

Fragments and Commentary

By Parmenides

Translated by John Burnet, Arthur Fairbanks, and H. H. Joachim

Fragments

Translated by John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Public Domain), Revised by JCC

DK 28 B1
= Sext. VII 111f

The steeds that bear me carried me as far as ever my heart Desired, since they brought me and set me on the renowned Way of the goddess, who with her own hands conducts the man who knows through all things. On what way was I borne 5 along; for on it did the wise steeds carry me, drawing my car, and maidens showed the way. And the axle, glowing in the socket - for it was urged round by the whirling wheels at each end - gave forth a sound as of a pipe, when the daughters of the Sun, hasting to convey me into the light, threw back their veils 10 from off their faces and left the abode of Night.

There are the gates of the ways of Night and Day, fitted above with a lintel and below with a threshold of stone. They themselves, high in the air, are closed by mighty doors, and Avenging Justice keeps the keys that open them. Her did 15 the maidens entreat with gentle words and skilfully persuade to unfasten without demur the bolted bars from the gates.

Then, when the doors were thrown back, they disclosed a wide opening, when their brazen hinges swung backwards in the 20 sockets fastened with rivets and nails. Straight through them, on the broad way, did the maidens guide the horses and the car, and the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and spake to me these words: - Welcome, noble youth, that comest to my abode on the car 25 that bears thee tended by immortal charioteers ! It is no ill chance, but justice and right that has sent thee forth to travel on this way. Far, indeed, does it lie from the beaten track of men !

Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well the unshaken heart of persuasive truth, as the opinions of 30 mortals in which is no true belief at all. Yet none the less shalt thou learn of these things also, since thou must judge approvedly of the things that seem to men as thou goest through all things in thy journey." R. P. 93.

DK 28 B2
= Procl. in Tim. 1.347,18

Come now, I will tell thee - and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away - the only two ways of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that *It is*, and that it is impossible for anything not to be, is the way of conviction, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that *It is not*, and that something must needs not be, - that, I tell thee, is a wholly untrustworthy path. For you cannot know what is not - that is impossible - nor utter it;

DK 28 B3
= Procl. in Tim. 1.347,18

For it is the same thing to think and to be.

DK 28 B4
= Clem. Strom. 5,15

Observe nevertheless how things absent are securely present to the mind; for it will not sever Being from its connection with Being, whether it is scattered everywhere utterly throughout the universe, or whether it is collected together.

DK 28 B5
= Procl. in Parm. I p. 708

It is all the same to me from what point I begin, for I shall return again to this same point.

DK 28 B6
= Procl. in Parm. I p. 708

One should both say and think that Being Is; for To Be is possible and Nothingness is not possible. This is what I bid thee ponder. I hold thee back from this first way of inquiry, and from this other also, upon which mortals knowing naught wander in two minds; for hesitation guides the wandering thought in their breasts, so that they are borne along stupefied like men deaf and blind.

Undiscerning crowds, in whose eyes the same thing and not the same is and is not, and all things travel in opposite directions !

DK 28 B7
= Plato Soph. 273a + Arist. Metaph. N 2. 10892
+ Sext. VII 114

For this shall never be proved, that the things that are not are; and do thou restrain thy thought from this way of inquiry.

Nor let habit force thee to cast a wandering eye upon this devious track, or to turn thither thy resounding ear or thy 5 tongue; but do thou judge the subtle refutation of their discourse uttered by me.

DK 28 B8
= Simpl Phys. 114,29 & 38,28

One path only is left for us to speak of, namely, that (what is) *is*. In it are very many tokens that what is, is uncreated and indestructible, alone, complete, immovable and without end.

Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for 5 now *it is*, all at once, a continuous one. For what kind of origin for it. will you look for? In what way and from what source could it have drawn its increase? I shall not let thee say nor think that it came from what is not; for it can neither be thought nor uttered that what is not is. And, if it came from 10 nothing, what need could have made it arise later rather than sooner? Therefore must it either be altogether or be not at all. Nor will the force of truth suffer aught to arise besides itself from that which in any way is. Wherefore, Justice does not loose her fetters and let anything come into being or pass

15 away, but holds it fast. The decision on these matters depends on the following; *it is*, or *it is not*. Surely it is adjudged, as it needs must be, that we are to set aside the one way as unthinkable and nameless (for it is no true way), and that the other path is real and true.

