

journey in a blaze of light, as befits one who 'knows'. The point of the narration is suggested rather by the obstacle that has to be passed and by the destination, the two things (apart from description of the chariot and its movement) upon which the poet dwells. Parmenides seeks to leave the familiar world of ordinary experience where night and day alternate, an alternation governed – as Anaximander would have agreed (110) – by law or 'justice'. He makes instead for a path of thought ('a highway') which leads to a transcendent comprehension both of changeless truth and of mortal opinion. No less important is his message about the obstacle to achievement of this goal: the barrier to escape from mortal opinion is formidable, but it yields to 'gentle argument'.

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

289 Fr. 5, Proclus in *Parm.* I, p. 708, 16 Cousin

... ξυνὸν δέ μοι ἔστιν
ὄπιπποθεν ἄρξωμαι· τόθι γὰρ πάλιν ἴξομαι αὔθις.

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

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

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

TRUTH

(i) *The choice*

291 Fr. 2, Proclus in *Tim.* I, 345, 18; Simplicius in *Phys.* I 16, 28 (lines 3–8)

εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσας,
αἴπερ ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι·
ἢ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,
πειθοῦς ἔστι κέλευθος ('Ἀληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ),
5 ἢ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεῶν ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,
τὴν δὴ τοι φράζω παναπτευθεῖα ἔμμεν ἀταρπτόν·
οὔτε γὰρ ἄν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἔόν (οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν)
οὔτε φράσαις.

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

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

Unfortunately consideration of this argument is not decisive. Certainly it appears impossible to know or point out what does not exist: nobody can be acquainted with Mr Pickwick or point him out to anyone else. But a predicative reading of Parmenides' premiss is also plausible: it seems impossible to know or point out what is not something or other, i.e. what possesses no attributes and has no predicates true of it. Clearer is 296, 5–21, where an analogous premiss – 'it is not to be said nor thought that it is not', lines 8–9 – is used to argue against the possibility of coming to be or perishing. The point Parmenides makes is that if something comes to be, then it must

previously not have been – and at that time it would have been true to say of it ‘it is not’; but the premiss forbids saying just that; so there can be no coming into being. Now ‘come to be’ in this context is plainly to be construed as ‘come to exist’. Here, then, ‘is not’ means ‘does not exist’.

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

From the unknowableness of what does not exist Parmenides concludes directly that the negative way is ‘indiscernible’, i.e. that no clear thought is expressed by a negative existential statement. We might put the point thus: ‘Take any subject of enquiry you like (e.g. Mr Pickwick). Then the proposition “Mr Pickwick does not exist” fails to express a genuine thought at all. For if it were a genuine thought, it would have to be possible to be acquainted with its subject, Mr Pickwick. But that possibility does not obtain unless Mr Pickwick exists – which is exactly what the proposition denies.’ This line of argument, in one guise or another, has exercised a powerful attraction on many philosophers, from Plato to Russell. Its conclusion is paradoxical, but like all good paradoxes it forces us to examine more deeply our grasp of the concepts it employs – notably in this case the relations between meaning, reference and existence.²

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

² Editors often complete the half-line 291, 8, with a fragment known only in quite different sources: 292 Fr. 3, Clement *Strom.* vi, 23; Plotinus v, 1, 8 τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι. (For the same thing is there both to be thought of and to be.) If thus translated (but some render: ‘Thought and being are the same’), it does sound as though it may fit here; 293, 1 shows that Parmenides explicitly deploys considerations about what can be thought, not just what can be known, in the context of argument against the negative way. But if so it is surprising that neither Proclus nor Simplicius quotes it at the end of 291. And it is hard to see

what contribution it adds to the reasoning of 291, 6–8. (If *noein* meant ‘know’ here, as e.g. C. H. Kahn (*Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968–9), 700–24) thinks, then perhaps 292 would simply be another way of putting 291, 7–8. But *noein* is used by Parmenides in parallel with simple verbs of saying (293, 1; 296, 8; cf. *anōnumon*, 296, 17), and so must be translated ‘think’.)

(ii) *Mortal error*

293 Fr. 6, Simplicius in *Phys.* 86, 27–8; 117, 4–13

5 χρῆ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ’ ἐὼν ἔμμεναι· ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι,
μηδὲν δ’ οὐκ ἔστιν· τὰ σ’ ἐγὼ φράζεσθαι ἄνωγα.
πρώτης γὰρ σ’ ἀφ’ ὁδοῦ ταύτης διζήσιος <εἰργω>,
αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ’ ἀπὸ τῆς, ἣν δὴ βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν
πλάττονται, δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν
στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλακτὸν νόον· οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται
κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοὶ τε, τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φύλα,
οἷς τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταῦτὸν νενόμισται
κοῦ ταῦτόν, πάντων δὲ παλίντροπὸς ἔστι κέλευθος.

