

PARMENIDES' POEM

IL POEMA Proemio

1

- ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι,  
πέμπον, ἐπεὶ μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι  
δαίμονος, ἧ κατὰ πάντ' ἄσθη φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·  
τῆι φερόμην· τῆι γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποι  
5 ἄρμα τιταίνουσαι, κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἠγεμόνευον.  
ἄξων δ' ἐν χιοίησιν ἴει σύριγγος αὐτῆν  
αἰθόμενος (δοιοῖς γὰρ ἐπείγετο δινωτοῖσιν  
κύκλοις ἀμφοτέρωθεν), ὅτε σπερχοίατο πέμπειν  
Ἑλιάδες κοῦραι, προλιποῦσαι δώματα Νυκτός,  
10 εἰς φάος, ὡσάμεναι κράτων ἄπο χειρὶ καλύπτρας.  
ἔνθα πύλαι Νυκτός τε καὶ Ἥματός εἰσι κελεύθων,  
καὶ σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάινος οὐδός·  
αὐταὶ δ' αἰθέριαι πληνται μέγαλοισι θυρέτροις·  
τῶν δὲ Δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς.
- 15 τὴν δὴ παρφάμεναι κοῦραι μαλακοῖσι λόγοισιν  
πεῖσαν ἐπιφραδέως, ὡς σφιν βαλανωτὸν ὄχηα  
ἀπτερέως ὥσειε πυλέων ἄπο· ταὶ δὲ θυρέτρων  
χάσμ' ἀχαιῆς ποίησαν ἀναπτάμεναι πολυχάλκους  
ἄξοντας ἐν σύριγγιν ἀμοιβαδὸν εἰλίξασαι  
20 γόμφοις καὶ περόνησις ἀρηρότε· τῆι ῥα δι' αὐτέωιν  
ἴθυσ ἔχον κοῦραι κατ' ἀμαξιτὸν ἄρμα καὶ ἵππους.  
καὶ με θεὰ πρόφρων ὑπεδέξατο, χεῖρα δὲ χειρὶ  
δεξιτερῆν ἔλεν, ὧδε δ' ἔπος φάτο καὶ με προσηύδα·  
ὦ κοῦρ' ἀθανάτοισι συνάορος ἠμιόχοισιν,  
25 ἵπποις ταί σε φέρουσιν ἰκανῶν ἡμέτερον δῶ,  
χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὔτι σε μοῖρα κακῆ προὔπεμπε νέεσθαι  
τήνδ' ὁδόν (ἧ γὰρ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν),  
ἀλλὰ θέμις τε δίκη τε. χρεῶ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι  
ἡμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμῆς ἧτορ  
30 ἡδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθῆς.  
ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεται, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα  
χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.

PROEM  
Fragment 1  
(verses 1-32)

