

## *Apeonta, pareonta*

*On fragment B4 DK.*

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**ABSTRACT:** The hermeneutical horizon of my work is provided by the extent of the discussion of the relationship between the doctrine of the truth and the doctrine of opinion as are dealt with in Parmenidean thought and work. Rejecting the vision of any separation or opposition between the two parts in which the Parmenidean poem has traditionally been divided, I argue in favour of its theoretical unity. In this way, the ontology lays the foundations for an innovative explanation of natural phenomena. After having highlighted how this unity is required by the general structure of Parmenides' thought, I show how the B4 DK fragment represents the place where Parmenides constructs the passage from ontology to the explanation of natural phenomena.

**KEY-WORDS:** Parmenides, being, *doxa*, *eon*, *dokounta*, *apeonta*, *pareonta*.

**RIASSUNTO:** L'orizzonte interpretativo entro cui questo lavoro si inserisce è quello della discussione del rapporto tra la dottrina dell'essere e quella dell'opinione nel poema di Parmenide. Rifiutando la prospettiva di una qualche separazione o opposizione tra le due parti in cui esso tradizionalmente viene diviso, sostengo la tesi dell'unità teorica del Poema. Dopo aver mostrato come una tale unità sia richiesta dall'impianto generale del pensiero di Parmenide, individuo nel frammento 4 il luogo in cui Parmenide articola il passaggio tra le due dottrine. Il Poema offre pertanto una positiva visione della realtà, dove l'ontologia pone le premesse di un'originale spiegazione dei fenomeni naturali.

**PAROLE-CHIAVE:** Parmenide, essere, *doxa*, *eon*, *dokounta*, *apeonta*, *pareonta*.

## I.

The history of the studies on Parmenides witnessed a crucial turning point with the turn of the second millennium. The traditional monopoly of metaphysical interpretation – called by Mourelatos “the Standard Interpretation” (Mourelatos, 2008, xv) – reading the poem *Peri Physeos* as an unfinished draft of ontology<sup>1</sup>, gradually crumbled and was replaced by a clear retrieval of the positive teaching embedded in the fragments of what is unanimously considered the second part of the poem, i. e. the so-called “doctrine of the *Doxa*”. With a sort of Copernican revolution, which emphasized what until then had been too hastily marginalized or considered philosophically uninteresting, Parmenides as a scientist, or at least as a naturalist, started to overshadow the theorist of Being as presented in traditional textbooks. And I do not believe there would be any exaggeration in stating that if Theophrastus or Plutarch or Simplicius, as any of the commentators to whom we owe most of our present knowledge of Parmenides’ poem, came across a report on the recently published studies on the *sophos* from Elea<sup>2</sup>, maybe would toil in recognizing in his profile outlined by these studies the long discussed philosopher. *Another Parmenides*, to quote the title of one of the most recent studies (Rossetti, 2017)<sup>3</sup>, pushed his way through the lines of fragments that had long been considered of low cognitive value, a keen scholar of natural phenomena, an expert cosmologist and daring researcher of vital processes. In short, the gravity centre of the poem changed.

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<sup>1</sup> “Parmenides began Philosophy proper. A man now constitutes himself free from all ideas and opinions, denies their truth, and says necessity alone, Being, is the truth. This beginning is certainly still dim and indefinite, and we cannot say much of what it involves; but to take up this position certainly is to develop the Philosophy proper, which has not hitherto existed” (Hegel, 1833, 208).

<sup>2</sup> Who, meanwhile, has turned out to be attractive to contemporary cultural sensitiveness. On Eleatica website ([www.eleatica.it](http://www.eleatica.it)) Pulpito has recorded more than seventy publications concerning Parmenides in the first two decades of the 21st century.

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed analysis of Rossetti’s book in Fratticci 2020.

Such an important shift did not obviously happen all of a sudden. It was prepared by a long series of works, which variously emphasized the importance of the so-called "second logos" of the poem<sup>4</sup>. The second part of the poem stopped being considered literary fiction<sup>5</sup> or a plain and simple criticism of Parmenides' contemporary scholars or precursors<sup>6</sup>, showing all its value as real research on natural phenomena. In this way, what was an evident imbalance in interpretation was redressed. After all, approaching with the modern logic of specialization or disciplinary distinction the 5th century - an age in which the philosophical reflection on the origins and the myths at the basis of the peoples' cultures was turning towards a more exact knowledge of the position of man in the world - was clearly an improper operation. A *sophos* of that time, to the extent he attempted to reconduct the plurality of natural phenomena to one principle with an approach we would call philosophical, could not dismiss the task of turning his searching sight towards them in order to decipher them. Consequently, assuming a preference for metaphysics to the detriment of naturalistic research<sup>7</sup> was clearly a wrong anachronism.

An interpreter is certainly the son of his time<sup>8</sup>. The eyeglasses he wears always belong to the time he lives in. General cultural dynamics, in particular, theoretical atmospheres that mark epochs more or less deeply, do not leave him unaffected. The prevailing, if not exclusive, metaphysical interest which characterized the tradition of the studies on Parmenides finds its explanation in this observation, which also helps

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<sup>4</sup> To be mentioned the studies by Schwabl 1953 and Bollack 1957.

<sup>5</sup> Zeller's view 1923.

<sup>6</sup> According to Diels 1897.

