Parmenides on Names (B 8.34-41)

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No one is astonished to find a queer verse in Parmenides, but line 38 appears to be unusually eccentric. The editors attempt bravely to translate it: "Darum wird alles besser Name sein," but the italics seem to betray their embarrassment, and no wonder; for the line is full of oddities. The singular ονομα is singular indeed, and when it is forced to mean "mere Name", by which is meant "unsubstantial as mere Name", it begins to look stranger still. The use of the future tense is to say the least surprising, although at a pinch it may be taken as the futurum consequentiae, of which philosophers, being given to drawing inferences, are said to be fond. It may be that even goddesses, in the act of making revelations to privileged men, may experience moments of recognition of a necessity in things, when they pass from the ignorance of the past into the knowledge of the future, and that they do not possess an unchanging knowledge of a timeless reality; it may be, although we should not expect Parmenides to speak as if this were the case. Still, even these peculiarities might be acknowledged and dismissed as harmless, were it not for the incongruity of the verse with its context.

Let us look first at what follows. The editors translate the next line thus: "was die Sterblichen in ihrer Sprache festgesetzt haben, überzeugt, es sei wahr," and this, I think, clearly right. The ellipsis is easy after what has preceded, but if confirmation of this interpretation is needed, it is found in B 19. Εν ουσίαν, ονομα τοιοῦτοι κατέθεντες επίστημον ἔκαστο. The meaning of the two lines is this: all the institutions (of speech) that mortal men have established in the belief that they are true will (turn out to) be Name. This is either disappointingly barren or alarmingly pregnant. If "Name" means no more than "word", then the lines make a true, but empty and tautologous, statement. If, on the other hand, it means what it says, we are left to conjecture of what the institutions of speech can be a name.
In the lines that precede, Parmenides makes the point that nothing, not even thought, can exist apart from that—which-is, for Moira holds the that (which is) in bonds, so that it is whole and immovable. Or, to put it differently, the that must be, and must be whole and immovable, so that that—which-is is unique, complete, and immutable; all else is, as it were, excluded and cast into not-being. Then our sentence follows, preceded by "therefore". The difficulty is: what is the connection of thought which is thus explicitly indicated? How does it follow from the exclusion of not-being that the institutions of speech are (or will be) Name? Parmenides goes on to give examples of the institutions of speech that he has in mind: becoming and perishing, being and not-being, change of place and play of colour. These terms, as we are told elsewhere, are used in combination by mortal men in their contradictory accounts of things. They mark the road of δοξα, not the road of truth. But that road expressly denies the dilemma that Parmenides poses here, for it combines "being" with "not-being". If Name is a synonym for, or an expression of, δοξα, then Parmenides is saying that the institutions of speech are a product of δοξα. But it then becomes inexplicable what this has to do with the argument of these lines, or indeed with any part of the way of truth.

Whatever fault may be found with Parmenides' verses, everyone must recognize that in rigour of argument his poem is unrivalled among contemporary or earlier thinkers. Before charging him with a fault in argument, we are obliged to consider whether the defect may not lie in the text. This must in any case be inspected.

These lines are quoted, as part of a long fragment of Parmenides' poem, by Simplicius in his commentary on Aristotle's Physics (116. 7-11). He apparently had the complete text before him; at any rate he quotes at length, because, as he says, copies of Parmenides were scarce in his day. Diels, in the apparatus of his edition of Simplicius, reports the readings of the MSS thus: "πάντ' ένώμασται; DEF (latet πάντ' ένωμ' ἔσται cf. p.37,1); πάν ἐνδ' έστιν α" (a is the Aldine edition of 1526). The correction he here proposes is based on a reading in an earlier passage of Simplicius' commentary (87. 1), in which this verse is quoted alone. There his apparatus gives the following note: "το έπαντ' ένωμ' ἔσται; a; το έπαντ' ένωμα ἔσται; F; το έπαντ' ένωμασται; E...το έπαντ' ένωμα ἔσται; D." Here the lesser F and the Aldine edition give the reading that Diels commends, whereas E has a variant of the reading given by the MSS in the long fragment and D provides an intermediate form.