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

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

steps will be 'backward-turning', i.e. contradictory. Of course, you will recognize that 'is' and 'is not' are *not* the same. But in failing to decide between them you will treat them as though they were the same.

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

294 Fr. 7, Plato *Sophist* 242A (lines 1–2); Sextus *adv. math.* VII, 114 (lines 2–6)

οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆ εἶναι μὴ ἔοντα·
ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ' ἀφ' ὁδοῦ διζήσιος εἴργε νόημα
μηδέ σ' ἔθος πολῦπειρον ὁδὸν κατὰ τήνδε βιάσθω
νωμᾶν ἄσκοπον ὄμμα καὶ ἠχήεσαν ἀκουήν
καὶ γλώσσαν, κρῖναι δὲ λόγῳ πολύδηριν ἔλεγχον
ἔξ ἐμέθεν ῥηθέντα.

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

(iii) *Signs of truth*

295 Fr. 8, 1–4, Simplicius in *Phys.* 78, 5; 145, 1
μόνος δ' ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο

λείπεται ὡς ἔστιν· ταύτη δ' ἔπι σήματ' ἔασι
πολλὰ μάλ', ὡς ἀγένητον ἔον καὶ ἀνώλεθρόν ἔστιν,
οὔλον μουνογενές τε καὶ ἀτρεμές ἡδὲ τέλειον.¹

¹ ἢδ' ἀτέλεστον Simplicius: for the emendation see G. E. L. Owen in *Studies in Presocratic Philosophy* II, ed. R. E. Allen and D. J. Furlley (London, 1975), 76–7, who also convincingly rejects KR's reading (taken over from DK): ἔστι γὰρ οὐλομελές τε καὶ ἀτρεμές... (Plutarch).

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

If we must avoid the way 'is not', our only hope as enquirers lies in pursuit of the way 'is'. At first sight it would appear that if we embrace that alternative, there open for us limitless possibilities of exploration: the requirement that any subject we investigate must

exist seems to impose scarcely any restriction on what we might be able to discover about it; and the argument that what is available to be thought of must exist (293, 1–2) makes it look as though the range of possible subjects of investigation is enormous, including centaurs and chimaeras as well as rats and restaurants. But in the course of a mere 49 lines Parmenides succeeds in reducing this infinity of possibilities to exactly one. For the 'signs' programmatically listed in 295 in fact constitute further formal requirements which any subject of enquiry must satisfy; and they impose formidable constraints (note the metaphor of chains in 296 and 298 below) on the interpretation of what is compatible with saying of something that it exists. The upshot of Parmenides' subsequent argument for these requirements is a form of monism: it certainly transpires that everything there is must have one and the same character; and it is doubtful whether in fact anything could have that character except reality as a whole.

(iii) (a) *Uncreated and imperishable*

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

οὐδέ ποτ' ἦν οὐδ' ἔσται, ἐπεὶ νῦν ἔστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν,
ἔν, συνεχές· τίνα γὰρ γένναν διζήσεται αὐτοῦ;
τῆ ἰσότητος ἀύξηθην; οὐδ' ἐκ μὴ ἔοντος ἔασσω
φάσθαι σ' οὐδὲ νοεῖν· οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητὸν
ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι. τί δ' ἂν μιν καὶ χρέος ὤρσεν
ὑστερον ἢ πρόσθεν, τοῦ μηδενὸς ἀρξάμενον, φύν;
οὕτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεῶν ἔστιν ἢ οὐχί.
οὐδέ ποτ' ἐκ μὴ¹ ἔοντος ἐφήσει πίστιος ἰσχύς
γίγνεσθαι τι παρ' αὐτό· τοῦ εἶνεκεν οὔτε γενέσθαι
οὔτ' ὀλλυσθαι ἀνῆκε Δίκη χαλάσασα πέδησιν,
ἀλλ' ἔχει· ἡ δὲ κρίσις περὶ τούτων ἐν τῷδ' ἔστιν·
ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν· κέκριται δ' οὖν, ὥσπερ ἀνάγκη,
τὴν μὲν ἔαν ἀνόητον ἀνώνυμον (οὐ γὰρ ἀληθῆς
ἔστιν ὁδός), τὴν δ' ὥστε πέλειν καὶ ἐτήτυμον εἶναι.
πῶς δ' ἂν ἐπειτα πέλοι τὸ ἔον; πῶς δ' ἂν κε γένοιτο;
εἰ γὰρ ἔγεντ', οὐκ ἔστ', οὐδ' εἴ ποτε μέλλει ἔσεσθαι.
τῶς γένεσις μὲν ἀπέσβησται καὶ ἄπυστος ὄλεθρος.

¹ Many scholars follow Karsten and Reinhardt in emending μή to τοῦ.