<sup>7</sup> But also, vice versa, a preference for science to the detriment of the reflection on Being, as suggested by some interpretative tendencies (the latest, Cerri 2018, 49-73, discussed by Fratticci 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Interpretation is always an open and, above all, endless process. It arises from the dialogue of a questioning reader with a text in which he seeks adequate answers, making sure not to lock the text within the boundaries of the questions, and taking up the challenge of being surpassed and questioned by the very answers.

understand the direction contemporary researchers took. Our postmodern and technological age – at the same time disillusioned with the all-encompassing views of the world built by a human, too human, metaphysical thought, and caught by the successes of science<sup>9</sup> – strongly affects the bias of the interpreters of our time, and represents the cultural horizon of their interpretation. The reader of the 21st century is therefore spontaneously led to find in past thinkers' works the syntony with the scientific issues he is mostly attuned to. The historiographical interest is consequently very easily focused on the first steps of an adventure whose present constitutes the most advanced stage. Taking into due account this kind of cultural prejudice is essential in order to avoid naïve generalizations to which the interpreter might be led.

In any case, Parmenides as a naturalist gained the centre of the stage. This new concern had the merit to advance the understanding of his thought, by digging in the fragments and obtaining new information. Among the scholars most committed in the endeavour to reconstruct Parmenides' naturalistic knowledge, Rossetti found in the poem and in the testimonies of doxography a catalogue of over 34 statements of undoubted naturalistic interest, some of which first provided by Parmenides himself<sup>10</sup>. The so-called *doxa* doctrine contains interesting information, and philosophical historiography cannot ignore it any longer.

The effects of this hermeneutic revision, though, are not limited only to the *doxa* doctrine, but inevitably concern the whole image of Parmenides' poem. As a matter of fact, the new emphasis on the naturalistic teaching outlines a different perimeter of Parmenides' thought, reopening at the same time old issues which seemed clarified. As a matter of fact, not only is the *doxa* legitimized and raised to the

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<sup>9</sup> And more than that, by a technology dismissing the interest in the great questions originating philosophical knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> E. g., the identity of *Esperos* and *Phosphoros*, the sphericity of the Earth, the discovery of the antipodes (Rossetti, 2017).

level of truthful teaching but, above all, the issue of the relationship between the two sections of the poem and the issue of the relationship between the doctrines which they present become problematic again. Because it does not seem that the strength and the cognitive depth of the information which can be obtained from Parmenides' naturalistic teaching can be conveyed by the ordinary hierarchy of the parts of the poem; a hierarchy within which the doctrine of Being was given the preponderant part of teaching, while the *doxa* was mostly ascribed the simple merit of a lively curiosity. Now the relationship is to be at least equalized<sup>11</sup>, and Parmenides' theoretical profile is to be fully retrieved, like the one of a *sophos* interested both in setting the foundation ensuring the stability of reality and in knowing the regularity of natural phenomena. In any case, the problematic relationship between the two theoretical cores of Parmenides' poem is entirely open.

Modern sensitiveness accustomed us to specifying the borders of knowledge related to different disciplines with precision and methodological rigour. We acquired considerable skill in outlining the competence in any study sector, and, above all, we are extremely sensitive to pointing out and rejecting any invasion of disciplinary fields. The autonomy of sciences is strongly emphasized. Therefore, it looks as if Parmenides' poem also cannot escape this hard and fast rule. And, consequently, the problem takes shape. How can two sides so differently oriented coexist in the same poem? Within a platonic frame, denying the *doxa* any epistemological status, an overall balance of the poem was easy to reach. But the current rediscovery of naturalistic teachings makes that frame inapplicable. How then do the two parts relate to each other? Is there a relationship between them or are they simply juxtaposed, each with its own logic, indifferent to the views and suggestions that may

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<sup>11</sup> If not completely reversed. As is the extreme case of Rossetti, who, arguing that "la sub-trattazione sull'essere, per quanto stupefacente, è una filosofia davvero molto virtuale" (Rossetti, 2017, 1-115), makes the doctrine of *doxa*, instead, the real core of Parmenides' message.

derive from the other? Should we not choose between them the one to be assigned the central role, making the other ephemeral and fleeting? The absence of explicit connections seems to point to the latter reading (Rossetti, 2017, 20). But, in this way, the unity of the poem is simply lost. The temptation to separate the two parts is strong. Therefore, if in the past the *doxa* was belittled, now the risk is to belittle the doctrine of Being, *Philosophia ancilla scientiarum*?

## II.

The present condition of the fragments does not provide any simple answer to the question. In order to find a loophole to the dilemma one has inevitably to go another way, which is uncertain but obliged, taking into consideration the whole of the poem, the complete message it conveys, and making the answer emerging out of it. The route might seem arbitrary, taking the risk of depending excessively on the interpreter's views. But, in fact, as Heidegger 1927 and Gadamer 1986 argued, interpretation always occurs within a hermeneutic circle, in which the continuous cross-references between text and context create the interpretative space. Only an insufficient hermeneutic positivism could argue that the text speaks by itself, removed from the general context hosting it and giving it meaning. Our first step, therefore, will be the reconstruction of the message of the poem, closely following the development of the activated communicative process.

The poem tells about the experience of a young man who is led by a goddess to share the knowledge of the immortals<sup>12</sup>, and who, through this privilege<sup>13</sup>, is enabled to obtain the sight making him a

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<sup>12</sup> Significant is the goddess' gesture, which anticipates and accompanies her speech: "in her hand she took my right hand" (1,22-23). It is a gesture of welcoming and sharing.