Both here and in his edition of the Vorsokratiker, Diels has preferred the reading πάντ' ένωμασται; in spite of the inferior authority of the MSS in which it occurs. His principal reason for doing so was, I suppose, that ένωμασται is unmetrical and ένωμασται ungrammatical.

The latter is indeed rare, but I believe authentic. It occurs as a variant again in another passage of the same commentary of Simplicius (180. 9-12), in which he quotes another fragment of Parmenides (B 9). The following is Diels' text of the first two lines:

άυτῷ ἐπεὶ δή πάντα φάος καὶ νῦξ ένώμασται καὶ τά κατά σφετέρας δυνάμεις ἐπί τοῦ σιτε καὶ τοῖς...

In his apparatus Diels reports: "ένώμασται; aF1: ένώμασται; DEF2". The former has the weaker authority, but is of course preferable on metrical grounds. Moreover, in yet another passage of Simplicius' commentary (31. 3-7) there is a paraphrase in prose of a portion of Parmenides' argument (B 8. 56-59). This portion deals with the two opposite principles which are the basis of the opinions of mortal men and was followed at a short interval, as Simplicius says (180. 8),
by these lines. The paraphrase states that the one principle comprises the rare, the hot, light, and so on; επί δὲ της τυχουσας ὄνωμασται τὸ ψυχρὸν καὶ ὁ θάνατος, κτλ. The verb, which does not occur in the text of which the paraphrase is made, has been borrowed, it is conjectured, from these lines, which were found a little further on; or it may have been taken from the lost lines that intervened. In either case the form ὄνωμασται must have occurred in one of Parmenides' hexameters. There seems to be no reasonable doubt that the form was used by Parmenides; it may have been pressed into service in verse by others as well.

If we return now to the lines of Parmenides with which we began, we see that ὄνωμασται has better manuscript authority and does not deserve the suspicion with which it is regarded. However, one further difficulty remains, Plato, in a passage of the Theaetetus (160d), refers to those who, like Melissus and Parmenides, opposed the doctrine of flux and affirmed that all things were one. He quotes the following verse:

οίον ἀκίνητον τελέθει τῷ παντὶ ὄνομ' ἐστιν.

The same line is also quoted by the invaluable Simplicius, who says (29. 16-18): ἀκίνητον αὐτὸ ἄνωμεν καὶ μόνον ὡς πάντων ἐξηρημένον.

In another place (113. 10) he gives it with a minor variant in some MSS (πάντη in 'ADF). Some scholars, relying on Simplicius' μόνον, correct οίον to οῖον, rightly I think.

Diels and others have taken this to be the same verse, a little distorted by Plato, who was notoriously lax about looking up his quotations, and copied faithfully from him by Simplicius. If this is correct, it must be granted that this quotation of the text supports ὄνωμ' ἐσται rather than ὄνωμασται.

Fortunately, there is little reason to suppose that it is correct, as Cornford has shown in an illuminating argument. Why should Simplicius, who apparently had the text of Parmenides before him and quotes from it often, have on this occasion copied Plato's misquotation? If he did, it is clear that he cannot have supposed it to be the verse with which we are concerned, for he was able to quote this twice, exactly or with substantial exactness, in its context. Plato, for his part, had studied Parmenides closely. It is incredible, Cornford argues, "that he produced a verse meaning 'It is sole, immovable. The All has the name 'Being' out of the end and the beginning of two sentences meaning 'Since Destiny has fettered it so as to be whole and immovable; Therefore all those things will be a (mere) name that mortals have agreed upon,' etc. This is not a case of arbitrarily completing a single ill-remembered verse.' It is hard to conceive the mental process that could generate such a hybrid in the most slovenly brain. Plato was not slovenly, and he had a deep respect for Parmenides." We must conclude that this is a different verse and is irrelevant to our present purpose.

