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### Parmenides' Verse B 8.34 and the Practical Meaning of νόος

One of the most famous notions associated with Parmenides is the relationship between thought and being. Although in philosophical tradition this notion has been understood as the notorious identity of thought and being, the precise form of the relationship in Parmenides is a matter of dispute, depending on syntactical construction of Greek lines that seem to express this relationship, i.e. the fragment B 3 (τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι) and the line B 8.34 :

ταὐτὸν δ' ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ οὐνεκεν ἔστι νόημα.

However, the interpretation of B 3 is essentially ambiguous since τὸ αὐτὸ could be taken either as a predicate or as a subject. Although ταὐτὸν in B 8.34 could be taken to be as problematic as τὸ αὐτὸ in B 3, there is an important difference between both lines. Whereas line B 8.34 occurs within a clear context of the fragment B 8 that can – as we shall see – help to settle its interpretation, the fragment B 3,

not taking up the whole hexametric verse, appears alone; we are thus short of clues on which it would be possible to decide how to construe it. Because of the rather problematic nature of the fragment B 3<sup>i</sup> we should concentrate merely on line B 8.34.

Now, although the precise form of the relationship between thought and being in B 8.34 is a matter of dispute, there seems to be no disagreement on its theoretical or epistemological character. However, it is the aim of this paper to undermine this general agreement on the theoretical-epistemological character of the line. Whereas, on the usual interpretation, νόος (or νόημα) is understood in theoretical terms as the act of, or the capacity for, νοεῖν, in interpreting the line we should rather proceed from the ordinary, rather practical meaning of νόος as found, e.g., in the archaic lyric poetry, where it meant a character, attitude, or even moral self. On this interpretation, the line is to be understood in practical or even ethical rather than epistemological terms. Hence, its main message is practical-ethical and only secondarily it has theoretical-epistemological implications.

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i Sometimes it is even suspected that B 3 is not an authentic quotation from Parmenides. Cf. Gadamer 1996, p. 154: 'Inzwischen hat mich Manssonner überzeugt, daß Fragment 3 überhaupt kein Parmenides-Zitat ist, sondern eine von Platon selbst stammende Formulierung, die (...) Clemens Parmenides zugeschrieben hat.'

## I. Syntactical Considerations about B 8.34

As we have suggested, there is a problem of how exactly to construe the line B 8.34 (ταὐτὸν δ' ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ οὐνεκεν ἔστι νόημα). In general, there are three main possibilities of how to construct it. They are based primarily on the understanding of ταὐτὸν which can function as predicate, subject, or attribute. The conjunction οὐνεκεν can be also rendered in three ways: ‘therefore’, ‘that’ and ‘because’. First of all, let us list some possible constructions for each interpretational type:

### A. (ταὐτὸν as predicate)

1. Dasselbe aber ist Erkennen und das, woraufhin Erkenntnis ist.<sup>i</sup> (Heitsch)
2. Penser et ce pourquoi la pensée est, sont la même chose.<sup>ii</sup> (Cordero)
3. It is the same to think and the thought that [the object of thought] exists.<sup>iii</sup> (Tarán)

### B. (ταὐτὸν as subject)

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i Heitsch 1974, p. 31.

ii Cordero 1984, p. 39.

iii Tarán 1965, p. 86.

1. Das Selbige aber ist zu erkennen, und zugleich der Grund, weshalb eine Erkenntnis seiend ist.<sup>i</sup> (Hölscher)
2. The same is to think and (is) wherefore [or ,that‘] is (the) thought [or ,thinking‘].<sup>ii</sup> (Mourelatos)

C. (ταὐτὸν as attribute)

Als Identisches kann es erkannt werden und weil die Erkenntnis Bestand hat.<sup>iii</sup> (Wiesner)

As to the (grammatical) suitability of the renderings suggested, the type B (or C) is to be preferred on two grounds: 1) Unlike type A, the grammatical construction ἐστὶ νοεῖν is used in its usual way: ‘it is (possible) to think’. 2) To interpret ταὐτὸν as subject fits better the context of the fragment B 8 for in B 8.29 (only five lines above our line) ταὐτὸν unambiguously appears in the function of subject, being synonymous with εἶν. As Hölscher puts it: ‘Es ist unwahrscheinlich, daß Parmenides fünf Verse später, und wieder am Versanfang, dasselbe Wort in einem anderen, unprägnanten Sinn gebraucht.’<sup>iv</sup> Or as Mourelatos puts it: ‘The presumption is that ταὐτόν

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i Hölscher 1986, p. 25.

ii Mourelatos 1970, p. 165

iii Wiesner 1987, p. 176.

iv Hölscher 1986, p. 97-98.

refers back to the subject under discussion in B 8 as a whole – ἐόν, “what-is”; it must therefore function as subject in B 8.34, not as predicate.’<sup>i</sup>

