

## Parmenidean Puzzles\*

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Central to Parmenides' philosophy are the distinctions between ways of thinking. Two such distinctions, recognized from antiquity, are the *way of truth* which is necessary and the *way of seeming* which is relative. Commentators, at least since Simplicius, have held that parallel to these distinctions are those between reason and perception.

Parmenides effects the transition from objects of reason to objects of sense, or as he himself puts it, from truth to seeming, when he writes, "Here I end my trustworthy discourse and thought concerning truth; henceforth learn the beliefs of mortal men. . ."<sup>1</sup>

I shall argue that *as Parmenides puts it*, the transition from the way of truth to the way of seeming is *not* a transition from reason to perception. Rather, the reason for the relativity of the way of seeming arises from the process Parmenides calls *naming* which is in effect the positing of entities.

To my knowledge only one ancient commentator clearly recognizes the close association of reason and perception. Theophrastus indicates, "For Parmenides regards perception and thought as the same."<sup>2</sup>

I shall argue that for Parmenides a formula, *being equals thought equals perception*, can account for the way of truth—if perception is taken in a certain way. The same equation, taking perception in another way, through

the process of positing entities, can account for the way of seeming.

This argument arises out of insights which stem from Heidegger's discussion of the pre-Socratics.

Basic to Heidegger's philosophy is the distinction between being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seiendes*) which functionally is that between whole and parts. Being is the whole, the unity which underlies all entities or things. According to Heidegger, Pre-Socratic philosophy consists of the gradual uncovering of things or entities out of the whole of being. This discovery of the Greeks is paralleled by a gradual shift of interest in the whole to an interest in things as such.<sup>3</sup> For Heidegger, Parmenides stands at the very beginning of the philosophical uncovering of the origin of things out of the whole of being.

My adaptation of Heidegger's being/beings distinction consists of an association of whole/parts in relation to perception. The further suggestion that Parmenides isolates the way in which entities arise is adapted in the second part of the argument which shows how the way of seeming is dependent upon the naming or positing of entities.

The second insight offered by Heidegger and presupposed here is that Parmenides distinguishes between three rather than two paths of thought. The first path is the way of truth or the way of being which must be thought.

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