

The Fragments of Parmenides

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Fragments 1-19 are numbered here according to the ordering used for the "B" fragments in H. Diels, *Die Fragment der Vorsokratiker*, ed. W. Kranz, 6th ed. (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1951). Hence Fragment 1 = DK B1, etc.

Fragment 1

- 1 The mares that carry me as far as my (their?) spirit might reach
- 2 Were conducting [me]; when leading (carrying) me they put me onto a many-voiced road
- 3 Of a goddess (*daim•n*), who [through all cities](#) bears the man of understanding.
- 4 On this I was carried, for on this the much-indicating mares were carrying me
- 5 Pulling the chariot at full stretch, and maidens led the way.
- 6 The axle in the wheel-boxes was sending forth the sound of a *surinx* (panpipe), itself
- 7 Burning, for it was being pressed down by its two turned
- 8-9 Wheels at both ends, as the Sun-maidens (*H•liades*) hastened to convey me, leaving behind the houses of Night,
- 10 Into [the] light, having pushed the veils from their heads with their hands.
- 11 There are the gates of the paths of Night and Day
- 12 And a lintel and a threshold of stone hold them together at both sides (top and bottom),
- 13 Themselves being filled by vast doors;
- 14 Of these many-penalized *Dik•* (Justice) holds the keys of exchange (alternation).
- 15 Her indeed the maidens blandishing with gentle words

- 16-17 Persuaded cleverly to push the bolted bar swiftly from the gates for them; and they of the doors,
17-19 Spreading, made a yawning gap, turning the much-bronzed posts in their sockets in turn
20 Closely fixed to them with pegs and nails. Right away straight through the gates
21 Along the carriage-road the maidens guided the chariot and mares.
22-23 And the goddess (thea) received me willingly, and took my right hand in hers, and spoke to me and addressed me thus:
24 "Young man in the company of immortal charioteers
25 And mares which carry you, arriving at our house,
26 Welcome, since in no way a bad fate (*moira*) has sent you forth to go
27 On this road - for truly it is far from the beaten path of humans -,
28 But rather *Themis* (Right) and *Dik•* (Justice). You must hearken to (learn) everything,
29 Both the unshaking heart of [well-rounded \(persuasive?\)](#) *Al•thei•* (Truth)
30 And the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true assurance.
31 But nevertheless you shall learn these things also, how the things that are believed (OR: the things that seem)
32 Must really be altogether [going] throughout all things (OR: Must really be accepted to be continually (continuously) pervading everything).
-

Fragment 2

- 1 Come now, I will speak, and do you carry this speech away with you once heard,
2 Just which are the only roads of inquiry (seeking) to conceive [of] (OR: for thinking; *no•sai*):
3 The one, [how it is](#) and how it is not not to be (OR: how it is not possible for it not to be),
4 Is the path of *Peith•* (Persuasion) - for [Al•thei• \(Truth\) attends upon her](#);
5 The other, how it is not and how it is necessary [for it] not to be,
6 This indeed I indicate to you to be an all-not-inquirable-into straight track:

- 7 For neither would you know what is not (not-being) - for that is not accomplished -
- 8 Nor would you indicate it.
-

Fragment 3

- 1 ...for the same thing is for conceiving (awareness; [noein](#)) [of] and for being
(OR:...for the same thing is to conceive (be aware) [of] and to be)
-

Fragment 4

- 1 Nevertheless gaze steadily with [noos](#) on what is absent and on what is present;
(OR:...gaze on/ observe steadily what is absent to [noos](#) and on what is present [to *noos*];)
- 2 For you will not sever what is (being) from holding to what is (being),
- 3 Neither by scattering it altogether in every way according to an order
(OR:...in every way throughout the universe)
- 4 Nor by bringing it together.
-

Fragment 5

- 1 ...It is the same (common) to me
- 2 From what place I should begin, for to that place I shall come back again.
-

Fragment 6

- 1 It is fitting (OR: necessary) to say and *noein* [eon](#) (being; what is) is; for it is (for this can be; for it is) for being (OR: to be),
(OR:It is necessary/fitting to say and *noein* that [eon](#) is; for...)
(OR:...; for to be is,)
- 2 By no means is it not. These things I bid you to indicate to yourself;
(OR:Nothing is not....)
- 3 For from this first road of inquiry I bar you,

