

POEM OF PARMENIDES

English translation :

John Burnet (1892)

I

The steeds that bear me carried me as far as ever my heart
Desired, since they brought me and set me on the renowned
Way of the goddess, who with her own hands conducts the man
who knows through all things. On what way was I borne
along; for on it did the wise steeds carry me, drawing my car,
and maidens showed the way. And the axle, glowing in the socket -
for it was urged round by the whirling wheels at each
end - gave forth a sound as of a pipe, when the daughters of the
Sun, hasting to convey me into the light, threw back their veils
from off their faces and left the abode of Night.

There are the gates of the ways of Night and Day, fitted
above with a lintel and below with a threshold of stone. They
themselves, high in the air, are closed by mighty doors, and
Avenging Justice keeps the keys that open them. Her did
the maidens entreat with gentle words and skilfully persuade
to unfasten without demur the bolted bars from the gates.
Then, when the doors were thrown back,
they disclosed a widepening, when their brazen
hinges swung backwards in the
sockets fastened with rivets and nails. Straight through them,
on the broad way, did the maidens guide the horses and the car,
and the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand
in hers, and spake to me these words: -

Welcome, noble youth, that comest to my abode on the car
that bears thee tended by immortal charioteers ! It is no ill
chance, but justice and right that has sent thee forth to travel
on this way. Far, indeed, does it lie from the beaten track of
men ! Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well
the unshaken heart of persuasive truth, as the opinions of
mortals in which is no true belief at all. Yet none the less
shalt thou learn of these things also, since thou must judge
approvedly of the things that seem to men as thou goest
through all things in thy journey."

II

Come now, I will tell thee - and do thou hearken to my
saying and carry it away - the only two ways of search that

can be thought of. The first, namely, that It is, and that it is impossible for anything not to be, is the way of conviction, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that It is not, and that something must needs not be, - that, I tell thee, is a wholly untrustworthy path. For you cannot know what is not - that is impossible - nor utter it; For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.

....

VIII

One path only is left for us to speak of, namely, that It is. In it are very many tokens that what is, is uncreated and indestructible, alone, complete, immovable and without end. Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for now it is, all at once, a continuous one. For what kind of origin for it. will you look for ? In what way and from what source could it have drawn its increase ? I shall not let thee say nor think that it came from what is not; for it can neither be thought nor uttered that what is not is. And, if it came from nothing, what need could have made it arise later rather than sooner ? Therefore must it either be altogether or be not at all. Nor will the force of truth suffer aught to arise besides itself from that which in any way is. Wherefore, Justice does not loose her fetters and let anything come into being or pass away, but holds it fast.

" Is it or is it not ? " Surely it is adjudged, as it needs must be, that we are to set aside the one way as unthinkable and nameless (for it is no true way), and that the other path is real and true. How, then, can what is be going to be in the future ? Or how could it come into being ? If it came into being, it is not; nor is it if it is going to be in the future. Thus is becoming extinguished and passing away not to be heard of. Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike, and there is no more of it in one place than in another, to hinder it from holding together, nor less of it, but everything is full of what is. Wherefore all holds together; for what is; is in contact with what is. Moreover, it is immovable in the bonds of mighty chains, without beginning and without end; since coming into being and passing away have been driven afar, and true belief has cast them away. It is the same, and it rests in the self-same place, abiding in itself. And thus it remaineth constant in its place; for hard necessity keeps it in the bonds of the limit that holds it fast on every side. Wherefore it is not permitted to what is to be infinite; for it is in need of nothing ; while, if it were infinite, it would stand in need of everything. It is the

same thing that can be thought and for the sake of which the thought exists ;
for you cannot find thought without something that is, to which it is
betrothed. And there is not, and never shall be, any time other, than that which
is present, since fate has chained it so as to be whole and immovable.

Wherefore all these things are but the names which mortals
have given, believing them, to be true –
coming into being and passing away, being and not being,
change of place and alteration of bright colour.

Where, then, it has its farthest boundary, it is complete on
every side, equally poised from the centre in every direction,
like the mass of a rounded sphere; for it cannot be greater or
smaller in one place than in another. For there is nothing
which is not that could keep it from reaching out equally, nor
is it possible that there should be more of what is in this place
and less in that, since it is all inviolable. For, since it is equal
in all directions, it is equally confined within limits.

Here shall I close my trustworthy speech and thought about the truth.

Henceforward learn the opinions of mortals,
giving ear to the deceptive ordering of my words.