However, type B is not immune to objections since its grammatical construction is not quite plausible. On this interpretation, the line consists of two clauses which are dependent on ταὐτὸν:

‘ταὐτὸν δ’ (subject)

ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε (first predicate)

καὶ <ἐστὶ> οὐνεκεν ἔστι νόημα (second predicate).’<sup>ii</sup>

The main problem of this construction is not that it requires supplying ἐστὶ from the preceding clause before οὐνεκεν but that the meaning of ἐστὶ supplied differs from the original one. The first ἐστὶ means ‘it is (possible) to’ whereas the second one has to be understood in the sense ‘it is the reason’.<sup>iii</sup>

Taking into account both the problems and the advantages of types A and B, Wiesner suggests a new

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i Mourelatos 1970, p. 165.

ii Mourelatos 1970, p. 166.

iii Wiesner 1987, p. 174: ‘Sie macht ja ein Zeugma insofern erforderlich, als ἐστὶ vor dem Infinitiv νοεῖν zunächst als “es ist (möglich) zu ..., kann” erscheint, dann aber vor dem οὐνεκεν -Satz als “ist der Grund, <is>” zum anschließenden “weshalb” oder “wherefore” überleiten soll.’

interpretation of the line listed as type C. But his interpretation is also susceptible to objections; for the present, it suffices only to mention that it is superfluous and (grammatically and factually) rather forced to construe  $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu$  as attribute (see our considerations further below).

To reiterate, apart from the differences within each particular interpretational type (depending largely on the understanding of  $\omicron\upsilon\nu\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\nu$ ), there are three main possibilities of how to interpret our line which are based on  $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu$ . As to the *grammatical* construction, each type is somewhat problematic. Hence the interpreters are seeking to account for each type by virtue of *factual* reasons. I even suspect that in construing the line, Wiesner was primarily led by the alluring factual (i.e. ontological) considerations: For to construe  $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu$  as attribute and  $\omicron\upsilon\nu\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\nu$  as ‘because’ entails two reasons why being (what-is) can be thought: 1) Being can be thought only as identical, i.e. because it is identical. 2) Being can be thought because there is thought. According to Wiesner, this reason is supported by the fact ‘daß Erkennen nur mit dem Seienden anzutreffen ist (B 8,35-36), d.h. einem realen, sachhaltigen Objekt.’<sup>i</sup> Yet, most scholars see in the line different factual or ontological implications. The advocates of the type A interpret it as stating the identity of being and thought

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i Wiesner 1987, p. 176.

whereas the advocates of the type B interpret it as follows: ‘The two clauses are complementary. The first guarantees the presence or the availability of a certain object. But it posits no obligation for mind to seek it. The second posits the obligation, but gives no guarantee of the object’s availability.’<sup>i</sup>

Now, we seem to be moving in a circle since the grammatical reasons are conditioned by the factual ones and *vice versa*. How could we get out of this vicious circle? To be sure, there is no perfect and indisputable solution of how to understand our line since it is the destiny of all interpretation to be captive in a circle – may we call it vicious or hermeneutical. Nevertheless, despite (or rather because of) the problems pertaining to the line B 8.34, we should try to develop a new approach of how to interpret it.

Let us start by tentatively considering the best grammatical construction. ταὐτὸν is best to be construed as subject (see the reasons mentioned in favor of the type B). However, unlike in the type B, we should avoid the supplying of ἐστὶ before οὐνεκεν, which seems too forced and controversial. As to οὐνεκεν, the rendering of which is most problematic, von Fritz’s remark is worth quoting: “It is true, as Fränkel points out, that in the overwhelming

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i Mourelatos 1970, p. 168. Cf. also Hölscher 1968, p. 99: ‘es ist das Denk-Mögliche und als solches der Grund für die Wahrheit des Denkens.’

majority of the cases in which the word οὐνεκα occurs in Homer, it means either ‘because’ or ‘that’ (...). But, in spite of this, it can hardly be denied that essentially and originally οὐνεκα is οὐ ἐνεκα (‘on account of which’). (...) [I]ts origin from οὐ ἐνεκα is so apparent that it is always possible to revert to the original meaning. In Parmenides the word οὐνεκεν occurs only once outside the passage discussed, but in this case it certainly means ‘because of which’ or ‘therefore’ (...).<sup>i</sup> In fact, for the meaning of οὐνεκεν in our line, it is decisive how it is used ‘in the only occurrence outside the passage discussed’, i.e. two lines above (in B 8.32), where – as von Fritz and the majority of the interpreters concede – it has to be rendered as ‘therefore’. Moreover, if we take into account that Parmenides’ poem belongs to oral culture and as such was designed for listening to rather than reading, one may be even prone to think that Parmenides used οὐνεκεν in B 8.32 (i.e. in a context where its meaning is unproblematic) only in order to make its meaning clear, thus giving his audience a clue of how to understand it two lines below.

