PARMENIDES

**On Nature**

Soon as the coursers that bear me and drew me as far as extendeth

Impulse, guided me and threw me aloft in the glorious pathway,

lip to the Goddess that guideth through all things man that is conscious,

There was I carried along, for there did the coursers sagacious,

Drawing the chariot, bear me, and virgins preceded to guide them—

Daughters of Helios leaving behind them the mansions of darkness—

Into the light, with their strong hands forcing asunder the night-shrouds,

While in its socket the axle emitted the sound of a syrinx,

Glowing, for still it was urged by a couple of wheels well-rounded,

One upon this side, one upon that, when it hastened its motion.

There were the gates of the paths of the Night and the paths of the Day-time.

Under the gates is a threshold of stone and above is a lintel.

These too are closed in the ether with great doors guarded by Justice—

Justice the mighty avenger, that keepeth the keys of requital.

Her did the virgins address, and with soft words deftly persuaded,

Swiftly for them to withdraw from the gates the bolt and its fastener.

Opening wide, they uncovered the yawning expanse of the portal,

Backward rolling successive the hinges of brass in their sockets,—

Hinges constructed with nails and with clasps; then on­ward the virgins

Straightway guided their steeds and their chariot over the highway.

Then did the goddess receive me with gladness, and taking my right hand

Into her own, thus uttered a word and kindly bespake me:

Youth that art mated with charioteers and companions immortal,

Coming to us on the coursers that bear thee, to visit our mansion,

Hail! for it is not an evil Award that hath guided thee hither,

Into this path—for, I ween, it is far from the pathway of mortals—

Nay, it is Justice and Right. Thou needs must have knowledge of all things,

First of the Truth’s unwavering heart that is fraught with conviction,

Then of the notions of mortals, where no true conviction abideth;

But thou shalt surely be taught this too, that every opinion

Needs must pass through the ALL, and vanquish the test with approval.

Listen, and I will instruct thee—and thou, when thou hearest, shalt ponder—

What are the sole two paths of research that are open to thinking.

One path is: That Being doth be, and Non-Being is not:

This is the way of Conviction, for Truth follows hard in her footsteps.

Th’ other path is: That Being is not, and Non-Being must be;

This one, I tell thee in truth, is an all-incredible pathway.

For thou never canst know what is not (for none can conceive it),

Nor canst thou give it expression, for one thing are Thinking and Being.

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 ...And to me ‘tis indifferent

Whence I begin, for thither again thou shalt find me returning.

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 Speaking and thinking must needs be existent, for IS is of being.

Nothing must needs not be; these things I enjoin thee to ponder.

Foremost of all withdraw thy mind from this path of inquiry,

Then likewise from that other, wherein men, empty of knowledge,

Wander forever uncertain, while Doubt and Perplexity guide them—

Guide in their bosoms the wandering mind; and onward they hurry,

Deaf and dumb and blind and stupid, unreasoning cattle—

Herds that are wont to think Being and Non-Being one and the self-same,

Yet not one and the same; and that all things move in a circle.

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 Never I ween shalt thou learn that Being can be of what is not;

Wherefore do thou withdraw thy mind from this path of inquiry,

Neither let habit compel thee, while treading this pathway of knowledge,

Still to employ a visionless eye or an ear full of ringing,

Yea, or a clamorous tongue; but prove this vexed demonstration

Uttered by me, by reason. And now there remains for discussion

One path only: That Being doth be—and on it there are tokens

Many and many to show that what is is birthless and deathless,

Whole and only-begotten, and moveless and ever-enduring:

Never it was or shall be; but the ALL simultaneously now is,

One continuous one; for of it what birth shalt thou search for?

How and whence it hath sprung? I shall not permit thee to tell me,

Neither to think: ‘Of what is not,’ for none can say or imagine

How Not-Is becomes Is; or else what need should have stirred it,

After or yet before its beginning, to issue from nothing?

Thus either wholly Being must be or wholly must not be.

Never from that which is will the force of Intelligence suffer

Aught to become beyond itself. Thence neither production

Neither destruction doth Justice permit, ne’er slackening her fetters;

But she forbids. And herein is contained the decision of these things;

Either there is or is not; but Judgment declares, as it needs must,

One of these paths to be uncomprehended and utterly nameless,

No true pathway at all, but the other to be and be real.

How can that which is now be hereafter, or how can it have been?