How, then, can what *is* be going to be in the 20 future? Or how could it come into being? If it came into being, it is not; nor is it if it is going to be in the future. Thus is becoming extinguished and passing away not to be heard of. Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike, and there is no more of it in one place than in another, to hinder it from holding together, nor less of it, but everything is full of what is.

25 Wherefore all holds together; for what is; is in contact with what is. Moreover, it is immovable in the bonds of mighty chains, without beginning and without end; since coming into being and passing away have been driven afar, and true belief has cast them away. It is the same, and it rests in the self-same place, abiding in itself.

30 And thus it remaineth constant in its place; for hard necessity keeps it .in the bonds of the limit

that holds it fast on every side. Wherefore it is not permitted to what is to be infinite; for it is in need of nothing; while, if it were infinite, it would stand in need of everything. Look steadfastly with thy mind at things afar as if they were at hand. You cannot cut off what anywhere is from

holding fast to what is anywhere; neither is it scattered abroad throughout the universe, nor does it come together.

To think is the same as the thought that It is;

35 for you will not find thinking without Being, to which it is betrothed. And there is not, and never shall be, any time other, than that which is present, since fate has chained it so as to be whole and immovable.

Wherefore all these things are but the names which mortals have given, believing them, to be true – 40 coming into being and passing away, being and not being, change of place and alteration of bright colour. Where, then, it has its farthest boundary, it is complete on every side, equally poised from the centre in every direction, like the mass of a rounded sphere; for it cannot be greater or 45 smaller in one place than in another. For there is nothing which is not that could keep it from reaching out equally, nor is it possible that there should be more of what is in this place and less in that, since it is all inviolable. For, since it is equal in all directions, it is equally confined within limits.

50 Here shall I close my trustworthy speech and thought about the truth. Henceforward learn the opinions of mortals, giving ear to the deceptive ordering of my words. Mortals have settled in their minds to speak of two forms, one of which they should have left out, and that is where they go astray from the truth.

55 They have assigned an opposite substance to each, and marks distinct from one another. To the one they allot the fire of heaven, light, thin, in every direction the same as itself, but not the same as the other. The other is opposite to it, dark night, a compact and heavy body. Of these 60 I tell thee the whole arrangement as it seems to men, in order that no mortal may surpass thee in knowledge.

DK 28 B9
= *Simpl Phys.* 180,8

Now that all things have been named light and night; and the things which belong to the power of each have been assigned to these things and to those, everything is full at once of light and dark night, both equal, since neither has aught to do with the other. R. P. 100.

DK 28 B10
= *Clem. Strom.* v 138

And thou shalt know the origin of all the things on high, and all the signs in the sky, and the resplendent works of the glowing sun's clear torch, and whence they arose. And thou shalt learn likewise of the wandering deeds of the round-faced 5 moon, and of her origin. Thou shalt know, too, the heavens that surround us, whence they arose, and how Necessity took them and bound them to keep the limits of the stars . . .

DK 28 B11
= **Simpl. *de cael.* 559,20**

How the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the sky that is common to all, and the Milky Way, and the outermost Olympos, and the burning might of the stars arose.

DK 28 B12
= **Simpl *Phys.* 39,12**

The narrower circles are filled with unmixed fire, and those surrounding them with night, and in the midst of these rushes their portion of fire. In the midst of these circles is the divinity that directs the course of all things; for she rules over all painful birth and all begetting, 5 driving the female to the embrace of the male, and the male to that of the female.

DK 28 B13
= **Plato *Symp.* 178b**

First of all the gods she contrived Eros.

DK 28 B14
= **Plut. *adv. Colot.* 1116a**

Shining by night with borrowed light, wandering round the earth.

DK 28 B15
= **Plut. *de fac. lun.* 16,6**

Always straining her eyes to the beams of the sun.