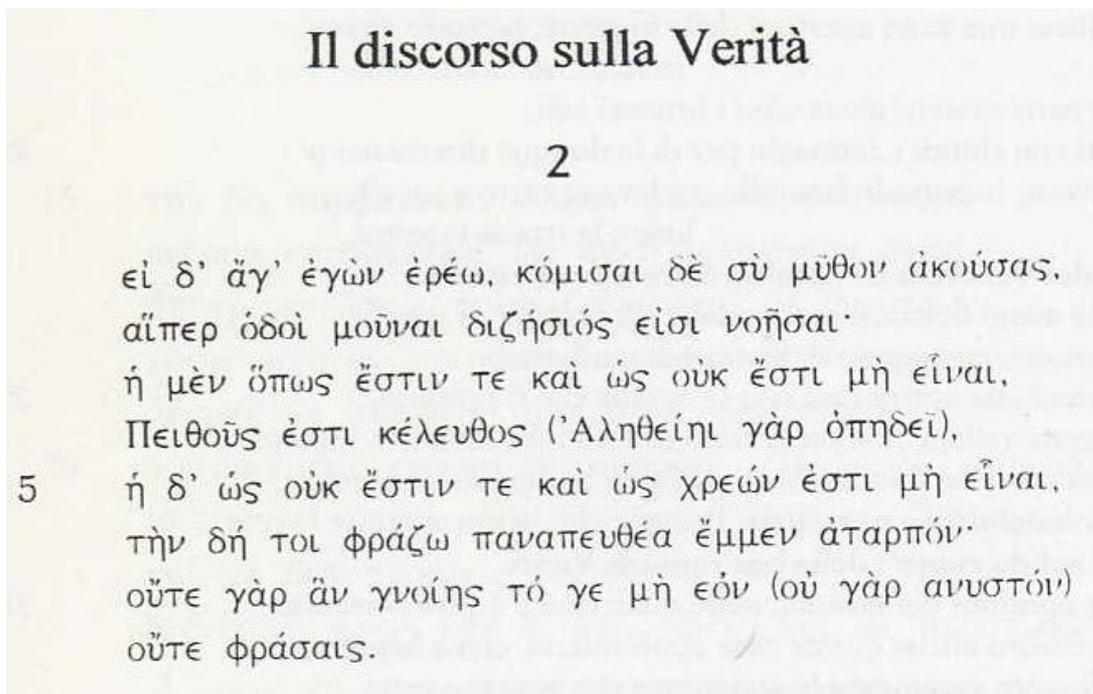
Translation

The mares that carry me until where my mind desires to go  
transported me after leaving and brought me toward the way with many voices,  
that belongs to the deity, that leads to all the places the man who knows;  
I was carried there; there in fact the wise mares brought me  
pulling the chariot, and maidens showed the way. 5  
The axis in the hubs emitted a squeal of the concave part,  
inflaming (in fact it was pressed on both sides  
by two well-worked circles), whenever the maidens, daughters of the Sun,  
accelerated the race, after leaving the houses of the Night,  
towards the light, removing with the hand the veils from their heads. 10  
There is the gate that divides the paths of Night and Day,  
and a lintel and a threshold of stone delimit it from above and below;  
it, erected in the ether, is closed by large shutters:  
of it Justice, which punishes severely, holds the keys that open and close.  
The maidens then persuading her with sweet words 15  
convinced her to carefully remove for them the bar of the bolt  
quickly from the gate: this, opening,  
produced a wide gap between the shutters, by turning - in mutual relationship  
in the concave parts of the hinges - the bronze axes  
fastened with nails and clasps: beyond so directly 20  
through the gate the maidens drove chariot and mares across the great road.  
And the benevolent goddess welcomed me, and took with her hand  
my right hand, and so she spoke to me:  
Oh young man, fellow-traveler of immortal drivers,  
who come to our house with the mares that take you, 25  
rejoice, because not a bad fate has sent you to follow  
this way (in fact it is out of the path of men),  
but divine will and justice. It is necessary that you learn  
both the solid hearth of well-rounded Truth  
and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no real certainty. 30  
But you will learn these things also, how should be really  
the appearances that pass all continuously.

Paraphrase of fragment 1

My philosophical and poetic inspiration, my imagination and my intelligence,  
which are able to bring, as fast mares, my mind until where my heart desires,  
led me to the way, which belongs to the deity, which leads the man who knows  
and who researches knowledge to know everything.

My inspiration took me, and the maidens, daughters of the Sun,  
illuminated my path of rational search for Truth.  
They took me from the houses of the Night and of human ignorance  
into the light of the Day and of divine knowledge. They guided me  
to the giant gate that divides the paths of Night and Day;  
Divine Law that governs the world holds the keys of the gate.  
The maidens, daughters of the Sun, convinced that divine guardian of the gate  
to open it for us: so I could access the divine knowledge.  
The Queen of the Gods greeted me kindly and so told me:  
Oh young man, who - led by inspiration and by the light of knowledge -  
reach our house, rejoice, because not a bad fate  
has sent you to follow this path (it is in fact out of the path of men),  
but divine will and justice.  
It is necessary that you learn all things,  
both the Truth known only by the Gods  
and the opinions of mortals, always deceptive;  
you also need how to interpret the appearances  
that continuously pass before the eyes of mortals.



### Translation

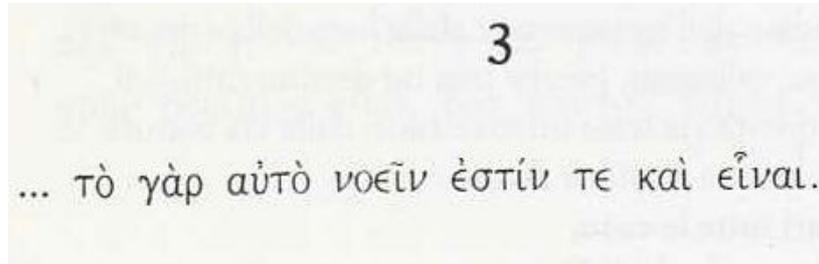
### THE SPEECH ON TRUTH

Fragment 2  
(verses 1-8)

If much I talk, you listen and accept my speech,  
which only ways of inquiry are thinkable:  
the first: that [Being] is and that it is not not-being,