<sup>13</sup> "Welcome, since it is by no means an evil lot that sent you forth to travel on this road (for it is far away from wandering of men) / but right and justice" (1, 26-28)

wise man<sup>14</sup>. For Parmenides the meeting with the goddess is completely other than a simple rhetoric device within which to encapsulate his work in order to protect and authenticate it. What Parmenides presents is a revelation which has the truth as its object, not simply an aetiological story about the origins, as it was in Homer or Hesiod, but the manifestation of the truth, that is to say the exposition of reality in all its hidden fullness, which is simultaneously to be welcomed and protected from the cognitive options, only seemingly appropriate, which man may have constructed in his life experience.

And the goddess, after welcoming the young man who has come to her, indeed warns him with these words (1,28–30):

Χρεῶ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι  
ἡμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος<sup>15</sup> ἀτρεμῆς ἦτορ  
ἡδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἐνὶ πίστις ἀληθίης.

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<sup>14</sup> Or even better, considering all the implications of words, enlightened (εἰδῶτα φῶτα: 1,3). Unfortunately, modern languages cannot fully convey all the nuances of Parmenides' poetic language. The term used in the poem to mean the young man, φῶς, keeps a clear reference to light (φάος) in its root; in this assonance game involving the second term with which the young man is described, εἰδῶς, the special condition reached by the protagonist of the journey is highlighted very effectively. Such a condition is not defined by sharing human nature, which in fact makes man a mortal (βροτός), opposed to divine immortals (ἀθάνατοι). Quite differently, it is the enlightenment coming from divine revelation and allowing the access to the knowledge possessed by gods, which turns the young man into a *sophos* (Ruggiu, 1991, 177. This issue has been well highlighted by Gemelli Marciano 2008, who, however, draws conclusions which are hard to accept concerning the mystical initiation nature of the poem).

The same may be said about the term εἰδῶς, the person who is in a condition to εἰδέναι, i.e. to have a fulfilled vision of reality. It is more than the simple knowledge of single things, as it also contains an implication of value. Romance languages have kept this semantic complexity, e. g. in the Italian word 'sapere', which has at the same time a cognitive and an evaluative meaning, referring to taste. Thus, εἰδῶτα φῶτα (1,3) has been translated as "the man who knows" ("l'uomo che sa", by Albertelli 1939, Reale 1991, Untesteiner 1958; "l'homme qui sait", by Beaufret 1955, Cordero 1982), "the knowing man" ("l'uomo sapiente", by Cerri 1999; "savant", by Collobert 1993). In English, researchers who have conveyed a closer meaning to this are Thanassas (2007), who avails himself of the translation "the wise man" (although "wisdom" mostly conveys a practical attitude) and Coxon/McKirahan (Coxon 2009), who use the translation "a man of understanding". Instead, most interpreters generally use the translation "the man who knows", which, however, misses the evaluative implication.

<sup>15</sup> A code variation provides εὐπειθέος, *persuasive*. I am not dealing with the question, as it is marginal to this speech.

You must understand everything,  
both the unmoved heart of well-rounded Truth  
and also the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true  
conviction.

As in a sort of programmatic statement, the goddess informs the young man about the route through which she will lead him towards knowledge. The first step marks the horizon. The knowledge to be revealed concerns nothing less than the whole of reality: following the goddess the young man will be led to understand<sup>16</sup> everything. His sapiential knowledge of reality will, therefore, be full and complete, since it will turn out to coincide with all the possible cognitive options; πάντα (everything) excludes any shaded corners escaping the cognitive ascertainment outlined by the goddess.

Reaching knowledge, however, does not only concern contents, but also a more radical metacognitive dimension. "Understanding everything", indeed, does not only involve acquiring the identity of every single item, but also being able to ascertain the value of the truth of every single statement about knowledge, and, above all, clarifying the reasons leading to incorrect representations of reality. Because what is stated about reality may be untrue<sup>17</sup>; the discovery of a cognitive deficit might affect the whole system of knowledge, making it radically uncertain. Before starting any research process, one needs to turn it into the right direction with the right moves.

Then the goddess immediately shows two ways of relating to reality, respectively presented as the truth and opinions<sup>18</sup>. The bipolar logic<sup>19</sup> structuring the whole poem defines them as alternative to each

<sup>16</sup> Πυθέσθαι, Pythia's verb. It is oracular communication, not simple rationally controlled acquisition of knowledge.

<sup>17</sup> In Hesiodic story, Muses state they can, if they want to, both lie and tell the truth: "we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things" (*Theogony*, vv.27-28).

<sup>18</sup> To be noted: "opinions" (δόξαι), not opinion. Parmenides is not interested in developing a theory of *doxa* meant as the theory of a world of lies.

<sup>19</sup> ἡμὲν ... ἠδὲ (1, 29-30). This bipolar rhythm occurs also in 2, 3-5 and 8, 15-18.



other. Whatever the concrete contents deriving from those approaches, they are not made explicit at this initial stage of the goddess' speech<sup>20</sup>. For the time being the attention is entirely focused on the separation of two cognitive types, of which a general assessment is offered binding one, but not the other, to the truth, and, at the same time, relating the different distance from the truth to the cognitive skills of the researching subjects. This is not explicit in the text, but there is no doubt that the truth belongs to the ἀθάνατοι, the immortals; while the βροτοί, the mortals only possess δοξαί, opinions. But in these, there is not any truth, and they are therefore unreliable.