Mortals have settled in their minds to speak of two forms, one of which
they should have left out, and that is where they go astray from the truth.

...

PHAEDO

Phaedo, known to the ancients also by the descriptive title On the Soul, is a drama about Socrates' last hours and his death in the jail at Athens. On the way back home to Elis, one of his intimates, Phaedo, who was with him then, stops off at Phlius, in the Peloponnese. There he reports it all to a group of Pythagoreans settled there since their expulsion from Southern Italy. The Pythagorean connection is carried further in the dialogue itself, since Socrates' two fellow discussants, Simmias and Cebes—from Thebes, the other city where expelled members of the brotherhood settled—are associates of Philolaus, the leading Pythagorean there. Pythagoreans were noted for their belief in the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation in human or animal form and for the consequent concern to keep one's soul pure by avoiding contamination with the body, so as to win the best possible next life. Socrates weaves all these themes into his own discussion of the immortality of the soul.

It is noteworthy that these Pythagorean elements are lacking from the Apology, where Socrates expresses himself noncommittally and unconcernedly about the possibility of immortality—and from Crito, as well as the varied discussions of the soul's virtues in such dialogues as Euthyphro, Laches, and Protagoras. Those dialogues are of course not records of discussions the historical Socrates actually held, but Plato seems to take particular pains to indicate that Phaedo does not give us Socrates' actual last conversation or even one that fits at all closely his actual views. He takes care to tell us that he was not present on the last day: Phaedo says he was ill. Socrates makes much of the human intellect's affinity to eternal Forms of Beauty, Justice, and other normative notions, and of mathematical properties and objects, such as Oddness and Evenness and the integers Two, Three, and the rest, as well as physical forces such as Hot and Cold, all existing in a nonphysical realm accessible only to abstract thought. None of this comports well with Socrates' description of his philosophical interests in the Apology or with the way he conducts his inquiries in Plato's 'Socratic' dialogues. It is generally agreed that both the Pythagorean motifs of immortality and purification and the theory of eternal Forms that is linked with them in this dialogue are Plato's own contribution. Indeed, the Phaedo's affinities in philosophical theory go not toward the Socratic dialogues, but to Symposium and Republic. There is an unmistakable reference to Meno's theory of theoretical knowledge (of geometry, and also of the nature of human virtue) as coming by recollection of objects known before birth. But now the claim is made that this recollection is of Forms.

d through eating and drinking, for food adds flesh to flesh and bones to bones, and in the same way appropriate parts were added to all other parts of the body, so that the man grew from an earlier small bulk to a large bulk later, and so a small man became big. That is what I thought then. Do you not think it was reasonable?

I do, said Cebes.

e Then further consider this: I thought my opinion was satisfactory, that when a large man stood by a small one he was taller by a head, and so a horse was taller than a horse. Even clearer than this, I thought that ten was more than eight because two had been added, and that a two-cubit length is larger than a cubit because it surpasses it by half its length.

And what do you think now about those things?

97 That I am far, by Zeus, from believing that I know the cause of any of those things. I will not even allow myself to say that where one is added to one either the one to which it is added or the one that is added becomes two, or that the one added and the one to which it is added become two because of the addition of the one to the other. I wonder that, when each of them is separate from the other, each of them is one, nor are they then two, but that, when they come near to one another, this is the cause of their becoming two, the coming together and being placed closer to one another. Nor can I any longer be persuaded that when one thing is divided,
b this division is the cause of its becoming two, for just now the cause of becoming two was the opposite. At that time it was their coming close together and one was added to the other, but now it is because one is taken and separated from the other.

I do not any longer persuade myself that I know why a unit or anything else comes to be, or perishes or exists by the old method of investigation, and I do not accept it, but I have a confused method of my own. One day
c I heard someone reading, as he said, from a book of Anaxagoras, and saying that it is Mind that directs and is the cause of everything. I was delighted with this cause and it seemed to me good, in a way, that Mind should be the cause of all. I thought that if this were so, the directing Mind would direct everything and arrange each thing in the way that was best. If then one wished to know the cause of each thing, why it comes to be
d or perishes or exists, one had to find what was the best way for it to be, or to be acted upon, or to act. On these premises then it befitted a man to investigate only, about this and other things, what is best. The same man must inevitably also know what is worse, for that is part of the same knowledge. As I reflected on this subject I was glad to think that I had found in Anaxagoras a teacher about the cause of things after my own
e heart, and that he would tell me, first, whether the earth is flat or round, and then would explain why it is so of necessity, saying which is better, and that it was better to be so. If he said it was in the middle of the universe, he would go on to show that it was better for it to be in the middle, and if he showed me those things I should be prepared never to
98 desire any other kind of cause. I was ready to find out in the same way