The tradition of the text favours ὄνωμασται. Furthermore, if ὄνωμασται is accepted, τῷ cannot mean "therefore", as it is commonly translated; for the institution of names is not a consequence of the exclusion of not-being. In order to understand, it is necessary to recognize the construction ὄνωμασειν ἐπί τινι. It occurs often enough, being found in Parmenides, Empedocles, and Thucydides. It is used of the relationship between names and reality; there is a fine example of a similar construction in Plato, appropriately enough in the Parmenides (117d): ἔξαστον τῶν ὄνομάτων οὐκ ἐπί τινι καλέσαι...οὐκοῦν καὶ τῷ ἐξερημωμένῳ ἔστιν ἐπί... It occurs without ἐπί in Parmenides (B19. 3): τοῖς δ' ὄνομα ἄνθρωποι κατέθεντ' ἐπίσημον ἔκάστῳ. The meaning of the line now appears: "With reference to it (the real world) are all the names given that mortal men have instituted, in the belief that they were true, becoming and perishing, being and
not-being, change of place and play of colour." For the use of όνομάζω in this
sense, see Empedocles B 8. Ἐτὸς ὑπὸ τοὺς ὄνομαζεις ἀνθρώποις:
"The name of ὑπὸς is given to these by mankind."

The names that mortal men institute, although false and deceptive, are not
mere fancies or illusions of the mind. They are accounts of the one real world,
to the existence of which men's beliefs are at times committed. But men's con­
victions are not steadfast, because they have accepted the authority of appearance
(δόξα) and are held fast in the contradictions of the dualism to which this
testifies. The road that they have chosen can never lead them to truth, because
it must forever turn back upon itself in contradiction, affirming and denying in
turn the being of the world. The names which they set up as sign-posts along the
way share necessarily in this fatal error. They say, as Parmenides points out,
that it comes to be but also perishes, that it is but also is not, that it suffers
change of place and play of colour. All the names that mortal men make contain
the light of truth, but this is inevitably snuffed out by contradictions. The
question remains: is there any name, not made by men, of which the light cannot
be put out?

In order to seek an answer, it is necessary to consider the difficult lines
at the beginning of our passage. First, thinking is said to be the same as
οὐνέκεν ἐστὶνόμα. Then Parmenides continues: "For you will not find
that thinking without that-which-is, in which it is expressed. Nothing is or
shall be apart from that-which-is, since Μοῖρα bound that so as to be whole and
unmoved."

Probably the commonest way of taking οὐνέκεν is to give it the meaning of
to οὐ ἐνεκα. The verse then means: "thinking is the same as the purpose
(or the foundation, or cause, or necessary condition) of thought." The latter
term is then identified with the "that-which-is" of the next line and "thinking"
is supplied as the subject of "is expressed". The meaning attributed to οὐνέκεν
seems dubious, but what condemns the interpretation is the sense that it ascribes
to Parmenides. He is made to distinguish that-which-is from thinking in two ways:
it is the purpose or cause of thinking and it is that in which thinking is expressed.
But on the other hand thinking is the same as that-which-is, since both are identi­
fied with the purpose of thought. It is not easy to conceive how these statements
can be reconciled so as to form a consistent whole; for, if that-which-is is
the purpose or cause of thought as well as the bearer of its expression, then it
must be something more than thought: but if it is the same as thought, then it
may indeed be thought's expression, but it can never be the cause of thought or
the bearer of thought's expression. The usual means of escaping the dilemma is
a recourse to either idealism or realism. Either that-which-is is reduced to a
product of mind, or else thinking is limited by an objective reality. Theoretically
speaking, these lines of escape are open, but who will say that Parmenides' own
words, or those of his contemporaries, point clearly in either direction?

