

PARMENIDES' CRITIQUE OF THINKING

The *poludēris elenchos* of Fragment 7*

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It is reasonable to suppose that Parmenides' primary objective in writing his famous poem was to provide a correct account of what exists. Much of the long argument of Fragment 8 is aimed at establishing the attributes of 'the real' (*to eon*), and it is the teaching of Fragment 6 that all thinking and speaking must be about the real. Yet we should remember that the goddess who delivers Parmenides' message announces in Fragment 1 that we will learn also about 'mortal beliefs' (*brotōn doxas*) and 'the things believed' (*ta dokounta*). The argument of Fragment 2 begins by listing the ways of enquiry that are 'available for thinking' (*noēsai*). Parmenides' poem is therefore both an enquiry into being and an enquiry into thinking, and his positive theory is both about being and about thinking. In what follows, I offer an account of Parmenides' critique of human thinking, focusing on the crucial, but largely misunderstood, idea of the *poludēris elenchos* mentioned briefly at the end of Fragment 7. I shall argue that in the motif of the *dēris* Parmenides expressed a view of the human capacities for independent thinking that departed from an older and derogatory view, and that by adapting the older idea of the *elenchos* to a new, philosophical, use, he introduced an influential decision procedure into philosophical enquiry.

I The meaning of *elenchos*

In Fragment 7. 3-6, Parmenides' goddess urges her audience not to let custom or habit (*ethos*) force their aimless eye and resounding ear and tongue along the path of what is not. They should not, in other words, make the mistake of trying

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to look at, listen to, or speak about a world in which what is not is implicitly allowed to exist. Instead, they should judge by *logos* (reason or account) the *poludērin elenchos* spoken by her:

κρίναι δὲ λόγῳ πολύδηριω ἔλεγχον
ἐξ ἐμέθεν ῥηθέντα.¹

The renderings of the meaning of *poludērin elenchos* are many and various: 'strife-encompassed proof' (Kirk and Raven), 'very contentious challenge' (Mourelatos), 'hard hitting refutation' (Furley), 'much contending refutation' (Barnes), 'much contested argument' (Robinson), 'much disputed question' (Wheelwright), 'much debated proof' (Vlastos, Cornford). So far we can safely infer only a 'much somethinged something'. The choice of 'refutation' was favoured by Liddell and Scott, and justified to some degree by the character of the fifth-century Socratic *elenchos*. As David Furley explained,² the original meaning of *elenchos*,

¹ Following the text given by Diels-Kranz. I assume without argument that *polupeiron* modifies *ethos* and means 'much-tried'; i.e. 'habitual practice', that *echēssan* modifies both ear and tongue, and that the relevant function of the tongue is not taste but forming words into speech (cf. *Iliad* (Il.), XX. 248: *glossa . . . polees muthoi*). The dominant image in this passage is that of the indeterminacy, the 'unfocusedness' of perceptual experience: the 'untargeted eye' and the 'roaring of the ear and tongue'; for a defence of this view, see A. P. D. Mourelatos's 'Determinacy and Indeterminacy as the Key Contrast in Parmenides', *Lampas*, VIII (1975) and an expanded version in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, suppl vol 2 (1976).

² 'Notes on Parmenides', in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, ed E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and A. O. Rorty (Assen, 1973), 1-15. A similar claim was made by Montgomery Furth: 'his own word for his argument is *elenchos* which we must assume means for him, as it presently was to mean for Socrates, the technique of refuting an opponent by reasoning from a premise that the opponent accepts to a conclusion that he must regard as intolerable' ('Elements of Eleatic Ontology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, VI, No 2 (April 1968), 111-32, repr in A. P. D. Mourelatos, *The Pre-Socratics* (New York, 1974), 241-70). Furth at least faithfully follows out the implications of viewing the *elenchos* as the Socratic *elenchos* by inventing an opponent (Betathon—a believer in some non-existences) whom Parmenides proceeds to refute on Betathon's own terms. Furth is entitled to his imaginative reconstruction (which he prefaces by a disclaimer for historical accuracy) but it is not correct to say that Parmenides' *elenchos* is mere dialectical criticism, for the repudiation of the two erroneous ways relies crucially on several Parmenidean assumptions about knowledge, truth, and meaning. Furth elsewhere says that Parmenides is 'floating a critique of ways or roads of enquiry' and that there is 'a sole survivor of the critique' (248). This is both true and relevant to the real meaning of *elenchos* in Parmenides (as will be argued shortly), but it cannot be

