With his *To Eon*, did Parmenides attempt to escape *logos* and fail, or did he set out to demonstrate the impossibility of a reality that escapes *logos?* The question is, I think, unanswerable, and the two positions are not mutually exclusive: Parmenides would be caught in the paradoxes of language whether he was conscious of them or not. This means, furthermore, that wherever one comes down on the question of his intent, the incoherences we identify in Parmenides's text should be considered not as a failure of his philosophical theory (as if he really could escape language if he tried hard enough) but rather as one of its generative sources, as he attempts to square the circle of contradictions that inhere within ontology as a philosophical project.

These contradictions are ineradicable because they arise from ontology's irreconcilable desires: the desire to subordinate *logos* to *to on* by producing a transparent language of being, and the desire to subordinate *to on* to *logos*, to fix being as an object of discourse and in this way to consecrate what Parmenides calls a "trustworthy *logos* and thought about truth" (B8.50–51/D8.55–56).[10] These competing desires converge in Parmenides in the sphere, which is both the figure of a nonfigurable Being and the structure of Parmenides's poem. The sphere instantiates Parmenides's desire for an autonomous metaphysical reality, a reality that can be truly expressed in *logos* but that exists before and beyond any similes by which we might describe it. At the same time, as the structure of his poem, the sphere represents the dream of a *logos* that encircles that reality in its entirety: both Aletheia and Doxa, Is and Is Not. In the sphere, then, *logos* and *onta* encircle one another in an ontological Möbius strip, each simultaneously the other's outside and inside, neither separable nor synthesizable into a single, homogeneous ontological whole. This chapter will trace the contours of this aporia, marking in Parmenides's metaphors both the path and the impasses of his revolutionary metaphysics.

THE *HODOS POLUPHĒMOS*

Parmenides's poem begins on the road.

> ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ᾽ ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἱκάνοι,
> πέμπον, ἐπεί μ᾽ ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι
> δαίμονος, ἣ κατὰ πάντ᾽ ἄστη φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα. (B1.1–3/D4.1–3)[11]

Marciano 2008, 37–41; and Cherubin 2017, 2018. I am in sympathy with this approach, but I remain agnostic on the question of intent. See the discussion of the author function in the Conclusion, below.

10. These competing desires have shaped the entire history of Western philosophy and are manifest in the discipline's current bifurcation between analytic (with its faith in mathematics and formal logic) and continental (Nietzsche and his heirs, including Derrida).

11. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.111 tells us this fragment was the opening of the *Peri Phuseōs* (though it is unlikely that these were the first lines: Sider forthcoming, ad loc.). I accept his reading of *daimonos* (referring to the goddess); Diels-Kranz print Stein's emendation *daimones,* referring to the Heliades.

> The mares that are bearing me as far as passion might reach
> were conveying me, when they led and set me upon the goddess's road of
>   much speech,
> which bears through all towns a man who knows.

The poem charts a journey of passion (*thumos*), and its first line anticipates its *telos* in that passion's fulfillment. The speaker goes on to detail his adventure. Escorted by the Maidens of the Sun, he comes to the palace of the goddess, who presents him with two routes: the way of Truth, *Alētheiē*, and the path of Opinion, *Doxa* (B1.28–32/D4.28–32, B2/D6). This fork in the road will set the direction for the poem as a whole, which will first follow the path of Truth to describe Is, before moving to the second route and human opinion.

The path leading up to that critical crossroads is described as *poluphēmos*, much speaking or much spoken of. The word is markedly poetic: it occurs repeatedly in epic poetry and once in reference to an epic poet (Hom. *Od.* 22.376). The epic resonance of the adjective is all the stronger if it reminds the listener of the cyclops Polyphemus, establishing the *Odyssey* as the key poetic intertext for this philosophical voyage.[12] *Poluphēmos* is also used of the enigmatic utterances of divine or prophetic speech, like the words of the Pythia, which conceal their true meaning (Hdt. 5.79.4, cf. Hom. *Od.* 2.150), suggesting another contemporary model for Parmenides's enigmatic and divinely inspired poem.[13] But one might wonder about the meaning of *poluphēmos* itself. Does it mean "much spoken of" or "much speaking"?[14] If the former, is it the road that is renowned—a nod to the well-traveled trope of "the path of song"—or the poem that exalts it, an aspirational transfer of epithet that makes the path a proleptic metaphor for the poem itself?[15] If the latter, the word is a daring metaphor, since roads do not literally

12. The word also appears in Pindar (*Isthm.* 8.58) in reference to epic *kleos*. The epic antecedents of the journey motif and Parmenides's adaptation of them are well documented by Mourelatos (2008c, 16–25). Parmenides is in continuous dialogue with Homer and Hesiod throughout his poem. Cassin (1998, 48–64) reads the poem as a palimpsestic rewriting of the *Odyssey* with Being as its hero; cf. Havelock 1958, with Parmenides himself in the role of Odysseus. See further Deichgräber 1958, 15–43; Schwabl 1963; Pellikaan-Engel 1974; Böhme 1986; Floyd 1992; Wöhrle 1993; Mourelatos 2008c, 1–46; Coxon 2009, 7–12; Ranzato 2015; and Mackenzie 2021a, 78–93. Folit-Weinberg (2022, esp. 65–116) argues that *Odyssey* 12.55–126 provided the discursive blueprint for Parmenides's "invention" of deductive reasoning.