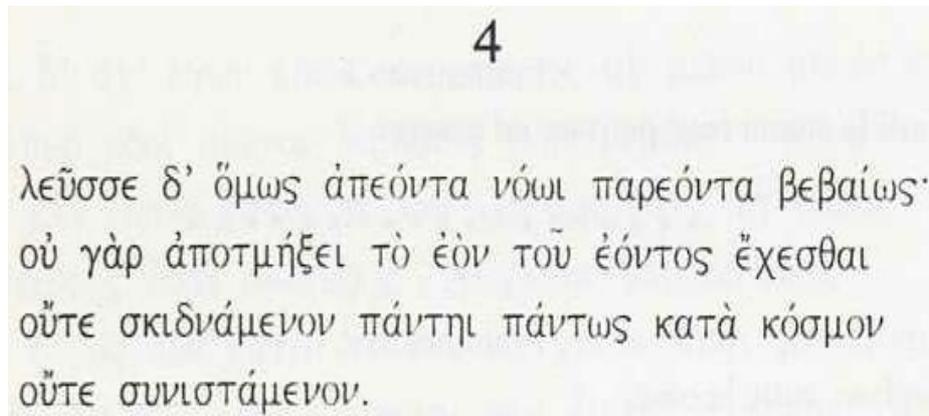
is the way of Persuasion (in fact it accompanies the Truth),  
the second: that [Being] is not and that is necessary it is not,  
I teach you that this is an entirely unknown way;  
neither in fact you could know the Non-Being (in fact it is impossible)  
nor you could express it.

5



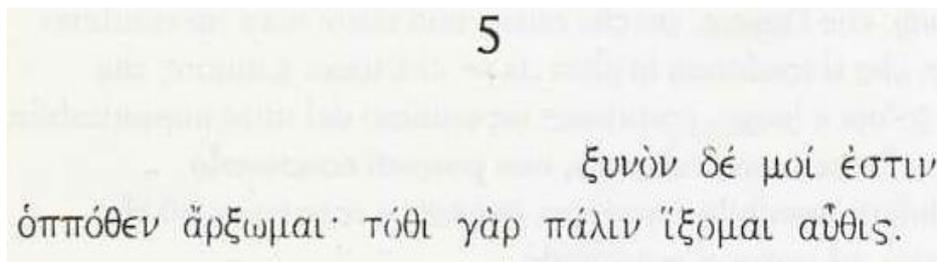
Fragment 3

... in fact it is the same to think and to be.



Fragment 4  
(verses 1-4)

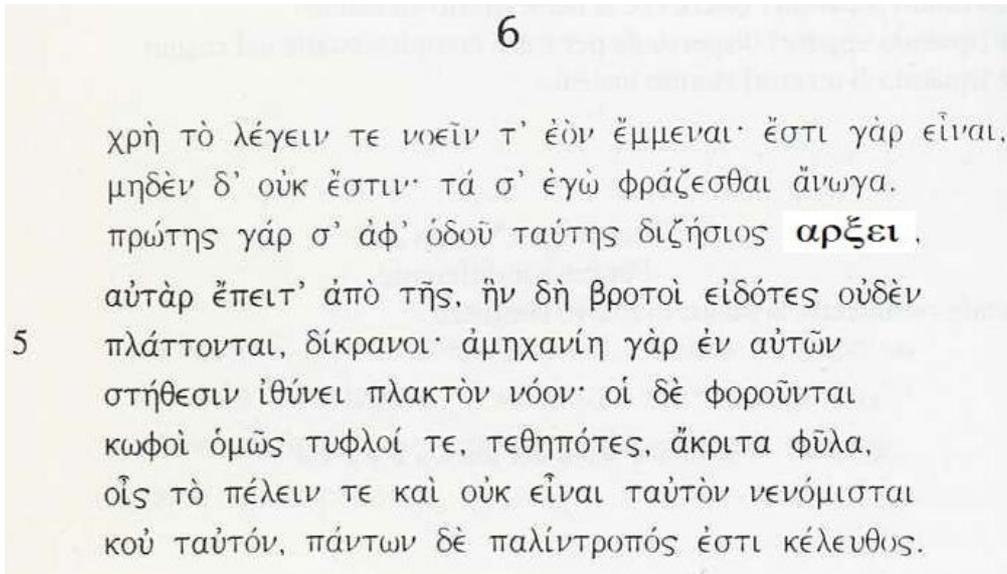
Consider how far things have a strong presence to mind:  
in fact [the mind] will not separate the being which holds narrow to the being  
either [when it appears] fully scattered everywhere in the cosmos  
or [when it appears] joined together.



Fragment 5  
(verses 1-2)