Our considerations about the best grammatical construction would, then, result in the following preliminary rendering:

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i von Fritz 1945, p. 237-238.



PR (Preliminary Rendering)

What is in itself the same (i.e. ἑόν) is to think and that is why there is thought.

The objection to this rendering is evident: it may be grammatically most appropriate but factually it is very problematic for it seems to be *tautological*. To say ‘Since it is possible to think (being), there is thought’ is trivial and as such – we can suspect – it has nothing to do with the elaborate and sophisticated argument of the fragment B 8. Yet, before we reject this rendering on the grounds of its triviality, we should consider whether it is not only the translation into modern languages that is trivial and tautological. Since the alleged tautology of the line is based on the conception of thought, we should first inquire into the meaning of νοεῖν and its cognates.

## II. The Meaning of νόος

Since our understanding of νοεῖν and νόος draws largely upon Kurt von Fritz’ brilliant study, let us start our inquiry into this topic by summarizing and rethinking some of his approaches and conclusions. His main contribution, let us preliminarily remember, consists in proving that whereas our concept of thought involves discursive activity

as its constitutive element, the Greek word  $\nu\omicron\epsilon\iota\nu$  being closely related to the sense of vision<sup>i</sup> is based on a passive and receptive relation to the world.

Unlike the verbal form  $\nu\omicron\epsilon\iota\nu$ , the meaning of its nominal cognate  $\nu\omicron\omicron\varsigma$  underwent extensive changes which sometimes led even to the contradictory uses of this noun. Whereas the original meaning of  $\nu\omicron\epsilon\iota\nu$  was ‘to realize or to understand a situation’,<sup>ii</sup>  $\nu\omicron\omicron\varsigma$  in Homer developed as follows: ‘Since the same situation may have a different “meaning” to persons of different character and circumstances of life, the notion develops that different persons or nations have different  $\nu\omicron\omicron\iota$ . As these different meanings of a situation evoke different reactions to it, and since these reactions are more or less typical of certain persons,  $\nu\omicron\omicron\varsigma$  sometimes implies the notion of a specific “attitude”.’<sup>iii</sup> In opposition to many different  $\nu\omicron\omicron\iota$  another meaning of  $\nu\omicron\omicron\varsigma$  gained ground: a notion of ‘the  $\nu\omicron\omicron\varsigma$  which penetrates beyond the surface appearance [and] discovers the real truth about the matter. There can, then, be no different  $\nu\omicron\omicron\iota$  in this situation, as the  $\nu\omicron\omicron\varsigma$  in this case is obviously just one.’<sup>iv</sup> In Hesiod further semantic shifts took place: ‘The

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i Cf. von Fritz 1945, p. 223: ‘But in the stage of the semantic development represented by the Homeric poems, the concept of  $\nu\omicron\epsilon\iota\nu$  is more closely related to the sense of vision.’

ii von Fritz 1945, p. 223.

iii von Fritz 1945, p. 223.

iv von Fritz 1945, p. 224.

notion that different persons may have different *vóoi* has been further developed in two opposite directions. On the one hand, the same person may have a different *vóoç* at different times. On the other hand, *vóoç* now can designate not only a more or less permanent attitude, as in Homer, but also a fixed moral character, so that the word is now often connected with adjectives expressing moral praise or blame.<sup>i</sup>

Having analyzed Homer and Hesiod with respect of *vóoç*, von Fritz claims that '[w]ith the rise of philosophical speculation in the narrower sense, common language and philosophical terminology gradually begin to develop on different lines.'<sup>ii</sup> Nonetheless, that is I suggest the most problematic move of von Fritz's analysis. For it is far from evident to assume – as he does – a philosophical tradition or line of thought based merely on such scanty evidence as provided by Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Parmenides. We cannot be even sure whether these thinkers were acquainted with one another, let alone assume a continuous line of their interdepending thoughts. So von Fritz appears to squeeze these thinkers into narrow limits of an assumed philosophical tradition that he takes to be determined by the

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i von Fritz 1945, p. 225.

ii von Fritz 1945, p. 226-227.

tendency of *vóos* to be rare and exceptional among people.<sup>i</sup> Although this notion of *vóos* seems to obtain for Xenophanes and Heraclitus in whom only few occurrences of *vóos* survived, it is not suitable for Parmenides. For in his poem there is at least one occurrence of *vóos* that is unambiguously attributed to all men.<sup>ii</sup>

So if we want to understand how *vóos* was used in Parmenides, we should not close him up in a presumed or prefabricated line of thought but, instead, situate him in a wider contemporary language context (represented to us by the surviving contemporary texts). Let us then shortly survey the use of *vóos* in the post-Homeric tradition as found primarily in the archaic lyric poetry, which – on von Fritz’s account – represents the second (non-philosophical)