about the sun and the moon and the other heavenly bodies, about their relative speed, their turnings and whatever else happened to them, how it is best that each should act or be acted upon. I never thought that Anaxagoras, who said that those things were directed by Mind, would bring in any other cause for them than that it was best for them to be as they are. Once he had given the best for each as the cause for each and the general cause of all, I thought he would go on to explain the common good for all, and I would not have exchanged my hopes for a fortune. I eagerly acquired his books and read them as quickly as I could in order to know the best and the worst as soon as possible. b

This wonderful hope was dashed as I went on reading and saw that the man made no use of Mind, nor gave it any responsibility for the management of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other strange things. That seemed to me much like saying that Socrates' actions are all due to his mind, and then in trying to tell the causes of everything I do, to say that the reason that I am sitting here is because my body consists of bones and sinews, because the bones are hard and are separated by joints, that the sinews are such as to contract and relax, that they surround the bones along with flesh and skin which hold them together, then as the bones are hanging in their sockets, the relaxation and contraction of the sinews enable me to bend my limbs, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my limbs bent. c d

Again, he would mention other such causes for my talking to you: sounds and air and hearing, and a thousand other such things, but he would neglect to mention the true causes, that, after the Athenians decided it was better to condemn me, for this reason it seemed best to me to sit here and more right to remain and to endure whatever penalty they ordered. For by the dog, I think these sinews and bones could long ago have been in Megara or among the Boeotians, taken there by my belief as to the best course, if I had not thought it more right and honorable to endure whatever penalty the city ordered rather than escape and run away. To call those things causes is too absurd. If someone said that without bones and sinews and all such things, I should not be able to do what I decided, he would be right, but surely to say that they are the cause of what I do, and not that I have chosen the best course, even though I act with my mind, is to speak very lazily and carelessly. Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause. It is what the majority appear to do, like people groping in the dark; they call it a cause, thus giving it a name that does not belong to it. That is why one man surrounds the earth with a vortex to make the heavens keep it in place, another makes the air support it like a wide lid. As for their capacity of being in the best place they could possibly be put, this they do not look for, nor do they believe it to have any divine force, but they believe that they will some time discover a stronger and more immortal Atlas to hold everything together more, and they do not believe that the truly good and "binding" binds and holds them together. I would e 99 b c

gladly become the disciple of any man who taught the workings of that kind of cause. However, since I was deprived and could neither discover
 d it myself nor learn it from another, do you wish me to give you an explanation of how, as a second best, I busied myself with the search for the cause, Cebes?

I would wish it above all else, he said.

After this, he said, when I had wearied of investigating things, I thought that I must be careful to avoid the experience of those who watch an eclipse of the sun, for some of them ruin their eyes unless they watch its
 e reflection in water or some such material. A similar thought crossed my mind, and I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with each of my senses. So I thought I must take refuge in discussions and investigate the truth of things by means of words. However, perhaps this analogy is inadequate,
 100 for I certainly do not admit that one who investigates things by means of words is dealing with images any more than one who looks at facts. However, I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis in each case the theory that seemed to me the most compelling, I would consider as true, about cause and everything else, whatever agreed with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree. But I want to put my meaning more clearly for I do not think that you understand me now.

No, by Zeus, said Cebes, not very well.

b This, he said, is what I mean. It is nothing new, but what I have never stopped talking about, both elsewhere and in the earlier part of our conversation. I am going to try to show you the kind of cause with which I have concerned myself. I turn back to those oft-mentioned things and proceed from them. I assume the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest. If you grant me these and agree that they exist, I hope to show you the cause as a result, and to find the soul to be immortal.

c Take it that I grant you this, said Cebes, and hasten to your conclusion.

Consider then, he said, whether you share my opinion as to what follows, for I think that, if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything. Do you agree to this sort of cause?—I do.

d I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. That, I think,
 e is the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error. This is the safe answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful. Or do you not think so too?—I do.

And that it is through Bigness that big things are big and the bigger are bigger, and that smaller things are made small by Smallness?—Yes.

