

## PARMENIDES AND THE GURUS

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### INTRODUCTION

In his monumental study of Greek philosophy, Professor Guthrie dismisses the profitability of comparing the thought of Parmenides with that of Hindu thinkers in a brief footnote<sup>1</sup>. The aim of this article is to show that the motives and methods of the Indian schools, and the theological and mystical background of their thought<sup>2</sup>, however different they may be from those of the Greeks, can provide new perspectives for a consideration of Parmenides. However different the sources and time-scale of Hindu thought, Hindu thinkers had wrestled with similar problems and had come to similar conclusions as Parmenides a long time before. It is suggested that far from being unprofitable a comparison of the life and thoughts of Parmenides with the typical life and similar thoughts of Indian sages can help our understanding of some of the difficulties involved in evaluating Parmenides.

### Relevant Features of Hinduism

The corpus of Hindu philosophical literature is both vast and variegated in content. There are few problems and questions raised by philosophers in the West which have not been raised by the Hindu sages. As in the West, there have been a rich variety of schools of thought in India — metaphysical idealism, scepticism, naturalism, materialism, etc — and conflicts between these schools.

The mould of Hindu thought was formed in the Vedic period, which can be placed approximately between 2,500 and 600 B. C. During this period, there was a movement of thought out of polytheism through henotheism to a non-theistic monism, most fully developed in the Upanishads. The Upanishads, while being part of the Vedic religion, represent the meditations of philosophers bent on the search for the true nature of Reality, including the true nature of the Self. To these philosophers, reality was ultimately one and ultimately spiritual, or at least non-material. Reason is used extensively in this search but in the end to know the truth the philosopher must realize it in actual experience.

To the philosopher, in the Upanishads, reason can demonstrate the truth but cannot discover it. The word which most aptly describes philosophy in India is *darsana*, which comes from the verbal root *drś* meaning «to see». «To see» is to have a direct intuitive experience of the object, or rather to realize it in the sense of becoming one with it<sup>3</sup>. The second period of philosophical development was from 600 B.C. to A.D. 200. It was in this period that the Bhagavad-Gita was written and the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy began to develop along systematic lines. It was also the period of the great schisms within Hinduism that gave birth to both Buddhism and Jainism. This was fol-

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1) A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol. II, pp. 53.

2) Ibid. footnote 1.

3) Redhakrishman & Moore; «A Source Book in Indian Philosophy», p. xxiii - xxiv.

lowed by the Sūtra period in which philosophical discussion continued to be carried out on a more systematic and logical basis, and an atomic theory of matter was evolved.

(a) *The Philosopher's Way of Life*

The bond between philosophy and religion was very close, since the objective of the search for truth was *moksha* or liberation. To obtain liberation, there were three ways — the way of Karma or good works, the way of Bhakti or Devotion and the way of Jnana or Knowledge. This third way -- the way of Jnana was the philosopher's way and involved becoming a student or follower of a great teacher or guru.

The duty of the guru was to lead the student through study and meditation to a realization of the true nature of Reality. The guru invariably had his own circle of followers or disciples, and the student seriously bent on discovering the truth would become a member of what for all practical purposes was a philosophic or religious commune with its own rules and rituals. Such communes were known as *asrams* and are to be found both in India and other parts of the world today.

(b) *Reality*

In the Upanishads, reality is to be found both within man as the eternal self (*atman*) and in the external world as the eternal ground of the universe (*brahman*). Brahman and *atman* are often interchangeable.

Brahman is described in the following terms :

(i) In the beginning there was Existence, One only without a second. Some say that in the beginning there was non-existence only and that out of that the universe was born. But how could such a thing be? How could existence be born of non-existence? No, my son, in the beginning there was Existence alone — One only, without a second. He, the One, thought to himself: Let me be many, let me grow forth. Thus out of himself he projected the universe; and having projected out of himself the universe, he entered into every being. All that is has its self in him alone. Of all things, he is the subtle essence. He is the truth. He is the Self. And that, Sveta-ketu, THAT ART THOU — *Chandogya Upanishad*<sup>4</sup>.

(II) The wise understand that THAT exists everywhere beyond sight, beyond grasp, without form . . . eternal, all-pervading, ever changeable, the source of all things. As a spider spins out his web from within himself and draws it in at pleasure; or as herbs grow out of the earth; or as hairs grow out of the living man, so indeed, does evolve the Kosmos from the ever immutable One. — *Mundaka Upanishad*<sup>5</sup>.

(III) Where one sees nothing but the One, hears nothing but the One, knows nothing but the One — there is the Infinite. Where one sees another, hears another, knows another — there is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite is mortal . . . The Infinite is below, above, behind, before, to the

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4) The Upanishads — Prabhavananda and Manchester, p. 68—9.

5) Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture — P. Brunton, p. 16.

right, to the left. I am all this. The Infinite is the Self — Ch and o g y a U p a n i s h a d <sup>6</sup>.

(IV) The one absolute, impersonal Existence, together with his inscrutable Maya, appears as the divine Lord ... At the periods of creation and dissolution of the universe, He alone exists. Those who realize Him become immortal ... He alone is all this what has been and what shall be. He has become the universe. Yet He remains forever changeless, and is the lord of immortality .... — S v e t a s v a t a r a U p a n i s h a d <sup>7</sup>.

(v)           Without beginning art thou  
              Beyond time, beyond space  
              Thou art he from whom sprang  
              The three worlds. ....  
  
              There is nor day nor night  
              Nor being nor non-being  
              Thou alone art .....  
  
              Thou dost pervade the universe  
              Thou art consciousness itself,  
              Thou art creator of time.  
              All-knowing art thou ...  
  
              Thou art the Primal Being  
              Thou appearest as this universe  
              Of illusion and dream,  
              Thou art beyond time,  
              Indivisible, infinite, the Adorable One.

S v e t a s v a t a r a U p a n i s h a d <sup>8</sup>

(VI) There are, assuredly, two forms of Brahman, Time and timeless. That which is prior to the sun is the timeless; it is without parts. But that which begins with the sun is Time, and this has parts — M a i t r i U p a n i s h a d <sup>9</sup>.