The qualifications of these two different states are interesting. The truth – or, more precisely, the heart of the truth – is defined as ἀτρεμές, not trembling, and therefore unshakable, stable, safe<sup>21</sup>. It is not meaningless that here Parmenides gives shape to the truth, and represents it in its metaphorical physicalness, by providing it with a heart; because what the goddess is disclosing to the young man is the hidden foundation of reality<sup>22</sup>, its centre of ontological consistency, which is at the same time also the hub and the heart of the system of thinking<sup>23</sup>. The truth the goddess speaks about is the authentic manifestation of reality, and not its mere imagined representation, which, instead, is all men can produce, being able to simply provide opinions. These, again, are not signalled as false, as we should do it when we oppose truth to falsity, but as devoid of any reliability (πίστις ἀληθείς). The truth, as its opposite, does not belong to the judgment of the knowing subject. More than the expression of cognitive power,

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<sup>20</sup> This will happen soon, starting with fragment 2, where the connection of the truth with the way of Being is established and vouched for by the goddess' authoritative word.

<sup>21</sup> The adjective ἀτρεμές, which in 1,29 radically qualifies the truth, is found again in 8,4, where it is indicated as one of the σήματα of εὖν. The truth-Being possesses an unshakable stability, which makes it totally reliable. As we will see, in 4,1 the concept of stability explicitly recurs in the adverbial form βεβαιοῶς.

<sup>22</sup> As Ἀληθείη is correctly translated by Coxon-McKirahan (Coxon 2009) and Palmer 2008.

<sup>23</sup> B3: ... τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι. ("... for Thinking and Being are the same).

ἀληθεία is a revealing manifestation of reality in its authenticity. And this reality in its true manifestation is what mortals do not have any access to; they can only reproduce it with an act of subjective creativity, which, however, reveals itself inadequate because, more than false, it is unreliable, impossible to believe<sup>24</sup>.

The beginning of the goddess' speech, then, outlines the perimeter of knowledge and of the research object. It is already possible to guess her intention, which is to expose the truth and protect the young man from the false opinions on reality that circulate among mortals, as the goddess confirms in B8, 60<sup>25</sup>. The critical knowledge of the opinions contrary to the truth, indeed, strengthens the awareness of the truth, and, above all, removes the traps which ordinary experience sets for the ones who want to investigate the whole truth. B6 and above all B7 put the young man on his guard against the risk of falling into these traps, towards which one is led<sup>26</sup> by a sensitive experience unable to investigate the deep dimension of reality. Indeed, by following the changeable nature of things<sup>27</sup>, mortals apply the mark of Being and non-Being without distinction, unable to see the radical opposition separating them, and thus letting reality sink into the abyss of chaotic instability where everything sways<sup>28</sup>. Asking for heed and careful

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<sup>24</sup> "Il criterio di verità non si colloc[a] nell'adeguatezza del dire al reale (con la conseguente antitesi tra vero e falso), bensì nella condizione della sua pensabilità" (Germani 1988, 194). Ἀληθεία is re-velation, even before the correspondence of saying; as Heidegger (1943) well clarified, it is Being in its self-manifestation, although it remains hidden because it exceeds any single manifestation. It is not accidental at all that in the poem terms related to the lexical family ψευδ- are absent.

<sup>25</sup> "All this appearing world-arrangement I declare to you appropriately, so that no mortal view may ever outstrip you."

<sup>26</sup> βιάσθω (7,3), the verb of βία, force, the mute companion of Κράτος in the prologue of Aeschylus' Prometheus. Power is always accompanied by force, which is incapable of dialogue.

<sup>27</sup> By which they are carried on as a ship at the mercy of the winds (Untersteiner, 1958, cxiv n. 38).

<sup>28</sup> An "unfathomable chasm" (χάσμι' ἀχανές [1,18]) gaped for a moment ahead of the young man, as soon as the gates before the entrance of the goddess' kingdom opened to allow the continuation of the journey. The goddess' welcome gesture mentioned in footnote 11 is, therefore, more than simple courtesy. Nihilism can be overcome only by means of the help of the revelation of the truth.

consideration of her words, the goddess shows the young disciple the correct perspective from which to start the path towards the right understanding of reality. The way of the truth is not the attractive way of non-Being, on which the two-headed mortals wander aimlessly, but only the way of Being, which anchors the various moments and moves of reality to a stable foundation, supporting all things in their permanent flowing and by means of which ensures the very possibility of their knowledge<sup>29</sup>. Being, i. e. keeping stable in time and space is the characteristic of the world, which is understood in its entirety, and which can thus be defined τὸ εἶναι, the reality that fulfils the basic condition of Being<sup>30</sup>.

The affirmation of the truth and the condemnation of the error: it looks as if the outlining of the work horizon is fulfilled. With this baggage, one can start one's journey<sup>31</sup>. The goddess, instead, has something else to add. The plan is enriched by a further statement, which looks like a footnote

Ἄλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα  
χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περ ὄντα.

But nevertheless these you shall learn as well, how appearing things  
should be accepted: all of them altogether as beings. (1,31-32).

The two final lines of fragment 1 are unanimously considered by researchers a real interpretative riddle. The state of the codes does not allow philologists to skilfully loose the knots, which are in almost any

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<sup>29</sup> As we will see later, Being and non-Being do not make either an existential (Owens, 1960: also the way of non-Being does exist) or a predicational (Mourelatos 2008, Curd 2004) sense. They must be interpreted in a sense which we might call foundational, as they respectively convey the stable permanence of reality or its wavering consistency (Fratricci 2012).

