

## THE CRITICS ON LIGHT AND PARMENIDES

To the present time there has been no real consensus of opinion regarding the definition or place of Light in the extant fragments of Parmenides. In fact, ever since Diels began working on the problem in the late 1890s, attempts at definition have generally ended in confusion and overzealous speculation. Diels himself acknowledged that everything rested on the proper understanding of the proem and saw clearly that Parmenides as a poet was taking himself and us «into the aether of pure Reason» («in den Aether der reinen Vernunft»)<sup>1</sup>. The general method which Parmenides supposedly used, however, was for Diels that of allegory<sup>2</sup>. For him Light as an allegorical phenomenon could be easily manipulated in the hands of both philosopher and critic to establish the «proper» intellectual equivalents between Being and Light. Diels' interpretation was facile and gave rise to even more extended considerations of the allegorical variety. The most famous is, no doubt, that of Bowra who argues that the proem is plain and simple allegory itself<sup>3</sup>. In his opinion Parmenides regarded knowledge as a kind of «enlightenment»<sup>4</sup> for «in his view the more light a thing possesses the higher it is in the scale of things. The realm of his goddess is the realm of day — «the highest of all states.»<sup>5</sup>. Bowra tells us that Parmenides makes use of allegory and the obvious imagery of darkness and light on an «easily understood» level<sup>6</sup>. But in the end Bowra limits Parmenides' use of Light solely to allegory, for he claims that when Parmenides comes to his real philosophical tasks, the allegory breaks down altogether<sup>7</sup>. Vlastos at a later date also adopts the allegorical point of view, claiming that the chariot and sunmaidens described in the proem are allegorical phenomena that may be juxtaposed facily with certain features of Parmenides' theory of knowledge<sup>8</sup>. Although it must be said that in the course of his argument Vlastos does indeed make some interesting observations on the relationship between light, memory, and sensation<sup>9</sup>, he in the end, like Bowra, obscures the question by arguing that the proem and hence the logic and physics of the Parmenidian worldview can be understood only with reference to its «affinity to mystical religion»<sup>10</sup> — thereby extending what some might consider to be the ultimate allegory into the total Parmenidian corpus.

1. H. Diels, *Parmenides Lehrgedicht* (Berlin 1897), pp. 7—8.

2. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 46ff.

3. C. M. Bowra, «The Proem of Parmenides», *CP* 32 (1937), 97—112.

4. *Ibid.*, 100.

5. *Ibid.*, 111—112.

6. *Ibid.*, 99.

7. *Ibid.*, 98.

8. G. Vlastos, «Parmenides' Theory of Knowledge», *TAPA* 77 (1946), 73.

9. *Ibid.*, 68: «Memory is a power of the living, wide-awake soul; as such it depends on the excess of light. Sensation, on the other hand, depends on light and darkness in any ratio whatever.» See also 73: «So infallibly secure judgement must have for its base not merely «more» light, but all light.»

10. *Ibid.*, 75. See also 76: «Thus the philosophy of Parmenides is a strange blend of mysticism and logic.»

The latest book on Parmenides also argues the case for allegory<sup>11</sup>, and here too Mourelatos is forced, just as were Bowra and Vlastos in other ways, to establish a disjunction between poetry and philosophy. The «real» Parmenides tends to appear when one extricates oneself from the allegory of the proem and enters the «philosophy» of the poem proper<sup>12</sup>. Mourelatos endeavors to argue that Parmenides is dependent upon «analogy», «allegory», and «metaphor» for very specific operations of his cognitive quest<sup>13</sup>. It is significant, I think, that he must, in the end, return to Diel's point of view and state that the earlier critic's «conception of the relation of Parmenides to the poetic tradition before him remains essentially correct.»<sup>14</sup> Once allegory is taken for granted, the distinction between poetry and philosophy becomes unavoidable. Then too one should note, I think, that to regard Light and Dark in terms of allegory is to reduce the logical and poetic powers of these two phenomena to a simplistic and superficial symbolism bordering on mere imagery. Yet, the question must arise whether or not Parmenides necessarily sees the world from an allegorical point of view and, hence, whether or not the disjunction between poetry and philosophy is a necessary premise for Parmenidian thought<sup>15</sup>.