The shifts between the impersonal Brahman, which «is neuter and is often simply called tat, 'That' or 'It'», and the more personal Atman and Brahma, the personified creator God, which 'are both masculine' <sup>10</sup>, may be confusing but do underline the unity of the two aspects of Reality, as conceived by the Upanishadic sages, — Brahman as both primal matter and changeless spirit. «In the Upanishads, Brahman is both changeless Being beyond space and time, the material cause of the universe and its efficient cause as well. The human soul is at one with IT in so far as, at its deepest level, it has its being outside time, but it is distinct from It in that it does not share the creative activity in time. In Western terminology, it partakes of Absolute Being, but it is not for that reason God» <sup>11</sup>.

While the characteristic features of the Brahman/Atman principle are peculiar to Hinduism and distinct from Parmenides' starker 'Being' the metaphysical status of Brahman and Parmenides' Being is very similar.

For both Parmenides and the Upanishadic sage, reality is One, indivisible, beyond time, unchangeable, without beginning or end, and uncreated.

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6) Prabhavananda and Manchester, p. 73.

7) Ibid, p. 121—123.   8) Ibid, p. 124—127.

9) Quoted by Zaehner — Hinduism, p. 72.

10) Ibid, p. 68.   11) Ibid, p. 72.

(c) *The Doctrine of Maya*

If Reality is One, indivisible, beyond time and space, unchangeable, infinite and uncreated, what are we to make of the phenomenal world of space and time, plurality, divisibility and motion?

For the Upanishadic sage, the eternal Reality of Brahman/Atman constituted the world of Being. The phenomenal world was of a different order, somewhere between Being and Non-Being. It was not Being, because it was subject to change, divisible, finite and was not absolute. It did, however, exist in the sense of being observed and being thought and was conceived metaphysically as emanating from Brahman. It was not totally unreal as it would have been had it been Non-Being. The phenomenal world belonged to the world of contingent being<sup>12</sup>. As such it was a world of appearance totally dependent on the eye and mind of the beholder. To the extent that men thought that the world of appearances constituted Reality, they were deceived—the world of appearances, the material world of everyday (prakṛti) was therefore described as *Māyā*, the ordinary meaning of which is 'deceit'.

The Upanishadic sage never went so far as to denounce the phenomenal world as false. What was false was to think that the phenomenal world was the world of Reality. To anyone who had experienced the realization of the Reality of Brahman/Atman, the reality of the phenomenal world was no less illusory than the world of dreams.

The doctrine of *māyā*, which is present in the Upanishads and is developed by the author of the *Yoga Vasishṭa*, Buddhism and Shankara, is a central feature of Hinduism and is a direct consequence of the assumption of Reality as Brahman/Atman, as the following passages help to indicate :

- (i) Now one should know that Nature is illusion  
And that the Mighty Lord is the illusion-maker<sup>13</sup>

*Svetasvatara Upanishad*

- (ii) The different objects cognized in dreams are illusory. For the same reason the objects seen in the waking state and dream ...

In dream, also, what is imagined by the mind is illusory and what is cognized outside appears to be real. But in truth, both these are known to be unreal. Similarly, in the waking state, also, what is imagined within by the mind is illusory; and what is experienced outside appears to be real. But in fact both should be held to be unreal ...<sup>14</sup>

*Mandirkyā Upanishad*

- (iii) Creatures, plants, horses, cows, men, elephants, whatever breathes, whether moving or flying and, in addition, whatsoever is immovable— all this is led by mind and is supported in mind. Mind is the final reality.

*Aitareya Upanishad*<sup>15</sup>

(Mind here is associated with Brahman/Atman as pure consciousness)<sup>16</sup>

- (iv) The whole world is merely idea. It does not exist except in thought. It arises and exists in the mind. The whole universe is the expansion of the

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12) Ibid, p. 101.

13) Brunton, p. 27.      14) Brunton, p. 27.      15) Ibid, p. 27.

16) Prabhavananda and Manchester, p. 62.



mind. It is a huge dream arisen within the mind. It is imagination alone that has assumed the forms of time, space, and movement ...

The reality of things consists in their being thought. The objective world is potentially inherent in the subject, as seeds of a lotus exist in the flower, as oil in sesamum seeds. All objects are related to the subject from which they proceed. They appear to be different from it, but are not so in reality. The world experience is nothing in reality but a dream ...

The objective world continues to be the same as it was imagined by the Lord of creatures at the beginning of creation. The world is the imagination of the Lord. It becomes as He thinks it to be. The inherent nature of objects like earth, snow, fire, etc., continues to be the same as it was imagined by the Creator ...

There is no difference between realism and idealism, for everything is ultimately of the nature of thought ... <sup>17</sup>

#### Y o g a V a s i s h t a

(v) By appearance is meant that which reveals itself to the senses and to the discriminating-mind and is perceived as form, sound, odour, taste and touch. Out of these appearances ideas are formed, such as clay, water, jar, etc. by which one says: this is such and such a thing and is not other — this is name. When appearances are contrasted and names compared, as when we say: this is an elephant, this is a horse ... or this is mind and what belongs to it — the things thus named are said to be discriminated. As these discriminations come to be seen as mutually conditioning, as empty of self-substance, as unborn, and thus come to be seen as they truly are, that is as manifestations of the mind itself — this is right knowledge. By it the wise cease to regard appearances and names as realities <sup>18</sup>.

#### L a n k a v a t a r a S u t r a (Buddhist Literature)

(vi) The proposition to be established is the illusoriness of objects that are perceived in the waking state. «Being perceived» is the ground for the inference. They are like the objects perceived to exist in dream are illusory, so also are the objects perceived in the waking state.

... The objects perceived to exist in the dream are different (when noted from the waking condition) from those perceived in the waking state in respect of their being perceived in a limited space within the body. The fact of being seen and the consequent illusoriness are common to both <sup>19</sup>.