'shame' or 'disgrace', had been replaced by that of 'refutation', and the reading makes some sense in the context of the poem: since Fragment 8 will soon say that only one way remains (*leipetai*) it seems obvious that the other ways have been refuted. It is therefore this *elenchos* = refutation that we are being urged to judge by *logos*.

It is hard to fault the logic of this crisp disjunctive syllogism, and equally hard to fault the minor *not-q* premiss; the 'shame' meaning of *elenchos* is singularly out of place in Parmenides' account. But it is difficult to accept Furley's disjunction of 'shame' or 'refutation' as a satisfactory account of the meaning of *elenchos* from Homer to Socrates. Chantaine, whose account Furley adopted, was himself less than fully confident of the story he had told.³ Admitting that the etymology of *elenchō* from *elachus* was uncertain, he also acknowledged that 'L'évolution de sens entre le vocabulaire homérique et le grec ionien-attique est remarquable' (335). The etymologies offered by Boisacq and Frisk are equally diffident.⁴ In fact, a survey of the employment of *elenchos* and *elenchō* from Homer and Hesiod up to the middle of the fourth century shows a much larger range of meanings than the 'shame' or 'refutation' disjunction can accommodate. Only when a full sense of the possible choices for *elenchos* is in hand can we make a reasonable choice of the right rendering for the *poludēris elenchos* of Parmenides' Fragment 7.

There is no reason to doubt that in seventh- and sixth-century writers, both the neuter noun form and the verb form convey the idea of shame or disgrace, as in the Muses' famous speech:

Shepherds of the wilderness, things of shame (*kak' elenchea*), mere bellies, we know how to say many false things resembling what is true . . .
(*Theogony*, 26-7)

seriously maintained that Parmenides thought of his account (of ways of enquiry that exist for thinking) as a cross-examination of some misguided individual.

³ Pierre Chantaine, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque* (Paris, 1968, s.v. *elenchō*).

⁴ Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1960); Emile Boisacq, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque* (Paris and Heidelberg, 1938).

and in Theognis:

... accursed old age disgraces (*elenchei*) one who is beautiful. (1011)

Tyrtaeus had already spoken of having one's 'splendid appearance (*eidos*) disgraced (*elenchei*)', but as one might expect in so military-minded a poet, the shame comes 'to one who does not stay and fight' (6. 9). The linking of shame or disgrace with a failure in valour is not peculiar to Tyrtaeus, in fact it was already a constant element of the use of *elenchos* and *elenchein* in Homer. The following are completely typical:

- (a) for *elenchos* (as well as for *elenchiē* and the adjectives *elenchēs* and *elenchistos*):

Son of Tydeus, what has happened to us to make us forget our furious valour, but come here and stand by my side, for a disgrace (*elenchos*) it will be if Hector of the flashing helm captures the ships. (Il. XI. 312-15)

- (b) for *elenchō*:

Telemachus, the stranger that sits in your house does not disgrace you (*ou . . . elenchei*), I did not miss the mark, nor did I grow weary in stringing the bow. (*Odyssey* (Od.), XXI. 424-5)

In the nineteen passages in which either the noun or verb appears, the idea of the *elenchos* is consistently linked with a failure in a military or athletic mission or contest.⁵ Lacking an established etymology for *elenchos* (or *elenchō*), it is not possible to know whether Homer has added the idea of the contest to an older shame word, or whether the Homeric usage is a surviving remnant of an older complex notion of *elenchos* as 'shame incurred through a failure in valour'. If the latter, then the simple 'shame' use of *elenchos/elenchō* in

⁵ This fact was noted by Anne Amory Parry in *Blameless Aegisthus* (Leiden, 1973): 'elenchos and its derivatives in Homer are almost exclusively connected with failures in valor'. Even where combat and feats of physical prowess are absent, there is still an *elenchos* if these noble warriors have somehow failed in their intended purpose. In the embassy of Phoenix to Achilles in Il. IX Phoenix says that Achilles' rejection of the pleas of Ajax and Odysseus would be an *elenchos* of their words and their having come to him. The frequent association of disgrace and reproach with a failure in action is discussed by A. W. H. Adkins in *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960), 30-57. For a dissenting view (though conceding a mainly 'shame in failure' meaning to *elencheiē*), see A. A. Long, 'Morals and Values in Homer', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, XC (1970), 121-39.

