## ANAIS DE FILOSOFIA CLÁSSICA

**ABSTRACT**: In fragment DK 28 B 2 of his poem, Parmenides presents his method for distinguishing true persuasion from the lack of true persuasion. The famous two ways for thought that he suggests are the enunciation of a complex system which aims to assure the assertions' truthfulness and finally a credible discourse, the only one capable of real persuasion. The present article tries to show the central role attributed to non-being in the Parmenidean argumentation. The entire fragment is interpreted from this central notion, surely attained by a reflection on the impossibility of negating being, shedding light on Parmenides' discovery of that impossibility, which we currently call "contradiction". He enunciates that the way to avoid contradiction in thought and discourse is through a rule that we call a principle of non-contradiction. The study featured here makes a detailed inquiry into the notion of non-being in fr. 2, finally offering a new translation.

**KEY-WORDS:** Parmenides; Non-being; Non-contradiction; Eleaticism; Parricide

# *Non-being in Parmenides, DK B2*

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**RESUMO:** No fragmento KD 28 B 2 de seu poema, Parmênides apresenta seu método para distinguir a persuasão verdadeira daquela em que falta veracidade. Os dois famosos caminhos para o pensar, por ele sugeridos são o enunciado de um sistema complexo que quer assegurar a veracidade das afirmações e, portanto, a credibilidade do discurso, daquele único tipo de discurso capaz da verdadeira persuasão. O presente artigo busca mostrar o papel central atribuído ao não ser na argumentação parmenidiana. O inteiro fragmento é interpretado a partir dessa noção central – obtida certamente com uma reflexão sobre a impossibilidade de negar o ser – que evidencia a descoberta de Parmênides daquela impossibilidade que virá a receber o nome de "contradição". Ele afirma, portanto, que a maneira de evitar a contradição no pensamento e no discurso consiste em seguir um certo preceito: trata-se de um tipo de preceito que nós chamamos atualmente "princípio de não contradição". O estudo propõe um exame em detalhes da noção de não ser no fragmento 2, oferecendo enfim uma nova tradução

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Parmênides; Não-ser; Não contradição; Eleaticismo; Parricídio

*Introduction*

As a philosophical notion, the expression 'non-being' appears for the first time with Parmenides. The history of philosophy demonstrates that 'non-being' is not a trivial notion, as its pragmatic use might suggest. Since its appearance in the text of Parmenides' poem, 'non-being' has presented a formidable aporia, perhaps the greatest of all aporias. And, in spite of the efforts of the greatest philosophers, the aporia seems to reappear from time to time, like a wound that reopens, revealing that, in fact, it never healed. The leap from the pragmatic use to the critical notion of non-being is so great that if the critical notion were applied to the pragmatic use, the world as we pragmatically see and interpret it would collapse. The first to notice this was Parmenides, and, with him, the Eleatics; for this reason, the aporia of non-being received the name of the Eleatic aporia. Its most radical expression is found in Melissus, but even in Parmenides' thought, where it emerges in an attenuated form, it is bewildering. In words of our own time, and according to today's way of thinking, we can say that if, on the one hand, non-being is the absolute negation of being, then it becomes impossible to sustain the common explanation of the phenomenon we call becoming. In fact, becoming consists in the assertion that things come into being and pass away, that everything changes, and that everything comes to be what it was not and ceases to be what it was. What the explicit critical notion of non-being puts at stake is simply the whole structure of our worldview. For this reason, it constitutes a genuine philosophical problem throughout the entire history of Western philosophy.

*The Theme of the Poem*

The approximately 160 verses of the poem currently comprise 19 fragments, reconstructed from quotations. In the first fragment, in 27 verses a didactic scene is presented: a young apprentice (though already well-versed in wisdom) is carried by a divine chariot led by divine creatures before an anonymous goddess, who will be his teacher of wisdom or even teacher of philosophy (Cordero 1990), if by philosophy we mean dedication to any knowledge, to all knowledge. In fact, when the young apprentice arrives, and after her welcome to him, the goddess presents her program of learning (v. 28 ff).

She says:

> χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι
> ἠμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ
> ἠδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής.
> ἀλλ᾽ ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεαι, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα
> χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.

> It is necessary for you to learn all things,
> Both the firm mind that comes from well-connected truth[1]
> And the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true trust.
> *But nevertheless you will learn these too — how it were right that*
> *The things that seem be reliably, being indeed, the whole of things*[2]
> (DK 28 B1.28-32)

Let us leave aside the last two verses, whose translation is difficult and much-contested, and which seem moreover to refer to the world of phenomena, discussed in a part of the poem that will not be considered here. Let us consider just the three first verses. Beginning in the second half of the first, the anonymous goddess announces to the disciple that he shall learn everything (*panta*), both the firm mind that comes from

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[1] The reasons for this very different translation from that of Diels and the majority of scholars are given in Galgano 2012 and Galgano 2017c, p. 40-54.

[2] The translation of the first three verses (B1.28-30) is mine. The translation of the last two (B1.31-32) is taken from Curd 2004, p. 21.

the well-connected truth, and the opinions of mortals, in which convictions are not true.[3] The two affirmations are introduced by the correlative particles *ēmen… ēde*, which have an antithetic but not adversative meaning (Smyth 1956, p. 644) and are translated with "verily on the one hand, verily on the other" (Denniston 1954, p. 287). The antithesis is referred to two kind of antithetic cognitive states, each one with its proper qualification: on the one hand, the firm mind that comes from well-connected truth; on the other, the opinions of mortals.  In this case, 'opinions of mortals' should be seen not as constituting knowledge but rather as a way of thinking which does not possess a truthful conviction. If we consider the antithetic structure, we can see that 'firm mind' is antithetic to 'opinions of mortals', whereas 'well-connected truth' is antithetic to 'untrustful conviction'. What Parmenides is bringing up is approximately what we call criteriology, i.e. the study of what allows a proposition to be considered truthful.  He did it in his archaic way, without any available vocabulary in his language and with very little knowledge already settled in his culture about this matter. Roughly, in traditional thought it was accepted that gods, with some exceptions, speak the truth. In this way, the mythical tale, even one that seemed unlikely, was taken as truthful (as actually it currently happens with many books that are considered sacred by current religions). However, a hard critique to the mythical tales and religious cults was already occurring in the thought of Ionians; Parmenides just goes a step further in this direction.[4]

Parmenides' critical understanding is prime. In fact, following

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[3] Parmenides' learning program was likely among the most advanced ones in his time, therefore it aims at a learned audience of a high level of culture.