#### S h a n k a r a C o m m e n t a r i e s

Like Parmenides, the attitudes of the Hindu sages towards the phenomenal world and their evaluation of it were probably influenced by their sense of the otherness of Reality. The nature of the world of Reality as they conceived it entailed a divorce from the day to day world of experience. The difference in the nature of the two worlds required a difference in their ontological status. Unlike Parmenides, however, the Hindu sages had a rationale to explain the difference and to bridge the gap between the two worlds. At the theological and the metaphysical level the rationale was supplied by the theory of emanation. At a more philosophical level, it was supplied by an implicit and explicit epistemology which recognized the centrality of man as the measure and within man as

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17) Brunton, p. 28—30.

18) Ibid, p. 31.

19) Ibid, p. 34—5.

the measure the centrality of pure consciousness or mind - the Atman end of Reality conceived as Brahman/Atman.

(d) *Epistemology*

The great feature of the Hindu sages of the Upanishads was their self-awareness. They were just not content with expounding or extolling Reality as they discovered it but sought with determination to establish their relationship to it as thinking sentient beings. In establishing this relationship they also established the way in which Reality could be known to men. To know Brahman, man had just to know the Atman within himself. To know the Atman involved recognizing the limits of sense perception and the world of ordinary language which correlated with the phenomenal world or Maya. To know the Atman meant discovering within oneself an unconditioned and absolutely static state of pure consciousness correlating with the pure Being of Brahman and knowing nothing of time and space. To the Hindu sage, all knowledge of time and space and knowledge of the phenomenal world of Maya was secondary to the world of Brahman, from which it was conceived as emanating. Knowledge of the Absolute within oneself parallels knowledge of Absolute Being and sets the standard whereby knowledge of the phenomenal world is differentiated from the truth.

The epistemology of the Upanishads tends to be implicit; in the Buddhist literature and Shankara it is perfectly explicit.

(i) Brahman is supreme; . . he is beyond all thought. Subtler than the subtlest is he, farther than the farthest, nearer than the nearest . . The eyes do not see him, speech cannot utter him, the senses cannot reach him . . . When through discrimination the heart has become pure, then, in meditation, the impersonal Self is revealed . . . The subtle Self within the living and breathing body is realized in that pure consciousness wherein is no duality — the consciousness by which the heart beats and the senses perform their office . . . The Self is not to be known through study of the scriptures, nor through subtlety of the intellect, nor through much learning. But by him who longs for him is he known . . . The Self is not to be known by the weak nor by the thoughtless, nor by those who do not rightly meditate. But by the rightly meditative, the thoughtful, and the strong, he is fully known <sup>20</sup>.

M u n d a k a U p a n i s h a d

(ii) Brahman can be apprehended only as knowledge itself — knowledge that is one with reality, inseparable from it. For he is beyond all proof, beyond all instruments of thought. The eternal Brahman is pure, inborn, subtler than the subtlest, greater than the greatest <sup>21</sup>. B r i h a d a r a n y a k a U p a n i s h a d

(iii) To Sanatkumara's question «What have you already studied?» Narada replied that he had studied all the branches of learning, art, science, music and philosophy, as well as the sacred scriptures. «But» said he «I have gained no peace. I have studied all this, but the Self I do not know. . . . .»

Sanatkumara said «Whatever you have read is only name. Meditate on name as Brahman.»

Narada asked: «Is there anything higher than name?» «Yes, Speech is higher than name. It is through speech that we come to know the many branches of learning, that we come to know what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is untrue, what is good and what is bad, what is pleasant and what is un-

20) Prabhavananda and Manchester, p. 47—8.

21) Ibid, p. 110.

pleasant. For if there were no speech, neither right nor wrong would be known, neither the true nor the false, neither the pleasant nor the unpleasant. Speech makes us know all this. Meditate on speech as Brahman.

«Sir, is there anything higher than speech?»

«Yes, mind is higher than speech. As the closed fist holds two amalaka fruits or two kola fruits or two atisha fruits, so does mind hold name and speech. For if a man thinks in his mind to study the sacred hymns, he studies them; if he thinks in his mind to do certain deeds, he does them; if he thinks in his mind to gain family and wealth, he gains them ... Meditate on mind as Brahman.

«Sir, is there anything higher than mind?»

«Yes, will is higher than mind. For when a man wills, he thinks in his mind; and when he thinks in his mind, he puts forth speech; and when he puts forth speech, he clothes his speech in words ... Meditate on will as Brahman.

«Sir, is there anything higher than will?»

«Yes, discriminating will is higher than will. For when a man discriminates by analysing his past experiences and considering on the basis of these what may come in the future, he rightly wills in the present. Meditate on discriminating will as Brahman.

«Sir, is there anything higher than discriminating will?»

«Yes, concentration is higher than discriminating will. Those who reach greatness here on earth reach it through concentration. Thus, while small and vulgar people are always gossiping and quarreling and for lack of concentration abusing one another, great men, possessing it, obtain their reward. Meditate on concentration as Brahman.

«Sir, is there anything higher than concentration?»

«Yes, insight is higher than concentration. Through insight we understand all branches of learning, and we understand what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false, what is good and what is bad, is pleasant and what is unpleasant. This world and other worlds we understand through insight. Meditate on insight as Brahman<sup>22</sup>».

Chandogya Upanishad

(iv) Appearance — knowledge belongs to the ignorant and simple-minded... who are frightened at the thought of being unborn ... Perfect knowledge belongs to the world of Buddhas who recognise that all things are but manifestations of mind; who clearly understand the emptiness, the unborness, the egolessness of all things ... When appearances and names are put away and all discrimination ceases, that which remains is the true and essential nature of things and as nothing can be predicted as to the nature of essence, it is called the «suchness» of reality. This universal, undifferentiated, inscrutable «suchness» is the only reality<sup>23</sup>».

Lankavatara Sutra.

(v) For when all delusions of the understanding are cast away without remainder, then the whole universe, perceived as innumerable forms through unwisdom, becomes the Eternal Reality only. The earthen jar, though it be moulded from earth, is not separate from the earth, since it is essentially earth. The form of the jar has no independent existence. What then is the jar? A name, built up as an appearance. The independent existence of the earthen jar cannot be perceived by anyone apart from the earth from which it is made; therefore the jar is built

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22) Ibid, p. 71—2.      23) Brunton, p. 32.

up as an appearance; the earth, of which it essentially consists, is the reality<sup>24</sup> —  
S h a n k a r a V i v e k a C h u d a m a n i.

