

Parmenides of Elea

Parmenides of Elea (born. c. 515 B.C.) wrote a challenging poem, *On Nature*, composed of 3 parts: the Proem; the Way of Truth (*alētheia*); and the Way of Opinion (*doxa*). He is often seen as a revolutionary figure and, in the Way of Truth, he seems to argue for a number of starting claims: that what-is-not cannot be; that what-is must be; that the senses are deceptive; and that there is no change.

[21] Parmenides, a native of Elea, son of Pyres, was a pupil of Xenophanes (Theophrastus in his *Epitome* makes him a pupil of Anaximander). Parmenides, however, though he was instructed by Xenophanes, was no follower of his. According to Sotion he also associated with Ameinias the Pythagorean, who was the son of Diochaetas and a worthy gentleman though poor. This Ameinias he was more inclined to follow, and on his death he built a shrine to him, being himself of illustrious birth and possessed of great wealth; moreover it was Ameinias and not Xenophanes who led him to adopt the peaceful life of a student. He was the first to declare that the earth is spherical and is situated in the centre of the universe. He held that there were two elements, fire and earth, and that the former discharged the function of a craftsman, the latter of his material.

[22] The generation of man proceeded from the sun as first cause; heat and cold, of which all things consist, surpass the sun itself. Again he held that soul and mind are one and the same, as Theophrastus mentions in his *Physics*, where he is setting forth the tenets of almost all the schools. He divided his philosophy into two parts dealing the one with truth, the other with opinion. Hence he somewhere says:

Thou must needs learn all things, as well the unshakeable heart of well-rounded truth as the opinions of mortals in which there is no sure trust.

Our philosopher too commits his doctrines to verse just as did Hesiod, Xenophanes and Empedocles. He made reason the standard and pronounced sensations to be inexact. At all events his words are:

And let not long-practised wont force thee to tread this path, to be governed by an aimless eye, an echoing ear and a tongue, but do thou with understanding bring the much-contested issue to decision.

[23] Hence Timon says of him:

And the strength of high-souled Parmenides, of no diverse opinions, who introduced thought instead of imagination's deceit.

It was about him that Plato wrote a dialogue with the title *Parmenides* or *Concerning Ideas*. He flourished in the 69th Olympiad. He is believed to have been the first to detect the identity of Hesperus, the evening-star, and Phosphorus, the morning-star; so Favorinus in the fifth book of his *Memorabilia*; but others attribute this to Pythagoras, whereas Callimachus holds that the poem in question was not the work of Pythagoras. Parmenides is said to have served his native city as a legislator: so we learn from Speusippus in his book *On Philosophers*. Also to have been the first to use the argument known as the Achilles: so Favorinus tells us in his *Miscellaneous History*.

Diogenes Laertius 9.21–3

Come now and I will tell you, and you should spread the story once you've heard it,
What the only routes of inquiry are for thinking (*noein*):
The one, that it is (*einai*) and that it is not possible not to be,
Is the route of Persuasion, for she accompanies Truth [*aletheia*];
The other: that it is not and that it must (*chreōn*) not be,
This I declare to you is an utterly inscrutable (*panapeuthēs*) path,
For neither could you know (*gignōskein*) what is not (for it cannot be accomplished),
Nor could you declare (*phrazein*) it.

Proclus *In Timaeum* 1.345.18–24, 26–7, 3–8; Simplicius *In Phys.* 116.28– 117.2
= DK 28 B2

For thinking (*to noein*) and being (*einai*) are the same.

Clement *Stromata* 6.23; Plotinus 5.1.8; 5.9.5 = DK 28 B3

It is necessary (*chrē*) to say (*legein*) and think (*noein*) that it is being (*eon*), for it is being¹
And nothing (*mēden*) is not. These things I bid you consider.
From this first route of inquiry I <...> [restrain? (Diels)] you,
And then from that one, upon which mortals, knowing nothing,
Wander two-headed. For helplessness in their
Breasts directs a wandering mind; and they are carried
Deaf and blind alike, dazed, undiscerning people,
By whom to be and not to be are thought to be the same
And not the same, and the road of all is backward turning

Simplicius *In Phys.* 117.4–13, 86.27–8, 78.3–4 = DK 28 B6

¹ Alternative translation: 'what is there to be said and thought must needs be' (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1982: 247).

The following translation is from D. Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea: A Text with an Introduction* (University of Toronto Press, 1984).