13. Tor 2017, 265–66. The choice of dactylic hexameter amplifies both the Homeric and prophetic resonances.

14. Translations differ. Gallop 1984: "the much-speaking route"; Tarán 1965: "resounding road"; Laks-Most: "many-worded"; Diels-Kranz: "vielberühmten"; Mansfeld 1964, 229: "ruhmvoll und Ruhm verleihend," which he takes as a reference to Parmenides's own fame.

15. The road metaphor was well established—perhaps even a cliché—by this time. Homer has paths of song (*Od.* 8.74, 8.481, 22.347); Hesiod, the steep path of justice (*Op.* 216–8, 287–92); and the image is ubiquitous in Pindar (e.g. *Ol.* 6). On Parmenides's models and for the trope in archaic Greek poetry, see Bowra 1937. See also Becker 1937; Nünlist 1998, 228–83; and the detailed study of Folit-Weinberg (2022), who attends to the physical, as well as poetic, affordances of ancient *hodoi* for Parmenides's

speak. This word for polyvocality is itself polyvocal. Proliferating meanings, literal and metaphoric, it sends the reader off on branching paths of poetic allusion.

Performing the verbal multiplicity it names, this *hodos poluphēmos* alerts us to the polysemy of words and their tendency toward metaphor. Sextus Empiricus, who quotes the fragment, reads the entire proem as an extended metaphor, a Platonizing allegory in which each element symbolizes something it is not: the horses are the irrational impulses of the soul; the maidens, the senses; the road, the progression of "theoretical contemplation in accordance with philosophical reason which, like an escorting divinity, leads to knowledge of all things."[16] Sextus's one-to-one correspondence between each signifier and its hidden signified keeps us on the hermeneutic straight and narrow, but once we abandon literal meanings every word points in multiple possible semantic directions, as the divergent allegorical interpretations of the proem demonstrate.[17]

Transporting us from the literal to the figurative, a metaphor of metaphor, Parmenides's route opens onto an ostentatiously poetic terrain. The *hodos poluphēmos* resonates in the polyphony of *polu*: the "much-thinking" mares (*poluphrastoi*, 4), "much-punishing" Dikē (*polupoinos*, 14), the pivots of "much bronze" (*polukhalkous*, 18–19).[18] These pivots (*axonas*) turning in their sockets (*surinxin*, 19) are themselves part of an elaborate verbal patterning. At line 6 the same words describe the chariot as it rushes along its path: "The axle (*axōn*), burning in the axle boxes, emitted the cry of a whistle (*suringos*)." As words are repeated, any notion of a univocal or proper meaning is left by the wayside: does *surinx* mean "whistle" or "socket"? All meaning starts to look metaphoric and multiple. Throughout the proem Parmenides multiplies these multiplicities with a linguistic exuberance that draws us repeatedly away from any singular trajectory such as Sextus's "philosophical reason which . . . leads to knowledge of all things." Rampant Homeric and Hesiodic allusions pull us to one side, tempting us down intertextual digressions.

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philosophical method. More generally, Gagné (2021, 203–65) demonstrates the importance of travel narratives to ancient poetic world-creation.

16. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.112 (ad B1/R8). Sextus's explication of this journey metaphor is itself freighted with journey metaphors, proving Derrida's point that any philosophical exposition of metaphor is bound to replicate its terms.

17. Most agree in reading it as an allegory for the attainment of knowledge, but they differ on the particulars: e.g., for Coxon (2009, 14–18) it symbolizes the journey of the soul toward divinity; for Bollack (2006, 71–96), the drive of language toward truth; for Cordero (2004, 19–35), Parmenides's philosophical method; while Latona (2008) supports Sextus's interpretation. Other allegorical readings are surveyed by Couloubaritsis (2008, 165–77), and the question is treated by Mackenzie (2017). Bowra (1937, 98) notes that allegorizing on this scale is unprecedented in Greek poetry. Arguing against an allegorical reading (in favor of understanding the scene as the literal account of a real religious experience) are Mansfeld 1964, 222–73; Robbiano 2006, 22–23; and Gemelli Marciano 2008.

18. There are later echoes in the Aletheia in the *polupeiron ethos* (much-experienced habit) that might drive one toward *doxa* (B7.3/D8.3) and the *poludērin elenkhon* (much-contested proof) of truth (B7.5/D8.5); and in the Doxa in mortals' *meleōn poluplanktōn* (much-wandering limbs, B16.1/D51.1). The play on *polu* may recall the opening of the *Odyssey* and its *polutropos* hero; if the diction of manyness there alludes to the *Iliad,* as Pucci (1982) proposes, Parmenides's intertextuality proliferates polyphemy.

Repetitions like *surinx* and *axōn* force us to circle back and retrace our steps, while the ornate detail in the description of the palace gates (B1.16–20/D4.16–20) makes us linger, delaying our forward journey. Indeed, despite the best efforts of our divine escorts, the proem's route has an aleatory quality that makes it unclear even whether it is an ascent into the light or a descent to the underworld.[19]

This meandering road, "far from the path of men" (*ap' anthrōpōn ektos patou*, B1.27/D4.27), anticipates the aporia (literally, "pathlessness") of human opinion.[20] The Doxa will chart a terrain of error and errancy. This is the "road of inquiry" (*hodos dizēsios*)

> ἣν δὴ βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν
> πλάττονται,[21] δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν
> στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλακτὸν νόον· οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται
> κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοί τε, τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φῦλα,
> οἷς τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταὐτὸν νενόμισται
> κοὐ ταὐτόν, πάντων δὲ παλίντροπός ἐστι κέλευθος. (B6.4–9/D7.4–9)

> that know-nothing mortals
> wander, two-headed. For resourcelessness in their hearts
> guides straight their wandering thought. And they are borne
> deaf and blind alike, stunned, indiscriminate races,
> by whom to be and not to be are considered the same
> and not the same, and the path of all things is backward-turning.