Hesiod and Theognis would represent a selective narrowing of the original meaning. But whether the idea of 'prowess-shame' is the original form or not, it is clear that, after Homer, other writers express the same idea. When Pindar uses forms of the verb *elenchō*, it is to designate just such a shaming in a contest.

... when they went down into the races, they put the Hellenic hosts to shame (*ēlenxan*) through their swiftness of foot. (*Pythian*, XI. 49)

... he was handsome to look upon, and by deed he did not disgrace his beauty of form (*ou kata eidos elenchōn*) when he won the wrestling match. (*Olympian*, VIII. 19)

It is therefore not surprising that when we first see a masculine form for *elenchos* appear, it means not the neuter 'disgrace' but the *test* or *contest* in which one incurs or avoids disgrace:

For many tales have been told, and in many ways, but to put one's new inventions⁶ to the test by a touchstone (*basonōi es elenchon*) is altogether risky. (*Nemean*, VIII. 20-1)

For Pindar, the ultimate test for human excellence is athletic competition, and the paragon of *aretē* is the 'Olympic' victor. Nowhere is this said more succinctly than in *Olympian*, IV:

This is a word that will never be tainted with falsehood:
Trial (*diapēira*) is the test (*elenchos*) of mortals. (17-18)

The *elenchos* here is clearly not the *to elenchos* of Homer and Hesiod but the *ho elenchos* of *Nemean*, VIII, the testing in which excellence is attained, or, as in *Nemean*, III, disgrace is avoided:

in the contests (*elenchessin*) your Aristocleides did not dishonour (*ouk . . . emiane*) by being worsted in the pankration. (15-17)

Just as *to elenchos* = shame has been joined by *ho elenchos* = test, so *elenchō* = to shame oneself or another in a test, comes to mean just 'to test' or 'to be a test of'. So at least it appears in Bacchylides' comparison of wisdom and

⁶ *neara d'exeuronta*. I take these 'inventions' to be the poet's own odes (reinforced by the reference to *logoi* at line 21) and the *elenchos* to be the 'trial' by the touchstone of public opinion.

truth with the 'touchstone', the Lydian stone, which served to distinguish gold from inferior metals:

Λυδία μὲν γὰρ λίθος
μανύει χρυσόν, ἀν-
δρῶν δ' ἀρετὰν σοφία τε
παγκρατῆς τ' ἐλέγχει
ἀλάθεια . . .

(Fr 14)

For the Lydian stone indicates gold, but it is wisdom and all powerful truth that shows (*elenchei*) the excellence of men . . .

While the verb *elenchō* had in Pindar retained the idea of shaming oneself, or someone else, in the testing, here, in Bacchylides, the context requires just 'tests for' or 'indicates'. *Elenchei* parallels *manuei*, 'to reveal' or 'indicate', and wisdom and truth must be a touchstone for virtue, and not a shaming of it. It is clear therefore that by the early part of the fifth century, both *elenchos* and *elenchō* had lost the connotation of shame and disgrace characteristic of their employment in Homer, and had begun to designate just the test or testing process through which the true substance of a thing or person could be determined.