- 4 But also from the road on which mortals understanding nothing
- 5-6 Wander two-headed, for helplessness in their own breasts drives their wandering noos straight,
and they are borne lurching along
- 7 Deaf and blind equally, dazed, a tribe without judgment,
- 8 By whom it is held that *pelein* (to be; to go on) and *ouk einai* (not to be) are the same
- 9 And not the same, but the path of all is back-turning.
-

Fragment 7

- 1 For never is this to be forced, that things that are not (*m• eonta*) are,
- 2 But do keep (hold back) your thought from this road of inquiry:
- 3 Neither allow many-experienced (much-experienced) habit to force you along this road,
- 4 To ply an aimless (heedless) eye and a roaring hearing (ear)
- 5 And tongue, but pick out (judge; distinguish; *krinai*) for yourself by means of reason (an account;
logos) a much-contesting refutation
- 6 Out of what I said.
-

Fragment 8

- 1 ...One account (story; *muthos*) of a road yet
- 2 Is left: how it is. On this signs are,
- 3 Very many, how it is [a] being (*eon*) unborn and indestructible,
(OR:...,how what is (being; *eon*) is unborn and indestructible,)
- 4 Whole, unique and unmoving and complete (or: without issue, unaccompanied);
- 5 Neither was it ever nor will it be, since it is now all together (common),
(OR:There is not was or will be, since...)
- 6 One, continuous; for what parentage (birth) will you seek out for it?
- 7-8 How and whence grown? Nor will I allow you to say nor yet to conceive (think, take it, etc.;

noein) that it was out of what is not (out of not being; *ek m• eontos*); for it is neither sayable (*phaton*) nor perceptible to *noos* (conceivable; *no•ton*)

9 That (How) it (what is; *eon*) is = it is not. And what necessity would have started it (this; *min*) going
(OR:[That] it (*eon*) is how (in the manner of) it is not. And...)
(OR:That (How) it (*eon*) is is not. And...)

10 Later or sooner, beginning from nothing, to spring up?

11 Thus it is necessary either to be entirely (wholly), or not [to be].

12 Nor will strength of assurance ever allow, out of what is not (out of not being; *ek m• eontos*)

13 Something to come to be beside it; on account of (for the sake of) this neither coming to be

14 Nor perishing does *Dik•* (Justice) allow by loosening the shackles,

15 But she holds; and in this is the distinction regarding these:

16 It is or it is not; for it has in fact been decided, just as is necessary,

17 To permit that the latter road is unconceived [-of] (*ano•ton*) and unnamed (nameless) - for not a true (genuine; real)

18 Road is it, and to permit that the former is to be and to be genuine (true).
(OR:...to grant the former to be thus: to be genuine (true).)

19 How could what is (being; *to eon*) perish? How could it come to be (be born)?

20 For if it came to be, it is (was) not, nor if it is ever about to come to be.

21 In this way coming to be has been extinguished and destruction is not heard of.

22 Neither is it divisible, since it is all alike (like);
(OR:..., since all is alike (like);)

23 Nor is it in any way more in any one place, which would keep it from holding itself together;

24 Nor is it in any way less; but all is full of what is (being; *eontos*).

25 Therefore all is continuous; for what is (being; *eon*) comes near to what is (being; *eonti*).
(OR:Therefore it is all continuous; for...)