DK 28 B16
= **Arist. *Metaph.* 1009b21**

For according to the mixture of much-wandering limbs which each man has, so is the mind which is associated with mankind: for it is the same thing which thinks, namely the constitution of the limbs in men, all and individually; for it is excess which makes Thought.

DK 28 B17
= **Galen *in Epid.* VI 48**

On the right boys; on the left girls.

DK 28 B18
= **Cael. Aurelianus *Morb. chron.* IV 9**

When a woman and a man mix the seeds of Love together, the power (*of the seeds*) which shapes (*the embryo*) in the veins out of different blood can mould well-constituted bodies only if it preserves proportion. For if the powers war (*with each other*) when the seed is mixed, and do not make a unity in the body formed by the mixture, they will terribly harass the growing (*embryo*) through the twofold seed of the (*two*) sexes.

DK 28 B19
= **Simpl. *de cael.* 558,8**

Thus, according to men's opinions, did things come into being, and thus they are now. In time (they think) they will grow up and pass away. To each of these things men have assigned a fixed name. R. P. 102.d.

Ancient Authors' Commentaries on Parmenides

Literature: The fragments of Parmenides have been collected by Peyron, Leipzig 1810 ; Karsten, Amsterdam 1830; Brandis, *Comm. Eleat.* Altona 1813; Vatke, Berlin 1864; Stein, *Symb. philol. Bonn.* Leipzig 1867; V. *Revue Phil.* 1883, 5: 1884, 9. Berger, *Die Zonenlehre d. Parm.* Munchen, 1895.

PASSAGES RELATING TO PARMENIDES IN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

English translation by Fairbanks, *The First Philosophers of Greece* (Public Domain); supplemented by Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, trans. H. H. Joachim (e-text, Public Domain), where noted.

Plato, *Theaet.* 180d.

I almost forgot, Theodoros, that there were others who asserted opinions the very opposite of these: 'the all is alone, unmoved; to this all names apply,' and the other emphatic statements in opposition to those referred to, which the school of Melissos and Parmenides make, to the effect that all things are one, and that the all stands itself in itself, not having space in which it is moved.

DK 28 A5 = Plato, *Theaet.* 183e.

Feeling ashamed before Melissos and the rest who assert that the all is one being, for fear we should examine the matter somewhat crudely, I am even more ashamed in view of the fact that Parmenides is one of them. Parmenides seems to me, in the words of Homer, a man to be revered and at the same time feared. For when I was a mere youth and he a very old man, I conversed with him, and he seemed to me to have an exceedingly wonderful depth of mind. I fear lest we may not understand what he said, and that we may fail still more to understand his thoughts in saying it; and, what is most important, I fear lest the question before us should fail to receive due consideration. . . .

Plato, *Soph.* 238c. (concluding a discussion of Parmenides).

You understand then that it is really impossible to speak of not-being or to say anything about it or to conceive it by itself, but it is inconceivable, not to be spoken of or mentioned, and irrational.

Plato, *Parm.* 163c.

This statement: It does not exist, means absolutely that it does not exist anywhere in any way, nor does not-being have any share at all in being. Accordingly not-being could not exist, nor in any other way could it have a share in being.

Arist. *Phys.* i.2.184b16.

The first principle must be one, unmoved, as Parmenides and Melissos say, . . .

Arist. *Phys.* i.3.186a4.

To those proceeding after this impossible manner things seem to be one, and it is not difficult to refute them from their own statements. For both of them reason in a fallacious manner, both Parmenides and Melissos; for they make false assumptions, and at the same time their course of reasoning is not logical. . . . And the same sort of arguments are used by Parmenides, although he has some others of his own, and the refutation consists in showing both that he makes mistakes of fact and that he does not draw his conclusions correctly. He makes a mistake in assuming that being is to be spoken of absolutely, speaking of it thus many times; and he draws the false conclusion that, in case only whites are considered, white meaning one thing, none the less there are many whites and not one; since neither in the succession of things nor, in the argument will whiteness be one. For what is predicated of white will not be the same as what is predicated of the object which is white, and nothing except white will be separated from the object; since there is no other ground of separation except the fact that the white is different from the object in which the white exists. But Parmenides had not yet arrived at the knowledge of this.