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i Cf. von Fritz 1945, p. 230: ‘In any case, the notion that *vóos* is something exceptional which only few people possess becomes very prevalent in the generation after Xenophanes, especially with Heraclitus, though it can already be found in the poems of Semonides of Amorgos. It is obvious that this implies a change in the character of the insight which is supposed to be the result of genuine *voeîn*.’

ii It is the notorious expression *πλακτὸς νόος* in B 6.6. This *vóos* is not rare and exceptional among men but rather widespread and even ubiquitous. It is further significant that von Fritz takes this expression to be mysterious and unintelligible: Cf. von Fritz 1945, p. 237: ‘But a very real difficulty, which has never been solved and perhaps does not admit a perfect solution, is created by the fact that in some instances Parmenides seems to assert that *vóos* and *voeîn* are always and necessarily connected with *εἶναι* and *εἶν* and therefore with the truth, which seems to imply that the *vóos* cannot err.’ For the alternative interpretation of *πλακτὸς νόος* see the third and fourth sections of our paper.

line of the semantic development of νόος he is not interested in. This survey reveals two main semantic trends of νόος: 1) The νόος is sometimes attributed to gods, thereby appearing to retreat out of range of ordinary people.<sup>i</sup> To attribute the νόος to gods does not however necessarily involve denying it completely to ordinary men. It is only more difficult for them to possess it. It is this use of νόος that the von Fritz analysis finds in Xenophanes and Heraclitus. Yet, this meaning of νόος is quite rare in our extant texts. 2) As a number of occurrences of νόος in our extant texts suggests, νόος meant above all a character or even a kind of moral self. So the original Homeric notion of νόος as a character or attitude was not only preserved and strengthened but also morally deepened and developed towards a kind of men's moral fundament or self. The frequent connection of νόος with a moral attribute testifies to this sweeping trend.<sup>ii</sup>

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i Cf. Semonides: νοῦς δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισιν (fr. 1.3, Diehl); Solon: πάντῃ δ' ἀθανάτων ἀφανῆς νόος ἀνθρώποισιν (fr. 17, Diehl); Theognis: θεοὶ δὲ κατὰ σφέτερον πάντα τελούσι νόον (v. 142).

ii In Solon νόος occurs eight times. Only once it is ascribed to God (cf. preceding note), the other occurrences testify to the meaning 'character or attitude'. Moreover, since it is used five times with a moral attribute, it is possible to conclude that in Solon this (practical) meaning of νόος is emphasized by its connection with the moral domain; cf. ἄδικος νόος (fr. 3.7, Diehl); μέγαν νόον (fr. 4.7); νόος ἄρτιος (fr. 5.10); χαῦνος νόος (fr. 8.6); τραχὺν νόον (fr. 23.15). For a similar account see Theognis; cf. πιστόν νόον (v. 74, cf. v. 88);

By the way, either semantic use of νόος seems to have quite different a relationship to the original verbal form νοεῖν. For whereas νόος in the former use might (as a kind of divine insight or plan) be related to the act of νοεῖν,<sup>i</sup> the νόος in the latter use seems to be lacking all relations with the verbal form, meaning just a moral character.

### III. νόος in Parmenides

Let us now look at how νόος is used in Parmenides. Preliminarily, it could be submitted that whereas νόος was – as the majority of its occurrences in the contemporary texts suggests – usually used in moral-practical terms (meaning a character or even moral self), Parmenides seems to have used it quite differently. Since Parmenides' poem is usually understood as an ontological exposition, it is sus-

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καθαρόν νόον (v. 89); ἄπληστον νόον (v. 109); πλήμονα νόον (v. 196); νόου ἐσθλοῦ (v. 223) etc.

<sup>i</sup> This use of νόος could be rendered either way (i.e. as an insight or a plan/intention) corresponding to the original Homeric meaning of νοεῖν as 'realizing or understanding a situation', cf. von Fritz 1945, p. 223-224: 'A dangerous situation, or a situation which otherwise deeply affects the individual realizing it, often immediately calls forth or suggest a plan to escape from, or to deal with, the situation. The visualization of this plan, which, so to speak, extends the development of the situation into the future, is then also considered a function of the νόος, so that the terms νόος and νοεῖν can acquire the meaning of "plan" or "planning".'

pected that the meaning of νόος is theoretical rather than moral-practical. For as the expressions like λεύσσε νόωι (‘Observe through your mind’, B 4.1) or ἄλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ’ ἀφ’ ὁδοῦ διζήσιος εἰργε νόημα, ‘hold back your mind from this way of inquiry’, B 7.2) suggest, Parmenides seems to conceive of the meaning of νόος in theoretical terms. So there seems to be a considerable difference in how νόος was used in usual colloquial language, on the one hand, and in Parmenides, on the other hand. That deserves not only our attention, but also an explanation.