To me it does not matter

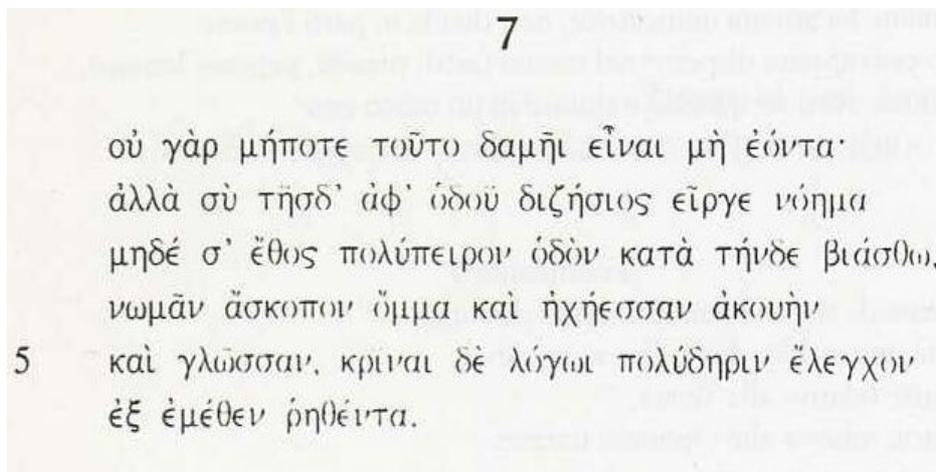
whence I will begin: in fact there I will return again.



Fragment 6  
(verses 1-9)

It is necessary to say and think that Being is;  
nothingness is not: I order you to declare these things.  
In fact you'll begin from this first way of inquiry,  
but then from that invented by mortals who know nothing,  
men with two heads: the uncertainty in fact guides  
in their hearts the wandering mind: and they are dragged,  
stupid and also obtuse, astonished, confused races,  
for which Being and Non-Being are regarded as the same thing  
and not the same thing, and the walk of all things is reversible.

5

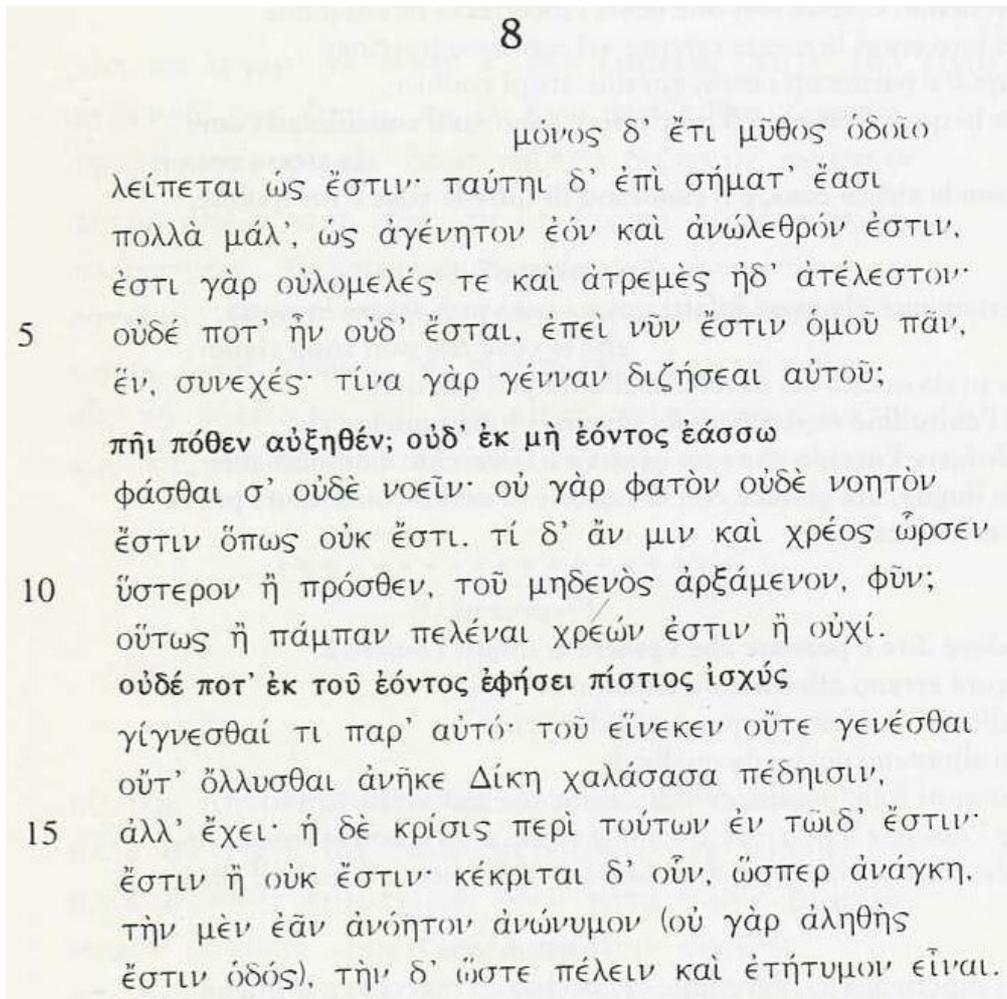


Fragment 7  
(verses 1-6)

Certainly this thing can never be imposed, that there are things that are not:

but you remove your thought from this way of inquiry  
nor long habit push you along this way,  
to direct the eye that does not look and the resounding ear  
and the tongue, but judge by reasoning the hard-fought proof  
exhibited by me.