<sup>30</sup> In B8,26-27 Being is defined as ἀκίνητον (motionless), ἀναρχον ἄπαστον (without a beginning or an end).

<sup>31</sup> Might reflections like these have convinced Sextus Empiricus to close the quotation of the proem with line 30 and move immediately forward to the analysis of the way of Being?

word, particularly in the last line. The solutions proposed, therefore, are simple conjectures, and none can be stated decidedly<sup>32</sup>. The research line I am following, however, luckily allows me not to directly join the discussion on the different hypotheses concerning the reconstruction of these lines. From this debate, I simply take one point on which researchers substantially agree, the one concerning the general meaning of the lines. In them, the goddess says that one needs to pay attention to the *δοκοῦντα*. But first, there is another factor that has to be thoroughly pondered.

This is the way the goddess provides some further news: “But nevertheless you shall learn these as well”. *Ἄλλ’ ἔμπης*, but nevertheless: the adversative meaning of these conjunctions must not be reduced. They create a sort of suspension in the speech; a kind of pause, which, by breaking in, suspends what has just been won in terms of acquisition. There is still something to examine, if one wants to understand everything; the remainder turns out to be something different and more than a simple third way of knowledge<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, if the goddess had simply wished to expand the field of what can be learnt, in adding a new element to the previous ones, she would have used other expressions, such as *ἔτι δὲ καὶ*, and then, furthermore. By saying, instead, “but nevertheless” she seems to draw her disciple’s attention to an exceeding factor which expands the binary pattern of true–untrue to involve something which would not seem to be immediately included in it. There is something that does not coincide with the stable foundation of reality, and that, on the contrary, seems much closer to the experience mortals have of things, although they are not able to understand it fully, which turns out to be the main obstacle making their opinions deceptive and unreliable.

The fact is that in these opinions, in spite of their distance from

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<sup>32</sup> Therefore, I will not discuss the textual variants in this case either.

<sup>33</sup> It is indeed a remainder, not a third route.

the truth, there hides a positive factor whose value is still to be enhanced, as long as, obviously, the scope of the research is changed. Although mortals delude themselves in expressing their confused convictions on the nature of things, their wrong judgments convey a positive need of knowledge, which is met with misleading outcomes, and, consequently, meant to be unfulfilled; nonetheless, it is authentic and fully justified. Man's daily contact with the different worldly realities rouses and assumes the possession of information thereon. The simplest human operations and activities can be performed only with an exact identification of what human actions are directed to. Not having any notions of the sun and its movements would make it impossible to plan what men do during the day. Therefore mortals are rightly led to attempt to give an explanation of the happenings of natural phenomena. In this there lies the motive impelling their research. Only, they lack right reference points, and above all, they can simply follow phenomena, without understanding them, because they are deprived of the right sight<sup>34</sup>. The will, previously expressed by the goddess, to instruct her disciple about the entirety of reality must therefore take into account, and put in the right perspective, also this area of human experience.

Beyond the truth, i. e. the manifestation of Being in the entirety of its stable occurrence which validates every correct speech, there are not only the opinions of mortals, that do not share anything with it; there remains a space of intelligence of single worldly things and phenomena. The one who is given the sapiential sight cannot be excluded from their true and full knowledge. Natural phenomena ought to be released from the indefinite becoming, since they are not entities wavering between Being and non-Being, like the celestial bodies of Xenophanes' cosmos that almost miraculously compose themselves

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<sup>34</sup> B6,8 clarifies mortals' error: they have as a rule (νενόμισται: to have a νόμος, a habit with the force of a principle – see B7.3) to confuse Being and non-Being.

every evening to dissolve again in the morning<sup>35</sup>. Following these uncertain reconstructions, nature would be delivered to the chaos of chance and its knowledge would simply be impossible. But mortals, in their false knowledge, are not able to go beyond this surface, unable as they are to grasp the profound unity of the whole. But, reshaped on this background, natural phenomena lose their fragmentary and fluctuating inconsistency and reveal themselves as what they truly are, that is manifestations of εὖν, concrete modes in which the only Being occurs here and now in the multitude of worldly realities. As the goddess says, they are δοκοῦντα.

How to interpret then these δοκοῦντα? The possibility to find a positive evaluation of natural phenomena lies in the answer to this question. A long interpretative tradition<sup>36</sup> found in them some “appearances” (Taràn 1965), “Scheinwesen” (Diels 1897), “things that seem to be” (Burnet 1908, Barnes 1982), which, as such, cannot be. These seeming realities would therefore be deprived of any ontological depth, they would be mere illusions. Any attempt to find opportunities of knowledge in them is consequently bound to collide with their ontological emptiness. Consequently, the only reason why Parmenides speaks about them would be to criticize the ones who tried to derive any knowledge from them. Any knowledge of worldly things, summarized with the comprehensive term of δόξα, is therefore nothing but a doctrine of appearance.

However, an evident, although not always recognized, platonic influence affects this interpretation. The logic behind it is the opposition of the true reality of Being to the seeming reality of the changing natural phenomena. The former *is* indeed, while the latter are shadowy appearances. In none of the sections of the poem, however, Parmenides makes such a comparison. Wherever a comparison is made, as we have

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<sup>35</sup> Xenophanes 21A38 DK. The Sun, then, according to converging testimonies, would consist of fiery clouds and sparks that gather (21 A32.33.40 DK).