[4] For example, Xenophanes: in DK 21 B 14: "But mortals suppose that gods are born, / wear their own clothes and have a voice and body" ; in B 15 "But, if horses or oxen or lions had hands / or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, / horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen, / and they would make the bodies / of the sort which each of them had"; in B 16 "Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black; / Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired. (Tr. Lesher 2001, p. 25)

Xenophanes, he realizes that there are "truths" that are non-truthful. Then, he makes evident that what is called "truth" (*true narration*, in the archaic conception of truth, *alētheia*[5]) is first of all a subjective psychological fact, i.e., it is a conviction, a subjective certainty, a state of 'being persuaded of'. This conviction, from a subjective point of view, is always a "truth"; however, looking from an external point of view, it is possible to realize that there are convictions that are not true (as for example, those many conceptions about the whole or about the gods enlightened by Xenophanes). In this way, the subjective conviction is not a criterion of truth anymore; now it becomes necessary to find a method that assures the mind of the validity of that conviction, which is now set in disbelief by the observation of the many cultures' cognitive behavior (again Xenophanes). In other words, once one has observed the fact that the subjective conviction does not suffice to certify a proposition anymore, one must find another method that could do it.[6]

Thus, let us observe the *status quaestionis* offered by Parmenides: (1) the mind has convictions[7]; (2) however, now we know that being persuaded about something is not enough to be assured of the truth of that conviction, hence we do not know whether convictions of mind are

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[5] For the archaic meaning of *alētheia* as "true speech", see Levet 1976.

[6] The fact that Parmenides' criticism refers to the traditional thought can be inferred from the whole of the poem. However, there are passages, which are not discussed here, that make this criticism evident. As I see, the most important element is that referred to *brotoi*, the mortals, who have opinions (beliefs in mythic tales, mainly those related to natural events) in which there is a lack of reliable certainty. Who are these *brotoi*? Although the many disagreements among scholars, with many of them interpreting *brotoi* as figures related to opposite thinkers (e.g. Heracliteans), there is a passage that clearly reveals the traditional mythical thought as the aim of Parmenides' criticism. In fr. 7, the goddess requests the disciple to escape from *ethos polypeiron*, the habit of many experiences, which forces him to remain on the wrong way. What is *ethos polypeiron*? It is a habit of thinking acquired by the repeated cultural experience. Such a cultural habit, for chronological reasons, cannot come from the recent Ionic or Pythagorean science's achievements, because they were too close in time for been considered a settled *forma mentis*, i.e. a *ethos polypeiron*. In terms of non-mythical conceptions, there were no candidates other than these schools of thought for the target of Parmenides' criticism. The only remaining possibility is the traditional mythic thought, i.e. those tales that somehow tried to explain the world. Criticizing it, Parmenides holds in perfect continuity with Xenophanes.

[7] For the notion of 'mind' in Parmenides, see Galgano 2016, 2017a, 2017b.

or are not true; (3) there is an objective method that certifies the truth of convictions (which are always subjective); (4) after applying the method, we know that there are true convictions and convictions that are not true. Convictions of the first kind make the mind firm and without any oscillation of doubt. Convictions of the second kind, after they are submitted to the method, make the mind oscillate in doubt (they are the opinions of mortals). Thus, we can read again the expression of the goddess in a paraphrase: "You should learn (about) 'all things', both the firm mind that comes from well-connected truth and the opinion of mortals, in which there is no truthful conviction."

*The Roads*

After exposing the learning program, the goddess begins explaining her method of verification. Here is the passage on which we will focus our attention, because it is here that we find the notion of non-being for the first time. It is fr. DK 28 B 2:

εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσας,
αἵπερ ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι·
ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,
Πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος (Ἀληθείηι γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ),
ἡ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεών ἐστι μὴ εἶναι,
τὴν δή τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἔμμεν ἀταρπόν·
οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἐὸν (οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν)
οὔτε φράσαις.

Come now, and I shall tell you, and you, hearing, preserve the story,
the only ways of inquiry there are to think,
the one, that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be
is the way of Persuasion (for it attends upon truth),
the other, that it is not and that it is necessary for it not to be,

this I tell to you is a path wholly inscrutable
for you could not know what is not (for it cannot be
                                                                  accomplished)
nor could you express it.

*Verses 1 and 2*

Let us focus on the first two verses:

Come now, and I shall tell you, and you, hearing, preserve
the story,
the only ways of inquiry there are to think,

These verses have an important structural function in the poem: the goddess announces that she will say something very important and asks the kouros to be prepared, for there are few specific ways for the inquiring thinking (afterward we will know that they are only two). There has been much discussion about the meaning of *noēsai*, mainly about it being active or passive. Here *noēsai* is referred to an inquiring thought, which is necessarily active, since a passive inquiring is a very weird oxymoron. The general meaning of the verse is: "the only ways followed by the thought when it engages in inquiring", they are those only two ways that he will describe in the next verses. Another possible translation would be: among all possible ways, thinking follows only these two in its inquiring activity.

Let us see in the sequence, the coordination with verses 3 and 5, which present correlatives:

Come now, and I shall tell you, and you, hearing, preserve the story,
the only ways of inquiry there are to think,
(verse 2 + verse 3) *to think that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be*
(verse 2 + verse 5) *to think that is not and it is necessary for it not to be.*

The construction shows the active meaning of *noēsai* in this case. There is a specific activity of the mind. In this activity, the mind follows many ways of investigation, but only two of them seem to be practicable or make sense: the inquiry with the thought that it is; and the inquiry with the thought that it is not. What does this verse tell us? It tells us that Parmenides reflected upon the human mind, although he did not have the concept of "mind" as we currently understand it. This reflection was fateful and we will see why. For now, it can be said that Parmenides' starting point was reflective. His reflection was upon the functioning of mind, more specifically upon that functioning that leads to either 'the persuasion along with the truth' or unsatisfactory conclusions on explanations of the world.

*Verses 3 and 4*

> the one, that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be
> is the way of Persuasion (for it attends on truth)

Verse 3 is likely the most studied of Parmenides' verses: it deserves it. Nevertheless, let us look first at verse 4. There we note the presence of a very psychological word, *peithous*, persuasion. Parmenides realizes that persuasion is a matter of "mind", ("mind" in our current language, since he did not know such a concept), somehow identified with his description of mental sensations.[8] He identifies two persuasions: one accompanying the truth and the other in which there is no true conviction. He calls the first *peithō*; it generates the firm sensation in the mind (*atremes ētor*, DK B1.29) and accompanies the truth. And he calls the second "opinions of mortals", in which there is no *pistis alēthēs* (DK B1.30), for it is a conviction that does not accompany the truth.

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[8] A complete discussion is found in Galgano 2012, and Galgano 2017c, p. 40-54.

This distinction shows us the accuracy of his psychological observation. There are two types of certainty: one is a certainty that gives space to doubt and the other is an indubitable certainty. This discloses a gnosiological problem: given a conviction (and everyone has convictions), how could we know if this conviction is true or just a conviction without basis and without correspondence to reality? From a subjective point of view, it is impossible to know. Our mind shows its subjective conviction, and for knowing whether it accompanies the truth or not, it is necessary to appeal to something extra-mental. In other words, an external proof is necessary, because the mind by itself cannot identify whether its convictions are or are not true.

