Analyze and give commentary on Parmenides' argument for the proposition 'It is'.

Parmenides used the proposition 'It is' to argue that reality is one and not many. His poem outlines this path and his metaphysical theory of reality. In the poem Parmenides takes a journey to the House of Night where a Goddess promises to reveal two paths available to him; the way of truth (aletheia) or the way of opinion (doxa). She starts with the way of truth. The Goddess claims that there are only two roads of inquiry; 'It is' and 'It is not'. By the term 'It' Parmenides means whatever can be known or whatever exists. The term 'is' however is more ambiguous. In the predicative sense 'is' is incomplete. The proposition 'It is' would leave us asking "It is what?". In the existential sense the term 'is' would mean exists, making the proposition 'It is' to mean 'whatever can be known, exists'. It could be possible that Parmenides meant both senses of the term however it is most likely that by the proposition 'It is', Parmenides means anything we talk about or anything we can think about.

According to the Goddess, what 'is' must be unchanging and imperishable. As a result being cannot come into existence from not-being. Next she claims that it is a single whole, and therefore it is not divisible. As a consequence we are making a mistake when we divide the unity of being into opposites. It is also motionless. In order to move, something requires space for it to move into. Since all space is full of what is, nothing can move. Finally the Goddess argues that it is perfect. Being must be complete for if it were not complete something else would have to exist besides Being.

Of the two roads to inquiry, the Goddess dismisses the road 'it is not' as impossible for "you may not know that which is not, nor may you declare it". She argues that since it is the same for thinking and being, it is impossible to think about what does not exist. Things that can be thought about are only those that exist. In addition anything that can exist and can be thought about must exist. Therefore it is only possible that 'it is', if something can be thought about then it exists. The formal argument for the proposition 'it is' is as follows:

a. A thing can be thought about only if it is possible for it to exist
b. Anything that does not exist, cannot exist
c. Therefore, anything that can exist, does exist
d. Therefore, anything can be though about only if it exists
e. Therefore, anything that does not exist, cannot be thought about

In premise (a) Parmenides argues that we can only think about something if it is possible for it to exist. I believe this claim is sound since I cannot think of anything that would be impossible to exist. The soundness of the second premise (b) is not as clear.

Parmenides appears to be claiming that it is impossible for there to be another world containing things that don't exist in this actual world. He rules out the possibility that things can exist in another world. Barnes argued that "What does not exist can't exist" is ambiguous. It could mean "It is not possible that what does not exist exists" or "If a thing

does not exist, then it is not possible for it to exist". I believe Parmenides could mean both interpretations. The former is an argument stating the law of non-contradiction which supports his emphasis on presenting his argument logically. The later interpretation however supports his argument itself. For Parmenides what is possible to exist is what actually exists, therefore you cannot think about what does not actually exist but could possibly exist.

Another issue with his argument is that Parmenides misses an important fact. He assumes that there are only two ways things can come into existence. The first would be 'from being', however this can be ruled out since a being cannot come into existence from itself. The second would be from 'not-being', however this can also be ruled out because nothing can come into existence from nothing. Parmenides misses the possibility that something can come into existence from something else. We now have scientific proof of the theory of evolution. Human beings came into existence from 'other Beings'. Parmenides likely could not have considered this fact however he could have considered human reproduction. When a couple conceives a child a 'Being' appears to come from 'other Beings'.

A final concern with his argument is that Parmenides claims 'It is' is a single whole. However if the Goddess gives us two roads, the way of truth and the way of opinion, why would we mistakenly chose the way of opinion? In order to choose the wrong path we would require a mind to make that decision, a mind that exists independently. If 'It is' is not divisible as the Goddess claims then our mind must be part of the single whole. Therefore as part of the single whole, a whole that is perfect, we could not possibly error and take the wrong path for that would make us imperfect and as a result the whole would be imperfect. The Goddess appears to believe that most of us error and take the wrong path, yet at the same time we are part of a perfect single whole.

Parmenides' Goddess claims that when we face the choice of thinking about what 'is' or what 'is not' our choice is illusory as the later option does not exist. Existence presupposes all thinking, therefore we can't think of what 'is not'. As a consequence coming into being and passing away is impossible since it requires thinking about not-being which is impossible. Parmenides conceives the nature of reality as one perfectly united whole, 'It is'.

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