Arist. *Phys.* i.5.188a20.

Parmenides also makes heat and cold first principles; and he calls them fire and earth.

DK 28 A27 = Arist. *Phys.* iii.6.207a15.

Wherefore we must regard Parmenides as a more acute thinker than Melissos, for the latter says that the infinite is the all, but the former asserts that the all is limited, equally distant from the centre [on every side].

Arist. *Gen. Corr.* i.3.318b6.

Parmenides says that the two exist, both being and not being – i.e. earth and water.

DK 28 A35 = Arist. *de gen. et corr.* 2.3.330b13

But those who postulate two from the start – as Parmenides postulated Fire and Earth-make the intermediates (e.g. Air and Water) blends of these.¹

¹ Translated by H. H. Joachim

DK 28 A35 = Arist. *de gen. et corr.* 2.9.336a3

For 'since' (as they say) 'it is the nature of the hot to dissociate, of the cold to bring together, and of each remaining contrary either to act or to suffer action', it is out of such materials and by their agency (so they maintain) that everything else comes-to-be and passes-away.²

Arist. *Metaph.* i.3.984.b.1.

None of those who have affirmed that the all is one have, it happens, seen the nature of such a cause clearly, except, perhaps, Parmenides, and he in so far as he sometimes asserts that there is not one cause alone, but two causes.

DK 28 A24 = Arist. *Metaph.* i.5.986.b.18.

For Parmenides seemed to lay hold of a unity according to reason, and Melissos according to matter; wherefore the former says it is limited, the latter that it is unlimited. - Xenophanes first taught the unity of things (Parmenides is said to have been his pupil), but he did not make anything clear, nor did he seem to get at the nature of either finiteness or infinity, but, looking up into the broad heavens, he said, the unity is god. These, as we said, are to be dismissed from the present investigation, two of them entirely as being somewhat more crude, Xenophanes and Melissos; but Parmenides seems to speak in some places with greater care. For believing that not-being does not exist in addition to being, of necessity he thinks that being is one and that there is nothing else. . . . and being compelled to account for phenomena, and assuming that things are one from the standpoint of reason, plural from the standpoint of sense, he again asserts that there are two causes and two first principles, heat and cold, or, as he calls them, fire and earth ; of these he regards heat as being, its opposite as not-being.

Arist. *Metaph.* ii.4.1001a32.

There is nothing different from being, so that it is necessary to agree with the reasoning of Parmenides that all things are one, and that this is being.

PASSAGES RELATING TO PARMENIDES IN THE DOXOGRAPHERS

English trans. by Arthur Fairbanks, ed. and trans., *The First Philosophers of Greece* (Public Domain)

DK 28 A1 = Theophrastos, Fr. 6a; Laer. Diog. ix. 21, 22 (D. 482).

Parmenides, son of Pyres, the Eleatic, was a pupil of Xenophanes, yet he did not accept his doctrines. . . . He was the first to declare that the earth is spheroidal and situated in the middle of the universe. He said that there are two elements, fire and earth; the one has the office of demiurge, the other that of matter.

(22) Men first arose from mud; heat and cold are the elements of which all things are composed. He holds that intelligence and life are the same, as Theophrastos records in his book on physics,

² Translated by H. H. Joachim

where he put down the opinions of almost everybody. He said that philosophy has a twofold office, to understand both the truth and also what men believe. Accordingly- he says: (Vv. 28-30) 'Tis necessary for thee to learn all things, both the abiding essence of persuasive truth and men's opinions in which rests no true belief.'

DK 28 A7 = Theophrastos, Fr. 6 ; Alexander *Metaph.* p. 24, 5 Bon.(D. 482).