It is better to take οὐνέκεν in the sense of "that", which is common in
Homer. This meaning provides the translation: "thinking is the same as the
thought that it-is." It is evident that we have here a statement of the form
that thinking must take. We are reminded of that way of which Parmenides says
(Β 2. 4) that it belongs to Conviction and follows after Truth: it asserts that
"it-is". Thinking can take no other way than this, and it must follow that it
then takes the form of the thought that "it-is".

This is the correct road to the truth about the real world. Anyone who
thinks at all must think this, for the only alternative is the thought, "it-is-not".
Parmenides, as is well known, did not distinguish clearly between the meanings of
"is". Most statements about the world that contain this word were existential,
and consequently negative statements of this form connoted non-existence. But Parmenides is in search of the right road to the truth about reality. For him a negative existential statement about the world cannot provide such a road, for it can only mean that the real world does not exist. A road that denies the existence of its destination cannot lead anywhere. This is the sense that we must attribute to Parmenides' doctrine that the way of not-being is neither thinkable nor speakable. It is evident that he cannot have meant that no statement of this form can be made, since he himself formulates such a statement before duly rejecting it. He does not mean that the vocables cannot be uttered, nor that the statement has no meaning. What he denies is that it can refer to anything real. It is impossible that the real world should be non-existent. If we are to think about the real world at all, we must think that "it-is" and cannot think that "it-is-not".

It is now possible to grasp the movement of the argument in these lines. Thinking can take only one form ("it-is"), because thinking of this kind and that-which-is are inseparable (and so thinking can never be found "with" anything else, nor in any other form than "it-is"). This is because (there cannot be anything else, "with" which thinking might be found, since) that-which-is is unique, being necessarily whole and unmoved. The argument moves from thinking to that-which-is. It asks why thinking can take only one form and answers that the necessity of being, which makes that-which-is unique, does not permit an alternative. It is evident that Parmenides finds in being a limitation upon thought and cannot therefore have held any view that reduced being to thought.

On the other hand, it is no more likely that he regarded thought as determined by being. We may grant that it is possible that the mind is somehow limited by an objective being, but Parmenides goes further than that: he says that thinking must take the form "it-is", and that that-which-is-not can be neither thought nor spoken. How could the mind be compelled, by a necessity not its own, not merely to take a certain form, but to use a certain word? How could an objective being compel the mind to say "it-is" and to refrain from saying "it-is-not"?

Parmenides' words simply do not give a clear statement of either of these theories. It seems prudent, therefore, to seek another account of his thought, preferably one that is less sophisticated than either of these, and so more appropriate to the early fifth century B.C. It is plain that Parmenides conceives of a necessary relation between the thought "it-is" and the real world. The question is: what is that relation?

The answer is to be found, I believe, in the second line of our passage. There, in the course of saying that thinking and that-which-is are inseparable, Parmenides adds a most significant, though subordinate, clause. He speaks of "that-which-is in which it is expressed". The "it" is generally held to be "thinking", although doubts have been felt about this. Now if Parmenides said that thinking is expressed in that-which-is, we face the same metaphysical dilemma as before. He could not, in that case, say either that that-which-is is an expression of thinking or that thinking is determined by that-which-is. There would be an "expression" of thinking, but it would carry beyond the mind to find itself "in" that-which-is. Burnett indeed notices the difficulty and translates, "as to which it is uttered", but I cannot reconcile this version with Parmenides' Greek. It seems better to ask whether it would not be preferable to supply a different subject.

I believe that we must supply as subject here, just as in so many other passages, the real world, which appears often in the fragments by implication in the formula "it-is", and explicitly as "this" (το or αυτο). Parmenides would then say that the real world is expressed in that-which-is and would thus state...
definitely how he conceived the relation between "it-is" and the real world.
Thinking must take the form "it-is", because the real world is "expressed in"
that-which-is, and consequently in the thought, "it-is". Conversely, "it-is-not"
is unthinkable and unspeakable, because the world is not "expressed in" it.