We mortals wander (*plattontai*) through the world in ignorance of the truth, our intellectual resourcelessness directing us straight (*ithunei*) to more wandering

19. *Katabasis:* Morrison 1955, 59–60; Burkert 1969, 1–15; Kingsley 1999, 59, 68–85; 2002, 369–81; and Palmer 2009, 54–55. Ascent: Fränkel 1975, 1–6; Owens 1979; Kahn 2009, 210–15; and Coxon 2009, 275–76. Miller (2006, 18–24); Mourelatos (2008c, 15–16); Bryan (2020, 222–26); and Mackenzie (2021a, 94–97) argue for deliberate ambiguity; cf. Granger 2008; and Gemelli Marciano 2008, 29–32. Tor (2017, 347–59) surveys the various options: his support for a circular journey is appealing in light of Parmenides's ring composition, discussed at the end of this chapter. If *kata pant' astē* is the correct reading in line 3, the road leads "through all cities," an Odyssean wandering. But the text is disputed: see Lesher 1994b; and Sider forthcoming, ad loc.

20. Parmenides does not use the word *aporia*; *poros* is not among his many synonyms for *hodos*. At this time, *poros* referred primarily to a sea crossing and only later became generalized as a physical or conceptual pathway, and *aporia* as the absence thereof. The closest we get to *poros* is with the *doxai* that at B1.32/D4.32 are said to "pass entirely through everything" (*dia pantos panta perōnta*). The verb *peraō* (etymologically linked to *poros*) also gives us *peras* (limit), which we shall see is a seminal term in Parmenides's ontology. The connections between the proem and the Doxa are detailed by Cosgrove (2011), arguing for an ironic reading of the proem. Note in particular the diction of light and fire (B1.7/D4.7, B1.10/D4.10), and of day and night (B1.8–11/D4.8–11), all prominent in the Doxa.

21. Diels prints the manuscripts' *plattontai*, understanding it as the corruption of a dialectical variant of *plazontai*, from *plazō* (to go astray, wander): see Diels 2003, 72–73. Sider (1985, 363–65, forthcoming, ad loc.) argues for *plassontai* from *plassō* (to fabricate, mold, invent). Laks-Most offer both translations.

(*plakton noon*). Our path leads around in circles (*palintropos*). This mental errancy derives from our lack of discrimination: mortals are an uncritical race, *akrita phula*, unable to discern (*krinein*) the fundamental distinction (*krisis*) between Is and Is Not.[22] We fail to differentiate not only between Being and Nonbeing, but even between sameness and difference. As a result, we falsely distinguish (*ekrinanto*) singularities into opposites (B8.55/D8.60). Double-headed (*dikranoi*, B6.5/D7.5), we see the world in binary terms, dividing male and female (B12.5–6/D14b.5–6, B17/D46), heavy and light (B8.57–59/D8.62–64), night and day, and dark and light (B8.56–59/D8.61–64, B9/D13).

Our erroneous division of singular Being is associated with language. Mortals

> μορφὰς γὰρ κατέθεντο δύο γνώμας ὀνομάζειν·
> τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεών ἐστιν—ἐν ὧι πεπλανημένοι εἰσίν—
> τἀντία δ᾽ ἐκρίναντο δέμας καὶ σήματ᾽ ἔθεντο
> χωρὶς ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων. (B8.53–56/D8.58–61)

> have established two forms to name their thoughts,
> one of which must not be named—in this they go astray—
> and they distinguished a body into opposites and established signs
> apart from each other.

Through naming we divide what is truly one, creating a false multiplicity, all the myriad nameable things that fill our cosmos. Our world of discrete phenomena and diverse opinions is an illusion sustained by language: "For it [Being] all things will be a name (*onoma*), the things which mortals have established, believing them to be true (*alēthē*), to be born and to die, to be and not to be" (B8.38–40/D8.43–45).[23]

From these false multiplicities mortals construct false unities. Thus when we have named (*onomastai*) all things light and night and divided the world between them, "the whole is full of light and invisible night at once, both equally" (B9/D13). The result is a confused and ambiguous unity, a poetic rather than ontic unity, as in the paradoxical description of the moon as a "night-shining alien light wandering around the earth" (*nuktiphaes peri gaian alōmenon allotrion phōs*, B14/D27). With its vivid compound adjective *nuktiphaes* (a Parmenidean coinage); its

22. "The choice (*krisis*) concerning these things lies in this: Is or Is Not" (B8.15–16/D8.20–21); cf. *kekritai*, B8.16/D8.21; *krinai*, B7.5/D8.5. On *krisis* in the Aletheia and Doxa, see Bryan 2018, 27–35. Curd (1992 [~ 1998, 98–126]) helpfully identifies the false dualities of the Doxa as enantiomorphs, each element of which entails the other.