It should not be taken for granted that the allegorical interpretation of Light has always been considered a *sine qua non* of Parmenidian studies. Even Kranz, who in many ways<sup>4</sup> is a strict interpreter by allegory<sup>16</sup>, notes that «der Gegensatz von Licht und Finsternis gibt dem Proömium seinen tiefsten Gehalt»<sup>17</sup>. It was evidently clear to Kranz that somewhere behind, underneath, or above the allegory of Light and Dark lay a basic regulatory device or logic. He perceptively stated this unknown in terms of opposition. Yet, much more was left to be said for the strange phenomena of Light and Dark in Parmenides.

Kart Reinhardt in 1916 produced a work that to date is still, in my opinion, an extremely valuable contribution towards a solution of the Parmenidian «Light-

11. A. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (New Haven 1970), p. 32; p. 40: «The suggestion has also been made, and I find it attractive, that in the fact that the chariot goes 'through' the gate, where the routes of Day and Night meet, and on to something described as a 'chasm' and a 'highway', we are to see an allegory of mind's vision *beyond* the interplay and mixture of the cosmic forms of 'Light' and 'Night' 'toward the unqualified simplicity of what-is or truth.'»

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 34 ff. See especially pp. 39—40.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 46: «The *logos* of prose would not have been a live option for one whose very concept of knowing was based on an analogy with 'questing' and 'journeying,' whose concept of logical-metaphysical necessity was in the process of being formulated on the model of the theme of Fate-Constraint.»

14. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

15. For an extended examination of the «allegorical interpretation» of Parmenides, see J. Mansfeld, *Die Offenbarung des Parmenides und die menschliche Welt* (Assen 1964), pp 223 ff.

16. W. Kranz, «Über Aufbau und Bedeutung des parmenideischen Gedichtes,» *SPA II* (1916), 1159 ff., where he argues a straight allegorical interpretation of specific gestures mentioned in the proem. See also p. 1165 where he apparently argues a strict allegorical-symbolic identity between Light, Being, and Truth and Night, Wandering, and Not-Being: «Das Licht ist, weil gleich der Wahrheit, auch gleich dem Seienden, die Nacht, weil gleich dem Irrtum, auch gleich dem Nichtseienden.»

17. *Ibid.*, 1164.

problem»<sup>18</sup>. To begin with, he looked upon the pre-Socratic's use of Light and Dark as an opposition directly related to the most primaeval representations of these phenomena<sup>19</sup>. (This point was later examined more closely by Verdenius who noted that the contrast of Light and Darkness was not confined to Parmenides or, for that matter, even to the Pythagorians<sup>20</sup>.) Reinhardt sketched clearly the extent of these ancient powers in the realm of Appearance — that is, the realm regarded by Parmenides as that of *Doxa*. Light and Darkness are no mere allegorical trappings found dwelling in the poem alone; they take firm root in quite another sense in the poem itself. And they are not only found in the World of Appearance because Light is directly related, as Reinhardt understands it, to the origin of things, positiveness, and Being<sup>21</sup>. It is at this point, however, that Reinhardt makes what I consider to be a major error: he endeavors to describe an opposition to Being in terms of Light-Dark that I can find nowhere suggested in the extant fragments of Parmenides. Darkness, he claims, is related to the negative elements opposed to Being. He endeavors, in effect, to draw the realm of Being as Light back into the realm of Appearance in an attempt, as he says, to represent a world of *Doxa* that is truly a total «mortal Reality»<sup>22</sup>. Parmenides would not, I think, have approved: *meden d' ouk estin* (6. 2). He certainly would have wondered at Reinhardt's particular, triadic formulation of a mixture of Light and Dark constituted at the one end of an unintermediated realm of Light and at the other of an unintermediated realm of Darkness — Light and Dark here in total opposition<sup>23</sup>. Reinhardt turned our minds away from allegory but also overextended the polar logic of opposition which Kranz was first to observe.