For if it hath been before, or shall be hereafter, it is not:

Thus generation is quenched and decay surpasseth believing.

Nor is there aught of distinct; for the All is self-similar alway.

Nor is there anywhere more to debar it from being unbroken;

Nor is there anywhere less, for the All is sated with Being;

Wherefore the All is unbroken, and Being approacheth to Being.

Moveless, moreover, and bounded by great chains’ limits it lieth,

Void of beginning, without any ceasing, since birth and destruction

Both have wandered afar, driven forth by the truth of conviction.

Same in the same and abiding, and self through itself itself it reposes.

Steadfast thus it endureth, for mighty Necessity holds it—

Holds it within the chains of her bounds and round doth secure it.

Wherefore that that which IS should be infinite is not permitted;

For it is lacking in naught, or else it were lacking in all things.

\* \* \* \* \* \*  
  
 Steadfastly yet in thy spirit regard things absent as present;

Surely thou shalt not separate Being from clinging to Being,

Nor shalt thou find it scattered at all through the All of the Cosmos,

Nor yet gathered together.

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 One and the same are thought and that whereby there is thinking;

Never apart from existence, wherein it receiveth expression,

Shalt thou discover the action of thinking; for naught is or shall be

Other besides or beyond the Existent; for Fate hath determined

That to be lonely and moveless, which all things are but a name for—

Things that men have set up for themselves, believing as real

Birth and decay, becoming and ceasing, to be and to not-be,

Movement from place to place, and change from color to color.

But since the uttermost limit of Being is ended and perfect,

Then it is like to the bulk of a sphere well-rounded on all sides,

Everywhere distant alike from the centre; for never there can be

Anything greater or anything less, on this side or that side;

Yea, there is neither a non-existent to bar it from coming

Into equality, neither can Being be different from Being,

More of it here, less there, for the All is inviolate ever.

Therefore, I ween, it lies equally stretched in its limits on all sides.

And with this I will finish the faithful discourse and the thinking

Touching the truth; and now thou shalt learn the notions of mortals.

Learn and list to the treach’rous array of the words I shall utter.

Men have set up for themselves twin shapes to be named by Opinion

(One they cannot set up, and herein do they wander in error),

And they have made them distinct in their nature, and marked them with tokens,

Opposite each unto each—the one, flame’s fire of the ether,

Gentle, exceedingly thin, and everywhere one and the self-same,

But not the same with the other; the other, self-similar likewise,

Standing opposed, by itself: brute night, dense nature and heavy.

All the apparent system of these will I open before thee,

So that not any opinion of mortals shall ever elude thee.

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 All things now being marked with the names of light and of darkness,

Yea, set apart by the various powers of the one or the other,

Surely the All is at once full of light and invisible darkness,

Both being equal, and naught being common to one with the other.

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 For out of the formless fire are woven the narrower circlets,

Those over these out of night; but a portion of flame shooteth through them.

And in the centre of all is the Goddess that governeth all things:

She unto all is the author of loathsome birth and coition,

Causing the female to mix with the male, and by mutual impulse

Likewise the male with the female.

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 Foremost of gods, she gave birth unto Love; yea, foremost of all gods.

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 Then thou shalt know the ethereal nature and each of its tokens—

Each of the signs in the ether, and all the invisible workings

Wrought by the blemishless sun’s pure , lamp, and whence they have risen.

Then thou shalt hear of the orb-eyed moon’s circumambient workings,

And of her nature, and likewise discern the heaven that surrounds them,

Whence it arose, and how by her sway Necessity bound it

Firm, to encircle the bounds of the stars.

\* \* \* \* \* \*  
  
 ...How the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the ether

Common to all, and the milk of the sky, and the peak of Olympus,

Yea, and the fervent might of the stars, were impelled into being.

Circling the earth, with its wanderings, a borrowed, a night-gleaming splendor.

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 Wistfully watching forever, with gaze turned toward the sunlight.

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 Even as in each one of men is a union of limbs many-jointed,

So there is also in each one a mind; for one and the same are

That which is wise and the nature generic of members in mortals,

Yea, unto each and to all; for that which prevaileth is thinking.

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 Here on the right hand the youths, and there on the left hand the maidens.

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 Thus by the strength of opinion were these created and now are,

Yea, and will perish hereafter, as soon as they grow unto ripeness;

Men have imposed upon each one of these a name as a token.

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*Translation Thomas DAVIDSON*