing all other divine figures was not foreign to Parmenides' world. The Egyptians held such a conception of the divine and we find a clear statement of this 'holistic monad' in the theology of the Derveni papyrus: "Now he is king of all and will always be … Zeus the head, Zeus the middle, and from Zeus all things have their being."[43] The Derveni theology has Zeus contrive (μήσατο) the cosmos just as Parmenides has 'the divine' devise (μητίσατο) Eros first of all the gods.[44] The cosmology says that "he himself [i.e., Zeus/*Nous*] became solitary (αὐτὸς δὲ ἄρα μοῦνος ἔγεντο)," which the Derveni commentator explains as: "[*Nous*] itself, being alone, is worth everything, as if the others were nothing."[45] This description of the divine nature is also employed by Parmenides: "since it exists it is unborn and imperishable, whole, unique (μουνογενές), immovable."[46] This unique/singular divine power, encompassing all, represents something of a 'monadic holism' in the Derveni papyrus and was likely common among the Orphics. This very term μονογενής was adopted by Plato to refer to the uniqueness both of the paradigm of the universe and of the universe itself.[47]

41. Kingsley, *Dark Places*, 95.

42. Coxon, 168. In line 29 Parmenides uses ἀλήθεια for the first time in the poem and the word appears two other times in the extant fragments (B2.4, B8.51). In every case it does not imply veracity or certitude, but rather an objective reality. The adjectival αληθής is used twice with the same meaning (B8.17, 39).

43. G. Betegh, trans. *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology, and Interpretation* (Cambridge, 2004), 16.14, 17.13 [hereafter *Derv. Pap.*].

44. *Derv. Pap.*, 25.14 (trans. Betegh); B13.

45. *Derv. Pap.*, 16.6, 8–11 (trans. Betegh).

46. Parmenides, B8.4 (trans. Guthrie, 26). There are many variations of this line, but the most solid reading (backed by Guthrie, 26–27 and Tarán, 91–93) is the οὖλον μουνογενές τε from Simplicius. Arguments for other readings are based on perceived troubles with μουνογενές, but it is attested in Aeschylus, Plato and now in the Derveni papyrus. The meaning in Plato seems to be 'unique,' 'singular' (cf. *Tim*. 31a–b & 92c).

47. *Tim*. 31a–b & 92c; West, *Orphic Poems*, 109: "Parmenides' sense that Being is all one and continuous has something in common with the theological myth in which the entire universe is united in the body of Zeus, and when he calls Being 'whole, unique,' this recalls the Orphic poet's phrase, that Zeus 'became the only one.' Zeus' creation of the cosmic Aphrodite and his intelligent 'contriving' of Oceanus and other entities finds echoes in Parmenides'

Hence the word represents the singular perfection of the divine—complete, whole, one—a singular perfection which has been found in Parmenides' proem, the cosmology of the Doxa, and the logos of the Truth. Parmenides' poem itself stands as a whole.

Through the artistry of the poem as a whole, Being is conceptually paralleled with the goddess in her various instances, i.e., 'the divine,' Aletheia, and *Nous*. Since the Way of Truth receives nearly all scholarly attention, this parallel presentation is often missed. For this reason many readers end up taking the argument of Parmenides to be based on a linguistic or logical game involving the verb 'to be.' Rather, in order to understand the poem one must read it as a whole, seeing the monadic holism of Parmenides' divine illustrated throughout in various ways, but with a universal commonality.[48] Parmenides uses the verb 'to be' and its varying permutations with an intention inseparable from the imagery of the poem. Thus the use of *einai* is only one facet of the overall revelation, albeit an essential element. Begun by the artistry and statement of the proem, the verb 'to be' is used to reveal the nature of the divine—or rather, to have the divine reveal itself. Consequently, the meaning of *einai* ought to be examined. Kahn has argued for several meanings of *einai* in Greek independent of the distinctions based upon logical classes. Kahn contends that "for the philosophical usage of the verb, the most fundamental value of *einai* when used alone (without predicates) is not 'to exist' but 'to be so,' 'to be the case,' or 'to be true'."[49] He defines this 'veridical sense' and two others, the durative and locative, as the usual meanings of the verb in Greek writing.[50] However, as Kahn says, the primary sense for philosophers is the 'veridical':

> Being … means what is or can be truly known and said. To on is first and foremost the object of true knowledge and the basis or the correlative of true speech.[51]

'apparent' cosmology, where a 'goddess who steers all things—for she rules over all birth and union, sending female to unite with male and male with female'—was said to 'contrive' other gods, beginning with Eros."