The idea of the *elenchos* as the 'acid test' of a person's truthfulness or character is a common refrain in fifth-century writers. In the *Suppliant Maidens*, written in the first half of the century (c.463), Aeschylus writes that 'an unknown companion is brought to the test (*exelenchesthai*) in time' (993), and as Johansen and Whittle explain,⁷ '*elenchetai* denotes a process through which the true nature of a thing is revealed'. We can also see in Aeschylus' plays the first signs of a 'legalized' idea of *elenchos*, the 'cross-examination' or testing of a person to determine his truthfulness or innocence (cf. *Eumenides*, 433: '*exelenche* him and decide justly' and *The Libation Bearers*, 851: 'I wish to *ellexai* the messenger'). One can find in Sophocles' plays both the idea of the *elenchos* as a contest between two persons and the idea of the *elenchos* as the testing of someone's words, that is as examination: 'the two guards *elenchōn* with one another and nearly came to blows' (*Antigone*, 260), 'Eteocles ousted me from my country by persuading the people and not by an *elenchon* of

⁷ Aeschylus: *The Suppliants*, vol iii (Copenhagen, 1980), 285.

hand or deed of war' (*Oedipus Coloneus*, 1297) and 'an *elenchon* of the queen's words' (*Oedipus Tyrannos*, 603). In Euripides, the most common meaning of *elenchos* is that familiar from Pindar and Bacchylides: it is the testing that reveals the true nature of a thing or person:

Having been exposed in the *elenchon*, it now comes out who you are.
(*Alcestis*, 640)

The bow is no *elenchos* of a man, it is a coward's weapon, the real man stands in the ranks and dares to face the spear. (*Heracles* (*Heracl.*), 162-3)

Your wife, fearing that if put to the *elenchon* she might be proved a sinner, wrote a letter . . .
(*Hippolytus*, 1310)

This is what misfortune means among mankind;
upon no man who wished me well at all,
could I wish this acid test (*elenchon*) of friends might fall.
(*Heracl.* 58-9, tr. Arrowsmith)

Herodotus also speaks of the *elenchos* as the test to which someone or something is put:

. . . when I return you will bring your son here before me to be put to the test (*ton paida es elenchon*).
(*History*, I. 209)

The belief in the river Oceanus is grounded in obscurity (*aphanes*) and lacks a testing (*ouk echei elenchos*).⁸

But there is one passage in which Herodotus employs the verb *elenchō* to refer not to the testing or examination of an account, but to the controverting or refuting of someone's story. In II. 115, the men who travelled with Alexander are allowed to tell their own version of what he did, and Herodotus says that 'they *elenchon* his story', which seems to mean that they refuted it.

The idea of an *elenchos* as a refutation is familiar to us from the character which the Socratic *elenchos* takes on in

⁸ *History*, II. 23. Herodotus' statement that this belief does not 'have *elenchos*' has been variously understood: 'does not admit of testing', 'does not have a proof', 'does not have a refutation', 'does not need a refutation'. The presence of the term *aphanes* is however significant, since it reflects a tendency among many fifth-century writers (e.g. the author of *On Ancient Medicine*) to treat the older cosmological beliefs about 'what is above the heavens and below the earth' as 'non-evident', i.e. as beyond the range of what can be tested and known to be true or false. I think it is plausible to suppose that Herodotus is here taking the belief in Oceanus, the encircling river, to be one of those beliefs lying beyond the range of testing.

the early Platonic dialogues. Socrates tests his interlocutors, he cross-examines them, and he routinely refutes them. The first unmistakably 'refutation' uses of *elenchos* occur in the *Protagoras* (at 344b) and *Gorgias* (473e), but the refutation sense of *elenchos* is prominent in Aristotle (it is defined as a *sylogismos antiphaseōs* in the *Sophistici Elenchi*) and in the *peri Theōn* (3. 8) of Philodemus some two hundred years later.

The older meaning of the *elenchos* = testing has now been augmented (not, as we shall see, replaced) by the *elenchos* = refutation, and there is yet another remarkable development. In *Gorgias*' famous 'Defence of Palamedes' composed at some time in the last quarter of the fifth century, *elenchos* seems to mean neither 'testing' nor 'refutation' but 'proof':

And of the things which my accuser himself has said, not one of the things he has spoken is a proof (*apodeixis*), so his own account succeeds only as abuse not having *elenchos*.
(Fr B 11 a, s 29)

and also in section 34:

... you must not prefer *aitiai* to *elenchōn*.