Parmenides' imagery points in the same direction. He does not say that he
is searching his mind or his experience in order to find truth. He is in search
of the right road. This implies that a right road exists, among the thoughts or
words that are in use, and leads only to truth. It is not something that man can
make, nor a means that he devises to any of his ends. It is something to be
discovered: it is the track -- and contains the expression -- of the real world
itself. It must lead to truth, because the real world is "in" it. When we think
of the real world by means of the thought that "it-is" and conceive of it as
"that-which-is", and severely eschew the opposite thoughts, we have found that
track and cannot fail of its goal. This thought teaches us how to conceive of
the real world, and so constitutes the only way by which the mind can achieve its
purpose in the apprehension of truth. We must conceive of the real world, not
as "it", but as "that-which-is", if the world is to become intelligible. We can
grasp it only in its aspect as being; that is to say, as expressed in that-which-
is.

However, Parmenides, I take it, conceives of a necessary expression of the
real world as the manifestation of the world, not to the mind alone, but in lan­
guage as well. "That-which-is" and "it-is", even considered as words, evidently
contain expressions of the world, since the one contains, and the other implies,
the "that". The expression of the world is necessarily to be found in "being"
as well as in being. Parmenides says repeatedly that we are compelled to speak,
as well as to think, in a certain way. There are correct forms of words, with
which thought cannot dispense, which it must use if it is to follow the right
course. "That-which-is" and "it-is" are such forms. Both are, of course, uses
of the word "being", which, when used of the real world, is necessarily true,
because the real world is seen to be "in" its uses. "Being" is more than a word: it
is the world's name.

It now becomes profitable to consider the fragment that Cornford discovered
in the quotations made by Plato and Simplicius. It runs thus, in its emended form:

οἶον ἄχινητον τελέθει τῷ παντὶ ὄνομ' εἶναι.

It does not, it must be admitted, seem at first sight a likely verse to be chosen
as the epitome of Parmenides' philosophy. Yet Plato certainly quoted it to serve
that purpose, and Simplicius, who quotes it twice, appears to give independent
testimony for the text. What can be made of it?

Cornford commented as follows: "the only suspicious word is τελέθει, which
(according to Diels, Vors., index) the Presocratics never use to mean 'is'.
Empedocles uses τελέθειν (once) and ἐκτελέθειν in their proper sense 'to
arise', 'to grow' -- an association that Parmenides would avoid in speaking of
his changeless Being." On this ground Cornford felt justified in conjecturing
tεθέλει and compared a famous fragment of Heraclitus: ἐν τῷ σοφόν
μοῦνον λέγεσθαι ὅσ' ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸν ὄνομα (B 32). He then
proposed placing this new verse after B 19 at the end of the poem in this way:

τούτων οὐδεὶς πίστις ἐνι; μοῦνον γὰρ ἰδανὴ
οἶον ἄχινητον τε Θέλει τῷ παντὶ ὄνομ' εἶναι.

and translated: "but all these names are false; for Necessity is willing that
the All should only be called one and immovable." An attractive consequence of this conjecture is that it would provide a definite echo of the language of Heraclitus as well as a rejection of his doctrine.

Now it is true that τελεθεί does not occur in the surviving fragments of Parmenides' poem, but Parmenides cannot have avoided it for the reason that Cornford gives. Although είναι is his most characteristic word, he does not hesitate to use πέλειν in its place, presumably for metrical reasons. Yet this word has similar connotations of becoming and change, and Parmenides does not refrain from using a verb of motion even of the immovable that—which-is, as in his έόν γάρ έόντι πελάζει (B 8, 25; cf. 8, 46-47). The use of τελεθεί is possible in Parmenides and is evidently attested independently by Plato and Simplicius. If it were nevertheless to be rejected, a simpler emendation could be found in τε πέλει.