48. Coxon, 20: "Modern exegesis has in consequence saddled him with, most generally, an existential understanding of the verb, or else with an archaic failure to distinguish between its existential and copulative uses.'"

49. C. Kahn, "The Verb 'To Be' and the Concept of Being," in *Foundations of Logic* 2 (1966): 250: "the traditional dichotomy between the existential and the predicative use of the verb would have to be rejected for Greek as a hopeless oversimplification."

50. Cf. Kahn, 254–62; 261: "it is only natural for the object of knowing to be conceived of after the pattern of propositions, for what can be known and truly stated is what is the case: a fact, situation, or relationship, not a particular thing or 'object' as such. The chief discrepancy between the Greek concept of Being and the modern notion of existence lies precisely here, for we normally assign existence not to facts or propositions or relations, but to discrete particulars: to creatures, persons, or things."

51. Kahn, 260.

The veridical sense plays itself out especially through the nature of the mythos—i.e., the statement which Parmenides is articulating—of the poem because "the language of Greek ontology naturally lends itself to the view that the structure of reality is such as to be truly expressed in discourse."[52] Therefore the utterance of the goddess is 'the real.' What is said amounts to a revelation of reality; it is truth and truth is being and being is uncovering/revealing itself. This is not necessarily a momentary revelation—the final impact of the mystery is that as Being is, i.e., being Being, it is eternal, immutable, perfect, but also as Being is, it is perpetually unfolding/revealing itself. Hence, although Parmenides rebukes those "who wander two-headed" and form opinions based on sense-perception, he is also showing that the world we experience is not some sort of deception or mirage, but rather there is reality in it because its order and perfection reflect the divine. Being is as it is. As it is Being is eternally unfolding itself, presenting itself—hence the experience of perfection and order in the world of be-coming. The question ought to be how Being is experienced, how the world before us is not a deception or mirage, i.e., how we perceive the presentation of Reality?

Fortunately, Parmenides tells us how this happens: by *nous*. Henn deftly points out that "one who misses the lesson of Fragment B3 misses the lesson of the poem."[53] The statement "τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν καὶ εἶναι" has been translated variously:

> Because the same thing is there for thinking and for being (Gallop)
> For the same thing can be thought and can exist (Tarán)
> For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be (Burnet, Guthrie)
> For the same thing can be thought as can be (Raven)
> Thinking and Being are the same thing (Vlastos)
> For ascertaining and being real are one and the same thing (Robinson)
> For what exists for thinking, and being, are one and the same (Kingsley)
> For it is the same thing to think and to be (Freeman)

There is a natural ambiguity in translating this fragment, because νοεῖν and εἶναι could be either infinitives or archaic forms of the dative. Then there are the added problems that, first, as Henn notes, "our impersonal pronoun 'it' is not expressed in the Greek, yet it occurs over and over again in our standard translations," which leaves the subject dangling, and second, there is the tendency to take τὸ αὐτὸ as the object "for" the datives or of the infinitives, yet this complicates the reading.[54] The simplest option, then, may be just to read B3 as an identification of νοεῖν and εἶναι. Nonetheless, the key to the

52. Kahn, 253.
53. Henn, 54.
54. Henn, 54; cf. 34–39.

significance of the fragment does not lie with how the words are translated, but with how the meaning of what is said is translated.