Gorgias appears to be contrasting mere accusations with solid proofs. The most natural explanation for all this is that the *elenchos* which had originally consisted in the testing of a thing's nature or a person's character comes to be used in the context of testing a person's veracity, and those who have passed the test can be said to have had an *elenchos* of their claims, that is a proof, and those who have failed it can be said to have had an *elenchos*, that is a refutation, of theirs. The multiplicity of meanings for *elenchos* in the fifth century would thus stem from a process of diachronic development and bifurcation that is visible elsewhere in Greek and Latin (e.g. in the Greek *sumpherō* where what is 'brought together' becomes both 'benefits' and 'misfortunes' and in the Latin *altus* where *altus*, from *alo* meaning 'nourish', becomes both 'high' and 'deep').

The same is true for the verb *elenchein*. In the *Gorgias*, it is used along with the refutational *elenchos*, and marks not just examination, but refutation (473b9-10):

Polus: That is more difficult to refute (*exelenxai*) than your first point.
Socrates: Not difficult, but impossible, for the truth is never refuted (*oudepote elenchetai*).

Elsewhere *elenchein* must mean, as Georges Daux demonstrated, not actual refutation,⁹ but rather 'cross-examination with the intention of refuting what is said'.⁹ And even as late as Plato's *Republic*, one can find both *elenchos* and *elenchō* in the sense of test/testing rather than either proof or refutation:

... the man who is unable to define in his discourse and distinguish and abstract from all other things the aspect or idea of the good, and who cannot, as it were in battle, running the gauntlet of all tests (*elenchōn*), and striving to examine (*elenchein*) everything by essential reality and not by opinion, hold on his way in all this without tripping in his reasoning—the man who lacks this power you will say does not really know the good itself. . . .
(VI. 534b, tr. Shorey)

We can then offer a thumb-nail sketch of the meaning of *elenchos* and *elenchō* which, while not exhaustive, certainly goes beyond the existing 'shame or refutation' dichotomy. The meaning of shame or disgrace can be seen in the use of *elenchos* in Hesiod and Theognis, but the most common early use of the term is to designate the shame incurred through a failure of military or (semi-military) athletic valour (in Homer, Tyrtaeus, and, for *elenchō*, Pindar).

In Pindar we see the masculine form *ho elenchos* used, without a suggestion of shame or disgrace, to mark an athletic competition and the testing of a poet's creations by public opinion. In Bacchylides (Fr 14) the verb *elenchō* means 'show' or 'be the indicator of', and the idea of the *elenchos* as the 'acid testing' of a thing's true nature, or a person's true mettle is the single most common element of fifth-century usage of the term. Toward the end of the century, we find a more specialized use of the *elenchos* to mark a testing of a person's words for their truth or falsity, and the use of *elenchos* as 'cross-examination' becomes common. In the philosophers of the late fifth and early fourth century, *elenchos* shows a full range of applications, from contests and testings, to cross-examinations, proofs, and refutations.

⁹ 'Sur quelques passages de "Banquet" de Platon', *Revue des Études Grecques*, LV (1942), 252-3. Daux also provides convincing evidence that the verb *elenchō*, as it is used in Andocides' speech 'de Mysteriis' (given in 399 BC) must sometimes be translated as 'cross-examine' and sometimes (even in a succeeding sentence) as 'prove'.

II Eleatic *elenchos*

We do not know the exact date of the composition of Parmenides' poem, but our evidence does not justify placement later than the first quarter of the fifth century. Plato's story in the opening of the *Parmenides* would place Parmenides' birthdate around 515–510 BC. Diogenes Laertius (*Lives*, IX. 231) puts Parmenides' *akmē* in the sixty-ninth Olympiad (504–501 BC) perhaps following Apollodorus' arbitrary choice of the founding of Elea (in 540–539 BC) as the year of Parmenides' birth. We must therefore think of Parmenides as an early fifth-century thinker and writer, drawing heavily on the language and phrasing of Homer and Hesiod, and contemporary with the poets Bacchylides and Pindar. In terms of the evidence supplied by our survey of the usage of *elenchos* outside Parmenides' poem, we should reject 'challenge', 'argument', and 'question' as translations of '*elenchos*', and take the meaning of 'test' or 'testing' as more probable than the later 'proof' and 'refutation'.