Hermann Fränkel was not so easily deceived in the matter of Light in the Parmenidian poem. First he noted that Light changes when it is in polar opposition to Night; he refused to identify light in the World of *Doxa* with the light of Being in the real world<sup>24</sup>. The negative law of the Parmenidian universe

18. Karl Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (Bonn 1916). The following references are from the second edition, the 1957 Göttingen printing.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 14: «... denn die beiden Gegensatzpaare fallen für Parmenides in einem einzigen Gegensatz zusammen, den der Urelemente Licht und Finsternis... der Gegensatz des Lichtes und der Finsternis und all die unzähligen Kontraste, die die Natur uns zeigt sind nur Abwandlungen und Differenzierungen jener beiden Urformen der Erscheinung.» See also W. J. Verdenius, *Parmenides: Some Comments on His Poem* (Amsterdam 1964), p. 45, who argues that in no way does the contrast of light and darkness in Parmenides' World of *Doxa* «serve as a synopsis of earlier theories and that Parmenides' handling of this principle does not suggest such a doxography either.» We are dealing here with something more pervasive than can be found in the history of literature or philosophy.

20. W. J. Verdenius, «Parmenides' Conception of Light,» *Mnemosyne*, Series 4, 2 (1949), p. 117.

21. Reinhardt, *Parmenides*, p. 20: «Das Licht ist mit dem Entstehen, mit der Bejahung, mid dem Sein verwandt...»

22. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 71: «... es ist nichts anderes als eine Übersetzung der drei logischen Kategorien ins Räumlich: an beiden Ende die Beiden unvermittelten Gegensätze, Licht und Finsternis, und in der Mitte ihre Mischung».

24. H. Fränkel, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens* (München 1968), p. 180. The chapters first appeared under the title of «Parmenides - studien,» *NGG*, 1930, 153—192.

assumes a quasi-positive worth in the World of Appearance where dark is juxtaposed to light as an equal and a second<sup>25</sup>. The dynamics of the situation rest, according to Fränkel, upon an inherent lightness of light — that is, while the mixture of light and dark in the World of Appearance remains in suspension, light rises<sup>26</sup>. Fränkel's observation of the kinds of light and his refusal to equate all light with Being further destroys the simple «interpretation by allegory.» Some have carried this insight too far, declaring that light, and therefore Light, cannot be identified with Being at all<sup>27</sup>. Yet, even so, Fränkel's observation gave rise to a much closer examination of light and dark in the realms of *Doxa* and Being, and it is from these examinations that a comprehensive statement concerning Parmenidian Light may be drawn.

In the Realm of *Doxa*, light is generally regarded to be in opposition to, and in mixture with, darkness. In other words, against a monism of Light in the World of Being, there lies a dualism of light-dark in the World of Appearance<sup>28</sup>. Verdenius, I think, is especially insightful in his comments concerning this realm. He sees the dyad of light-dark lying as a given premise of the world. Parmenides' question had to be, of course, «How could he free himself from the dualism of Light and Darkness to which mortals are fettered by nature? How could he proceed along a road which 'lies far from the beaten track of men' (frag. 1,27) and attain to the realm of pure Light in the manner described in the opening part of his poem?»<sup>29</sup> The mingling of darkness and light, therefore, becomes one of the ground principles of Parmenides' doctrine of knowing<sup>30</sup>. The poet-philosopher represents the polarity of the two phenomena in his words on the male and female (**dexiteroisin men kourous, laioisi de kouras** ... 17, see also 18). Verdenius notes too that for Parmenides the moon, ever-changing in terms of light and darkness (*alomenon allotrion phos* — 14), also symbolizes man's shifting, unsure experience in the Realm of *Doxa*<sup>31</sup>. The

25. *Ibid.*, p. 182: «Parmenides lässt das negativ Gesetzte nur in der sinnlichen Welt als Quasi-Positives gelten: neben dem Hellen steht hier das Nichthelle, das Dunkle, als ein gleiches und zweites.»

