

Handout for:

Was Parmenides a True Poet?  
CAAS Meeting, October 9, 2009

{Note to website viewers: If you reached this page by means other than the link in the article to which it refers, the address for that article is [www.efbeall.net/parmenides.htm](http://www.efbeall.net/parmenides.htm).}

#1 Parmenides fragment 1 (Diels-Krantz):<sup>1</sup>

ἵπποι, ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι  
πέμπον, ἐπεὶ μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι  
δαίμονος, ἢ κατὰ πάντ' ἄ(σ)τη(?)<sup>2</sup> φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·  
τῇ φερόμην, τῇ γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποι  
ἄρμα τιταίνουσαι, κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἠγεμόνευον. 5  
ἄξων δ' ἐν χνοίησιν ἴ(ει) σύριγγος ἀυτὴν  
αἰθόμενος, διοιοῖς γὰρ ἐπείγετο δινωτοῖσιν  
κύκλοις ἀμφοτέρωθεν, ὅτε σπερχοίατο πέμπειν  
ἠλιάδες κοῦραι προλιποῦσαι δώματα νυκτὸς  
ἐς φάος, ὡσάμεναι κράτων ἄπο χερσὶ καλύπτρας. 10  
ἔνθα πύλαι νυκτὸς τε καὶ ἡματός εἰσι κελεύθων,  
καὶ σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάϊνος<sup>3</sup> οὐδός,  
αὐταὶ δ' αἰθήρια πλῆνται μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις·  
τῶν δὲ δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς.

...

The horses, the females that carry me as far as the heart might desire,  
when they went to lead me, brought me to the much-discussing way  
of divinity, which<sup>4</sup> bears the knowing man through all towns;  
on this I was borne, for on it the erudite horses bore me,  
straining at the chariot, while maidens led the way. 5  
The axle threw out the scream of a pipe in the naves,  
the blazing (axle), for it was pressed by the two inlaid<sup>5</sup>  
wheels from both sides, whenever the daughters of the sun  
hastened to convey (me), having left the domain of Night

<sup>1</sup> Greek text: A. H. Coxon, *The Fragments of Parmenides* (Assen, 1986), except as noted.

<sup>2</sup> Coxon has ἄ(ν)τη(ν), which he construes as "straight onwards." I hesitantly give, rather, the original DK reading, even though it is now recognized to be devoid of MS authority; see in particular J. H. Lesher, "The Significance of κατὰ πάντ' ἄ(σ)τη in Parmenides Fr. 1.3," *Ancient Philosophy* 14 (194) 1-20.

<sup>3</sup> Coxon and other editors actually print λάϊνος, which is acceptable as long as one remembers to pronounce the initial vowels correctly (a diphthong would render the verse's meter incorrect).

<sup>4</sup> Some commentators have interpreted the feminine relative to refer to the δαίμων just mentioned rather than the feminine noun ὁδός. However, we do not learn that the deity is female until line 22.

<sup>5</sup> Although some interpret δινωτός in its classical sense as "rounded," Coxon seems correct to adopt the Homeric meaning as something decorative in nature.

for the light, thrusting the veils from their heads by hand. 10  
 There are the gates of the paths of Night and of Day,  
 and a stone lintel and threshold hold them above and below,  
 while they are filled by great doors in the upper air;  
 and the arch-punisher Justice holds their interchanging<sup>6</sup> keys.  
 ... (In the sequel, the maidens persuade Justice to open the  
 gates, the travelers proceed to the goddess, and she receives  
 the narrator, through 1.23.)

**Fragment 8:**

... μόνος δ' ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο  
 λείπεται, ὡς ἔστιν· ταύτη δ' ἐπὶ σήματ' ἕασι  
 πολλὰ μάλ', ὡς ἀγένητον ἐὼν καὶ ἀνώλεθρόν ἐστιν,  
 οὐλον μουνογενές τε καὶ ἀτρεμές ἡδ' ἄτέλεστον,  
 οὐδέ ποτ' ἦν οὐδ' ἔσται, ἐπεὶ νῦν ἐστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν, 5  
 ἔν, συνεχές· τίνα γὰρ γένναν διζήσεαι αὐτοῦ;  
 πῆ πόθεν ἀύξηθέν; οὔτ' ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐάσω  
 φάσθαι σ' οὐδὲ νοεῖν, οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητόν  
 ἐστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι· τί δ' ἄν μιν καὶ χρέος ὤρσεν 10  
 ὕστερον ἢ πρόσθεν τοῦ μηδενὸς ἀρξάμενον φῦν;  
 οὕτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεῶν ἐστιν ἢ οὐκί.  
 οὐδέ ποτ' ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐφήσει πίστιος ἰσχυρὸς  
 γίγνεσθαί τι παρ' αὐτό· τοῦ εἶνεκεν οὔτε γενέσθαι  
 οὔτ' ὄλλυσθαι ἀνήκε δίκη χαλάσασα πέδῃν  
 ἀλλ' ἔχει, ἢ δὲ κρίσις περὶ τούτων ἐν τῷδ' ἐστιν, 15  
 ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν· ...