23. Cf. B19/D62, probably the final lines of the Doxa: "Thus according to *doxa* these things were born and now exist and afterwards, having grown from this, will die. And to each of them mortals have given a distinguishing name (*onom[a] . . . episēmon*)." *Onomazein* is associated with false speech and *doxa,* in contrast to *legein, phasthai,* and *phrazein,* which denote true speech: see Tarán 1965, 129–33, 141–43; and Cassin 1998, 153–74. Barrett (2004, 279–87) sees the problem of naming as paradigmatic of the failure of mortal understanding; cf. Mason 1988.

euphonious alliteration (*alō-, allo-*) and repetition (*phaes, phōs*); its pun on *phōs* (which with one accentuation means "light" and with another, "man") and astronomical repurposing of the epic phrase *allotrion phōs* (which in Homer refers to a stranger), the beautiful line encapsulates the seductive adornment of the language of *doxa*, just as the moon's wandering orbit literalizes *doxa*'s erroneous thought.[24]

Doxa is the realm of words, then, but its words inevitably fail to denominate the singular reality of Being. Parmenides famously introduces the Doxa section of the poem as "the deceptive order of my words" (*kosmon emōn epeōn apatēlon*, B8.52/D8.57).[25] *Kosmos* suggests a rational order but also ornament or adornment. The phrase evokes an entire archaic Greek discourse of poetic speech as *apatē*, persuasive but untrue.[26] This deceptive persuasion is anticipated in the proem, where the Daughters of the Sun persuade Justice to open her gates, "talking her around with soft words" (*tēn dē parphamenai kourai malakoisi logoisin*, B1.15/D4.15). In the *Odyssey*, Calypso uses "soft and wily words" (*malakoisi kai haimulioisi logoisi*, 1.56) to divert Odysseus from his course, a diversion echoed in Parmenides's verb *paraphasthai* (literally, "to speak to the side"), which can mean either to persuade or to deceive.

The duplicitous language of *doxai* and the goddess's *kosmos apatēlos* concerning them thus bring us back to the proem's resonant *hodos poluphēmos*. The ambiguous, polysemous language of the proem anticipates the Doxa and its false dualities. The proem too is full of dualities, as Kathryn Morgan has shown, like the "gates of the paths of Night and Day" (B1.11/D4.11) where the philosophical initiate is led by the Sun-maidens who themselves "seem to oscillate between the worlds of darkness and light."[27] Morgan views this imagery as part of a strategy of "the studied cancellation of dualistic imagery," in which Parmenides sets up in the proem the dualities that will be overcome, in the Aletheia, in the unity of Being. Thus she views the philosopher's path as a kind of Hegelian *Aufhebung* in which doxic

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24. Popper (1992) notes the importance of the moon for Parmenides. The line was striking enough that Empedocles copied it, also in reference to the moon (Emp. B45/D139).

25. Cf. B8.60/D8.65 where the Doxa is a *diakosmon eoikota* ("a plausible or fitting order"): the label is well discussed by Bryan (2012, 58–113). See also Cherubin 2005; and Mackenzie 2021a, 70–73. Macé (2019) proposes that Parmenides was the first to apply the word *kosmos* (which in archaic poetry denotes an aesthetic or military ordering) to the universe. On the word's philosophical evolution, see further Kahn 1960, 219–30; and Finkelberg 1998. Nünlist (2005, 75–76) lists the parallels for *kosmos epeōn* and proposes that the poetological metaphor was well established, perhaps even ossified, by Parmenides's time.

26. Detienne (1996) tracks the intimate connection of poetic truth to *peithō* and *apatē* (69–88) and to *doxa* (109–19) in early Greek thought; he presents Parmenides as the culmination of this tradition (130–34).

27. Morgan 2000, 73–81 (the quotation is on 77). The day-night binary is compounded by the gender binary between the *Heliades kourai* (B1.5, 9/D4.5, 9) and the philosophical *kouros* (B1.24/D4.24). The binary of *kouroi* and *kourai* is a feature of human *doxa* (B17/D46); see also B12.4–6/D14b.4–6 on the "hateful mixing" of male and female in childbirth. Cherubin 2019 (extending Journée 2012) examines gender in Parmenides.

duality is canceled in the ascent to a purer unity.[28] This hermeneutic trajectory aligns with readings that take Parmenides to use doxic language in the manner of Wittgenstein's ladder, to be thrown away once it has been ascended.[29] Both readings posit poetic language as something that philosophy must move beyond in order to reach the lucent aether of reality and both suggest that the essence of philosophy lies in this transcendence.

These interpretations follow the path Parmenides sets for us. Indeed, the metaphor of the road seems designed expressly to produce such teleological readings: as Alexander Mourelatos observes and Benjamin Folit-Weinberg emphasizes, in Homer a *hodos* is a one-way road to a specific end.[30] The passion that launches Parmenides's journey sustains its undeviating course until it reaches the sphere of Being, where the goddess terminates (*pauō*) her "trustworthy *logos* and thought about truth" (B8.50–51/D8.55–56). The directive force of the metaphor is reinforced by the several divine escorts of the proem and especially the goddess herself, whose voice soon supersedes that of the first-person narrator and who bossily dictates his (and the reader's) every move.

This unnamed deity embodies the enunciative force of the poem and directs its argumentative trajectory. At her command, our hermeneutic paths narrow from many to two to one.