26. *Ibid.*, p. 184 in discussion of fragment 12.

27. E. g. Mansfeld, *Offenbarung*, who will go on to place Parmenides' experience entirely within the World of Appearance, denying any entrance into the Realm of Being, argues (p. 237): «Die Identifizierung des Lichts mit dem Seienden macht allerhand Schwierigkeiten ...» See also p. 254. Verdenius wavers on the issue, arguing at one point («Conception of Light,» 129—130) that «the philosopher experienced his discovery of the truth as an illumination. He even seems to have felt some connection between Light and Being, though he never identified them» and (*Parmenides*, p. 63): «There is nothing to indicate that he [Parmenides] created one of the two 'Forms' [Light or Darkness] with a higher degree of reality. There is one exception. We have seen Parmenides penetrate to the realm of Truth owing to the preponderance of Light in his mind. This does not show, however, that he imagined any relation between Light and Being.»

28. For a sensitive discussion of this point see J. Schwabl, «Sein und Doxa bei Parmenides: Zur Formung des parmenideischen Prooimions,» *WS*, 66 (1953), 52 ff.

29. Verdenius, *Parmenides*, p. 11.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 24. See also N. I. Boussoulas, «La structure du mélange dans la pensée de Parménide,» *RMM* 69 (1964), 1—12

31. Verdenius, *Parmenides*, pp. 6—8.

light of the man waxes and wanes, but, as Verdenius has so elegantly argued, «Both 'Forms,' Light and Darkness, each taken as a whole, are equal (frag. 9,4 — *ison amphoteron*); represented in any single object they do not, however, appear as being distributed in equal portions.»<sup>32</sup> No clearer statement exists of the structural perfection of Parmenides' Realm of *Doxa*.

Whose realm is this? Primarily, I think, it is the realm of all men<sup>33</sup>. But the light and darkness of *Doxa* for Parmenides has an immediate connection with *Dike*. Mansfeld has argued that *Dike* is used by Parmenides in its root sense. The I. E. root *deik-* means «to show» (G. *deiknymi*, L. *dicere*)<sup>34</sup>. The Goddess as she speaks, therefore, somehow shows Parmenides the way (*hodos*). Exactly where the «way» might be has been somewhat a matter of doubt. Mansfeld, incorrectly I think, argues that the Goddess *Dike* is pointing to the Way of Parmenides in the Realm of *Doxa*—that is, she does not lead him to the Light but to the cities of all men<sup>35</sup>. Yet, it is quite clear, on the other hand, that *Dike* is the authority set above or over the realm in which Parmenides begins his journey (l. 11—13)<sup>36</sup>. It is also clear that in the structure of the worlds of *Doxa* and *Aletheia*, it is *Dike* who stands «in between», as it were, holding the «interchanging keys (*kleidas amoibous* — l. 14) to the gates of the paths of Night and Day (*pylai Nyktos te kai Ematos ... keleuthon* — l. 9). It is this «much-punishing» (*polypoinos*) Goddess who leads or points the philosopher-poet's way through the realm of *Doxa*. This is true, but she also stands or holds her position at the very «edge» of this realm, controlling the ways of Day and Night and thereby showing or directing the poet beyond this «edge» and into the Realm of Aether, Light, or Being. She also represents the very gates of heaven—ætherial gates (*pylai aitheriai* — l. 11 and l. 13), as Parmenides describes them<sup>37</sup>. The sunmaidens become, as Verdenius so perceptively states, powers that «are the lightful element in his [Parmenides'] mind, and his journey

32. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

33. This, of course, is the primary argument of Mansfeld's book: Parmenides' experience is one of revelation (*Offenbarung*). It is impossible to have knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) before the experience of knowledge (*Erlebnis der Erkenntnis*) (*Offenbarung*, p. 227). Parmenides' experience that will eventually yield to revelation is in this world.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 264 ff. He refers among others to J. Gonda, *DEIKNYMI: Semantischestudie over den Indo-Germanschen wortel DEIK*— (Amsterdam 1929), pp. 224 ff.; L. R. Palmer, «The Indo-European Origins of Greek Justice», *Trans. Phil. Soc.* (London 1950), 149—168; E. Schwyzler, *Griechische Grammatik* (München 1939—1971), I. 459; and L. Gernet, «Sur la notion du jugement en droit grec», *Droit et société dans la Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1955), p. 68. See also É. Benveniste, *La vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris 1969), II. 107—110 and especially M. Gagarin's excellent review of the etymology in «Dike in the Works and Days», *CP* 68 (1973), 82.

35. Mansfeld, *Offenbarung*, p. 227: «Die Göttin (oder der Weg) führt den wissenden Mann nicht zum Lichts, sondern in alle Städte.»

36. See K. Deichgräber, *Parmenides' Auffahrt zur Göttin des Rechts. Untersuchungen zum Prooimion seines Lehrgedichts* (Wiesbaden 1958), p. 39: «Das Reich, in welchem die Fahrt des Philosophen sich abspielt, ist eine von der einen Göttin Dike beherrschte Welt, der Tag und Nacht untergeordnet sind.»

37. *Ibid.*, p. 33. See also Fränkel, *Wege und Formen*, p. 162, where he speaks of the «ätherische Tor des Lichts» and H. Vos, «Die Bahnen von Nacht und Tag», *Mnemosyne*, Series 4, 16 (1963), 31.

under their guidance means his gradual illumination which reached its completion in his shaking hands with the goddess of Light.»<sup>38</sup>

I have noted the «geography» of *Dike's* position previously in terms of her guardianship of the keys which in themselves are intimately connected with the Ways of Day and Night. In terms of Parmenidian Light, it has been the investigation of these Ways or *keleuthoi* that has proven most useful Vos brings to the question an examination of the Homeric description of the land of the Laestrygonians (*k* 80—86) where «near are the paths of night and day» (*engys gar nyktos te kai ematos eisi keleuthoi* — *k* 86). It is the aether, he argues, that in this case is named the paths of night and day because the Laestrygonians take up their habitat in the West where the sun, the day, and the night begin their path<sup>39</sup>. This Homeric «place» in Heaven's dome lies on the rim of Earth. This aether represents a kind of layer of air that is always bright and clear since it is above the clouds<sup>40</sup>. Vos gives proof that in antiquity this aether was always described as full of light<sup>41</sup>. Woodbury carries this investigation even further by noting the striking parallels between Pindar and Parmenides in their «aetherial comprehension». In *Ol.* 6.42—46 we are told that the gods enjoy «all their days» in Olympus, illuminated by a never-clouded, bright light<sup>42</sup>. In both poets he sees that aether and Pure Light are intimately connected with *Dike*. It is *Dike*, after all, that constrains and holds Being from becoming or from being destroyed: *tou heineken oute genesthai / ollysthai aneke Dike chalasasa pedeisin / all' echei* (8.13—15). «Right or justice is the rule of this world, but it is also the way by which the world is transcended»<sup>43</sup>

In order, then, to avoid the assured philosophical fallacy which states that because of some innate polar opposition Light represents Being and Dark, Not-Being<sup>44</sup> and in order to at last admit that the latter proposition is in no way attested in the fragments of Parmenides, it is necessary to focus one's attention upon the appearance of light and dark in the realm of *Doxa* and to the ultimate goal of light. *Dike* regulates both for men, but she most importantly gives entrée to *to eon* (Being) and «the motionless heart of well-rounded Truth» (*Aletheias eukykleos atremes etor* — 1.29). Vos, then, is essentially correct when he sees the Parmenidian journey as a movement from a deceptive mixture of light and dark to Light as Truth<sup>45</sup>. We are in no way using an analogy of Light and

38. Verdenius, «Conception of Light,» 122.

39. Vos, «Die Bahnen,» 25—26. See also my own arguments linking this area to the horizon, *Archaic Logic* (The Hague/Paris 1976), pp. 98—100.