A single story of a route still
Is left: that [if] is; on this [route] there are signs
Very numerous: that what-is is ungenerated and imperishable;
Whole, single-limbed, steadfast, and complete;
[5] Nor was [it] once, nor will [it] be, since [it] is, now, all together,
One, continuous; for what coming-to-be of it will you seek?
In what way, whence, did [it] grow? Neither from what-is-not shall I allow
You to say or think; for it is not to be said or thought
That [if] is *not*. And what need could have impelled it to grow
[10] Later or sooner, if it began from nothing?
Thus [it] must either be completely or not at all.
Nor will the strength of trust ever allow anything to come-to-be from what is
Besides it; therefore neither [its] coming-to-be
Nor [its] perishing has Justice allowed, relaxing her shackles,
[15] But she holds [it] fast; the decision about these matters depends on this:
Is [if] *or is* [if] *not*? but it has been decided, as is necessary,
To let go the one as unthinkable, unnameable (for it is no true
Route), but to allow the other, so that it is, and is true.
And how could what-is be in the future; and how could [it] come-to-be?
[20] For if [it] came-to-be, [it] is not, nor [is it] if at some time [it] is going to be.
Thus, coming-to-be is extinguished and perishing not to be heard of.
Nor is [it] divisible, since [it] all alike *is*;
Nor is [it] somewhat more here, which would keep it from holding together,
Nor is [it] somewhat less, but [it] is all full of what-is.
[25] Therefore [it] is all continuous; for what-is is in contact with what-is.
Moreover, changeless in the limits of great chains
[It] is un-beginning and unceasing, since coming-to-be and perishing
Have been driven far off, and true trust has thrust them out.
Remaining the same and in the same, [it] lies by itself
[30] And remains thus firmly in place; for strong Necessity
Holds [it] fast in the chains of a limit, which fences it about.
Wherefore it is not right for what-is to be incomplete;
For [it] is not lacking; but if [it] were, [it] would lack everything.
The same thing is for thinking and [is] that there is thought;
[35] For not without what-is, on which [it] depends, having been declared,
Will you find thinking; for nothing else <either> is or will be
Besides what-is, since it was just this that Fate did shackle
To be whole and changeless; wherefore it has been named all things
That mortals have established, trusting them to be true,
[40] To come-to-be and to perish, to be and not to be,
And to shift place and to exchange bright colour.
Since, then, there is a furthest limit, [it] is completed,

From every direction like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere.
Everywhere from the centre equally matched; for [it] must not be any larger
[45] Or any smaller here or there;
For neither is there what-is-not, which could stop it from reaching
[Its] like; nor is there a way in which what-is could be
More here and less there, since [it] all inviolably is;
For equal to itself from every direction, [it] lies uniformly within limits
[50] Here I stop my trustworthy speech to you and thought
About truth; from here onwards learn mortal beliefs,
Listening to the deceitful ordering of my words;
For they established two forms in their minds for naming,
Of which it is not right to name one - wherein they have gone astray -
[55] And they distinguished opposites in body and established signs
Apart from one another: here, on the one hand, aetherial fire of flame,
Which is gentle, very light, everywhere the same as itself,
But not the same as the other; but on the other hand, that one too by itself
In contrast, dark night, a dense and heavy body;
[60] All this arrangement I proclaim to you as plausible;
Thus no opinion of mortals shall ever overtake you.

Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 145.1–146.25 [lines 1–52]; 39.1–9
[lines 50–61] = DK 28 B8, trans. D. Gallop

The following translation of the same text is from P. Curd and R. D. McKirahan, *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia* (Hackett, 2011).