At the same time, no conclusions about what *elenchos* probably meant in the early fifth century can suffice for determining what *elenchos* might mean in the writings of a particularly creative thinker, nor can it determine what Parmenides might have meant by *elenchos* in a particular context. '*Elenchos*' might be used to designate a proof or refutation (even if that is not what '*elenchos*' means) just as 'There is some fruit in the kitchen' might be a remark about apples, even if 'fruit' does not mean 'apples'.

It has long been recognized that Parmenides' account introduced into philosophical discourse an element of rigorous argumentation that deeply influenced subsequent philosophizing. Clearly, he succeeded in constructing logical arguments for his view of reality long before Aristotle articulated principles of valid inference and the doctrine of the syllogism. But we must be careful in our ascriptions of logical acumen to Parmenides to avoid making him into more of a logician than his logical arguments will justify. The idea of a deductive proof is not expressed openly, or defined, until Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, the description of a disjunctive premiss will not appear until Theophrastus (at least according to

Alexander's *Commentary*), and the schema for a disjunctive syllogism is first seen in Chrysippus' account of the fifth indemonstrable syllogism. We may (indeed should) view Parmenides as a philosopher who succeeded in marshalling arguments in defence of his conclusions, but once we have distinguished between skill in constructing particular arguments and presenting an analysis of the forms of valid argument, there is no case for viewing Parmenides as a logician.¹⁰

The word *elenchos* appears only once in Parmenides' poem, in line 5 of Fragment 7, immediately following the abuse heaped on the 'two-headed' mortals who think both *estin* and *ouk estin*, and the goddess's injunction to keep our thought from this way, not letting custom force us to steer our wandering eye, echoing ear and tongue down this path. When we are told at this point to *krinai* the *elenchos*, our first thought would naturally be that we should *krinai* the *elenchos* instead of taking the wandering path of mortals (or at least as a response of some sort to mortal thinking) and this would make the *elenchos* into something of a refutation of mortal opinion. The problem with taking *elenchos* in this way is that the refutation of mortal belief (in generation, destruction, etc.) is really the business of Fragment 8 where the various attributes of *to eon* are established, and the various beliefs in 'partial existence' or 'temporary existence' are rejected. Since Fragment 8 begins with only one way

¹⁰ A view urged by Mansfield in *Die Offenbarung des Parmenides und die menschlicher Welt* (Assen, 1964). He takes the *elenchos* to be a proof by disjunctive syllogism (called a 'streitreichen Prüfung' and later 'der widerstreitende Beweis', 89) and constituted by the 'disjunctive' discussion of the two ways available for thinking in Fr 2. On his interpretation, Parmenides is the prototypical Stoic logician. Mansfield does not discuss the fact that *esti* is treated as a premise in Fr 2 rather than a derived conclusion, but it is a serious anomaly for his reconstruction. It is true that only one way *leipetai* by the time of Fr 8. 2, but (as we shall see) this is not sufficient to justify reading the poem as a disjunctive syllogism. If moreover we take the *elenchos* to have already occurred in Fr 2, we are forced to read the injunction to *krinai* in Fr 7 as merely a 'refresher to our memory', and the mention of the *krisis* in Fr 8 as yet another reminder of the *elenchos*. As we shall see, there is a more natural alternative to these heroic measures. The failure to distinguish between 'skill in constructing particular arguments . . . and the analysis of forms of logical argument' was noted by Charles Kahn in his review of Mansfield (*Gnomon*, XLII (1970), 113). The idea of the *elenchos* as a proof by elimination was stated originally by Reinhardt, *Parmenides* (Bonn, 1916), 46–7, and more recently by Ernst Heitsch, 'Evidenz und Wahrscheinlichkeitsaussagen Bei Parmenides', *Hermes*, CII (1974), 411–19.

remaining, whereas Fragment 7 still speaks in terms of several ways, it seems certain that Fragment 8 really does follow Fragment 7. In the natural sense of an aorist participle, an *elenchos* that is *hrēthenta* is an *elenchos* that *has been* spoken. But if so, the proofs against mortal beliefs which are yet to come in Fragment 8 cannot be the *elenchos*.¹¹