... A single account of a way still  
 remains: "is."<sup>7</sup> On this (way) there are very many  
 signposts: that being is uncreated and indestructible,<sup>8</sup>  
 entire, unique, unmoved, and perfect(?),  
 never having been nor yet to be, since it is all, now, 5  
 one, continuous. For what parent of it will you seek?  
 How (and) whence did it grow? Nor will I let you say or think  
 (in answer) "from not-being"; for it is neither said nor thought  
 how "is" is not; and what matter could make it arise  
 later or earlier, beginning to grow from nothing? 10  
 Thus it must either turn out to entirely be or not at all.  
 Nor from not being will the strength of confidence ever permit

<sup>6</sup> I adopt the construal that the keys alternate between opening the gates and closing them, although some think of first opening one of the two gates and then the other. Most hold that the gates are double doors between Day and Night, but perhaps, rather, there is one gate to the one and another to the other.

<sup>7</sup> As opposed to "is not," an opposition first stated in fragment 2.

<sup>8</sup> So Parmenides scholars understand ἀνώλεθρος. However, in Homer the similar word ἀνόλεθρος means that something is not only not destroyed, but even "undamaged," and that may be meant here too.

anything to come to be beside (being); on account of this, from  
neither genesis  
nor destruction does Justice deign to loosen the bonds,  
but holds them; and the decision about these (matters) is in this: 15  
is or is not. ... (The sequel through verse 49 makes specific  
points about why specifically "is" is the correct choice.)

Most recent important conventional discussions (which see for references to earlier work): S. Austin, *Parmenides and the history of dialectic: three essays* (Las Vegas, 2007), 1-27; N.-L. Cordero, *By being, it is: the thesis of Parmenides* (Las Vegas, 2004); P. Curd, *The legacy of Parmenides: Eleatic monism and later presocratic thought* (Princeton, 1998; repr. Las Vegas, 2004), 9-126; D. W. Graham, *Explaining the cosmos: the Ionian tradition of scientific philosophy* (Princeton, 2006), 148-85; J. Palmer, "Parmenides," <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/parmenides>, esp. Sec. 3.5.

#2

ἵπποι, ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι  
πέμπων, ἐπεὶ μ' ἐξ ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι  
δαίμονος, ἢ κατὰ πάντ' ἄ(ν)τη(ν) φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·  
τῇ φερόμην, τῇ γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποι  
ἄρμα τιταίνουσαι, κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευον.

5

**Verse 1:** Most famously, for ἵπποι, ταί με φέρουσιν, cf. ἵπποι θ', οἱ φορέεσκον, "and also the horses that carried (Achilles were good)," also beginning *Il.* 2.770 (although P.'s beginning the verb a short syllable later is actually more natural; cf. *Il.* 14.132, 15.175, 18.137, 19.279, 24.275, *Od.* 2.414), but also ἵπποι γάρ με, "for the horses (sped past) me," *Il.* 11.615. For ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι, cf. ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ λᾶαν ἵησιν, "about as far as one throws a stone," also ending *Il.* 3.12 (although a second hemistich consisting of ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ ... is a common formation; see R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, gen ed. G. S. Kirk, Vol. IV. Books 13-16 (Cambridge, 1992), 266 ad 15.358-61); also, ἰκάνοι preceded by its subject ends *Il.* 1.610, 18.465, *Od.* 9.333, 19.49, and θυμὸς preceding a verb in the optative or subjunctive (not to mention other moods) also ends *Il.* 4.263, 8.189, 9.101, 22.346, while we have them coupled together with the latter, rather, as object of the former, θυμὸν ἰκάνει, ending the formulaic *Il.* 8.147 = 15.208 = 16.52 = *Od.* 18.274.

**Verse 2:** For πέμπ- beginning a verse but ending a sentence, see also πέμπω "I will send (the priest's daughter back to him)," *Il.* 1.184. For ἐξ ὁδὸν βῆσαν, cf. ἐξ οἴκου βῆσαν, "(the oxherd and the swineherd) went out of the house, earlier in the line, *Od.* 21.188. For πολύφημον ἄγουσαι, cf. πολύφημον ἰκέσθην, "(two eagles) reached (the space above the middle of the assembly) of much discourse," also ending *Od.* 2.150; οἶνον ἄγουσαι, "bringing wine," also ending *Il.* 7.467.