First of all, it is a question why we are so easily prone to understand νόος in Parmenides in theoretical rather than practical terms. For although νόος in the expressions mentioned above seems to have theoretical meaning, it is not difficult to imagine another constructions (e.g. ‘Observe by virtue of your character’, ‘Hold back your character from this way of inquiry’). There are I suggest at least two reasons for its theoretical construction: 1) The usual ontological or theoretical understanding of Parmenides’ poem seems to play an important role in it. For if one expects to find in the poem an ontological exposition, they are also prone to understand νόος as a basis of, or a capacity for, this ontological or theoretical activity. 2) Probably a more important reason for its theoretical construction involves our assumption or even prejudice to construe νόος by

means of its connection to νοεῖν. As to νοεῖν, it is actually to be construed in theoretical terms since it is an activity of seeing, contemplating, or thinking. Moreover, in Parmenides it seems even to be explicitly connected with εἶν (cf. ‘without εἶν ... you won’t find νοεῖν, B 8.35-36). Since εἶν is supposed to be an ontological (i.e. highly theoretical) concept, the connection of νοεῖν to εἶν seems to only stress the original theoretical meaning of νοεῖν.

Now, since there is an etymological or linguistic connection between νόος and νοεῖν, we are prone to assume that – similarly to our words ‘to think’ and ‘thought’ – there must be also a functional or semantic connection between both Greek words. As we have however suggested at the end of second section of our paper, the functional or semantic connection between νόος and νοεῖν is largely at odds with the contemporary usual and most frequent meaning of νόος. For if νόος was then construed in moral-practical terms as a character, it seems to have been discharged of most of its connections to νοεῖν. So although we can find it evident to functionally or semantically connect νόος to νοεῖν (in particular because of the connection of our own words ‘to think’ and ‘thought’), in the contemporary language it did not seem to hold. In any case, in assuming the functional or semantic connection between νόος and νοεῖν, we could be inclined to render νόος as an act of, or a capacity for, νοεῖν, thereby understanding it in



theoretical terms. To reiterate, if νόος means a character or a moral self, it is rather difficult to see how it could bear upon the verbal form, the meaning of which is the activity of seeing or contemplating.

If the theoretical meaning of νόος largely depends on its functional or semantic connection to νοεῖν, we can ask whether this connection is explicitly to be found in the poem or whether it is only vaguely implied on the analogy of our words ‘to think’ and ‘thought’. There is at least one place in the poem where both words seem to occur in a very close connection. This connection seems to be somehow established in the line B 8.34; but since it is this line we are dealing with and since we have not so far arrived at its interpretation, we had now better pass it over. Another place where the connection appears to be established immediately follows lines B 8.35-36 that (by means of the particle γάρ) give reason for the line B 8.34: ‘For (γάρ) without being (ἐόν) on which it (i.e. νόημα) once revealed depends<sup>i</sup> you won’t find contemplation (νοεῖν).’ (B 8.35-

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i I construe the clause ἐν ᾧ πεφρατισμένον ἐστίν in keeping with Mourelatos’ interpretation: ‘The key to the phrase is, I believe, not in the participle πεφρατισμένον (from a rare verb, the semantics of which are unavoidably obscure) but in the phrases ἐν ᾧ ... ἐστίν. The usual translation assumes that ἐν has vaguely locative or instrumental force. It has been overlooked that the ἐν together with εἶναι can have an idiomatic sense “to depend on, to rely upon, to be under the authority of”.’ (Mourelatos 1970, p. 171) The subject of the clause is νόημα, supplied from the preceding line, πεφρατισμένον being just the attribute.

36) As these lines suggest, νοεῖν and νόος (or νόημα)<sup>i</sup> are linked by virtue of ἐόν<sup>ii</sup> since both νοεῖν and νόος are thought to be closely related to ἐόν.<sup>iii</sup>

Although the theoretical implications of νόος in Parmenides' poem seems to be very strong and conspicuous, there still remain two questions to ask: 1) Do

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i Although νόος is sometimes distinguished from νόημα by the reference to the grammatical fact that the nouns with the ending -μα designate the result of an action (cf. Stenzel 1989, p. 221), in Parmenides νόος and νόημα mean the same (cf. von Fritz 1945, p. 241, n. 95). See also uses of νόημα in Xenophanes and Theognis: In fragment B 23 Xenophanes says that God is totally different from mortal beings in shape (δέμας) and νόημα. The contrast with God's outer shape makes it clear that νόημα means his inner nature or character, and not (only) his thought. In three of all four occurrences (v. 435, 1083, and 1149) Theognis uses νόημα synonymously with νόος (meaning character). Only in v. 985 it seems to be used in the meaning 'as swift as thought', but even this use of νόημα is more appropriately to be understood in terms of the swiftness of spirit that can immediately see even the most distant places and times (cf. von Fritz 1945, p. 224: 'In this connection νόος seems to designate the imagination by which we can visualize situations and objects which are remote in space and time.'). and not in terms of the swiftness of thought as a particular act of thinking.