This differentiation between two kinds of persuasion is clear[9] in the poem and, if Diels' ordering of the fragments is correct, it belongs to the preparatory part, since in the part regarding *to eon* in fr. 8, when the order of the world is explained, there is a quick mention in 8.39 (rejecting the persuasion of mortals) and another mention in the final part of goddess' discourse of truth, where she announces the end of her trustworthy speech (piston logon), just briefly summarizing what she already taught. This means that this topic belongs to the reasoning tools that will lead to the subsequent cosmological analysis. Thus, in verses 3-4, an earlier announced proclamation (vv. 1-2) is now enunciated (vv. 3-4), in the first way. She enunciates the way of the thought that inquires with true persuasion; this is not the mental performance in which there is no true conviction, but that way that accompanies the truth. Now let us go back to verse 3.

Verse 3, ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι, cannot be isolated from the previous verse 2 (neither from its correlative verse 5) and, therefore, we cannot forget that it is referred to a way, i.e. it points

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[9] Besides its association with 'way of truth' here in fr. 2, the word persuasion is also associated with "mortals" and their "opinions", as in 8.38-9. There, we find emphasized "... therefore they are mere names that men have established, persuaded that they were true things" (τῶι πάντ' ὄνομ(α) ἔσται, ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ). Note that *pepoithotes*, attributed to mortals, is the perfect participle of *peithō*.

to a dynamic element. Notwithstanding, it is easy to see that all involved notions (different forms of 'to be') are static and there is no dynamic or sequential or any other motor element. How to reconcile these two aspects? I think that, from this point of view, the thought of *estin te kai hōs ouk esti mē einai* is not a momentary thought but a thought that follows a way. In other words, this means that, in order to inquire with true persuasion, the *estin te kai hōs ouk esti mē einai* must be constant along the way. This is a structural notion: the way of inquiring thought must contain a constant, valid for any moment and passage along the way. This affirmation of a (static) constant in a dimension of a (dynamic) way reinforces the idea of something external and permanent by nature, which must be applied to something in process by nature, i.e., it is a law, since the notion of law also expresses the permanent relations among the dynamic elements of one or more processes.

Let us focus closely on the verse's syntactical structure: *hē men estin te kai hōs ouk esti mē einai*. After the correlative conjunction *hē men* – that will coordinate with *hē de* of 2.5 (*hē d'hōs*) – the verse has two autonomous syntactical units. These are subordinated to verse 2 by the pronouns *hopōs* and *hōs*, and moreover the two units are linked by the conjunction *te kai*. Let us see the syntactic construction without getting into the semantic, i.e., without translating the terms *estin, ouk esti and mē einai*:

on one side (*hē men*) that "A" and also (*te kai*) that "B".

The conjunction *te kai* (and also) points out that we have two clauses that, given the structure of the fragment, should be complete. I say 'should be' because they do not seem to be. Let us see them separately and without pronouns:

A. *estin*;

B. *ouk esti mē einai*.

The first clause has no subject or object, and it is constituted just by the verb; the second has no subject either, however it has a direct object. The first is affirmative, whereas the second is negative. However, the second negates a second negation included in the object, it is a negation of negation.

| | | Correlative Conjunction | Relative pronoun | Subject | Verb | Object |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Verse 2.3 | | *hē men* | | | | |
| | Clause 1 | | *hopōs* | — | *estin* | — |
| | Clause 2 | | *hōs* | — | *ouk esti* | *mē einai* |

Given the fact that in ancient Greek the subject is always explicit or implied, the great mystery of these words is the absence of the subject, for it is neither explicit nor implied and represents an authentic literary anomaly. It would be better, in this opportunity, not to go back over the discussion among the many scholars about this absence; for what could concern us, we will face this question with other measures. For the time being, let us present a summary of the possible solutions reported by Cordero. For the scholar, there are four possibilities in order to explain the anomaly: "(1) that there is an error in the transmission of the text (if this is so, it must be corrected introducing the absent subject); (2) that there is an implicit conceptual subject that has to be sought in the rest of the Poem; (3) that there is no possible subject; and (4) that the subject must be extracted from the isolated verb: "*estin*" "produces" its own subject. All four of these possibilities have had their champions." (Cordero 2004, p. 46)

I think that is not the case that we can endorse any of these positions immediately; we will do this at the end of our analysis. For the time being, let us go on with our considerations. The first consideration is that the two clauses are not in a simple conjunction; they are more

than simply joined, because they gather just one notion in three variations: *estin*, *ouk esti*, and *mē einai*, are variations of the semantic field of *eimi*, the verb 'to be'. They would simply be joined if they presented different verbs and objects. Evidently, this kind of construction would be possible and would present two independent and joined clauses.[10] However, in our case, a construction made by three forms of the same verb can hardly have just a conjunctive connection. Moreover, the first clause is affirmative and the second twice negative, which reminds one of the structure of Plato's citation (*Soph.* 237a 8; DK B 7.1). The sentence is not syntactically equal, but is very similar: "*that things that are not are*", in which a double negation denies the existence of non-beings, and it implicates just different forms of *eimi*, this time with a neuter plural participle, *ta onta*, that is not present in fr. 2.[11]    These elements must be investigated.

Let us start with the conjunction *te kai*; it is generally translated as a simple conjunction by scholars, but here it takes a stronger value.[12] First, the fact that it is a conjunction eliminates the interpretations of the verse as a disjunction.[13] However, more than they would be by a conjunction alone, the two clauses are linked by a vital connection, in which *te kai* (with the meaning of 'also' or even implying 'both') represents the conjunction of a second part reinforcing the first. This occurs not because the second part explains the first, but because both

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[10] For example: "the only ways of inquiry there are to think, on one hand, that it considers and does not pretend not to judge."

[11] It is possible to show that the Platonic citation (B7.1) has the same structure of B2.3. See Galgano 2017c, 108 ff.

[12] Humbert (1954, p. 370): "D'ailleurs, d'une façon générale une certaine indétermination, inséparable de la poésie qui *exprime* moins qu'elle ne suggère, est peu favorable à un emploi rigoureux et précis des particules."

[13] Some scholars interpret it as a disjunction, ex. Mansfeld (1960, 56 ff), but see the perfect criticism of Meijer (1997, p. 100 ff). Mansfeld's argument begins with the consideration that disjunctive syllogism does not need a subject (in the case of Parmenides, the argument would not need a subject either for A (*estin*) or B (*ouk esti mē einai*).

belong to the same whole, as the two sides of a coin.[14]

For the moment, I will leave aside the first hemistich and consider just the second. The second hemistich means something like: *the only ways of inquiry there are to think that [A] and that it is not non being*. The peculiarity of this clause is that, beside the repetition of the negation (not… non), there is also a repetition of the verb 'to be' (is… being). Evidently, it is not a dittography; therefore we should distinguish the first negation (*ouk esti*, it is not) from the second (*mē einai*, non being). The first negation is given by the negative particle *ouk* plus the present indicative *esti*. The straight and simple translation sounds: (it) is not. There seems not to be any difficulty in this translation; however, the problem of the lack of a subject remains. If the translation '(it) is not' is right, we should find out what its grammatical object is, and there is no other candidate than the next *mē einai*.