> 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. (B2/D6)

> Come, I will tell you and you listen and convey my speech,
> what are the only roads of inquiry for thought:
> the one, that Is and cannot not be,

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28. Morgan 2000, 75. She goes on, however, to cast doubt on the purity of a truth communicated via mythical figures. Morgan does not use the Hegelian term, but see Cassin (1998, 63), who identifies both the poem's transcendence of epic and the Aletheia's transcendence of *doxa* as an *Aufhebung*. Derrida (1982b, 225–26) links Hegel's treatment of metaphor as the *Aufhebung* of the concrete into the conceptual to the grounding distinction of metaphysics: hence "Metaphysics—the *Aufhebung* (*relève*) of metaphor" (258; cf. 268).

29. First proposed by Owen (1960, 100–101) and much cited; cf. above, Introduction, n. 40. Morgan (2022, 236) connects her theory of ascent to the Wittgensteinian ladder in passing. Tor (2023b, 271) observes that the image both overstates Parmenides's argumentative reliance on human language and underestimates language's hold on his listeners.

30. Mourelatos 2008c, 18. Folit-Weinberg (2022, 35–46) notes that the deeply rutted roads of archaic and classical Greece locked travelers into a prescribed route and destination, with significant implications for Parmenides's use of the image (see esp. 258–62).

is the way of Persuasion (for she attends Truth);
the other, that Is Not and must not be,
I tell you this is a path that cannot be learned,
for you could not know what is not (for that is impossible)
nor could you speak it.

In a move that will be repeated several times in the poem, the goddess brings us to a fork in the road and seems to offer us a choice only to bar one of the two routes. "The choice (*krisis*) concerning these things lies in this: Is or Is Not" (B8.15–16/ D8.20–21), but Is Not has already been judged (*kekritai*) unthinkable and unnamable; not only is it not the road to truth, it is not even a true road (*ou gar alēthēs estin hodos*, B8.17–18/D8.22–23). First the nonroute to Nonbeing is blocked, then the detour to Doxa: "I bar you from this first road of inquiry [Is Not], and then in turn from this one," the wandering path of "two-headed mortals" (B6.3–5/D7.3–5; cf. B7.3–5/D8.3–5).[31] Through this reiterated gesture toward foreclosed alternatives, the field of inquiry is constricted until, as the goddess says at the start of B8/D8, "a single utterance of road is still left: that Is" (*monos d'eti muthos hodoio leipetai hōs estin*, B8.1–2/D8.6–7).

By this single, undeviating road we seem to leave the poetic terrain of the proem and the doxic semiotics it prefigures. The seductive duplicity of "soft words" (B1.15/D4.15) and the "deceptive adornment" (B8.52/D8.57) that characterize human opinion are apparently left behind, as *peithō*—so often opposed to *alētheia* in early Greek thought—joins forces with truth on "the way of Persuasion (for she attends Truth)" leading to Is (B2.4/D6.4).[32] The peculiar locution *muthos hodoio* ("utterance of road") at B8.1/D8.6 marks the culmination of Parmenides's road imagery (which will occur only once more in the extant fragments, B8.17–18/ D8.22–23). Metaphor yields to *muthos*, the authoritative speech of ontology.[33] The vague passion (*thumos*, B1.1/D4.1) that initiated the journey now finds its proper object: in place of *muthos* (Simplicius's reading) at B8.1/D8.6, Sextus Empiricus

31. *Eirgō* in B6.3/D7.3 is Diels-Kranz's supplement (defended by Wedin 2014, 53–71; contra, Cordero 1979; Sider 1985, ad loc.), based on the parallel with B7.2/D8.2: "Bar (*eirge*) your thought from this road of inquiry." Again, the choice is no choice, as this barred path will ultimately be traveled. There is much debate as to whether Parmenides imagined two roads or three. More important than the initial number of routes, to my mind, is the way they are insistently reduced to one. Compare Couloubaritsis (2008), who proposes that Parmenides transforms the polysemic theme of the *hodos* into a philosophical method, a *met'hodon* (32–33, 54–55, 57–66, 295, 307, 366–67). See also Folit-Weinberg (2022, 52–63), who shows that purposeful activity was part of the semantics of *hodos* from Homer on.

32. Blank 1982. Cf. *pistis alēthēs* (B1.30/D4.30, B8.28/D8.33) and *Alētheiēs eupeitheos* (Sextus's reading of B1.29/D4.29; Simplicius has *eukukleos,* discussed below, n. 79). On Peithō and *pistis* in Parmenides see further Mourelatos 2008c, 136–63.

33. Cf. B2.1/D6.1. For *muthos* as authoritative utterance, see Martin 1989, 1–42. Cassin (1998, 19–23) takes this ambiguous phrase as the starting point for two divergent readings of the poem: "le mot du chemin" (the word Is, which constitutes Parmenides as the first rationalist) and "le récit de la route" (the epic saga of Being).

tellingly reads *thumos*. In this way Parmenides's guiding metaphor itself guides the reader out of the proem's landscape of metaphoric language as our route narrows from the *hodos poluphēmos* to a singular, authoritative, univocal word: Is.