296 It never was nor will be, since it is now, all together, one, continuous. For what birth will you seek for it? How and whence did it grow? I shall not allow you to say nor to think from not being: for it is not to be said nor thought that it is not; and what

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

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

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

(iii) (b) *One and continuous*

297 Fr. 8, 22-5, Simplicius in *Phys.* 144, 29 (continues 296)
 οὐδὲ διαιρετόν ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἐστιν ὁμοῖον·
 οὐδέ τι τῆ μᾶλλον, τό κεν εἴργοι μιν συνέχεσθαι,
 οὐδέ τι χειρότερον, πᾶν δ' ἐμπλεόν ἐστιν ἐόντος.
 τῷ ξυνεχῆς πᾶν ἐστιν· ἐὼν γὰρ ἐόντι πελάζει.

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

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

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

(iii) (c) *Unchangeable*

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

αὐτὰρ ἀκίνητον μεγάλων ἐν πείρασι δεσμῶν
 ἔστιν ἀναρχον ἄπαυστον, ἐπεὶ γένεσις καὶ ὄλεθρος
 τῆλε μάλ' ἐπλάχθησαν, ἀπῶσε δὲ πίστις ἀληθείης.
 ταῦτόν τ' ἐν ταύτῳ τε μένον καθ' ἑαυτό τε κείται
 30 χούτως ἔμπεδον αὔθι μενεῖ· κρατερὴ γὰρ Ἀνάγκη
 πείρατος ἐν δεσμοῖσιν ἔχει, τό μιν ἀμφὶς ἔεργει.

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

Lines 26-8 suggest the following argument:

- (1) It is impossible for what is to come into being or to perish.
 So (2) it exists unchangeably within the bonds of a limit.
 It is then natural to read lines 29-31 as spelling out the content of (2) more fully. So construed, they indicate a more complex inference from (1):
 (2a) it is held within the bonds of a limit which keeps it in on every side.
 So (2b) it remains the same and in the same place and stays on its own.

The notion of *limit* Parmenides is employing here is obscure. It is easiest to understand it as spatial limit; and then (2b) follows

intelligibly from (2a). But why on this interpretation should (2a) follow from (1)? Perhaps rather 'within limits' is a metaphorical way of talking about *determinacy*. In (2a) Parmenides will then be saying that what is has no potentiality for being different – at any time or in any respect – from what it is at present.

(iii) (d) *Perfect*

299 Fr. 8, 32–49, Simplicius in *Phys.* 146, 5 (continues 298)

οὔνεκεν¹ οὐκ ἀτελεύτητον τὸ ἐὼν θέμις εἶναι·
 ἔστι γὰρ οὐκ ἐπιδευές· [μὴ] ἐὼν δ' ἄν παντός ἐδεῖτο.
 ταῦτόν δ' ἔστι νοεῖν τε καὶ οὔνεκεν ἔστι νόημα.
 35 οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐν ᾧ πεφατισμένον ἔστιν,
 εὐρήσεις τὸ νοεῖν· οὐδὲν γὰρ <ἦ> ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται
 ἄλλο πάρεξ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐπεὶ τό γε Μοῖρ' ἐπέδησεν
 οὔλον ἀκίνητόν τ' ἔμεναι· τῷ πάντ' ὀνόμασται,²
 ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ,
 40 γίγνεσθαί τε καὶ ὄλλυσθαι, εἶναι τε καὶ οὐχί,
 καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διὰ τε χροᾶ φανὸν ἀμείβειν.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πείρας πύματον, τετελεσμένον ἔστί,
 πάντοθεν εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκω,
 μεσσοῦθεν ἰσοπαλές πάντη· τὸ γὰρ οὔτε τι μείζον
 45 οὔτε τι βραϊότερον πελέναι χρεόν ἔστι τῆ ἢ τῆ.
 οὔτε γὰρ οὐκ ἐὼν ἔστι, τό κεν παύοι μιν ἰκνεῖσθαι
 εἰς ὄμόν, οὔτ' ἐὼν ἔστιν ὅπως εἴη κεν ἐόντος
 τῆ μᾶλλον τῆ δ' ἦσσον, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἔστιν ἄσυλον·
 οἶ γὰρ πάντοθεν ἴσον, ὁμῶς ἐν πείρασι κύρει.

¹ For οὔνεκεν as 'therefore' cf. τοῦ εἶνεκεν, 296, 13. 'Because' is the more usual meaning in epic usage, and is preferred by many here.

² ὀνόμασται Simplicius (*in Phys.* 87, 1) E; ὀνομα ἔσται DF. Cf. Mourelatos, *Route*, 180–5; M. F. Burnyeat, *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982), 19 n. 32.

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

somewhat less here or there. For neither is it non-existent, which would stop it from reaching its like, nor is it existent in such a way that there would be more being here, less there, since it is all inviolate: for being equal to itself on every side, it lies uniformly within its limits.

¹ Or: 'in which thinking is expressed'.

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

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

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