The epistemology of the Hindu sages was rarely pure in the sense of being independent from overall religious motives and intentions. The Hindu's analysis of the mechanisms of human cognition was aimed at facilitating the realization of Reality and the liberation (moksha) of the individual soul from the bonds of pain and suffering derived from an attachment through ignorance to the world of senses (sansara). At the top of the Hindu equivalent of Plato's divided line was insight — above the analytic or «the discriminating will». The reason for this was not purely mystical, as some have tended to say<sup>25</sup> but because, to the Hindu, knowledge of the Absolute entailed becoming one with the Absolute and hence the elimination of the duality of subject and object. The elimination of the basic duality was recognized as being exceptional. For the most part, human knowledge depended on the use of the faculties of language, perception, cognition, attention etc. — but such knowledge was «appearance knowledge» since it was knowledge of the world of appearances. It was only when the sage realized through insight the relationships between the world of Reality and the world of appearance that he understood the reasons why x or y was right or wrong, true or false and why knowledge of x and y being right or wrong, true or false derived through language and analysis was only «appearance-knowledge».

Orthodox Hindu epistemology was undoubtedly idealistic for the most part (if one treats the Carvaka system, which assumed various forms of scepticism, materialism and atheism, as heterodox), not dissimilar to that of Berkeley and Kant. The doctrine of «esse est percipi» and the distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds, would be endorsed by the Hindu sages. The functions of Berkeley's Cosmic Thinker, is very similar to that of Brahman, and Kant's analysis of the human cognitive mechanism demonstrating the limitations imposed by the categories of the human mind is not so far removed from the Hindu realization of the limitations of the subject/object duality.

#### (e) *Summary*

The sages of the Upanishads established as a by-product of their religious endeavours and mystical experiences a coherent philosophy of Being and contingent being and a viable epistemology enabling them to explain why knowledge of contingent being was not the same as knowledge of Being. While the Upanishadic literature is not systematic and is highly poetic, there is a consistency in the exposition of Reality, the world of appearance, and the significance in the difference between them for the human being to suggest that these sages shared a rigorous and systematic body of thought and belief.

### P A R M E N I D E S

It is time now to reconsider Parmenides' life and the structure of his thought, from the standpoint of the philosophical perspectives established by the Hindu sages.

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24) Ibid, p. 35.      25) Guthrie, p. 53.

### (A) Life and religious background

Not much is known for certain of Parmenides' life. He was born around 515—10 B. C. There are only four reported facts about him <sup>26</sup>.

- (i) he was a pupil of Xenophanes ;
- (ii) he was converted to the contemplative life (εἰς ἡσυχίαν) by Amenias, the Pythagorean, whom he followed as a disciple and to whom he built a shrine on his death ;
- (iii) he legislated for his city of Elea and ensured it was well-governed ;
- (iv) he visited Athens when well advanced in years with his pupil Zeno around 450 to 445 B. C. and was met by Socrates then a young man.

Whether Parmenides was in fact a pupil of Xenophanes or not, it is more than likely that he was aware of Xenophanes' radical attack on the Homeric theological scene and his proclamation of the Unity of all Existence — *μίαν δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἦτοι ἐν τῷ ὄν καὶ πᾶν*<sup>27</sup> — and the One God beyond human experience — 'One god, greatest among gods and man, in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought'<sup>28</sup> ; 'always he remains in the same place, moving not at all ; nor is it fitting for him to go to different places at different times, but without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind'<sup>29</sup> but concentrating on the whole world he says that the One is god'<sup>30</sup>. Xenophanes' claim also to have discovered the truth about the world which was beyond most other men — the claim to a special state of enlightenment — must have marked him out as a special man 'No man knows, or ever will know, the truth about the gods and about everything I speak of: for even if one chanced to say the Complete Truth, yet oneself knows it not ; but seeming is wrought over all things (δόκος δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται)<sup>31</sup>. Most men are condemned to the world of seeming, appearances Only a few gain the privilege of enlightenment, and this they can achieve through searching'<sup>32</sup>. This sense of religious exultation is characteristic of the early Pre-Socratics and the Hindu gurus.

Parmenides' membership of the Pythagorean community must have prepared him for this own search. Although converted to the contemplative life by a Pythagorean teaching but broke out to search for Reality by himself. While his search may have been in the same direction as the Pythagoreans and Xenophanes, his discovery was uniquely his own. His fearless deductions about Being were his particular answer to the intense debate that was storming through the minds of the early thinkers of Greece about the nature of Reality and truth. Parmenides' answer was uncompromisingly total. He was utterly convinced of the truth of his discoveries and as such his declaration about the nature of Being and the world of appearances was a watershed in Greek religious and philosophical thought.

In the Prologue of his poem Parmenides shows that his search is something more than a mere intellectual endeavour. Guthrie sees the general character of the prologue as pointing to the «shamanistic» strain in early Greek religious thought<sup>33</sup>. Parmenides feels close to the gods and privileged to be led beyond the world of Night to the bright light of enlightenment — *εἰδότεα φῶτα*<sup>34</sup>. With a goddess

26) The Presocratic Philosophers — Kirk & Raven, paras. 337, 339, 340.

27) Ibid, 168. 28) Ibid, 173, 174. 29) Ibid, 177.

30) Ibid, 177. 31) Ibid, 189. 32) 191. 33) Guthrie, Ibid, p. 11.

34) Kirk & Raven, pars. 342.

as his guide, he is taken 'away from the beaten track of men'. 'Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, as the opinions of mortals in which is no true belief at all (ἡδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῦς οὐκ ἐνὶ πίστις ἀληθείας). Yet none the less shalt thou learn these things also—how, passing right through all things, one should judge the things that seem to be—ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσαιο, ὥς τὰ δοκοῦντα χρῆν δοκιμῶς εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα<sup>35</sup>.

Parmenides' later authority probably derived partly from his reputation as someone divinely inspired.