With this singular word we enter new linguistic territory. *Esti* is the verb "to be" in its present indicative form. The form is third-person singular but has no stated subject: it is being without a specific be-er.[34] Parmenides's audacious use of the word, unprecedented in Greek literature, develops the metaphysics implicit in the Greek verb *einai*. In his exhaustive study of the verb, Charles Kahn argues that the primary sense of *einai* was not existential ("exists") but veridical ("truly is, is the case"). This basic meaning conjoins the notions of existence and predication, reality and truth: *esti* indicates both what is and what can truly be said to be.[35] This conflation is in keeping (as Kahn stresses) with Parmenides's apparent equation of speech, thought, and being: "It is necessary that to speak and to think be what is, for to be is and nothing is not" (B6.1–2/D7.1–2).[36] This equation suggests, on the one hand, that the objects of thought and speech partake of reality and, on the other, that reality is by its very nature thinkable and speakable (which is why Is Not can be neither thought nor spoken, B2.7–8/D6.7–8, B8.8–9/D8.13–14, B8.17/D8.22). *Esti* encapsulates this congruence of language and reality. Collapsing signified and signifier, What Is and what is said about it, into a single lexeme, it bespeaks the speakability of being.[37] At the same time, if "it is necessary that to speak and to think be what is," that lexeme itself shares in the reality of being. *Esti*—the word—is.

With this metaphysical *esti* Parmenides forges an *onto-logos*, a novel language of being. Singular, abstract, and univocal, fully present in its eternal present tense, *esti* seems to escape from the polysemy of ordinary human language as

34. A variety of potential subjects has been mooted; the possibilities are discussed by Finkelberg 1988; Cordero 2004, 44–54, 60–64; and Sider forthcoming, ad B2.3.

35. Kahn 1973, 331–70, 401–9. He presents that study as a "grammatical prolegomenon" to the radical new notion of Being formulated by Parmenides (Kahn 2009, 109–10). See further Kahn 2009, 16–40, 62–74, 170–80. Kahn insists on the veridical sense of the verb in Parmenides (e.g. at 2009, 150–56, 170–80, 198–206) against proponents of an existential reading like Owen 1960; Gallop 1979; and Barnes 1982, 160–61. See also the "definitional" reading of Curd 1998, 34–51; and Bredlow 2011.

36. *Khrē to legein te noein t'eon emmenai; esti gar einai, mēden d'ouk estin.* Cf. B3/D6.8, B8.34–36/D8.39–41. Translation of B6.1–2/D7.1–2 is extraordinarily difficult and there is no agreement on its interpretation. My reading follows Kahn (2009, 163–65), who views the lines as articulating "a correspondence theory of truth." He surveys other interpretations at 189–91. Cassin (1998, 34–38, 144–48) offers a lucid discussion of the syntactical complexities and their ontological implications. See further Mourelatos 2008c, 77n7 (and 164–93 for his own "correspondence theory" of thought and reality) and Long 1996 for a strong argument for the identity of thinking and being. For the counterargument and review of the question, see Cherubin 2001. Badiou (2014) identifies his construction of a "borromean knot" of being, thought, and nonbeing as Parmenides's signal innovation.

37. This is articulated in the strange construction "that Is" (*hōs estin,* B8.2/D8.7; *hopōs estin,* B2.3/D6.3), which emphasizes *esti* as signifier. Contrast B8.16/D8.21, where the decision is *estin ē ouk estin,* a choice between signifieds not signifiers, two alternative realities not two statements about them.

Parmenides characterizes it in the proem and Doxa.[38] Indeed, it seems to escape language altogether. Without subject or predicate, *esti* seems to float in glorious isolation from syntax. In paradigmatic statements like B8.1–2/D8.6–7—"a single utterance of road is still left: that Is" (*hōs estin*)—*esti* is propositional content in and of itself; in fact, it is the only true propositional content. Syntax falls away. Or rather, *esti* absorbs all syntax into itself. Containing within itself its own subject (in the third-person singular form) and its own predicate ("is" = "is real/true"), *esti* is a complete grammatical sentence. Moreover, as Kahn suggests, in its collapsing of existence and predication the verb enacts the ideal correspondence between signifier and signified, word and world, that is the foundation of language as a whole.[39] *Esti* simultaneously transcends language and sublimates it as a pure *logos* of *to on*.

Via this linguistic *Aufhebung*, Parmenides's Is appears to escape the mire of metaphor. Metaphor trades in the slippage between signifier and signified, transferring a signifier (say, *hodos*) from its proper signified (a road) to define something else (like a philosophical inquiry). Thus, as Derrida says, every metaphor conveys "philosophy's *unique thesis*": that reality can be separated from its expression, the signified from its signifier, *einai* from *legein*.[40] With his *esti*, Parmenides refuses the metaphoric thesis. Both expressing and enacting that refusal, *esti* functions as a signifier of Parmenides's dream of a nonmetaphorical or antimetaphorical language of metaphysics. *Esti* is: the ultimate fantasy of *onto-logy*.[41]

But that fantasy is fragile. *Esti* is supposed to name a reality that is unitary, singular, and unchanging, wholly and eternally present. But the verb itself is subject to the same doubling, negation, and polysemy as all language. For one thing, it seems to have a synonym. In five instances Parmenides uses the verb *pelenai* as a substitute for *einai* with no clearly discernible difference in meaning.[42] This substitute not only replaces *esti* but also constitutes one of its necessary qualities:

38. On the temporality of Parmenides's *esti,* see Tarán 1965, 175–88, 1979; Schofield 1970; Stokes 1971, 128–31; Owen 1974; O'Brien 1980; Sorabji 1983, 99–108, 128–30; Gallop 1984, 13–14; Mourelatos 2008c, 103–11; and Couloubaritsis (2008, 297–342), who emphasizes the absolute present of *Eon* (which he translates "What is in the present"); cf. Alcocer Urueta 2023.