ii See e.g. von Fritz 1945, p. 237: 'Parmenides *seems to assert* (my italics) that νόος and νοεῖν are always and necessarily connected with εἶναι and ἐόν'. Cf. also Wiesner's statement quoted in part above where the connection between νόος and νοεῖν is also just supposed without being accounted for: 'Der zweite Grund "weil die Erkenntnis Bestand hat" wird dadurch gestützt, daß Erkennen nur mit dem Seienden anzutreffen ist (B 8,35-36), d.h. einem realen, sachhaltigen Objekt.' (Wiesner 1987, p. 176).

iii Cf. 1) the relationship between νοεῖν and ἐόν ('without ἐόν you will not find νοεῖν') and 2) the dependence of νόημα (or νόος) as the subject of the clause ἐν ᾧ πεφασισμένον ἐστίν on ἐόν.

really all occurrences of νόος in the poem unambiguously testify to theoretical meaning? 2) Even if there is a unique. all uses of νόος in Parmenides are completely lacking all practical implications νόος had in the contemporary colloquial usage?

As to the first question, we can answer it in the negative. For there is at least one occurrence of νόος in the poem that unambiguously testifies to the colloquial practical meaning of νόος as a character. It is the occurrence of νόος in the line B 6.6. But before embarking on its interpretation, we should remember the context in which it occurs. As the survey of the contemporary, primarily lyric texts suggest, the main part of the fragment B 6 works up the traditional views about men and their relation to gods, which can be taken to be a kind of archaic anthropology.<sup>i</sup> Given its almost stereotypical use in the lyrics, the archaic anthropology could be considered to be a standard lyric motive. As the fragment B 6 taking up the traditional lyric vocabulary of the archaic anthropology states, in comparison with the omnipotent and omniscient gods, men appear to be not-knowing (cf. εἰδότες οὐδέν, B 6.4), helpless (cf. ἀμηχανίη, B 6.5), straying (cf. πλάττονται, B 6.5), deaf and blind (cf. κωφοί, τυφλοί, B 6.7) etc.

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i Cf. Mansfeld 1964, p. 1-41.

Now, it is significant that within Parmenides' exposition of the archaic anthropology the word νόος occurs, being attributed to ordinary men who are helpless, not-knowing, deaf and blind. Its relationship to ordinary men is further stressed by the attribute πλακτὸς ('straying', B 6.6) by which it is accompanied. In other words, νόος (as a πλακτὸς νόος) is here explicitly understood as straying, i.e. erroneous, labile, or changing. Now, if we take into account our preliminary survey of the uses of νόος in the poem that largely accord with its usual theoretical understanding, the use of νόος in B 6.6 seems to be quite unique, even anomalous. For – as we have seen – the usual meaning of νόος in the poem seems to be construed by means of its connection to being, the νόος appears to exclude any kind of error or lability; indeed it is hardly conceivable that what is essentially connected with the unchanging steady being could be labile. So, on this interpretation, the very notion of a straying or labile νόος has to be dismissed as a unique or even anomalous use of νόος in Parmenides.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. von Fritz 1945, p. 237: 'But a very real difficulty, which has never been solved and perhaps does not admit a perfect solution, is created by the fact that in some instances Parmenides seems to assert that νόος and νοεῖν are always and necessarily connected with εἶναι and ἔόν and therefore with the truth, which seems to imply that the νόος cannot err.'

Now, as to our first question, we can submit that there is indeed one occurrence of *vóos* in the poem that unambiguously testifies to its colloquial practical meaning (to be rendered as a character). For if, within the exposition of the archaic anthropology, *vóos* is attributed to ordinary, i.e. helpless and not-knowing men, it is *first* to be expected that it has practical rather than theoretical meaning. This colloquial practical meaning *further* explains why the *vóos* can be straying, i.e. labile or erroneous. For it allows us not to construe *vóos* by means of its apparently essential connection to being so that its straying or labile nature would no longer be suspicious or even problematic.

Let us now turn to our second question, i.e. whether other occurrences of *vóos* in the poem could also have some practical implications. To reiterate, our preliminary survey, that is in accord with the usual interpretation of *vóos*, suggested that *vóos* in the poem should be construed in theoretical terms. Nevertheless, if there is one unambiguous practical use of *vóos* in the poem (as it is in B 6.6), then excluding all practical implications from other occurrences of *vóos* would involve assuming two quite distinct and incompatible uses of *vóos* in the poem. Although one usually tends to understand *vóos* in this way, it would be nevertheless more plausible to assume that there is only one conception of *vóos* in the poem. If so, *vóos* should have both theoretical and practical meaning. In other

words, each occurrence of *vóos* should be understood as having both theoretical and practical implications.