## (B) The Way of Truth

### (1) The relationship of mind to being

There are three passages in the remaining fragments of the Way of Truth which seek to relate Noein with Einai but which are not as clear as one might wish:

- (i) Τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι — Fragment 3
- (ii) Χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐὼν ἔμμεν τι· ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι, μηδὲν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν — Fragment 6
- (iii) Ταῦτόν δ' ἔστι νοεῖν τε καὶ οὔνεκεν ἔστι νόημα. οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐν ᾧ πεφατισμένον ἐστὶν εὐρήσεις τὸ νοεῖν. — Fragment 8 ε 34

There is considerable difference of opinion among scholars as to the precise meaning of these passages. Fragment 3 is often taken into the last sentence of Fragment 2, and is interpreted as a further argument for denying the existence of Non-Being. While this is indeed a possible interpretation, it involves forcing the text a little and need not be the only one.

Fragment 2 can be rendered as follows — «Come now, I will tell you . . . what the only ways of searching are for the activity of mind» — [Literally EXIST FOR THE NOUS — Greek εἶσι νοῆσαι, the old dative sense of the infinitive.] The one way, how it is and how it cannot not be, is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon Truth), the other how it is not and needs must not be — this I tell you is a wholly indiscernible path. For thou couldst not be aware (γνοίης)<sup>36</sup> of the not-being (for that is not possible) nor utter (φράσαις) it». Fragment 3 is then taken at this point as confirming the argument so far, and is translated variously as follows —

- (a) For the same thing can be thought as can be — Kirk & Raven
- (b) For it is the same thing that can be thought and can be — Guthrie
- (c) Denn Denken und Sein sind dasselbe — Mansfeld.

(a) and (b) follow Zeller and Burnet and are based on the assumption that the construction for Fragment 3 is precisely the same as it is in Fragment 2.2 «εἶσι νοῆσαι» with the infinitive having its original dative force. Guthrie, who accepts this interpretation, does, on the other hand, make the point<sup>37</sup> that Burnet's

35) Ibid, 342 fin.

36) See Kirk & Raven para. 357 where Theophrastus reports that Parmenides held that everything that exists has some measure of awareness (γνώσις) Guthrie's translation is surely correct in context.

37) Guthrie Ibid, p. 14.

specific argument that the bare infinitive could not be the subject of a sentence is not conclusive.

Before we offer an alternative interpretation, it may help to reconsider :

- (a) the overall context of the Way of Truth and Fragment 2's place in it ;
- (b) the specific role of *Nous*, *Noein*, etc.

The objective of Fragment 2 is to set Parmenides on to the one true track open to *Nous* — «εἰσι νοῆσαι» — which leads to the ultimate Reality of the One Being. It does not seem to be aimed at arguing why he should follow this one track — this is done in Fragment 6 — but at presenting Parmenides with the facts about Being and Not-Being. The impossibility of pursuing Non-Being is made clear — Non-Being cannot be the object of awareness or uttered. Parmenides here uses «γνῶντες» and not *Noein*. This is not accidental. Later in Fragment 8, lines 8–9, when the goddess is describing the characteristic of Being and Being is clearly the object of attention, the question how and whence did it grow is answered categorically — «Nor shall I allow you to say (φράσαι) or *Noein* from that which is not, for it is not to be said (φατὸν) or νοητὸν that it is not.» This use of *Noein* and νοητὸν is not accidental. The object of *Noein* is here Being. *Noein* is reserved for the way of truth and the understanding of Reality. It relates to a special faculty.

Professor Guthrie points out the peculiar status of *Noein* and *Nous* in Greek literature<sup>38</sup>, *Noein* connoted primarily an act of immediate recognition. *Nous* as a faculty was considered as something «external to the other faculties, not dependent like them on bodily organs, and more than human»<sup>39</sup>. Parmenides himself (Fragment 4, line 1) indicates this — «Look steadfastly at things which though far off, are yet present to your *Nous* ; thou shalt not cut off what is from clincing to what is, neither scattering itself everywhere in order nor crowding together». *Nous* here enables man to be aware of things beyond sight. Euripides said «The *nous* in each of us is god» — Fragment 1018. Aristotle himself concedes infallibility to *nous*, makes a sharp distinction between its activity and the process of discursive reasoning ; and admits that the *psyche* may perhaps survive the dissolution of the living man — ‘not all of it but the *Nous*’<sup>40</sup>. Guthrie describes the function of *Nous* in the following terms — «to grasp universal truths immediately and intuitively, as in the inductive leap, and so to assure the primary premises or principles on which deductive argument is based». He concludes by stating «it was, then, a general Greek belief that human powers of cognition included a faculty of immediate apprehension of the true nature of an object or situation, comparable to, but going deeper than, the immediate apprehension of superficial qualities by the senses»<sup>41</sup>.

Had Guthrie not been so quick to dismiss the relevance of the Hindu sages to our understanding of Parmenides, he might have recognized the similarity in status between the Hindu concept of Atman as pure consciousness or pure activity of mind and *Nous* and the similarity in function between insight in the Chandogya Upanishad — see (d) (iii) above, and *Noein* as he himself describes it.

It is suggested that the special status and function of *Nous* and *Noein* should be given the full weight Parmenides gives them in his poem and should not be obliterated by translating these words in such a way as to denude them

38) Ibid, p. 17–20.    39) p. 18.    40) p. 19.    41) p. 19.



of their special significance. The English word «thought» does not carry this special significance. There may well be no precise English equivalent. The meaning syndrome demarcated by Mind, Consciousness, Insight have something of the necessary metaphysical overtones. It might, therefore, be best to stick meticulously to the literal-Mind for Nous, and to activate Mind or have insight for Noein. With this in mind let us re-examine the Way of Truth.

Fragment 3 permits two interpretations, depending on whether we allow the bare infinitive to be the subject of the sentence or not. If we do, then the sentence could be interpreted as stating the identity of Mind or Pure Consciousness, and Being — ie «For it is the same thing to activate Mind and to be» or «For the activity of Mind and being are the same». Taken with Fragment 2, this would underline the impossibility of Non-Being by asserting something new — the bond between Mind and Being. An active Mind has no alternative but to search for Being.