In either case we have a verse of not more than Parmenidean uncouthness. Its meaning, I take it, would be: "one and unmoved is the name of the all — 'being'." The main construction of the sentence is similar to that in another fragment of Heraclitus: τό οὖν τόξω οὕνεμα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος (B 48). Although τό πάν does not occur elsewhere in what is left of Parmenides' poem, it is used by other early philosophers, occurring several times in Empedocles (B 13, 11, 39, 3), for example. Moreover, the MSS of both Plato and Simplicius, with substantial agreement, attribute the expression to Parmenides; it is possible that Aristotle also remembered the verse and the expression when he reported of the Eleatics: ἐν καὶ ἀχύρτον τὸ πάν εἴναι φασι (de gen. et corr. A 8, 329a 13ff; cf. VS I, 222, 14). Still, it is worth noticing that Parmenides, who uses πάν often enough in apposition to the subject of the verb "is", does not elsewhere use τό πάν. It is possible that πάντι had for him, in this case also, an appositional function. If this is correct, the effect of the word is to give strong assurance that the name applies to all of reality whatsoever, just as in another passage (B 8, 33) it serves to make plain that, as reality is lacking in nothing, so that—which-is—not would be completely defective. It is well to observe that έόν also occurs sometimes with, and sometimes without, the article; πάν may have been used similarly. On this interpretation the meaning of the verse is: "'Being' is the one and unchanged name of all of it."

Cornford's fragment gives direct confirmation in this way of the interpretation suggested for B 8, 33-36. "Being", in its various verbal forms, is the correct name and "it-is" the correct thought, by means of which we attain to truth. The verse that states this is most important for the understanding of Parmenides. Plato was therefore, as far as we can see, perfectly justified in quoting it as the type of the Parmenidean philosophy of rest. Indeed, I cannot find in our fragments any other verse that would have served his purpose equally well. The verse says, it is true, rather more than he needs, since he is not here concerned with names at all. Nevertheless, if no better text was available, Plato was quite ready to turn whatever he could find to his purpose. This is quite evident from his choice of Homer's mention of "Ocean, the wellspring of all things, and mother Tethys" (II, 11, 201 and 302) as the first statement of the philosophy of movement. The verse of Parmenides required a good deal less interpretation in order to serve as an example on the one side than Homer's innocent mythology needed on the other.

The view which we have now attributed to Parmenides, that reality is expressed in a certain thought and name, is of course common among unsophisticated people. The name speaks the truth about things; οὐσία ὀρνίς; the nomen is an omen. In a famous passage of the Agamemnon (681-698) the chorus reflect on the name of Helen and wonder who it was who named her so truly — perhaps some one unseen who spoke the name happily with foreknowledge of what was to be. For she was
"Hell-on-ships, hell-on-men, hell-on-cities". Sophocles' Ajax, brooding over the disaster that has befallen him, groans "αίαν" and then asks who would have thought that his name would so truly fit his tragic fate (130-133). The Aeschylean chorus conceives that Helen's name may fit the disaster that she was to become: that is "expressed in" Helen. Sophocles is, as usual, more subtle. The form of the old belief is preserved, for the name proves true and the truth is conceived as a fitting of name to fate. But it is not made clear, as in Aeschylus, that this is the work of divinity, or even of nature; and the correspondence between name and fate, whether real or fancied, is a matter of surprise as much as of wonder. The lines do not seem to bear the full weight of the old meaning, and yet to reduce the idea to a conceit is to make it trivial and insipid. Sophocles, on this as on other occasions, knew how to balance the old form against the new rationalism.

It will be remembered that even Aristophanes, who could weigh with precision the verses of Aeschylus and Euripides, did not venture to set a line of Sophocles in the balance.