<sup>36</sup> Accurately reconstructed by Cordero, 2017.

seen, the discourse is not ontological. The uncompromising rejection of mortals' knowledge takes exclusively place on a gnoseological ground. What leads them astray is a "helplessness in their breasts" (B6, 5-6). They are not able to keep their sight focused on Being, they are not able to see the things as grounded on the εὖν, but, since they are confused and disoriented by the change which characterizes things, they mistake, and overlap, Being with non-Being. For them, those realities are and are not at the same time (B6, 8-9). Consequently, they are not wrong because they give a true being to what simply has the appearance of being, but because they do not know how to ground on Being the changeable passing of worldly realities. As already noticed critically by Aristotle in *Physics* 1. 3, Eleatic Being does not allow any degrees. The principle of Parmenides' ontology can simply be summarized like this: "Being" is expressed only in one way. A hierarchy concerning the degrees of Being is then unthinkable, unlike in Plato's philosophical model, where the multitude of sensible ὄντα is confronted by the ὄντως ὄν, the only expression of the fullness of Being<sup>37</sup>. Outside Being for Parmenides there is only the impossible (and consequently unthinkable) non-Being; there are no illusory realities to which one may improperly assign a being that they do not possess<sup>38</sup>.

The δοκοῦντα, then, are authentic realities, and they are such because in them the whole of Being takes concrete shape. They are

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<sup>37</sup> *Phaedrus* 247e. In modern languages, where language conveys a different ontology, which does not allow more or less Being (see Plato, *Respublica* 515d), the syntagm is practically untranslatable. It would approximately sound as *beingly being*. The issue is consequently dealt with by using a sentence like *a being what really is what it is* (Cooper 1997).

<sup>38</sup> One does not go much further from this perspective by moving, in agreement with modern sensitiveness, the gravity centre onto the subject and the knowledge dynamics. Now τὰ δοκοῦντα are mortals' opinions, "gli apparenti aspetti dell'opinione" (Calogero 1932), "things deemed acceptable" (Mourelatos 2008), "die [menschlichen] Meinungen" (Gemelli 2009). The goddess' action is then justified by necessary amending work meant to restore the exact sense of things, which are merely thought as opinions. The doctrine of *doxa* is thus certainly rehabilitated, but it is still deceitful. As written by Mourelatos 2008, 197, "Parmenides' δόξα is first and foremost 'opinion' or 'supposal', rather than 'appearance'".

therefore to be thought as ὄντα, beings, particular manifestations of a totality, which in its permanent stability ensures them a positive ontological dimension. As Cordero 2010, 9 writes, “ὄντα are realizations of Being, because Being is not ‘elsewhere’, but ‘in’ the ὄντα”. Parmenides’ Being does not lie in a transcendence isolated from the world of single things. Within the theoretical horizon of the *sophos* from Elea, there is no such notion as two types of being, and one cannot speak of ἐὸν lying elsewhere as to εἶόντα<sup>39</sup>. Reality, Being, is all man is given.

Ἐόντα then is not simply the plural of ἐὸν<sup>40</sup>, it does not mean the existence of replicas of the same being; and neither is this one of the many beings. The difference, which does exist, is to be meant otherwise. It is a methodological difference, which stands out in the diverse approach to relate to reality<sup>41</sup>. Reality may be considered as a whole, as totality, as *physis*, and as such it does deserve the name bearing the fundamental character of Being. It is τὸ ἐὸν, what-is, appropriately meeting the condition which B2,3 sets for correct thinking. The research way which the goddess made her disciple follow meets reality as something which is, as what keeps steadily. Among the σήματα, which B8 first lists and then analytically justifies, we do find out that τὸ ἐὸν is οὐλομελές, “whole, unique” as translated by Taràn 1965, and then ἀτρεμὲς, unshaken<sup>42</sup>. The changing reality of daily experience, however, consists of single and particular meetings with single things that continuously change. They, however, do not exist outside Being, of

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<sup>39</sup> In this sense, and only in this sense, beyond any neoplatonic resonance, one ought to speak of Parmenidean monism. Metaphysical transcendence is a conquest of Platonic speculative power (*Phaedo* 79a).

<sup>40</sup> As seems to be thought by Thanassas (2007, 58), who speaks of a “lack of differentiation” between the two forms, although he realizes that what is at stake in the poem is “a precise, compact reconstruction of the world of appearances made possible by the noetic form of Being”.

<sup>41</sup> But it is at the same time an ontological difference. “C’est donc du plus intime de l’ἐὸν que ‘naissent’ les δοκοῦντα, c’est au plus intime de l’ἀληθεία que se situe l’origine de la nécessité de la δόξα” (Beaufret, 1955, 48).

<sup>42</sup> Like the core of the truth in B1,29. The other σήματα also emphasize the idea that Being is fundamentally stable.



which they represent the concrete manifestation. Being, therefore, exists as these things, which can, or better, must be defined as εόντα, as things which are. Anchored to that ground they find their ontological counterbalance to their never-ending changing. Single things, consequently, cease to be unpredictable meteors, in order to acquire an essentially stable foundation. Thus, natural phenomena become object of knowledge. Because only if natural phenomena are seen as rescued from chaotic and accidental becoming, it is possible, and even necessary, to seek the rule of their manifestation.