5



Fragment 8  
(verses 1-61)

Remains still an only speech of the way

[what says] It is: on this [way] there are many  
signs, that Being is not-generated and undying,  
entire and motionless and endless;

not sometimes it was nor sometimes it will be, because it is now, whole together,  
one, continuous: which origin in fact will you search of it? 5

How and whence would it grow? From Non-Being I will not allow you  
to say or to think: in fact What Is Not is absolutely

unutterable and unthinkable. What necessity would push it,  
if it originated from nothing, to be born after or before? 10

So it is necessary or that it is entirely or that it is not at all.

Never force of certainty will concede that from Being something arises next to it: because of this the Justice did not allow it to be born or to die loosening it from the chains, but she holds it still; choice about these things is this: is or is not; it was therefore decided, as is necessary, to abandon an unthinkable and unutterable way (in fact it is not the way of Truth), and that the other really exists.

15

πῶς δ' ἂν ἔπειτα πέλοι τὸ εἶναι; πῶς δ' ἂν κε γένοιτο;  
20 εἰ γὰρ ἔγειν', οὐκ ἔστ', οὐδ' εἴ ποτε μέλλει ἔσεσθαι  
τῶς γένεσις μὲν ἀπέσβεσται καὶ ἄπυστος ὄλεθρος.  
οὐδὲ διαιρετόν ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἐστὶν ὁμοίον·  
οὐδέ τι τῆι μάλλον, τό κεν εἴργοι μιν συνέχεσθαι,  
οὐδέ τι χειρότερον, πᾶν δ' ἔμπλεόν ἐστιν εἶντος.  
25 τῶι ξυνεχὲς πᾶν ἐστὶν· εἶν γὰρ εἶντι πελάζει.  
αὐτὰρ ἀκίνητον μεγάλων ἐν πείρασι δεσμῶν  
ἔστιν ἀναρχὸν ἄπυστον, ἐπεὶ γένεσις καὶ ὄλεθρος  
τῆλε μάλ' ἐπλάχθησαν, ἀπῶσε δὲ πίστις ἀληθῆς.  
ταῦτόν τ' ἐν ταῦτῳ τε μένει καθ' ἑαυτὸ τε κεῖται  
30 χούτως ἔμπεδον αὐτῷ μένει· κρατερὴ γὰρ Ἀνάγκη  
πέρατος ἐν δεσμοῖσιν ἔχει, τό μιν ἀμφὶς ἔεργει,  
οὐνεκεν οὐκ ἀτελεύτητον τὸ εἶναι θέμις εἶναι·  
ἔστι γὰρ οὐκ ἐπιδευές· εἶν δ' ἂν παντὸς ἐδεῖτο.

How might Being arise later? How could it be born?

In fact, if it was born, it is not, nor it is if is going to be.

20

Thus the birth is off and the death is unknown.

Neither it is divided, because it is all homogeneous:

neither there is somewhere a more [of being], which can prevent it from being united, nor a less, but it is all full of being.

So it is all continuous: being in fact approaches to being.

25

But motionless within the limits of great bonds,

it is without a beginning and without an end, since the birth and death were rejected very far, a real certainty expelled them.

And remaining the same in the same place, it lies in itself and so it remains here steady: in fact the hard Necessity

30

holds it in the bonds of the limit, shuts it around,

since it is established that Being is complete:

in fact it does not need anything; otherwise it would lack everything.

ταῦτόν δ' ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ οὐνεκεν ἔστι νόημα.  
35 οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐν ᾧ πεφατισμένον ἐστίν,  
εὐρήσεις τὸ νοεῖν· οὐδὲν γὰρ <ἦ> ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται  
ἄλλο πάρεξ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐπεὶ τό γε Μοῖρ' ἐπέδησεν

Thinking and that because of there is thinking are the same thing.  
In fact without Being, in which it is expressed,  
you will not find thinking: in fact nothing else exists or will exist  
outside of Being, as the Fate forced it

35

οὐλον ἀκίνητόν τ' ἔμεναι· τῷ πάντ' ὄνομ(α) ἔσται,  
ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ,  
40 γίγνεσθαί τε καὶ ὄλλυσθαι, εἶναί τε καὶ οὐχί,  
καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διὰ τε χροῖα φανὸν ἀμείβειν.  
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πείρας πύματον, τετελεσμένον ἐστί,  
πάντοθεν εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκωι,  
μεσσόθεν ἰσοπαλὲς πάντη· τὸ γὰρ οὔτε τι μείζον'  
45 οὔτε τι βαιότερον πελέναι χρεόν ἐστί τῆι ἢ τῆι.

to be whole and motionless; to this One so many names will be assigned  
as many are the things that mortals proposed, believing that they were true,  
that they were born and perish, that they exist and do not exist,  
that they changed the place and their bright color.