26 But unmoving in limits of mighty bonds

- 27 It is without beginning and without cease, since coming to be and destruction
- 28 Wandered very far off, and (but) true assurance pushed them away.
- 29 Remaining the same and in the same place (way), it lies by (according to) itself
- 30 And thus it stands fast on the spot, for mighty *Anank*• (Necessity)
- 31 Holds it in bonds of limit, which shuts it in all around (on both sides).
- 32 Wherefore (Since) it is not right (lawful, meet; *themis*) for what is (being; *to eon*) to be incomplete:
(OR:Wherefore (Since) it is right (etc.; *themis*) for what is (*to eon*) to be not incomplete:)
- 33 For it is not lacking; if it were, it would lack everything.
- 34 The same thing is for conceiving (thinking, awareness, etc; *noein*) [of] and is wherefore (for the sake of which) there is that which is conceived (thought, etc.; *no•ma*) [of]
(OR:...and is wherefore (for the sake of which) there is conceiving (thought, awareness, etc.; *no•ma*)
(OR:...and is wherefore (for the sake of which) it (i.e., *eon*) is [a] *no•ma*)
- 35 For not without that which is (being; *tou eontos*), [on which what is expressed depends](#)
- 36 Will you find conceiving (awareness, etc.; *noein*). For nothing either is or will be
- 37 Besides that which is (being; *tou eontos*), since *Moir*a (Fate, Portion) bound it
- 38 To be whole and unmoving; with respect to this everything [has been named \(specified; reading *onomastai*\)](#)
(OR:...with respect to this [it has been named \(reading *onomastai*\)](#) all things)
(OR:...with respect to this [everything will be a name \(reading *onoma estai*\)](#))
- 39 As many as (As much as) mortals having laid down trusting to be true
- 40 To come to be (Coming to be) and to be destroyed (being destroyed), to be and not to be,
- 41 And to change place and to exchange bright surface colors.
- 42 But since a limit is outermost, it (i.e., what is) is completed (perfected),
- 43 From every side like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere,
- 44-45 In all ways equally balanced from the middle, for it is necessary that it be neither something greater nor something smaller in one way or another (in this or that);

- 46 Nor does what is (being; *eon*) not exist, which would prevent it from attaining
- 47-48 To the same thing; nor is what is (being; *eon*) such that it could be more than (of) what is (being; *eon*) in some way (place) and less in another, since it is all (since all is) inviolate.
- 49 For from all sides (in all ways) equal to itself, it proves to be uniformly within limits.
- 50 At this point I cease my trustworthy speech and thought to you
- 51-52 About (On both sides of) truth. From this point onward learn by hearing from me in addition the opinions of mortals, a deceptive order;
(OR:...From this point onward learn mortal opinions by hearing in addition from me a deceptive order;)
- 53 For two judgments (opinions, marks) they laid down to name (specify) appearances (forms),
- 54 One of which it is necessary not [to name? to lay down?] - in respect to this they have wandered (are misled) -
- 55 They distinguished (picked out; *ekrinanto*) for themselves opposites in respect to form and laid down signs for themselves
- 56 Separate from one another; here on the one hand [they laid down the sign] ethereal (high-up) flaming fire,
- 57 Being mild (A mild thing), extremely light in weight, the same as itself in every way,
- 58 And not the same as the other [one]. But that (the latter) one in conformity with itself
- 59 Oppositely [is? they laid down the sign?] obscure (unlearnable) night, a solid and weighty form.
- 60 I tell you about this whole fitting arrangement
- 61 In order that at no time may any opinion of mortals overtake (surpass) you.
-

Fragment 9

- 1 But since in fact all things have been named light and night
- 2 And these each according to their own powers have been given as names to these things and to those,
- 3 All is full of light and invisible night together

4 Both equally, since nothing has a share in neither one (OR: since neither has a share of nothing).

Fragment 10

1-3 You will know the celestial nature and all the constellations in the sky and the destructive (unseen?) deeds of the clear bright sun's torch and whence it came into being,

4 And you will learn the wandering (revolving) deeds of the round-eyed moon

5 And its nature, and also you will know whence the sky holding (embracing) on both sides (all around)

6 Came to be, and how *Anank*• (Necessity) leading it bound it

7 To hold in bonds of stars.

Fragment 11

1 ...how earth and sun and moon

2 And common aether and the Milky Way and furthest (*eschatos*, line 3) Olympus

3 And the hot force of stars were set in motion

4 To come to be.

Fragment 12

1 For the narrower [rings] are filled with unmixed fire,

2 The ones next to these are of night, and a portion of flame is discharged;

3 In the middle of these is the divinity (*daim*•*n*) who steers everything;

4 For she rules over the painful birth and mixing (mingling) of all,

5 Sending female to male to join together (in sexual intercourse) and then in turn contrariwise

6 Male to female.

Fragment 13

1 First of all the gods [she](#) devised *Er•s* (Love).

Fragment 14

1 [A night-shining borrowed light wandering around the earth](#)

