Commentary on Long

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Let me begin with some remarks on Fragment B3 (Diels), which lies at the heart of Tony Long's stimulating talk this evening. The Greek text, as printed by Diels, is τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τὸ καὶ εἶναι. This line is attributed to Parmenides by Plotinus, and is rendered by Diels as denn Dasselbe ist Denken und Sein (Diels). Long points out that this can be understood in two ways. Either "the same" (τὸ αὐτὸ) is predicated of "thinking" (νοεῖν) and "being" (εἶναι), or the two infinitives are predicated of "the same" (τὸ). If I followed him correctly, there is for him no conceptual difference between these two renditions, to which he refers collectively as "the mind/being identity' reading" (ibid.). I would like to suggest that it is better for Long's own version of this reading to prefer the second alternative and to translate into English as follows: "The same is both (τὸ ... καὶ) thinking and being." This suggestion, which is supported by Lambros Couloubaritsis in an interpretation that is very similar to Long's, allows us to argue that identity is not synonymy, as Long himself points out. It also allows us to avoid the extreme anachronism of making Parmenides a Neo-Platonist or even German Idealist, as might seem to follow from taking the fragment to say that "thinking and being are the same."

Let me mention initially that Couloubaritsis has been inspired by Heidegger's interpretation in the essay "Moira," to which Long also refers. For Heidegger, τὸ αὐτὸ is the Rätselwort, the riddle word, which expresses the unfolding (Entfaltung) of the bifurcation (Zwiefalt) of Being and beings, in the sense of an Entbergung des Anwesens von Anwesendem (246, 249). In simple English, "the same" is the enigmatic expression of the uncovering of the presence of entities or beings, i.e., of beings as present, and so as "at hand" (in Heidegger's earlier terminology). This uncovering itself requires a λέγειν and νοεῖν, i.e., a thinking in the sense of a letting lie before, a rendering

1 Couloubaritsis 1986, 238ff.
accessible to human thinking of the presence of present things as lying spread out before us, but which we then collect together in discursive thought. The presence of what is present leads also, however, to the concealment of presence by the things that it presents; these things are captured in names, i.e., they constitute the beings of the way of deception or δόξα. To recapitulate, the same is the intrinsically enigmatic unity of presence and what gets presented; so the very process by which presence shows us the presented beings leads to a covering over, i.e., the famous forgetting, of presence or Being. This is all that Heidegger has to tell us about the riddle-word τὸ αὐτὸ, which he says Parmenides also fails to think, i.e., to explain (255f).

Now to return to the two translations of fragment 3 that together constitute the mind-being identity reading. I would further articulate the difference between the two translations as follows. The crucial question is what Parmenides means by “one” in B8: ἕπει οὐν ἔστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν./ἐν. συνεχέσ (11.5-6). “since it is now, all together, one, continuous.” Contrary to the polemical presentation of Eleatic monism from Plato onward, this line says nothing of homogeneous unity. A “one” that is continuous because everywhere all together is a totality. On the reading “thinking and being are the same,” the sense seems to be that they are one and homogeneous rather than two distinct elements within a unity. And this sense of “one” leads to all the paradoxes and contradictions traditionally associated with Eleaticism. On the other hand, if we read “the same is both thinking and being,” then we can take “one” to mean “unity” in the sense that not only thinking but all other required properties of being, including being itself, belong to one and the same entity. In other words, “one” means that whatever is constitutes a unity that possesses several attributes, e.g., thinking, life, and the spatial attributes of finitude, circularity, and so on. The unity of oneness thus refers to what we would call a structure. We can then accommodate the limited, spherical, and of course, living nature of being, which possesses an ἄρτος or heart and so too a mind. One could object that this interpretation destroys the monolithic homogeneity of Eleatic doctrine, but the reply to this objection is that it begs the question, and in so doing it renders Parmenides completely unintelligible. It makes him out to be either a fool or a charlatan.

I note very briefly that on my suggestion, the sequence of fragments 2 through 8 becomes easy to see. We cannot know or speak of what is not, which is inaccessible (2). Whatever we know or speak of, is. (3) can then be taken in a strong or a weak sense. In the weak sense,