**Verse 3:** For δαίμονος beginning the verse, cf. vocative δαίμονιη, expressing a gamut of emotions ranging from pity to an accusation of insanity to begin a speech, *Il.* 1.561, etc., *W&D* 207. A verse-beginning word referring to a

person, followed by a relative, albeit unlike in our case the relative actually refers to it, is frequent (*Il.* 2.673, etc.). For κατὰ πάντ', cf. κατὰ πάντας, "among all," also ending the 1<sup>st</sup> hemistich, *Il.* 10.117. This is the natural verse position for εἰδότα, and for specifically εἰδότα φῶτα, cf. ἵστορα φῶτα, "learned man," also ending *W&D* 792.

**Verse 4:** For τῇ φερόμην, cf. τῇ πιθόμην, "I obeyed her," also beginning *Il.* 9.453. For the common πολύ- compound beginning after a feminine caesura, cf. especially the similar word πολύφρονα, "wise," at *Il.* 18.108, *Od.* 1.83 = 14.424 = 20.239 = 21.204. φέρον ἵπποι also ends *Il.* 2.838 = 12.96, 13.31, and with an intervening adjective at 11.597.

**Verse 5:** For ἄρμα τιταίνουσαι, cf. ἄρμα τιταίνων, later in the verse, *Il.* 2.390 = 12.58. For κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευον, cf. γέρων ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευεν, "the old man led the way," also ending *Od.* 24.225, and similarly 2.261 = 7.30, 10.501, but also κούρη Διὸς ἄλλ' ἐνόησεν, "the daughter of Zeus [Athena] thought otherwise," 5.382.

**Discussion:** R. Böhme, *Die verkannte Muse: Dichtersprache und geistige Tradition des Parmenides* (Bern, 1986), esp. 35-95; Coxon (above, n. 1), 45; F. Ferrari, "L'officina epica di Parmenide: due sondaggi," *SemRom* 8 (2005), 113-29, at 117-24; A. P. D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides*, revised ed. (Las Vegas, 2008; first ed. 1970), esp. 6-11; L. Tarán, Review of Mourelatos 1970, *Gnomon* 49 (1977), 651-66.

**#3 Fragment 1** after the journey ends and the goddess is met, whereupon she speaks:

“ὦ κοῦρ' ἀθανάτησι συνήορος ἠνιόχοισιν  
 ἵπποις θ', αἶ σε φέρουσιν, ἰκάνων ἡμέτερον δῶ 25  
 χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὐ τί σε μοῖρα κακὴ προὔπεμπε νέεσθαι  
 τήνδ' ὁδόν, ἧ γὰρ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν,  
 ἀλλὰ θέμις τε δίκη τε· χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι,  
 ἡμὲν ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος(?)<sup>9</sup> ἀτρεμῆς ἦτορ  
 ἡδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, τῆς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθῆς. 30  
 ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεται ὡς τὰ δοκεῦντα  
 χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.”

“Hey, youth accompanied by immortal charioteers,  
 the horses, the females, are bringing you to reach our domain; 25  
 welcome, since it was no base fate that sent you forth to inhabit  
 this road, indeed yes away-from humanity it is a far pace;  
 no, (it was) Right and Justice; and it necessary that you hear all,  
 both the unshakeable heart of persuasive(?) truth,  
 and mortal notions in which there is no true confidence. 30  
 Yes you should even learn this as well, how appearances  
 are necessarily acceptable, by penetrating all entirely.”

<sup>9</sup> The arguments for preferring this to the variant εὐκυκλέος, "well-rounded," are not definitive.

References: M. J. Henn, *Parmenides of Elea: a verse translation with interpretative essays and commentary to the text* (Westport CT, 2003), 1-6, esp. 3; cf. G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad, a commentary*, gen ed. G. S. Kirk, Vol. I Books 1-4 (Cambridge, 1985), 20-21.<sup>10</sup>

Further note: Some of the papers of the 16<sup>th</sup> CORHALIE conference held in Paris in June, 2005, and subsequently published in *Revue de philosophie ancienne* 23.2 (2005) and 24.1 (2006), discuss the poetic aspects of the Parmenides fragments. In particular, Martin Steinrück, "La forme figurative et le vers de Parménide," 24.1, 17-24, esp. 19-20, discusses ring structure in fragment 1, albeit he (23-24) ultimately concludes from such points as the frequency of enjambement that Parmenides's hexameter has evolved from Homer's in a local fashion. Jean Bollack, "Parménide, un auteur," 24.1, 45-49, insists that the issue of whether Parmenides used epic form as an artifice cannot be evaluated by simply comparing him with Homer, and suggests that he in fact innovated in the medium.