Moreover, if we considered the occurrence of *vóos* in the fragment B 6 to be unique or even anomalous, not only its very occurrence would be strange and incidental but, consequently, the whole exposition of the archaic anthropology in fragment B 6 would become rather superfluous and futile. However, given the central role of fragment B 6 for Parmenides' (ontological) argument<sup>i</sup>, we have to take everything in the fragment to essentially contribute to Parmenides' argument or his narrative strategy.<sup>ii</sup>

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i The first two lines are usually considered to essentially contribute to an assumed ontological argument of the poem: Parmenides first relates being to λέγειν and νοεῖν (given the difficult syntax of the first sentence, the precise form of the relationship is however a matter of dispute among the interpreters) and second makes a vital contention that whereas there is being, nothing is not (cf. B 6.1-2). Sometimes the fragment B 6 or rather its first two lines are taken to constitute a part of a continuous ontological argument containing the fragments B 2, B 3, and B 6.

ii As we have suggested in the previous note, only the first two lines of B 6 are usually considered to relevantly contribute to Parmenides' intrinsic (ontological) argument, and the rest of the fragment where there is the exposition of the archaic anthropology is taken to be a mere poetical or metaphorical pendant to the intrinsic (ontological) argument.

#### IV. Interpretation of B 8.34

After these general considerations about νόος in Parmenides' poem, let us return to the line B 8.34. In the first section of our paper we have considered its most plausible syntactical construction and arrived at the following preliminary rendering (PR): 'What is in itself the same (i.e. ἑόν) is to think and that is why there is thought.' Yet, despite its syntactical plausibility, its (philosophical) meaning appeared problematic. For, on this rendering, the line amounts to saying 'Since it is possible to think (being), there is thought'. So the line seems to be trivial or even tautological. Yet, having clarified the meaning of νοεῖν and in particular that of νόος (or νόημα), we can now translate its rendering as follows:

##### B 8.34

What is in itself the same (i.e. ἑόν) is to contemplate and that is why the mind/character (νόημα) is true.

The line involves two statements: 1) being (ἑόν) is to contemplate (νοεῖν) and 2) the contemplation of being makes mind/character true; as to the truthfulness of mind, I

take ἔστι to be used in the veridical meaning.<sup>i</sup> The usual interpretation assumes that the intimate connection between εὖν and νοεῖν (seemingly supported, e.g., by the B 8.35-36 ‘Without being (εὖν) (...) you won’t find contemplation (νοεῖν).’) the truthfulness of mind would be indeed trivial, for it is *first* assumed that there is a semantic or functional similarity between νοεῖν and νόος or νόημα (νόος so is thus understood as an act of, or a capacity for, νοεῖν), so that – because of its connection to εὖν – νόος is *secondly* supposed to be always true and steady. But if, on the contrary, the very nature of νόος is labile and erroneous (and as the expression πλακτὸς νόος in B 6.6 clearly suggests it is), then the line puts forward a very nontrivial and even revolutionary idea, i.e. that the truthfulness of mind/character is possible only by means of the contemplation of being. In other words, in order for the line to be nontrivial, it has to presuppose the colloquial practical meaning of νόος.

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i If we take the lability and erroneousness of the νόος (as it is corroborated by the expression πλακτὸς νόος) seriously, we have to construe ἔστι in the veridical meaning. For if we interpreted it, e.g., in the existential meaning, the line would read as follows: The very existence of the νόος is conditioned by the act of the contemplation of being; so if someone is not able to contemplate being, they do not have the νόος, which entails its nonexistence. Yet since in B 6 νόος is unambiguously attributed to ordinary, i.e. helpless and not-knowing, men, who confuse being and nonbeing (cf. B 6.8-9), the contemplation of being cannot itself guarantee the existence of the νόος, as it is usually supposed.