39. Kahn 1973, 227.

40. Derrida 1982b, 229. In Mourelatos's understanding of Parmenides's *esti* as "the copula of speculative predication" (X *is really* Y), the verb functions like a metaphor as "the conveyer to the reality of a thing" (2008c, 51–60; the quotation is on p. 59). Thus Is "is *essentially* a route; it is not a route by poetic license" (134). He does not take the further step of connecting *Esti* to metaphor in general, although his idiom of transport and conveyance (2008c, 61, 134–35; 2008a, 349) suggests the connection. Literalized in "Is," not just the metaphor of the route but metaphor *tout court* is left by the wayside.

41. See the suggestive comment of Morgan (2000, 85): "At the heart of the goddess' revelation lies the dream of language denying itself, an unshaken kernel where Being is uniform and there is no distance between the referring word and that to which it refers."

42. For example in the criticism of mortals "for whom to be (*pelenai*) and not to be (*einai*) are considered the same thing" (B6.8/D7.8). Cf. B8.18/D8.23, B8.45/D8.50, and possibly B8.19/D8.24, although the text is disputed. The verb is not used accidentally. *Pelenai* is etymologically connected to *teleō* (to turn) and thus to the perfect completeness of Being as sphere (*tetelesmenon,* B8.42/D8.47; cf.

so we hear of Being that "it is necessary either that it be (*pelenai*) entirely or not [be]" (B8.11/D8.16). Singular Being has a double name: *einai* and *pelenai. Esti* is itself *poluphēmos.*

This doubleness divides *esti.* Throughout the poem, forms of *einai* proliferate and the meaning of the verb shifts and slides. As a result, the word's every occurrence is the object of divergent and contested readings.[43] Kahn offers a neat taxonomy of the eighty-nine occurrences of the verb "to be" in Parmenides's extant fragments, dividing them into "the strong or ontological use" and "ordinary uses" (like the copular or predicative).[44] But in every instance "ontological" *esti* is at risk of dissolving back into the "ordinary" verb—not "Is" (reality itself) but just "is," a garden-variety linking verb. The opening lines of B8 are typical.

> μόνος δ' ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο
> λείπεται ὡς ἔστιν· ταύτηι δ' ἐπὶ σήματ' ἔασι
> πολλὰ μάλ', ὡς ἀγένητον ἐὸν καὶ ἀνώλεθρόν ἐστιν,
> ἐστι γὰρ οὐλομελές τε καὶ ἀτρεμὲς ἠδ' ἀτέλεστον. (B8.1–4/D8.6–9)[45]

> A single utterance of road is still left:
> that Is (*estin*). And there are (*easi*) very many signs along this road,
> that being (*eon*) ungenerated, it is (*estin*) also indestructible,
> for it is (*esti*) whole-limbed and untrembling and without end.

"Is" in the second line is *esti* in Kahn's ontological sense: it is a strong statement of Parmenides's commitment to a reality that can be fully accessed in speech and a speech that can fully access it. But the same verb in the third-person plural (*easi*) inserts *sēmata* between that reality and its expression. Can these signs be said to "be" in the same way that Being itself "is," or does the same verb signify different existential conditions? These *sēmata* show, in the third line, that Is, "being ungenerated, is also indestructible." In the ambiguous grammar of this line, *eon* and *estin* both seem to function as copulae, connecting "Is" to its defining predicates, "ungenerated" and "indestructible." But an alternative reading of the line might take *estin* as predicative and the participle *eon* as ontological ("that being [*eon*, i.e. because it truly is], it is [*estin*] ungenerated and indestructible"); or, more strongly, *estin* as predicative and *eon* as substantive ("that Being [*eon*] is [*estin*] ungenerated and indestructible"); or, stronger still, *eon* as predicative and *estin* as

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B8.4/D8.9, B8.32/D8.37). But as Tor (2023b, 266–67) and Alcocer Urueta (2023, 177–78) observe, it also introduces a sense of motion and change at odds with the fixity of What Is.

    43. Gallop (1984) registers this aporia: beneath his functional translation, Gallop includes multiple alternative translations of disputed lines, an editorial decision unparalleled in the Phoenix Presocratics series. See also Tarán 1965. The signifier that promises to unify language and being instead throws their relation into crisis.

    44. Kahn 2009, 187–91.

    45. I print Diels's *monos* in the first line. Sider (1985, 365–66) argues for the epic form *mounos*, which Parmenides uses elsewhere. This would preclude running B8 into B7 (as Laks-Most do in D8).

ontological ("that being [*eon*] ungenerated and indestructible, it Is [*estin*])." Only the will of the translator differentiates the numinous "Is" from an ordinary linking verb, with its different numbers (*easi*, B8.2/D8.7) and tenses (*ēn, estai*, B8.5/D8.10). Untrembling *esti* trembles.[46]