And succeeding him Parmenides, son of Pyres, the Eleatic – Theophrastos adds the name of Xenophanes – followed both ways. For in declaring that the all is eternal, and in attempting to explain the genesis of things, he expresses different opinions according to the two standpoints: — from the standpoint of truth he supposes the all to be one and not generated and spheroidal in form, while from the standpoint of popular opinion, in order to explain generation of phenomena, he uses two first principles, fire and earth, the one as matter, the other as cause and agent.

DK 28 A22 = Plut. *Strom.* 5 (D. 580).

Parmenides the Eleatic, the companion of Xenophanes, both laid claim to his opinions, and at the same time took the opposite standpoint. For he declared the all to be eternal and immovable according to the real state of the case; for it is alone, existing alone, immovable and without beginning (v. 60); but there is a generation of the things that seem to be according to false opinion, and he excepts sense perceptions from the truth. He says that if anything exists besides being, this is not-being, but not-being does not exist at all. So there is left the being that has no beginning; and he says that the earth was formed by the precipitation of dense air.

DK 28 A23 = Hipp. *Phil.* 11 (D. 564).

Parmenides supposes that the all is one and eternal, and without beginning and spheroidal in form; but even he does not escape the opinion of the many, for he speaks of fire and earth as first principles of the all, of earth as matter, and of fire as agent and cause, and he says that the earth will come to an end, but in what way he does not say. He says that the all is eternal, and not generated, and spherical, and homogeneous, not having place in itself, and unmoved, and limited.

DK 28 A28 = Theophr. Fr. 7 ; Simpl. *Phys.* 25 r 115,11 (D. 483).

In the first book of his physics Theophrastos gives as the opinion of Parmenides: That which is outside of being is not-being, not-being is nothing, accordingly being is one.

DK 28 A37 = Cic. *de Nat. Deor.* i. 11,28 (D. 534).

For Parmenides devised a sort of contrivance like a crown (he applied to it the word *stephanen*), an orb of light with continuous heat, which arched the sky, and this he called god, but in it no one could suspect a divine form or a divine sentiment, and he made many monstrosities of this sort; moreover, he raised to the rank of gods War, Discord, Desire, and many other things which disease or sleep or forgetfulness or old age destroys; and Similarly with reference to the stars he expresses opinions which have been criticized elsewhere and are omitted here.

DK 28 A44 = Theoph, Fr. 17 ; Diog. Laer. viii. 48 (D. 492).

Theophrastos says that Parmenides was the first to call the heavens a universe and the earth spheroidal.

DK 28 A46 = Theoph. *de Sens.* 3 (D. 499).

Parmenides does not make any definite statements as to sensation, except that knowledge is in proportion to the excess of one of the two elements. Intelligence varies as the heat or the cold is in excess, and it is better and purer by reason of heat; but nevertheless it has need of a certain symmetry. (Vv. 146-149) 'For,' he says, 'as at any time is the blending of very complex members in a man, so is the mind in men constituted; for that which thinks is the same in all men and in every man, viz., the essence of the members of the body; and the element that is in excess is thought.'

He says that perceiving and thinking are the same thing, and that remembering and forgetting come from these as the result of mixture, but he does not say definitely whether, if they enter into the mixture in equal quantities, thought will arise or not, nor what the disposition should be. But it is evident that he believes sensation to take place by the presence of some quality in contrast with its opposite, where he says that a corpse does not perceive light and heat and sound by reason of the absence of fire, but that it perceives cold and silence and the similar contrasted qualities, and in general that being as a whole has a certain knowledge. So in his statements he seems to do away with what is difficult by leaving it out.

Aet. i. 3 (D. 284).

Parmenides, the Eleatic, son of Pyrrhes, was a companion of Xenophanes, and in his first book the doctrines agree with those of his master; for here that verse occurs: (V. 60), Universal, existing alone, immovable and without beginning. He said that the cause of all things is not earth alone, as his master said, but also fire.

DK 28 A 29 = Aet. i. 24,1 (D. 320).

Parmenides and Melissos did away with generation and destruction, because they thought that the all is unmoved.

DK 28 A31 = Aet. i. 7,26 (D. 303).

The world is immovable and limited, and spheroidal in form.