It seems that there is no previous attestation of *mē einai* in epic poetry. In a search in TLG, the first attestations seem to belong to Parmenides' time, or even afterward, which, in this case, would mean that Parmenides himself was the first who used it. However, looking forward to more precise philological results, we can be assured that the notion of *einai* in the second negation should not be the same as the first, because it would generate a perplexing contradiction in terms. This possibility instigated the fantasy of many scholars; for example, I refer to those who wanted to see in the two negations only the grammatical meaning and ended up finding Parmenides' argument weak or tautological, or even inconsistent.[15] However, the first negation (*ouk esti*) wants to negate another specific negation (*mē*), that which negates *einai*.

I will repeat the sequence because, on one side, the action of the first negation is predicative and, on the other, the predicate notion has

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[14] A *status quaestionis* of the problematic of *te ka*i can be found in an important study of Anna Bonifazi et alii 2016.

[15] For example, C. Kahn, whose unique conclusion, following his reading, would be: "If we restate Parmenides' claim in the modern, formal mode, it might run: 'm knows that p' entails 'p'." (Kahn 2009, p. 153-154).

the greatest extensions and the greatest comprehension and might produce a small argumentative distress. The first negation negates a second negation, that which negates *einai*. In other words, the second negation negates something specific, i.e., negates *einai*. The concept becomes clear if we keep in mind the psychological meaning of the Parmenidean expression more than the gnosiological one. Negating is something that both expressions do, either the first or the second negation. However, the second negation is the specific action of negating *einai*. This second negation is an action of mind, a concrete performance, the mental behavior of negating *einai*. Parmenides argues that the persuasive way is that which negates the possibility of a mental behavior that negates *einai*: it is impossible to negate (to mentally behave negating) *einai*.

This overreliance on grammar is a mistake that has created much confusion. When he says that *non-being is not*, Parmenides does not affirm that it is impossible to negate at all, as if he himself was perpetrating the greatest of self-contradictory absurdities. There are many scholars who interpret Parmenides in this way and end up asserting that Parmenides is (just) the philosopher of being, given his supposed incomprehension of non-being. But this is not true. Parmenides uses negation grammatically, but he also uses it gnosiologically and epistemologically. Even more can be said: it can be said that he uses negation in a masterful way, as few were able to do it in the history of philosophy. In fact, the second hemistich asseverates that there is a mental way, which is capable of persuasion (v. 4), when it does not follow *mē einai*. One more time: the mental way of inquiry is persuasive when, in mental behavior, it does not negate *einai*, when it does not behave negating *einai*. It remains to find out what is *einai*.

The term *einai* is an infinitive. As it is known, infinitive is the verbal expression without any accessory signification: "[c]'est de cette façon négative que l'infinitif a été défini comme représentant *l'idée verbale nue*." (Humbert, 1954, p. 125). The most different studies were

not able to explain in a convincing way a specific meaning for Parmenides' use of it. For example, *The verb "be" in ancient Greek* (Kahn, 2003, *passim*), one of the most complete studies on this topic, was forced to ascribe to Parmenides a supposedly new usage, however – it seems to me – in an inappropriate and unnecessary way.[16] I think that when Parmenides wanted to introduce a new meaning, he invented a new term, as in the case of *to eon* (an invention on the already consolidated line of creating substantives from the neuter gender of verbs). He did not do the same with *einai*, and for this reason its meaning should be sought among traditional meanings, which are multiple and equivocal, as Aristotle will say later.

In the infinitive form, *einai* expresses the general idea of the verb, in a semantic field that embraces senses ranging from "presence" to the predicative function, an idea shared by many Indo-European languages. I believe that it is useless try to find out a precise meaning, such as "to exist" or "to be locally in presence" or anything else. *Einai* means all of this, mainly because it is employed in infinitive form and as an object of the clause. In English, the word that expresses with an equivocalness and plurality close to the Greek is the verb "to be".[17] For this reason, it seems to me quite useless to search for a unique and precise meaning, which is a restriction that leads to polemical interpretations. As I see it, even for the meaning of "to be" as "to exist" there were inappropriate criticisms. Also, there are criticisms that reach strange points of discussions, such as

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[16] Kahn extracts the meaning of Parmenides' *einai* not from his usage but from the general context of Parmenidean philosophy. In theory, it would be a viable method, given the possibility of correctly understanding the philosopher's message. However, in the case of Parmenides' poem that studies exactly *einai* and its cognates, there is a huge risk of falling in a *petitio principii* trap – in which, in my opinion, Kahn fell – where the meaning of *einai* is obtained from the general philosophical message (Kahn derives it from 1.29, the poem's summary, which could give a general idea of the poem) and, vice-versa, the philosophical message is obtained from the meaning of *einai*. Kahn believes that he found the new usage of *einai* in its "veridical" meaning.

[17] For *eimi*, the Liddell Scott Jones dictionary presents seven different fields (from A to G) with 16 meanings and many subsections.

that of whether Parmenides did or did not think that non-existing beings, such as chimeras or other mythological beings, could have been included in the predicative interpretation.[18] Mainly, it is necessary to retain the equivocalness of the term, because it corresponds to the author's *forma mentis*, and because distinctions that did not exist in that culture cannot be demanded. In fact, attributing to ancient cultures our own *forma mentis* is a fatal sin for a historian of philosophy.

In this way, the initial translation of *mē einai* with 'non-being', even for its ambiguity (for our sensitivity), holds the same equivocalness of the language of Parmenides' time. Therefore, given this ambiguity, we need to know whether it expresses a philosophical meaning, first of all one valid for that time, and then one valid for us. The comparison of 2.3, *ouk esti mē einai*, with 7.1, *ou damē einai mē eonta*, that is Plato's testimony, makes us realize that in these words there is not only a philosophical meaning, but the main meaning of Parmenides' philosophy.[19] To return to the construction, we need to understand why thinking non-being (*mē einai*) is something impossible or that should not be done or that simply 'is not' (does not happen), as in the words of Parmenides (*ouk esti*).

Besides the simple and immediate translation there are many

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[18] Kahn again (2009, p. 172): "To take the philosophical objection first: it is simply false to say that you cannot think or talk about (point out in speech, *phrazein*) what does not exist. And the falseness of this would be obvious to any Greek who reflected for a moment on the profusion of monsters and fantastic creatures in traditional poetry and myth, from Pegasus to the children of Gaia with a hundred arms and fifty heads apiece." Later, we will see that exactly in the philosophical question Kahn is wrong and Parmenides is right: it is impossible to think and to say non-being.

[19] In fact, through the Eleatic stranger, Plato says that opposing the Parmenidean precept of avoiding the way where non-beings are being could mean to kill the father Parmenides. If Plato considers that disregarding such a precept leads to a parricide, this means that he considers it the heart of Parmenides' philosophy, without which he dies. Therefore, with Plato's testimony we are sure of the deep philosophical message of these words.

other possible translations[20]; these translations can be interesting in order to focus on this or that nuance. However, since we can use the verb 'to be' in a usage close to the Greek, we do not need to turn to circumlocutions and we can translate *ouk esti* with "(it) is not"[21] and *mē einai* with "non-being". Hence, the second hemistich paraphrase says:

> the only ways for inquiring thoughts are:
> on one side, the way to think that [A] and **that non-being** (*mē einai*) **is not** (*ouk esti*).