As we noted above, Parmenides has neatly identified Aletheia and Being. Here he seems to be further adding *Nous* to this identity. The issue with translating νοεῖν is that it is very difficult to translate out of Greek (hence it is transliterated here), and common renderings such as 'Mind' or 'thought/thinking' simply do no justice to it (or outright mislead). *Nous* in Homer had the sense of perception/apprehension/realization and is used almost exclusively in this sense.[55] When Zeus asks Thetis to leave after she has requested his help in regaining Achilles' honour, Zeus is concerned lest Hera perceive what they are doing: "go home now, lest Hera τι νοήσῃ" (*Il.* 1.523). Similarly, when Priam prays to Zeus to send an omen—ὄφρα μιν αὐτὸς ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι νοήσας—he asks so that he might perceive (νοήσας) and by that perception know that it is truly the will of god that he retrieve Hector's body from Achilles (*Il.* 24.307–13). In these two examples, νοεῖν means a perception/apprehension of the immediate situation, but it also has a broader meaning. In Homer and Greek literature until at least the late fifth century, *nous* carries no sense of 'reason':

> stress is then always laid on the visualization of the situation as a whole, not on the process of reasoning by which we may gradually arrive at this visualization … where νοεῖν means planning, it is the visualization of the plan which we see unfold, not a process of reasoning by which its usefulness or the necessary interdependence of its different parts might be demonstrated … [hence] it is not conceived of as the result of a process of reasoning, much less as this process itself, but rather as a kind of mental perception, if this expression is allowable.[56]

Nous was also used as a word describing the relationship of the gods and man: "it is characteristic of the outlook of the god-fearing man that with him the gods are always 'part of the picture', and this may also be expressed by saying that his νόος is always turned to the gods."[57] Therefore the *nous* of a man is an awareness of the divine. Moreover, in both the above examples *nous* perceives in near concert with the senses. *Nous* operates in the manner of the senses as perception—what is poetically depicted is sensory—yet what is truly perceived is somehow more than the mere sense perception, i.e., it is somehow truly true/really real. Hence the word *nous* implies a perception, a way of experiencing a world within or behind sense perception. Although this notion would be expanded and developed further by later philosophers,

55. Cf. K. von Fritz, "NOOS and NOEIN in the Homeric Poems," *Classical Philology* 38.2 (1943): 82–90.

56. von Fritz, 90.

57. von Fritz, 91.

Parmenides seems to have been the first to have set up the definite parallel of two modes of perception, and therefore of two worlds before us; as Guthrie says, "the essential point is therefore that Parmenides was the first to draw the distinction between *aistheton* and *noeton*."[58]

In the *Iliad* Homer speaks about the *nous* of Zeus and sees it as somehow over-riding, all-encompassing, and all-embracing. Just after Patroclus has killed Sarpedon, the poet writes:

> But Patroklos, with a shout to Automedon and his horses, went after the Trojans and Lykians in a huge blind fury. Besotted: had he only kept the command of Peleiades he might have got away from the evil spirit of black death. But always the mind of Zeus is a stronger thing than a man's mind (Διὸς κρείσσων νόος ἠέ περ ἀνδρῶν). He terrifies even the warlike man, he takes away victory lightly, when he himself has driven a man into battle as now he drove on the fury in the heart of Patroklos.
>
> (*Il.* 16.685–91, trans. Lattimore)

Zeus' *nous* is stronger than that of man: Patroclus is intent to proceed, the Achaeans are intent to follow, the Trojans are intent to flee. Yet here is only the *nous* of Zeus. Apollo stands, and after batting away Patroclus three times, declares to Patroclus that it is not his destiny that Troy should fall to his spear. Hector stands inside the Skaian Gates wondering whether to turn around and fight. Apollo appears to Hector in the form of Asios, tells Hector to re-enter the battle, and then goes "once more, a divinity into the mortals' struggle."[59] Gods and men have their own *nous*, but ultimately it is the *nous* of Zeus which encompasses all. Warden points to a profound shift in the above quotation:

> the mind of Zeus is stronger; he terrifies even the warlike man, etc. Should *noos* be retained as the subject? Does it matter? The shift is so easily effected that Zeus is more or less identified with his *noos*.[60]

Warden is correct here; Zeus is his *nous*. Indeed, if we think back on the other examples of the usage of *nous*, we can even argue that there is a similar identification between the individual and its *nous* in those quotations. This is perhaps why Moderns wish to interpret *nous* as 'mind', ingrained as we are with a sense of the ego or of our consciousness as self. It seems ridiculous to think of self as perception, apprehension, design/intention, intuition or self as realization, i.e., that we *are* as participants.