Fragment 15

1 [Always looking around for the rays of the sun](#)

Fragment 15a

1 [...rooted in water](#)

Fragment 16

1 For as on each occasion a blending (mingling) holds of much-wandering limbs,

2-3 So *noos* is present to humans; for the nature (form) of limbs is the same thing that thinks (apprehends; *phroneei*) in humans
(OR:...is the same thing that is thought (apprehended) in (of, for) humans)

4 Both for all together and individually; for the full is conceived (thought; *no•ma*) [of].
(OR:...is what is conceived (thought) [of].)

Fragment 17

1 [Boys to the right, girls to the left](#)

[Fragment 18](#)

When woman and man [together] mix the seeds of Venus (Love), the power which forms [bodies] (OR: the power which is formed) out of the different blood, if it maintains proper proportion, produces well-

formed (well-constituted) bodies. For if the powers, when the seeds are [being] mixed, fight and do not constitute (make) a unity in the body in which the mixture has taken place, then they will terribly (cruelly) torment the nascent (growing) sex with double seed.

Fragment 19

- 1 In this way for you these things arose according to opinion and now are
 - 2 And from this point onwards will be completed after they have grown up;
 - 3 Humans having laid down a distinguishing name for each.
-

“Cornford's Fragment”

- 1 Such, unmoving is (comes to be; *telethei*) that for which as a whole the name is 'to be'
-

Notes

Fragment 1, line 3: The manuscripts here are all corrupt (i.e., they must be the results of miscopying since they present a series of letters that do not form a sequence of correctly-spelled words). The most common way to make sense of them gives the sequence of words I have translated above. Recently N.-L. Cordero has argued that the letters could yield a different sequence of words, so that this line would read something like (my translation): Of a goddess, who bears there, in relation to everything, the man of understanding. See N.-L. Cordero, *By Being, It Is* (Parmenides Publishing, 2005) and *Les Deux chemins de Parménide*, 2d ed. (Vrin/Ousia, 1997).

Fragment 1, line 29: The manuscripts differ here. Some offer *eupeitheos*, well-persuasive; others have *eukukleos*, well-rounded.

Fragment 2, line 3: The Greek here is very difficult. The Greek phrase is *h•s estin*. *H•s* means 'how' or possibly 'that,' and *estin* is the third-person singular form of the verb 'to be.' Like some modern languages such as Spanish, Greek often omits the noun or pronoun preceding a verb if the subject of the verb is clear from the context. Thus *h•s estin* would mean how/that [something] is. But because we do not have the whole text of Parmenides' poem, we do not have an absolutely clear indication of what the subject of the verb (the "something") is. Given the goddess's remarks about *eon* ("being" or "what is") in Fragments 6 through 8, many scholars suggest that the subject of the verb *estin* in Fragment 2 line 3 is *eon*. This would match well with the description of what must be said and conceived concerning *eon* on the road of inquiry that is discussed in the first 49 lines of Fragment 8. Other commentators have suggested that in fact there is no subject for the verb, and that the line should be read as indicating that

one road of inquiry is to conceive that "is," i.e. to take seriously the meaning and implications of saying that anything "is."