If we had followed the traditional methodological order, examining verse 2.3 we would have analyzed first *estin* and then *ouk esti mē einai*. Now, if after have studied the second hemistich we were to focus our attention on the first, we would have no methodological gain, for we would fall again into a reading that is based on well-known assumptions. In fact, we would get the meaning of *estin* by the common (and right) assumption that in Greek *estin* means 'it is'. However, in this way we would attain already known results, which are considered unsatisfactory by the same authors of each interpretation. The concrete datum is that the poem does not offer any direct or indirect definition of *estin*, although it presents many *semata* for *eon*. On the other hand, the poem deals widely with *mē einai*. And it is not necessary to go too far away for finding references to the notion of *mē einai*, since we can observe many data in verses 5 to 8 of our fragment. Therefore, we will go to verse 5 and the subsequent verses.

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[20] Another possible way of translation, mainly employed by authors of English language, for idiosyncratic reasons of the language, is the usage an expression with a notion very wide and ambiguous too: "thing". However, this expression is a noun and does not own the dynamic aspect of the verb. Then, it is necessary to add the verb to be; hence it is possible to translate "things that are" and "things that are not". Another way is to translate is making use of the pronoun "that", in predicative meaning, substituting "thing" or "things". Another way to translate is with demonstrative (this, that) or indefinite (something) pronoun, also substituting "thing(s)", in the most indefinite meaning.

[21] In English, there is the obligation of making the subject explicit.

*Verses 5 to 8*

> the other, that it is not and that it is necessary for it not to be,
> this I tell to you is a path wholly inscrutable
> for you could not know what is not (for it cannot be accomplished)
> nor could you express it.

Let us recall the wording of verse 5: *hē d'hōs ouk estin te kai hōs chreōn esti mē einai*. It has a parallel construction to verse 3, with two hemistiches, in the second of which we meet our *mē einai*.

In next verse 6, the path is called *panapeuthea*, a term whose translation is very much disputed by scholars. However, for our ends, its general meaning is clear, whether one prefer to translate "wholly inscrutable" (Curd) or "completely unknowable" (Cordero 2004, p. 191) or "wholly without report" (Coxon 2009, p. 56) or other. In short, the general notion is that there is a barrier that cannot be broken through, and the remainder verses will tell us why.

As in some expositions' methodologies, where first comes the thesis and then the demonstrative arguments, Parmenides first proclaims (as it is convenient to a goddess) and then says why. Note that the cultural innovation is exactly this why, where affirmations are not just imposed by their hieratic strength anymore; now announcements need explanations.[22]

Our first problem is that the enunciations (first of verse 3, now of verse 5) are not clear to us. Then, we can ask explanations to the arguments. What is the argument? Parmenides' answer is: *oute gar an gnoiēs to ge mē eon (ou gar anyston) oute phrasais*. Here the translation is

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[22] Rossetti (2010, p. 192 ff). The necessity of explanations is a requirement of the new audience, who now ask for arguments.

clear and there is not much divergence among scholars: *for you could not know what is not (for it is impossible), nor you could say it*. In this sentence there is a clear topic of discussion, *to mē eon*, which we can translate – this time without any hesitation – "what is not". I say without hesitation because *to eon* is an unknown expression before Parmenides. It arises with him, it is studied by both his disciples and critics (from Melissus to Aristotle), and it is reported by doxographers as a Parmenidean invention.

The notion presented by Parmenides is sequential: the path of inquiry in which thoughts think *ouk estin*, here called *atarpon* (impracticable), cannot be followed, for it is impossible "to know" (*gnoiēs*, 2nd person of active aorist optative of *gignoskō*) what is not; let us return to "to say" *oute phrasais* later. Let us concentrate our attention on *gnoiēs*. For our ends, a grammatically and stylistically precise translation is less important than the precision of the philosophical notion in it. On this word there was (and still is) an intense discussion. Many say it should be translated as "to know", (Coxon 2009, p. 56; Gallop, 1984, p. 55; Tarán 1965, p. 32, and many others), some as "to recognize" (for example, Barnes 1982, p. 124). Anyway, the problem of what meaning should be attributed to "to know" (or others) remains. I think that in this context it is not epistemic knowing, but gnosiological knowing, i.e., it has to do with the capacity of the mind in processing the knowing. The fact that Parmenides is talking about a process is clear by the terminology that he used, mainly for his *hodos*, which will last forever as a perfect metaphor of the procedures that must be taken in order to accomplish tasks of any nature: it received the name of 'method'.

For the method of epistemic thought, Parmenides says, it is not appropriate to follow a certain way, because there is at least one stage in which it is necessary "to know" (i.e., to operate the gnosiological capacity) *to mē eon* (what is not), but this is impossible. Actually, the terms *anyston* (reported by Simplicius) as much as its variant *ephikton*

(reported by Proclus) have a denotation of processing. I mean, the task of thinking *to mē eon* (what is not) does not present an immediate impossibility; on the contrary, it is a task that implies a process, which is impossible in its entirety, it cannot be accomplished. In fact, *anystos* means "to be accomplished", "practicable", whereas *ephiktos* means "easy to reach". Both the terms have a dynamic and progressive meaning, and the negation presented by Parmenides means that this process cannot be accomplished.

Which process is Parmenides talking about? In my opinion, it is the concrete process of thinking the negation of being, a meditation. Parmenides belongs to the cultural Pythagorean area, and Pythagoreans in that time studied oppositions, the most abstract of them, passing from the most ancient, limit and unlimited (*peras* and *apeiron*), to a set of ten oppositions (Arist. *Metaph* 986a.15-26). There is nothing that could discredit a possible attempt by Parmenides, in search for an opposition to the 'whole' (that *panta* of verse 1.28, a notion that soon will become *physis*). In fact, oppositions were made by Pythagoreans also with negation by alpha privative, as witnessed by *peras* and *apeiron*.

The meditation on non-being is a most interesting one to do in philosophy. Trying "to think" "non-being" is a deep experience and takes to radical considerations not only on human existence but also on existence in general as a whole. The fact that Parmenides dedicated himself to this meditation is assured, for he says it indirectly in 2.2, when he affirms that the only ways for inquiring thoughts are that of thinking *estin* and *ouk estin*. What we do not know, and cannot say for sure, is what kind of meditation he did. Well, the terms *anyston* and *ephikton* can help us and inform that it is a progressive meditation, *which does not reach an end*. I described this process in detail in another work (Galgano, 2017c, p. 117-21, and 2019, p. 143-48) and will summarize briefly here. Thinking non-being means to think concretely the negation of the concrete being (both of visible and intelligible world), i.e., of each being. In order to make this process clear, one can begin by negating the

existence of one being, then of what is around it, then of the planet, of the universe (visible and intelligible, actual and potential) and then of the world as a whole, finally of the whole.