Therefore the line has to be interpreted on two levels:

1) The line makes sense only on the assumption that the *vóoç* is by itself labile and erroneous. This meaning of *vóoç* is not only clearly stated in B 6 but – as we found out in the second section of our paper – it was its ordinary colloquial meaning. Now, as we have suggested and as we would see more clearly in connection with the second level of interpretation, it might have been Parmenides' intention to get over this exclusively practical meaning of *vóoç* towards a more philosophically promising and relevant one. Still, in interpreting the line we have to proceed from the ordinary practical meaning. For it was this meaning which Parmenides had at his disposal when he composed his poem and from which he had to proceed by conceiving of *vóoç* in a new way. Moreover, if we take account of his audience, that was at that time constituted by listeners rather than readers, it is hardly conceivable that Parmenides would have utterly ignored its expectations and possibilities of understanding and used one of his key philosophical terms in a rather solipsistic manner. Indeed, it is hardly conceivable that he (or any other author) would have run the risk of being totally misunderstood by his audience.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Of course, it could be at once objected that Parmenides was a philosopher who ignored the contemporary audience and uncompromisingly elaborated his visions and arguments. Although

However, against the background of the ordinary practical meaning of νόος, the line not only becomes intelligible, but also receives a new important dimension. For whereas the line has so far been usually understood in (theoretical) terms of epistemology (i.e. as somehow relating νοεῖν or νόος to εἶναι), its practical and even *ethical* dimension now becomes evident. On this practical or ethical interpretation, the first part of the line ('What is in itself the same is to contemplate') is to be understood as an *appeal* to contemplating being, whereas the second one ('that is why the mind/character is true') states what one can expect as the *fulfillment* of the appeal, i.e. truthfulness and steadiness of one's own character. Hence, by contemplating being, our mind/character becomes true and steady; in other words, by contemplating being, we can hope to overcome the lability and erroneousness of our character or even our human nature.

2) As to the first level of interpretation, it largely represents the way of how contemporary audiences would have proceeded by interpreting the line. Yet, as we have suggested, it might have been Parmenides' intention to

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philosophers could be seen that way, in the case of Parmenides that kind of philosophic arrogance is out of place. As we have suggested, his audience was listeners rather than readers. Unlike the readers, who – because of their repeated reading – have the time and possibility to rethink their usual notions, the listeners have to immediately grasp the meaning of what they are listening to.

achieve the essential link between νοεῖν and νόος and, consequently, construe νόος in theoretical terms. It is the lines B 8.34-36 that seem to testify to this effort: ‘What is in itself the same (i.e. ἐόν) is to contemplate and that is why the mind/character (νόημα) is true. For (γάρ) without being (ἐόν) on which it depends (i.e. νόημα), once revealed you won’t find contemplation (νοεῖν).’ The theoretical construction of νόος or the functional connection between νοεῖν and νόος seems to be established by virtue of ἐόν; for both νοεῖν and νόος are here thought to be closely related to ἐόν.<sup>i</sup>

It is, however, significant that the connection of νοεῖν and νόος to ἐόν (and thereby the theoretical construction of νόος) is not argued for but rather rhetorically or poetically invoked. One can be of course inclined to refuse this interpretation as not philosophically relevant, for philosophy is supposed to proceed by arguments and justifications. Still, before doing so, we should realize that, on the usual interpretation, the connection of νοεῖν and νόος to ἐόν is also very vague, being merely assumed, i.e. not only not argued for, but not explained either. So, in comparison with the usual interpretation that is based on a mere assumption, our interpretation provides

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i Cf. 1) the relationship between νοεῖν and ἐόν (‘without ἐόν you won’t find νοεῖν’) and 2) the dependence of νόημα (or νόος) as the subject of clause ἐν ᾧ πεφαστισμένον ἐστίν on ἐόν.

an explanation. If we take into account that we are dealing with a poem, it is not so surprising that there are non-argumentative narrative strategies and procedures there. At any rate, it is also significant that in philosophical tradition this interpretation, that is only secondary, has become not only prevalent, but the only possible.

## V. Conclusion

Unlike the usual approach that construes the line B 8.34 in terms of epistemology, we should proceed from the ordinary practical meaning of *vóos* as a character. In our interpretation, the line is then to be understood both as an ethical appeal and as Parmenides' effort to redefine or extend the colloquial practical meaning of *vóos* towards a more theoretical or epistemological one. If we, on the other hand, discarded the relevance of the ordinary practical meaning of *vóos* for the interpretation of the poem, we would not only run the risk of misconstruing it but we would not be able to correctly appreciate Parmenides' innovative genius and his contribution to philosophy; in other words, we would miss how he established the functional connection between *voεῖν* and *vóos* or how he conceived *vóos* in theoretical terms.

In our interpretation of line B 8.34, there further seems to be an important (practical or ethical) alternative between two sorts of human attitude or character (νόος) in Parmenides' poem: the one νόος, we can call philosophical, is characterized by its truthfulness and steadiness (being dependent on εἶν), whereas the other, peculiar to ordinary men as characterized by the archaic anthropology, is straying, erroneous and labile. This interpretation may have some consequences for the understanding of the poem as a whole. For whereas it is usually seen as a kind of theoretical treatise on ontology or epistemology, it now turns out to have important *practical* implications. In fact, it is what one would expect from the very fact that it is a poem composed in Homeric hexameters and using the Homeric and the old lyric vocabulary and phraseology (e.g., the motive of archaic anthropology).

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