. . . Just one story of a route
is still left: that it is.
On this [route] there are signs
very many, that what-is is ungenerated and imperishable,
a whole of a single kind, unshaken, and complete.
[5] Nor was it ever, nor will it be, since it is now, all together
one, holding together: For what birth will you seek out for it?
How and from what did it grow? From what-is-not I will
allow you neither to say nor to think: For it is not to be said or thought
that it is not. What need would have roused it,
[10] later or earlier, having begun from nothing, to grow?
In this way it is right either fully to be or not.
Nor will the force of true conviction ever permit anything to come to be
beside it from what-is-not. For this reason neither coming to be
nor perishing did Justice allow, loosening her shackles,
[15] but she [Justice] holds it fast. And the decision about these things is in this:
is or is not; and it has been decided, as is necessary,
to leave the one [route] unthought of and unnamed (for it is not a true
route), so that the other [route] is and is genuine.
But how can what-is be hereafter? How can it come to be?
[20] For if it came to be, it is not, not even if it is sometime going to be.
Thus coming-to-be has been extinguished and perishing cannot be investigated.
Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike,
and not at all more in any way, which would keep it from holding together,
or at all less, but it is all full of what-is.
[25] Therefore it is all holding together; for what-is draws near to what-is.
But unchanging in the limits of great bonds
it is without starting or ceasing, since coming-to-be and perishing
have wandered very far away; and true trust drove them away.
Remaining the same and in the same and by itself it lies
[30] and so remains there fixed; for mighty Necessity
holds it in bonds of a limit which holds it in on all sides.
For this reason it is right for what-is to be not incomplete;
for it is not lacking; otherwise, what-is would be in want of everything.
What is for thinking is the same as that on account of which there is thought.
[35] For not without what-is, on which it depends, having been solemnly pronounced,
will you find thinking; for nothing else either is or will be
except what-is, since precisely this is what Fate shackled
to be whole and changeless. Therefore it has been named all things
that mortals, persuaded that they are true, have posited
[40] both to come to be and to perish, to be and not,
and to change place and alter bright colour.

But since the limit is ultimate, it [namely, what-is] is complete
from all directions like the bulk of a ball well-rounded from all sides
equally matched in every way from the middle;
[45] for it is right for it to be not in any way greater or lesser than in another.
For neither is there what-is-not — which would stop it from reaching the same —
nor is there any way in which what-is would be more than what-is in one way
and in another way less, since it is all inviolable;
for equal to itself from all directions, it meets uniformly with its limits.
[50] At this point, I end for you my reliable account and thought
about truth. From here on, learn mortal opinions,
listening to the deceitful order of my words.
For they established two forms to name in their judgments,
of which it is not right to name one—in this they have gone astray —
[55] and they distinguished things opposite in body, and established signs apart
from one another — for one, the aetherial fire of flame,
mild, very light, the same as itself in every direction,
but not the same as the other; but that other one, in itself
is opposite — dark night, a dense and heavy body.
[60] I declare to you all the ordering as it appears,
so that no mortal judgment may ever overtake you.

Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 145.1–146.25 [lines 1–52]; 39.1–9
[lines 50–61] = DK 28 B8, trans. P. Curd and R. McKirahan

The following translations of B2–4 and B6–7 are also from P. Curd and R. D. McKirahan, *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia* (Hackett, 2011) and may be compared to those offered of B2, B3, and B6 above.

But come now, I will tell you—and you, when you have heard the story, bring it safely away— which are the only routes of inquiry that are for thinking: the one, that is and that it is not possible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon Truth), the other, that it is not and that it is right that it not be, this indeed I declare to you to be a path entirely unable to be investigated: For neither can you know what is not (for it is not to be accomplished) nor can you declare it.

Proclus *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* 1.345.18; lines 3–8; Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 116.28 = DK 28 B2, trans. Curd and McKirahan

. . . for the same thing is for thinking and for being.

Clement *Miscellanies* 6.23; Plotinus *Enneads* 5.1.8 = DK 28 B3, trans. Curd and McKirahan

But gaze upon things which although absent are securely present to the mind. For you will not cut off what-is from clinging to what-is, neither being scattered everywhere in every way in order nor being brought together.

Clement *Miscellanies* 5.15 = DK 28 B4, trans. Curd and McKirahan

It is right both to say and to think that it is what-is: for it can be, but nothing is not: these things I bid you to ponder. For I < gap in the manuscript > you from this first route of inquiry, and then from that, on which mortals, knowing nothing, wander, two-headed: for helplessness in their breasts steers their wandering mind. They are borne along deaf and blind alike, dazed, hordes without judgment for whom to be and not to be are thought to be the same and not the same, and the path of all is backward-turning.

Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 86.27–28; 117.4–13 = DK 28 B6, trans. Curd and McKirahan

For in no way may this prevail, that things that are not are; but you, hold your thought back from this route of inquiry and do not let habit, rich in experience, compel you along this route to direct an aimless eye and an echoing ear and tongue, but judge by reasoning (*logos*) the much-contested examination spoken by me.

Plato *Sophist* 242a; Sextus Empiricus *Against the Mathematicians* 7.114 = DK 28 B7, trans. Curd and McKirahan