But these considerations do not suffice to show that *elenchos* cannot refer to a proof or refutation, for there are proofs (or at least clear attempts at proof) well before the end of Fragment 7. To my mind, the best recapitulation of Parmenides' argument is to be found in Owen's famous 'Eleatic Questions':

The purpose of these arguments is well known: it is to rule out two wrong roads which, together with the remaining right road, make up an exhaustive set of possible answers to the question *estin ē ouk estin*; 'Does it exist or not?'¹²

The right path, according to Owen, is given 'an unqualified yes', the first wrong path (*ouk estin*) an 'equally unqualified no', and the second wrong path (both *esti* and *ouk estin*—i.e. *estin* here or *estin* there, *estin* now or *estin* earlier) is 'two-headed' and moving in opposite directions, 'treating existence and non-existence as different and yet identical'. Owen takes the arguments against generation and destruction, indivisibility, and non-uniformity that run the length of Fragment 8 to reinforce this earlier denial of the second wrong way, and 'thus by elimination he tries to establish the conclusion he wants: *estin*' (57). There is much truth in Owen's account, but on a crucial point it blurs the issue: does the *estin* path remain because it is true (and the others are not), or does Parmenides argue that it is true *because* the other members of an exhaustive disjunction are not? Is it, in short, proven to be true 'by elimination' or proven true while the others are eliminated? The point is crucial because it involves the question of Parmenides' sense of a logical proof,

¹¹ This objection to *elenchos* as 'proof' can be found in Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (New Haven and London, 1970), 91; Leonardo Tarán, *Parmenides* (Princeton, 1965), 81; Verdenius, 'Der Logosbegriff bei Heraklit und Parmenides II', *Phronesis*, XII (1967), 64; Furley, above n 2, 10.

¹² G. E. L. Owen, 'Eleatic Questions', *Classical Quarterly*, X (1960), 84-102, repr in Furley and Allen, *Studies in Presocratic Philosophy*, vol ii (London, 1975), 48-81.

and it raises the specific issue of the use of the Stoic fifth indemonstrable as the correct reconstruction of the logic of Parmenides' account. Chrysippus' story about the 'logical dog' (cited by Sextus to provide a sceptical argument against belief in the supremacy of human reason¹³) makes a great deal of just this question of logical acumen. The dog arrives at a three-way road in pursuit of the quarry. He sniffs at each of the first two roads and then, *without sniffing*, immediately sets out down the third road. This, says Sextus, shows that the dog could make a complex application of the fifth indemonstrable: *P* or *Q* or *R*, not *Q*, not *R*, therefore *P*.¹⁴

If Parmenides is to be credited with the logical acumen of Chrysippus' dog, he must perform at least as well. After setting out the exhaustive disjunctive premiss (way *A* or way *B* or way *C*), and after having rejected two of them, he must infer, 'without sniffing', way *A*. He must, in other words, infer the correctness of way *A* from the falsity of the two remaining disjuncts. Failing that, he may be credited with an orderly, serial review of each of the available options, and a rejection or vindication of each of them, but he cannot be rightly said to have proven the truth of *estin* by disjunctive syllogism, or 'by elimination' of the other possibilities.

In at least four different respects, we must ignore salient features of Parmenides' account in order to make it fit this logical mould:

(1) Parmenides does *not* give us a disjunctive statement of the three possible ways.

Come now and I will tell you which are the only ways (*haipei hodoi mounai*) available for thinking, the one (*hē men*) that it is and cannot not be . . . the other (*hē de*) that it is not and must not be . . .

The goddess does *not* tell us that there is at least one way of enquiry available (*not: A* or *B*) but that there are two contrasting ways of enquiry available for thinking. It is true that

¹³ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I, 69.

¹⁴ The form of the fifth indemonstrable is described elsewhere as just *A* or *B*, not *B*, therefore *A*, and the sense of *dia pleionōn* in Sextus' account could be either a 'multiform' version of the simple argument, or a 'repeated' application of it. As Benson Mates explained (*Stoic Logic* (2nd pr, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961), 80), we can derive the desired conclusion through two successive simple disjunctive syllogisms.