The passages in Fragment 6 and Fragment 8 explain this stark assertion a little more. Guthrie points out<sup>42</sup> the difference between the word «Phrazein» used in Fragment 2 in connection with the denial of non-existence and «legein» used in Fragment 6. Legein had a history — «perhaps connected with the magical identification of name and object». Legein connected the speaker to reality. Fragment 6 might thus be rendered as follows :

«To speak meaningfully and to have insight must be being, for they can be being, whereas nothing cannot be being.»

In effect, the only significant statements are made after insight. They must be real, unlike the thoughts of unenlightened mortals — εἰδότες οὐδὲν — whose mind is wandering (πλῆκτὸν νόον) and guided by helplessness.

Finally, Fragment 8, line 34, could be rendered as follows :

«To have insight ... and the object because of which there is insight are the same; for, you will not find insight without the being in respect of which it is expressed.»

In this passage, there is an explicit connection between the act of mind-insight and the object of insight, which at this stage in the poem must refer to the One Being described in earlier lines.

Leading scholars are divided as to whether the infinitive can be the subject in these three passages. Diels, von Fritz, Verdenius and Vlastos thought it could be at least in fragments 3 and 8, and Vlastos has advocated the line that Parmenides was asserting the identity of thought and being. Others, following Zeller and Burnet, have preferred to postulate another subject<sup>43</sup>.

Provided the philosophically important significance of Nous, Noein and Legein and their relationship to Reality is retained, it does not matter too much which line is adopted as to the subject of the sentences. For example, a translation of these passages, based on postulating a subject other than the infinitives, could bring out the philosophical significance of Noein etc. as follows :

(1) Fragment 3

«The same thing can be an object of insight as can be»

(2) Fragment 6

«That which can be expressed meaningfully and be the object of insight

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42) p. 20. 43) See Guthrie p. 39—40.



needs must be. For it is possible for it, but not for nothing, to be»

(3) Fragment 8, line 34

«What can be apprehended by insight and the insight that it is are the same; for without that which is, in which it is expressed, thou shalt not find insight». Guthrie's interpretation <sup>44</sup> amended.

Whatever the linguistic difficulties, it is clear that Parmenides is seeking to assert an important belief, based on a common Greek view about the relationship of *Nous* to reality that there was a correspondence, if not identity, between Mind and Being in the sense of the Eternal One Being.

It is fashionable today to dismiss this belief of Parmenides as philosophically naive if not mistaken. It is obviously possible to think of objects that do not exist—e.g. unicorns, mermaids and a myriad other mythical concoctions. The non-existence of these objects, however, is based on an assumption that the everyday world of recognizable objects exists. But this assumption is not shared with us by Parmenides nor the Hindu sages. Indeed, to the Hindu sage, the move to ridicule Parmenides with concocted objects would itself appear to be naive and misconceived, since to the Hindu there was no difference between the objects of dreams or the objects of sense perception; both were creations of the mind and both were similarly illusory.

Parmenides' pre-occupation in the Way of Truth is with ultimate Reality. To the Hindu sage, knowledge of Brahman involved becoming one with it. Parmenides does not go so far, but does suggest that enlightenment comes from the bond between *Nous* and Being — a bond that lies at the core of Platonism.

(ii) Reality

Having established that Being is the only object of insight and meaningful speech, Parmenides goes on to deduce the characteristics of Being :

- (i) It is uncreated and imperishable
- (ii) It is entire, immovable, without end
- (iii) It is not subject to coming into being and perishing
- (iv) It is indivisible
- (v) It is motionless, finite and spherical.

All these characteristics <sup>45</sup>, save the last two are to be found in the Hindu sages' description of Brahman. *Peiras* or Limit was one of the two fundamental Pythagorean principles on the same side of the Table of Opposites as the principle of Unity. Unlike the Hindu sages, Parmenides and, with him, all Greek thinkers after him, felt uneasy about the open-endedness of the concept of infinity. To them Unlimited or Unbounded was essentially incomplete and therefore imperfect. Reality could not be incomplete or imperfect; it therefore had to be bounded in a way reflecting its perfection — eg: by its structure of roundness, of being a sphere. The perfection of the circle or sphere was something that almost possessed the Greek mind and pervades the cosmologies of both Plato and Aristotle. It reflects the Greek love of the geometric and distaste for the apparent irrationalities of the algebraic.

The most important single feature of the Parmenidean and Hindu concept of Reality was its consequences for their conception of the everyday world. Both

<sup>44</sup>) Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup>) See Kirk & Raven paras. 347, 348, 350, 351.

Parmenides, following Xenophanes before him, and the Hindu sages accepted what the logic of their concept of Reality entailed—namely the illusoriness of all that men ordinarily think to be real. The social, economic, and scientific effects of this downgrading of the phenomenal world as incapable of revealing the truth have been considerable.

### (C) The Way of Seeming

Given the characteristics Reality, as conceived by the Hindu sage and Parmenides, the phenomenal world with its characteristics of birth and death, movement, divisibility, beginning and end was left stranded somewhere between the Reality of Being and the unreality of Non-Being.

The sheer facticity of the phenomenal world demanded an explanation, even if the explanation was expected to explain away.

To both the Hindu sage and Parmenides, men are deceived (μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων Frag 8 253) when they think that the phenomenal world is real. To Parmenides such men are unenlightened—βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν (fragment 6, line 4)—‘helplessness guides the wandering consciousness in their breasts; they are carried along, deaf and blind at once, altogether dazed—hordes devoid of judgement (ἄκριτα φῦλα) who are persuaded that to be and not to be are the same, yet not the same, and that of all things the path is backward turning»<sup>46</sup>. Strong, almost contemptuous words for men who are confined to Plato’s cave. Parmenides, enlightened like the Hindu sage, is categorical about the ignorance of those who have not experienced Reality like himself. Their opinions carry no truth value—ἡδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἐν πίστις ἀληθῆς—fragment 1, line 30. What they believe to be true is merely nominal—«Wherefore all these are mere names which mortals laid down believing them to be true—coming into being and perishing, being and not being, change of place and variation of bright colour»<sup>47</sup>.