#### #4 Fragment 1.1-3:

ἵπποι, ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι  
πέμπον, ἐπεὶ μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι  
δαίμονος, ἣ κατὰ πάντ' ἄ(σ)τη φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·

The horses, the females that carry me as far as the heart might desire,  
when they went to lead me, brought (me) to the much-discussing  
way  
of divinity, which bears the knowing man through all towns;

Cf. *Il.* 1.1-2, to begin the poem:

μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος  
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε.

Sing, goddess, the wrath of Achilles the son of Peleus,  
the baneful (wrath) that put countless troubles on the Achaeans.

#### #5 *Il.* 1.269-73. Nestor speaks:

“καὶ μὲν τοῖσιν ἐγὼ μεθομίλεον ἐκ Πύλον ἐλθὼν,  
τηλόθεν ἐξ ἀπίης γαίης· καλέσαντο γὰρ αὐτοί.  
καὶ μαχόμεν κατ' ἔμ' αὐτὸν ἐγὼ· κείνοισι δ' ἂν οὐ τις  
τῶν οἷ νῦν βροτοὶ εἰσιν ἐπιχθόνιοι μαχέοιτο·  
καὶ μὲν μευ βουλέων ζύνειν πείθοντό τε μύθοῃ

<sup>10</sup> Some reject Kirk's "rising threefolder" conception in favor of the traditional explanation of the lines without caesura, namely, that sometimes the poet simply must insert a word in the middle of the line which is too long for the normal hexameter pattern. But this view fails to account for the point that one would expect a merely random offending word to have some variation in its length, whereas in fact the word invariably ends at the long syllable of the 4<sup>th</sup> foot.

**“Indeed, I consorted with (these mighty Lapiths), (even) coming from Pylos, from afar, from a distant land; for they called me (one of) themselves, and I fought (alongside them) by myself, and no one of mortals who are now on earth could fight them; and indeed they heard my counsel and trusted my words.”**

**Parmenides, Fragment 8.6 ff:**

... τίνα γὰρ γένναν διζήσεαι αὐτοῦ;  
πῆ πόθεν ἀύξηθέν; οὔτ’ ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐάσω  
φάσθαι σ’ οὐδὲ νοεῖν, κτλ.

... **For** what parent of (“is”) will you seek?  
How (and) whence did it grow? Nor will I let you say or think  
(in answer) “from not-being”; etc.

**Reference: I. J. F. de Jong, “Γάρ Introducing Embedded Narratives.” In *New Approaches to Greek Particles*, ed. A. Rijksbaron (Amsterdam, 1997), 175-85.**

**#6 Fragment 1.11-12:**

ἔνθα πύλαι νυκτός τε καὶ ἡματός εἰσι κελεύθων,  
καὶ σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάϊνος οὐδός,

**There are the gates of the paths of Night and of Day,  
and a stone lintel and threshold hold them above and below,**

**Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 748-51, within the underworld:**

... ὅθι Νύξ τε καὶ Ἡμέρη ἄσσον ἰοῦσαι  
ἀλλήλας προσέειπον ἀμειβόμεναι μέγαν οὐδὸν  
χάλκεον· ἡ μὲν ἔσω καταβήσεται, ἡ δὲ θύραζε  
ἔρχεται ...

**(this is) where Night and Day go nearest  
one another and greet as they pass the great threshold  
of bronze; the one going in, the other going  
out the door ...**

**Discussion: G. Cerri, *Parmenide di Elia, Poema sulla natura: introduzione, testo, traduzione e note* (Milan, 1999), esp. 96-110; M. L. Gemelli Marciano, “Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides’ *Aletheia*,” *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008), 21-48; P. Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness, CA, 1999), *Reality* (Inverness, CA, 2003), 15-306; G. W. Most, “ἄλλος δ’ ἐξ ἄλλου δέχεται. Presocratic Philosophy and Traditional Greek Epic,” in *Literatur und Religion: Wege zu einer mythisch-rituellen Poetik bei den Griechen*, 2 vols., ed. A. Bierl, R. Lämmle, K. Wesselmann (Berlin/New York,**

2007) I 271-302, at 280-84; C. Robbiano, *Becoming being: on Parmenides' transformative philosophy* (Sankt Augustin, 2006), esp. 149-54. And cf. M. Miller, "Ambiguity and Transport: Reflections on the Proem to Parmenides' Poem," *OSAPh* 30 (2006), 1-47, esp. 18-24, who believes that both the underworld image and the usual idea of traveling to the light are present.