Once the real thing is recognized as "in" that-which-is, the true name is not only the "fitting" or the like, but the "being", name. Herodotus provides a good example. He tells us (6. 5. 3) that Cleomenes asked Oedipus what his name was; and the other told him τὸ ἐόν. We are likely to translate: "he told him what it was". But it would be better to turn τὸ ἐόν as "his true name", and better still as "his real name": i.e., not simply the name which men give to him, but the name by which the real man is truly known — that in which his reality is expressed. Even Plato (Phaedo 78d), who did not believe that reality was to be found in any names or statements, nevertheless preserved the old connection between the λόγος and being, although in an altered form; for "being" (ἐίναι) is for him the λόγος that we give of reality (οὐσία).

It is now possible to see the meaning of what has seemed at once the plainest and the most inscrutable of Parmenides' statements:

\[ \tauὸ \gammaὸ\ ς\ αὐτὸ\ νοεῖν\ ἐστὶν\ τὴ\ καὶ\ ἐίναι \] (B 3)

These words apparently say that thinking and being are identical, but what they mean is harder to determine. Some commentators take the statement at its face value, and some of these are willing to accept the consequence that being thinks. Others, who rightly reject the attribution of such a view to Parmenides, attempt to force the words to mean that the same thing can be thought and can be. This in turn is said to mean that only that which can be thought can be, and being is thus reduced to the thinkable. But the interpretation is hard won — if won it is — from the text and there is much in Parmenides that prevents us from attributing such a view to him. The best suggestion was made by Heidel, who related this fragment to B 8. 34 and so took the meaning to be that thinking is the same as thinking that it (the object of thought) is. There is, in other words, one and only one right form of thought. This interpretation accords very well with the view that there is one correct name and thought, which we have found reason to ascribe to Parmenides. The difficulty about Heidel's interpretation is that it requires the reader to supply νοεῖν again with ἐίναι, and it is not very clear that such an ellipsis is regular or even possible.

It seems better to accept the simplest version, that thinking and being are the same, and to consider, in the light of what we have learned, what that can mean. "Being", as we saw, is more than a word: it is the name of the real world. Not even thought can dispense with it, but must take the form of the thought that "it-is". If we now go one step further and ask what is the meaning of that name and that thought, we are reminded that, in fifth-century Greek, νοεῖν serves for "mean" as well as for "think": τί ποτ' οὖν νοεῖν τὸ ὄνομα. The answer can only be that it means the being of the real world, or, in Parmenides' terms, τὸ τὸν. It is now customary to translate this as "that-which-is", but it
would probably be more exact to turn it as "that-as-being" or "that-in-being", for Parmenides says that it is "in" this that the real world (the "that") is "expressed". There is a reciprocal relation between the world and "being". On the one hand, "being" (εἶναι) is a name considered qua name; but it is the name of the world. On the other hand, the world (τὸ ἔον) is expressed only in that-in-being (τὸ ἔον), which is the world named. Name and world are reciprocally dependent, since a name implies that world of which it is a name and the world, which must find expression, can find it only if the name is used of itself. The name refers to the world but means the world in being.


voeιν has been until now translated, for convenience' sake, as "mean" or "think", but these renderings will no longer suffice, since it now appears what is implied when voeιν is used, as by Parmenides, not of a word or a thought, but of the name of the world. The object of voeιν is that-in-being, and in consequence voeιν can stand only for that knowledge which perceives the world as it is. Knowledge of being can be found only in the meaning of the name, "being". Parmenides' philosophy of names leads directly into his ontology. But we have no text which asserts the identity of knowledge with its object, of voeιν with τὸ ἔον. The text that has so often been thought to make this assertion says in fact something quite different. It says that voeιν is the same as εἶναι, and this must mean that knowledge can be found only in the use of the name.

Notes

1. The form may have been used by Theognis: cf. Studies in Honour of Gilbert Norwood (Toronto, 1951) 33.
4. This interpretation has been preferred by many, notably by Heidel and Fränkel; cf. W.J. Verdenius, Parmenides: Some Comments on his Poem (Groningen, 1942) 39, n. 2.
5. Cf., e.g., Verdenius, op. cit. 35.