40

But since there is an extreme limit, it is limited,  
on all sides like the mass of well-rounded sphere,  
from the center equal in every part: in fact it is necessary  
that it is not larger nor smaller in one part or another.

45

οὔτε γὰρ οὐκ ἐόν ἔστι, τό κεν παύοι μιν ἰκνεῖσθαι  
εἰς ὁμόν, οὔτ' ἐὼν ἔστιν ὅπως εἶη κεν ἐόντος  
τῆι μᾶλλον τῆι ἥσσον, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἔστιν ἄσυλον,  
οἷ γὰρ πάντοθεν ἴσον, ὁμῶς ἐν πείρασι κύρει.  
50 ἐν τῷ σοι παύω πιστὸν λόγον ἠδὲ νόημα  
ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης· δόξας δ' ἀπὸ τοῦδε βροτείας  
μάνθαιε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούοι.

Neither indeed there is a Non-Being, which can make it desist from coming to be the same [across all its surface], nor it is possible that Being belongs to Being more here and less there, since it is all not forced:

in fact equal on all sides to itself, equally it touches the borders.

Now I interrupt the trustworthy speech and reflection about truth: henceforth learn the opinions of mortals listening to the deceptive construction of my words.

50

## THE SPEECH ON OPINIONS

### Il discorso sull'Opinione

μορφὰς γὰρ κατέθεντο δύο γνώμας ὀνομάζειν,  
τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεῶν ἔστιν - ἐν ᾧ πεπλανημένοι εἰσὶν -  
55 τὰντία δ' ἐκρίναντο δέμας καὶ σήματ' ἔθεντο  
χωρὶς ἀπ' ἀλλήλων, τῆι μὲν φλογὸς αἰθέριον πῦρ,  
ἥπιον ὄν, μέγ' ἐλαφρόν, ἑωυτῶι πάντοσε τωῦτόν,  
τῶι δ' ἑτέρωι μὴ τωῦτόν· ἀτὰρ κάκεῖνο κατ' αὐτὸ  
τὰντία νύκτ' ἀδαῆ, πυκινὸν δέμας ἐμβριθές τε.  
60 τόν σοι ἐγὼ διάκοσμον εοικότα πάντα φατίζω,  
ὥς οὐ μὴ ποτέ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη παρελάσσει.

In fact they proposed to call "forms" two opinions,  
one of which is not necessary - in this they were wrong -  
and they distinguished them as opposite things and assigned names to them  
separately from each other, on the one hand the celestial fire of the flame [of the sun]  
which is benign, light, identical to itself in every part,  
but not identical to the other; but [they suggested] also the other thing on its own  
as opposite things, the dark night, dense and heavy body.

55

To you I completely expose the likely cosmic order  
so some opinion of mortals will never surpass you.

60

αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ πάντα φάος καὶ νύξ ὀνόμασται  
καὶ τὰ κατὰ σφετέρας δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τοῖσί τε καὶ τοῖς,  
πᾶν πλέον ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ φάεος καὶ νυκτὸς ἀφάντου  
ἴσων ἀμφοτέρων, ἐπεὶ οὐδετέρωι μέτα μηδέν.

Fragment 9  
(verses 1-4)

But since all entities are named light and night  
and these two, according to their powers, [are applied] to these or those,  
everything is full at the same time of light and dark night  
of both in the right proportions, since, if neither the one nor the other is present,  
there is nothing.

Paraphrase of difficult verses of fragments 8 and 9

Verses 8,5-15

Being not sometimes in the past was and then it was over,  
not sometimes in the future will begin to be but now is not,  
but it exists now, all together, one, continuous.

Being can be born neither from Non-Being, that is, from nothingness,  
because Non-Being does not exist and is unthinkable and unutterable,  
nor can be born from Being: if Being beget another being beside itself,  
there would be a quantity of being greater than before;  
so this more of being, this part of being born now, would appear "ex novo",  
so - although deriving from Being - would emerge however from nothingness,  
from Non-Being. Therefore the divine law did not allow it to be born or to die,  
but keeps it still tying with chains.

Verse 8,20

In fact, if it was born, it is not existing forever; and it is not existing forever, if it is going to be born.

Verses 8,22-25

In these verses Parmenides affirms the continuity of Being inside itself:  
it is not internally divided by parts of itself apparently more concentrated  
(such as a wall or a mountain) or by parts of itself that seem to be less dense  
(such as air): Being is homogeneous, of the same density everywhere.

Verses 8,42-49

These verses are not a repetition of the previous concept of the verses 8,22-25.

Here Parmenides no longer speaks of the homogeneity and continuity of Being inside itself, but of the uniformity of its outer surface. Its outer surface is not more protruding at one point and less in another, because outside of Being there is no other thing that can "force" it, that is: a) press on its surface, producing projections or recesses on it depending on the lesser or greater pressure exerted on it, or b) despoil it of a part.