As effectively highlighted by the theoretical commitment of early *sophoi*, real knowledge is indeed always accompanied by the focus on a principle, an ἀρχή, an equilibrium behind the changing events. Thales, Anaximander, Pythagoras and Heraclitus are joined by this kind of research, in spite of their different personal theories. And Parmenides does not think otherwise. It is the grounding of things in Being, it is their being beings, i. e. realities possessing the fundamental condition of Being, which makes the knowledge of their seemingly disorderly appearing possible<sup>43</sup>. Trying to map celestial phenomena or bringing forth hypotheses, which we would nowadays call embryological, turns out to be a reachable goal. Parmenides' teaching on natural phenomena as provided to us by B10-19 and by the numerous and harmonizing testimonies, has a high cognitive value and a clear epistemic content. The knowledge of Being would be incomplete without the knowledge of its manifestations. The latter is not, consequently, *doxa* but authentic and true knowledge of the world.

### III.

Between the two types of knowledge, therefore, there is neither opposition nor indifference. Instead, they cooperate in making the world

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<sup>43</sup> Like the different appearance of Venus, as morning or evening star, could let one think.

theoretically hospitable. The feared dissolution of the unity of the poem into fragmentary parts is simply the result of an incorrect theoretical approach. Between the knowledge of Being and the knowledge of natural phenomena there is a tight connection, as shown by the first lines of the fragment 4.

λεῦσε δ' ὅμως ἀπέοντα νόῳ παρεόντα βεβαίως·  
οὐ γὰρ ἀποτιμήξει τὸ ἐὸν τοῦ ἑόντος ἔχεσθαι

Look how beings that are absent, are firmly present in the mind;  
for you will not cut off the being from holding fast to the being.

In fact, the fragment 4 did not arouse much interest among scholars<sup>44</sup>. Cassin 1998 summarized the reasons that make it “the most disputed of all fragments” (Cordero, 2004, 16). They basically consist in the presence of the singular form τὸ ἐὸν and the plural forms ἀπέοντα and παρεόντα in the same fragment, distanced by one line, which makes the arrangement of the fragment problematic<sup>45</sup>. The rigid pattern of traditional interpretation, which assigns the speech on ἐὸν to the doctrine of the truth, while assigning the interest in the plurality of things to the *doxa*, proves unsuitable to explain that unexpected closeness<sup>46</sup>. The theoretical perspectives of the two approaches turn out

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<sup>44</sup> In this respect, the position of an illustrious scholar such as Alexander Mourelatos is interesting and significant. In outlining the history of his interest in Parmenides in the “Preface and Afterword” of the revised and expanded edition of his *The Route of Parmenides*, he recalls that in the dissertation *The philosophy of Parmenides* (1963), where he defended the “Standard Interpretation”, B4 represented one of the passages “that had originally drawn me to its subject” (Mourelatos, 2008, xv). But then, after he changed his view in his major work, the reference to the fragment remained only in two marginal passages (one concerning the metrical examination of Parmenidean hexameters). To be mentioned among the few who emphasized the value of the fragment is Ruggiu 1991.

<sup>45</sup> Less relevant to the interpretation we are here proposing are the philological and syntactic issues, which the fragment raises. They have been analytically discussed by Viola 1987, Cassin 1998, 216–217, Ruggiu 1991, 237–251.

<sup>46</sup> Again Mourelatos 2008, p. 216 n. 64: “Evidently he was anxious to be as neutral as possible regarding what-is before the deductions of B8”.

to be too divergent to justify the bonds B4 creates between Being and beings<sup>47</sup>. But by removing the platonic lenses by which one sees dualism in Being<sup>48</sup>, then the fragment appears in a different light and its function in the general texture of the poem turns out to be anything but marginal. We will then be able to see in it the special relationship of inclusion, which the plurality of natural phenomena has with the whole of nature. The fragment thus “riveste un ruolo di cerniera, in quanto rapporta i contenuti che sono oggetto della *doxa*, cioè il molteplice e l'apparire, al tema primario dell'*aletheia*, τὸ ἐὶν” (Ruggiu, 1991, 245).

It is necessary to regain the depth of this early philosopher's insight. Parmenides is not faced with an established theoretical framework within which to set the details of the single aspects of the worldly experience; he is the one who creates this framework with the primary intention to set Being as principle and foundation of thinking. When in B2 the goddess sets Being as the only legitimate way of research, she qualifies Being with the feature of steady presence. The language family of εἶναι in B2 highlights something more profound than simple being or existing. The alternative conveyed in B2, 3.5 is to be meant correctly. It does not oppose an existing to a non-existent way. Both ways of research are there, they are facing the young man who is led to meet the truth. Their irreconcilable opposition is expressed in the reference to and the assessment of the consistency of such an existence, which, on the first way, is acknowledged as guaranteed in its permanent reality, while, on the second way, it is radically undermined by the absence of any real supporting stability. Therefore, the way of the truth, already described in B1.29 as unshakable, is the way of Being, the way which considers Being a safe and unshakable foundation. On the way marked by Being, *physis* then reveals itself as what bears this fundamental seal with any truth: its name is τὸ ἐὶν.

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<sup>47</sup> Which the γὰρ of 4,2 confirms.

<sup>48</sup> Also in the really modern form of the dualism of cultures.