Hera's complaint at the end of Book I does something to accentuate the divide between herself—a goddess, sister and wife of Zeus—and Zeus, king

58. Guthrie, 25–26.
59. *Il.* 16.726–27 (trans. Lattimore).
60. J.R. Warden, "The Mind of Zeus," in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971): 7.

of gods. Hera complains that Zeus has never spoken a word about what it is he holds in his *nous* (*Il.* 1.540ff). What she does not understand is that Zeus cannot unfold his entire *nous* to her: to comprehend his *nous*—unlike Thetis' request to understand Achilles'—is not within the power of Hera's *nous*. She is limited, and her understanding/perception cannot apprehend the entirety of his comprehension. One might even say that if Zeus were openly presenting his *nous*, Hera would not comprehend it all; she would believe that he is still not fully revealing his *nous* and hold the same complaints. Hera's quarrelling with Zeus does not illustrate that he is keeping things secret, but rather that she is in some degree ignorant—she cannot comprehend all of his *nous*, nor can she perceive that she cannot comprehend all of it. The *nous* of Zeus arches above all, guides and directs all. All other *nooi* could very well be seen as imitations and parts of his *nous*. Hence, if Zeus perceives the whole picture, and in some sense *is* the whole picture, then all the particular, limited *nooi*, whether in a particular time, place, or thought, perceive only bits of the picture, and *are* only bits of the picture. The realization of a mortal's *nous* brings one into the divine because *nous* is the divine, but at the same time it is but an encounter with, a glimmer of, the divine light.

For the Greeks of the Classical period there does not seem to have been such a hard distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. The distinction of the perceived and the perceiver was bridged by an awareness of a shared commonality between the two, i.e., the perception itself. In Aristotle's theory of sense-perception we see either a vestige or Aristotle's permutation of this earlier view of perception in the actualization of potential sensation:

> The sentient subject, as we have said, is potentially such as the object of sense is actually. Thus during the process of being acted upon it is unlike, but at the end of the process it has become like that object, and shares its quality.[61]

Moreover, sensible things are appropriate to particular modes of sensation. When sight perceives it perceives colors, and colors are that which "can produce movement in that which is actually transparent …. This is why it is not visible without light, but it is only in light that the color of each individual is seen."[62] Light acts on transparent substance to make it transparent. Hence where there is light the transparent substance becomes actualized, i.e., transparent, and light shines. When there is no light they are potentially transparent and dark. Therefore, the space in-between the perceiver and the perceived is not empty, there is a medium which conducts the perceived to the perceiver: "For vision occurs when the sensitive faculty is acted upon; as it

61. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. W.S. Hett (Harvard U Press, 1936), 2.5.418a [hereafter *De An.*].

62. *De An.* 2.7.418b (trans. Hett).

cannot be acted upon by the actual color which is seen, there only remains the medium to act on it."[63] Thus, for Aristotle the act of perception encompasses three elements: the perceiver, the perceived, and the medium.

In earlier literature perception is similarly threefold, with the mode of perception acting as the mediator between the perceived ('the object') and perceiver ('the subject').[64] Hence *nous* as a perception holds together the perceived thing and the perceiver, i.e., there is oneness to it, and moreover, it is all *nous*—it happens in, by, through, and because of *nous*. In this holding together—this oneness in *nous*—there is a conflation of the perceiver, perceived, and perception. As Henn recognizes,

> In fragment B3 the opposition between the subjective and the objective disappears along with the thinker's relativity of observation. The disappearance of relative perspective in B3 is what distinguishes the Way of Truth from the Way of Opinion. On the one hand, opinion always presupposes a built-in perspective on reality by separating perceiver from perceived; on the other hand, thought in the sense of νόησις is not something that can be true or false, accurate or inaccurate.[65]

Therefore, the goddess by seizing and taking us past the Gates is bringing us into *nous*. The goddess calls us into the knowledge of the one, the whole, the unique Being and, moreover, she is inducting us into the deepest and most profound of mysteries—how we might be. The nature of *nous* pulls down all distinction and difference—ταὐτὸν δ' ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ οὕνεκεν ἔστι νόημα. οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐν ὧι πεφατισμένον ἐστιν"[66]—and melts even our identity into the one complete fullness/participation of the divine.