And you would not accept the statement that one man is taller than another by a head and the shorter man shorter by the same, but you would bear witness that you mean nothing else than that everything that is bigger is made bigger by nothing else than by Bigness, and that is the cause of its being bigger, and the smaller is made smaller only by Smallness and this is why it is smaller. I think you would be afraid that some opposite argument would confront you if you said that someone is bigger or smaller by a head, first, because the bigger is bigger and the smaller smaller by the same, then because the bigger is bigger by a head which is small, and this would be strange, namely, that someone is made bigger by something small. Would you not be afraid of this? 101

I certainly would, said Cebes, laughing.

Then you would be afraid to say that ten is more than eight by two, and that this is the cause of the excess, and not magnitude and because of magnitude, or that two cubits is bigger than one cubit by half and not by Bigness, for this is the same fear.—Certainly.

Then would you not avoid saying that when one is added to one it is the addition and when it is divided it is the division that is the cause of two? And you would loudly exclaim that you do not know how else each thing can come to be except by sharing in the particular reality in which it shares, and in these cases you do not know of any other cause of becoming two except by sharing in Twoness, and that the things that are to be two must share in this, as that which is to be one must share in Oneness, and you would dismiss these additions and divisions and other such subtleties, and leave them to those wiser than yourself to answer. But you, afraid, as they say, of your own shadow and your inexperience, would cling to the safety of your own hypothesis and give that answer. If someone then attacked your hypothesis itself, you would ignore him and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another.¹³ And when you must give an account of your hypothesis itself you will proceed in the same way: you will assume another hypothesis, the one which seems to you best of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable, but you will not jumble the two as the debaters do by discussing the hypothesis and its consequences at the same time, if you wish to discover any truth. This they do not discuss at all nor give any thought to, but their wisdom enables them to mix everything up and yet to be pleased with themselves, but if you are a philosopher I think you will do as I say. 102

What you say is very true, said Simmias and Cebes together.

ECHECRATES: Yes, by Zeus, Phaedo, and they were right, I think he made these things wonderfully clear to anyone of even small intelligence.

13. Alternatively: "If someone should cling to your hypothesis itself, you would dismiss him and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another."

PHAEDO: Yes indeed, Echecrates, and all those present thought so too.

ECHECRATES: And so do we who were not present but hear of it now. What was said after that?

PHAEDO: As I recall it, when the above had been accepted, and it was
b agreed that each of the Forms existed, and that other things acquired their name by having a share in them, he followed this up by asking: If you say these things are so, when you then say that Simmias is taller than Socrates but shorter than Phaedo, do you not mean that there is in Simmias both tallness and shortness?—I do.

But, he said, do you agree that the words of the statement ‘Simmias is
c taller than Socrates’ do not express the truth of the matter? It is not, surely, the nature of Simmias to be taller than Socrates because he is Simmias but because of the tallness he happens to have? Nor is he taller than Socrates because Socrates is Socrates, but because Socrates has smallness compared with the tallness of the other?—True.

Nor is he shorter than Phaedo because Phaedo is Phaedo, but because
d Phaedo has tallness compared with the shortness of Simmias?—That is so.

So then Simmias is called both short and tall, being between the two,
presenting his shortness to be overcome by the tallness of one, and his tallness to overcome the shortness of the other. He smilingly added, I seem to be going to talk like a book, but it is as I say. The other agreed.

My purpose is that you may agree with me. Now it seems to me that
e not only Tallness itself is never willing to be tall and short at the same time, but also that the tallness in us will never admit the short or be overcome, but one of two things happens: either it flees and retreats whenever its opposite, the short, approaches, or it is destroyed by its approach. It is not willing to endure and admit shortness and be other than it was, whereas I admit and endure shortness and still remain the same person and am this short man. But Tallness, being tall, cannot venture to be small.
103 In the same way, the short in us is unwilling to become or to be tall ever, nor does any other of the opposites become or be its opposite while still being what it was; either it goes away or is destroyed when that happens.—I altogether agree, said Cebes.

When he heard this, someone of those present—I have no clear memory of who it was—said: “By the gods, did we not agree earlier in our discussion¹⁴ to the very opposite of what is now being said, namely, that the larger came from the smaller and the smaller from the larger, and that this simply was how opposites came to be, from their opposites, but now I think we are saying that this would never happen?”

On hearing this, Socrates inclined his head towards the speaker and
b said: “You have bravely reminded us, but you do not understand the difference between what is said now and what was said then, which was that an opposite thing came from an opposite thing; now we say that the

14. The reference is to 70d–71a above.

opposite itself could never become opposite to itself, neither that in us nor that in nature. Then, my friend, we were talking of things that have opposite qualities and naming these after them, but now we say that these opposites themselves, from the presence of which in them things get their name, never can tolerate the coming to be from one another." At the same time he looked to Cebes and said: "Does anything of what this man says also disturb you?"