DK 28 A32 Aet. i. 25,3 (D. 321).

All things are controlled by necessity; this is fated, it is justice and forethought, and the producer of the world.

DK 28 A36 = Aet. ii. 1,2 (D. 327).

The world is one.

DK 28 A36 = Aet. ii. 4,11 (D. 332).

It is without beginning and eternal and indestructible.

DK 28 A37 = Aet. ii. 7,1 (D. 335).

Parmenides taught that there were crowns encircling one another in close succession, one of rarefied matter, another of dense, and between these other mixed crowns of light and darkness; and that which surrounded all was solid like a wall, and under this was a crown of fire; and the centre of all the crowns was solid, and around it was a circle of fire; and of the mixed crowns the one nearest the centre was the source of motion and generation for all, and this 'the goddess who directs the helm and holds the keys,' he calls 'justice and necessity.' The air is that which is separated from the earth, being evaporated by the forcible pressure of the earth; the sun and the circle of the milky way are the exhalation of fire, and the moon is the mixture of both, namely of air and fire. The aether stands highest of all and surrounding all, and beneath this is ranged the fiery element which we call the heavens, and beneath this are the things of earth.

DK 28 A38 = Aet. ii. 11,4 (D. 339).

The revolving vault highest above the earth is the heavens. 340. The heavens are of a fiery nature. 13 ; 342. The stars are masses of fire.

DK 28 A40a = Aet. ii. 15,4 (D. 345).

He ranks the morning star, which he considers the same as the evening star, first in the aether; and after this the sun, and beneath this the stars in the fiery vault which he calls the heavens.

Aet. ii. 17 (D. 346).

Stars are fed from the exhalations of the earth.

DK 28 A42 = Aet. ii. 25,3 (D. 356).

The moon is of a fiery nature.

DK 28 A42 = Aet. ii. 26,2 (D. 357).

The moon is of the same size as the sun, and derives its light, from it.

DK 28 A43 = Aet. ii. 20,8a (D. 349).

The sun is of a fiery nature. The sun and the moon are separated from the milky way, the one from the thinner mixture, which is hot, the other from the denser, which is cold.

Aet. ii. 30 (D. 361).

(The moon appears dark) because darkness is mingled with its fiery nature, whence he calls it the star that shines with a false light.

DK 28 A43a = Aet. iii. 1,4 (D. 365).

The mixture of dense and thin gives its milk-like appearance to the milky way.

DK 28 A44a = Aet. iii. 11,4 (D. 377).

Parmenides first defined the inhabited parts of the earth by the two tropical zones.

DK 28 A44 = Aet. iii. 15,7 (D. 380).

Because the earth is equally distant on all sides from other bodies, and so, rests in an equilibrium, not having any reason for swaying one way rather than another; on this account it only shakes and does not move from its place.

DK 28 A45 = Aet. iv. 3,4 (D. 388).

The soul is of a fiery nature.

DK 28 A45 = Aet. iv. 5,5 (D. 391).

The reason is in the whole breast.

DK 28 A45 = Aet. iv. 5,12 (D. 392).

Life and intelligence are the same thing, nor could there be any living being entirely without reason.

DK 28 A46a = Aet. v. 30,4 (D. 443).

Old age attends the failure of heat.

DK 28 A47 = Aet. iv. 9,6 (D. 397).

Sensations arise part by part according to the symmetry of the pores, each particular object of sense being adapted to each sense (organ).

DK 28 A50 = Aet. iv. 9, 14 (D. 398).

Desire is produced by lack of nourishment.

DK 28 A53 = Aet. v. 7,2 (D. 419).

Parmenides holds the opposite opinion; males are produced in the northern part, for this shares the greater density; and females in the southern part by reason of its rarefied state.

DK 28 A53 = Aet. v. 7,4 (D. 420).

Some descend from the right side to the right parts of the womb, others from the left to the left parts of the womb; but if they cross in the descent females are born.

DK 28 A54 = Aet. v. 11,2 (D. 422).

When the child comes from the right side of the womb, it resembles the father ; when it comes from the left side, the mother.