Fragment 2, line 4: Many translators present this line so that *Peith*• (Persuasion) follows *Al•thei*•, but the spelling in the manuscripts suggests that it is the other way around. This may or may not be a result of corruption in the manuscripts. As for what *al•thei*• (also spelled *al•theia*) means, it is related, but not identical, to truth. It is also not equivalent to unconcealment, another way the word is sometimes rendered. To present *al•thei*• is to do more than to say something true, or to state the truth. Whereas the opposite of truth is falsity or falsehood, *al•thei*• is opposed not only to *pseudos* (lie, falsehood) but also to *l•th*• (oblivion, forgetting) and its relatives. We might start to characterize *al•thei*• by saying that it is something like the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We would then need to add the further specifications that telling *al•thei*• cannot include lies, mistakes, errors, misapprehensions, gaps, or other inaccuracies; and cannot (wittingly or unwittingly) distort, conceal, omit, or ignore anything pertinent to the topic at hand. To be able to tell *al•thei*• requires an awareness of the whole of what is relevant, and awareness of the context of one's subject. This suggests another contrast with truth: we can say that someone has "guessed the truth," or that he or she has "stated the truth" in making an accurate surmise. There is no comparable Greek use of *al•thei*•. In Pindar and in Hesiod's account of the Muses, awareness of the origins of things (of the cosmos, of a city, of a family) is a requisite for presenting current events properly in one's poem. Awareness of these origins is necessary in order to be able to give each thing and person its due and to present each in its proper place (according to *dik*•) in the world. There is then something explanatory in the *al•thei*• these poets claim to be presenting, and that aspect will figure prominently in Parmenides' fragments. (Portions of this note have appeared in print in my contribution, "*Al•theia* and Inquiry in Parmenides," pp. 1-20 in *Proceedings for the Fourth Annual Independent Meeting of the Ancient Philosophy Society, 2004*.)

Fragment 3, line 1: *Noein* is the infinitive of a verb that most often means "being aware [of]," "to be aware [of]," "to conceive [of]" (in the sense of having a mental conception of something - not conception in the sense of procreation), "conceiving," and so on. It can also mean "to intend," "to plan," and the like.

Fragment 3, general note: Fragment 3 is metrically only half a line long, and may not represent a complete sentence or even a complete clause.

Fragment 4, line 1: *Noos* can be translated as 'mind,' 'intelligence,' 'awareness,' 'intellectual awareness.' It is etymologically related to *noein*. [Anaxagoras](#) will use the same word; it is spelled *nous* in his dialect.

Fragment 6, line 1: *Eon* can be translated as 'being,' 'a being,' 'that which is,' 'what is,' or perhaps 'what is the case.' *To eon* adds the definite article, so it can be translated as 'the being,' 'the thing that is,' 'what is,' 'that which is.' The plural is *eonta* (beings, things that are, etc.). *M• eonta* means "things that are not." *To m• eon* means "what is not," "that which is not," or "not-being."

Fragment 8, lines 35-36: In *The Route of Parmenides* (Yale University Press, 1970), A.P.D. Mourelatos proposes that this line be translated, "For not without what-is, to which it stands committed, will you find thinking" (pp.170-172). The Greek word does indeed connote commitment, so this is a very

important translation alternative. I would translate *noein* as 'conceiving' or 'awareness' instead of 'thinking,' for reasons detailed in my article, "*Legein, Noein, and To Eon* in Parmenides" (*Ancient Philosophy* 21 [2001]: 277-303).

Fragment 8, line 38: Some manuscripts have *onomastai*, 'it has been named,' while others have *onoma estai*, 'it will be a name.'

Fragment 13, line 1: It is not clear just who is supposed to have devised *Er•s* (god of love and desire). Quite possibly the unnamed female divinity of Fragment 12 is meant; that seems to have been the impression of some ancient commentators. We do not know whether this divinity is the same as any of the other female divinities in Parmenides' fragments.

Fragments 14 and 15: These fragments are supposed to describe the Moon.

Fragment 15a: This fragment is supposed to describe the Earth.

Fragment 17: This fragment is supposed to describe the placement of embryos in the womb.

Fragment 18: This fragment has come down to us only in Latin prose translation, so I have rendered it in prose instead of verse. It is apparently supposed to explain why some individuals are attracted only to their own sex (as opposed to being attracted to the opposite sex - or to both sexes?).

"Cornford's Fragment": This fragment was identified by F.M. Cornford and is widely but not universally accepted as genuinely a fragment of Parmenides' poem. It presents a number of difficulties. We do not know where in the poem the fragment originated if it is genuine: Is it part of the goddess's account of roads of inquiry? Is it part of her account of the opinions of mortals? Is it something else? Further, it is not clear whether this fragment represents a full sentence or only part of one. Another problem is the wording. The first word may be either *hoion*, 'such,' or *oion*, 'alone.'