Therefore, Being can freely press from the inside to the surface of the sphere and of its own border with equal pressure from all sides: therefore it resembles a sphere.

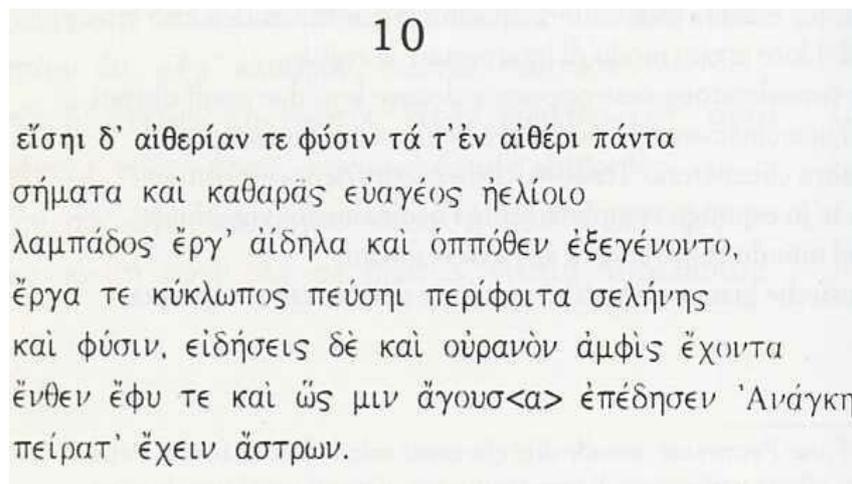
#### Verses 8,53-59

In fact, since ancient times men individuated two opinions, two appearances, and mistakenly believed that they were two real entities, whereas it was only one - at that time historically their mistake and their wrong way of interpreting reality began -, regarded them as opposite things and gave them two distinct names, and called the one Light, which is benign and very slight, the other called Darkness, which is dark, dense and heavy.

#### Fragment 9

But since - according to human opinion - all the entities are made of light and darkness, and these, mixing in various proportions, constitute them, all things are made of light and darkness, because, if both were absent, there would be nothing.

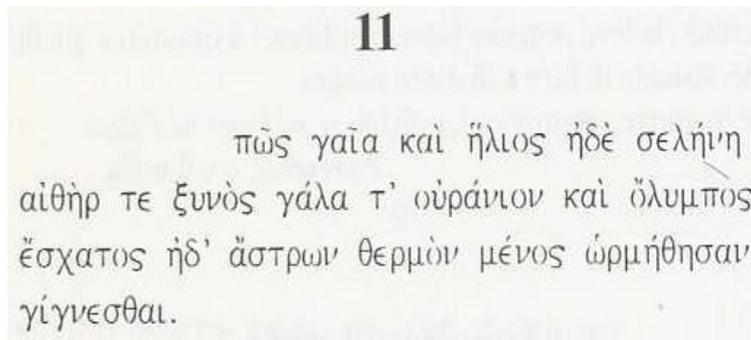
#### Translation



#### Fragment 10 (verses 1-7)

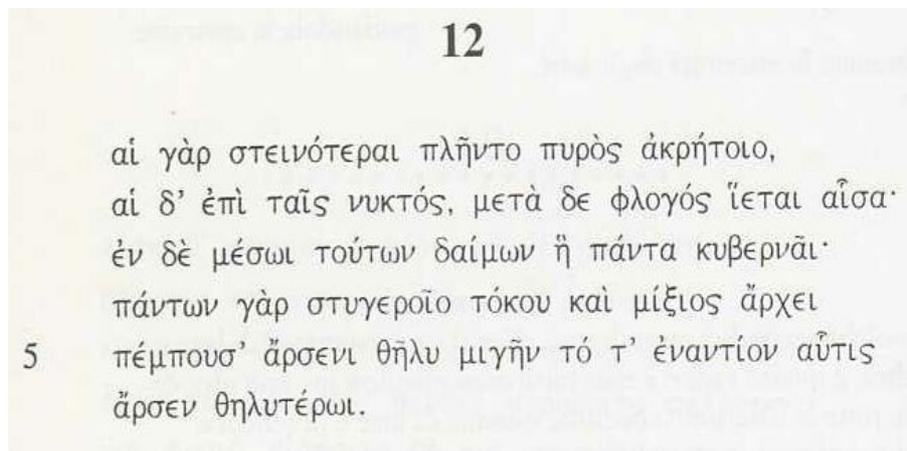
You will know the nature of heaven and all the constellations in the sky and the unseen works of pure and shining torch of the sun, and from where they derived, and you will learn the wandering works of the round-shaped moon

and its nature, also you will know from where was born  
the sky that surrounds everything and how Necessity guiding it  
forced it to support the extremities of the stars.