With respect to reaching the negation of the whole, the main problem of this meditation is exactly to think whether the cognitive subject belongs to the whole or not. When one thinks the negation of the whole, it still remains the cognitive subject who thinks, he/she who thinks the whole as he/she was watching from a virtual external (to the whole) point of view. When we try to include the thinking subject two possible alternatives happen: 1) the cognitive subject, trying to think himself/herself inside the whole as annihilated, reappears as a witness of his/her own annihilation;[23] 2) the cognitive subject disappears and with him/her, any cognitive notion of "non-being" disappears too. Hence, we can be assured that the process of thinking 'what is not' (*to mē eon*) does not end: whether because it is impossible to exclude the cognitive subject from the whole, for it always reappears in each try, or because the process stops when the cognitive subject annihilates himself with the whole. This makes impossible the accomplishment of the negation of the whole. We cannot know if Parmenides' meditative model was similar to this, but it seems to me that there is nothing that could discredit that possibility.

Well, what is the importance of the impossibility of thinking the negation of everything? Following the Parmenidean reasoning, the cognitive path (*atarpon*) of inquiring thoughts that think *to mē eon* cannot be accomplished. *Atarpon* is a synonym that Parmenides uses for *hodos* of verse 2.2 (*hodoi*); this means that the second way can be started but cannot be ended. However, if the route cannot be accomplished, why is it identified as a way? Why is it not excluded from the beginning when the goddess could have announced a unique way instead a

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[23] If I think the annihilation of everything including myself, I should think myself as annihilated. However, this thinking generates a new thought, which implies a new cognitive subject who thinks. If I annihilate this new thought, I would have a new cognitive subject who thinks this new annihilation and so on *ad infinitum*.

plurality of them (*mounai* is a plural)? The answer to this question sheds lights on the curious expression of the second hemistich of verse 5: it is necessary for it not to be (*chreōn esti mē einai*). Parmenides asseverates that, even being a way that never can be accomplished, it cannot be excluded and it keeps on belonging to the (two) unique ways of inquiry: it is necessary.[24]

Let us make again the construction of this part of the reasoning with this new element:

> the only ways for inquiring thoughts are:
> on one side, the way to think that [verses 3 and 4] and
> on the other, the way to think that [first hemistich] **and that it is necessary for it not to be**

In fact, this second way (*atarpon*) is impracticable, for it is impossible to accomplish the reflection (*gnoiēs*) when one thinks 'what is not' (*to mē eon*). In other words, the equation between the second way (v. 5) and the reflection about 'what is not' becomes very clear. Finally, the second hemistich of v. 5 says that this is a way to think that 'non-being must be', and it is a path on which thoughts try to think 'what is not'. Hence, now we know what Parmenides calls *mē einai*. For Parmenides, *mē einai* (non-being) is that structure of thought when it tries inexorably and unsuccessfully to think 'what is not' (*to mē eon*).

Now we have the semantics of *mē einai*, and we know that it means the impossibility of thinking non-being. With this datum we can reconstruct the remainder of the argument; however first let us approach *oute phrasais* (v. 8). The main premise is the background of Parmenidean research, which is searching for a reliable discourse, as the goddess says

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[24] Here the notion of necessity should be considered in the conditional context of the Parmenidean precepts: in order to achieve the coherence of discourse (non-contradictoriness) it is necessary to keep non-being as non-being. Then, in this case the expression *chreōn esti* holds the archaic meaning of "right, due, appropriate" rather than "constraint, inevitable". For the archaic meaning of *chrē* and cognates, see Mourelatos, 2008, p. 277.

at the end of fr. 8 (maybe echoing symmetrically some lost part of the poem).[25] Thinking 'what is not' is impossible, hence 'what is not' is also unsayable. Well, this means no more and no less that saying what is impossible is against the meaning of saying. It is unsayable not because one does not know what is about 'what is not', as it is interpreted by many scholars who read it merely epistemologically.[26] It is unsayable (and unspeakable) because to say non-being means to make a promise that cannot ever be accomplished; when one says 'non-being', it seems that the expression points to something possible, i.e., the negation of being; and the unwary person believes it to be actually possible. Nevertheless, the expression "non-being" refers to something that will never be accomplished, i.e., the negation of being. This is exactly the notion expressed in the words of fr. 7.1 cited by Plato: *It shall never prevail that things that are not* (non-beings) *are.*[27]

The expression *mē einai* represents this impossibility for the process of thinking and therefore it is an impossible speech, something that radically opposes the very notion of saying, hence it opposes any meaning of the world and its order in a reliable discourse. A question arises: what? If *mē einai* cannot be said, if this is impossible, is not a flagrant contradiction of the goddess there, since she says *mē einai* and even makes arguments on it? The objection would be valid if the goddess says what is impossible to say, i.e., if she would practice the impossibility. However, the goddess does not say what is impossible to say, she points out the impossible, she just indicates it, for she says that

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[25] 8.50-2: "ἐν τῶι σοι παύω πιστὸν λόγον ἠδὲ νόημα / ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης· δόξας δ' ἀπὸ τοῦδε βροτείας / μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων." Here I stop my trustworthy speech to you and thought / About truth; from here onwards learn mortal opinions, / Listening to the deceitful ordering of my words.

[26] This is the epistemological-predicative reading: if I do not know the color of an object (because the color is not, i.e., it is not accessible to my knowledge), I cannot say the color of the object.

[27] The two expressions have an inversion of predicate and negation. However, the notion remains the same: that beings are not (as in the perishing discussed in fr. 8) and that non-beings are (as in the birth, also discussed in fr. 8). The notion is the transit between being and non-being.

"the notion of the impossibility of thinking" and "the notion of the impossibility of saying" exist. In other words, the goddess says what is the limit of thinking and the limit of saying. Thought cannot go beyond this limit, for it is impossible; and also reliable discourse cannot go beyond this limit, for it is impossible. The impossible region beyond these limits is not admitted by what is sayable, it is against saying, it is contra-dictus, it is contradictory.

The expression *mē einai* in Parmenides is exactly the phrase that expresses the mental process that we call contradiction, and he was the first who named it in this way (*oute phrasais*, corresponding to not-sayable). It is odd that no scholars have clearly realized this. All of them say that the principle of non-contradiction is implied in Parmenides, and the other principles too, since the reasoning in the poem is developed following the principle of non-contradiction, which however, they say, is not enunciated. Some, like Cordero, see the principle of excluded middle (8.16, *estin ē ouk estin*) made explicit, but no one saw that, in addition to the mere notion, the word 'contradiction' itself (*oute phrasais*, you will not say, corresponding to not-sayable, contra-sayable, contra–dictory) is present explicitly in the poem. I think that the fundamental reason of this lapsus should be sought in the great attention paid to "being" and the scant attention to "non-being". As we will see later, because of this lapsus it was not possible to plainly understand fragment 2's structure, which simply does not present a disjunctive syllogism or any contradiction between the way of being and the way of non-being. Parmenides asseverates that the expression "non-being" is contradictory; "non-being" cannot be said because "non-being" is contradictory and the expression "non-being" points out just this concrete impossibility, that of making real the impossible.