This slippage between the ontological and copular is a challenge for the metaphysics of Parmenides's Is. First, copular *esti* is prone to disappear. Since Greek does not need an expressed linking verb in order to convey predication, *esti* can always be omitted. This possibility is illustrated in the final line of the passage above: in Diels-Kranz's text (*esti gar oulomeles*) the repetition of *esti* in the two strongest line positions at the end of line 3 and beginning of line 4 makes an insistent claim for the being of Being, a claim supported by but independent of its various predicates. But an alternative reading of line 4 has *oulon mounogenes* ("whole, single-born") without *esti*.[47] On the former reading, *esti* forcefully asserts Parmenides's ontology as the true signifier of Being. On the latter, *esti* evanesces, absorbed into syntax, and Being itself is replaced by its predicate. This points to a second problem, for even if copular *esti* is expressed, predication doubles the singularity of Being. Being is one (*hen*, B8.6/D8.11), but as Plato already observed, to say this is to say it is two things, Being and one.[48] Plato's observation turns every predication into a metaphor, importing an alien meaning and dividing proper identity: predicated, Being is both itself and something else. This problem is compounded in this passage by the emphatically negative form of the predicates: ungenerated, indestructible, untrembling, and unending. These predicates insinuate the impossible, unspeakable Is Not into the very definition of Is, troubling the word's pure presence and positivity. Is *is not* what it is not.[49]

46. Cassin 1998, 46. She tracks a trajectory in the poem from *esti* to *to eon,* the substantive identity or "proper name" of Being (the participle without the article in this passage marks a medial stage). But *to eon* is subject to the same slippages as *esti:* to doubling and division (B4.2/D10.2), to negation (B2.7/D6.7), to negative predication (B8.32–33/D8.37–38).

47. The former (Diels-Kranz's text) is the reading of Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1114C; the latter (printed by Tarán, Gallop, Laks-Most) that of Clem. Al. *Strom* 5.112.2; Simpl. *in Cael.* p. 556, *in Phys.* p. 29 (DE), p. 120 (D), p. 145 (E). Other emendations are collected by Gallop (1984, ad loc.) and discussed by Tarán (1965, 88–93); and Sider (forthcoming, ad loc.).

48. Pl. *Soph.* 244b–d. Tarán 1965, 193: "To say 'Being is X' would be tantamount to admitting the reality of difference, which difference from Being could be for Parmenides only non-Being and non-Being is for him inconceivable." He sees the negative predicates as denying difference, but if so they reinscribe it in the very process. Tor (2023b, 252–55) offers an intelligent critique of the Platonic objection, which he argues rests on too restrictive an understanding of Parmenides's monism.

49. Again, the problem manifests in the text. At the end of the fourth line Diels-Kranz print *ēd' ateleston* ("and unending"), but this seems to contradict Parmenides's insistence at B8.32/D8.37 that Being is "not unending" (*ouk ateleutēton*), and editors have suggested various emendations including *ēde teleston* ("and complete"), *ēde teleion* ("and perfect"), and *oud' ateleston* ("and not unending"). The predicate destabilizes the text of Being such that its own proper qualities become uncertain and contradictory.

The metaphor of the path seems to carry us decisively out of the poetic proem, with its branching and multivalent *hodos poluphēmos*, and onto the terrain of ontology, where *logos* unites with *to on* in a sublimity of the real and true. Forcefully prohibiting the impossible detour into Is Not and the wandering of Doxa, the goddess insists that we follow the single remaining "utterance of road" (*muthos hodoio*), and readers have generally obeyed her command, traveling a unidirectional ascent from duality to unity, from physics to metaphysics, and from the doubleness and duplicity of human language to the univocal true *logos* of Being. And yet if Parmenides's path does suggest such an ascent, it misleads, because like Hegel's *Aufhebung* it retains what it cancels: negativity, doubleness, polyvalence. Indeed, the new landscape resembles the old so much that we might wonder whether the straight road has merely brought us back to where we began (a circle to which we will circle back at the end of the chapter). Perhaps the authoritative *muthos hodoio* glossed as "Is" is, after all, just a myth consisting of a metaphor. The thesis (or metaphor) of language as a Wittgensteinian ladder supposes that the destination can be separated from the journey, the philosophical *telos* from the linguistic process by which it is reached. This is, of course, the thesis of metaphor itself: that ideas can be separated from the image that "conveys" them. But that metaphorical thesis, itself conveyed metaphorically, merely reproduces metaphoricity *en abyme*, as Derrida proposes.[50] However far it goes and however undeviating the path, then, metaphysics cannot escape metaphor. Parmenides's road is a metaphor of that futile attempt.

BOUNDS OF BONDS

If with his novel language of "Is" Parmenides attempts to sublate *logos* as Being, he also exploits metaphorical language to secure that sublime Being. With the recurring metaphor of Anankē's bonds or bounds, Parmenides strives to subordinate *logos* to *to on*, to ensure that metaphor works in the service of metaphysics, faithfully articulating its essential truths. And yet, as we shall see, these images also have a truth of their own: the metaphor of bonds does not merely describe a preexisting and always-existing substance but instead secures its substantiality, defining its very essence. A necessary supplement to Being's totality, the origin of a Being without origin and limit of a Being with no beyond, the metaphor deployed to stabilize Being consistently destabilizes and deontologizes it, showing again and again that *To Eon* requires *logos* to achieve its innate form. Necessity's bonds of bounds are thus the tie that binds—and unbinds—Parmenides's ontological project as a whole.

The metaphor of bounds/bonds appears multiple times in the poem in slightly different configurations. We find the image first at B8.13–15/D8.18–20 where Dikē (Justice) is said to hold *To Eon* in her fetters (*pedēisin*), not slackening them so as

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50. Derrida 1982b, 262.