40. Vos, «Die Bahnen,» 25.

41. *Ibid.*, 26: «Eur. *I. T.* 29, Plato *Phaedo* 109b, Verg. *Aen.* VI 640—641, Cic. *De Rep.* VI (*Somnium Sc.*) passim.»

42. L. Woodbury, «Equinox at Acragas: Pindar *Ol.* 2.61—62», *TAPA* 97 (1966), 602—603.

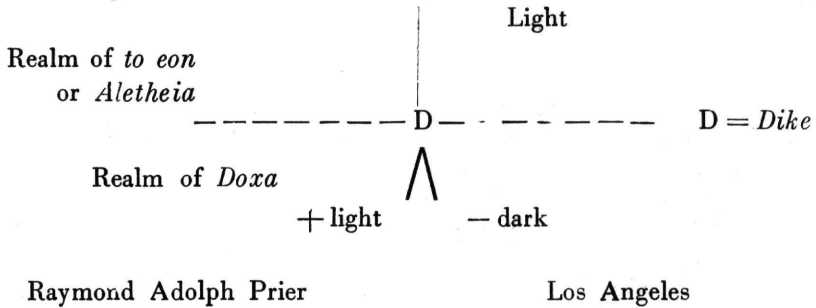
43. *Ibid.*, 615.

44. E.g. to avoid O. Gigon's major error, *Ursprung der griechischen Philosophie von Hesiod bis Parmenides* (Basel 1945), p. 247: «Die Nacht ist Repräsentant des Nichtseins, wie das Licht des Seins.» See also Kranz, «Aufbau,» 1165. In fact if one were to take the phrase *nyx aphantos* (9.3) as pertinent to this question, it would be possible to argue with perversity that Night or Dark in itself does not belong to the realm of «appearance» at all!

45. Vos, «Die Bahnen,» 32—33.

Darkness but are dealing with Light as a kind of «collected form» of «both forms,» and hence, as Schwabl so clearly states, only Being as Light must perforce come into consideration <sup>46</sup>.

In the world of *Doxa*, therefore, a vague positive possibility exists insofar as there lies there a mixture of dark *and* light — the alternating circles, as Parmenides at one point describes them, of fire and night (*hai d'epi tais nyktos, meta de phlogos hietai aisa* — 12.2). Accordingly everything here is named light and night (*panta phaos kai nux onomastai* — 9.1); the all of Appearance is full at once of light and invisible night, both in equal parts (*pan pleon estin homou phaeos kai nyktos aphantou/ison amphoteron* — 9.3-4). In the world of Being, however, the Light of which the Maidens of the Sun (1.9) are godlike representatives and beyond whose «aetherial gates» (*pylai aitheriai* — 1.11 & 13) Parmenides travels this Light is bound and regulated by *Dike* (8.13-15), just as are the ways of Night and Day in the World of *Doxa* (*ton de Dike polypoinos echei kleidas amoibous* — 1.14). It is *Dike*, then, that creates or displays the world in both of its connected forms, and this world's structure or scheme — if one wishes to turn to the obvious diagrammatic possibilities inherent in the play of Parmenidian Light — is:



<sup>46</sup>. Schwabl, «Sein und Doxa,» 54: «Als die eine, die beiden, «Gestalten» zusammenfassende «Gestalt» kommt natürlich nur das Sein in Frage....»