Let us return to our argument and to the question that we left unanswered: why is it necessary for *mē einai* to be there (or to exist or why is it necessary that *mē einai* is?) We know that verses 7 and 8 report an unsuccessful process of knowing 'what-is-not' (*to mē eon*).

Parmenides says that it is impossible to know and say *to mē eon*, 'what-is-not'. This process receives the name of *mē einai*, non-being; we call this process contradiction.[28] Then, this is the indication: there is a way for thoughts that think *mē einai* (the contradiction) and it is necessary for it to be there, because (I will repeat three times in different forms to signify the same thing):[29]

    1) If there was no contradiction,

    2) If one has no notion of contradiction,

    3) If one does not know what contradiction is

one falls into contradictory discourse, which prevents reliable discourse. It is necessary to know that *mē einai* (the process of contradiction) is a way to be avoided, because it generates contradictory thoughts and speeches.

Let us see again the paraphrase of our fragment with the elements that have been clarified so far: the only ways for inquiring thoughts are:

> on one side, the way for thinking that… [verses 3 and 4] and on the other, the way for thinking that *ouk estin* and that **it is necessary for it to be contradiction (***mē einai***).**
> This, I tell you, is a path wholly inscrutable, for it is impossible to know and to say what is not
> (*to mē eon*)

I think that the conceptual space left open by *ouk estin*, can now be fulfilled: there is a way of inquiring thoughts that think "it is not", which must be considered contradictory, because it is a path that leads nowhere. The expression *ouk estin* is the negation of the 3rd person

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[28] Even for us, contradiction is a process, because it indicates the position of something in opposition with something else. This means that these two somethings must be related in order to be in contradiction; otherwise, something beside something can live together without contradiction. Hence, the knowledge of some contradiction implies thinking the two elements both as contradictory and as non-contradictory and finally decide, hence, it is a cognitive process. However, this is out of topic and needs much more instruments for a good understanding.

[29] I do repeat in search for clarity, since constructions of our regular language use to "slip" on these issues.

indicative of *eimi*, to be. Apart from the problem of the lack of a subject, the expression itself has nothing special and it means just 'it is not'. However, now we know the complex argument at the roots of it. In my opinion, it does not make too much sense to search for a subject or an object in order to determine whether it is transitive or intransitive, whether it expresses existence or predication, or any of the many other combinations that can be formed assembling the many equivocal meanings of *eimi*. On the other side, we made evident its semantic field; its meaning is clear and moreover there is Plato's testimony: the semantic field of the many forms of *eimi's* negation is related to a reflection about the impossibility of this negation. Obviously, in order to say that something is impossible I must point out this impossibility in some way with some expression. For example, if I say "square triangle", I point out to an impossibility, since by definition the triangle's essence excludes the square's essence. Hence, the expression "square triangle" does not mean what it seems to promise, because it does not mean a special geometric figure that is, at the same time, square and triangle, since such a figure does not exist and it is impossible for it to exist. Saying "square triangle" means saying something that should not be said in an epistemic discourse, therefore it is unsayable, non-sayable (in an epistemic discourse). "Square triangle" is not sayable, it is contra dictum, contradictory.

The semantic field of non-being goes far beyond the domain of morphological or syntactical grammatical distinctions, which simply do not influence it. The subject matter – the order of being and non-being in the world – is strong enough to override any linguistic form. It is so strong that it is the origin of the law of language and not the inverse, as Plato realized very well in the *Sophist*, where the theory of predication arises from a reflection upon the order of the basic laws of the world. In fact, the linguistic approach to the poem can advance only up to a certain point. From there on, the poem is frankly philosophical and the linguistic key does not suffice for accessing it. This means that with the

linguistic key it is not possible to open the door of the philosophic question of the poem. If the question is "non-beings can never become being" as (approximately with these words) Plato argues, citing Parmenides, then in face of this semantic presented by *ouk estin*, the discussion about the syntactical subject is a minor task. Considering the disproportion between the content (the semantic) and the recipient (the word), between signifier and signified, it is not impossible that *ouk estin* could be just a simplified expression or maybe even a didactical simplification (a kind of name for the ways, easy to memorize), because the concept's content is expressed and justified afterward, in verses 7 and 8.

The way to think 'what is not' and to think 'that it is necessary not to be' is a way that affirms the necessity of holding steady the notion of non-being. Contradiction must be permanently held and identified as such, because it is the only way to prevent its entrance into thoughts and discourses. If non-being were not considered as contradictory, the contradiction would invade the inquiring way and prevail. In this manner, the way would lose *pistis alēthēs* (1.30). For this reason, it is necessary for the way to be identified as *mē einai*: on one hand, non-being is unknowable, but on the other it is necessary to know that it is unknowable. Knowing about the unknowable assures knowledge,[30] because if one does not identify non-being, he falls in the problem of thinking that being and non-being are the same and not the same, as Parmenides says in fr. 6.5-6. Necessarily, the way on which thoughts think non-being leads to a process of contradiction (*mē einai*). But, a way with a never ending conclusion (*anyston*) is not evident in the verbal expression; on the contrary, *to mē eon* seems a common negation, like any other; however, it is not and for this reason this is a knowledge reserved to wise men and not to mortals, since it is a knowledge coming from a sophisticated reflection.

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[30] Here is a seed of Socratism.

*Back to verses 3 and 4*

I believe that we can go back to the second hemistich of verse 2.3, where we found the expression *mē einai*. Now we have its semantics and we can add it to the reconstruction of our paraphrase:

the only ways for inquiring thoughts are:

> on one side, the way to think that [A] and also that *ouk esti mē einai*
>
> is the way of Persuasion (for it attends on truth)
> on the other, the way to think that (it) is not and that it is necessary for it to be (a way of) contradiction (*mē einai*).
> This, I tell you, is a path wholly inscrutable, for it is impossible to know and to say what is not (*to mē eon*), for it is an impossible (*panapeuthea*) path, for the thought of non-being cannot be accomplished.