The entirety of Being then possesses its firm stability, it does not sway sinking into nothing, it does not shed parts in its daily course. Instead, this is what men believe in their limited capability to interpret the world; they assume that a permanent conflict between principles – one positive, Being, light; the other negative, non-Being, darkness – affects the worldly things, depriving them of any reliable consistency (B8, 53-59). But “generation and destruction have wandered quite far away, and genuine conviction has expelled them” (B8, 27-28). The firm and immutable support of things escapes any nullifying aggression; as the whole development of fragment 8 reminds us, τὸ ἔὸν does not have any contact with nothing, either on the time line or on the space relationship.

However, once ensured the stability of the whole, the problem is not yet fully resolved, because one has still to explain the evident metamorphoses of natural things, which seem to contradict the principle just affirmed. How is it possible to keep the principle of Being, if things evidently disappear, sink into nothing, as does the sun every day at sunset? Could Xenophanes be right? In order to avoid the contradiction, would it not be necessary to leave natural phenomena to their inconsistency and absence of true being, as Simplicius seems to mean (*In Coel.* 558, 15-17)? But Parmenides is not Neoplatonist. The special angle to which the goddess led him allows him to exceed the immediate data of sensation. The things that disappear from sight do not leave Being, do not fall into nothing, as might seem to all appearances. Their mutable condition does not convey the conflict of Being and non-Being. The things that change and pass stay in Being, they simply express a different mode of being: like things which *are* in the distance (ἀπερόντα), or which *are* close (παρερόντα). The change is by no means a change *away from* Being, but *in* Being. Τὸ ἔὸν is an inseparable wholeness, which does not allow the nothing to wedge into it. Whether seen as an enclosed whole or considered in its orderly parts, Being keeps its fullness. Therefore, Xenophanes is wrong. The sun and the stars do

not die and rise every day<sup>49</sup>.

The two plurals of B4,1, therefore, have to be much emphasized and considered in the fullness of their meaning, in order not to waste their theoretical strength. Indeed, those scandalous plurals<sup>50</sup> represent the most advanced outcome of Parmenidean innovative theoretical construct. They lead into Being what seems to be (but is not) vanishing into nothing. The disappearance from the observation horizon is not the equivalent of sinking into abysmal chaos. Absence is not annihilation, but simply withdrawal from presence. Distant things do exist, the same as close things; the mind will think of them both as firmly grounded (βεβαίως) in Being. They belong in Being. The adverb closing the first line of B4, βεβαίως, deserves then the strongest emphasis. By conveying through the single phenomena the steadiness characterizing nature in its entirety, it turns out to be the focus on which the truth of Being and the plurality of δοκοῦντα meet in a harmonious order<sup>51</sup>.

There is then a stability in Being to be affirmed against any appearance. Consequently, the world can appear at last as an orderly *kosmos*. What is thus conquered is first of all the basic condition of the knowability of natural phenomena. Only if the whole is immutable and well grounded in its stable permanence, only if the single phenomena can be thought of as beings, the change in the whole makes sense and has a chance to be understood. The task of νοῦς will be exactly to let

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<sup>49</sup> “And what requirement would have made it / later rather than before, beginning from nothing, to grow?” (8, 9–10) The question the goddess asks about τὸ ἔὸν can all the more be asked about τὰ ἔόντα.

<sup>50</sup> So scandalous as to be turned into singulars, as Diels did, followed by Kranz, who translated them as “das Ferne” (Diels 1897).

<sup>51</sup> This raises the issue of the right arrangement of fragment B4 DK. The lines at our disposal do not allow a clear solution. Perhaps, what one can say is that the ordinary location suggested by Diels–Kranz does not seem to be satisfactory. One might assume, as many scholars do, that the lines were within the long fragment B8, or, in any case, before the presentation of Parmenidean physics, i. e. before B9. But, for the time being, these are simple suppositions, as about a good deal of the remaining fragments.

one conceive<sup>52</sup> what is absent, in fact, remains in Being, is still a being. The sun is (elsewhere) even when it is not (here), therefore it turns out to be possible to wonder whether there is a rule governing this alternation in Being. “Nothing is created, nothing is lost, everything is transformed”, the law of mass conservation, stated by Lavoisier in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the foundation of the newly born science of chemistry, is already in Parmenides’ complex vision of Being (Popper 1998).

A coherent unitary physiognomy, capable of conveying the sense of the whole and its parts, governs Parmenides’ poem, whose most important heritage lies in showing a method of thinking, which challenges the immediacy of data in order to conceive the deep sense of reality in its continuous manifestations. Consequently, with his poem Parmenides proves that philosophical reflection, in the strongest meaning of the term, is by no means a marginal or side factor of thought. And if the contemporary horizon, saturated with technique, leads us to different evaluations, he reminds us that a powerful metaphysical framework represents the indispensable theoretical background on which science grows and develops<sup>53</sup>. For philosophy the space of thinking then is still open. But it is from the *sophos* from Elea that we have to depart.

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<sup>52</sup> I. e. to reveal. As noted by Untersteiner 1958, xcii the verb λεῦσσειν carries the root λευκός, and means “vedere qualche cosa di luminoso”. He adds that, together with νόϛ, it means “vedere razionale”. But the role of νοῦς here is ambivalent.

<sup>53</sup> Whewell 1842, x wrote: “Physical discoverers have differed from barren speculators, not by having *no* metaphysics in their heads, but by having *good* metaphysics while their adversaries had bad; and by binding their metaphysics to their physics, instead of keeping the two asunder”.

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