Not at the moment, said Cebes, but I do not deny that many things do disturb me.

We are altogether agreed then, he said, that an opposite will never be opposite to itself.—Entirely agreed.

Consider then whether you will agree to this further point. There is something you call hot and something you call cold.—There is.

Are they the same as what you call snow and fire?—By Zeus, no.

So the hot is something other than fire, and the cold is something other than snow?—Yes.

You think, I believe, that being snow it will not admit the hot, as we said before, and remain what it was and be both snow and hot, but when the hot approaches it will either retreat before it or be destroyed.—Quite so.

So fire, as the cold approaches, will either go away or be destroyed; it will never venture to admit coldness and remain what it was, fire and cold.—What you say is true.

It is true then about some of these things that not only the Form itself deserves its own name for all time, but there is something else that is not the Form but has its character whenever it exists. Perhaps I can make my meaning clearer: the Odd must always be given this name we now mention. Is that not so?—Certainly.

Is it the only one of existing things to be called odd?—this is my question—or is there something else than the Odd which one must nevertheless also always call odd, as well as by its own name, because it is such by nature as never to be separated from the Odd? I mean, for example, the number three and many others. Consider three: do you not think that it must always be called both by its own name and by that of the Odd, which is not the same as three? That is the nature of three, and of five, and of half of all the numbers; each of them is odd, but it is not the Odd. Then again, two and four and the whole other column of numbers; each of them, while not being the same as the Even, is always even. Do you not agree?—Of course.

Look now. What I want to make clear is this: not only do those opposites not admit each other, but this is also true of those things which, while not being opposite to each other yet always contain the opposites, and it seems that these do not admit that Form which is opposite to that which is in them; when it approaches them, they either perish or give way. Shall we not say that three will perish or undergo anything before, while remaining three, becoming even?—Certainly, said Cebes.

Yet surely two is not the opposite of three?—Indeed it is not.

It is then not only opposite Forms that do not admit each other's approach, but also some other things that do not admit the onset of opposites.—Very true.

Do you then want us, if we can, to define what these are?—I surely do.

- d Would they be the things that are compelled by whatever occupies them not only to contain that thing's Form but also always that of some opposite?—How do you mean?

As we were saying just now, you surely know that what the Form of three occupies must not only be three but also odd.—Certainly.

And we say that the opposite Form to the Form that achieves this result could never come to it.—It could not.

Now it is Oddness that has done this?—Yes.

And opposite to this is the Form of the Even?—Yes.

- e So then the Form of the Even will never come to three?—Never.

Then three has no share in the Even?—Never.

So three is uneven?—Yes.

- As for what I said we must define, that is, what kind of things, while not being opposites to something, yet do not admit the opposite, as for example the triad, though it is not the opposite of the Even, yet does not admit it because it always brings along the opposite of the Even, and so the dyad in relation to the Odd, fire to the Cold, and very many other things, see whether you would define it thus: Not only does the opposite not admit its opposite, but that which brings along some opposite into that which it occupies, that which brings this along will not admit the opposite to that which it brings along. Refresh your memory, it is no worse for being heard often. Five does not admit the form of the Even, nor will ten, its double, admit the form of the Odd. The double itself is an opposite of something else, yet it will not admit the form of the Odd. Nor do one-and-a-half and other such fractions admit the form of the Whole, nor will one-third, and so on, if you follow me and agree to this.

I certainly agree, he said, and I follow you.

- c Tell me again from the beginning, he said, and do not answer in the words of the question, but do as I do. I say that beyond that safe answer, which I spoke of first, I see another safe answer. If you should ask me what, coming into a body, makes it hot, my reply would not be that safe and ignorant one, that it is heat, but our present argument provides a more sophisticated answer, namely, fire, and if you ask me what, on coming into a body, makes it sick, I will not say sickness but fever. Nor, if asked the presence of what in a number makes it odd, I will not say oddness but oneness, and so with other things. See if you now sufficiently understand what I want.—Quite sufficiently.

Answer me then, he said, what is it that, present in a body, makes it living?—A soul.

- d And is that always so?—Of course.

Whatever the soul occupies, it always brings life to it?—It does.

Is there, or is there not, an opposite to life?—There is.