Parmenides alone enlightened, like the Hindu sage, is in a position to view the phenomenal world in true perspective and thereby to give a proper account of it. This surely is how the goddess viewed Parmenides’ role—ἀλλ’ ἐμνης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσαιο, ὥς τὰ δοκοῦντα / χρῆν δοκιμῶς εἶναι διὰ παντός πάντα περῶντα.. Yet nonetheless shalt thou learn these things also—how, passing right through all things, one should judge the things that seem to be»<sup>48</sup>.

Parmenides may be contemptuous of ordinary men who believe that their views of the world derived from sense perception are true. He is nowhere contemptuous of the facticity of the phenomenal world. He nowhere specifies that this world is unreal. The opinions of mortals about it may be false, but this does not make the world totally unreal, as both Guthrie<sup>49</sup> and Owen<sup>50</sup> have over-hastily concluded. Like the Hindu sages of the Upanishads who provided an account of the origins and processes of the phenomenal world while at the same time underlining its illusoriness, Parmenides provides an account of the world of seeming parallel with that of the way of truth. Such parallelism is a common feature of philosophers or sages seeking to provide a total explanation of the universe. In Parmenides’ case, his insight into truth, guarantees that his explanation of the world of seeming is equally beyond mortal refutation—«The

46) Kirk & Raven, para 345. 47) Ibid, para. 352. 48) Ibid, para. 342.

49) p. 4. 50) Owen «Eleatic Questions» C. Q. 1960.

whole ordering of these, I tell you, as it seems likely, so that no thought of mortal men shall ever outstrip thee»<sup>51</sup>.

To the Hindu sages, the world of dreams and the phenomenal world were no more or less illusory compared to their concept of Reality but this did not prevent them from discussing and seeking to explain these worlds. Parmenides similarly discusses and seeks to explain the world of seeming. The problem, which Guthrie describes as a central problem and the problem some scholars find in discovering reasons why Parmenides should go on to the Way of Seeming from his Way of Truth, is essentially a non-problem.

#### (D) Epistemology

The central epistemological problem for Parmenides was how to bridge the gap between the World of Being and the World of Seeming. From the extant fragments it is clear that Parmenides had thought through an epistemology for the World of Seeming, although not completely. Theophrastus explains<sup>52</sup>:

«The majority of general views about sensation (περὶ αἰσθήσεως) are two: some make it of like by like, others of opposite by opposite. Parmenides, Empedocles and Plato say it is of like by like, followers of Anaxagoras and of Heraclitus of opposite by opposite . . . Parmenides gave no clear definition at all, but said only that there were two elements and that (γνώσις) knowledge depends on the excess of one or the other. Thought (διάνοια) varies according to whether the hot or the cold prevails, but that which is due to the hot is better and purer, though even then it needs a certain balance (συμμετρίας) . . . For he regards sensation and reflection as the same (τὸ γὰρ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν ὡς ταὐτὸ λέγει). So, too, memory and forgetfulness arise from these two elements through their mixture; but he never made clear whether, if they are equally mixed, there will be reflection (φρονεῖν) or not and if so what its character will be. Nevertheless that he regards sensation (αἰσθησιν) as also due to its opposite as such he makes clear when he says that a corpse does not sense (οὐκ αἰσθάνεσθαι) light, heat or sound owing to its deficiency of fire but that it does sense (αἰσθάνεσθαι) their opposites — cold, silence and so on. And he adds that in general everything that exists has some measure of awareness — καὶ ὅλως δὲ πᾶν τὸ ὄν ἔχειν τινὰ γῶσιν».

From this passage, it is clear that Parmenides reflects the hylozoism of early Greek thinking. All objects in the universe were imbued with a degree of awareness — γνώσις. A corpse was an object and had an element of sensation (αἰσθησις). Living creatures contained hot and cold elements in their bodies; the interplay of these elements with the phenomenal world produced perception and knowledge of this world. The Greek words used here are critically important; γνώσις and διάνοια are used for awareness and knowledge and the verb for the process leading to such knowledge φρονεῖν, which we have translated distinctively as reflection to differentiate from Gnosis and Noein. Phronein is distinct from Noein used elsewhere in the Way of Truth. When Parmenides is reported by Theophrastus as saying that sensation and reflection (Phronein) are

51) Kirk & Raven, para. 353.

52) Kirk & Raven. para. 357.

the same, he is not equating perception with insight (Noein), the word used in the Way of Truth<sup>53</sup>.

The actual fragment 16 quoted by Theophrastus makes this point very clear, although the point seems to have been lost on both Theophrastus and others who fail to distinguish between (a) the «κρᾶσιν μελέων» of Parmenides' own fragment and the mixture of hot and cold elements which Theophrastus is talking about and (b) Nous and Noema on the one hand and phronein.

«For according to the mixture that each man has in his wandering limbs, so is the mind (Noos) in mankind. For that which reflects (ὅπερ φρονέει) is the same thing, namely the substance of the limbs, in each and all men: For insight (νόημα) is something more.»

This is a difficult passage but Noos and Noema seem directly connected and to be differentiated from phronein. The main gist seems to be something like: the element in man that reflects (phronei) and makes sense out of sensation (τὸ γὰρ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν ὡς ταῦτόν) is the same in all men and is derived from the basic substance (perhaps undifferentiated) of their body. This element is not the same as Noema (insight) which depends on the Noos. Noos is derived from the precise structure of an individual's body. While thought about the phenomenal world (φρονεῖν) is a common place activity, insight (νόημα) is somewhat special and depends on the structure of the individual. This may appear to be too elaborate an explanation but it is closer to the actual words of the text than other explanations which do not preserve the distinction between Nous/noema and phronein/aisthesis<sup>54</sup>.

Knowledge in the world of seeming has a physiological mechanism — the mixture of the elements — and is built up out of sensation and reflection. Such knowledge is reinforced by custom and experience but does not constitute the basis for the discovery of truth. For this something else is required — namely insight.