*Ouk esti* of verse 3 seems to be different from *ouk estin* of verse 5. In verse 5, it is almost the name of the way (maybe a didactical simplification), whereas in verse 3 it seems to mean just "it is not", in a regular predicative meaning. This is, indeed, the way of persuasion and therefore it is that of non-contradictory thought. There (v. 5) persuasion was impossible for the contradiction, here (v. 3) persuasion is possible for the non-contradiction. We know that the expression *mē einai* is the expression of supreme contradiction, then non-contradiction is the negation of *mē einai*. Then, translating *ouk esti* comes easily (although maybe it could seem ambiguous to find two different meanings for two *ouk esti* so close each other) and for this second hemistich I hold this translation: "it is not", which matches perfectly the Parmenidean discourse:

> on one side, the way to think that [A] and also that **it is not** "contradiction" (*mē einai*)

I believe that finally we can easily approach the *estin* of verse 3, that verse that made and makes scholars suffer a lot. Here again, the magnitude of the cosmological question implied – coherence or contradictoriness of the real – simply makes so small the question of the grammatical subject of *estin* that it disappears. I am inclined to think that it is just a didactical simplification,[31] whose linguistic anomaly helps memorization.[32] However, at last I can take a side and get in the fourth group of those listed by Cordero: the subject must be extracted from the isolated verb: "*estin*" "produces" its own subject.[33] Anyway, the philosophical meaning is precise: there is a way for inquiring thoughts that think "(it) is"; this same way is that of thoughts that think (it) is not (and cannot be) "contradiction". Then, there is another way, that of thoughts that think "(it) is not", which is a way that necessarily leads to contradiction. The first establishes the coherent (persuasive) discourse whereas the second leads to nowhere and must be avoided. Notwithstanding, in order to realize what must be avoided, the impossibility of the second way must be known. In order to follow the first way, it is necessary to know that there is another one, always

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[31] Following Plato's testimony in the Parmenides, Zeno went to the Panathenaic Games with his master with the aim of defending his master's philosophy. The defense was in his book, full of paradoxes. This suggests that the poem did not expose Parmenides's philosophy exhaustively, but that it was just a memorandum, with ideas in their essential form, that were elaborated in his classes (cf. Kurfess 2012, p. 7 ff).

[32] It is amazing how this didactic simplification remains active even currently. On one side, this simplification misrepresents the Parmenidean message, but on the other it preserves it. Thus, in all high schools of the world where philosophy is taught, Parmenides is that philosopher who said: "What it is it is and what it is not it is not".

[33] The question of the absence of subject in 2.3 is not our focus here, because it has no philosophical relevance in the context of the reasoning that I presented. However, it could be very important if we consider the type of reflection that Parmenides concretely performed. In fact, the "experience" of non-being – in the case of Parmenides, maybe in connection with rituals of incubation – happens in a reflective dimension that invades the dreamlike dimension. The dreamlike territory has another very different syntax and a simple *estin* could be more expressive than a thousand syntactical articulations. We do not know for sure of these rituals in Elea, however, this pre-syntactical meaning is not excluded.

threatening, that seems to offer the truth but its truth is not reliable, since it necessarily leads to the contradiction of thoughts and linguistic expression.

## *The method of non-contradiction*

Likely starting with Pythagorean suggestions, Parmenides meditates upon the opposition to all that exists; thus he discovers non-being. He discovers that non-being, i.e., negating being, negating what is there, is not possible to accomplish completely (is totally impossible). Then, he understands that non-being, as such an impossibility, is something that the human mind thinks, believing that this thought follows a particular way; but – he discovers – it follows another one, that which never reaches any place. This way that leads nowhere is that followed by mortals, who confound to be and not to be. However, the wise man should distinguish: on one side, the way of "it is", which is the way of non-contradictory discourse, and on the other, the way of "it is not" which is a way of discourse turned useless by contradiction.

Parmenides discovers contradiction (through the meditation upon negation) and realizes that it is the reason for misdirection in discourses about the world. Then, he enunciates that contradiction must be avoided. This enunciation we call a principle of non-contradiction, here in the version of Parmenides (later, from Plato and Aristotle on there will be more versions). Parmenides works in a cosmological ambit and his concern – as much as his colleagues at the time – is with the world, with the totality of things, with those *panta* of his proem (1.28). In this cosmological ambit, he discovers that there is in the world a principle for which an impossibility arises: the contradiction. Contradiction is a principle because what is there, all things (*panta*), as a whole, escapes the total negation. Then, contradiction is a principle as much as non-contradiction, because it is contradiction that allows non-contradiction. Without the notion of contradiction, we walk with uncertain senses, as

the mortals.

The value of these affirmations of Parmenides is historically unfading. In fact, beginning with a discussion about the world as it was seen from outside by an observer (as Anaximander saw the whole world for the first time looking at his *pinax* – Rossetti, 2013 e Galgano 2021, p. 43), he reaches a discussion that includes the observer. In this way, he began first of all a discourse on being (ontology), all beings, including intelligible beings (see the famous fr. 3, where is said that thinking and being are the same). For him, the wise man is not anymore the one who knows about the deeds of the world, as the old shaman, in whom the individual figure melts in a mere intermediary with the divinity. Now he is also the one who is able to think on those deeds, i.e., that who has a cognitive dominance over the inquiring thoughts and, hence, over himself. Thus, the wise man, instructed by the goddess, should think on his own and judging using the new criteria instead of the common usual discourse (cf. fr. 7). In other words, he should not judge by the discourse but he should *judge the discourse*, because he is now enriched with a universal law (the law given by *estin* and *ouk estin*), a new trustworthy tool for judging. Parmenides opens up the world, adding the world of thinking and the linguistic world to the physical world. This is the reason for which the two principles, being and non-being, remain two exactly eliminating one of them, driving crazy some scholars who discuss Parmenidean monism or dualism. For Parmenides, the world is one, however, our cognition deceives us, not in perceiving the plurality of things but in the argument about plurality of things. Overall, our cognition deceives us mainly about the becoming of things, an aspect the he specifically discusses. There is a principle that cannot be eliminated, namely contradiction, which is a principle of human error: when one eliminates it, when he disregards it, when he pretends that it does not exist then the contradiction invades and settles. However, when the principle is considered, the contradiction can be avoided.

This reasoning is weird also for us, because we must have the (notion of) contradiction in order to eliminate the contradiction; we must know what contradiction is in order to recognize a contradictory discourse. These concepts are still mysterious and they are strange issues of our mind. For example, the notion of "impossible" obviously (i.e., for our pragmatic life) does not refer to anything concrete, however, we have this notion and it is very useful; another example, the notion of "infinity", which does not refer to anything concrete, and it is highly useful. The same we should say of the notions of contradiction and absolute nothing that we use pragmatically, with more or less profit.

Parmenides finds this way and exposes it. It is a perplexing anti-intuitive but irrefutable way. For this reason, the Platonic solution of physically eliminating the notion of absolute nothing (the parricide) is not surprising. Plato thought that he overcame that notion and said 'goodbye'[34] to it, but the absolute nothing as a contradictory notion remains. As much as the inadequate account of becoming – as we know it with a passage from nothing to being in birth and from being to nothing in death – remains. From here on, innumerous philosophical commentaries are possible, but I stop my study and propose the version of fragment 2 following the concepts here presented:

> Come now, and I shall tell you, and you, hearing, preserve the story,
> the only ways of inquiry there are to think,
> the one, that it is and that it is not possible for it to be (the way of)
> contradiction
> is the way of Persuasion (for it attends on truth)
> the other, that it is not and that it is necessary for it to be (the way of)
> contradiction,
> this I tell to you is a path totally inscrutable
> for you could not know what is not (for it cannot be accomplished)
> nor could you point it out.

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[34] Platão, Soph. 258e7-259a1: ἡμεῖς γὰρ περὶ μὲν ἐναντίου τινὸς αὐτῷ χαίρειν πάλαι λέγομεν, εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μή, λόγον ἔχον ἢ καὶ παντάπασιν ἄλογον·

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