Fragment 11  
(verses 1-4)

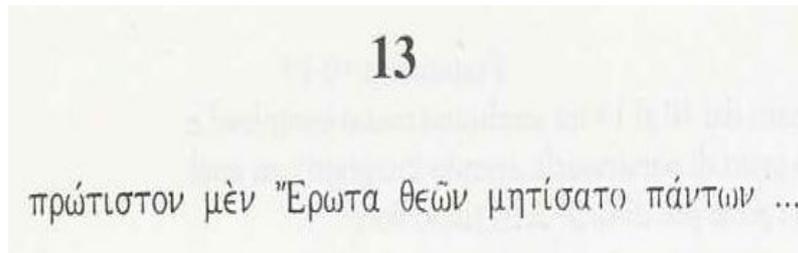
How the earth and the sun and the moon  
and the ether common to all and the heavenly Milk Way  
and the high Olympus and the hot strength of the stars were forced  
to be born.



Fragment 12  
(verses 1-6)

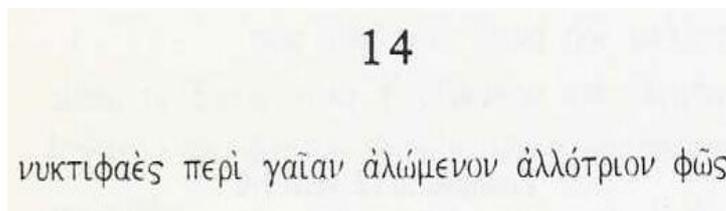
In fact the lowest [celestial spheres] were filled with pure fire,  
the other above these [were filled] with darkness, but there infiltrates a portion of the  
flame;  
among these [spheres] is the goddess who governs everything:  
she rules all things, the terrible childbirth and sexual union  
pushing what is feminine to join what is male and again mutually

what is male to join what is feminine.



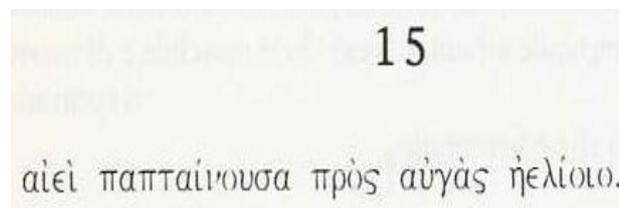
Fragment 13

[the Goddess] produced with the mind Love first of all the gods...



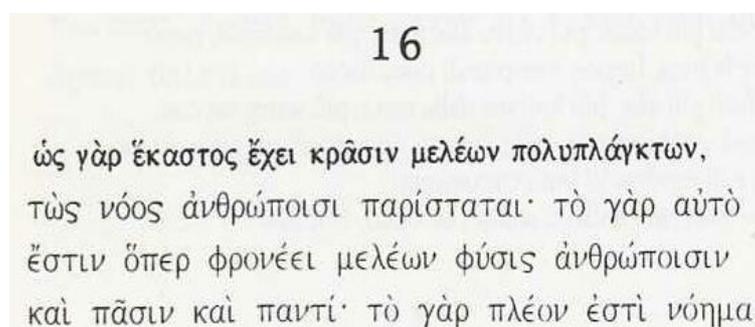
Fragment 14

[the moon] reflected light shining by night wandering around the earth



Fragment 15

[the moon] always looking towards the rays of the sun



Fragment 16

(verses 1-4)

In fact as each man governs a mixture of organs subject to errors,  
so a mind governs men; in fact the same  
thinking thing in men, both in all and in each,  
is the structural substance of the organs, whose main part is the thought.

17

δεξιτεροῖσιν μὲν κούρους, λαιοῖσιν δὲ κούρας ...

Fragment 17

[in the uterus] on the right males, and females on the left...

18

*femina virque simul Veneris cum germina miscent,  
venis informans diverso ex sanguine virtus  
temperiem servans bene condita corpora fingit.  
nam si virtutes permixto semine pugnent  
nec faciant unam permixto in corpore, dirae  
nascentem gemino vexabunt semine sexum.*

Fragment 18

(verses 1-6)

When the female and the male mix together the seeds of Venus,  
the shaping force in the veins from different blood,  
if maintains a proportionate mix, forms well built bodies.  
If instead the forces, when the seeds are mixed, contrast between them  
and do not form a unit in the body formed of a mixture, terrible  
will torment the nascent sex because of the dual seed.

19

οὕτω τοι κατὰ δόξαν ἔφην τάδε καὶ νυν ἔασιν  
καὶ μετέπειτ' ἀπὸ τοῦδε τελευτήσουσι τραφέντα·  
τοῖς δ' ὄνομ' ἄνθρωποι κατέθεντ' ἐπίσημον ἑκάστωι.

Fragment 19

(verses 1-3)

So according to the opinion these things were born and now are  
and then henceforth, after being grown, will die:  
men imposed a marked name on each of them.