The goddess makes this point earlier in the Way of Truth — «For it shall never be proved that things that are not are; but do thou hold back thy insight from this way of enquiry, nor let custom born of much experience force thee to let wander along this road thy aimless eye, thy echoing ear or thy tongue; but do thou judge by reason (κρίναι δὲ λόγῳ) the strife-encompassed proof that I have spoken.»<sup>55</sup>

Through insight, Parmenides is shown the truth about Reality by the goddess. He is now asked to use his discriminating will (λόγος) to judge the validity of her rejection of Non-Being and the Way of Seeming as being candidates for Reality.

Like the Hindu sages, particularly the sage of the Chandogya Upanishad, who placed insight at the top of the various cognitive faculties, Parmenides is aware of the limits of knowledge derived through sense perception. These limits correspond to the limits of the way of seeming. The correspondence between Mind and Being in the Way of Truth is paralleled by the correspondence between sense perception and the objects in the world of seeming.

The Hindu sages bridged the gap between the world of Reality and the world of appearances by subordinating the world of appearances to the mind of man,

53) Kirk & Raven ignore this important difference when they say «the equation of perception and thought comes strangely from the author of the way of truth» p. 283.

54) A similar distinction between ἐπιστήμη and φρόνησις is made by Plato in the «Meno».

55) Kirk & Raven, para. 346.

which itself was subsidiary to Atman as pure consciousness, an aspect of Reality. Parmenides does not seem to have gone so far down the subjective road to eliminate the facticity of the world of seeming. He seems to have been content with the parallelism of knowledge in the way of Truth and knowledge in the way of seeming.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the differences in culture and religion, there are sufficient similarities in the structure of Parmenidean and Hindu thought to merit further study. Indeed, insofar as Hindu thought is far closer to the original inspiration that prompted the early Greek search for truth and reality than any contemporary thought patterns, it can provide a far more relevant guide to an understanding of Parmenides than a study of contemporary philosophy. Parmenidean and Hindu thought were on the same parameter.

While there are differences in overall motivation, there are many points of substance where the thoughts of Parmenides and the Hindu sages converge. To establish this convergence is one thing but it does open out the whole question of why such convergence should occur.

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΙΣ

### Ὁ Παρμενίδης καὶ οἱ Γκουρού

Ὁ σκοπὸς τοῦ ἄρθρου εἶναι νὰ ἐπιστηθῇ ἡ προσοχὴ ἐπὶ τῆς παραλληλίας τῶν σκέψεων τῶν Ἰνδουϊστῶν σοφῶν εἰς τὰ ἱερὰ Ἰνδικὰ κείμενα τῶν Οὐπανισάδ καὶ τοῦ Παρμενίδου.

Τὸ πρῶτον μέρος τοῦ ἄρθρου περιγράφει σχετικὰ τινὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ τῆς Ἰνδουϊστικῆς σκέψεως καὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῆς ζωῆς τῶν Ἰνδουϊστῶν φιλοσόφων—κυρίως τοῦ ῥόλου τῶν Γκουρού ἢ μεγάλων διδασκάλων—τὴν ἔννοιαν τῆς πραγματικότητος καὶ τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς ὑπάρξεως· τὴν σχέσιν μεταξύ Brahman καὶ Atman· τὸ δόγμα τοῦ Maya καὶ τὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ κόσμου τῆς ἐμπειρίας ὡς παραισθήσεως· καὶ τὴν ἔννοιαν τῆς ἀληθείας ὡς ὑπαρχούσης πέραν τῆς κοινῆς ἀντιλήψεως καὶ γνώσεως μετὰ τῶν ἐπιστημολογικῶν τῆς συναρτήσεων.

Τὸ δεύτερον μέρος τοῦ ἄρθρου ἐπανεξετάζει τὸ ὕψος τοῦ βίου καὶ τὴν δομὴν τῆς σκέψεως τοῦ Παρμενίδου ὑπὸ τὸ φῶς τῶν Ἰνδουϊστῶν Γκουρού. Ἐφιστᾶται ἰδιαιτέρως ἡ προσοχὴ εἰς τὴν θρησκευτικὴν διάθεσιν τὴν διέπυσαν τὸν τρόπον τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ εἰς τὸν κρίσιμον δεσμὸν μεταξύ νοεῖν καὶ εἶναι, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι στενότερος εἰς τὰς σχέσεις μεταξύ Brahman καὶ Atman εἰς τὴν Ἰνδουϊστικὴν παράδωξιν παρὰ εἰς τὰς συμβατικὰς σημασίας, αἱ ὁποῖαι δηλοῦνται σήμερον μὲ τὰς λέξεις «σκέψις» καὶ «ὑπαρξις». Ἡ ἔννοια τῆς πραγματικότητος εἰς τὸν Παρμενίδην δεικνύεται ὅτι εἶναι ὁμοία πρὸς τὴν τῶν Ἰνδουϊστῶν σοφῶν, αἱ δὲ διαφοραὶ δεικνύεται ὅτι προέρχονται ἀπὸ κάποιαν εἰδικὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἀντίληψιν τῆς τελειότητος. Ἡ στάσις τοῦ Παρμενίδου ἐναντι τοῦ τρόπου τοῦ φαινομενικοῦ δεικνύεται ὅτι πηγάζει ἀπὸ τὴν ἀντίληψιν τοῦ περὶ τῆς πραγματικότητος καὶ ὅτι πάλιν εἶναι ὁμοία, ἀλλ' ὅχι ἡ αὐτή, πρὸς τὴν Ἰνδουϊστικὴν στάσιν ἐναντι τοῦ ἐμπειρικοῦ κόσμου. Τέλος, ἡ ἐπιστημολογία τοῦ Παρμενίδου, ἡ ὁποία διαφοροποιεῖ τὸ νοεῖν ἀπὸ ἄλλας μορφὰς τῆς γνώσεως, στηρίζεται εἰς τὸ εἰδικὸν ὀντολογικὸν καθεστῶς τοῦ νοῦ.

Τὸ συμπέρασμα εἶναι ὅτι ὁ Παρμενίδης θὰ ἠδύνατο νὰ κατανοηθῇ καλύτερον, ἐὰν τὸν ἀντελαμβάνομεθα μᾶλλον ὡς ἕνα Ἰνδουϊστὴν, Γκουρού, παρὰ ὡς ἕνα σύγχρονον φιλόσοφον.