Conclusion

Parmenides' mystery is this: we enter the divine, we are born to new life, *true* life, by orientating ourselves towards reality, by perceiving the truth (*noesis*), by *being nous* and by *nous* being. Such perception does not preclude us from the world of experience, rather it opens it up to our eyes, reveals it as *it*

63. *De An*. 2.7.419a (trans. Hett).

64. Parmenides, A48 (Aëtius, 4.13.9–10): "Hipparchus says that rays from each of the eyes reach out with their ends, fasten around external bodies as if touching them with hands, and thus render them apprehensible by vision. Some associate this view with Pythagoras also, as founder of sciences, and besides him with Parmenides, who expounds it in his poems" (trans. Gallop).

65. Henn, 56.

66. Parmenides, B 8.34–35; trans. variously: "The same thing is for thinking and [is] that there is thought; For not without what-is, on which [it] depends, having been declared" (Gallop); "Self-same as well the thought and thinking act that Being Is; for not without Being, in which it is expressed, will you discern the thinking act impressed upon the Mind" (Henn); "To think is the same as the thought that It Is; for you will not find thinking without Being, in (regard to) which there is an expression" (Freeman). In sum, Henn, 59, says, "in B 8.34–8 Parmenides dissolves the perceiver-perceived dichotomy explicitly."

is, and makes possible true experience and true life. Parmenides begins with a rapture by the divine which pulls him up into the 'all-knowing road' of the Sun. In the opening lines there is the representation of balance and perfection with the duality of opposites and the circular path of the Sun. Time, space, opposition—male and female, Light and Night, fire and earth—conflate in the realm of the Sun on the horizon. The Gates signify the center and limit of the universe, the *axis mundi*, a binding principle of perfection, unity and wholeness further signified by placing Dike at the Gates. The passage through the Gates holds the sense of transcendence, of passing beyond the point of conflation, of moving to the source. The source found beyond the Gates is the singular and unique divine, which then tells the initiate the revelation. The divine is unfolding itself and so the revelation is not an account of how things work—the nature of things, metaphysics, epistemology, etc.—but rather it is the state (-ment) of reality, of what is. Being is being itself. As it is described in the Way of Truth, Being is eternal, immutable, perfect, and unique. Identified with *Nous* and *Aletheia*, Being is experienced and apparent. Moreover, the Way of Doxa is critical for understanding the full nature of Being. The world of experience may be in flux, but the flux is eternal, perfect and complete, and as such it reflects the absolute nature of Being. Parmenides' key statement condemns those "mortals" who wander:

> knowing nothing, two-headed, for perplexity in their bosoms steers their intelligence astray, and they are carried along as deaf as they are blind, amazed, and uncritical hordes, by whom To Be and Not To Be are regarded as the same and not the same (B6).

The error of these mortals rests in the opinions they hold about reality because they have not properly apprehended the nature of Being.

There is no compromising to multiplicity for Parmenides, but rather a deep conviction that in order for one truly to live one must begin to appreciate the nature of nature—i.e., the one, unique and transcendent entity—and that all things can only be explained by that principle. Although such conviction was to be found among the Pythagoreans, Parmenides presents the first clear testament that, for the Presocratics, philosophy and religion were indistinguishable. One might say that Parmenides has used the religious imagery of his day as found in myths and mysteries, and reinterpreted it in accord with his philosophic vision. However, for him in his time and place, it may be better simply to say 'with his vision', and to see rather in the origin of philosophy its shared identity with the religious impulse. Parmenides stands as a philosopher and prophet, offering a vision which opens the world to intelligence and offers the seeker admittance into the divine life. As Henn puts it:

> Parmenides calls us to live a life of spiritual contentment where all tension between opposites, including the opposition between Spirit and Nature, vanishes within the tranquility of contemplative oneness with Being, i.e., *noesis* as such.[67]

In the end, Parmenides is a man of faith: "it is the path of Persuasion (for it follows Truth)." He provides no argument *per se* which is intended to prove the nature of Being/the divine. His poem is presented as a statement of revelation, bringing the initiate into the new, true life. The proof is ultimately internal; for those who have undergone the initiation, their old life is a death, and to 'live' without the revelation is not truly to live—it is to exist in a world where there is no basis for truth, beauty, goodness, or indeed even reason, a world confined to opinion.

67. Henn, 60.

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